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Updates on School Closure

May 6, 2020 UPDATE

Special Announcement: School Closure Extended Through 2019-20 Academic School Year

Message from Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.

State Superintendent of Schools

May 6, 2020

I would like to start this afternoon by giving a few updates on our efforts regarding child care and our meal program.

We have been able to distribute \$34 million dollars in payments to over 3,700 child care providers serving children of essential personnel, and all payments are now up to date. Our early childhood team worked around the clock to deliver more than \$29 million dollars in payments to our providers in the last week alone. This monumental effort completed the first round of invoice processing. We will continue to work diligently with our partners at the Comptroller's office and each of our essential personnel child care providers to keep these payments up to date. I want to thank our providers for their continued service to Maryland's children and families, and for their patience as we all work through these unusual circumstances. I encourage any provider with additional questions or concerns about invoices or payments to reach out to us through the contact information provided on our website.

Our meal program continues with success. Since the beginning of school closures in March, we have served nearly 8 million meals to school-aged children in Maryland. I want to thank our local food directors for this ongoing effort, as well as our partners at the National Guard, led by Colonel Gowan for assisting our school systems with delivery and distribution. We could not continue this undertaking without everyone's contributions, and I am very proud of the work being accomplished.

Today, I am announcing the closure of schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic school year. After extensive discussions with the Maryland State Board of Education, the Maryland Health Department and additional health experts advising the Governor, I am convinced this is the appropriate decision in order to continue to protect the health and safety of our students, educators, staff and all members of school communities throughout Maryland.

Although we will not see students and educators return to the classroom before the scheduled end of this school year, online and distance learning opportunities will continue. To guide school systems and school communities on the path forward, the State Department of Education is releasing a comprehensive plan for long-term recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

The “[Maryland Together: Maryland's Recovery Plan for Education](#)” was drafted in collaboration with the State Board, local school superintendents, and with input from a wide array of stakeholders throughout our State. This document lays the groundwork for the coming months as we maintain and improve upon online learning opportunities and identifies methods for recovering any lost instruction time that has occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan also establishes the foundation for school systems as they begin to consider how they will bring students and educators back into school buildings once they are able to in a safe way.

I want to emphasize that the recovery plan we are sharing with members of the public and the education community is not prescriptive and nothing included indicates any mandate or requirement that school systems have to follow. However, it outlines a set of options and considerations developed from best practices and available research. Our plan identifies several sample schedules and calendar ideas that could be used, and dovetails into the Governor’s Maryland Strong: Roadmap to Recovery plan.

At this point, we do not envision that schools would be included in Stage One of the Governor’s plan but different methods of returning to school could be included in both Stage Two and Three. For example, some strategies for small group learning with proper social distancing in school buildings could be included in Stage Two such as bringing various groups of students back on an alternating A and B day schedule or alternating weeks of in-person attendance with distance learning between different groups of students. School systems could also choose to bring students back in different groups to address specific students’ needs such as students with disabilities and English language learners.’

A full return of the student body to in-person instruction would be a part of Stage Three. Schools will restructure their day to day operations to be in concert with public health guidance. As is referenced in the plan, schedules for instruction, meals and transportation may all require modifications. Any return of students and staff to the classroom depends on the circumstances in each school system, and local school systems will have the flexibility to adapt the model to best serve their students.

We will continue to update and add to this document while addressing additional issues as they come up related to the recovery process for schools, and we will be certain to engage stakeholders for their input.

As I have previously stated, for our high school seniors and their families wondering about graduation ceremonies, those decisions will be made by each local school system superintendent. However, I have been assured by each superintendent that they are collaborating with the local community to be certain that recognition is moving forward and that Seniors will have the opportunity to be recognized for their exceptional accomplishments. I have reminded Superintendents, that however they choose to honor the Class of 2020, they must remain in compliance with the Governor’s executive orders.

I certainly understand the significant challenges we will face as we move forward to restore public education in Maryland, however, I am confident that with the leadership from local superintendents, and the collaboration among administrators, educators, parents and members of our school

communities that we can get through this crisis together and come out stronger than ever for all of Maryland students.

APRIL 17, 2020 UPDATE

Special Announcement: School Closure Extended to May 15

After extensive consultation with the State Board of Education and leading public health experts in the State, I am extending the closure of schools through May 15th. With regards to the remainder of the school year and summer, we will use this time to examine every option, and continue to develop a long-term plan for recovery.

In a very short timeframe, school systems have continued to increase their digital presence and capabilities to provide learning opportunities to all students. All school systems must submit their continuity of learning plans to MSDE. The plans include an overall description of how systems will deliver continuity of learning to all students:

- A description of the roles and responsibilities of district staff, school administrators, teachers, instructional assistants, students, and parents.
- A sample teacher and student day.
- A plan of accountability for how systems will monitor and assess student performance.
- A description of how the school system plans to address equity for special education students, English learners, students with academic needs, and homeless students.
- A section that identifies the professional development plan for staff. And a description of the resources currently available for students.

We are helping school systems to obtain the resources, such as additional devices, platforms for learning, and expanded broadband capabilities, that they need to carry out their plans in an equitable and meaningful way. We are hopeful that the additional \$207 million dollars in funding from the federal CARES Act, 90 percent of which will go directly to local school systems, will help to address gaps in the availability of these resources.

