

## MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Meria Joel Carstarphen, Superintendent

Date: May 4, 2020

Subject: Important Updates for APS Families

### **#ThankATeacher!**

We've marked the start of another great week in APS, and I hope you're doing the same! This is a very special week for us because it's Teacher Appreciation Week (Yay!). I encourage you to join all of us in celebrating our awesome teachers. We can't express enough our tremendous gratitude and appreciation for their dedication and service. They have faced and overcome unprecedented challenges these past several weeks with our closure for tele-schooling and teleworking.

Not only did they overcome those challenges, but they stepped up to tackle them with determination, persistence and grace. Our teachers continue to show us every day that they are committed to ensuring that all of our students succeed. The work has been difficult, but our teachers never let up, not once. I'm so proud of them, and I'm so proud to be working with such an incredible group of educators.

If you haven't already reached out to an APS teacher to express your appreciation, take time today to #ThankATeacher! Let's show them how much they are appreciated! We have planned a weeklong series of virtual celebrations in honor of our teachers that include our [Virtual Rocks and Runs 5K](#) that benefits teachers (May 2-15), virtual yoga, a comedy show, and a dance party on Instagram live! Get the full schedule of events and see my heartfelt message and video dedicated to our teachers [on my blog](#).

### **FY2021 Budget Outlook**

Given that many economists are predicting a sharp economic decline ahead due to the impact of COVID-19, we are implementing cost-cutting measures across the District for Fiscal Year 2021. More specifically, based on a memo issued last week by State School Superintendent Richard Woods to all Georgia school districts, we are anticipating a 14% reduction to Quality Basic Education (QBE) allotments for Fiscal Year 2021. This translates into a reduction of \$60 million for APS.

We are looking at ways to close that gap in funding for FY2021 by freezing spending in the current year to free up funds to carryover to next year, postponing the 6-12 ELA textbook adoption, sweeping school based reserves, reducing Central Office non-personnel, assuming lapsed salary, and reclassifying eligible expenses to the CARES act funds.

We have recommended to the Board that we postpone the tentative adoption of the FY2021 budget as other local school districts are doing and that we postpone our first public hearing for the budget until the regularly scheduled Board Meeting on June 1. We will work to schedule a Special Called meeting for Final Adoption and a second public hearing at least two weeks later, sometime around June 22.

### **Continued Operations**

As you know, Governor Kemp has lifted the shelter-in-place order for most Georgians, allowing many businesses to resume operations. However, this doesn't apply to APS. We are continuing only our essential operations as we have throughout this crisis, and must adhere to social distancing and other safety measures, such as wearing personal protective equipment. Our operations remain unchanged for now. And, remember that all APS facilities are closed for health and safety reasons. This includes parking lots, playgrounds, gyms, basketball courts, athletic fields, etc. Please ensure that neither you nor your children are coming onto school grounds to congregate for any reason.

### **We're in this Together**

I was so humbled and honored to participate in the global [Call to Unite](#) on Friday, May 1. This was a 24-hour, global livestream event that was a celebration of hope for a new future together. Former presidents, Oprah, Common, Deepak Chopra and others shared practices, faith, songs, reflections, and more to help people turn the pain of this moment into possibility for tomorrow. If you missed it, you can still view all of the videos, posts, and other supportive information online at [unite.us](http://unite.us).

### **Stress Buster Workshop**

We've all experienced stress in recent weeks. If you're looking for a way to relieve that stress, I invite you to participate in the University for Parents' stress buster virtual workshop this Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. University for Parents is hosting the workshop in collaboration with the APS Office of Family Engagement. Register today at [http://bit.ly/U4P-Stress\\_Busters](http://bit.ly/U4P-Stress_Busters). Once you register, you will receive an email and calendar invite from Brenda Coleman. The subject on the invite is U4P & APS Stress Management. For additional information, please [click here](#).

### **Grad Nation 2020 – #WorthTheWait**

I've been thinking a lot about the Class of 2020 and how much it weighs on me, principals, teachers, parents, counselors, and others that our seniors have had to bear a global pandemic during their final semester. I wanted to hear from them and tell them how much APS cares about their future. That's why I held a virtual town hall just for high school seniors on Instagram live last week. It was exhilarating, to say the least, to be on Instagram with APS high school seniors anxious about graduation. I thoroughly enjoyed answering their questions and concerns, and their energy brought lots of much-needed laughter to the unpredictable situation caused by the pandemic.

