



COLUMBUS CITY SCHOOLS DEPARTMENT OF ENGAGEMENT DISTRICT UPDATE TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Update for October 23, 2020

Email the CCS Department of Engagement at Engage@columbus.k12.oh.us.

SUPERINTENDENT SHARES IMPORTANT UPDATE - TRANSITION TO BLENDED LEARNING POSTPONED FOR MOST STUDENTS:

Columbus City Schools Superintendent/CEO Dr. Talisa Dixon announced this week that the blended learning transition plan for most of our PreK-8th Grade students has been postponed, and the majority of our students will remain in a remote learning model through the end of the first semester (January 15, 2021).

Still, she added, there are small, specific student groups who require in-person instruction and will return to our schools as part of a blended learning model beginning next month.

This important updates comes after news late last week on our local health data which shows positive cases of COVID-19 in Columbus on the rise and Franklin County identified as one of 29 counties across Ohio that are now in the "red" or level three of the Ohio Public Health Advisory Alert System.

BALANCING EQUITABLE EDUCATION WITH HEALTH AND SAFETY

In her announcement, Dr. Dixon made clear that the county alert level was not the sole health data-point leading to our postponed plans, but it was a significant factor that added to the many unknowns about what the future holds for combating this virus.

Positive cases are on the rise no matter where you look - locally, regionally, and nationally - which is concerning as flu season hits, the weather turns, and we spend more time indoors.

As a District focused on the academic success and growth of our nearly 50,000 students, our challenge has always been on how best to achieve our priority of providing an equitable education to all students within the context of the health and safety concerns of a pandemic.

PLANS FOR ORIENTATION SESSIONS PUT ON HOLD

Last week, the District announced that our updated blended learning plan would begin with optional student and family orientation sessions, including virtual and/or 15-minute in-person opportunities. For most of our students and schools, these orientation sessions will be postponed until we are ready to move into the blended learning model district-wide.

These virtual or in-person orientation session were designed to be similar to a parent-teacher conference, giving families the opportunity to talk one-on-one with their child's teacher to understand the new level of health protocols and safety protections we have put in place.

Principals will be coordinating the opportunity for these orientation sessions likely in January.

SERVING STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

In-person instruction and support are critical for the students within our Special Education program with the most significant challenges and needs.

Our Academic Services team and our Special Education experts have identified the students who meet specific requirements and have already reached out to those families to discuss the opportunity to return to the classroom. This does not include all students within Special Education, only a small, specific student group.

Based on those discussions, some of these students will start their blended learning model beginning the week of November 2 (grades K-12). Some will continue with remote learning.

KEEPING CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS ON TRACK

Also beginning the week of November 2, many of our Career and Technical Education (CTE) students will safely return for blended learning at Columbus Downtown High School and the Fort Hayes Career Center.

CTE students will attend in-person two days per week and continue to learn remotely three days a week. This includes students in our Advanced Manufacturing, Business, Construction, Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, Education, Health, Information Technology, Media Arts, Public Safety, and Visual Arts programs.

For these students, in-person learning is critical to learning the proper skills required for certification. For example, a student who's working to become a certified welder must show physical proof they can weld before receiving certification from the American Welding Society. Without certification, students cannot compete for these good-paying jobs in the workplace or attain the appropriate post-secondary credits.

SAFELY CONTINUING ATHLETICS AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

At this time, fall sports and extracurricular activities will continue on as they have. Columbus City League teams will continue to follow Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) and Ohio Department of Health guidelines and protocols for safe practices and competitions. Many of our fall teams have wrapped up competition or will in the coming weeks as we begin City League tournaments.

We know that winter sports seasons will be here soon, and our District's athletic and health experts will evaluate these in-person activities to make a determination on how best to safely proceed this winter.

TIME FOR RE-EVALUATION

Over the next several weeks, District leaders will explore additional specific student groups who might benefit most from safe, blended in-person learning opportunities.

CCS will reevaluate plans to expand the blended learning model district-wide in December as we prepare for the end of the semester in January.

