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James L. Henderson, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

Connecting for Success: Every Child, Every Classroom, Every Day

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Contact: Media & Public Relations Deborah Antoine dantoine@holmesccsd.org (662) 633-2454

HCCSD Delivering Education — and Meals — in New Normal

LEXINGTON, Miss. – Last week, Governor Tate Reeves announced his decision to close schools throughout the state through April 17, 2020, to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health and safety of our communities and state. In accordance with the announcement, Holmes County Consolidated Schools will be closed through April 17th, at a minimum, and will continue efforts to provide supports to students and their families to ensure learning continues. District staff continue to work according to the Governor’s executive order. This means some are working from home and some are working in uncrowded or near-isolated office settings. Large meetings, when there is a need, are held as video conferences.

Despite the state-wide closing of schools, Holmes County Consolidated School District (HCCSD) is continuing to educate its students and feed those who want a grab-n-go breakfast and lunch. Superintendent of Schools, Dr. James L. Henderson said, “We are committed to providing a quality education to our students despite the circumstances that are seemingly ever-changing. If there is a silver lining to the safety measures enacted as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, it is that education will never be the same in Holmes County. We are committed to ensuring that every

student continues to have access to instruction and moves forward with learning so that no one falls behind or misses out being prepared to succeed in the global economy. We have the will and means to get this done.”

“We also have the assurance from our state leaders. Governor Reeves declared that districts will continue to receive state funding to operate, and that employees will be paid during this time of school closure. Our district leaders, while following state-mandated safety protocols, are training school leaders and teachers to provide online virtual learning activities, assignments and assessments to students at home during this social isolation period. Chief of School Leadership, Dr. Joann Rucker, said, “We are working with our educational partners Renaissance (Math and Reading) and Edgenuity (online curriculum and learning solutions) in addition to others, to give all of our students the means to continue and complete the requirements for this academic year.”

Additionally, Title funds were reallocated to purchase one-to-one computing devices for all students in the district so that their educational gains won’t slide during their time away from school. “We will also provide hotspot devices or create mobile internet access locations for all



homes at no cost to our families,” Henderson said. The district is surveying parents to identify areas without internet access. “Our students and staff will benefit from the changes to our standard way of doing things as we learn more ways to communicate, solve problems and learn during this new normal,” Henderson said. “We are going to be better for overcoming this catastrophic pandemic.”

Henderson went on to say, “We want every student in this district to have equal access to maintain the progress of their educational trajectory. Families were contacted regarding the process for procuring the devices and received information on how to access the online virtual learning sites. Building leaders are applauding the efforts of the district. HCCHS assistant principal Antwayn Patrick said, “though we are dealing with a very challenging situation, I applaud Dr. Henderson’s efforts to modernize our district. Providing computing devices and hotspots removes the barrier to online learning that rural areas have.” Zenobia Cockrell, a librarian at William Dean Elementary School, agrees. “Providing computers is a plus since so many students do not have them at home. The district’s website is also beneficial because it is a one-stop site that provides updated information and communication, designed to keep everyone informed.”

With a growth mindset and determination to improve, easing the financial burden and hardships of families in the HCCSD is one of Dr. Henderson’s top priorities. The district began meal deliveries March 17 and will continue for as long as schools remain closed. The number of meals distributed has steadily increased and this is good news for the district. “We want our families to stay healthy,” Henderson said. “Delivering meals during this time of insecurity will help relieve some of the scarcity our families are experiencing.” Holmes County Central High School (HCCHS) student Harvey Ellington is grateful for this service. “I appreciate the district for doing this because it means a lot to my family and other members in our community.” Dr. Shem Whigham, assistant principal of HCCHS said, “People are excited to see the efforts of the district, going the extra mile, especially considering the challenges of doing it in a rural district.”

Congressman Bennie G. Thompson (MS-02) said, “I am proud of the Holmes County Consolidated School District for their leadership and service. They are serving their community by delivering meals directly to students and families, offering school counselor assistance, and distributing computing devices and hot spots to provide internet access to all families in the district. These services are increasingly important to provide our community with a sense of normalcy during these uncertain times. We are all appreciative of everything the District is doing to help the community.”

Lexington mayor Robin McCrory said “I have the utmost gratitude to the community, school district faculty and staff for stepping up and being responsive to the federal and state guidelines to maintain social distance and minimize contact. I’m in full support of the grab-n-go meals and the online learning the district is providing.”

“During these challenging times, we are stronger together. We will continue to communicate with our community and keep our families updated,” Henderson said. “Our website and social media accounts will always have the most current information pertaining to our schools and the district’s operation; this is our commitment to you.”

Media organizations in need of more information are asked to contact Ms. Deborah Antoine, Media Spokesperson by email: dantoine@holmesccsd.org, or call (662) 854-3447.