

FEBRUARY 23 2021

UNOFFICIAL NOTES:

**2/23/21 MCPS BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING -
"OPENING SCHOOLS IN RECOVERY OF
EDUCATION"**

MODERATELY MOCO

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FULL SLIDES

[https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BYJNUS60CCD3/\\$file/
Opening%20Sch%20Recovery%20Ed%20%20210223%20PPT.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/mabe/mcpsmd/Board.nsf/files/BYJNUS60CCD3/$file/Opening%20Sch%20Recovery%20Ed%20%20210223%20PPT.pdf)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Five board members were in person (Wolff, Evans, Smondrowski, Silvestre, Harris). Three board members called in from home (O'Neill, Docca, Asante).

Dr. Smith did not attend due to a family medical issue. Ms. Wolff said the next meeting will be on March 11.

Dr. McKnight gave an overview of topics, including:

- March 1 return of CTE and special education students
- Improving virtual learning
- New CDC guidelines (she said in person learning is a sensitive topic and a priority for MCPS)
 - Vaccination is not required, but makes staff feel comfortable
 - For staff returning on March 15, MCPS is in contact with other health providers for vaccines
 - County metrics indicate it is a reasonable time to bring students back
- Operations and nurse staffing
- Technology investments
- Principals – outreach
- Graduation and students needing help
- Social and emotional learning

She also discussed state assessments –state is discussing revising them so there is:

- reduced amount of time
- restricted to math and literacy
- both virtual and in person students will be tested
- possible waiver for accountability and reporting results

MCPS would like to focus on getting students reacquainted with school, not testing.

METRICS

Mr. Turner presented the current case rates (as of last Friday) of 12.2/100K and 3.3% test positivity (down from the previous Feb 9 meeting - 23.8/100K and 4.8% test positivity). CDC models project numbers to continue to decline.

He said MCPS will focus on the 3 priorities of CDC – masks (in school and on buses), 6 feet distance, and handwashing.

Additionally, 5427 vaccines have been administered or scheduled. Attestation from families will be collected centrally on a weekly basis and then principals will be informed. MCPS is providing thermometers to all families.

HVAC AND SAFETY SYSTEMS

Mr. Adams said there were 65,000 filter changes and 5,000 air cleaners added. The air cleaners are supports to the existing infrastructure and won't be in every room. They have been flushing water systems in accordance with guidance from the MD Department of the Environment. Water fountains will be turned off, but water bottle fillers are open.

COVID-19 SURVEILLANCE TESTING

This will begin on March 15 and will be regular and voluntary. It will be complemented by 50,000 rapid antigen tests provided by the state. There will be pool testing and quarantine of a class if a test is positive. There will be \$5M to add more testing.

SCHOOL HEALTH STAFF

County HHS has provided nurses and health techs (at least 1 per school). There is a contract to get more supplemental health services. The public health department will conduct contact tracing and staff will assist them.

Q AND A

Ms. O'Neill said this should allay the concerns of staff. She asked how to enforce compliance and what if families did not fill out the attestation. Mr. Turner said they rely on trust with families as part of the social compact. They don't want to penalize students if they forgot the attestation. Dr. McKnight said they will follow up if they are not getting attestations back. Mr. Turner said they will give guidance on enforcement of mask wearing, and it is part of the student code of conduct.

Mr. Asante asked why people can opt out of pool testing. Mr. Turner said they don't want to enforce this on staff or students. It is one more mitigation tactic.

Ms. Evans asked if all staff will have at least 1 shot before in person return. Dr. McKnight said the priority is staff who have been working in person and staff coming back in person. Dr. Nixon said they are verifying which staff are coming back on March 1 and 15 and following up on numbers. They are finishing March 1 staff now and are looking forward to more vaccines coming in mid-March.

Ms. Silvestre asked what the next step is in the class if there is a positive test result. Dr. McKnight said the pooled test approach is used by other districts. Ms. McGuire said the testing is meant for asymptomatic populations. The class would quarantine and the health department would proceed through the group with contact tracing. Mr. Turner had a flow chart for contact tracing. Ms. McGuire said there would be an alert and notification when a case is in a building, just as we have been receiving (eg, food service workers).

Ms. Smondrowski asked what is "as needed" for air quality. Ms. McGuire said the facilities website has information and every classroom was tested. Some systems have more "as needed" work. Mr. Adams said some systems only bring air in. They evaluate dilution contaminants, air exchange, the number of occupants, and size of the space. They went above and beyond the requirements and of neighboring districts. Ms. McGuire said there are standards but not one specific number.

Ms. Harris asked about doing better with sharing information with community advocates and allies. Dr. McKnight said the first step was the 56-page guide, they are working on more succinct information. Mr. Turner said there is a community conversation on Wednesday.

Ms. Wolff asked about the protocol for COVID illness. Ms. McGuire said the contract tracing protocol and the specific needs for health rooms are set.

Ms. O'Neill said the board should write to the county to prioritize teachers for vaccines because there will be more comfort for staff if they are vaccinated.

Dr. Docca noted that every building is different.

Mr. Asante suggested making simple documents.

Ms. Evans asked if adults will only be in contact with a certain group of students. Ms. McGuire said they will use cohorting as much as possible. She reiterated the 3 core pieces – masks, distance, and handwashing.

Ms. Harris noted that contact tracing specifies specific time and distance together.

