**An Important Message from MCPS About Finishing 1st Semester Through Virtual Learning and Starting 2nd Semester on Feb. 1st.**

Jan. 21st, 2021

Happy New Year to all the parents, students, and staff of Mecklenburg County Public Schools. This is Paul Nichols, Superintendent, with an important announcement about school opening over the next couple of weeks as we move from our first semester of school to the second.

Mecklenburg County Public Schools will have to complete the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year with remote learning for all students. It was our hope to bring the students that had been participating face-to-face for the first semester back to class on Monday, January 25th for the final week of the semester, but we have discovered that a significant number of our staff members are unavailable to fulfill their duties because they have been impacted by the COVID virus. The first semester ends on Wednesday, January 27th. Thursday and Friday are scheduled teacher workdays for teachers to wrap up the first semester and prepare for the second.

The second semester will begin Monday, February 1st.  At this time, we are optimistic that our COVID-19 numbers will continue to decrease, our staff will be with us, and we will be able to have students who have selected face-to-face instruction to begin on that day.

Elementary students who have chosen face to face learning will return to school Monday through Thursday of each week with in person learning. Friday will continue to be set aside for virtual learning. We will have more students learning in person this semester as more families have chosen to send their students back to school. Students will wear face coverings at all times except when eating, safety protocols will be in place to clean and move about the school, and we work together to keep each other safe.

Many of our middle and High School students have chosen to return to in person learning this semester for the first time. To keep everyone safe, especially to keep our numbers in the building low, secondary students are being placed on an alternating A/B weekly schedule for face-to-face on Monday – Thursday with Friday’s fully virtual.

There will continue to be a risk of increasing COVID cases in the county until we have widespread vaccinations. However, the determination of whether students will be able to attend face-to-face or must be shifted to full virtual learning is no longer focused primarily on the number of positive COVID cases in the county. The Governor, VA Dept. of Education, and VA Dept. of Health have issued new guidelines for schools to use. This shift in regulatory guidelines is based on data that shows that schools that practice proper procedures for health and social distancing are among the safest places anyone can be to avoid COVID exposure and transmission. These new guidelines were presented to the School Board last Tuesday night at the January meeting and will be used to make important decisions about quarantining students or staff, and about closing classrooms or buildings in the future.

This will have no impact on students whose parents have chosen to have them remain as full time virtual students. You will also end the 1st semester on Monday through Wednesday of next week and begin 2nd semester as virtual students on Monday, Feb. 1st.

There are students at the secondary level who still need to come to school next week to complete required SOL testing. These students have their schedules and will follow them.

The staff at MCPS has done an outstanding job during the first semester to create the best opportunities to educate our students through both virtual and face-to-face options. This has been a most difficult year for everyone. We are committed to finding the appropriate balance of providing high-quality education while keeping everyone safe and healthy.

Thank you for your continued hard work and perseverance as we make these important adjustments to the process.