

March 18, 2020

To OCSD Families,

We are in unprecedented times. Teamwork, understanding, patience, and support are critical. The uncertainty that envelops our nation is an opportunity for us, in Okaloosa, to show our resolve and our commitment to our students and to each other. I am aware of, and share, your concerns. I, and my staff, have been in contact with State officials, online providers, principals, and other stakeholders and worked around the clock through Spring Break to ensure that we have a plan to provide food and learning opportunities for students while taking the necessary precautions for the well-being and safety of our students, families, and employees. While it is impossible to craft a perfect "one-size fits all" plan, we are committed to forging ahead, with a "greater good" philosophy, knowing that our students, parents, and teachers are creative, caring, and resolute. We will play the hand we are dealt. And when this crisis has passed our students, teachers and staff, as is always the case, will be recognized as the standard for excellence among their peers across the State.

In order for us to be successful, we must continue to pull together. I understand and have sympathy with the challenges and complexities that this new reality presents for our families and students. I encourage you to work closely with your child's school as questions arise and of course I am here for you as well. We will exhaust all of our resources to ensure that our students are fed and educated. School will look different for our students as we transition to on-line education. I know this will present challenges and we will work through these challenges together. Your child's teachers and your child's Principal stand ready to help you! I will be sending you written guidance in the coming days regarding online education.

Please know that I am committed to continuing our operations as a school district so that we can be prepared to return to normalcy as soon as possible. These operations will include food services, facility cleaning and disinfecting, maintenance processes, and, of course, online instruction. Our employees are ready to do what it takes for their students. We will not be perfect as we transition into this new normal, but we will do everything within our means to ensure the success of our students.

I know that for many students, activities such as sports, band, field trips, state competitions and more have been cancelled. I share the frustration that this has created and I sympathize both as your superintendent and as a parent of a high school sophomore and senior. More significant than the disappointment of cancelled field trips and activities is the profound sadness seniors and their parents across Okaloosa are feeling. This culmination of thirteen years of hard work and dedication to your education was supposed to be YOUR year; YOUR final season, YOUR final competition, YOUR final year in high school. As a father of a Senior, I understand that you only get one Senior Year and for our Seniors, you are in my thoughts and prayers. It goes without saying that right now there is a lot of uncertainty, but rest assured, we are working in creative ways to make this situation the best we possibly can for you and all of our students in Okaloosa.

I also know that for many families, child care is now an issue. Whether your daycare is closed or you are simply concerned with the health and well-being of your children as you drop them off at daycare, we are facing the same dilemma that parents nationwide are facing. What we do know is that this pandemic has altered the daily routines of our way of life and many people in our community are scrambling just to try to find a way to work. These changes are new to all of us. Flexibility and understanding is a necessity to navigate these uncharted waters.

Please continue to watch District and school communications for updated information. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to your student's school. Our principals and their staff are ready to assist.

Again, I thank you for your commitment to your child and their teachers. Okaloosa is prepared and I know we will continue to lead the way as we navigate these "uncharted waters." Thank you for all you do and all you WILL do.

Very respectfully,

Marcus Chambers, Superintendent of Okaloosa County Schools

