



April 22, 2020

## ***A Message from the Department of Teaching and Learning***

Dear families of students identified as highly capable learners,

We hope this finds you well during this time of school closures due to COVID-19 and we wanted to reach out about resources and supports for you and your highly capable learner. We also wanted to let you know about a webinar opportunity this Saturday, April 25 (\$25). Please note that we are also hoping to offer this webinar free of charge to our HCL families later this spring and will send you the details as soon as a date is set.

The district and state have been focused on four main goals: 1) safety of students, staff and families, 2) providing food to students, 3) providing childcare for essential workers, and 4) striving for continuity of learning. There are resources for each of these areas posted on the district website at <https://bellingshamschools.org/resources/>, along with links to help requests related to basic needs, technology, and getting in contact with a variety of staff and resources.

Stress and anxiety are common right now in households. We know that students who are identified as highly capable have certain correlated social-emotional patterns and needs. A change to routine, a worry related to safety and wellness, and unknowns of what “school” now looks like for the remainder of the year, are affecting students in visible and invisible ways. Younger students may be worried about not seeing their friends or missing going to school each day. Older students may be stressed about grades, online learning, unknowns of college admissions, and more. Stress and worry may show up in a variety of ways for your child. Recognizing this and having strategies to respond and teach are important.

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**“Children may not have the words  
to express their worry, but you  
may see signs of it.”**

– American Academy of Pediatricians



Here are some resources that may be helpful to you related to managing stress and anxiety for your highly capable learner, along with links to our state and national gifted association webpages for additional supports.

*Specific resources for social emotional needs of gifted learners during COVID-19:*

- SENG's [webinar recording](#) of *Supporting your Gifted Child During COVID-19: Using a Trauma Informed Approach to Support the Social Emotional Needs of Your Child*, with Alessa Giampaolo Keener
- [Supporting your Gifted Child During COVID-19](#), by NAGC
- [Social and Emotional Support for Gifted Learners during COVID-19](#) by Minnesota Department of Education

*Organizations with additional supports:*

- [National Association for Gifted Children](#) (NAGC)
- [Supporting the Emotional Needs of Gifted](#) (SENG)
- [Northwest Gifted Child Association](#)

Student responses to learning at home will vary and will develop differently from child to child and over time. The SENG webinar listed above frames this time in the process of grieving a loss – the loss of routine, the loss of schooling, the loss of contact with friends and teachers, and in some cases the loss of a loved one.

*Slide from SENG Webinar 4/21/20:*

## Grieving Responses to School-at-Home

- Denial** → "I don't need to do this work because we're just going to go back to school in a couple of weeks."
- Anger** → "I hate these work packets. Online learning is stupid. You can't make me do this."
- Bargaining** → "What if I only do the hardest problems on the worksheet?"
- Depression** → "Why bother doing any of this work? It's only being graded as pass/fail, anyhow."
- Acceptance** → "I get this isn't how I want to learn, but I understand it's a necessary part of life right now and I'll do my best to do my part to get through."

We highly recommend parents of gifted learners watch the SENG [webinar](#). Finding the best way to support and encourage your child's engagement with the learning activities being sent home from their school and from their teachers can be difficult. This webinar gives practical strategies for supporting your child at home during this time of trauma, crisis and change. Here are two example slides from the webinar to give you a sense of what is included:

*From SENG webinar 4/21/20:*

## Trustworthiness During School-at-Home

How can you create a physically, socially, and emotionally safe space where your child trusts you to support their learning?

- Establish a learning zone for your child
- Minimize sibling rivalry
- Self-monitor critical comments you may make like, "I can't believe you did that?"
- Support a child's decision to not use a video feed during an online class
- Be transparent in who you make school-at-home decisions
- Model self-reflection and flexibility to change when school plans don't work out

## Empowerment During School-at-Home

How can you empower your child to develop confidence and competence in making good, self-directed choices about their academic lives?

- Utilize checklists and allow your child to prioritize what gets accomplished first
- Schedule regular check-ins to ensure time-management is happening
- Allow choice over with customizing school assignments
- Offer your child the opportunity to create their own alternative learning project
- Participate in Citizen Science or Crowdsourcing projects sponsored by museums and nonprofits

We will continue to collect resources like those above on our [district learning resource webpage](#). As you may be aware, the guidance from the state related to student learning during the school closures – especially related to our high school students – continues to change and evolve, and we are working collectively to adapt and respond accordingly. In addition to what comes from the school, you may want to access resources for extensions, learning ideas that foster connections, and links to learning opportunities offered by state and national organizations geared toward the needs of gifted students.

If you have questions or need additional information, resources or support, please use one of the links on the district website at <https://bellingshamschools.org/resources/>, or send an email directly to [angela.ritchey@bellingshamschools.org](mailto:angela.ritchey@bellingshamschools.org).

Again, we hope this finds you well. Stay healthy and connected and let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,

Trina Hall, Jessica Sankey, Keith Schacht and Jennifer Lawrence  
Dept. of Teaching and Learning team for highly capable learners

### Parenting presentation, NWGCA online webinar on Saturday

Prior to the school closure, we had plans to bring Austina DeBonte to Bellingham to share her knowledge with our teachers and our parents. She is presenting her *What Parents and Educators Need to Know About Smart Kids* workshop online from 3 to 5 p.m. this Saturday, April 25. There are limited spots available for \$25. [Click here to register](#).

**Please note:** We hope to offer this online workshop free of charge to our families in May, so stay tuned for that opportunity.

### What Parents & Educators Need to Know About Smart Kids (Online Workshop)

Saturday, April 25, 2020

3:00-5:00 p.m. PST

WA State Educator Clock Hours now available!