

May 1, 2020

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Sent via email

Dear Education Leaders:

Earlier this week, Governor Hogan talked about the need to move from defense to offense when it comes to the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We believe reopening our public schools, when it is safe to do so, is critical to fully bringing back the economy and getting our communities back on track. When schools are open once again, more parents will be able to work, and barriers to educational access such as a lack of devices or broadband will be removed.

We are aware of the tremendous effort educators of all job titles have undertaken to create continuity of learning plans and launch digital learning initiatives - but we also know that none of those plans replace in-person learning and the ability of school personnel to directly engage, support, and educate students. Digital learning is simply not a full replacement for in-person education in a classroom.

Over the course of the next month, we are asking you to work with your colleagues included on this letter, and members of the education community across the state, to develop benchmarks for reopening schools and re-engagement plans that ensure students and employees are safe, supported, and challenged as they get back to school. **Specifically, beyond the physical measures that will need to be taken to prioritize health concerns, we would like to understand your program plans for assessing and remediating learning loss which occurred during the pandemic, including consideration of in-person and online instruction for the start of the new school year, extended learning opportunities such as an earlier start in August, extended days, or the use of evening or weekend enrichment, as well as other school-based initiatives to reach students and meet their needs.**

The scope of plans is truly limitless. While we don't think the State Department of Education should dictate a one-size fits all approach to re-engagement, we do think a menu of options and corresponding supports is exactly what the Department can and should be offering. While not an exhaustive or required list of considerations, plans may include:

- A diagnostic tool that can assess possible learning loss and needs, particularly for students from at-risk populations and where digital instruction has not been utilized;
- Small teams of educators that cross grade levels and develop curriculum resources which can be put to work during short-term summer enrichment and throughout the entirety of the 2020-2021 school year;
- Use of pupil personnel workers, social workers, and school psychologists to do home or virtual visits with students and families identified by teachers to make sure re-entry plans address the whole child;
- Interventions and remediation plans addressing both academic and social/emotional needs based on valid recommendations provided over the summer and the start of the school year (*note: the trauma-related supports needed for students should also be provided for similar needs of school staff*);
- Enrichment camps in the evening, on weekends, or during longer breaks in the school year that focus primarily on remediation, but could also be used for project-based learning to tap into art, music, theatre, science, and other subjects that might not be initially included in student action plans;
- Physical distancing, health testing, masks and other personal protective equipment for everyone in the school building, and other health department safety recommendations;
- Creative scheduling plans to minimize movement in the school and account for classroom size limitations based on physical distancing of desks and other work areas;
- Having classrooms serve as lunch rooms and any nutritional and logistical hurdles associated with shifting some meal services away from the cafeteria;
- Utilization of common areas for larger group instruction;
- More routine and complete cleaning and sanitation of all school buildings; and
- Scheduling and staffing for the potential of year-round schooling.

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future provides a guide for many of the initiatives outlined above, including expanded tutoring, collaboration time for educators, and utilization of the community school model. So, while we have envisioned this future, we will need to make the tough decisions to realize some of these initiatives even faster than originally planned.

We want to support your work through briefings, workgroups, and discussions with legislative leaders. We are confident that working together with each other and with policy makers, we can identify fiscal needs and challenges, proposed regulatory or legislative changes, and other opportunities for this endeavor. This will require our coordinated cooperation and collaboration not only for the start of this upcoming school year, but for the next several years as well.

Our State will not bounce back from COVID-19 overnight and we don't expect our schools and students will either, so while your re-engagement plans should be focused on the immediate school year ahead, we should also identify the mid-and long-term challenges to social and emotional learning, trauma sensitive instruction, and the means by which student growth will be measured and utilized in school and personnel issues.

We have specifically included State and local officials as well as teachers in this conversation because the push to re-open schools and have students back is not done only through the lens of the students and their families. Your re-engagement plans need to specifically include the voice of educators to gain their insights as people on the front lines who are the essential staff charged with implementing what we expect to be collaboratively developed local plans.

Going on offense to re-engage students and re-open schools will take all of us working together in the best interest of students. We appreciate you for taking up this challenge and look forward to hearing back from you in the next several weeks.

Sincerely,

Adrienne A. Jones
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Chair, Ways & Means

Maggie McIntosh
Chair, Appropriations

Eric Luedtke
Majority Leader

Ben Barnes
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