

Learning Today - Building Tomorrow

August 13, 2020

Principal's Message

I hope you are all well and enjoying summer as I officially welcome you to the 2020-21 Markham Elementary school year. Most of you have already heard about the district's decision that all students will be participating in online learning at least throughout the entire first quarter. I'm sure this decision brings up many emotions for our community, as we look ahead to beginning the year together, yet physically apart. School will no doubt will look different this year. Covid-19, the shift to distance learning, and the racist incidents and ensuing world-wide protests during the spring and summer have impacted our staff, students, and families. We are returning and operating from a place of isolation and will be looking to regain a sense of belonging in our school community.

With that in mind, we will begin the year with a "soft start" that centers relationships, addresses the social-emotional needs of our students, and emphasizes community building and inclusive, equitable practices. We have learned some valuable lessons along the way and will launch a new school year better prepared than in the spring. I want to acknowledge that having all of our students participating in online learning will create new challenges and barriers that will significantly impact our learning community. As I have begun to meet members of the community, I am steady in my belief that we will come together to support the academic and social emotional growth of our students. Together, we can do hard things. As the interim principal, I am honored to navigate new paths within this ever-changing world alongside all of you. Please know that my (virtual) door is always open and don't hesitate to reach out. You can expect regular communication from me and you can find Superintendent Guerrero's message to the community and other updates about this fall here: www.pps.net/fall2020.

Family Engagement and Support

Devices

Our first priority in the next couple of weeks is to make sure we get a device in the hands of every student. We will be distributing devices to new Markham students and replacing broken devices until we reach that goal. The first wave of distribution will occur August 19-21 from 9:00-1:00 at the school site. To help with our planning, please complete this [FORM](#) if your student needs a Chromebook. Just a reminder that each student in your household will need their own chromebook or personal laptop.

Instructional Day

We are waiting on PPS and the teacher union to complete bargaining on what the re-entry expectations for teachers will look like. As they negotiate the details, it is slowing our progress for more granular planning and implementation. What we do know is that the first two weeks will be a "soft start" focused on making connections with every student and getting students in every grade oriented to the Seesaw platform.

Class Lists

The Markham staff spent hours last spring collaborating to create class lists that ensure that each classroom supports the social and academic needs of students and reflects a diversity of gender, race, academic skill, and learning styles. Our plan is to send out class assignments the week of August 24th. Due to FERPA laws that protect student confidentiality of their educational records, we will not be able to release student information as to who else is in your child's class.

Learning Pods

I know there has been some family planning and discussion around the idea of learning pods and appreciate the resourcefulness. I have been engaged with district leadership, other principals, and community to get a better sense of how to move forward. As we prepare for a new launch, we have reflected on the possibility of learning pods and have thought a lot about the potential impact and unintended consequences.

- We are concerned that by creating this structure we have essentially engineered classrooms that have excluded others from decision making, bumped students out of already intentionally formed class lists, and have created inequities all across the classrooms and teachers.
- We need to be able to determine the structure of schooling for all students. We understand the unusual circumstances and the need for flexibility. We would prefer to send the class assignments out, and allow families to THEN create the learning pods.
- By allowing some families to choose which classroom, maybe not the teacher, there is still the issue of exclusion. It will be impossible to accommodate all the potential requests and shifts.
- The potential shifting of students if and when we return this school year, and the possible shift of students of color and/or special education into one classroom is problematic. We currently have specific students in specific classrooms to allow us to provide additional supports.

Here is [an article](#) that may help you to reflect and ask questions as you explore the possibility of Learning Pods. At this time, the formation of Learning Pods is not part of the district's Comprehensive Distance Learning Plan. With that said, we will do our best to align programs and grade level teams so there is more consistency across teachers and learning platforms. If you do decide to form learning pods, we want to encourage you to consider equitable outcomes for ALL students. As a community, we are STRONGER TOGETHER.

Racial Justice Resources

In this section, we will share ongoing resources with families to support our priority of dismantling systems of oppression, developing students' anti-racist skills through critical thinking and reflection and honoring our Black, Indigenous and Communities of Color.

- [Center for Racial Justice in Education](#) This list of resources supports parents and educators to have many developmentally appropriate conversations about race, racism, anti-racism and social justice.
- UNICEF: [How to Talk to Your Kids about Racism](#). This article helps with the difficult conversations that help kids understand racism.

Upcoming Dates

8/19-21 First wave of chromebook distribution for new families and exchanges for broken devices

9/2 School starts for grades 1-5

9/8 First day for kindergarteners

9/2-11 "Soft Start" Comprehensive Distance Learning Orientation

Be Well,

Pam Joyner

Interim Principal Markham Elementary