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BIRMINGHAM CITY SCHOOLS PLAN SAFE RETURN TO IN-PERSON LEARNING
Parents May Opt for Students to Continue Virtual Learning Full-Time
Schools Will Provide Masks and Face Shields

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA — October 20, 2020 — With local rates of COVID-19 spread now at moderate levels, teachers and staff in Birmingham City Schools will return to in-person work on Monday, Oct. 26, and students will begin returning two weeks later.

Superintendent Dr. Mark Sullivan announced the plans via Livestream today. He said the decision is based on guidance from the Jefferson County Health Department. As part of the plan, the school district is taking several steps to prepare in advance of the return for educators and students, Sullivan said, including providing required face coverings for all students and teachers.

“Our overall goal has always been and still remains the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff,” Sullivan said. “That commitment has not changed. For several weeks now, our test positive rate in Jefferson County has been moderate, according to the Jefferson County Department of Health.”

Beginning Nov. 9, which coincides with the second grading period of the 2020-21 school year, pre-K through 8th-grade students, along with students with low-incidence special needs, will return. High school students will return on Nov. 16.

Students will be divided in two groups for a blended learning plan. Group A will attend school in-person on Mondays and Tuesdays with students in Group B attending by remote. The in-person days for Group B students will be Thursdays and Fridays.

The schools will go through deep cleaning on Wednesdays and after classes end on Fridays. Educators will work remotely on Wednesdays while cleaning is underway.

“We want to take all necessary steps to keep our facilities clean and sanitized,” Sullivan said. “In addition to cleaning the buildings, we will have hand sanitizing stations throughout all buildings.”

As part of the plan, students will have the option to continue with a remote learning curriculum. A survey of parents indicates that about 40 percent prefer virtual learning. Local schools will be contacting parents to follow up on their specific desires for their child’s education.
The blended schedule, along with students who opt to learn remotely full-time, will enable Birmingham City Schools to maintain social distancing. In keeping with Alabama Governor Kay Ivey’s Safer at Home order, all students will be required to wear masks. The school district is supplying masks and face shields for students and teachers. Also, air filters in school buildings have been replaced with the recommended filters for optimum ventilation.

“I’ve been a classroom teacher and a school principal. I am cognizant of what happens there and the value our educators and support teams provide every day,” said Dr. Sullivan. “We are a family in BCS. We are a resilient family. We are BCS Strong.”

Birmingham City Schools leadership decided to begin the school year with remote teaching and learning due to very high rates of community spread of COVID-19, with the intent to “follow the science” and guidance from local and state public health officials.

“We have to weigh the risks versus the benefit of in-person, virtual or blended instruction. Studies show that many of our scholars experience their best success through in-person learning. Just as we see students regress in learning after summer break, we have assessed our students and seen some significant regression since we moved to virtual learning in March,” said Dr. Sullivan. “We must close that gap and give our students the tools, instruction and support they need to prepare for the future.”

Dr. Sullivan said the district will continue to assess recommendations and data on COVID-19 and make changes if necessary.

For additional information, BCS will publish a Safe Return web portal on its website during the first week of November.

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