

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Families

From: Dr. Meria Joel Carstarphen, Superintendent

Date: June 5, 2020

Subject: Athletic Conditioning over the Summer, Virtual Graduations, and Other Important Updates

With the 2019-2020 school year behind us and with the anticipation of the District's reopening strategy for the 2020-2021 school year ahead of us, I want to take a minute to update you on a few key items and recent decisions we've made.

Messages to Students and Staff During these Challenging Times

As we experienced a weekend of civil unrest, I wrote a message to our community but directed mostly to our beloved students of Atlanta Public Schools. I told them that I'm heartbroken, as are they, during these challenging times. But, I wanted to remind them to lead by example by honoring the legacy of nonviolence in times of great adversity. I encourage you to take a moment to read it [here on my blog](#).

I also shared an important message with staff this week, acknowledging the range of emotions we are all struggling with in light of the racial injustice crisis and the alarming and tragic murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and so many others before them. I stressed Atlanta Public Schools' unwavering commitment to supporting our employees exercising their First Amendment rights to engage in peaceful protest, petition our government for redress of grievances, and insist on much needed and long overdue change against police brutality against minorities, especially African Americans.

More importantly, I reminded them that APS cares about and believes in its employees. We are standing in solidarity with those peacefully advocating for change, especially around issues of equality and civil rights that are important to our community. Through the development of the District's new strategic plan and our work to implement a new equity policy, APS is committed to acknowledging and addressing the impacts of systemic racism on our education system.

Athletics Return to Play Recommendations for Phase I: Summer Conditioning

I have several very important updates to share with you about our recommendations to allow Phase I of athletic conditioning over the summer. The Georgia High School Association (GHSA) has decided to allow sports to resume as early as Monday, June 8. To balance the health and preparation of strong athletics for fall sports and the safety of everyone amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and to create an opportunity for our high school students to participate, APS will reopen sports workouts for only fall high school GHSA sanctioned sports (cheerleading, boys

and girls cross country, football, girls flag football, girls softball, and volleyball) on Monday, June 15. Middle school sports remain suspended pending further diagnosis from GHSA and the Centers for Disease Control for additional guidance.

The district will adhere to GHSA guidelines in these activities, and all GHSA sanctioned sport workouts are voluntary, meaning that student-athletes choose to participate in conditioning on their own accord.

Please note, this is not a decision regarding the reopening of schools or the use of APS facilities by the community. Community access to APS schools, buildings, and facilities remains restricted until further notice. However, we are allowing Phase I of summer conditioning for the sports mentioned above so our high school students can participate in what GHSA has opened up for the summer. Also, these recommendations do not mean that a final decision has been made on whether sports will be played in the fall. We don't yet know from GHSA when a decision will be made about fall sports.

Per GHSA and District guidelines, we are limiting Phase I summer conditioning to groups of 20 persons, including coaches, for all workouts per sport, across all times at each campus/facility. There can be no more than 20 athletes and coaches at any workout location at any given time. Parents/caregivers, onlookers, visitors, and anyone else who is not part of that 20-person athletic group will not be allowed on APS campuses. Parents who drop off their children must leave the campus and return to pick up their children after workouts have been completed. Walkers, exercise groups, or outside groups are not allowed on APS campuses at any time.

Teams and athletes for the six fall high school GHSA sanctioned sports (competitive cheer, boys and girls cross country, football, girls flag football, girls softball, and volleyball) can resume restricted voluntary workouts under their coaches' supervision. The approved workouts are for conditioning only. No scrimmages or equipment is allowed during this Phase I conditioning such as balls, gloves, bats, nets, etc.

We are limiting workouts to 90-minutes per session, and workouts will be scheduled using as many hours of the day as possible to maximize the number of students who can condition while minimizing the number of people on campus at any given time.

The Athletics Department will establish a sign-in station where all athletes and coaches must check in and have their temperatures checked. Those exceeding a temperature of 100 degrees will be sent home immediately. All athletes and coaches must then report directly to their pre-assigned workout locations. Anyone violating those guidelines will be dismissed from conditioning sessions.

