

MEMORANDUM

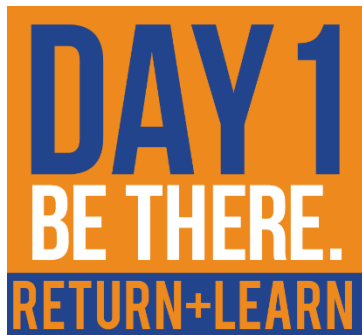
To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: August 27, 2020

Subject: Atlanta Public Schools Has Returned to Learn!

Dear Atlanta Public Schools Parents and Families: After weeks of preparations and an engaging Runway for a Return to Learning, Atlanta Public Schools has arrived for the first week of School Year 2020-2021.



Without a doubt, the first few days of school have been like no other, but I have personally seen the dedication through school visits and joining virtual class sessions.

It's hard to describe the challenges and uncertainties we face as we continue through the school year. Teaching and learning from a distance for at least the next nine weeks. Maintaining social distancing practices. Adhering to the highest levels of health, wellness, and safety amid a pandemic.

Yet, it doesn't change the fact that we had a great FIRST DAY of SCHOOL! Because of a season of pandemic and a season of protest, we may have returned to school within a virtual space, but that didn't stop us from moving into a glorious season of teaching and learning!

As a child and as an educator, I always live for the first day of school, and I spent mine visiting the awe-inspiring David T. Howard Middle School and the game-changing Atlanta College and Career Academy. I returned to my teaching roots with a visit to Therrell High School, and I enjoyed visiting Sutton Middle School's sixth grade campus. I joined some virtual lessons throughout the day and was impressed with the focus our students brought right at the start of this unfamiliar school year! I closed my day helping distribute food at Booker T. Washington High School.

Please follow me on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and bookmark my blog and other APS reports at talkupaps.wordpress.com. We are chronicling our experiences and sharing them with words and many photos!

Granted, while we had a great Day One, it was far from perfect. We all missed seeing our scholars in schools – especially our newest and renovated buildings. Zoom crashed and had our

teachers and crews scrambling for other virtual options. All of this was expected, but teachers, staff, students, families, and the community persevered!

But we knew we faced a challenge. There are moments when the tides of adversity require us to rise to meet new heights. It would not be an overstatement to say that we are amid the most difficult school year in decades.

Amid all of the joy and excitement, we hold trepidation and even fear about an unconventional and unfamiliar school year. But knowing that we have the best team in public education and an inspired Atlanta community behind us, I, for one, am not afraid.

I have confidence in our preparations for quality teaching and learning at a distance. Our Teaching and Learning and Instructional Technology teams have created engaging lesson plans, standards of service, and templates for the virtual space.

Our Facilities, Operations, and Security crews continue to maintain our schools and buildings, creating a sense of calm, health, and safety across our district.

Our Information Technology and Accountability experts continue to ensure that every child and every teacher has the devices, access, and resources they need for success.

Our Student Supports professionals stand at the ready to help with any social, emotional, or physical needs of our students.

Our Engagement team created informative resources, town halls, and fireside chats. Our Human Resources team has ensured that every classroom has a qualified teacher, once again allowing us to start a school year with the fewest vacancies in Metro Atlanta.

But let me continue to temper expectations. We did not have a perfect Day One. We will continue to experience issues with scheduling, technology, food distribution, and even with teaching and learning.

We'll resolve any issues as they arise, and even amid these challenges, we must all remember in this season to be patient. Please be patient with our teachers, our staff, our partners, and our volunteers who are all committed to the success of our beautiful children.

In addition to patience, I also ask our students, our families, our teachers, our staff, and our entire community to #WalkInYourGifts and #DisruptTheFear.

Times of adversity and challenge press us to explore our gifts and face our fears. I am imploring everyone in the APS community: Don't be afraid.

Don't be afraid to seek help. The unfamiliar breeds confusion, so please reach out to your schools and our district leaders with your questions and concerns. Here is a contact list:

- Use Let's Talk. You can access it on the homepage of our website (www.atlantapublicschools.us)
- Call 404.802.1000 for technology issues.
- Bookmark our new Day One: Return + Learn web site, which is rich with resources (www.atlantapublicschools.us/backtoschool)
- Reach out to our Student Support teams for social emotional learning and Trauma to Transition support.

Don't be afraid to be awesome. Be creative. Attempt something new. Embrace the virtual world and see what it will yield.

Don't be afraid to engage. Ask questions. Embrace learning in the new space.

Don't be afraid to #WalkInYourGifts and #DisruptTheFear!

This all leads up to this: Don't be afraid to have a great first week and a successful school year!

Yours in service,

Dr. Lisa Herring