

## MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Employees

From: Dr. Meria Joel Carstarphen, Superintendent

Date: March 23, 2020

Subject: Important COVID-19 Updates for APS Employees

This past Friday marked the end of the first week of closure of Atlanta Public Schools (APS) for teleschooling and teleworking, and I want to thank each and every one of you for the role you played in helping our District maneuver successfully through the unknown. It was impressive to watch staff across APS collaborate, innovate and problem-solve last week. It goes without saying that there were a few challenges along the way, but there was nothing we couldn't overcome. I am looking forward to this week being even more successful with all of you by my side!

### **Closure Dates, Spring Events, Community Meetings, and Graduation**

We've previously shared that APS would remain closed for teleschooling and teleworking through at least March 31 and possibly through Spring Break (April 6 – 10) and beyond. Given recent guidance from health officials and governmental actions from various elected officials, we anticipate that APS will remain closed at least through Monday, April 13 and possibly beyond. This will mean that we must continue to collaborate, innovate, and problem solve in this new extended virtual learning and working environment. I ask for your continued patience as we work our way through our new norm for the next several weeks. As a reminder, all previously planned community meetings and events have been cancelled during our closure. No final decision on graduation or other major District events has been made at this time. We are evaluating future events on a case-by-case basis, and will make decisions in the near future.

### **COVID-19 Update**

As of now, there remains one confirmed case of COVID-19 in APS. As I shared in my memo to you on [March 19](#), that one confirmed case yielded no exposure to students and there was no close contact with employees based on the Fulton County Board of Health's investigation. Please continue to practice the preventative measures provided by health officials to stop the spread of COVID-19. Those measures and other resources can be found on our [coronavirus webpage](#).

I am thankful for the number of APS employees who have volunteered to help distribute food and devices to our families, or whose roles as food workers, safety resource officers, facilities team members, and bus drivers have involved working at our food distribution sites. We couldn't have provided 30,000 meals a day to our families or put more laptops and devices into the hands of our students last week without your support. You are an incredible team, and I want to ensure that you stay healthy as well.

I spoke recently with officials at the Fulton County Board of Health about whether there are any health risks associated with our device distribution or our food and nutrition efforts, including food prep. Health officials said that for now, so long as people are not sick (especially not coughing) and are maintaining social distancing, we should still be okay for providing any distribution-type services for as long as we can. The only absolute no-no was coming to work sick. As we've stressed since the onset of COVID-19, please stay at home if you don't feel well, practice social distancing and all of the measures that prevent the spread of this virus.

### **APS District Town Hall: A Virtual Conversation, Thursday, March 26**

I know that parents and staff have a lot of questions for APS given our closure for teleschooling and teleworking. To help answer those questions and to hear feedback from our stakeholders in real time, I'll be hosting an APS District Town Hall on Facebook Live this Thursday, March 26 at 4 p.m. Please join us on Facebook ([@AtlantaPublicSchools](#)) for our virtual discussion. It's a great way for us to stay connected with you. See you there!

### **State Suspension of Assessments, Evaluations**

State School Superintendent Richard Woods on Monday, March 16, announced the suspension of state assessments, including the Georgia Milestones, as well as teacher evaluations and attendance accountability measures until further notice. Mr. Woods said school leaders need to be focused on the safety of students and staff and on creating flexible ways to keep virtual learning going. That's exactly what we plan to do.

### **Resources for Teleworking Employees**

While this transition to a long-term teleworking environment has required amazing work by many people and flexibility from all of us, it has not come without challenges. We are actively working to secure more technology devices for employees who need them, and we are working with internet providers to obtain higher quality, low or no-cost internet service for employees working from home. If you need technology devices or internet please let us know through the following link: <https://bit.ly/2Uen0P8>.

### **Employee Assistance Program and other Resources**

We also know that changing life circumstances can sometimes lead to personal hardships. The United Way has established a COVID-19 Community Economic Relief Fund to help individuals pay bills, pay rent, buy food, etc. For help, call 866-211-9966 or \*211, provide your area's zip code and you will be given a list of local assistance agencies.

As we all continue to face changes and challenges associated with COVID-19, we want you to know that our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to offer support and help you navigate through these stressful times. The EAP program offers counseling, financial and legal assistance, and more! Our EAP provider, Deer Oaks, can be reached by telephone, email, and mobile app. Information about the app can be found [here](#).

In addition, please note that any face-to-face counseling request will be at the discretion of the counselor chosen by the employee. When reaching out to Deer Oaks, we suggest you request a counselor who offers video-conferencing sessions as an option for everyone's continued safety

and convenience. Deer Oaks has provided us with a flyer outlining various resources: [Coronavirus resources flyer](#). Additional information can be found in the “News For You” section of the Deer Oaks [website](#). (Username and password are both “APS”.) As always, if you have any questions/concerns, you can reach our Employee Well-being Coordinator, Nzinga Benton, at [nzinga.benton@atlanta.k12.ga.us](mailto:nzinga.benton@atlanta.k12.ga.us).

### **Whitefoord Health Clinics Still Open, COVID-19 Testing Available for APS Employees**

Whitefoord Clinics will be open again this week, March 23-27, and observe the [same hours as last week](#). The clinics will continue to see routine and urgent health needs. They will also begin offering telehealth behavioral health appointments for children and adults this week. There are some visit types, such as immunizations or strep throat tests, that we can be done while patients wait outside in their cars.

In addition, Whitefoord can provide COVID-19 testing to APS staff, while supplies last. Just identify yourself as an APS employee to the phone screener so you can be prioritized. Whitefoord Health clinics have established this hotline number, (470) 427-2634 ext. 123, to assist patients with respiratory symptoms, and testing for COVID-19 and flu. Information is also available on their website at: <https://www.whitefoord.org/covid19>.

### **Telemedicine/Virtual Visits Available**

Telemedicine/virtual visits and a nurse hotline are great health benefits that are available to APS employees who participate in the State Health Benefit Plan, Anthem Blue Cross & Blue Shield, Kaiser Permanente, or United Healthcare. Telemedicine and the nurse hotline allow healthcare professionals to evaluate, diagnose, and treat employees using telecommunication technology. You will be able to see and/or talk to a participating provider from your mobile device, tablet or computer with a webcam while at home, work or on the go. For Telemedicine/virtual visits, please contact your healthcare provider listed below:

- Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield: [www.anthem.com/shbp](http://www.anthem.com/shbp) or 855.641.4862
- Kaiser [www.my.kp.org/shbp](http://www.my.kp.org/shbp) or 404.365.0966
- United Healthcare [www.welcometouhc.com/shbp](http://www.welcometouhc.com/shbp) or 888.364.6352

Thank you again for your commitment to our work. Your passion for this District shone through in every way last week. Keep up the great work, and let’s keep moving forward.

Air hugs to you all! Stay healthy and safe!