

Looking Forward to the New School Year

Dear HCPSS Community,

On August 25, I was privileged to welcome back our teachers to the start of the 2020-2021 school year and in just a few days I look forward to welcoming back our students.

I wish that I could continue the tradition of visiting as many schools as possible on the first day of school to greet students, staff and families in person. Instead, I hope that you will watch the [video message](#) that I created specifically for families and community members.

Virtual Learning This Fall

While our students will not be returning to the classrooms, I appreciate our families' efforts to cultivate a [learning space at home](#) to the best extent possible and am grateful for your partnership in nurturing and guiding your children to be successful this fall.

HCPSS staff have benefitted from lessons learned from the spring model to develop a more robust and engaging learning experience for the fall. We must still operate in a far from ideal state as the pandemic continues, and we ask that HCPSS staff, students and families continue to be flexible and understanding as we begin the new school year in a virtual format.

When students return to virtual school this fall, they are going to engage in live instruction and support on most days and have access to school staff five days a week. Parents/guardians now have access to view student's schedules in Synergy and students will be able to view their schedules in Canvas on Saturday, Sept. 5. Schedules include opportunities each week for students to receive 1-on-1 or small group instructional support if they are absent or require additional instruction to ensure understanding. Additionally, these are times when students can access the many student services that continue to be available with counselors, school psychologists, and other student services staff.

When students enter the virtual classroom, they will have a teacher and classmates to engage with and learn from. Students will have the ability to ask questions, provide answers to the teacher's questions, and learn from one another. Students will also be expected to participate fully in their virtual class discussions and learning activities. I encourage families to view the [Google Meet Expectations](#) for virtual learning for more details about

helping to ensure all virtual classrooms operate smoothly and effectively.

Mostly, I want to emphasize that your child is going to be supported and challenged academically and continue to have access to the many student services available from our schools and school staff. Our school system's stated mission to *ensure academic success and social-emotional well-being for each student in an inclusive and nurturing environment that closes opportunity gaps* does not pause because we must function virtually for the time being. There will be bumps in the road along this journey but I am confident that students will experience levels of growth, stimulation, development and support that families have come to expect from HCPSS.

There are a number of items on which I would like to provide greater details to prepare for the start of the school year.

- **Student Participation Expectations**

One important difference this fall as compared to the spring Continuity of Learning program is that students are expected to take an active part in synchronous learning activities throughout each week. For example, students may be called on by their teachers to respond to a question or asked to share feedback by using the chat box. The use of the video camera will still be primarily optional for students but teachers may ask students to turn the video camera on for short periods of time in order to engage in an activity or assessment.

- **Chromebook and Internet Access**

All students in grades prekindergarten through five have been provided with a device. Chromebook distribution to middle and high school students is ongoing. Families may request Chromebooks and internet access by [notifying the school system](#).

- **Attendance and Grading**

Attendance will be taken daily and [more details](#) can be found on the website. Your child's grade level will determine when attendance will be taken and what constitutes being present. Changes to the HCPSS grading policy will be discussed at the September 10 Board of Education meeting. More information will be provided as it becomes available.

- **Fall Meal Distribution**

Meals will be provided at no cost to all students through December 31, 2020, subject to U.S. Department of Agriculture funding availability. Families are encouraged to complete the Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMs) program application as soon as possible to ensure they will have access to free and reduced meals throughout the school

year along with a wide range of resources and discounts, including testing fees, tuition, internet and more. [Learn more](#) about the meal locations, pick up procedures, FARMs information and more.

- **Answers to Frequently Asked Questions**

The [HCPSS Help site](#) is grouped by subject to allow quicker and easier navigation, and includes a keyword search function, making it easier to quickly find answers to frequently asked questions.

Again, welcome back to the start of the school year. Please don't hesitate to reach out to staff at your child's school with questions or if there are any supports required by your child that they are not currently receiving.

I look forward to leading our school system with grace, courage and kindness, and I wish each of you a joyous beginning to another wonderful school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael J. Martirano
Superintendent

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