Ms. Silvestre asked if there is a plan for notification of a positive case. Ms. McGuire said they have communications planned for different scenarios. There would be contact tracing and informing people and letting them know their risk ASAP. Ms. Wolff suggested standardizing protocols as much as possible.

Ms. Harris said weekly testing should be required for staff and that schools should have an isolation room. Ms. McGuire said an isolation room is necessary and school health workers will staff the rooms.

Ms. Smondrowski asked about schools with vaccination clinics. The clinics will be transitioned out of Quince Orchard and Richard Montgomery High Schools.

Ms. Harris said there are advocates with professional expertise for air quality and asked about procurement of cleaning products. Ms. McGuire said they are in compliance, and the products are heavily regulated. Mr. Adams said they are talking with community experts.

SCHEDULES

Dr. Morris explained that schools start at 9 AM. Bus arrivals are tiered. Students will have support time at the schools prior to 9 AM. There will be no open lunch for high schools.

TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Cevenini said technology will be ready. There will be headphones and chromebook cases for students. Wifi is improved and there will be a microphone in each classroom. The equipment was purchased with MCPS funds, not school funds. There will be professional development.

Q AND A

Ms. Silvestre asked where high school students will eat lunch. Ms. McGuire said spaces will be used throughout the school, the point is they don't want students going off campus.

Dr. Morris noted the support period got moved from the end of the day to the beginning of the day.

Ms. Smondrowski asked why not schedule the virtual students around the schedule of the in-person students? Currently the in-person students are scheduled around the virtual learning schedule. (Dr. Wilson gave an answer, but it was unclear to me).

Ms. Harris said lunch should be outside. She asked where students go when they arrive early on the bus. Dr. Wilson said it depends on the school.

Dr. Wilson noted that employees already had schedules in place for a 9 AM start based on their personal childcare arrangements.

Ms. Evans thought eating lunch outside was extra work for the school. She suggested phasing in before giving them extra work.

Mr. Asante asked if students will be confined to a designated area at lunch. Ms. McGuire said it would be school specific.

Ms. O'Neill said students are capable of rising to the occasion. She asked if each teacher will have a microphone. Mr. Cevenini said yes and all microphones have been tested under masked conditions. They sit in one place in the room, they are not portable, there is not a headset.

Ms. Wolff asked if cameras follow the teachers. Mr. Cevenini said no, but they capture large areas of the room. Ms. Wolff would like evaluation data at the end of the year and said students should be able to see the teacher. Ms. O'Neill was concerned about equity and doesn't want schools to buy cameras. Mr. Cevenini said Owl cameras are \$1000 per class and MCPS is not buying them.

Ms. Silvestre asked about taking masks off to eat. Ms. McGuire said current guidance is to maintain distance and face forward.

Mr. Asante asked about the schedule and transportation for dual enrollment classes. Dr. Wilson will follow up with the specifics. Dr. McKnight noted Montgomery College is still online this spring.

Ms. Evans asked about the schedule for virtual internships. Dr. Wilson said they are working on it.

VIDEOS FROM PRINCIPALS

Principal Allrich from Argyle Middle School and Principal Mirshah-Nayar from Paint Branch High School were featured in videos about outreach to students and helping seniors not on track for graduation.

SUMMER SCHOOL

Dr. Hazel said there will be in-person and virtual summer school from late June to early August. Registration will be in April. There will be a waiver on summer school fees.

GRADING AND GRADUATION

MCPS has talked with student leaders and community groups about options for grades and course loads. There was a resolution to lower the graduation requirements to match the state (21 credits total; the additional math, PE, and elective requirements in MCPS were dropped). Ms. O'Neill asked about reducing SSL hours from 75 to 60 to match the state (I am unclear if that was added).

Q AND A

Ms. Smondrowski asked about the timeline to accelerate the return of students. She noted that she raised this issue at the last meeting. She wants all students back by the end of the third marking period. She asked why middle and high schools would be empty and noted that special education students going back might be the only students.

Dr. McKnight said they want to see how the phase in process goes (March 15 return). Ms. Wolff said that waiting for the March 15 return means discussing this at the March 23 board meeting (not at the March 11 meeting). Ms. O'Neill said parents want to accelerate return, teachers want to be vaccinated, and kids are only in school in equity hubs. She saw on the news that Fairfax County brought back kindergarteners. She said Texas and Florida are the wild west and it foolish and risky to open schools without planning.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND FOOD SERVICES

Dr. Reuben said there would be psychoeducational lessons when students return to school and mentioned parent well-being.

Ms. McGuire said there would be breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack provided daily at all school levels. There will also be an early morning bulk pickup available at White Oak and Seneca Valley.

Q AND A

Ms. Wolff asked about the diversion program. Dr. Reubens said there was collaboration with the SRO workgroup, Philadelphia public schools, the DA, and unions.

Ms. Harris asked about virtual learners getting meals since availability would now be at cluster hubs. Ms. McGuire said they can adjust as they go.

Ms. Silvestre asked about the hiring of classroom monitors. Dr. Nixon said 500 positions were requested, currently 779 applicants are being screened. Ms. Silvestre asked about if they need to quarantine. Dr. Nixon said they would keep their positions but not be eligible for sick leave. Substitute teachers and monitors will be part of the list for vaccines.

RESOLUTION

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