

BOARD MEMO

Date: January 21, 2021
For ACTION X
For INFORMATION X
Board Agenda: Yes X
No

FROM: Terri H. Mozingo, Ed.D, Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Meagan Alderton, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Enhanced Continuity of Learning Plan 5.0: Reimagining Schools Update

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN EQUITY FOR ALL

Goal 1: Systemic Alignment

Goal 2: Instructional Excellence

SY 2020-21 FOCUS AREA

Focus Area 1: Educational Equity

FY 2021 BUDGET PRIORITY

K-2 Literacy Programming

Outreach to Hispanic Families to Improve Attendance and Graduation

Outreach to Underserved Communities to Increase Engagement

SUMMARY

The Enhanced Continuity of Learning Plan 5.0: Reimagining Schools was presented to the School Board on Thursday, October 15, 2020. Based on our commitment to providing regular communication to the School Board and Alexandria community, we have prepared this presentation to focus on the following guidance regarding reopening schools: Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Interim Guidance to K-12 School Reopening (January 14, 2021); Considerations for Transitioning Between School Instructional Models; Levels of School Impact; and Decision Matrix for Transitioning Between Methods of Instruction.

On January 14, 2021, the VDH in coordination with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) released *Interim Guidance to K-12 School Reopening* (see attachment #2) on how to safely reopen school buildings and have students return to the classroom, replacing the phase guidance issued in July 2020. The new guidance does not serve as a mandate to reopen schools, but places greater emphasis on returning safely to in-person instruction. It also prioritizes high-needs students, including students with disabilities, English Learners (EL), and younger students.

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Guiding Principles

While the community spread of COVID-19 is still part of the decision-making process, the new guidance includes six principles that must be taken into account when reopening schools:

1. **Support in-person learning** considering both students and staff. Account for the learning needs and the health needs of all students.
2. **Prioritize younger learners, students with disabilities, and English Learners.**
3. **Put education first.** Prioritize educational opportunities over extracurricular activities or other events in the school and surrounding community. Establish reasonably safe in-person educational environments and then think through including extracurriculars and athletics.
4. **Focus on prevention.** Establish a school culture of adherence to mitigation strategies both in and out of school. Encourage people to physically distance, wash hands, and wear masks. Coordinate closely with your local health department. Educate students/staff to monitor health daily and stay at home if they have symptoms, and follow public health recommendations.
5. **Consider community needs.** Consider disease data and understand the socioeconomic factors, literacy barriers, and other educational needs in your community when making plans.
6. **Be flexible and innovative.** Scientific knowledge evolves rapidly, and local context is incredibly important. Decisions about instructional modality ideally should be made for shorter periods of time (e.g. 2-4 weeks) in response to changing disease dynamics rather than for longer periods or months ahead of time.

Core Indicators

The new guidance further calls for schools to assess their ability to adhere to the five mitigation strategies:

- Wear a mask
- Physical distancing
- Wash hands
- Clean and disinfect
- Contact tracing

According to VDH, the mitigation strategies are most effective when compliance is universal and when all the strategies are used together. Along with the mitigation strategies, the school division will also need to continually collaborate with the Alexandria Health department regarding the extent of community transmission. Secondary indicators can be used to inform decision making, but would not be the sole basis (e.g. % occupied hospital beds, % of COVID-19 hospital patients, % change of new cases/100k, number of outbreaks.)

Three critical documents (listed below) will inform the decision-making process regarding the reopening of school buildings. These include:

1. **Considerations for Transitioning Between School Instructional Models** - this document (see attachment #3) provides considerations for when schools transition between the

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different instructional models (i.e., Hybrid, Modified Hybrid, and 100% Virtual) in response to the changing community and school-based COVID-19 outbreaks/cases. This guidance suggests an instructional model based on the COVID-19 criteria as well as the level of community transmission and school impact. For impact on schools, it now includes how strained a school's staff is because of student absenteeism. Another change is in the category of community transmission. Moderate risk is now less than 8% whereas it was previously less than 5%. The higher risk category will shift to 8-10% from 5-10% while the highest risk will remain unchanged at greater than 10%. In order to go to a higher risk, there will need to be two outbreaks within a short period or sporadic outbreaks in school (size of outbreaks remains small).

2. **Levels of School Impact** - This table (see attachment #4) assists schools once open for in-person instruction. This includes a description of how schools can assess the level of COVID-19 impact to a particular school. The levels of school impact in which schools are able to operate are: normal (100-75%), strained (75-50%), and critical (under 50%).
3. **Decision Matrix for Transitioning Between Methods of Instruction** - This table (see attachment #5) helps ACPS determine student populations/groups to prioritize for phasing in to in-person learning. Using the assigned community transmission and mitigation/school impact levels, schools can use this Decision Matrix table to identify when offering in-person instruction may be reasonable to consider, how to transition learning as community transmission levels change, and how to prioritize certain groups of students. Regardless of approach, schools should maintain remote learning options for staff and students who need it.

Overall, the new guidance emphasizes the critical importance of safely returning students to schools for in-person learning. It also aligns well with our decision-making methodology and validates the role of community input, such as our strong partnership with the Alexandria Health Department. Taken together, all these actions are guided by our community health metrics and school impact indicators.

RECOMMENDATION

The Superintendent recommends the School Board review the phased reopening update as presented based upon the new guidance from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Interim Guidance to K-12 School Reopening.

IMPACT

ACPS will implement a comprehensive phased in transition plan contingent upon community transmission metrics, staffing, and building capacity to ensure that all students and staff are healthy, safe, and engaged during the reopening of our school buildings while following required health and sanitation procedures from the *Alexandria Health Department (AHD)*, the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*, and the *Virginia Department of Health (VDH)*. This phase in plan also ensures that all students receive personalized academic support and interventions to address any learning losses resulting from school building closings. It is

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important to note that school reopening decisions remain a local decision under the new guidance.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 210121_PowerPoint_Enhanced_Continuity_of_Learning_Plan_5.0_Reimagining_Schools
2. VDH Interim Guidance to K-12 School Reopening (January 14, 2021)
3. Considerations for Transitioning Between School Instructional Models
4. Levels of School Impact
5. Decision Matrix for Transitioning Between Methods of Instruction

CONTACT

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