

MCPS Middle and High Schools

Second-semester opportunity for students to return for face to face learning

Working plan and FAQ, December 2020

We continue to plan for the safe return to school and face to face learning for our middle and high school students. It is our hope to be able to make this shift to begin the second semester. The second semester begins Monday, February 1st, 2021.

For our planning process, we need to know how many students would like to return to face to face learning in our middle and high schools. Before you can make that decision, you should know what our current proposed model for safely returning our students is. Here are the key points:

- Students would be divided into ‘A week/B week’ groups to allow for social distancing in classrooms without any crowding.
- While ‘A week’ group is in school and learning face to face, ‘B week’ group will be learning from home, ideally in a synchronous manner. While ‘B week’ group is in school and learning face to face, ‘A week’ group will be learning from home, ideally in a synchronous manner.
- Face to face and/or synchronous new instruction will occur Monday through Thursday each week. All secondary students will access learning remotely on Fridays.
- Each day, Monday through Friday, regardless of group, new learning will take place. In other words, ‘A week’ group and ‘B week’ group are learning the same thing at the same time – only one is learning while accessing class remotely and one face to face.
- Students physically in school will rotate from class to class according to their schedule; but not all students will move at once in an effort to reduce the opportunity to spread the virus. Class changes will be staggered to limit the number of students in hallways and restrooms.
- Students will be required to wear face coverings at all times, maintain social distance, and all desks will be disinfected between classes. Hand sanitizer stations will be located throughout the building in key locations.
- High touch areas, such as restrooms and door handles, will be disinfected systematically throughout each day.
- Breakfast and lunch will generally be consumed in classrooms.

Beginning the week of December 7th, school personnel will begin calling homes to ask two questions:

1. Will you send your secondary school student(s) back to school for face to face learning?
2. Will you need MCPS transportation for your student(s)?

Frequently Asked Questions

Can we safely open our middle and high schools? We believe our proposed model will let us safely open our middle and high schools for greater numbers of students. Middle and high school students traditionally move from one period/block to the next for four classes each day. As classes change, students, faculty, and staff are re-configured. We are counting on the full cooperation of our students, faculty, and staff to wear properly fitting face coverings, maintain social distancing, and practice good hygiene throughout the day – and we are limiting the numbers of students in our schools at any one time to do so.

Why is this change being made now rather than earlier? For all of our high school students and many of our middle school students, the semester is a time when students normally change classes (and teachers). If we made an earlier change, it was likely, especially for middle school students, that schedules (and teachers) would have to be changed. Further, while not ideal, there is some sense of consistency in continuing with the same remote learning model we have in place rather than disrupt it with a change prior to the semester. Moving faster would essentially mean changing our model once before the semester ends and then changing courses/teachers again just a few weeks later with the new semester. With all of the change of this year students and employees are already dealing with, adding one more does not make sound instructional or emotional sense. Finally, it is our hope that at the semester we will be able to make the adjustments in our transportation loading and route information to safely transport approximately half of our secondary students to school each week.

What is ‘A Week/B Week’ Rotation? The student population will be divided approximately in half to reduce the number of students physically present in school at any time. While one group attends class Monday through Thursday, the other group accesses the same instruction remotely from home. For students in this model, they will physically be in school every other week and home, learning remotely, the other. New learning is continual; regardless of whether in person or remote, students will all be learning the same lesson that day.

What is synchronous learning? Is it required? Synchronous learning describes teaching and learning that is taking place ‘live’ as it happens. For example, if class starts at 9:00, a teacher would be on ‘live’ via their camera in GoogleMeet to all students who are logged in at that time. The teacher will interact with the students in their class and may also do so with the remote learning students as well. The synchronous learner would be able to see, hear, and interact with the class in real time. All sessions will take place via GoogleMeet and will be recorded. While recommended, it is not required that a student access the lesson synchronously. Secondary students must check in for each class/period at some point daily for attendance purposes.

I have more than one secondary school age student. Will my middle and high school aged children be on the same A week/B week rotation? It is our goal to work with families to make that happen, yes. We will need accurate and timely communication to make sure that we are able to do so. When the school calls, please ensure they make note of any and all middle or high school siblings who will also return at the semester.

Will my student have to wear a face-covering? Any student being transported by MCPS or in school at MCPS will be expected to wear a properly fitting cloth face-covering provided by the family. Recent guidelines require face coverings be worn at all times. Failure to properly wear a face covering or inability to do so will mean the student may not attend school face to face.

How come we don’t immediately implement this change? We want our students back in school, but we must be able to bring them back safely and when it is instructionally appropriate. In fact, we still have some uncertainty about our ability to make this model work – we will need specific data. We must know our numbers who desire to return to school in this model. We must then create rotation schedules that try to keep siblings together. Finally, we must build transportation schedules for ‘A week’ and ‘B week’. We are optimistic that we can potentially make this safely work. It makes sense, instructionally, to change at the semester when there is natural change in the academic year for all high school students and most middle school students.

Could this model change? There are many factors that could cause our model to change. If we are unable to re-arrange transportation or safely assign students into classes, we may have to re-visit our

planning. We should know by early January if this plan is possible or not. If it is not, we will revise our plan and reach out once more with another option to safely return students. If COVID-19 infection rates spike, at any time, we may have to revert to remote learning. The bottom line is, however, we want our students safely back in school.

What happens if there is a positive case at school? Our greatest apprehension about bringing back our secondary school students is what will happen if a student or faculty member tests positive for COVID-19. Unlike in our elementary schools, where students are kept in small cohorts that do not interact outside of that cohort, our secondary school return model relies on students following our health and safety protocols without fail – but even that may not be adequate if someone tests positive. This is why: If an elementary school teacher or student tests positive, only that one class – as many as fifteen students and the teacher(s) – may be quarantined, but the rest of the school may continue to operate. In secondary school, since students change courses throughout the day, meeting in four courses each day with new students in each period, a positive case could result in the quarantining of dozens of students, multiple faculty and staff, and perhaps even require the entire school to shut down for a quarantine period of fourteen or more days.

Do I have to send my student back for face to face instruction? No. At this time, it remains the option of the parent/guardian to continue to access learning remotely. We must stress parents must be involved in their student's remote learning in order for those students to learn and grow academically. Failure to make sufficient progress may result in the retention of the student or, if a senior, even failure to graduate.