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MSDE CONTINUES TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT FOR SAFE AND EFFECTIVE OPENING OF SCHOOLS DURING PANDEMIC

New Video Highlights Safe Local School System Openings and Public Health Practices

Baltimore (February 23, 2021) - Overcoming the challenges of the Covid-19 public health emergency, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) continues to provide leadership and guidance to serve Maryland's families and children. First steered by guardrails detailed in Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education, MSDE led the State's education efforts in the face of the pandemic – from continuity of learning to the return of in-person instruction. Combined with the distribution of \$1.2 billion in emergency education funding, MSDE has changed the landscape of the pandemic response by improving device dissemination, platforms for virtual learning, the expansion of connectivity, and materials to support the safe reopening of school buildings.

MSDE, in collaboration with local school systems, has redefined education by providing research-driven guidance, funding, personal protective equipment, a first-term school year 20-21 performance dashboard, learning-loss recovery strategies and Covid-19 testing in schools, as outlined below. Illustrated in a [new video](#) showcasing in-person instruction in Baltimore City and Carroll County as well as other counties, schools across Maryland are reopening safely and effectively. [Local school system opening updates](#) can be found at marylandpublicschools.org

“MSDE and the State Board will continue to review statewide strategies to improve student outcomes across the State as we continue in our recovery efforts,” said State Superintendent Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D. “Schools are ready to welcome children back into the building, and it is our moral obligation to make sure that we provide students the opportunity to learn in classrooms with their teachers once again.”

A list of major initiatives spearheaded by MSDE during the last 11 months include:

State and Local Recovery Plans: One of the first comprehensive guides of its kind in the country, [Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education](#) outlined 13 requirements for local school systems to address in their local reopening plans. Maryland's Recovery Plan for education explained the concept of hybrid learning, as well as public health mitigation and social distancing practices necessary for reopening schools. MSDE reviewed and approved all 24 local reopens plans. The State plan also addressed guidance for athletics, socio-emotional learning and special education.

[Guidance for School Reopening](#), issued in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, features two educational design options to support the goal of quickly and safely restoring in-person learning for Maryland's students, and prioritizes students who are most academically vulnerable. Option 1, recommended by MSDE and MDH, returns all grade bands to at least a hybrid model of instruction and provides daily, in-person

learning to students with disabilities, special learning needs, and English learners. Additional guidance including temperature checks and mask-wearing are located on MSDE's [Covid-19 Resource page](#).

\$1.2 Billion in Federal Funding: In addition to the initial \$400 million delivered by the Coronavirus Aid, Recovery, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, MSDE is providing another \$780 Million in federal relief for school systems to address the effects of the pandemic. The \$1.2 billion funding has been used for devices and connectivity, materials and supplies to reopen schools, and will support measures to combat learning loss with strategies such as intense tutoring. MSDE has swiftly and effectively distributed these funds to local school systems, and is developing monitoring teams to ensure that funds are utilized appropriately.

Continuity of learning and emergency meals: During the first days of the pandemic, MSDE directed the provision of emergency school meals to ensure students' nutritional needs were met. MSDE is especially grateful for the work of food service professionals, who have provided more than 45 million emergency meals. MSDE provided guidance for continuity of learning, reviewed policy, issued needed waivers and hosted virtual learning professional development for educators across the State.

Child Care and Early Education Support: MSDE addressed the safe reopening of child care facilities, gradually restoring capacity to licensure standards as outlined in Maryland's Child Care Recovery Plan. During the initial phases of the pandemic, MSDE created and funded a more than \$90.7 million essential employee child care program. Additionally, MSDE is providing a \$60 million grant program to support eligible child care programs throughout the state to help meet operating costs and address lost revenue.

Personal protective equipment: The state has provided school systems with two million masks and 200,000 face shields, as well as hand sanitizer, gloves, and gowns.

Prioritization of Education Staff for Vaccines: MSDE requested that the State prioritize teachers and education staff to receive COVID-19 vaccinations in the phase for essential workers. School systems are working together with local health departments to vaccinate staff.

Maryland K-12 COVID-19 Testing Program: The COVID-19 Testing Task Force, Maryland Department of Health (MDH) and MSDE have developed a K-12 Testing Program to provide free COVID-19 tests for both public and non-public schools across the state who choose to participate. This program is an additional tool to support COVID-19 safety measures in schools that are already open, or plan to reopen in March 2021 for the remainder of the school year.

Dashboard: MSDE, in conjunction with the State Board of Education, developed a COVID dashboard, which houses a number of performance metrics from the first term of the school year including student attendance and enrollment figures.

Learning Loss Mitigation: MSDE is forming implementation teams to support local systems in applying evidence-based strategies such as high-intensity tutoring services, extended summer learning programs, social-emotional learning, and targeted academic acceleration to further mitigate the impacts of learning loss.

School Reopening Video: With Baltimore City and Carroll County Public Schools currently open for in-person instruction, MSDE produced a new video featuring Walter P. Carter Elementary/ Middle School in Baltimore City and Robert Moton Elementary School in Westminster. It emphasizes the efforts of Principals Brandon Pinkney and Darryl Robbins and school staff, who are partnering to implement public health safety features throughout the building. The video features safety precautions such as proper social distancing on school buses, in hallways, and in classrooms, and the importance of practices such as hand washing, sanitizing, air purifiers, and constant wearing of masks. Other systems highlighted in the video include Worcester, Caroline and Dorchester counties.