

September 4, 2020

The 2020 school year is underway at Portales Municipal Schools. Since August 18th students at Portales High School and Portales Junior High School have been attending classes virtually. All elementary schools will open with virtual classes on Tuesday, September 8th.

Although our intent was to begin elementary school in-person with one-half of our students attending classes in school on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and the other half attending on Thursdays and Fridays, those plans were disrupted by the Public Education Department and Department of Health orders on August 27th when Districts were told that counties with a positivity rate greater than 5% and positive cases of over 8 per hundred thousand population may not begin in-person hybrid classes until the rates fall below that threshold. Basically, counties are distinguished by colors. Green counties may begin in-person classes, yellow, and red may not. Currently, Roosevelt County is considered a red county. Roosevelt County, as of September 4, has a daily case average 10 per 100,000 and a positivity rate of 7%.

We all know that the best education comes from students being in class with teachers. Our teachers are well trained, care for kids, and are as good as any teachers in the state. They care about their jobs and they care about the education of our students and are willing to do whatever is necessary to provide the best education they can in these unusual circumstances. All of our teachers have had additional training in online platforms and delivering instruction virtually and through Google Classroom. They have been preparing for the eventuality that classes would begin virtually. High school and junior high school teachers and students are successfully delivering and completing online and virtual classes. Now, our elementary teachers will do the same for our elementary students.

Teachers in each of our elementary schools have been reaching out to parents to assist you with information that you and your child needs to begin school on September 8. If you have not heard from your teacher, please contact the school(s) where your child or children attend to get more instruction about attending classes virtually. If you are in need of a computer device for your child, you may borrow one from the District. Families who do not have internet connectivity may also borrow a hotspot that will provide internet in your home. Students in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten may borrow Chromebooks and hotspots as well. We do ask that if you already have a personal computer device that you use that device so that we have the capacity to ensure that we have the inventory to ensure that all students have access to a device. If you have only one computer, but two children, please borrow a Chromebook so that all of your children can be connected.

Due to the Public Education Department, the NM Department of Health, CDC, and Governor's Health Orders that are in place, school districts must operate cautiously to abide by these orders and maintain safe and efficient classrooms and buildings for our students. Over the past two months much of the guidance has changed weekly if not more often. The ever evolving changes

in State guidance makes planning difficult not only for the school district and teachers, but we know it also creates multiple challenges for families and parents. Therefore, the Portales

Municipal School District has made the decision to, if nothing else, at least provide some stability and continuity within the first nine (9) weeks of the school year so that parents and staff can plan and be prepared for the Hybrid phase of school reentry in Portales. **Regardless of when Roosevelt County turns green, the elementary school in-person Hybrid phase will not begin until October 20th.** This means that all schools in Portales will continue to offer classes online until October 20. If the county turns green prior to October 20th, it will allow us flexibility that may include allowing students to begin meeting with teachers on a limited basis until we go into the full Hybrid phase. Of course, if Roosevelt County is not green by that date, we will be forced to continue in the distance education mode.

Currently the Public Education Department has made allowances for some in-person attendance for Pre-K to 3rd grade and Special Education students even while the county is in the red status. Because we believe it is important that our youngest students have an opportunity to build a relationship with their teachers and to have one-on-one instruction, we plan to take advantage of this allowance and offer every student who attends Brown Early Childhood Center and James Elementary School the opportunity to meet in-person with their teachers at least one day each week beginning September 15th. Every day from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., teachers will be able to allow five students to come to school to receive in-person instruction and work on skills that are important to learn in these formative years. Students who are not in school in the mornings will be able to log-on to their Google accounts and receive lessons for the day. The teacher will be live on-line in the afternoons Tuesdays through Fridays to deliver live lessons and be able to work with students on that day's lessons. Pre-K to 2nd grade students will primarily be receiving instruction in reading and mathematics. If, as a parent, you have questions or issues, please call your child's school or teacher as soon as you have an issue. Please remember, though, that there most likely will be unintended problems in the beginning and it will take parents and teachers working together to make this a good experience.

Another exception allowed by the Public Education Department is to allow certain Special Education students to attend in-person classes no matter their grade levels. Parents of Special Education students who fall within this category have already been contacted by their schools. As with PK-2nd grade, these students will be in classes no larger than 5 students and one teacher.

The District will provide transportation for Pre-K to 2nd grade and Special Education students on the days of their attendance. Parents will be notified which bus their children will ride and the times and location of the bus stops.

All students who attend school in person must have a face mask. On September 4th, Districts were notified by the Public Education Department that *neck gaiters, bandanas, scarves, and face shields* are not substitutes for face masks. The school supply list that was published in July does show face masks as something each student needs. It is best if each student has at least two face masks so that one can be washed while the other is being used. PMSD will provide multi-layered face masks to each student prior to the Hybrid opening and soon to all students attending in-person in grades PK-2 and Special Education students. If your child does not have a face mask, he or she will be issued a cloth mask if available when they arrive at school. Each school will also have disposable masks on hand should a child forget their mask or need a replacement

during the day. The District has ordered multi-layered face masks and will provide them to students as soon as they arrive or upon the first day of Hybrid education in October.

Finally, we know that distance learning presents childcare issues for many parents. Some children may not have the opportunity to attend an online class at the time it is presented. For that reason, every class will be recorded and accessible at any time for students. We do ask that even if a student cannot log-in at the appointed time, that every class be logged into and completed at some point during the day. By doing this, your child will get credit for attendance and keep up with the lessons. If your child must log-in after working hours, please feel free to e-mail your child's teacher with any questions you have or call them during their posted office hours. Our intent is to have teachers available to help you even if the response is delayed because of the time that a class is viewed.

The School Board, School Administrators, Teachers, Directors, and I all know that Distance education is not the best way to start a school year. However, we also realize that the safety of our students, teachers, staff, and community must be a priority. Please know that everyone working in the District is ready to get back to school and have all of our students sitting in classrooms. Not only is that best for their education, but it is best for their social-emotional growth as young people. Everyone in this District is willing to take the extra step to help you and your children as we move forward. This crisis has created many things that aren't in the District's control and certainly are out of the control of teachers and staff. Regardless, the school year is underway and your children are our priority.