

Looking Ahead

Dear HCPSS Community:

I want to share with you some insight on our planning for when school resumes in the fall. Our current Continuity of Learning (COL) plan was built to carry on teaching and learning through the end of the current school year, not to serve as a solution moving into next school year. We recognized early on that we will need a far more robust and long-term solution in anticipation that the pandemic will continue its impact into the fall. With nearly three months until the scheduled start of the fall semester, our reality at that time will likely be different than our current state – perhaps significantly. We need to prepare for an array of possibilities for the return to schools and then progressively narrow the scope as we learn more throughout the summer.

We have convened a planning team of individuals from all HCPSS divisions to plan for learning to resume – in some form – in the fall. The team is charged with considering diverse perspectives in their planning, and it will be important to have extensive input and feedback representing all stakeholder groups. At the appropriate times during the summer, team members will reach out to and connect with students, families, staff and the community to gather input on the solutions being considered.

We will look beyond "recovery of learning" to a redesigned approach to teaching and learning to build better and more equitable models that will ensure learning may continue almost seamlessly, whether we face another pandemic, a blizzard or any other crisis in the future.

We have heard from parents and guardians, including staff who are also parents, who are concerned about what the return to schools and offices will look like, and how they will manage children's learning while they themselves return to work. We understand these concerns and are keeping the well-being of everyone in our HCPSS community at the forefront of our planning.

Just as we have throughout since the outset of this crisis, our school system will continue to lead from the heart in all of our planning, by providing for students' basic needs for food and safety, and continuing to be kind and patient with our students, families and staff who may be dealing with very difficult personal circumstances. I appreciate your understanding, feedback and partnership, which will continue to be essential as we embark on the next phase of school in a COVID-impacted environment.

Additional details on what this process looks like and the considerations to developing the solution for the fall are [provided on our website](#).

As always, I wanted to provide some additional updates below that will be helpful:

Calendar update

On Wednesday the State Board of Education approved the Board's request for a waiver of five school days. The last day of school for students will be Tuesday, June 23. The last three days: June 19, 22 and 23, will be half-days, and students will receive adjusted online schedules for those days. The week of June 8 will be the last week that teachers will assign students new work, and assignments will be due on June 12.

Given the late school closure date, coupled with the tremendous emotional toll of the pandemic, we want to close out the school year providing ample opportunities to focus on our students' social-emotional well-being and a structure for summer support. Our plans for student learning during the final week of school are as follows:

- From June 15-18, student activities during check-in times will focus on well-being, including self-care and support, making explicit connection to summer learning and well-being opportunities. Students will continue to receive academic and service-goal support during designated periods that exist in the current schedule, such as IEP, 504, EL, reading intervention and optional office hours.
- On the final half days, June 19, 22 and 23, students will take part in end-of-year celebrations and activities that each school will develop, to give closure and ensure that each child is engaged and honored during the final days of the school year. Each school will develop a schedule that best meets the needs of their school community.

Meal distribution

HCPSS has served well over 800,000 free meals to provide essential nutrition to children during the school closure, at our 14 meal distribution sites throughout the county. We will continue to offer [free meal services](#) for as long as schools remain closed.

Many families have been financially impacted by the pandemic, and may now be eligible to receive benefits through the Free and Reduced Price Meals (FARMS) program. In addition to meals, students participating in the FARMS program qualify for a wide range of resources and discounts, including testing fees, tuition, internet and more. You can find [details and registration information](#) on our website.

We understand that some families may find it difficult to pick up meals for their children at the locations or times when meals are served. I want to remind you that any family may authorize a designee to pick up meals for their children by completing the Meal Request Form provided on our [website](#).

Unfortunately, HCPSS does not have sufficient funding available to add more sites, or to provide door-to-door delivery, and we must comply with federal mandates for meal distribution meals. We greatly appreciate the community members who are helping to distribute meals to families who are unable to reach the meal sites. We ask any families who need additional support to contact their principal. Our pupil personnel workers and school administrators are checking in with families and connecting them to HCPSS, county and community services so that all students are supported. A detailed update on [HCPSS food distribution](#) is provided online.

Graduation

Virtual [graduations](#) will begin on Thursday, June 4 and continue through Tuesday, June 9. I'm excited to announce that the Howard Hughes Corporation and the Downtown Columbia Partnership are honoring our graduates by lighting up the 6100 Merriweather Drive building in Columbia. On each scheduled virtual graduation day, this high-rise office building will be brightly lit, day and night, with the school colors for each of that day's graduating high school rotating in five-minute intervals. Graduates and their families are invited to Azlon Plaza at any time on graduation day to take photos or videos with 6100 Merriweather lit up in the background.

Our high schools are continuing to celebrate graduation, collaborating with students, PTSA's and the school community to offer photos and other opportunities for students and families to mark this important milestone, while observing proper social distancing guidelines.

Again, I want to express my appreciation to our parents and guardians, who have partnered with us to ensure students continue their learning at home while schools are closed, and often while balancing their own jobs. Our staff have risen admirably to the challenge by embracing remote instruction while often balancing child care and other personal responsibilities. Most of all, our students deserve a great deal of credit for staying engaged and positive under challenging and unfamiliar circumstances.

I hope this weekend gives you opportunities to get outdoors and enjoy the sunshine.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Additional Updates

Senior Grades and Transcripts Update

Senior grades will be available electronically by the end of next week and transcripts will be available electronically in mid-June.

SMOB Elections

Elections for Student Member of the Board (SMOB) for the 2020-2021 school year will take place online June 2-3. Voting will take place on Canvas and is open to all students in grades 6-11. Students can visit the [Howard County Student Community](#) Canvas page and each candidate's social media accounts to learn more about SMOB candidates Joshua Drasin of Long Reach High School and Zach Koung of Howard High School. Students needing support with voting on Canvas should contact their school media specialist. [Learn more.](#)

Las familias pueden ver las [guías específicas por grado](#) del HCPSS en español, coreano y chino.

Para asistencia con servicios de interpretación, visite la [página de Idiomas](#) en el sitio del HCPSS.

家庭可以上网去看 HCPSS 针对不同年级的西班牙文、韩文和中文指南 (<https://www.hcpss.org/health/coronavirus/continuity-learning/#zh>)。

如需翻译服务，请访问 HCPSS 网站上的语言(Languages)网页 (<https://www.hcpss.org/languages/>)。

가족 여러분께서는 HCPSS 의 학년별 안내([grade-specific guides](#))를 스페인어와 한국어 또는 중국어로 보실 수 있습니다.

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