



July 15, 2020

Dear Petal Panthers:

I hope this summer message finds you and your family healthy and happy! As we draw closer to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, I have some important information to share with you. With all the uncertainty around COVID-19, it has been a very busy summer to put it mildly. Through the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), I had the pleasure of working on a small committee to safely reopen schools in the state of Mississippi. This state plan allows for schools to make local decisions based on circumstances around specific communities and the county as a whole; therefore, all districts across the state will have a varied approach to the new school year.

The purpose of this communication centers around sharing the Panther approach to a new and exciting school year. Our administrative team has worked around the clock to build the safest and best plan for our district. Before sharing the plan, it is important to better explain our thoughts behind the decision making.

Dating back to March, our weeks have been filled by attending weekly video calls with local/state healthcare experts, lawyers, MDE officials, state/local government officials, and school districts across the state/country. This summer, that communication has increased even more as the situation is so fluid. In addition, we have been researching through sound organizations the safest way to protect our staff and students. I have learned more about medical terminology, science, and cleaning supplies than any other time in my life. It is important that you know that this plan has been vetted by a local healthcare team consisting of doctors. This team of local experts has served and will continue to serve as my sounding board when seeking medical advice. As you probably have noticed through social media and the internet, there are many ideas floating around that vary from institution to

institution. I have opted to utilize people in the trenches that are serving on the front lines right here in the Pine Belt as we tailor plans for our district. Please know that every decision that has been made is through the lenses of safety and the well-being for ALL Panthers!

It is also important to note that I have been in contact with my Superintendent Advisory Team at every school, the Teacher Leadership Teams at the building level, PLC Leaders, Administrators district-wide, our Board of Trustees, and the District Shared Decision Making Committee that consists of staff, students, parents, and community members. Applying the medical advice along with the thoughts/suggestions from our Panther Team, we have a solid plan to share with you.

Now on to the Petal Panther Plan! As you peruse this plan, remember there is no way to cover every single scenario. We will have to be flexible from day 1 to day 180 as this is just a very unique and ever changing situation. Please understand the need for patience and grace as we walk this path together. Due to the potential to change as the year progresses, direct communication will be key to the success of our approach. We understand that you might have many more questions or thoughts after reviewing the plan. I encourage you to share your thoughts directly with us. You can reach us by email at info@petalschools.com to get detailed and accurate information. In addition, you can reach out to your building administrator, or central office by phone at any time for personal assistance.

Petal Primary School (Grades PreK - 2) - 601.554.7244

(Principal - Tessa Trimm; Assistant Principals - Ashley Harvey, Jana Perry)

Petal Elementary School (Grades 3-4) - 601.582.7454

(Principal - Wyn Mims; Assistant Principal - Jennifer Carr)

Petal Upper Elementary School (Grades 5-6) - 601.584.7660

(Principal - Emily Branch; Assistant Principal - Luke Daniels)

Petal Middle School (Grades 7-8) - 601.584.6301

(Principal - Tyler Watkins; Assistant Principal - Sandy Hampton)

Petal High School (Grades 9-12) - 601.583.3538

(Principal - Rob Knight; Assistant Principals - Joel Bowman, Amanda Garcia, LuCina Taylor; CTE Supervisor - Brooke Walter)

Petal School District Central Office - 601.545.3002

(Superintendent - Dr. Matthew Dillon; CO Administrators - Dr. Andy Schoggin, Margaret Tynes, Kelli Brown)

In closing, our new theme for the 2020-2021 is **Forward Panthers!** As we experience this new and exciting school year, let us be reminded it is important to continue to move *forward* in a safe and responsible way. In an effort to stay in school all year without closure, please consider doing your part to promote social distancing and wear a mask in large gatherings. Our school district is a bright

light in our community and with that comes a lot of responsibility and pride. No matter the circumstances or how often they will change, we plan to move *Forward* for the sake of our students, families, staff, and community as a whole. As documented in the past, Panthers always overcome, and this will be no different. Our approach might be different but our goals remain the same, and that is a commitment to our people. Join me in marching *forward* into a new school year, and know the best is yet to come!

Thank you,

Matthew L. Dillon, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Petal School District Return to School Plan

2020-2021 School Year



PSD has taken steps to prepare for the health, wellness, and safety of students and staff for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year. These guidelines are part of a living document and will be updated with new information as it becomes available. **Decisions will be made in coordination with local/state guidelines as they are released along with our local healthcare team.**

On June 8th, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) issued [Considerations for Reopening Mississippi Schools](#). In the MDE document, three options were outlined: the [traditional school model](#), a [hybrid school model](#), and a [virtual distance learning model](#). Throughout the school year, parents must be prepared for all three models to be utilized depending on direction from the Governor's Office, the Mississippi State Department of Health, the Mississippi Department of Education, and the Petal School District.

