

January 27, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians:

I imagine most of you have already heard that the governor and the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED) have given all school districts permission to begin hybrid education beginning the week of February 8th. Although this is not the perfect solution to getting our kids back in school, it is certainly a move in the right direction. Therefore, Portales Municipal Schools will begin hybrid instruction in all schools beginning Tuesday, February 9th.

As a reminder, hybrid education means that one-half of the students in each school can attend two days each week in person. In other words, one-half of students will attend on Tuesday and Wednesday and the other half will attend on Thursday and Friday. Students who are not physically in school on their two days will still attend on-line at the same time their classes meet in person. Students must attend the online classes on their days off, as teachers will not be repeating the same class instruction from Tuesday/Wednesday on Thursday/Friday. Some elementary grades may have slightly different online schedules, but those will be communicated with parents as soon as possible.

Even though our District will begin in hybrid education mode on February 9th, we also understand that there are parents who might be uncomfortable sending your children back to an in-person setting. At the beginning of the school year, we asked parents who had reservations about sending their children to an in-person setting to enroll with our fully online classes. These classes will continue through the rest of the year. If your child is not enrolled in the online program and you would prefer fully online school for the remainder of this year, you may certainly enroll your child in this program. Please contact your school's principal or counselor to complete this process.

If you do want your child to begin attending school in-person on February 9th, that is great, too. Most students have been scheduled to attend school based upon the junior high and high school rosters with students whose last name begins with letters A-L attending on Tuesday and Wednesday, and students whose last name begins with letter M-Z attending on Thursdays and Fridays. We understand that this may create a conflict in some families where siblings in the junior high and high schools might not be attending on the same days as their younger siblings. If this is the case and you have a need for all siblings to attend on the same days, please contact your elementary school principal so that they can work with the other schools to schedule all of your children on the same two days.

Upon returning to school, all students and district personnel must follow COVID safe practices and protocol. Classrooms are arranged to maintain 6 foot social distancing. Students will follow the same flow in hallways maintaining social distancing. Cafeterias have been arranged to ensure social distancing while students eat. Restroom and passing period protocols have also been established and will be explained to students on the 9th. No one will be allowed to enter a school building without a mask. Every school has cotton and disposable masks on hand for when a student forgets his or her mask or if a mask is lost or soiled. We will also be distributing one two layer school logoed mask to every student soon after school begins. Please ensure that your child has another cloth mask so that while one is being cleaned, the other is available for use.

Buses will run beginning February 9th. However, this will mean that students from other schools will be mixing together for their rides to and from school. To make this safer for all, the fewer students on a bus will result in less risk of spreading COVID-19. Normally, I would not support this, but if possible, you may wish to give your child a ride to and from school. Regardless, buses will follow safety protocols and all students must wear a mask and sit one to a seat when possible or with siblings. Please reinforce with your child that social distancing at bus stops should be maintained. It is very important to notify your child's school immediately if you have moved and have not changed your address with the school. Buses will be making stops based on address information in our system as of February 8th.

Athletics and activities need to be addressed. As of today, athletics will not begin until February 22nd other than the 4:1 group activities that are currently in place. Most activities, such as FFA, BPA, MESA, etc. will be able to meet within their cohorts. Band and choir may meet during the day in school, but the PED has provided a strict guideline that they may not sing or play wind instruments at this time. Hopefully, some of the guidelines will change soon. We will keep you informed.

Finally, the safety of our students is paramount. This means we will follow the Department of Health, CDC, and PED guidance as we move forward. Every student will have their temperature take upon arrival at school. Students who have fever, are coughing, have obvious runny noses, or other symptoms that might be of concern as a sign or symptom of COVID-19 will be sent home. These students would then have either to have a negative COVID test or remain quarantined for 14 days before returning. Because we do not want to have to send anyone home, we ask that you do not send your child to school if he or she is exhibiting any COVID-19 like symptoms. If your child does suffer from chronic, mild non-specific COVID-19 symptoms such as allergies please contact the school nurse so that she will be aware of the condition or ask your health care provider to provide a note that demonstrates that these symptoms are non-COVID-19 health issues. If you know that your child has been exposed to COVID-19 in the home or somewhere other than the school, the New Mexico Health Order requires that the child be quarantined for 14 days and may not return to school during that time. Any out of state travel other than travel to visit a health care provider also requires a 14 day quarantine according to the order. Please be aware of these requirements and do not send your child to school if either of these circumstances occur. If a student must be quarantined, the student can still log-on to his or her classes and submit assignments and will not be counted absent. However, if the child does not log-in to classes, absences will be recorded and could affect the students grades.

I believe that children will be safe at school. Every school has worked hard to create plans that will mitigate the chances of the spread of the disease. However, we cannot guarantee that someone will not be exposed to COVID-19. If a case does occur in a school, all parents of students in that school will be notified by e-mail and School Messenger in a timely manner. If your child is a close contact with someone positive for COVID-19, you will be called directly with information about next steps.

Welcome back! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your school principal or teacher.