No water fountains or water cows will be allowed. Athletes should bring their own water bottles or schools will provide single-use paper cups. Teams cannot use the locker rooms. Students must come dressed from home and return home. For anyone who wishes to use the weight room, it must be wiped down before and after each use. Participants must maintain social distancing, and masks or face coverings are recommended for conditioning but are required in the weight rooms.

Groups should be the same individuals (including coaches) for each session to limit the risk of exposure. Students or coaches cannot change groups for the duration of this guidance, and no visitors are allowed at conditioning sessions. The District will conduct frequent and random monitoring of all activity with high school and athletic department leaders reviewing progress with coaches at the end of every week.

[Please click here to read our Athletics Return to Play Recommendations for Phase I: Summer Conditioning](#) in its entirety. I will continue to keep you updated on this topic as GHSA makes additional decisions.

APS Survey Update

Thank you to those of you who completed the survey card we sent to help us determine the needs of our families so we can identify community partners who can help. For those of you who haven't completed it yet, there's still time! There is a QR code on the survey you can use to take the survey online or simply drop the completed card in the mail. If you experience any issues scanning the QR code, you can still complete the survey online using the student code on your card and by visiting <https://dig.apsgaphs.com/parentsurvey/> or clicking the direct link (designated by the big blue checkmark) from the APS district home page. Please note: This survey was produced before the COVID-19 crisis and can no longer be returned to your school. Please complete the survey online or return the prepaid card by mail. We will share the information collected with our generous partners who match our community's needs.

Summer Food Distribution

As a reminder, our summer food distribution program is being implemented with the help of our food services vendor, SFE, and our generous partners. We are providing a scaled-back service of 60,000 meals over the first three Mondays in June (1st, 8th, 15th). The food is being provided to our partners — Horizons, Breakthrough, LaAmistad, and the Boys and Girls Club. Students must be enrolled in these programs to get the meals; the food distribution isn't open to the public.

In the past, our summer feeding program has been limited to only those students who physically appeared for in-person summer school learning. As there is no in-person summer school learning this year, APS is distributing food through partners who serve large numbers of APS students in wraparound and support programs.

However, our [Summer Food Distribution webpage](#) includes additional information for our families about other organizations that are distributing food throughout the metro Atlanta area. You can text FINDFOOD to 888-976-2232 for a tailored list of food sites by zip code through the Atlanta Community Food Bank. We also provide a link to the [Atlanta Community Food Bank's 50 food distribution sites](#), and we've provided a list of several food pantries in our communities.

Summer Learning and Shine Your Light Series

As a District, we are striving to keep summer learning at a high level. It may all be virtual, but it all meets our students' needs and quality standards. We have branded our effort as Summer Recharge, and you can find all of our resources at www.atlantapublicschools.us/ReCharge.

And if you have a child in PreK through third grade, you might want to check out the *Shine Your Light 2020* online series offered through [Cox Campus](#). They are offering free literacy resources to families this summer. These online resources are designed to help develop and extend your child's learning through meaningful interactions and engaging activities in everyday situations. It's done in a way that best suits your family – so everyone is ready when school starts again.

Cox Campus' [Shine Your Light 2020](#) series is five weeks dedicated to helping change the trajectory of educational equity in our city and country.

Here are the free offerings available through this series:

- For Everyone – June 11: LIVE webinar (online) Town Hall about the science of relationships for reading brain construction and well-being, delivered by child development experts Renée Boynton-Jarrett, MD, and Maryanne Wolf, Ph.D., with open Q&A following.
- Week of June 15 - Week of July 6:
 - Families of children birth-5: Engaging preschool teachers and child development professionals share expertise and structured class time focused on relationships. Also, there is guidance for learning through home routines, LIVE webinars to go deeper and open Q&A, including preschool experiences and parent guidance for Spanish-speaking families.
 - Families of children K-3rd: Inventive and entertaining educators lead children and families through a learning experience with social-emotional emphasis and focus on literacy instruction plus science, art, physical expression, math and more to ensure every child is ready for school on Day 1. Experiences follow the themes of emotions, identity, voice, and community.
 - Teachers birth-5: Guidance for adults with responsibility for youngest children with emphasis on the science of talking with babies and building deep connections to build brains made for learning.
 - Teachers children K-3rd:
 - Evidence-based assessments and how to use them to meet children where they are to differentiate instruction, and monitor progress
 - Science-based explicit instruction around building the on-going literacy foundation
 - Socio-emotional experiences for whole-child engagement, emphasizing empathy, self-regulation, and feelings
 - Opportunities on Fridays to join multifaceted, collaborative student artistic workshops led by professional artists

