



June 29, 2020

Dear Marion County School District Family:

I hope this letter finds you doing well and enjoying your summer. I once read a quote about summer that said, "Everything good, everything magical happens between the months of June and August." I pray you are finding those sparks of magic during the summer months.

On June 4, 2020, Dr. Carey Wright informed superintendents across the state that she had partnered with a workgroup of nine superintendents from a diverse range of school districts to outline the key issues districts need to address for the eventual reopening of schools. She explained they would release their document titled Considerations for Reopening Schools in MS soon. She also explained that members of the Superintendents' Workgroup and MDE would lead virtual meetings at **10 a.m. June 16** and **June 25** to discuss the specifics and logistics related to the six key issues. Monday evening, June 8, 2020 at the close of the workday at 5:30 p.m., we received the document with ideas for reopening school along with the specific topics that would be covered in two webinar meetings. Here is a link to the document. <https://msachieves.mdek12.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Considerations-for-Reopening-Schools-June-8-FINAL.pdf>. The **June 16** meeting focused on academic planning, operations, and family and community support. The **June 25** meeting focused on communications, health and safety, and technology/learning management systems. Dr. Wright's workgroup reviewed the document with superintendents and school principals.

This document suggests three models for reopening.

Traditional – Requires students to be physically present in school with scheduling modifications to follow CDC and Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) recommendations.

Hybrid – Combines online and face-to-face instruction for students. Schools must meet distance learning requirements.

Virtual - Instruction provided through distance learning.

The document addresses six key areas for planning.

Academic Programming

Strategies for Mississippi leaders to consider as they plan to reopen schools to address learning gaps and provide high-quality instruction

Operations Programming

Strategies for Mississippi leaders to consider as they plan to reopen schools to address operational support, transportation, and food service planning

Family and Community Support

Strategies for Mississippi leaders to consider as they plan to reopen schools to keep the community informed

Health and Safety

Strategies for Mississippi leaders to consider as they plan to reopen schools to keep students and staff safe

Effective Communications

Strategies for Mississippi leaders to consider as they plan to reopen schools and keep internal and external stakeholders informed

Technology/Learning Management Systems

Strategies for Mississippi leaders to consider as they plan to reopen schools and equip teachers and students with tools for digital learning

In addition to the above MDE meetings, Dr. Wright has had two additional meetings with superintendents on May 28, 2020 and June 3, 2020. We have also participated in many webinars over the summer as we have developed and refined our plan while also adhering to guidance given by the Center for Disease Control, the Governor's office, the Mississippi Department of Health, the Marion County Department of Health, the Marion County Emergency Management director, and our local sheriff's department. These are just a few of the many webinars that we have joined.

- MDE – Dr. Wright's and the State Technology Director – May 28, 2020 webinar to discuss digital learning plans for Dr. Wright MDE's technology Initiative for 250 million dollars. Follow-up meeting to review plans before submitting to MDE was on June 3, 2020.
- MHSAA – Mississippi High School Activities Association - We received our first guidance from MHSAA for sports on Friday, May 22, 2020. We met with our high school principals and athletic directors on Tuesday May 26, 2020 to review the guidelines and set in order a plan of action for resuming activities at the high school level. MHSAA will be holding an additional meeting on Tuesday, June 30, 2020 to be forthcoming with additional guidance.
- MDE - Guidance on district ESSER funding (June 10, 2020)
- Mississippi School Board Association webinar for Guidance in Reopening schools. (June 10, 2020)
- Weekly Wednesday MS Association of School Superintendent webinars at 1:30 covering various important topics for reopening. (Don Hinton – MHSAA, State Auditor's Office, Public Communication Officers, Various Superintendents discussing ideas for reopening)
- Webinar with Dr. Thomas Dobbs and Dr. Paul Byers from the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) Safer at School Guidance (June 23, 2020)
- We have had multiple meetings with cleaning supply companies to ensure we have proper cleaning supplies to support daily cleaning of our facilities and buses.
- Webinars to secure all components of our Learning Management system (June 1, 2020)
- Early Learning Collaborative – Preparing for next year. (May 14, 2020)
- Save the Children – Summer Plans as well as future plans for the upcoming school year, technology grant through STC to ensure additional devices (May 11, 2020)

Dr. Wright has asked the legislators for 250 million dollars to help with funding MDE's technology initiative to ensure all students have a device, and all families have access to the internet. The final amount allotted has not been determined. We are also patiently anticipating our final MAEP allocation as our legislators are working hard to complete the state budget. Our business manager and business department has done a great job to project a budget without knowing the absolute amount. In addition, each school district across the state is allotted ESSER funding under the CARES Act to help the district with expenses due to Covid-19 with very detailed guidance on how the funds can be spent. We are working on our ESSER plan that is due July 10, 2020.

