

State Board Update on School Re-openings

Thank you, President Crawford. I appreciate the opportunity to update the Board on the reopening plans of our local school systems for in person instruction for all students.

As you know after the Governor and I announced the call for schools to return to in person learning by March 1st, MSDE asked local Superintendents to send us their timelines for returning students. I am pleased to report that 18 of our 24 school systems are providing an opportunity for in-person instruction for at least two days per week by the end of March for each grade level in elementary, middle and high schools.

Four local school systems are not opening for all grade levels by the end of March:

- one system (Charles) has not announced any reopening dates
- one system (Baltimore City) is only opening for elementary – K-5 and grade 6, 9
- one system (Harford) is open for elementary K-5 for two days, but only 1 day for middle and high school students, and
- one system (P.G.) has announced openings for the month of April

Specific information regarding each local school system's return dates will be posted on the MSDE website following this presentation.

Congratulations to the following local school systems who are currently providing in-person instruction in a hybrid mode. They include:

- Carroll and Worcester who returned students in January
- Calvert, Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Frederick, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's,

Somerset, Talbot, Washington and Wicomico

- It should be noted that some of these systems were open in a hybrid fashion this Fall – for example, Kent County opened for Pre-K-5 and grades 6-8 in the Fall and in February brought back grades 9-12.

In guiding local school systems' efforts to reopen safely, MSDE has redefined education by providing research-driven guidance, funding, personal protective equipment, a first-term school year 20-21 performance dashboard, learning-loss recovery strategies and in concert with the Maryland Department of Health initiated Covid-19 testing in schools to begin on March 1, 2021.

I want to take a moment to highlight the major initiatives spearheaded by MSDE during the last 11 months and also address future plans.

One of the first comprehensive guides of its kind in the country, [Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education](#) outlined 13 requirements for local school systems to address in their local reopening plans and introduced the concept of hybrid learning, as well as public health mitigation and social distancing practices necessary for reopening schools.

In collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, the [Guidance for School Reopening](#), features two educational design options to support the goal of quickly and safely restoring in-person learning for Maryland's students, and prioritizes students who are most academically vulnerable.

During the first days of the pandemic, MSDE directed the provision of emergency school meals to ensure students' nutritional needs were met. MSDE is especially grateful for the work of food service professionals, who have provided more than

45 million emergency meals and continue to feed our students both in and outside of the school facilities.

In addition to the initial \$400 million delivered by the Coronavirus Aid, Recovery, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, MSDE is providing another \$780 Million in federal relief for school systems to address the effects of the pandemic. The \$1.2 billion funding has been used for devices and connectivity, materials and supplies to reopen schools, and will support measures to combat learning loss with strategies such as intense tutoring. MSDE has swiftly and effectively distributed these funds to local school systems.

MSDE addressed the safe reopening of child care facilities, gradually restoring capacity to licensure standards as outlined in Maryland's Child Care Recovery Plan. During the initial phases of the pandemic, MSDE created and funded a more than \$90.7 million essential employee child care program. Just announced last week, MSDE is providing a \$60 million grant program to support eligible child care programs throughout the state to help meet operating costs and address lost revenue.

MSDE, in conjunction with the State Board of Education, developed a COVID dashboard, which houses a number of performance metrics from the first term of the school year including student attendance and enrollment figures. This dashboard will be updated with second marking period data from local school systems and presented to the State Board in March.

In December, MSDE requested that the State prioritize teachers and education staff to receive COVID-19 vaccinations in the phase for essential workers. Currently, school systems are working together with local health departments to vaccinate staff.

Most recently, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and MSDE have developed a K-12 Testing Program to provide free COVID-19 tests for students and staff in both public and non-public schools across the state who choose to participate. This program is an additional tool to support COVID-19 safety measures in schools that are already open, or plan to reopen in March 2021 for the remainder of the school year. The Maryland Department of Health has been a steadfast partner to MSDE in mitigating this unprecedented pandemic. In fact, in addition to the weekly technical assistance sessions with the Maryland Department of Health for all local schools – both public and non-public, Dr. Chan and myself host a weekly briefing call to address questions from local Superintendents and local Health Officers.

This Spring, MSDE is forming monitoring teams to support local systems in applying evidence-based strategies such as high-intensity tutoring services, extended summer learning programs, social-emotional learning, and targeted academic acceleration to further mitigate the impacts of learning loss. Additionally, MSDE continues to provide guidance to local school systems in technical assistance sessions with leadership across the State as well as myriad virtual learning professional development opportunities for educators.

MSDE has changed the landscape of the pandemic response by improving device dissemination, platforms for virtual learning, the expansion of connectivity, and materials to support the safe reopening of school buildings.

In concert with the State Board of Education, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) continues to be committed to provide leadership and guidance

to serve Maryland's children and families as we move toward a full educational recovery.