



Norfolk Public Schools

The cornerstone of a proudly diverse community

June 8, 2020

Dear Norfolk Public Schools' Families,

With the last day of this unprecedented school year fast approaching, I want to reach out to our students and families regarding several important topics.

First, I want to thank our students for all they have done to ensure that their education did not stop when the doors of our schools closed on March 16, 2020. Students, I take heart in your perseverance because it is a marvelous trait that will help you master all future challenges as well. Parents/Guardians, my gratitude and respect for you are boundless. Literally, overnight you became home-school teachers, determined your children would not fall behind because a pandemic had fallen upon us. Thank you for making sure your children got to their virtual class on time, for shepherding them through completion of their learning in place plans, and for stepping in to help them master any and every challenging detail.

While I am sure many of you are celebrating the end of School Year 2020, your happiness may be tempered by some concerns regarding the start of school in the fall. I do want you to know that the NPS administration, public health officials, school-level personnel, and others are working together to plan for a safe and secure re-opening. At this writing, we are awaiting further guidelines from agencies such as the Governor's Office, the Virginia Department of Public Health, and the Virginia Department of Education before we finalize plans. However, we are also working on several options that take into account social distancing, remote/virtual education approaches, and creative student scheduling to name a few. This means we are likely to be in more frequent communication with you than is typical during the summer break. I ask for your patience in advance in that area.

Finally, I want to touch on an issue that goes to the heart of the social-emotional well-being of our students and that is the recent George Floyd tragedy. I addressed this circumstance publicly at the June 3rd School Board meeting for many reasons, but primarily because if we are ever to have a chance of ridding this world of ignorance, prejudice, and ill intent, it will be through education. So as we prepare for a new school year, besides planning on how to avert the effects of a pandemic, we will be planning how we can strengthen our outreaches designed to promote equity, respect, and diversity, to include respecting people from diverse backgrounds, diversity of thought, and diversity of opinion. We all know this to be true: Today's children will take us closer to becoming a world where people are judged based upon the content of their character not the color of their skin. Yes, the government can change laws, but educators can change hearts and minds. And when we have families like yours supporting our efforts, we will be an unstoppable force for good.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharon I. Byrdsong
Superintendent of Schools