August 28, 2020

Dear QACPS Families, Employees, and Community:

On Thursday, August 27, 2020, Governor Hogan and State Superintendent, Dr. Salmon, held a press conference that offered some metrics to guide the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 school year. Governor Hogan made it clear that all Maryland school districts are authorized to safely reopen. In addition to health metrics related to COVID 19 positivity rates, Key Reopening Guidance was shared during the press conference to include the following:

Cloth face coverings must be worn at all times by students and staff on school property, including buses
Practice physical distancing
Stay home if COVID 19 symptoms are present
Utilize appropriate cleaning and disinfecting methods

The COVID 19 Guidance for Maryland Schools document was issued on August 27, 2020, and can be accessed here. The QACPS Recovery and Reopening Plan reflects the suggested guidance as outlined in the COVID 19 Guidance for Maryland Schools and accounted for bringing in small groups of students within the first few weeks of school. QACPS will not change our plan for the reopening of schools. Small group instruction will begin for most schools during the week of September 14, 2020. Sudlersville Elementary School will begin small group instruction during the week of September 8, 2020, to provide continuity of instruction with their summer program. QACPS will continue to monitor our recovery and reopening plans regularly. Any changes to the QACPS Recovery and Reopening Plan will be communicated to families and employees along with a rationale for the changes.

QACPS leaders will do our best to communicate updates and changes to our plan in a timely fashion when possible. Sometimes, the timing of changes is outside of our control. Your patience is requested and greatly appreciated.

During the press conference, Dr. Salmon mentioned that she will discuss hours for daily synchronous instruction with the State Board of Education (SBOE) at their next Board meeting on September 1st. I believe that the hours for synchronous instruction allocated by QACPS are sufficient and were devised with consideration given to appropriate amounts of screen time but if adjustments need to be made to our plan by way of a mandate from the SBOE, we will revise and share any updates as soon as possible.

By now you have received multiple communications about the new Schoology platform. Teachers and administrators have participated in training and will continue to engage in professional learning as the year progresses to increase their knowledge and proficiency. There are many features to the platform that will be introduced gradually over the school year. Each feature must be vetted and must adhere to our student privacy policy.
Concerning student privacy and in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), video and audio recording of live synchronous instruction (including screenshots) will be prohibited beginning with the 2020-21 school year. This decision has been made to protect student privacy, proactively prevent cyberbullying, avoid the inadvertent distribution of copyrighted materials, and comply with Maryland law. (Please note that in Maryland, it is illegal to record another person through any medium without his/her knowledge.)

Teachers will be permitted to record themselves and use instructional video for use during synchronous and asynchronous instruction but no student images or audio will be recorded.

Next week, principals will share more information about virtual learning and videoconferencing with families and employees including expectations for virtual learning, consent forms, and opt-out forms for small group instruction.

QACPS school-based and district employees stand ready to support students’ safe return to school while utilizing safety protocols that will allow each employee to return home safely to loved ones at the end of the day. Thank you for all that you do to support QACPS students and each other. Have a great school opening!

Sincerely,

Andrea M. Kane, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools