

August 4, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

The new school year is upon us. Over the past few weeks we have tried to keep you informed about the start of school through e-mails, School Messenger calls, media, text messages, and on our website. I have never seen a time before a school year with such uncertainty and questions. Because of the COVID-19 Crisis, planning has been difficult and is so dynamic that many times we have to make changes from week to week. Everything we do to begin this year is greatly dependent upon decisions and guidance from the Public Education Department, the Governor's Office, and the Department of Health. As we plan for the new year, we are watching this guidance carefully so that when students do return to school, our students and staff are as safe as possible.

Because of the many changes, and in order to try to keep school from running into June, school will begin for junior high and high school students on August 18th in a distance environment. If your child is in junior high or high school, his or her schedule is enclosed with this letter. Your child's teacher will be contacting you soon to discuss how lessons will be delivered and the expectations.

If your child is an elementary student, your child's school will contact you soon to schedule an appointment for preliminary assessments that will be beneficial as we begin their school year on September 8. As of this writing, elementary students from Pre-K to 6 will begin school at their buildings on September 8. However, should the PED or Governor's Office determine that no school can start in-person at that time, these students will begin school in the distance environment. During your scheduled time, teachers will work with you and your student to help you understand the Google Classroom program so that your child knows the process should we begin in distance learning.

Our intent is to help make sure everyone has access to the internet and at least Chromebooks. Again, as in the Spring, we will loan families Chromebooks so students will have access to these devices to complete their lessons and attend virtual classes. We will also loan hotspots to families who do not have access to the internet. Hopefully, this will allow every student in this district to have access to the internet and a computer device.

Parents who feel that it is safer for their children to receive instruction through distance education only, may certainly make that decision. If you have made that choice, you may borrow a Chromebook for each of your children. If you do not have internet, you may also borrow a hotspot.

To help ensure that we have the correct information regarding each of our students, I ask that if you have not already done so, you go to our website and register your children. This is the same information that we request at the beginning of each year; however, this year it is online and will

make the process much easier for you and helps us to disaggregate the information much more quickly. Completing the registration is very important if you have changed addresses or phone numbers and to verify that the information we do have is correct. This form also has questions that provide us with information regarding your decision to have your children return to school in-person or by distance. When completing the form, if you want your child to return to the classroom when we open our schools, please mark the “in-person” box. If your child will be in distance education after we open the buildings, please mark the “distance” box.

The District will begin loaning out Chromebooks on August 10th to junior high and high school students who do not have a device at home. If your student has a computer, we would prefer that he or she uses his or her own device. Chromebooks will be available for loan at the high school gym starting August 10 from 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. each day. The District will also loan hotspots to families who do not have internet at home. We are waiting for delivery of the hotspots and will notify families who need them when they arrive. If they are not available by August 18th, Wi-Fi will be available in the parking lots of each school where students can download or complete lessons.

Please go to the District’s website at <http://www.portalesschool.com> to register or to read the Reentry Plans for this school year. You may also e-mail us at parenthelp@portalesschools.com, or call your child’s school or Central Office at (575) 356-7000.

As I mentioned in the Spring, none of what we are doing will be easy and it won’t be perfect. There will be mistakes and miscommunications along the way. If you are having difficulty, please call your school or Central Office and we will do everything we can to help you. Even though this is not a usual year, I know that every teacher, every administrator, and every staff member in this District wants to do the best they can for your children. Please keep that in mind if issues arise. Our goal is to help you and your children to make this a productive and effective year of education.

Sincerely,

Johnnie S. Cain
Superintendent