

## MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: October 16, 2020

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

Dear Parents/Caregivers:

As promised, I am writing you today to share our decision regarding our Phase II reopening plan. 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.

In addition, 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.

As we have previously shared in numerous virtual town halls, fireside chats, memorandums, weekly videos, and news reports, all decisions regarding our phased approach for a return to face-to-face teaching and learning remain rooted in the current COVID-19 health data for our community.

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.

While the community transmission data is the leading metric utilized to inform our instructional models, it is not the only data considered by the district. As was also shared in our most recent board presentation, local COVID-19 data from the City of Atlanta and epidemiology reports from our local boards of health (Fulton and DeKalb) also greatly impact our decision making.

The specific information we refer to for decision making is based on the information included on the maps from GA Department of Public Health (<https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>) entitled “COVID-19 by County”. When hovering over the individual counties, our team locates the levels of community transmission/spread which is denoted as the “cases per 100K (last two weeks)” and includes the 14-day incidence rate of new diagnoses.

The decision to further delay the in-person opening of our schools was difficult. But after consulting with our teachers, staff, students, families, and public health officials, I decided this is the right approach at this time.

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. I want to extend my appreciation to the more than 22,000 families (or 58% of you) who 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.

There are three schools that 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.

Click below to review the results of the declaration form.

- **Total completion:**  
<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/15292/Final%20-%20Percentage%20Complete%20Intent%20to%20Return.pdf>
- **In-Person:**  
<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/15292/Final%20-%20Percentage%20In%20Person%20Intent%20to%20Return.pdf>
- **Site-Based Virtual:**  
<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/15292/Final%20-%20Percentage%20Site%20Based%20Virtual%20Intent%20to%20Return.pdf>
- **AVA:**  
<https://www.atlantapublicschools.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/15292/Final%20-%20Percentage%20AVA%20Intent%20to%20Return.pdf>

We know there are differing opinions across families and communities regarding this decision. I want you to know that we have considered many different voices throughout this process. But at this juncture, I want to encourage unity across our school community as we work collaboratively through this pandemic and continue to put our students and staff first.

Our commitment to giving each one of our students a great education has not changed, and I know you stand with us in keeping that commitment. But, we recognize that it will be harder to ensure we live up to this goal as we continue remote learning, and we will need your support and engagement now more than ever.

But, we 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. APS is 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.

We stand committed to supporting the academic, social, and emotional needs of every single student in APS, even as we continue in this virtual space. There's no question that this pandemic has affected our students and so many of us in different ways. Our most vulnerable students have been hit hardest, which is why we have implemented more deliberate outreach efforts, including but not limited to:

- Daily phone calls directly to parents and guardians of students when they are not logged on or do not remain online throughout the school day
- At-home visits when students have not logged-in over a three-to-four day period of time or if staff is unable to contact parents of students who are consistently not remaining logged-in
- Consistent monitoring of attendance and login rates every week
- Schools also send home “no contact letters,” similar to the attendance letters they would send home in a traditional instructional setting
- Support staff assists our teachers and administrators with these issues, and social workers are brought in as needed to engage with students who consistently remain offline during the school day.

In addition, we have followed through on the commitments we made this spring to distribute internet-connected devices to families across the district and partner with organizations that offer support for students who need them most.

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](http://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.

### **Access to Schools and Buildings**

All of our facilities are open to non-APS employees by appointment only. Facilities are unavailable for rental and outside use.

We know you may have questions. Please click [here](#) for our latest FAQs.

The uncertainties created by this pandemic require us as a school district and as a school community 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.

I want to thank you — our APS parents and our community — for your engagement, resilience, and patience. 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