

A Message from the Superintendent of Schools, Marcus Chambers – Sunday, March 22, 2020

Parents,

The week of March 23rd will be a busy week for our schools in Okaloosa County. As parents, you will receive several important notifications through email, social media, and call outs. The goal for this week is to provide our students and parents with the necessary information as we all transition into this new normal of online instruction. I will also be sending out a document and a video later this week that will provide some guidance for parents on online education.

Additionally, we will be providing approximately 17,000 devices to students and families beginning this Tuesday, March 24th. While we do not currently have enough devices to hand one out for each of the 32,000 students in our district, we have enough to ensure that all students who are in need will receive one. It is important to note that elementary students will be issued an iPad and secondary students will be issued a laptop. ***What does this mean for you and your child(ren)?*** If you currently have an iPad or a laptop, we ask that you use your device to allow our students without an iPad or laptop the ability to receive one. At this time, we are only disbursing one device per family; however, we have purchased more devices and have a plan in place to deploy second devices once we have ensured each family that needs a laptop or an iPad has received one.

You have likely seen information posted on social media from your child's school on the protocols and procedures for picking up a device. It is vital for everyone's health that you follow the guidelines each school has in place for deploying devices. Each school's procedure follows CDC guidelines for crowds and social distancing. Knowing that, please understand that picking up devices will take time, so please be prepared to wait in your car until it is your turn to receive a device. Your patience and understanding during this process is appreciated!

Since this is a new normal for everyone, I want to be transparent in this transition to online education. While we are prepared for this new model of instruction, I want all parents to know that, as with anything new, there will be bumps in this process. However, just like education in a traditional school setting, it is imperative that you work with your child's teacher and principal as they quickly work to remedy any issues you may face. Communication will be key to making this work in the best way for you and your child.

My message to our teachers and principals during this time has been to handle situations with compassion and grace. While I want our teachers and principals to work with compassion and grace in their hearts, I also ask that each of you handle your new normal with compassion and grace. Helping your children navigate the waters of this new normal might be, at times, uncomfortable. I ask that you treat yourselves, your children, and their teachers with grace and compassion. Allow mistakes. Learn from them knowing that our entire community will come out much stronger than we have ever been. I am confident that this new model will serve your children well until we can reunite back in our physical schools.

In addition to preparing for the online education model, we have been working on expanding our Feeding Program. Last week we provided over 1,200 meals a day, and we expect that number will rise in the weeks to come. To prepare for that, we will be adding feeding sites across the district beginning March 25th. Moreover, we will be expanding the use of busses to deliver food to bus stops for families who cannot get to feeding sites. More information will come out on Monday regarding the additional school sites and bus stop locations.

For parents who have high school aged children, we know that you have many questions. Please be sure to reach out to your child's teachers, guidance counselor, and administrators, as they will be able to help. Unfortunately, some questions still do not have answers as only time can tell. I can assure you that as we are provided guidance and timelines, I will share them. While I recognize that many of you are still left questioning the viability of prom, athletic events, field trips, honors programs and more, I can only say that these events are currently cancelled until further notice. While AP and IB have announced their solutions to the 2019-2020 testing situation, we still await word from AICE about their solution to testing. Simply put, we are all doing our best to give high school students the "experience" they expect from high school while in the midst of a pandemic.

As it pertains to graduation for the Senior Class of 2020, only time will tell whether we will be able to celebrate this monumental occasion at the end of May. What I can assure you is that we **will** have a graduation for our seniors. They have worked too hard for this moment and we will not deprive them- or you- of this. While I might not be able to tell you what graduation will look like, I can tell you it will happen.

I fully understand that these are uncertain times. As your Superintendent, I simply cannot express how proud I am of our teachers, staff, and administrators who have worked throughout Spring Break to ensure the best educational environment for your child. Similarly, there have been those behind the scenes, the district staff, who have worked tirelessly to support our schools with the goal of resuming instruction on March 30th. This has been no small feat, and yet all parties came together to guarantee that your children's educational goals were not stopped in the face of a global pandemic. Finally, I am beyond proud of the students who are dealing with this historic change that has upended the routine of their lives. While some students have mentioned their hesitation to begin this new normal, some have been excited to continue their education at home while staying healthy. Regardless of the emotion, I am so proud of each of our students and I say to each of you... we will get through this together.

Parents, please stay tuned for the information you will receive this week and thank you from the bottom of my heart for your encouraging messages, prayers and support. Okaloosa is the best because of the community we live in and I am thankful!

Very respectfully,

Marcus Chambers, Superintendent of Okaloosa County Schools