

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: December 11, 2020

Subject: Return+Learn Reminders and Key Holiday Dates

With the holidays fast approaching, 2020 will soon be behind us. In retrospect, this has been a year full of new and unexpected challenges, not just in education, but across every sector of this community, our country, and globally. The new year ahead may bring its own unique challenges – reopening our schools and buildings for the option of in-person learning among them – but I believe this new year will also bring new hope. I’m counting on your continued support and partnership as we continue to move forward.

January 2021 Reopening Update

We have received questions regarding our reopening plan and while we won’t be able to answer them all in this letter, we do want to address those that will help you complete your [Intent to Return Declaration Form](#) before December 21st. Remember, on this form you are choosing a learning option through the third quarter which ends March 19th. You will have an opportunity to update your choice for the fourth quarter at a later date. A variety of resources are included on our APS Return + Learn Phase II [page](#) and we will continue to update our [FAQs](#) to include your questions.

If you submitted a response during the previous intent-to-return declaration period, you may use this form to update your response. Remember, if you don’t complete the form by Monday, December 21st, your student (s) will be placed into an instructional model based on your previous declaration or will remain in their current instructional learning model (virtual instruction with your local school or Atlanta Virtual Academy). You can change your response until the declaration period closes on December 21st. More details are available on the [Declaration Form page](#).

What Will In-Person Instruction Look Like?

For those of you considering the in-person option for your child, you may be curious about what in-person instruction will look like in the classroom. I can tell you that principals are planning now and need the data from the Intent to Return Declaration Form to understand exactly how it will look. Principals do not know at this time if your student will have the same teacher or if their teacher will be virtual with an assistant in the classroom. Here’s what you can expect inside the classroom:

- Everyone will be required to wear a mask for the duration of the school day
- Hand sanitizer stations will be available in each classroom

- Desks and chairs will be arranged to support social distancing recommendations
- More district-wide safety measures can be found at [APSprotects](#)

Here's what you can expect during a lesson:

- Instruction in classrooms may include simultaneous teaching as teachers may have to work with both in-person and virtual learners
- Instruction in classrooms will consist of a combination of hands-on and technology-based activities
- All students and teachers will use their own instructional supplies and laptops/tablets as there will be no sharing of instructional materials
- All classroom teachers will have access to an interactive whiteboard
- All students and classroom teachers will have access to MyBackpack, Gsuite, Zoom, and other instructional technology platforms

Phased-In Approach

As you know, APS has developed a phased-in approach for reopening schools as we prepare for January 2021. I wanted to remind you about several key dates currently in place. These 2021 dates include teacher preparation days leading up to reopening with the option for in-person learning.

- Monday, January 11 – Central Office staff return to work in person
- Tuesday, January 19 – School-based staff return to work in person
- Monday, January 25 – Students phased in beginning with PreK-2 and Special Education (low incidence – PreK -12)
- Monday, February 1 – Students in grades 3-5, 6, 9, and 10 return
- Thursday, February 4 – Students in grades 7, 8, 11, and 12 return

Our plan includes three instructional delivery models: 1) Site-Based Virtual Learning, 2) Face to Face and 3) Atlanta Virtual Academy.

Why reopen in January?

We want to provide each family with the opportunity to choose an option that best fits the needs of their individual child and the health concerns of their family. We know that some students have a greater need for in-person instruction than others. Virtual learning has been successful for some while challenging for others. While data regarding community transmission of COVID-19 will still be a factor, it will not be the only indicator we use.

We are reopening based on a variety of current factors, many that did not exist in October:

- Current research regarding children and community spread in schools
- Updated guidance from the CDC
- APS Comprehensive COVID-19 Testing Protocol (in partnership with health care experts)
- Vaccination progress
- Effective launch of in-person targeted intervention supports, which has allowed us to evaluate our mitigation strategies and strengthen health and safety protocols

- Risks and well-being considerations of students for not reopening buildings

Could this plan and/or timeline change?

Yes. Unless there is a state or federal mandate, we will begin reopening buildings to students on January 25. We believe that with our deliberate mitigation strategies paired with our Comprehensive COVID-19 Testing Protocol and the progress we are seeing with vaccines that we will be able to move forward as planned. As we've learned this year, however, we need to be flexible and ready to adapt to new circumstances. We are constantly assessing the data with our expert health care partners, reviewing the factors mentioned above, and working to meet the needs of all students.

