

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Employees

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: October 16, 2020

Subject: Delay of Phase II of Return + Learn and face-to-face instruction

Dear colleagues,

I am making an important announcement this afternoon regarding Phase II of our Return+Learn plan, and I wanted to make sure I updated you before I notified the rest of our community.

I have decided that Atlanta Public Schools (APS) will postpone all reopening plans for in-person learning until January 2021. This decision comes after our continued monitoring and tracking of COVID-19 health data that is trending unfavorably, consultation with public health officials and healthcare experts, and data secured to determine both feasibility and stakeholder feedback. Given this current information and careful consideration, we will continue with the current virtual model until at least January 2021.

Before I go into further details, I want to express my appreciation to each and every one of you for your focus and commitment to providing a quality education for EVERY child despite this pandemic. We have asked a lot of you during these challenging times, and I have been humbled seeing the dedication of our teachers, administrators, and support staff rising to the occasion and proving that we have the best team in public education today.

Join me later today on Workplace at 4 p.m. where I will briefly share my decision with staff. Please note that this is not a town hall, this is just an opportunity to hear this decision directly from me. I look forward to seeing you there (aps.workplace.com).

I remain committed to keeping you safe and supported throughout the pandemic as well as keeping you informed.

To that end, we will proceed with our practice of monthly health data checkpoints and present the next update at the November 2 Board meeting. We also continue to explore ways to support our most vulnerable learners, particularly our low-incidence special needs population and our youngest students, including their potential return to some in-person services prior to January 2021.

APS monitors, on a daily basis, the COVID-19 data published by the Georgia Department of Public Health at this link: <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>. That daily report contains levels of community transmission over 14 days, the rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases, and percent of positive tests by county. Despite downward trends in recent weeks, our

community has seen recent increases in new cases, resulting in a current average that exceeds 130 new cases per 100,000 county residents. That number leaves us in substantial spread of COVID-19 and unable to reopen to in-person instruction.

As you know, we sent the Intent to Return Declaration Form to 38,397 students, which represents the total PreK-12 enrollment of all traditional APS schools. Please note that this figure does not include charter and partner students, which represents an additional 10,000+ students. Families of students at charter and partner schools did not participate in the intent to return process. More than 22,000 families in our traditional schools (or 58%) submitted their forms by the deadline. Of those submitting the forms, 10,460 expressed their intent for their children to return to school if we were to resume in-person instruction. That's less than half the people who filled out the form.

Three schools had more than 60% of students declare their intent to return in person. All three of these schools were elementary schools in the North Atlanta cluster, Brandon, Jackson, and Smith. We had 16 schools where less than 20% of students declared their intent to return in person. As a cluster, North Atlanta had the highest percent of students declare in person with 42%, compared to the Mays cluster, with only 19%. I should note that for the 16,200 families that did not return the forms, their forms defaulted to site-based virtual instruction.

Regarding the staff questionnaire that closed on September 28, 27% of school-based staff indicated that they would be unable to work in person in any reopening model due to a personal health condition or household issue. On October 6th, the school staff who were part of the proposed reopening model presented at the October 5 Board meeting (all except middle school and high school core and extended core teachers), were asked to officially declare their intent to work from home starting October 19 using an online form. To date, 32% of that school-based group requested telework. Of the teachers in the group, a slightly higher amount, 39%, requested telework.

We all must remain focused on giving every APS student a high-quality education regardless of the instructional model. That means we will continue to support every teacher in our district, enabling them to put their creativity to work to deliver engaging lessons that get our students excited to learn. Again, we are grateful for our passionate and dedicated teachers who have worked diligently since schools moved to a virtual model in the spring to meet the needs of every one of our students. I have been encouraged by the fact that our students are engaged and have been logging on at an average rate of 95% each week.

Given our decision, I want to share an update on a few other areas of significance:

Nutrition

With APS remaining in the virtual setting, our Nutrition program will provide seven-day weekly meal kits (seven breakfast meals and seven lunch meals) with distribution occurring each Monday, beginning October 26, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. from one of the 14 curbside pick-up locations or designated school bus routes listed at www.atlantapublicschools.us/Page/63224.

Athletics

Our high school football, volleyball, softball, and cross country teams will continue to compete, following the appropriate health and safety protocols we've put in place. No fans are allowed in the stands. In addition, we expect our winter sports athletes to begin conditioning soon, following all health and safety protocols.

Synchronous Wednesdays

As a result of our decision to remain virtual for the rest of this semester, Wednesdays will remain synchronous (students learn at the same time) instructional days, as we've been doing for the first nine weeks. We were implementing asynchronous (students learn at different times and work at their own pace) Wednesdays only as part of our Phase II face-to-face plan. We appreciate the teachers who took the opportunity to organize, rearrange, and prepare their rooms on the professional learning days this week and know it will be helpful later to have undertaken these activities now.

Employee Telework Process and Access to Schools and Buildings

For both district office and school-based staff whether you are currently working remotely or are reporting to work in person, please maintain your current schedule until further notice. Anyone with a telework application currently in process for Phase II reopening should complete the process to have their approval or denial documented for future reference.

New telework applications should not be submitted by school-based employees. (Some operations staff may still encounter a need to apply for telework.) Teachers, remember that you can still use your classrooms for virtual instruction. Any employee with questions about telework, paid leave, ADA accommodations, or any employee-related matter should contact their supervisor or the Human Resources department. All of our facilities are open to non-APS employees by appointment only. Facilities are unavailable for rental and outside use.

The uncertainties created by this pandemic require us as a school district to be nimble and to prepare for different scenarios, including returning to school for in-person learning or extending virtual instruction further if necessary. This is the nature of the world in which we now all live.

As we continue our preparations for the eventual return to in-person instruction, we will continue to monitor the health data, maintain our safety measures and protocols in our buildings, and communicate with our students, families, teachers, staff, and the APS community throughout this process.

Like many of you, I look forward to the day when we can welcome all of our students back into our buildings safely, embrace them, and teach them face to face. That day is coming. We are all in this together and I assure you that we will get through this together.

Thank you, and please be well.

Yours in Service

Dr. Lisa Herring