November 6, 2020

Dear Birmingham City Schools Family,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we teach and how and where our scholars learn. For nine weeks, our scholars have been engaged in remote teaching and learning. This will change on November 9, when students in PreK-8th grade return to in-person learning under a blended instruction plan. High School students will return the following week on Nov. 16.

This decision, based on guidance from the Jefferson County Health Department, has been difficult. Our overall goal has always been and still remains the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff.

As part of the plan, we are taking several steps to prepare in advance to help protect our educators and students. The school district is providing the required face coverings for all students and teachers. We also are providing hand sanitizer for all facilities and classrooms. Because we have turned off the water fountains as a precautionary measure, we will provide bottled water for the students.

In keeping with Alabama Governor Kay Ivey’s Safer at Home order, all students will be required to wear masks. The school district is supplying masks and face shields for students and teachers. Also, we have replaced air filters in school buildings with the recommended filters for optimum ventilation.

Students will be divided in two groups for a blended learning plan. Group A will attend school in-person on Mondays and Tuesdays with students in Group B attending by remote. The in-person days for Group B students will be Thursdays and Fridays.

The schools will go through deep cleaning on Wednesdays and after classes end on Fridays. Educators will work remotely on Wednesdays while cleaning is underway. In addition to cleaning the buildings, we will have hand sanitizing stations throughout all buildings.
If you have chosen remote learning for your child, you still have that option. Our recent surveys showed that about 40 percent of parents prefer virtual learning. The blended schedule, along with students who opt to learn remotely full-time, will enable Birmingham City Schools to maintain social distancing.

Local schools have contacted families to follow up on that preference. If you have not connected with your child’s school regarding this matter, it is imperative that you do so right away so that we can properly accommodate all students.

We have to weigh the risks versus the benefit of in-person, virtual or blended instruction. Studies show that many of our scholars experience their best success through in-person learning. Just as we see students regress in learning after summer break, we have assessed our students and have seen some significant regression since we moved to virtual learning in March. We must close those gaps and give our students the tools, instruction and support they need to prepare for the future.

In the coming weeks, we will continue to assess public health recommendations and data on COVID-19 and make changes if necessary.

We have developed a dedicate web portal with information on our Safe Return to in-person learning. I encourage you to access it from our website at www.bhamcityschools.org.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Sullivan
Mark A. Sullivan, Ed.D
Superintendent