

**March 27, 2020**

## **Update**

Dear Preston Public Schools Learning Community,

Thank you for all of your positive thoughts, well wishes, and caring comments about our staff, our parents, our community, and our students. They are deeply appreciated.

The newest Governors Executive order includes several statements the most important may be that a gathering of **more than five people is strongly discouraged**. We also heard from the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Miguel A. Cordona, who stated that it is too early to talk about closing school for the rest of the year, but certainly, within a month, a decision will be made.

A few quick reminders:

- The district is taking the **full April break**. We believe that families and staff will need this time to recharge in the face of so much change. We are sensitive to the transformation we are going through, and we caution against what we are calling **virtual fatigue** that is not virtual at all.
- The **last day** of school will be **Thursday, June 18, 2020**.
- We are not unemployed, **we are redeploying**, and all-district personnel remain on the payroll.
- **Food distribution will continue Good Friday, March 10, and Monday through Friday of April break.**
- **Board of Education** has held a *test virtual meeting* to help iron out the kinks in the presentation of their future virtual agendas. The first official virtual meeting will happen in the next week or two. It will focus on our COVID-19 response, the FY 21 budget and other items of priority.
- Custodians continue to work to **secure infrastructure, water, heat, fuel, and grounds**.
- We are closing down our distribution of **Chromebooks** as our requests wain. If families need technological support contact your principals directly.

As you can imagine, things have been moving very quickly as we wade through the vast amount of changes necessary to build a new way of operating, teaching, and learning. We are going through a forced social reconstruction brought on by the necessity to respond to COVID-19 virus with as much patience, planning, and commitment as we can muster. Our primary task is to do what we can to keep children and adults safe and, simultaneously, provide the highest level of learning experience attainable. Keep in mind that with good hygiene, steady attention to social distancing, calm, both internally and externally, and dedication to the task of caring for children and each other, we will get through this time in history.

As we prepare for a coming surge in COVID-19 infection, we must work hard to stabilize and normalize many aspects of our human activity, including school. Below we offer a few pieces of advice for our parents and caregivers at home as they take on the challenge of supporting the learners at home:

- Remember always to take breaks, be relaxed, and be kind.

- Fear not. Fear and worries weaken our immune systems and do not help us solve the problems before us. We are all working hard and adjusting to a profound change in our normal routines.
- These changes can be overwhelming, so please care for yourself and those you love.

## **VIRTUAL LEARNING PLAN**

Most home communications will come from your principal, your teacher, or your paraeducator. Our Virtual Learning Plan is shaping up driven by the efforts of teachers and with support of their paraeducators teammates and administrative partners. Teachers are available to students between the hours of 9 to 3. However, most teachers are working in the **Google Classroom** environment well beyond those hours to stay connected to students. Remember, many of our staff have school-age children at home so they are pulling double duty!

Special Education teachers and Pupil Personnel staff will continue to collaborate with families in providing individual student plans. Students with Section 504 plans will continue to correspond with school-based providers to ensure learning is accessible.

A few things about “online etiquette.” to review with your child as we move into this dynamic environment:

- When microphones are used remember to mute and be respectful of teachers and paraeducators who are interacting with you. Be aware that background noise is audible when not muted, and everyone online can hear what is happening. Try to establish a quiet learning space so that your child can positive learning experience away from distractions.
- Please stress the importance of respectful exchanges during virtual learning with your child, and please provide necessary supervision and support for your child as needed for their safety and wellbeing.
- The district is **assessing attendance** for students based on engagement and connection not minutes, hours, or periods of instruction. Please do what you can to support your learner's engagement by staying connected to Google Classroom, email, phone, and other means. It is okay to take a break, be a family, and recharge.

Thank you for your continued support. Be safe. Be strong. Be well.

***Roy M. Seitsinger, Jr., Ph.D.***

***Superintendent of Schools***