



LOUDOUN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

"Empowering all students to make meaningful contributions to the world."

July 22, 2020

Dear Loudoun County Public Schools families and staff members:

I hope this message finds you and your family members safe.

Last night, I recommended and the Loudoun County School Board endorsed a plan for Loudoun County Public Schools to start the new school year providing 100% distance learning to all students, with limited exceptions, and to subsequently implement the planned hybrid model in stages.

Nearly all students will start the school year on September 8 participating in classes provided remotely, using electronic tools to access live, synchronous classes and classroom meetings, while also engaging in structured learning through online resources and other learning tools provided by LCPS. Most students will not come to school buildings for instruction at the start of the new school year.

This is a change from our most recent plans. Recognizing that the families of 38 percent of our students recently chose the hybrid option (in-person learning combined with distance learning), I know this is a disappointment to some families. I also believe, and the School Board as a collective entity agrees, that this is the best, safest mode of instruction LCPS can provide at the start of the school year. First and foremost we must protect the health and well-being of our students, staff members, and the broader community, while fulfilling our educational mission in the best way possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have consistently emphasized that decisions will be based on conditions, particularly public health conditions, and that plans are subject to change, given how much is unknown about the virus and the evolving science-based understanding of it. We based yesterday's recommendation on new information and insights from the last three weeks.

- We gained greater insight into the challenges of safe, in-person learning once we started providing in-person learning opportunities to limited numbers of students with disabilities on Monday, July 13;
- We've learned that the rise in cases nationally, particularly in the south, has delayed the processing times for COVID-19 tests, which undermines efforts to operate safely and effectively;
- Additional information from public health officials regarding when they would recommend student and staff quarantines and isolations, as well as school closures, clarifies the level of disruption to learning that would occur unless physical distancing and face covering recommendations are implemented with extremely high levels of consistency;
- As division-level administrators and principals across the division have worked on school-level plans, we've gained a fuller understanding of the challenges that teachers, other staff members and students would experience daily to maintain their safety while participating in high-quality, in-person learning; and

- New data relating to child care and potential leaves of absence sheds light on challenges to meeting our staffing needs so that we can best serve students.

Details about these and other new factors that relate to last night's decision are contained in [my latest presentation](#) to the school board.

I want to focus for a moment now on the benefits that we see emerging from this decision, even as we continue to develop our plans. First and foremost, starting the year with 100% distance learning and implementing the planned hybrid model in stages better protects the health of students, staff, and the broader community by enhancing LCPS' capacity to consistently implement crucial public health precautions, including consistent physical distancing and use of face coverings. This approach allows the division to increase the scale of implementing public health precautions in several stages, rather than immediately moving to full-scale implementation. Each new stage of scaling will be contingent on assessing implementation of the previous stage, as well as public health conditions and other data available at that time, enabling a safer and more successful expansion. This approach also allows more time for the potential of decreasing the current processing time for testing, which supports contact tracing.

Secondly, implementation of the hybrid model in stages also will provide more consistent, higher-quality learning experiences for students, given the additional information we received regarding the situations in which quarantines, isolations, and school closures would occur. We know these situations would be more likely (and extremely disruptive to the learning experience for students) without implementing the hybrid model in stages in order to promote greater consistency with public health precautions, particularly as it relates to guidance for physical distancing and face coverings. Starting the year with a 100% distance learning model also will allow instructional staff members to focus more on strengthening the instructional value of the distance learning model, including applying lessons learned during our spring distance-learning experience.

Finally, implementation of the hybrid model in stages increases the likelihood that LCPS can meet staffing needs in order to better meet the needs of students. Concerns related to staffing include the availability of childcare for staff members, as well the ability to provide a safe environment so teachers can focus on doing their jobs rather than the potential risk associated with exposure to the COVID virus. Even if only a small percentage of school-based employees take leave or resign due to childcare issues or health concerns, it would threaten our ability to assign qualified individuals to school-based positions.

We will provide additional details regarding the school year as we move forward with planning, including information regarding the details of the stages, such as which students would participate in in-person learning in particular stages. We know this is not the solution that some Loudoun families prefer, and we recognize that this model creates new challenges for many. LCPS' preference continues to be for 100% in-person learning, as long as we can provide learning experiences safely and in accordance with the requirements and recommendations of state and public health officials. We all look forward to the day when we can reopen schools with in-person learning for everyone. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Eric Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent