BCS prepares for a return to blended learning

With the number of COVID-19 cases decreasing in Jefferson County and a large percentage of Birmingham City Schools employees receiving vaccinations, all school district employees are returning to in-person work on March 1. Students who choose blended instruction will begin returning for in-person learning on March 8.

“Every decision we have made regarding the pandemic has been based on science,” said Superintendent Dr. Mark Sullivan. “With these developments, I am confident now that we can safely return to blended learning.”

Sullivan rolled up his sleeve for his first shot at Parker High School on Wednesday, Feb. 10. Birmingham City Schools is partnering with UAB to provide vaccinations for the community at the historic A.H. Parker High. UAB also is working to get BCS employees vaccinated.

“This partnership is integral to the health and safety of our employees and the community,” Sullivan said. “The next step is to bring our scholars back for in-person instruction.”

BCS families will be contacted by their local school staff regarding their preference for blended or continued virtual learning. Students in Group A will have in-person instruction on Mondays and Tuesdays. Students in Group B will have in-person instruction on Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesdays will be deep-cleaning days, with students working independently at home on assignments from their teachers.

The district is taking several steps to ensure a safe return. The custodial and operations teams will work in the coming weeks to ensure that all facilities are cleaned and sanitized. In addition, all ventilation systems are being examined and filters are being replaced. Personal protective equipment will be provided for all educators, support staff and students.

Although Jefferson County is showing a downward trend in the number of COVID-19, Sullivan said he is encouraging BCS students and staff to continue following safety protocols including wearing masks at all times, hand-washing, and social distancing to help mitigate the spread of the virus.
March brings a return to in-person work for all Birmingham City Schools employees and the opportunity for blended learning for our scholars. While we welcome the positive changes that bring us to this point, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We must continue washing our hands, wearing masks and maintaining social distance.

Through our partnership with UAB, the vaccine has been made available to many of our employees. It is my hope that everyone who wants to be vaccinated will have access to this medicine. I rolled up my sleeve for the first vaccine dose a couple of weeks ago, because I feel it's important to our community's health and safety.

The vaccinations, coupled with other positive developments, are contributing to a downward trend in the number of COVID-19 cases. Because of this, we feel it is safe at this time to return to in-person work and blended learning.

ALL employees – teachers, bus drivers, child nutrition staff, administrative and support personnel – should return to in-person work on Monday, March 1.

Our scholars will start returning in the blended model on Monday, March 8. We look forward to our teachers having the opportunity to work with our scholars in-person. Students must show up for in-person or virtual learning each day – and be prepared to learn.

Virtual learning works – but for many of our students, the opportunity to dialogue with teachers and receive in-person instruction makes all the difference in learning success.

The pandemic has brought challenges for Birmingham City Schools and school districts throughout the country. We will be intentional and strategic in meeting those challenges, and I am certain that our solid team of educators will help propel every scholar to their highest potential for success.

“We’ll have to do some things differently to help eliminate the gaps that existed pre-COVID and as a result of COVID.

Many of our scholars are in the middle of state mandated testing right now. Others will be testing later this month. The State Board of Education has not relaxed expectations for accountability, and in Birmingham City Schools, we will not relax our pursuit of excellence.

Our educators do their best work each day to prepare our students academically for every challenge. I am confident our students will do their best work on the state assessment tests.

By now, you’ve probably heard about the proposed modified calendar. Students would start school in mid-July. Throughout the year, there will be extended breaks between grading periods to give scholars more access to remediation, enrichment and academic support.

We are seeking parental input with a Town Hall Meeting on March 2, and a survey that has been made available via email and also online.

All of our initiatives and proposals have the same overall goal -- building leaders that impact the world. Because We are BCS Strong!
Black History Month has been celebrated across the district in many fantastic ways. Central Park Elementary School has been no exception. This year, fifth-grade teacher Stephen Wolfe pitched an idea to Assistant Principal Angelia Groves -- combining Literacy Night and Black History Month.

