

MEMORANDUM

To: All APS Employees

From: Dr. Lisa Herring, Superintendent

Date: January 15, 2021

Subject: Phase II of Return+Learn Begins and Other Updates

Team, with a lot of planning, hard work, and determination, we got off to a bold start to the new year! District administration staff began returning to work in person this week, and next week, our school-based staff returns to our buildings. Following that, a portion of students whose families opted for face-to-face instruction will begin returning to our school buildings.

My gratitude and thanks, as always, for your patience and your dedication to Atlanta Public Schools! We could not be where we are today without you! I want to send a special thank you to our principals, teachers, and school leaders who have worked incredibly hard to develop unique school plans to support in-person learning.

Throughout our effort to provide an option for in-person learning for students, I have heard the full range of emotions on both sides of the issue about when our children and teachers return to school. Not a day has gone by that this issue hasn't weighed heavily on my mind. I always want to be clear that health and safety remain our top priority, and we continue to monitor the level of community spread daily.

We have worked collaboratively with public health officials on implementing the appropriate mitigation strategies and in effectively managing all factors involved in providing face-to-face learning options for our students. I know and acknowledge that this is a difficult time for so many of us, and I appreciate everything this team has done in support of this herculean effort.

Much of the reminders and updates today focus on our efforts this month to expand our instructional models to include the in-person learning option. I also share a few reminders about our health and safety measures, including our mitigation strategies and protocols around COVID-19.

Video Updates on Return to In-Person Learning

In preparation for teachers, staff, and students returning to our schools and buildings, we have prepared several videos to help our school community get a better sense of what returning to our district buildings and schools will look like. Please view the video geared toward school-based staff [here](#). The following video is geared toward our parents, caregivers, and families [here](#).

Timeline for Return to In-Person Learning

Now that district office employees began returning in-person this week, here's the remaining timeline for our school-based staff and students:

- Tuesday, January 19 – School-based staff return to work in person
- Monday, January 25 – Students who elected to return will be 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

School Plans and Mitigation Strategies

Our principals and school staff have been preparing their schools to meet social distancing recommendations and health and safety requirements provided by the Centers for Disease Control. To that end, they have used the Atlanta Capacity Dashboard to create models on how classrooms and shared campus space can be configured. [Schools expecting 60% or greater return for in-person instruction](#) had the flexibility to modify the instructional model while implementing the necessary mitigation strategies and safety protocols.

Each of our schools posted their unique plans on their websites this week, so our staff, families and the community can better understand exactly what to expect when students return for in-person learning in our school buildings. All schools are expected to adhere to district health and safety guidelines, which include screening measures and temperature assessments, use of masks and face shields, social distancing, and other hygiene and cleaning equipment and procedures. The district has distributed personal protective equipment for our students and employees to use when in our buildings.

To be more specific about health screening procedures:

- All students and employees will be required to wear a mask that covers their mouth and nose at all times. Daily cleaning protocols have been established to ensure that workplaces, workstations, equipment, and facilities are clean. Hand sanitizer stations have been installed in common areas.
- Students and employees will also participate in daily temperature checks and screenings and complete a daily questionnaire if they are experiencing symptoms or have been exposed to COVID-19. Parents have been asked to assess students before sending them to school each day.
- The results of the self-assessment will determine if the individual should go to school/work or remain at home. Conducting regular screenings for symptoms and ongoing self-monitoring will help reduce exposure and limit the risk of spreading the virus.

Please remember to get into the habit of daily health assessments for yourself before you come to work, as I outlined in previous memos.

COVID Health Updates

We have several updates regarding our strategies to mitigate COVID-19 in our schools and community.

Testing Strategy:

We have adopted a Comprehensive COVID-19 Testing Strategy in collaboration with public health officials, community partners, universities, and healthcare organizations. This strategy works with our school-based health clinics and community resources to provide testing for the following groups:

- Students, teachers, and staff with symptoms identified through the health screening protocols
- Students, teachers, and staff who have had contact with someone with COVID-19 in the school or workplace
- All students, faculty, and staff with possible exposure in the context of outbreak settings

As part of our testing strategy, we have testing options available for students, teachers, and staff at these school-based health centers and clinics:

- Dobbs Elementary - 2025 Jonesboro Rd SE
- Hollis Innovation Academy - 225 James P Brawley Dr. NW
- King Middle - 545 Hill St. SE
- Miles Elementary - 4215 Bakers Ferry Rd. SW
- Toomer Elementary - 65 Rogers St. NE
- Whitefoord Early Learning Academy - 35 Whitefoord Ave. SE

[The Community Organized Relief Effort \(C.O.R.E.\)](#), the [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta](#), and [Emory University](#) are also providing free COVID-19 testing.

Case Tracking:

We have employed a deliberate case tracking process as part of our mitigation strategy for the past several months. In the event a student or staff member receives a positive test result for COVID-19, they must first notify the school or workplace.

Upon receipt of the reported positive COVID-19 case at an APS school or office location, we work directly with our local boards of health (Fulton County and DeKalb County) as they conduct contact tracing. Based on the guidance provided by the local board and our APS Health Services department, notifications are sent to impacted staff, students, and families.

If an individual is found to have had close contact while contagious, those who were in close contact will be required to quarantine. For more details about this process, please visit section 1.6 of the [APS OnCourse Guide](#).