CONNECTING FAMILIES TO LEARNING EXTENSION CENTERS:

Columbus City Schools is partnering with many of our city's non-profit and faith-based organizations on free Learning Extension Centers - safe, adult-supervised, welcoming spaces where students are supported while learning virtually during the day.

Learning Extension Centers are a true community partnership effort that address the educational and social-emotional needs of our students and families during this time of virtual learning. These centers offer internet access for students to interface with their teachers and virtual assignments while also providing safe, educationally-conducive environments for students whose families may not have the resources at home.

We have 145 Learning Extension Centers identified across the city - and expect the list to grow - with a wider range of services being provided at different hours throughout the day. To make it easy for families to find the LEC closest to their homes, we have created an interactive map.

Information about LEC's and the locator map is at www.ccschools.org/LearningExtensionCenters.

LEARNING EXTENSION CENTERS HOURS

Each LEC is unique to the hosting organization and the needs of the community they serve. Service hours and days of the week vary. Some centers require students to sign up ahead of time, while other centers allow for drop-ins at any time.

When you use the locator map on our website, you'll be able to get more information on the LEC's hours and services.

SUPPORTS AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS AT THE LECS

In addition to the supports offered by each LEC, several of our local non-profit and social service providers are teaming up to offer additional supports to students and families.

Thanks to the generosity of the business community, non-profit partners, and local government entities - and a significant investment by Mayor Ginther and Columbus City Council - our students who visit a LEC will have access to:

- A safe, adult-supervised, educationally-conducive environment with reliable broadband internet access for students to virtually interface with their teachers or engage in the CCS Digital Academy.
- Knowledgeable LEC staff to be able to assist students when needed.
- Identified health protocols and PPE to keep every student safe (masks, hand sanitizer).
- Volunteers to assist with tutoring, enrichment activities, and lunch at many of the sites (food provided by Children's Hunger Alliance).
- Additional technology, such as Chromebooks, hotspots, or printers.
- Health/wellness checks in partnership with Nationwide Children's Hospital.
- College and career guidance from our higher education access partners at I Know I Can.

The LEC's working with Columbus City Schools do not charge fees to families for these services. Day Care providers that charge for services are different than a LEC.

ADDITIONAL FAMILY SUPPORTS DURING REMOTE LEARNING:

Our families have been through a great deal since March, and we appreciate their patience and flexibility as our District leaders have worked to determine the best and safest path forward.

For these families and the tens of thousands of CCS students who will remain in a completely virtual learning environment, we will be enhancing our remote supports in the coming months. This will include a revamped food service model, increased tech support, leveraging our community partnerships, and seeking continual feedback from our families.

CHANGING UP OUR FUEL UP! FOOD DISTRIBUTION EFFORTS

A recently family survey about our Fuel Up! food service program provided some great insight on how people are using our once-a-week distribution.

While most respondents appreciate the convenience of the program - five-day meal packs distributed once per week on Wednesdays - many families have also asked for a variety of meals or the option of a more traditional menu of items, including fresh fruits and vegetables.

Our Food Services team is finalizing plans to revamp the program to address the great feedback. Until then, meal boxes will still be available Wednesday at 44 locations from 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. or in the evening from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

OFFERING BETTER TECH SUPPORT

Several families continue to share a need for additional technical support both during the day and in the evening hours. This ranges from Chromebook troubleshooting to resetting passwords. Our Technology team is working on a plan to address this feedback and provide additional support for our students and families.

In the meantime, we have dedicated staff and outside support to help answer calls to our IT Help Desk at 614-365-8425.

HEARING FROM FAMILIES THROUGH SURVEYS AND ENGAGEMENT

During these first weeks of the school year, many families have been proactively engaged with our District. For those we may have not heard from yet, we still want to get feedback and learn about their experiences with remote learning.

The District will be conducting an upcoming survey for all CCS families to identify specific challenges and needs they have as this pandemic moves into the fall and winter months. Data and insight will also allow us to align the services and supports of our community partners to meet those needs.