Wolfe, a 21-year educator who has been with BCS for 13 years, said his vision was in part an answer to the school's accountability action plan.

“When our school was preparing for our Literacy Night, as part of our ACIP plan, the school needed someone to lead it. I volunteered, since I absolutely love books,” said.

“I talked to Ms. Groves and convinced her to combine our Literacy Night with Black History Month with the hopes of encouraging kids and families to read together, and also to introduce our community to more books featuring African-American main characters and/or books written or illustrated by African-Americans.”

“While all of the books we shared weren’t representative of that, most were,” he said. “Teachers sent videos to me, and I posted them on our school FB page daily, Monday-Friday, each week.”

Wolfe also led efforts via Zoom to help parents secure e-library cards for their children during Central Park’s Virtual Literacy Night on Feb. 1.

“At the end of the day, it really isn’t about me. I just want to brag on Central Park and let people know that good things are happening in BCS schools and Central Park is doing our part.”

For book suggestions, parents and students can follow his Instagram account: @mrwolfereads.

You can find all the stories read by Central Park educators and special guests here.
Students at South Hampton K-8 School took their lessons to another level on Jan. 28, 2021, with a Virtual Science/STEM Fair featuring experiments and research. Candace Chandler Ortiz, the school’s curriculum coach, coordinated the science fair for students in 5th-8th grades with support from Principal Dr. Alicia P. Washington.

“Interest was very high. Scholars were encouraged to choose topics that were high in rigor and included innovation and creativity,” Chandler-Ortiz said. “They truly worked very hard with their parents and teachers.”

The judges for the science fair were Dr. Marcy Burroughs of the Office of School Improvement with the Alabama State Department of Education; Lise Falconer, an AMSTI Science Specialist; and Kevin Garrett, a UAB/AMSTI Science Specialist. Judges rated the scholars on scientific method, presentation, creativity and justification/data.

“Participation in the STEM Fair increased student understanding of science inquiry, and positively influenced the attitudes of the majority of students in the study toward STEM courses and careers,” said Chandler-Ortiz. “At South Hampton, we are always walking in a spirit of excellence.”

Winners Were: 5th Grade -- 1st Place- Jacob Smith; 2nd Place- Maria Burroughs; 3rd Place- Terea Bennett. 6th Grade -- 1st Place- DeCori Bledsoe. 7th Grade -- 1st Place- Braylon Player; 2nd Place- Jeremiah Cheatham. 8th Grade -- 1st Place- Christion French.

Diane W. Kennedy Scholarship Fund

A scholarship fund has been set up in honor and in memory of Diane W. Kennedy, a long-time Birmingham City Schools bus driver who passed away from Covid-19 last year. The deadline is March 9, 2021. For more information on the Diane W. Kennedy Scholarship fund, parents and students can go here.

For more scholarship opportunities for BCS students, click here.
BCS, ED FARM AND BIRMINGHAM LINKS PARTNER TO LAUNCH MORE CODING CLUBS FOR STUDENTS

Dozens of Birmingham City Schools students are tuning in two Wednesdays in each month for a new coding and engineering initiative with the Birmingham Chapter of Links Inc. and Ed Farm.

In six sessions through April, students in Ed Farm’s signature Color Code program will learn foundational coding concepts, such as loops, variables, and functions. They will practice and apply their skills in a variety of ways using Swift Playgrounds, an interactive coding environment.

The Birmingham Chapter of Links Inc., led in forming the partnership. Students at 10 elementary, middle and high schools have formed junior chapters of the National Society of Black Engineers. The coding curriculum will be offered during the NSBE meetings. School Board President Daagye Hendricks is representing the Links in the collaborative effort.

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School Board President Daagye Hendricks is representing the Links in the collaborative effort. "We want to expose our children to the many opportunities that exist in this ever-changing world of technology," Hendricks said. "In addition to learning about coding, these students also will gain valuable leadership experience through NSBE, one of our nation’s premier organizations.”

