St. Mary's County Public Schools
Central Administration
Office of the Superintendent
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Superintendent

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St. Mary's County Public Schools

October 29, 2020

Dear St. Mary's County Public Schools Families:

Over the last few weeks, we have welcomed students in small groups as we began the transition to hybrid instruction. Hearing students' voices in the hallways, seeing their faces in person, and engaging with them has brought a joy we have been missing for over seven months. Our students, our teachers, and our whole community have demonstrated such resiliency and an incredible level of creativity and commitment to learning in new ways. We could not be more proud of the work that has been done and the constant effort that it takes to buoy the inquisitive spirit of students across a sea of screens.

As our students return, we have been steadfast in our resolve to put safeguards in place. Everyone in our buildings must wear face coverings, maintain social distancing, and wash hands throughout the day. Hand sanitizer is readily available and ongoing cleaning protocols are in place to sanitize our classrooms, buses, and high touch areas throughout our buildings. Our Health and Safety page on our website provides further detail.

As part of our Recovery Plan, one of the key facets is to use data to guide the gradual return of students to school. We monitor state and local data, as well as the number of cases within SMCPS. We monitor state and local data, as well as the number of cases within SMCPS. To help us keep track of all this, we have created a data dashboard that houses our school system data as well as links to St. Mary's County Health Department data and the Maryland Governor's "Safely Reopening Maryland Schools" COVID data dashboard. Governor Hogan and the Maryland State Department of Education provided guidance with specific benchmarks to guide reopening schools. They are the COVID 19 *Percent Positivity Rate* and the *New Case Rate per 100,000* people. In St. Mary's County, we have seen both these measures increase recently. The St. Mary's Health Department issued a press release this morning with the following data:

- Total cases of COVID-19 in St. Mary's County residents: 1,542 (+97 in past 7 days)
- New Case Rate per 100,000: 9.69 (+5.22 in past 7 days, 117% increase)
- Percentage Confirmed Positive (PCR) Cases: 6.53 (+2.9 in past 7 days, 80% increase)
- Estimated Effective Reproduction Number (Rt): 1.17 (+0.34 in past 7 days, 41% increase)

According to the Governor's "Safely Reoponing Maryland Schools" decision matrix, the number and rate of increase for both *Percent Positive Rate* and *New Case Rate per 100,000* require us to reassess our plan. We are doing so now in close collaboration with the St. Mary's County Health Department. It is important to realize that the recent spike in COVID 19 cases are in the community and not in SMCPS. We are determined to keep it that way even if it means altering our return timeline.

As of today, the recent spike appears to be following previous trends and may well be receding. To make sure this is the case, we will be closely following the data from the St. Mary's County Health Department and working with them daily. We will also slightly modify our return plan by pushing the start of Phase 2 by one day - from Monday, November 2, 2020, to Wednesday, November 4. This will allow us to make sure that the spike we see in the community today is, in fact, receding. As Tuesday is election day and school is not in session, the start day of Phase 2 will be **Wednesday, November 4.**

Phased-In Return of Students for Hybrid Instruction Fall 2020

Dates	Student Group	Notes
Phase 1 (continuing) Monday, November 2	**Regional Programs** • SAIL • COMPASS	Students in these programs will continue with their regular schedule with in-person instruction being delivered each school day (Monday-Thursday). *They will remain in this 4 day/week schedule throughout the following phases as well.* All other students will be online Monday, Nov. 2
Phase 2 Wednesday, November 4	Students by **grade cohort** return: **Elementary Level** • Head Start and PreK+ • Grades K and 1 **Middle School** • Grades 6 **High School** • Grades 9 and 12	**Head Start and PreK** will return with AM and PM sessions- for in-person instruction Monday-Thursday. **Grades K, 1, 6, 9, and 12** will begin the hybrid model with in-person instruction 2 days per week with the A group attending Monday and Wednesday and the B group attending Tuesday and Thursday. Fridays will remain an online work day with dedicated office hours and opportunities for intervention and enrichment as well as professional development and instructional planning.
Phase 3 Monday, November 16	**All remaining students** return: **Elementary Level** • Head Start and PreK+ • Grades K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 **Middle School** • Grades 6, 7, and 8 **High School** • Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12	**Head Start and PreK** will continue with AM and PM sessions- for in-person instruction Monday-Thursday. **All grades, K-12, will begin** in-person instruction 2 days per week with the A group attending Monday and Wednesday and the B group attending Tuesday and Thursday. Fridays will remain an online work day with dedicated office hours and opportunities for intervention and enrichment as well as professional development and instructional planning.

Returning students to face to face instruction requires the entire community to be committed. We all must follow CDC guidelines of masking, social distancing, and hygiene. We must weigh high risk behaviors against our ultimate goal of providing some normalcy for our kids. Our employees are committed to this and have worked tirelessly to welcome kids back - and it shows. It is inevitable that people will begin experiencing pandemic fatigue, but this is the moment when we need everyone to be most vigilant. We are in this together, we are dependent upon one another, and we must all pull together.

Sincerely,

J. Scott Smith, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools