



THE SCHOOL BOARD OF BROWARD COUNTY, FLORIDA

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ROBERT W. RUNCIE
Superintendent of Schools

**The School Board of
Broward County, Florida**

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March 24, 2020

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Dear Broward County Public Schools Community,

While the world focuses on the best way to attack the coronavirus pandemic, we must reinvent our public education system overnight to respond to the challenges created by the society-wide disruptions.

Our schools reflect the structural and societal challenges we struggle with in this democracy. Four areas stand out in this crisis – food insecurity, the digital divide, access to quality childcare, and a fragile healthcare system. Here is our response to these issues.

One in seven, or more than 12 million, children in the United States struggle with food insecurity and hunger, symptoms of larger societal issues of poverty and inequality. Over 60% of children attending Broward County Public Schools (BCPS) qualify for free or reduced meals. For many children, our public schools are the only reliable place for them to receive two nutritious meals – breakfast and lunch - each day. Many of our schools, as well as community organizations, offer dinner to students in aftercare programs.

Finding ways to continue feeding our children when school closes for any reason – hurricanes or a pandemic - is a priority. Immediately after closing schools in response to the spread of the coronavirus, we opened nine feeding sites across the county where families could safely pick up grab-and-go meals, no questions asked. Starting on Monday, March 30, we will open 47 sites across the District and will add more locations, if needed. Our campuses may be closed, but our kitchens are open.

Likewise, although our physical campuses are closed, instruction and learning are still open (#LearningNeverCloses.) Over the past three years, we have been developing our capability to deliver personalized education with a blend of classroom time with teachers and online digital resources available anytime and anyplace. Our Canvas Learning Management System has given us a common tool to make this possible and most of our educators have been using it for the past few years. Canvas delivers digital versions of textbooks, links to educational programs and resources, lesson plans and instructional materials for every grade level and subject including resources for students with special needs and those needing bilingual curriculum/instruction. Our teachers will be working through Canvas to engage our students in distance learning after Spring Break.

We will continue to deliver social and emotional learning and mental health and wellness services through this distance learning platform as we connect our school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other mental health professionals with students who need their support.

We will also collaborate with parents to determine the best manner and timeframe to provide ESE services and bilingual services.

More than 10% of students nationally do not have digital access - an astonishing statistic in the 21st century technological age. We are doing two things to deal with this inequality. First, we are providing a laptop computer to any student who does not have one. On March 20, we distributed more than 64,000 laptop computers to students across Broward. This day was made possible through the taxpayers of Broward County, who passed our SMART Bond referendum, which allowed us to purchase over 95,000 computing devices and reduce our student to computer ratio from 6:1 to 2:1, and in many grade levels it is now 1:1. Because of this investment, we are technology-rich and ready, which is needed now more than ever.

We will hold a second distribution on Saturday, March 28 for parents and guardians who were unable to go to their child's school for the first distribution, or if the school ran out of laptop computers. Additionally, our laptop computers and online learning environment are configured with our students' safety and security in mind including restrictions on downloading and installing third party programs and content filtering to limit access to inappropriate websites.

It has been estimated that between five and 15% of our healthcare workers may have to stay home as schools and businesses close. This could create a significant hardship on an already stressed healthcare system. To help curb the impact that school closures will have on our community, BCPS temporarily offered free childcare services at nine locations for families of emergency first responders and medical personnel.

We have also heard of an additional struggle our healthcare workers are having - securing supplies. Some compare it to being "at war with no ammo." Our medical workers should not have to put their lives at unnecessary risk to save others. To help, we will start donating medical supplies from our schools' allied health programs and the medical programs at our three BCPS technical colleges. We will also collect supplies from school clinics in our elementary, middle and high schools.

There are many things that we are still working through. Since the state has cancelled all mandated examinations, including the Florida Standards Assessments and End-of-Course exams, how will course grades and promotion decisions be determined? Will SAT, ACT and AICE exams be offered? How will we handle high school graduation ceremonies? How will clubs and activities such as peer counseling and mentoring, speech and debate, band and orchestra, theater, and various athletics continue to be provided?

There will be challenges and mistakes as we travel through these uncharted waters. Our promise to you is that we will fix them and find solutions to move forward. Our children deserve nothing less.

“It takes a village to raise a child,” is an African proverb that has never been more germane than in this moment. We appreciate the assistance and support of our state agencies, our municipalities, public health experts and community partners, and we thank our entire community for coming together as we navigate this unprecedented crisis. It is up to all of us - working together - to do whatever it takes to help our children continue to learn and grow.

May God bless you and keep you and your family safe and healthy.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert W. Runcie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Superintendent Robert W. Runcie
Broward County Public Schools

For information about the coronavirus, please go to [browardschools.com/coronavirus](https://www.browardschools.com/coronavirus) to find the most updated information pertaining to our students, families, teachers and staff.