All of the one-hour bi-weekly sessions will be held virtually on Zoom, said Beth Sanders, director of learning with Ed Farm. The sessions can be viewed here.

Remaining session dates are March 10th and 24th, and April 7th and 21st. High school sessions will start at 10 a.m., followed by middle school at 11 and elementary school at noon.

Participating schools include Woodlawn, Carver, Parker and Ramsay high schools and Norwood, Hayes, Hudson, Inglenook and W.J. Christian elementary and K-8 schools. Students in the YMCA Youth Center’s academy also participated.
Ambitious Phillips Academy 5th-grader Ethan Hill is doing big things in the world! Founder of “Ethan’s Heart,” a mission to help support the homeless population in Birmingham, Ethan was recently invited to an interview on Kelly Clarkson’s talk show. Watch the video.

Dr. King! He took a stand!
And fought for equal rights all around the land!
We appreciate you for making such a nonviolent plan,
Seeking equality for every man.
Changes have come that have benefited many men,
There are also still problems that infect plenty of women,
The struggle continues to make it clear that everyone has rights,
And their freedom is dear,
May we never forget and honor your dream,
Last but not least, thank you Dr. King,
For encouraging me about my American dream!

Submitted By: Ji’Bria Poole,
Jones Valley Middle School, 6th Grade

Congratulations to Ramsay IB High School theatre scholars Mackenzie Williams, left and Taylore Kenty, right, the winners in the 2020 Word Up Poetry Slam. Each student showcased their poems in the statewide 2020 Poetry Out Loud Competition (POL). Taylore won in two categories, 3rd Place in the Original Poetry Competition and 1st Place in the 2020 Social Challenge Poetry Competition.

Congratulations to Rising Star, Tamauri Murray!

Tamauri is a senior at George Washington Carver High School with a 4.12 GPA. He is Senior Class President, Drum Major, Drama Club President, and a Gear Up Ambassador. Outside of school, he gives back through Habitat for Humanity, helping with youth literacy and more. In all he does, his leadership shines. We salute you Tamauri!
Birmingham Water Works plans to continue its annual “A World Without Water” school program as a virtual curriculum to teach fifth-graders across its service area all about the importance of water!

The theme for the program challenges the students to grasp how water is Essential to Life. Water makes up at least 70 percent of our bodies. We use it to cook and clean, as well as to make products and materials. Increasingly, water pollution threatens the availability of a safe water supply. And, as we have learned over the past year, washing our hands is necessary to prevent the spread of disease.

For puzzles, quizzes, videos, at-home experiments, and other activities, click here.

CONGRATS TO OUR DISTRICT SPELLING BEE WINNERS

Overall Winners

1st Place - Jonathan Davis
7th Grade, W.J. Christian K-8

2nd Place - Cameron Levins
6th Grade, Washington K-8

3rd Place - Kenneth Linder
7th Grade, Phillips K-8

Honorable Mention

Sareniti Duncan
5th Grade, Robinson Elementary

Isaiah Williams
5th Grade, Oxmoor Valley Elementary

Manhood Mondays Mentor Ramsay Scholars

The COVID-19 pandemic prevents large in-person gatherings, but it hasn’t stopped dozens of young men and mentors from getting together virtually for Ramsay IB High School’s Manhood Monday.

The programs began during the 2014-2015 school year and have been part of the male mentoring landscape for seven years. The sessions are held the second and fourth Monday of each month at 8 a.m. “This program creates connections between young men at Ramsay and male leaders in our community,” said Assistant Principal Micah Kemp, organizer of the initiative. “We encourage dialogue that will provide uplift and guidance to our young men.”

Most recently, Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed was the guest speaker. Other speakers included educators, business owners, doctors and lawyers. Dr. Brian Sims, a Ramsay alum who was the program’s initial speaker this year, offered a $1,000 scholarship to a college-bound male senior at Ramsay.