Determinations about outbreaks and whether school closures become necessary are determined on a case-by-case basis with direct consultation and guidance from the Department of Public Health. Atlanta Public Schools provides a daily update on COVID-19 cases within the district on our website [here](#).

Vaccinations:

Working closely with the local Boards of Health, Atlanta Public Schools is striving to make vaccinations for employees available at the first opportunity. Our school resource officers, school nurses, and all staff who are age 65 and older are currently eligible as part of Phase 1A, including substitutes. All other APS staff will be eligible as part of Phase 1B. We are working closely with the Boards of Health on the timeline for the administration of the vaccine as it relates to the health and well-being of all APS employees.

Thanks to our partnership with the Fulton County Board of Health, nearly 300 APS employees who are 65 years of age or older, plus school nurses and safety and security officers will receive the COVID-19 vaccine this Saturday, January 16, in a special “Super Saturday” event at Mercedes Benz Stadium. Eligible employees were identified and invited to participate in this special vaccination day. For anyone else in Phase 1A wishing to receive the vaccine on a different day, they will need to enroll through the Fulton County Board of Health’s website. [Click here to go to the Fulton County Board of Health website](#) for more information.

Telework and Leave Options

As previously communicated, the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA) was set to expire on December 31, 2020. The District’s telework procedure and emergency paid leave procedures were previously based on the FFCRA. We have been actively monitoring for any extension of the Act or replacement with similar legislation. To date, no new legislative action affecting paid leave has been passed. Until further notice, the District will handle telework and leave as follows:

- New telework requests will only be accepted for positive COVID testing or direct exposure with documentation, and newly diagnosed personal high-risk health conditions with doctor’s note that includes the date employee was diagnosed/informed. Visit www.atlantapublicschools.us/teleworking for more information.
- Employees who do not qualify for telework may want to consider family medical leave (FMLA) to care for themselves or a household member with a serious health condition. Contact leaverequests@atlanta.k12.ga.us for more information. Some employees who would like a workplace accommodation due to a disability, such as a change in physical workspace or arrival or departure time, may contact OffEmpRelations@atlanta.k12.ga.us.
- Employees who are too ill to telework or whose job is not eligible for telework (i.e. custodians, bus drivers, skilled trades workers) and request time off due to COVID testing or exposure will be eligible to use any sick or personal leave accrued and then receive up to 10 paid days from the District’s timeshare sick leave bank.
- Employees who are asked to stay home from work by the District’s health services or human resources department as a result of contact tracing in the workplace will receive up to 10 paid days from the District’s timeshare sick leave bank and then be able to use any sick or personal leave accrued.
- Employees who do not qualify for telework or leave and do not report to work will be offered a two week period (10 workdays) of unpaid, job-protected emergency leave to take care of their personal situation so that they can return to work. Employees may request one extension of unpaid emergency leave for an additional two weeks (10

workdays) for a total potential leave period of four weeks (20 workdays). Employees may resign without penalty at any time during the unpaid leave period. Upon expiration of emergency paid leave, employees may receive disciplinary action if they do not report to work.

Governor's Announcement of State Bonus and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act Funding (CRRSA)

You may have seen the announcement yesterday from Gov. Kemp and State School Superintendent Richard Woods about their plan to give every K-12 public school teacher and school-level staff member a one-time, \$1,000 bonus payment. We expect Superintendent Woods to make an official recommendation at the State Board of Education's February 18 meeting. We are watching this closely and will be sure to update you as this information develops. As you know, this must go through the legislative process before being finalized.

In other financial news, I was happy to report during the Atlanta Board of Education meeting this week that Atlanta Public Schools expects to receive about \$89.6 million in federal funds as part of the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act Funding (CRRSA). We should get the official notice by next week.

This is in addition to the nearly \$23 million the district received last year and is part of the \$1.8 billion Georgia will receive. We plan to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment that includes input from various stakeholders (including principals, teachers, community leaders, and family engagement representatives). We will then develop a cross-functional task force to prioritize the needs and determine funding parameters. I will be sure to update you as more details become available.

Partner Use of APS Facilities

Even though we are opening our schools to students who have opted for in-person learning, we will continue to restrict third party use of school buildings during the school day. Additionally, general public use of APS facilities through the District's "School Dude" rental/usage process will not be permitted at this time.

Principals may consider afterschool third party use of building space that directly serves APS students.

We continue to restrict third party use of our parking lots and playfields, although exceptions may be made to serve the best interest of the community, such as COVID testing and food distribution. However, any activities of this nature must be approved by Larry Hoskins, our Chief Operating Officer, and Anita Williams, our Chief of Schools. The district will continue to review and update these guidelines, as appropriate.

Resources for Conversations about the Events in Washington, D.C.

National politics remains in the spotlight as Inauguration Day approaches on Wednesday, January 20. I know that our students may continue to have questions about our democracy and

governmental processes. It is appropriate at any grade level to have conversations about these topics. Please visit [my blog](#) for helpful resources.

Thank You and Be Well!

As we move through Return+Learn, I want everyone to not only remain engaged but to do everything they can to stay healthy. Thank you for playing an integral role in the success of our students and Atlanta Public Schools!

Yours in Service,

Dr. Lisa Herring