

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Meria Joel Carstarphen, Superintendent

Date: April 27, 2020

Subject: Important Updates for APS Families

Welcome to the start of a new week of tele-schooling and teleworking for Atlanta Public Schools (APS)! We look forward to your continued support in ensuring that our students are logging on to their computers each day and staying engaged in their schoolwork. That engagement is so critically important to student success in our current virtual learning environment.

Student Log-In Information:

Speaking of students logging on, I was excited to see a 7.2% increase in student logins when we compared data from the week before Spring Break to data from the week after Spring Break. However, when we compare the login data for just the last two weeks (post spring break) the district wide student login rate dropped by 6.7% to 69.6% (pre-spring break levels).

Here's the breakdown:

- Commutative login information since tele-schooling began (3/16/20 to 4/24/20) – District data for this period is 92.7% student logins.
- Logins during the week before spring break (3/30/20 to 4/3/20) – District data for this period is 69.1% student logins.
- Logins during the week immediately following spring break (4/13/20 to 4/17/20) – District data for this period is 76.3% student logins.
- Logins during the week of 4/20/20 to 4/24/20 – District data for this period is 69.6% student logins.

We need your help in ensuring that our students log in for virtual learning. I encourage you to continue that effort all the way through the end of the school year so that our student log in numbers continue to increase, and our students are actively engaged in distance learning. For those students who are not logging in consistently, you should expect to hear from your school over the next week.

Internet Access Should Not Be a Luxury

If there is one thing I've become convinced about after being on the frontlines of supporting our community during this pandemic, it is that connectivity must be considered a public utility, much like electricity and water. Internet access is no longer a luxury, and all of our communities need and deserve high quality Internet services.

Access to WiFi today is akin to what clean water was in the 1970s. In 1972, the Clean Water Act was passed. The Safe Drinking Water Act followed just two years later. It established the general principle in the developed world that EVERY person had the right to safe drinking water. Today, in the 21st century, the general principle needs to be in the developed world that EVERY person has the right to connectivity.

APS continues to do all that we can to help our families get devices and internet access. We have made great strides with the “[Get Our Kids Connected](#)” campaign with Comcast, which has brought in generous donations from the United Way and Atlanta Tech Village and a soon-to-be-announced \$1.3 million dollar donation! With each \$300 donation, one of our deserving scholars gets brand spanking new computers with a five-year warranty that they get to keep for their very own!

With about \$1.8 million, we will be very close to connecting 100 percent of our students, but we still have a heavy lift ahead in getting those devices and access to all of them. A reminder to all families: If your APS student does not have access to a computer device or the Internet, please call your child’s school or email getourkidsconnected@aps12.org!

Book Distribution at our Food Sites

I’m so excited to share that in addition to picking up food at our [eight APS food distribution sites](#) (Bunche Middle School, Cleveland Avenue Elementary School, Douglass High School, Hope-Hill Elementary School, King Middle School, Phoenix Academy [formerly Alonzo Crim High School], Sylvan Hills Middle School, and Young Middle School), families can also receive books at those sites each Monday, during food distribution from 10 a.m. to noon! Our Department of Media Services purchased books for our families to add to or build their home libraries that will last beyond distance learning. The award-winning books are divided by grade band with elementary school having both lower and upper grade book choices. Students can also select any book of their choice. These books are diverse classic literature that teachers use in our classrooms. Close to 150 books will be available at each site through May 18.

Grad Nation 2020 – #WorthTheWait

As I shared during last week’s APS Virtual Town Hall, we plan to hold virtual graduation celebrations for the Class of 2020 in May, delaying traditional ceremonies until the summer or a later safe date in the fall that adheres to Georgia Department of Health guidance. For all the logistical details on Grad Nation 2020, please see my [earlier blog post](#).

We reached this decision based on survey input from 1,650 graduating seniors across all 14 high schools. They significantly favored a traditional ceremony, and they made it clear that they are #WorthTheWait!

