

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Employees

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: July 14, 2020

Subject: Day One 2020: Return + Learn

Dear Colleagues:

Over the past few weeks, our leadership has made it clear that the most pressing issue for our district – and all school districts around this country – has been collaborating on plans for opening for the 2020-2021 school year in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The health and wellness of our students and staff in Atlanta Public Schools has always been our top priority. Every decision we are making is made through the lens of public health and based on the scientific data related to our local community.

In Atlanta, the data is showing an upward trend in the trajectory of new COVID-19 cases, which means our city is in “substantial spread” of the disease. This demands that we take the utmost of caution and do what’s best for our students and our community. Thus, we are proposing a delay for an in-person return to our schools this fall.

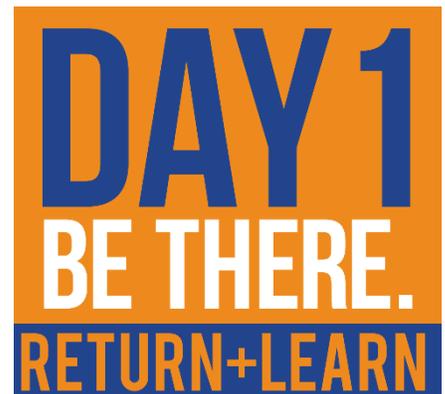
Day One 2020 Return + Learn

With our Day One 2020 Return + Learn proposal, Atlanta Public Schools would move Day One for School Year 2020-2021 to Monday, August 24, with our schools offering virtual learning programs for all students. We would maintain this model for at least the first nine weeks of school or until we have reached minimal or moderate spread.

The Atlanta Board of Education approved a first reading for the change to the school calendar last night, which reduces our instructional days to 170 for the school year. A final reading and a vote on the change is expected in early August.

Focus on Student Wellness and Preparation

But our work actually starts on Monday, August 3. For two weeks of mostly virtual pre-planning with some in-person, small-group activities, our Day One “Runway” will focus on family connections, team building, safety planning, and teacher and staff professional development.



As part of the planning, all of us will be focused on:

- Providing professional development on virtual learning practices at a school level and district-wide for teachers
- Cleaning out and preparing classrooms/in-home spaces for virtual instruction
- Providing content-specific training for core and non-core subjects
- Engaging support personnel in preparation for the school year, and
- Preparing for the use of virtual platforms and resources

During the two weeks, our APS colleagues will be charged with completing such tasks as:

- Distributing or refreshing devices for virtual learning
- Distributing instructional materials and personal protective equipment to students
- Ensuring we have current contact information for our students and families
- Addressing the social and emotional well-being of our students and staff
- Providing windows of time for in-person, small-group engagement between teachers and students in preparation for online learning
- Assessing the academic readiness of students through the use of diagnostic assessments, and conducting wellness and social/emotional check-ins with students

We need you all to be particularly involved beginning the week of August 17 when we will conduct additional student assessments and get-to-know-you activities and set learning expectations to get a strong start for an unconventional school year. It is also critical as we focus on student wellness and preparation that we collect the most current emergency contact information for every single student!

Key Dates	Interaction	Key Activities
<p>Pre-Planning August 3 – 7, 2020 August 10 – 14, 2020</p>	<p>Mostly Virtual some in person activities may be needed in small or limited groups for staff</p>	<p>Focus on Planning for the Virtual Model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with Families • Team building • Teacher Planning • Teacher Professional Development • Safety and Yearly Planning
<p>Runway for Return to Learning August 17 – August 21, 2020</p>	<p>Mostly Virtual some in person activities may be needed in small or limited groups for parents to pick up needed supplies and materials for the 9 week period</p>	<p>Focus on Student Wellness & Preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess Student Learning • Social Emotional Learning Support • Health & Wellness Checks • Student Supply Distribution • Emergency Contact Information Submissions
<p>Day 1: First Day of School August 24, 2020</p>	<p>Virtual Learning for all students <i>(for at least the first 9 weeks of school or until we have entered minimal/moderate spread)</i></p>	<p>Focus on Student Learning and a Strong Start</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students Engage with Curriculum • Additional Student Assessments • Get to Know You Activities • Learning Expectations

First Day and First Nine Weeks of School

From the first day through the first nine weeks of school, APS will implement a virtual instruction model for students where they remain enrolled and receive instruction from teachers at their school. While similar to last spring, the model offers key improvements focused on greater connections, engagement, and best practices for distance learning:

- Instructional delivery will include such strategies as live, virtual instruction, interactive videos, and independent work.
- Parents may opt to enroll in the Atlanta Virtual Academy if that is their preference. Students would receive instruction from AVA teachers, not their home school teachers.
- Teachers will prioritize content from the end of last school year and integrate them within the SY21 scope and sequence documents
- Daily instructional schedules will be provided including teacher office hours

Through our Department of Student Services, we will align our ESOL and Gifted programs to the virtual model, develop a Whole Child Supports Framework with SEL and positive behavior supports at its core, and create a “Trauma to Transition Team” to help the most vulnerable students and staff with this return to school. We are developing Intervention Services and Targeted Support for Students with Disabilities as well.

Safety

Students and staff will be required to wear masks when in APS buildings. The District plans to procure and distribute personal protective equipment for students and employees to use when in our schools and buildings. This equipment will include a mask, hand sanitizer, thermometers, and gloves.

Parental Supports and Training for Virtual Learning

We will also expand our parental supports. Both the Department of Instructional Technology and the Department of Engagement have partnered to train parent liaisons and family engagement specialists on digital resources identified to support virtual instruction. Our educational technology specialists will continue to offer a Parent Technology Institute specific to learning programs in each cluster and adaptable for each grade band.

We will also develop a Parent University website to inform parents on the tenets of virtual instruction and outline how they can assist their learners and will update the APS Mobile App with MyBackpack application to increase parental access.

District parent trainings and webinars will occur using Zoom, which will allow access to the Language Interpretation tab to assist Spanish-speaking families.

Our proposal to reopen virtually is in line with what’s happening around us as we all recognize the current spread of this disease and the fact that the numbers are going in the wrong direction. We have to do what’s in the best interest of our students.

The work is not complete. In truth, there is much more work ahead.

We have asked so much of you amid these challenging months. I cannot thank you enough for how often you exceeded your commitment to keep students and schools first in your work. Humbly, I will have to ask all of you to not only keep up that spirit and momentum but to lean in just a little bit more in the weeks ahead.

Together, we will face these challenges and obstacles directly. We will take those additional steps so we will not just survive but actually succeed against unbelievable odds. Together, we will be mindful of the difficulties of the time. Therefore, we must find ways to support, nurture, and care for each other.

Together, we will remain focused on our mission to reach our vision. Thus, we will continue to create that culture of trust and collaboration so that every student graduates ready for college, career, and life. No pandemic will hold us back from becoming that high-performing school district where students love to learn, educators inspire, families engage, and the community trusts the system.

As your superintendent, I remain ever blessed to work with you.

Yours in service,

Dr. Lisa Herring