



Savannah-Chatham County Public School System

208 Bull Street / Savannah, Georgia 31401 / 912.395.5600

An Open Letter to the Graduating Class of 2020:

Our community, our nation, our globe continues to navigate a time of unbelievable and rapid change. As I reflect on what was our “normal” prior to spring break to what now has become a strange new way of operation that has forced us to move quickly, to adapt, and to make very difficult decisions for the good of all, I remain inspired by your resilience, your strength, and your compassion. We have all been affected by this pandemic. Some, in ways that we could not have ever imagined.

It has been difficult to be away from our friends, to learn in isolation, and to forego final athletic seasons, celebrations of achievement, and milestone events. This in the face of days filled with sunshine while our beautiful world continues to turn, seemingly unchanged. But, we have changed. And still, we must not forget that our current reality is temporary; however, when we return to full functionality some of us will never have the opportunity to experience milestone events in the traditional form that we have grown to love.

For my seniors, COVID-19 has taken so much. You did not get to experience the traditional form of prom, end of year celebrations, senior week, or say goodbye to those whom you have grown with and who helped you become the successful person you are today. And now, your graduation ceremonies have been affected by this pandemic. Please know this weighs heavy on our minds. Our leadership teams have had countless discussions to find a solution that would allow you to enjoy some form of normalcy as you prepare to enter the next phase of life. We must remain steadfast in our work to operate in a manner that reflects the safest environment aligned with the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Now, as we begin to hear discussions of the reopening of America, we are still far from returning to the traditional learning environment, school events, and familiar social gatherings.

Our plan to hold a curbside celebration for the distribution of caps and gowns to our seniors is just one way to bring our valued graduates the recognition that you so deserve. And as many districts across the state and across the nation have made the difficult decision to completely cancel graduation activities, here, we have decided to also provide a virtual graduation ceremony that will further recognize the Class of 2020 in a format that will allow you to safely celebrate at home surrounded by loved ones.

In making decisions that affect thousands, we must thoughtfully consider all factors/conditions and we must thoughtfully plan in advance. Changing graduation was no easy decision. At this time we are not able to fully predict what the future holds. What we do know is that our school leadership teams, District Administration, our Board of Education members, and this community believe in each and every one of you. Some have asked for postponed ceremonies when the risk of large crowds has passed, while others point out that many seniors who are going away to college and joining the military will not be in our area later this summer or early fall. You deserve recognition and you deserve it now. Especially now, while we are all still together. I am so proud of your accomplishments as you prepare to move into the world of work, collegiate level studies, and the armed forces.

Right now we know that CDC guidelines prohibit gatherings of 10 or more. We also are keenly aware of the guidance provided by the White House for a phased reopening that is contingent on many factors and subject to state level decisions that will continue to influence the way we operate in the coming months. However, our

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hope is to consider opportunities that will offer celebrations that resemble traditional ceremonies later this year or whenever feasible after the CDC eases restrictions for large group gatherings. The date when the CDC restrictions will be lifted to allow activities of this nature is still unknown.

When all conditions allow, we will determine the best course of action for those who wish to participate in such an event. I spoke to this publicly during our April 8 Board of Education meeting and several times since then. This is my commitment to our Class of 2020.

The pandemic is not something any of us wanted or anything that can be easily controlled. We do know that by following social distancing practices and adhering to the guidelines recommended by our nation's health professionals, we can have an influence on the spread of this disease and we can eventually return to the world we know. This public health crisis has affected every aspect of our lives, especially those aspects wherein we enjoy large group social events, including family events, religious services, celebrations of achievement, graduation ceremonies, even funerals. These events are sacred to us all. We all share in the disappointment of missing special and heartfelt occasions that in many ways define who we are.

Safety and adherence to safety guidelines must be the priority. When it is safe to operate otherwise, we will.

I remain inspired by the acts of kindness and compassion that I have seen throughout our school community. Please know that our work to hold a celebration of our seniors and virtual graduation ceremonies demonstrate our honor and love for you during a very difficult and restrictive time in our history. Your hard work has not gone unnoticed and will not be forgotten. You join a nation of youth who will graduate under the shadow of a global pandemic. But, I know you are stronger for it, you are wiser for it, and you are kinder for it.

I am proud to be your Superintendent and I am proud of the Class of 2020.

M. Ann Levett, Ed.D.

Superintendent

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