

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Employees

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: December 11, 2020

Subject: Return+Learn and Telework Reminders, Holiday Work Schedule, and Your Health and Well-being

Team, as the holidays approach, I find it somewhat hard to believe that we are nearing the end of the year. For some of us, 2020 cannot end quickly enough. A new year may have its own challenges – reopening our schools and buildings among them – but it also brings new hope. The new year isn't upon us yet. We still have another week ahead, so I need everyone to continue the hard work.

Let me provide some updates and reminders of what's ahead.

Holiday work schedule

With the holiday break quickly approaching, I wanted to remind you of the holiday work schedule. The following summarizes the work calendars for the holiday break:

- 201, 202 and 211 day staff do not work the weeks of December 21 and December 28.
- 252 and 231 day staff work Monday, December 21, and do not work the remainder of that week.
- 252 and 231 day staff do not work the week of December 28.
- 261 day staff do not work on Thursday, December 24; Friday, December 25; Thursday, December 31; and Friday, January 1, 2021.
- All employees return to work on Monday, January 4, 2021, which is a Teacher Professional Learning Day.

The work calendars for APS employees are available on the district website [here](#).

Holiday travel guidance

As we look toward the holidays, I want you to take care of yourself over the break, especially if you're planning to travel. It is recommended that you avoid any unnecessary personal travel outside of the state where possible. If travel is absolutely required, please take the following precautions:

- Check for symptoms of acute respiratory illness before starting travel.
- Check the CDC's Traveler's Health Notices for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from China, and information for aircrew, can be found on the CDC website.

- Notify your supervisor and promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if you become sick while traveling or on a temporary assignment. Follow your health insurance provider's guidance for obtaining medical care if you are outside the United States and are sick or contact an overseas medical assistance company to assist with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A U.S. consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, U.S. embassies, consulates, and military facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private U.S. citizens overseas.
- Email HRFrontDesk@atlanta.k12.ga.us for any questions regarding personal travel.

Telework Request Reminder

With only a week before the holiday break, I wanted to ensure that we keep you fully informed about flexible working arrangements. As part of our current reopening plan, we expect district office staff to return to work on staggered schedules starting January 11 and school-based staff for four days per week starting January 19 (as noted above).

Therefore, any employees who wish to have an ongoing telework arrangement must apply or re-submit a telework arrangement request before Monday, January 4, 2021. We will strive to provide responses as soon as possible. More details regarding telework can be found at www.atlantapublicschools.us/teleworking.

Whether you were previously approved for telework or not, we ask that you notify us about your need for telework or leave for the second semester, which begins on January 19, 2021. You should do the following:

- Obtain current documentation of your reason for telework or leave from a medical professional or other relevant authority. For the employee's own health condition, this would be a recent doctor's note that reflects that the employee is unable to work in person on or after January 19, 2021, due to increased risk of COVID-19 and lists the medical condition(s). Documentation related to quarantine requirements may include emails or screenshots of COVID-19 test results within the past 14 days from a doctor's office or testing facility. Employees may re-submit previously submitted documents if they are still current and relevant (not expired).
- Submit an online [request form](#) for telework or leave to Human Resources as soon as possible, but no later than Monday, January 4, 2021. Supporting documents must be included with the online form. [Click here](#) for further instructions about completing the form.
- Continue to perform job duties and remain available either remotely or in person during your normal job hours until your request is processed. Employees will not be penalized for requesting telework or leave.

Virtual Early Release Day – January 5

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. 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.

January 2021 Reopening Update

We have received questions from staff regarding our reopening plan and while we won't be able to answer them all in this letter, we do want to address several of the most common questions. As you know, APS has developed a phased-in approach for reopening schools as we prepare for January 2021. I want 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.

Can you explain the 60% or greater school capacity guidelines for in-person learning?

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.

For more details about reopening, please review my December 4th memo or visit our Return+Learn page at www.atlantapublicschools.us/reopen. As a follow-up to our December 3rd staff and community town halls, we have also prepared a set of FAQs that are available on the Return+Learn page or by clicking [here](#).

Health and well-being resources

With the holidays upon us, we may also feel additional stress and worries that come during this time of year. I want to remind you that we want to do everything we can to support you. If you

have any concerns, please do not hesitate to talk to your supervisor, contact our team in Human Resources, or make a confidential call to our Employee Assistance Program at (888) 993-7650.

If you are worried about childcare issues, don't forget that you can call 470-426-2610. Identify yourself as an APS staff member, and ask for Anna Buchman! Also, you can visit www.qualityrated.org to search for options online. We also encourage you to see if you qualify for a [SOLVE grant](#) by visiting the [Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning online](#).

For any staff members experiencing financial hardship in accessing learning and care options for their students, financial assistance may be available. Please contact [Rachel Sprecher](#) in our Office of Partnerships and Development, if you need support.

Thank you and Be Well!

As we prepare for next week, our final full week of 2020 for Atlanta Public Schools, I want to thank you all again for your dedication to serving our young scholars and our community. We can only accomplish our mission – graduate every student ready for college, career, and life – together. So let's 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.

I remain grateful to be a part of this wonderful team, and we will always keep you updated as we move forward...together.

Yours in Service,

Dr. Lisa Herring