We have asked you to participate in a few surveys that MDE has requested over the past three months in regards to distance learning, summer planning, digital learning, and the reopening of school. Your input has been very valuable as we plan. We sent you a survey on June 22, 2020 about reopening school. We will meet with my Superintendent's Advisory Committee and Parent Committee to review the data this week. After we review the data, we will meet with our MCSD school board to review and refine the plan.

Ultimately, we would like for the 2020-2021 school year to start with a traditional school model on August 6, 2020 for students. Realistically, we know that this may or may not happen, so we want you to know that we have been working daily making a plan for each of the three models for reopening school. We have plan A, plan B, and plan C. There have been so many obstacles to overcome within each of those six areas of planning for each model. This is still very fluid. Curriculum, technology, special services, federal programs, administrators, and I are meeting and using parent and staff survey responses and

state-level guidance as well as continuously monitoring CDC guidelines to plan alternate schedules that will enable the district to seamlessly transition to other learning plans such as a hybrid or virtual learning schedule if needed or if another local or state-wide school closure takes place. Within those plans are the fine-tuned details for using a learning management system that accommodates the specific needs to teach our students through each model. To aid in being prepared for learning and teaching to take place regardless of the setting or schedule, the district will be getting a number of devices through Dr. Wright's technology initiative for students in grades K -12 and for all teachers in the district. These new devices will add to the technology we currently have. These devices combined with the use of our learning management system will enhance learning in a traditional setting as well as enable teaching and learning to take place if distance learning is required.

Our child nutrition department has been working through MDE to possibly implement a plan titled CEP in which all students could be eligible to eat breakfast and lunch free of charge for the 2020-2021 school year. News on that will be forthcoming. Also, we have been developing a variety of plans to accommodate lunch schedules and feeding with all three plans. For example, for a traditional schedule some classes may enjoy lunch in the cafeteria while others may have lunch delivered to the classrooms to adhere to proper social distancing.

Our district maintenance/transportation director and staff are planning for additional sanitization support to ensure our facilities and buses are cleaned according to the guidance given by the CDC and MSDH. Protocols for student and parent entry are under development and will be provided to the community to explain how students will enter and leave the facility at all times. MCSD Transportation Department has been developing a plan for the district to follow as we work our way to the beginning of school and throughout the school year. Our goal is to keep our students safe and healthy while offering them every opportunity to learn and be successful.

Numerous questions remain as we are only six weeks away from beginning school in August. Do know that we are working and working hard each day. We are focused on providing the safest possible learning environment for all students. Our comprehensive Return-To-School plan will be communicated to parents on or before Monday, July 20, 2020. We want our plan to be accommodating, safe, and thorough. I am very confident that we will continue to provide a high-quality and a well-rounded education to all! Throughout the next few weeks, you will see information start to come out about the start of school. As we receive information, we want to distribute that information as it applies to our MCSD family. As a result, I want to prepare you that the plan is subject to change at any given moment depending on the guidance we are given by the aforementioned agencies of the state.

To say the least, this has been an interesting four months as this is still changing day-by-day according to the guidance from the state agencies. I have always been taught, when the going gets tough, the tough get going. I work with a great school board, leadership team, administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and community members. I could never find words with enough depth to say "thank you" for your patience and kindness as our leadership team works with the various committees to make plans for reopening. I would also like to say thank you to all of you who have sent emails and text messages that have simply said, "I am praying for you and your team." You all keep those prayers coming. Our new theme for 2020-2021 is Be A Spark! Ignite Inspiration! I appreciate all of you being those SPARKS that Ignite Inspiration in my soul. We will Ignite the SPARK of learning this year no matter the circumstances! We will keep the flame of education burning bright because WE ARE MARION COUNTY! WE INSPIRE EXCELLENCE!

Sincerely,



Wendy Bracey
Superintendent of Education