There are several other webinars available. This series is an excellent way to continue the learning this summer and to help get your children ready and excited about school in August.

2020 Graduation Update

I know many of you joined us on Facebook for our virtual celebrations of the more than 2,500 APS graduates (unofficial count) of the Class of 2020 in May. There were over 100,000 viewers of our 14 celebrations during graduation week, which highlighted our graduates' resilience, passion, pride, grit, empathy, and heart especially as COVID-19 tampered their senior year. Thank you for helping us celebrate our wonderful students! You can relive all the exciting moments from each celebration at my [ATLSuper blog!](#)

We are working as hard as we can and in alignment with public health guidelines on identifying a timeframe and location to host traditional graduation ceremonies when it's safe to do so because #APSGrad2020 is #WorthTheWait! We will communicate that information with you as soon as it is feasible. Also, our high schools have an open line of communication with our students and families and we will ensure that the Class of 2020 hears directly from schools once a decision has been made. Stay tuned for more details!

Back to School Update

Just like every other school district in the nation, we haven't made a final decision on our return to school in the fall. The truth about the education situation nationwide at this time is that no one has figured it out yet. We are planning to open schools on August 10, which is in alignment with the 2020-2021 school calendar. We are still working to determine the best model for instruction this fall, and we are following the research as we sort through these models.

With so many uncertainties about the ongoing pandemic, we cannot limit our options yet, although an eventual return to in-person school will certainly include virtual learning and social distancing precautions. We are preparing for the unexpected as we cannot expect to have anything like a normal school year. Along with exploring new ways to deliver core academics and co-curriculars, we know there will be an unprecedented need for mental health services, food, and child care.

We have to get the start of the new school year right, which means opening schools safely with precautions for student, teacher, and staff health and well-being and contingencies for any future outbreak. We recently learned that South Korea – often considered a leader in handling the pandemic – had to close dozens of schools just hours after reopening because of new infections. In France, officials reported 70 cases of COVID-19 within days of reopening schools. We must return to schools at the right time in the right ways, and we are working hard to get that right.

Special Shout Out to Principal Marcene Thornton

I want to send a huge shout out to a very special person in APS. Principal Marcene Thornton, founding principal of Carver Early College, announced her retirement after an astonishing 47 years of service to APS and our students. When APS embraced the new early college program concept in 2005, Principal Thornton was placed at the helm, and the school has never looked back!

For 15 years under her leadership, Carver Early College has guided hundreds of students, many earning 30 to 40 college credits while still in high school. They've gained acceptance to

America's most prestigious colleges and universities, often becoming the first in their family to graduate high school and attend college. Principal Thornton has been an advocate and force for our mission to graduate all students ready for college and career and for her own belief in “the ability of our school community to produce students who can be prepared to meet even the greatest challenges.”

We cannot thank Principal Thornton enough for her leadership! We will miss her, but we wish her all the best in her retirement.

Health Resources for our Families

As a reminder, you can take advantage of COVID-19 and other health screenings provided by our partners the Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) in partnership with the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation (www.coresponse.org/covid19-Atlanta) and Whitefoord Health Clinics (www.whitefoord.org/covid19).

Please continue to connect with us on our website at any time using *Let's Talk* at <https://www.atlantapublicschools.us>. We always look forward to hearing from you. Enjoy your week, and I'll be back in touch with you soon!

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