

## Superintendent's Update

August 28, 2020

### WELCOME BACK!

Unprecedented, unexpected, unique, challenging are all overused words in these times. Let's be frank – none of us has experienced anything like the last six months, and what we are about to do is not normal or routine. We recognize that there is worry and trepidation, which we will do our best to help ease. Whatever our next steps, we are moving forward together, and that is of great comfort. We care about each other, we trust each other, and we will get through this together. We remember that there is nothing that replaces the open and emotive face of a caring teacher or paraeducator looking into the engaged eyes of an equally expressive face of a student. In the end, this relationship is what we hope to reignite through our hybrid opening.

Preston Public Schools is ready to receive our students! Our approach to opening school has always been to keep the student in the center, follow the science and advice of the Department of Health, the advice and guidance of the Connecticut Department of Education, and our own local data. In my view, as we provide tours to families and students, talk to parents, listen to community members and staff, we learn that by-large our community looks forward to our school doors opening. I sincerely appreciate all of the custodians, transportation staff, lunchroom staff, paraeducators, teachers, and administrators as they pursued their extensive preparations to prepare a new learning environment.

We are all looking forward to welcoming both cohorts of students next week, Cohort A students on Monday and Tuesday, Cohort B students on Thursday and Friday at both schools. You should receive much of this information and more by building specific messages sent by our principals.

Here are updates to help you and your child get ready:

- **EXPECT** schools to operate and look somewhat different.
- **School begins at 8:25 AM at PPMS; and, 8:35 AM at PVMS. Doors will not be open before that time. Please do not congregate outside either building and respect social distancing practices.**
- **Please remember, do not drop your student off early.**
- **HOME HEALTH CHECKS:** Please see the document attached that shares the Department of Health's Daily Screening for Parents. We are asking all parents to conduct a home health assessment before sending their students by bus or dropping their students off at school. Always report your child's absence.
- **All students are required to wear a mask** on the bus and inside the school building. We will provide mask breaks during the day, and we erected tents around the building to enable outside instruction without masks. Please make sure your child has at least one extra mask in their backpack.
- The first few days of school are likely to reveal logistical issues that we will need to resolve – please be patient as we sort through unanticipated logistics.

- **All students for whom parents have electronically signed the Acceptable Use and Chromebook/Mobile Device Student User Agreement and Parent Permission Form in PowerSchool will receive their Chromebooks next week.** If you cannot access these electronic forms, please contact Gail Smith at 860-889-3831 or [smithg@prestonschools.org](mailto:smithg@prestonschools.org).
- Please see the Frequently Asked Questions and Parent's Guide to Safe and Responsible Student Internet Use documents posted on our district website and school websites.

### **School Operations:**

- **Early Dismissal:** Each day of our first week of hybrid in-person school will be early dismissal. PPMS – 12:45 PM and PVMS – 1:00 PM.
- **Transportation:** Bus routes have been completely reworked this year to create more stable cohorts traveling to school. Hand sanitizer dispensers are found on every bus. Masks are required to ride the bus. Bus drivers have some additional safety materials, including masks and sanitizer. Transportation will be slower as we navigate different routes and incorporate social distancing into bus routines. Please be prepared for your child to be dropped off later in the afternoon than you are accustomed to for at least the first few weeks of school. Bus route information is on building webpages.
- **Cafeteria:** Cold lunches will be served the first few weeks. Distance learning students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch will be able to pick up lunches at PPMS from 8:30 AM to 10:00 AM.
- **Visitors and Drop Off and Pick Up:** No visitors are allowed in school buildings without permission or an appointment. No caregivers should enter school at drop off or pick up.
- **Chromebook Distribution:** In the first few days of school, Chromebooks will be distributed to all students grades 3 through 8. We will offer technology support to students and families through requests to the principals of each school.

### **For our Distance Learners:**

- **Ramping Up:** Next week, our teachers at both of our schools will be focused on welcoming and acclimating students to in-person school. Our process will emphasize student well-being and a steady ramp up over the next few weeks to a complete instructional routine.
- **Connection:** A teacher (not your designated teacher) is assigned to grade-level groups of distance learners, and they will reach out and coordinate distance learner participation. Be patient and know that we are using all this coming week to bring our systems and practices up to speed.
- **New Policies and Practices:** Distance learners who did not receive a Chromebook last spring will be able to pick up a Chromebook at school next week. If you received a Chromebook last spring that is not functioning correctly, please let us know. Parents will need to have electronically signed off on the Acceptable Use Agreement and Chromebook/Mobile Device Student User Agreement and Parent Permission Form in PowerSchool for your child to be issued a Chromebook.

- **FAQ:** Please see the Frequently Asked Questions and Parent's Guide to Safe and Responsible Student Internet Use documents posted on our district website and on the PPMS/PVMS school websites.

**If you are confused or have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your school principal or the central office. More information will be forthcoming as we move into next week and beyond; please stay connected!**

**Thank you very much for your continued support.**

***Roy M. Seitsinger, Jr., Ph.D.***  
***Superintendent of Schools***