The **Petal School District** intends to begin the school year with the [traditional school model](#) with precautions and protocols designed around the health and well-being of our students and staff. The *American Academy of Pediatrics* strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.

Traditional School Model - This is the preferred method of delivering instruction for the Petal School District. Students will attend, in person, for the 180 day academic school year. We recognize that children learn best when physically present in the classroom. Students attending in person will be able to participate in extracurricular activities as appropriate. Multiple safety procedures will be followed to ensure student and staff well-being. Please review the [Commitment to Promote School and Community Health](#) and see all **health/sanitization protocols** below.

Virtual Distance Learning Model - A fully online option will be available, with restrictions, on a case-by-case basis. Families with health concerns must discuss the virtual learning opportunity with the building principal by July 31st. Students who participate in virtual learning must have access to reliable internet connectivity and commit to this model for each term. To meet MDE attendance requirements, students will follow a schedule set by the school and will be required to participate in local and state assessments. This model will maintain academic rigor and will be held to the PSD grading policies. Extracurricular activities and some elective courses will not be available for students participating in this model. Detailed information on this model is included in the [PSD Virtual Instructional Program](#).

Registration - Registration is now open for all students for the 2020-2021 school year. It is critically important to complete the registration process for each student as this assists in planning for class sizes, teacher units, etc. Please read our [registration information](#) to complete this process ASAP.

Health/Sanitization Protocols

Transportation - As social distancing on a bus will be challenging, we strongly encourage families to bring student(s) to school to help minimize numbers on the bus. When not possible, here are our bus guidelines:

- Students will be separated on the bus where feasible. Siblings or children living in the same household will be seated together.
 - Stagger seating if the bus is not at full capacity.
 - Assign seating for all students.
- Bus Drivers and any students who choose to utilize PSD bus transportation will be required to wear masks for the duration of the route to school and back home. Wearing a mask while riding the bus is a safety expectation.
- Buses will have hand sanitizer dispensers installed. Students will be expected to utilize hand sanitizer while entering and departing the bus.
- Buses will be appropriately disinfected after each use with approved [disinfectants](#).
- Bus drivers will be properly trained in COVID safety measures.

Arrival

- PreK-12th students will report directly to their classroom teacher while wearing a mask. There will be no convening in one area until the bell rings for the safety of our students/staff.
- Students will use hand sanitizer or hand washing upon arrival into classrooms.
- Common areas will be restricted when feasible.
- Late student sign in protocols--individual buildings/considerations will be documented on the door and on the individual school website.

Dismissal

- Parents must use the car line for student pick-up.
- Students will wear masks as they depart the classroom and move toward the car/bus line.
- Individual school protocols will be listed on the individual school website.

Cafeteria (Breakfast and Lunch) - Alternate serving methods will enable all students to have access to meals while complying with physical distancing guidelines. To achieve this goal, multiple meal service methods during a single meal service period may need to be utilized with different groups of children within the school building. Methods may include: serving meals in classrooms or providing "Grab and Go" meals in the cafeteria or hallways. Meals choice will be limited this year due to safety protocols for students and staff.

- Hand washing/hand sanitizer will be available before and after lunch
- Cafeterias will be appropriately disinfected after each use with [EPA approved products](#).

Classrooms

- Multiple social distancing strategies will be implemented based on feasibility of the unique space and needs of each school.
- Extra classroom furniture will be eliminated to accommodate more classroom space.
- Students will be encouraged to maintain distance from each other in the school and taught appropriate hygiene/COVID practices: COVID 19 [Do the 5!](#)

- Group work among students will be limited.
- Teachers will maintain updated seating charts in the event that contact tracing becomes necessary.
- PreK-6th students will keep their own supplies for use in the classroom.
- PreK-6th students will remain with their cohort throughout the day.
- Personal water bottles will be encouraged as drinking fountains will have limited availability.
- Frequent handwashing and hand sanitizing will be promoted throughout the day.
- Appropriate measures will be taken for cleaning Chromebooks/other technology devices.
- Students will be informally observed for illness prior to starting class and referred to the school nurse as needed.
- PSD teachers/staff will clean/disinfect frequent touch points regularly.