For those parents of APS seniors, here are a few key topics I covered during the virtual town hall with seniors:

Senior Fee Refunds:

Each individual high school has worked out a process to determine how to reimburse certain dues and fees. Seniors should check with their principals, graduation coaches, and counselors to see if they are eligible for any refunds. Most refunds will be partial, as fees were used to pay for yearbooks, caps and gowns, and other senior memorabilia.

Distribution Dates:

Just as with senior fee refunds, each school is preparing no-contact, drive-through pick up plans for caps and gowns, cords and stoles, yearbooks, diplomas and covers, and other senior memorabilia. Students should check with their principals, graduation coaches, and counselors for details.

Return Dates:

Seniors should check with their schools about returning devices, textbooks, uniforms, musical instruments, etc. Many schools are coordinating returns to be handled by the same time, date, and manner as distribution.

Retrieval of personal items from the school:

Students and families will not be allowed access to our schools at this time. We are following the recommendations from public health and safety officials and will communicate with the APS community when we can arrange reentry into our schools.

The District is producing videos to celebrate each graduating class, and those videos include snippets and sound bites with principals, valedictorians, salutatorians, others and myself. We will broadcast each video on Facebook on a set schedule. In that same spirit, we will also be celebrating our valedictorians, salutatorians, and STAR students through video. Stay tuned later this week to receive more specific details about the broadcast schedules of our virtual celebratory videos for the Class of 2020.

**Annual Student Recognition Celebration**

In light of our closure due to COVID-19 and public health recommendations regarding social distancing, we won't be holding an in-person ceremony to recognize outstanding student achievement this year. In past years, we would invite hundreds of accomplished students and their families downtown to our central office for special recognition by the Board of Education. Even though we can't meet in person this year, we will still celebrate our students' achievements in academics, arts, athletics, service, and other categories with a special "2020 Student Recognition" celebratory webpage. This webpage will list every award category and the names of every student being recognized in each category. You will receive additional information about the launch of this webpage and how you can access it in the coming days.

### **APS Receives \$1.3 Million Donation from Intercontinental Exchange**

As you know, ensuring that all of our students have devices and an internet connection is something I have been working passionately to address since our closure. I am beyond excited to share that we received a \$1.3 million donation last week from Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) to help the District and Comcast bridge the digital divide for students and their families through our [Get Our Kids Connected](#) campaign. With this gift, we will be able to get closer to getting thousands of APS children connected at home and equipped for distance learning. We are so grateful to ICE for this donation, and it demonstrates our corporate community's dedication to helping APS provide a quality education for our children.

### **Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) Provides Free COVID-19 Testing**

CORE in partnership with the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation is providing free COVID-19 testing in Atlanta at the Home Depot Backyard (1 Backyard Way, Atlanta, GA 30313) at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Drive-up or walk-up testing is available and appointments are strongly encouraged. To learn more and to sign up to get tested, please visit [www.coreresponse.org/covid19-Atlanta](http://www.coreresponse.org/covid19-Atlanta). For registration assistance, please call the COVID hotline at Good Samaritan Health Clinic at (404) 523-6571 ext. 4298.

### **Whitefoord Health Clinics Open Teen Help Line**

The Whitefoord Health Clinics have opened a phone line for local adolescents and teens who may be depressed, are feeling down, aren't sure where to turn for help and need someone to talk to. The Whitefoord Teen Thrive Line is available Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at (470) 427-2624 ext. 305. Those who prefer to text can leave a message and ask for a text message response. Licensed counselors are staffing the line and will be available to respond to students who need support.

As a reminder, this is a resource line and not a crisis hotline. Anyone who is in danger or worried that someone else may be in danger should call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255. For routine and urgent health needs, including COVID-19 testing, call (470) 427-2634 ext. 123, or visit <https://www.whitefoord.org/covid19>.

Thank you for your continued support and, as always, stay engaged with us 24/7 through *Let's Talk* at <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us>. Have a great week!

Meria