We will also continue hosting our twice-weekly Virtual Family Engagement Sessions on Zoom. Dr. Dixon will be joining these sessions on a regular basis - starting with this Thursday's "Super Session" - to engage with families, students, staff, and community stakeholders.

Sign up for these Virtual Family Engagement Sessions - hosted every Tuesday and Thursday from 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. by our Engagement team - at www.ccsosoh.us/rsvp.

KEEPING TEACHERS AND STAFF SAFE AT SCHOOL:

Teachers and staff continue to work from their classrooms and in our schools and office buildings. The District has made several investments to keep staff safe and mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

To date, the District has spent more than \$5 million on the purchase of safety materials and training for teachers, staff, and students. This includes masks and PPE, hand sanitizer, protective barriers, cleaning equipment and supplies, and professional development.

- For teachers and staff, each school received 5 reusable cloth face masks for each staff member based on the employee count at each site in June. The number of masks actually delivered was rounded up to the nearest 50 to provide for any additional employees who may have been assigned to the building over the summer.
- Elementary schools received single-use child-size masks; middle and high schools received single-use adult-size masks. The number delivered to each school was based on the May student enrollment multiplied by 10 and rounded to the nearest thousand.
- Each school building has enough masks for a minimum of 30 days, but most have enough for 6-8 weeks of blended learning. Additional deliveries to buildings will continue so that no building will be without masks.
- To make sure we have plenty of masks in reserve, there are 29 huge pallets of single-use masks available in the warehouse.
- Every building has hand sanitizer - often enough for every room - and the District has 100,800 bottles of hand sanitizer (16.9 ounce bottles) in the warehouse for replenishing.
- Staff were asked to attend training on health and safety protocols during their professional development time, and training will be ongoing.
- The District has purchased special ionization machines that are being used to clean each building. These electrostatic sprayers blanket a room in a mist of disinfectant.
- This deep-cleaning is in addition to custodial staff wiping down frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, keyboards, counters, handrails.

Air ventilation systems are also being monitored on a regular basis for problems. When a problem is found, it is repaired. Ensuring the supply of fresh air through the ventilation system is monitored daily by the buildings and grounds team. Air quality in buildings is tested when suspected contaminants are believed to be in the air of a building.

Right now, Columbus City Schools is allowing flexibility for some staff members to work on-site or remotely as their job duties allow it. There will still be times that staff is required to return on-site to work with students or to ensure adequate coverage across school buildings.

This flexible approach is designed to support both student and employee well-being, provide clear and concise expectations for our families and staff, and address the need to best serve our students and their families during the ongoing pandemic.

CONNECTING DISPLACED STUDENTS IN SHELTERS:

During this COVID crisis, a number of families have been forced to seek help in our city's shelter system. We don't the young people in those situations to miss any school time.

Our Department of Engagement has recently assigned specific staff members to visit and work with several homeless and protective shelters, identifying and connecting with CCS families so students stay connected to virtual learning.

The shelters have been provided with Chromebook carts to provide temporary laptops for students if they don't have a District-issued device. The District will also be offering any students experiencing homelessness transportation options to and from a nearby LEC.

OUTREACH TO IMMIGRANT AND NEW AMERICAN FAMILIES:

Our Engagement team is also set to launch an effort with Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS) to provide additional direct outreach to our immigrant and New American families whose students are at-risk or disengaged from remote learning.

This will include virtual and in-person home visits to help families stay connected to their children's schools and teachers. More information about this partnership will be shared soon.

ANSWERS TO MORE QUESTIONS:

We know that families will still have questions about this delay and the eventual plans for a safe transition to our blended learning model. That's why the District has set up a "Blended Learning Hub" with details regarding the District's plans.

The CCS Blended Learning Hub can be found at www.ccsok.us/BlendedLearning.

SHARE YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION UPDATES:

Please share this Community Update with the families and stakeholders you serve.

During this historic school year, it's important we communicate as much as possible to as many people as possible - in as many languages as possible - about the steps being taken in Columbus City Schools to support our students and engage our families.

Please share your updates with us at Engage@columbus.k12.oh.us.