Passing Periods (Transitions)

- Hallway traffic will be limited by schedule.
- Exterior/outdoor class changes will be made available.
- Movement throughout buildings will be limited or reduced to one way traffic.
- Masks will be required while in motion.
- Hand washing/hand sanitizer will be available.

Playgrounds

- Enforcing physical distancing on an outside playground is difficult and may not be the most effective method of risk mitigation. Emphasis will be placed on cohorting students and limiting the size of groups participating in playground time. Outdoor transmission of the virus is known to be much lower than indoor transmission (American Academy of Pediatrics guidance, June 2020).
- Handwashing/sanitizer will be available upon re-entry to building.
- Frequently used playground hard surfaces will be cleaned routinely following [CDC protocols](#).

Cleaning/Hygiene

- Cleaning with [COVID and EPA approved products](#) will target cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched hard, non-porous surfaces, such as counters, tabletops, stair rails, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, drinking fountains, and any other surfaces that are visibly necessary.
- [CDC Guide to cleaning/disinfecting](#)
- [Hand sanitizer](#) will be available at most exterior doors, all classrooms, and all buses.
- Students and families will be provided with best practices for hygiene during the school day ([Sanitize Five](#)) and upon arriving at home.

Health Services

- Each school is staffed by a full time registered nurse.
- School nurses will provide COVID safety training/materials to faculty and staff.
- Encourage parents to give student medications at home. If medication at school is necessary for students, please schedule a time with the school nurse to drop it off.
- Staff will conduct personal daily [self-screening](#).
- Encourage parents to [screen students at home](#) prior to sending to school.

- Students or staff demonstrating symptoms will be referred to physician or PSD clinic ~ **Prior to returning to school, consult school nurse and provide documentation from physician.**
- Students/adults who are symptomatic will be issued a mask to wear until they are picked up by a parent or leave the building.

PPE

- Use of personal masks will be strongly encouraged for students and [required while in motion](#) (ex: arrival/dismissal, class change, etc). All masks must be viewpoint neutral and school appropriate if they have pictures and/or logos. In all instances, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of school dress will be determined by school administrators.
- Use of personal masks will be strongly encouraged for staff and required while in motion.

Visitors/Volunteers

- Nonessential visitors will be limited and seen by appointment only.
- No lunch guests or volunteers allowed.
- Only essential vendors will be allowed on campus (must have medical screening by school personnel before entry).
- Masks are required in the lobby area.
- [Visitor Procedures](#)

Athletics/Activities

- Per the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) on July 14th, the start of the Fall Sports season is delayed two weeks. Practice for volleyball, cross country, and swim starts Aug. 10 with first meets/matches Aug. 24. Football practice begins Aug. 17. Opening games for football start Sept. 4.

Other General Items

- It will not be practical for temperature checks to be performed once students arrive at school. Parents should keep their child at home if they are ill. Any student or staff member with a fever of 100.4 degrees or greater or symptoms of possible COVID-19 virus infection should not be present in school.
- No field trips are permitted until further notice.
- Confirmed COVID case (student/staff)--[CDC Guidance](#) or MSDH/MDE guidance
- [CDC "Close Contact"](#)
- [Cleaning/Disinfecting a classroom or area with a confirmed case:](#)
- Additional guidance will be forthcoming as public health data, safety precautions, and guidance evolves.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- **Should I register my student for the upcoming school year?** Yes! In order for us to make decisions (class schedules, numbers, cohorts), all students must be registered for the 2020-2021 school year.

- **When will teacher/school student schedules be available?** Student schedules and teacher information will be released the week of July 20th on ActiveParent. You must be registered in order to view your student's schedule. These schedules are tentative based on current student registration information and are subject to change.
- **Are there any changes to the school calendar or school day?** No. We will follow the school board approved calendar for the academic school year. Additionally, school hours will remain the same.
- **Will masks be required to be worn all day?** Students/Staff are required to wear masks anytime they are in motion (arrival, dismissal, hallways, etc.). While we are strongly encouraging masks throughout the day, students and teachers may choose whether or not to wear a mask once they are in the classroom.
- **If someone (student/teacher) in your class has a confirmed positive COVID-19 case, will I be notified?** Yes. You will be contacted by building level administration for confirmed positive cases. Maintenance of confidentiality will limit specific information that can be shared.
- **Will there be a meet the teacher/open house night?** Yes. However, the structure will be different than previous events. Building level administration will be sharing individual plans that will promote small group sizes, social distancing, and the requirement of masks for attendees.

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¹ Revised July 14, 2020