

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: January 22, 2021

Subject: Slowing the Pace of Return to In-Person Learning for Students in Grades 3-12

APS families and community, it's important for me to speak candidly with you today about modifications to our plan for in-person learning.

Tiered Approach to Return

Our PreK-2 and Special Education students will still return as scheduled on Monday, January 25. However, I have decided to slow the pace of return to in-person learning for students in Grades 3 through 12 as follows:

- Grades 3 through 5 will now return on Monday, February 8
- Grades 6 through 12 will return on Tuesday, February 16.

This will provide more time to intensify and add to our current mitigation strategies and in anticipation of COVID-19 surveillance testing to be provided in our schools. Please remember that charter and partner school plans may vary. Parents of students in charter and partner schools should contact their school for updates.

This modification in our return schedule does not create an opportunity to change your intent to return declaration. Our schools have worked hard to develop comprehensive plans based on the results of the most recent intent to return forms and we must adhere to those plans to ensure everyone's safety.

During my visits to our schools, I've been impressed with the way our school leadership teams, teachers, and other school-based staff have prepared our buildings for in-person learning. I also understand the emotion and concern that some of you have expressed. I'm aware that many of you participated in the We Demand APS survey to further share your concerns about our return to in-person learning. I plan to work with the leaders of that group to secure your feedback.

There is no question that we are closely monitoring COVID-19 daily. There is not a day that I wake up that those numbers aren't on my mind. I am experiencing it along with you and I have lived it like some of you have.

The decision to return to in-person learning is not an easy one. And in my conversations with superintendents all around the country, there is no clear-cut answer that suits every school district. This has been frustrating, challenging, and yet it is our reality.

To be clear, we have resourced our schools well and provided them with the materials and equipment needed to stay safe while providing in-person instruction for our students. Our teachers and school-based staff returned to our schools this past week, with health and mitigation strategies in place.

In preparation for our return to in-person learning, we adopted a comprehensive COVID-19 testing strategy in collaboration with public health officials, community partners, universities, and healthcare organizations.

We also provided locations (www.atlantapublicschools.us/COVIDTesting) where our students, teachers, and staff can get tested, whether they have symptoms identified through our screening protocols or have come in contact with someone with COVID-19 at school or the workplace.

APS Introduces Surveillance Testing

We are preparing to implement COVID-19 surveillance testing of employees in all of our schools and buildings. This weekly testing will allow us to be proactive and identify the presence of the COVID-19 virus, even in individuals who may be asymptomatic.

In addition, you can view reports on the number of positive COVID-19 cases and exposures in our schools and buildings on our [COVID-19 dashboard online](#).

I am working diligently on accelerating the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine for all APS employees. Right now, our employees are categorized in Phase 1B, and we're working with our partners at the Fulton County Board of Health to speed up that process.

As your Superintendent, I can tell you that I'm committed to our mission. I appreciate your honesty, your engagement, and your flexibility. We will continue to make decisions in the best interest of our APS community, even in today's unpredictable environment. Please be well.

Yours in Service,

Lisa Herring