

March 9, 2021

Parents and Guardians:

As you may have already heard, the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) cleared all schools in the state to begin full reentry to a more normal school experience. This means that on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, all schools in the Portales Municipal School District (PMSD) will open for all students to attend school Tuesday through Friday. The only exception will be Pre-school and Pre-kindergarten students at Brown Early Childhood Center who will continue their current schedule. As of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, PMSD will no longer offer “hybrid” education. Instead, all students who are attending two days each week will be expected to attend every day, Tuesday through Friday. The only exception to that will be the week of March 29<sup>th</sup> when students will attend Monday through Thursday because there will be no school on April 2<sup>nd</sup> which is a scheduled holiday break.

Distance education will continue to be offered to those students who are currently attending classes remotely. If your child is currently registered in distance education and you would like for him or her to attend in-person, please contact your child’s school so that he or she can be scheduled to return to in-person learning.

Although I would prefer to have school open five days each week, there are still safety protocols and logistical issues that make this difficult at this time. We want to do everything we can for the safety of our students and staff, so Monday’s will be used for our weekly deep cleaning and disinfecting. We will continue to disinfect every Wednesday afternoon as well, and of course, daily cleaning of keyboards, doorknobs, desks, restrooms, equipment, and common areas will continue as we have been doing since the beginning.

When we return on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, all COVID safe practices will still be in effect. Social distancing will still be expected of students and staff to the greatest extent possible. All students and staff must wear a mask except while eating in the cafeteria. All students and staff will still have their temperatures taken when entering the building. Students who are showing symptoms that could be related to COVID-19 will not be allowed to enter the building or will be sent to the nurse for isolation until a parent can go to the school and pick them up. **I am asking you as a parent or guardian, to please keep your child at home if he or she is running a fever, is coughing, has a runny nose, is vomiting or showing any other symptoms of a cold, the flu, or COVID-19. Your assistance is very important to help us to ensure others are not infected or become close contacts to infected individuals that would necessitate the closure of classrooms or possibly the entire school.** When your child is symptom free and has no temperature for at least 24 hours without medication, he or she can return to school. If your child has a chronic condition such as allergies or asthma, please contact the school nurse so that can be noted on the child’s records so that does not become an isolation issue.

Buses will run as usual. No more than two children will be allowed in each seat and students must wear a mask when getting on the bus and while riding to or from school. Each bus is equipped with hand-sanitizer stations and we ask that students use this when getting on the bus prior to sitting down. Buses are sanitized each day prior to the morning and afternoon routes. If possible, in order to help prevent close contacts with other students on the bus, parents and guardians who can drive their children to and from school are asked to do so.

Finally, I know many of you are interested in athletics, band, choir, drama, and other extracurricular and cocurricular activities. Those activities will also resume as we begin school in full reentry. There will be some guidelines PED has provided in order for us to allow these activities to begin. Athletics has already begun. While the county is yellow, outside events are allowed to have spectators up to 25% of the facility's capacity. When the county turns green, we may have up to a 50% capacity crowd outside and 25% for indoor events. Our first goal will be to ensure that parents and siblings are able to attend these events and other fans can attend as long as we do not exceed the capacity limits. All sporting events are live streamed at [www.portaleschools.com](http://www.portaleschools.com) when possible. This includes junior high and high school sporting events and other activities when they occur. Most varsity games are broadcast on KSEL Radio.

Band and choir can begin. However, PED has placed strict limits on how these two groups can practice. All practice must be outside with 9-foot social distancing. Band members must wear specialized masks for their instruments and horns must have bell covers. The District will provide the masks and bell covers for these students. Choir may practice, but as with the band, their practice and performances must be outside with 9-foot social distancing and masks must be worn. I realize this is not ideal for any of these students, but for now they will at least be given the opportunity to practice together and prepare for outdoor performances. Hopefully, as the rest of this semester moves forward we will see these restrictions reduced.

All other extracurricular or cocurricular groups and organizations will be able to meet in classrooms or outside depending upon the organization and the ability to maintain social distancing.

This crisis has disrupted our schools, students, and families since March of last year. Through it all, our students, families, and school staff have persevered and we are now moving back to a more normal routine in this District. Although it won't be as it was before the COVID-19 crisis began, we are happy to welcome back students to the new normal for at least the remainder of this school year. This has been a work in progress that has taken not only the school staff to complete, but has taken your patience and understanding to get to where we are today. We can only pray that cases continue to fall and the 2021-2022 school year will be like the years of past where kids are in school getting a great education, participating in their activities, and getting to be kids again.

If you have any questions or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact your school's principal.

With best regards,

Johnnie S. Cain  
Superintendent