



Mohammed Choudhury
State Superintendent of Schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Lora Rakowski, 410-767-0486
lora.rakowski@maryland.gov

MSDE RELEASES STATEMENT ADDRESSING LOCAL SCHOOL CLOSURES

State Partners with School Systems to Provide Resources, Tools to Support Safe Continued In-Person, Full-Time Instruction

(December 20, 2021) – In response to several temporary school closures across the State, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is releasing the following statement:

Understanding the concerns regarding rapidly changing conditions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, the State Board and Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) continue to prioritize safe full-time, in-person instruction with minimal disruptions. There are proven evidence-based public health strategies to keep students and staff safe in school. To protect the health and safety of all members of the education community, the State Board and MSDE issued a face covering requirement through emergency regulations. In alignment with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), MSDE and the Maryland Department of Health issued school guidance stressing layered public health strategies including vaccines, social distancing and Covid-19 testing, [“test-to-stay”](#) approaches proven effective in keeping schools open to in person instruction nationally. Health experts continue to say Covid-19 vaccinations are among the most important defenses to keep schools safe. These vaccines are available for children age 5 and over.

MSDE is committed to supporting local school systems in the effort to keep each and every public school open for in person instruction, especially with readily available state and federal resources. If a local school system feels that it must temporarily adapt to virtual learning at an individual school or in a targeted manner to keep its school community safe, the flexibility exists for the local school system to do so. Only on a case-by-case basis under the most exigent of circumstances and in close consultation with State and local health departments will MSDE support a temporary transition of a school system to virtual learning with guardrails in place that ensure students have access to a connected learning device and meaningful synchronous instruction. However, local school systems that need to temporarily close schools for virtual learning will need to immediately and aggressively work to bring students back to in-person normal attendance and learning as required by Education Article § 7-103.

“Across the State, we must keep schools open for in-person instruction to ensure excellent educational opportunities and strong outcomes for all students, especially those who have been historically underserved and most impacted by the suspension of in-person learning,” said State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury. “There is strong consensus from researchers that schools can and should stay open for in-person instruction and that school leaders must use every tool at their disposal to do so given the adverse effects closures have on students and their families. We have seen the devastating impact of school closures and long-term virtual instruction on student learning here in Maryland and across the country. When COVID-19 transmission increases and health measures become a necessity, schools must be the last places to close. With unprecedented federal and State resources and tools, we can keep schools safely open for in-person, full-time learning.”

“Our objective is to keep children and staff safe in in-person classroom environments, because we know that out of school virtual learning is simply not as effective for many students as signaled by Maryland’s first marking period diminished academic achievement and increased achievement gaps,” said State Board President Clarence C. Crawford. “We are asking that our stakeholders continue to partner with us in layered public health strategies to keep schools open for in-person instruction and safe to accelerate student achievement and support social-emotional health moving forward.”

MSDE and the State Board of Education remain committed to working with local school systems, departments of health and other stakeholders to ensure the safety of students and staff. MSDE, together with the MDH, continue to monitor conditions throughout the State, and MSDE will provide updates to the local school system calendar as needed.

#