After speaking with local superintendents this past week, school systems have also started to develop plans for additional digital learning and the recovery of any lost instructional time in the form of expanding summer school programs. State and local school officials are preparing for a number of scenarios depending on when our educators and students would be able to re-enter school buildings. At the Department, we have started to develop a long-term plan for recovery and will actively seek to engage stakeholders throughout the State as the plan comes to fruition.

I understand the impact that the uncertainty of this situation has created for everyone in our school communities, especially for groups like our high school seniors. We want seniors and their families to have the opportunity to recognize their wonderful accomplishments from their time in high school

and receive their diplomas. Local superintendents have been working on a number of creative alternatives to ensure our high school seniors receive the recognition they deserve.

I would like to take a moment to give recognition to all of our local school superintendents for their unwavering tenacity and outstanding leadership during this unprecedented time. Additionally, I want to thank the teachers, for their hard work and flexibility as they provide instruction to our over 900,000 students across the State. I want to recognize the school system staff that provide support services to students such as counselors, psychologists and specialists – as their work is especially crucial during this time of uncertainty. There are also some unsung heroes operating in our schools and they are the food service workers, custodial and maintenance staff and many other employees that have been working 24/7 to make and deliver food, clean and sanitize and keep our school's infrastructure in great shape. Thank you for your dedication and tireless efforts.

We continue to provide child care services to essential personnel at more than 3,700 State-funded sites across Maryland. Over 25,000 children of essential personnel are enrolled in these sites, and the State has the capacity to serve an additional 20,000 if the need should arise. Eligible families can continue to identify locations where child care services are available at licensed child and family care centers, as well as a number of YMCAs, senior centers, and Boys and Girls Clubs, through the LOCATE hotline service and through comprehensive lists available on the State Department of Education website. I am pleased that the State of Maryland has received an additional 45.8 million dollars from the federal CARES Act to support the maintenance of child care programs and continuation of child care services for essential personnel in our State during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we celebrate the Week of the Child, I want to thank all those individuals providing child care who have dedicated their lives to children. You are all champions and we thank you for stepping up during this crisis.

Challenges remain as we take these unprecedented and swift steps to continue learning for students, and I want to thank our educators, parents, and students who have exhibited incredible patience and stepped up tremendously throughout this difficult and unprecedented time.

Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we react to what happens; not by what life brings to us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes, it is a catalyst ... a spark that creates extraordinary results. Let's continue to stay positive and work together while we are physically apart.

MARCH 26, 2020 UPDATE

After lengthy discussions with health experts from around the State, I have made the decision along with the State Board of Education to extend the closure of all public schools in Maryland for an additional four weeks through April 24, 2020.

We do not make this decision lightly. However, with the challenges facing our State and our country, we have a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of our school communities and the community at-large.

I am working in concert with all local school system superintendents, including multiple calls per week, in order to provide the continuity of learning to all of our students in every jurisdiction across the State of Maryland during this time.

We are already working very closely with every school system to address issues affecting their ability to provide educational services to all of their students. It should also be noted that we will be diligent in providing educational services to our students with disabilities.

Local superintendents have provided me with their plans for the continuity of learning during the additional closure period. My staff at the Maryland State Department of Education has been reviewing the plans and determining what supports and resources the State can provide where needed.

More information will be available in the coming days as we work collaboratively on a statewide plan that maintains equitable standards and expectations for students. Local school systems will be communicating with their individual school communities as they move forward with implementing their plans.

We plan to resume the continuity of learning next week, and we will be working closely with local superintendents, school administrators, and our teachers to activate that plan.

While it is too early to say when schools will reopen, we will continue to reassess the situation as we move forward and see where we are in a few weeks time.

Additionally, while child care and day care facilities throughout the State may remain open at this time, our urgent focus is ensuring there are child care options for the children of essential personnel.

We understand that those in the workforce providing essential services, such as those in our hospital and health care facilities and food distribution sites, may need child care provided to continue in their roles. However, if another parent or guardian is able to stay home with your children you should do that.

For those essential personnel that are unable to provide care, we have worked diligently in the past week to identify locations across Maryland that will provide child care.

At this juncture, we have identified space for more than 1,200 school-aged children (ages 4-12) of essential personnel at various locations throughout Maryland in spaces such as YMCAs, the Maryland School for the Blind, public libraries, Parks and Recreation facilities, and Boys and Girls clubs. We

are hoping to increase this capacity to more than 2,500 spaces in the coming days.

Essential personnel working in response to the COVID-19 pandemic who require child care are immediately able to find these services through a free referral hotline called LOCATE. The number to reach this referral service is 1-877-261-0060. We will provide additional guidance and information immediately following today's press conference.

I am so grateful to our educators and child care providers across the State for their commitment to our children and their school communities.

I also want to recognize the incredible dedication and commitment that our food services staff and volunteers have exhibited as they have continued to serve and transport meals to children at the 500+ food distribution sites we have set up across Maryland. Just as a reminder, for any family looking for a location to pick up meals for a student, please visit mdsummermeals.org for a list of locations in your area.

I appreciate everyone's cooperation during this difficult time, and I am looking forward to working with our local superintendents and school leaders in the coming days as we move forward.

- Dr. Karen B. Salmon

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