How will the 60% or greater school capacity guidelines for in-person learning affect my child's school?

We know many of you have questions about the 60% capacity guidelines that have been discussed. The 60% cap is based on school enrollment. Based on our October survey data, the vast majority of our schools (95%) will not be affected by the 60% enrollment capacity standard. This will look different at each school since it is based on the number of students that elect to return to in-person learning.

Principals were provided a Capacity Dashboard tool in October to help configure classrooms and shared spaces to meet the CDC social (physical) distancing recommendations. Schools where the number of students returning for in-person instruction exceeds the number allowed by the 60% cap, will have the flexibility to modify the instructional model to ensure we meet the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control. Principals need the data from the Intent to Return Declaration Form to solidify plans if their school meets this threshold. We anticipate receiving these plans by the first week of January.

I also want you to know that we presented the latest COVID-19 Public Health Data Checkpoint at the Atlanta Board of Education's meeting on December 7. It is available [here](#).

Why will every school continue to participate in Asynchronous Wednesdays?

All Wednesdays will remain asynchronous (independent learning) until the end of the semester, May 2021. We were intentional in planning these days for the following activities:

- Students - Independent learning and intervention
- Staff - Professional learning and student intervention
- Teachers - Planning and preparation for simultaneous teaching
- Schools - Deep cleaning
- District meal delivery

Additionally, district meal delivery will be on Wednesdays (previously on Mondays), along with COVID-19 testing.

It's our hope that the answers to these questions and the resources on our APS Return + Learn Phase II [page](#) will help you complete your [Intent to Return Declaration Form](#) by December 21. Form responses may be changed until the declaration period closes. You do not have to go back

and edit the form if you made a selection earlier this year that you wish to maintain. If you do not complete this form by the deadline, your student will remain in their current instructional learning model (virtual instruction with your local school or Atlanta Virtual Academy).

We are grateful for your understanding that there is not a one-size-fits-all plan or perfect process. Just as each of our students is unique, so too, are each of our schools and clusters. We need your continued support as we move forward together to reopen our schools for in-person instruction in late January and meet the needs of the entire District.

For more details about reopening, please visit our Return+Learn page at www.atlantapublicschools.us/reopen. As a follow-up to our December 3rd community town hall, we have also prepared a set of FAQs that are available at the Return+Learn page or by clicking [here](#).

We still have another full week in the school year ahead, and I want to take a moment to provide you with a few updates:

Key Holiday Dates

I want to make certain that you have marked important holiday break dates on your calendars.

- Friday, December 18 – Last day for students in 2020
- Monday, December 21-Friday, January 1 – Winter Holiday Break
- Monday, January 4 – Teacher Professional Work Day (no school for students)
- Tuesday, January 5 - First day back for students and Virtual Early Release Day
- Friday, January 15 – Last day of the first semester
- Monday, January 18 – Martin Luther King Day (no school)
- Tuesday, January 19 – First day of the second semester
- The full Student Calendar is available [here](#).

Remember, students return on January 5 and have two weeks of virtual instruction remaining in the first semester. The second semester begins on January 19.

Winter Holiday Meal Distribution Update

Due to the holiday break, our APS Nutrition Department will distribute seven-day meal kits (seven breakfast and seven lunch meals) to all children (ages 1-18) in Atlanta on Friday, December 18, from 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. from one of the five curbside pick-up locations listed below and by designated school bus routes from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

- Bunche Middle
- Carver High
- Douglass High
- Maynard Jackson High
- Washington High

Regular food distribution for 2021 will resume on Wednesday, January 6, and will continue every Wednesday through the rest of the school year.

Virtual Early Release Day – January 5, 2021

Atlanta Public Schools will observe an early release for traditional schools on Tuesday, January 5, 2021, to allow time for staff and eligible high school students to vote in the upcoming runoff election. Schools will adhere to the half-day dismissal schedule as follows:

- Elementary – 11:30 a.m.
- Middle – 12:30 p.m.
- High – 12:00 p.m.

After School activities including Targeted Intervention Programs will continue as scheduled.

As we prepare for our final full week of 2020 for Atlanta Public Schools, I want to express how thankful I am for your ongoing support, engagement, and collaboration. After all, we can only accomplish our mission – graduate every student ready for college, career, and life – together. Let's continue to work together to improve teaching and learning in both the traditional and virtual environments, continue to take care of ourselves and each other, and strive to overcome the many obstacles before us.

Yours in Service,

Dr. Lisa Herring