This year’s graduating class is a very special class that has led many moments garnering national attention. Today, I penned an open letter to the Class of 2020 that I encourage you to read on my blog <https://atlsuper.com/> or on *Atlanta Journal Constitution* columnist Maureen Downey’s [Get Schooled Blog](#). What gives me hope in these challenging times is that the Class of 2020 — the

leaders, learners, and strivers I have had the pleasure to watch grow over the past six years — will be responsible for building and shaping a new world, and they will do it together.

APS Virtual Town Hall for the Class of 2020 – Thursday, April 30 at 4 p.m.

I look forward to connecting with the Class of 2020 this Thursday for a Virtual Town Hall discussion on Instagram (@MeriaCarstarphen)! This class deserves our full attention, and I'm sure they will have a lot to share with me during our digital dialogue.

The Call to Unite: 24 Hours to Be Together as One

Over the six weeks of our closure due to this pandemic, we have asked our community for patience and understanding as we work to get virtual learning right and continue to support our families. I've been in the social emotional learning (SEL) space for over 10 years now, and as SEL initiatives remind us, we have to take a moment every now and then to reconnect and remember that we're in this together. Our longstanding partners such as the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning and its chair, Tim Shriver, helped us rebuild our culture in APS. They along many others, including me, will reach out across the world to support each other in this unprecedented time. The Call to Unite is one attempt to do that. Starting at 8 p.m. Friday, May 1, the Call to Unite is a 24-hour global livestream event that invites people around the world to celebrate hope for a new future together.

This livestream event is a global opportunity to stand in solidarity with those experiencing pain, fear, loneliness, and grief – and offer hope and support as we build a new future together. Throughout the event, global leaders — from former presidents to Oprah to Common to Deepak Chopra — will join participants from around the world in sharing practices, faith, songs, reflections, and more to help people turn the pain of this moment into possibility for tomorrow. You are welcome to join us if you would like support by visiting the website unite.us.

Virtual Rocks & Runs 5K:

Don't forget to participate in our Virtual Rocks & Runs 5K to benefit APS educators during National Teacher Appreciation Week. Because of COVID-19 concerns, instead of running the race through Atlanta's Historic West End, participants may now complete the three-mile run/walk on their own between Saturday, May 2, and Friday, May 15, at the location of their own choosing! All registrants will receive a race bib, commemorative T-shirt, and finishers medal! Packets will be mailed to the address provided during registration. All proceeds will go toward an appreciation gift for APS educators. Get more details online at our Rocks & Runs website: <https://runsignup.com/Race/GA/Atlanta/AtlantaPublicSchools5k>.

School Choice Applications for Next School Year

Parents who wish to apply for their child to attend another APS school other than their zoned school for the 2020-2021 school year may submit a transfer application until May 1, 2020. To submit an application, and for a list of schools and grade levels accepting transfers, parents should visit the Student Transfer website at <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/transfers>.

Limited School Access for Staff at Schools under Construction or Relocating

Nine of our schools (Inman, Morningside, Springdale Park, Hutchinson, Obama Academy, Humphries, West Manor, Grady, and Centennial) will have construction projects on their campuses or are relocating over the summer. We will be allowing staff at those nine schools limited access to their buildings to pack and retrieve school supplies and materials from classrooms and offices. I want you to be aware of this because you may see increased activity at these locations, including cars in parking lots or people on school grounds over the next few weeks. This limited access is being granted to staff only. We are not granting student access to retrieve items from lockers at this time.

We developed a safety plan for staff access to those schools that follows a set schedule, is being implemented in an orderly fashion, and that adheres to health and safety guidelines from public health officials. Staff will observe social distancing and will be required to wear masks and gloves during this process. We appreciate your understanding that students and families will not be allowed access at this time. We continue to follow the recommendations from public health and safety officials and will communicate with you when appropriate regarding reentry to school.

Whitefoord Health Clinics Are an Available Resource

Whitefoord Health Clinics are a valuable resource to our families for most routine and urgent health needs, including COVID-19 testing. Telehealth appointments are available and some visits such as immunizations or strep throat tests, can be done while you wait in your car. Call their hotline number, (470) 427-2634 ext. 123, or visit them online at <https://www.whitefoord.org/covid19>.

Please continue to engage with us 24/7 with your questions or comments through *Let's Talk* at <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us>. As always, have a happy, healthy and safe week!

Meria!