

# Allegany County Public Schools

## Q&A for Families

Reopening of Schools for the 2020-2021 School Year

### Overview

ACPS is aware that with the decision to begin the 2020-2021 school year in a fully virtual learning environment comes many questions. It is our hope that this Q&A will address as many of these questions as possible. Please note that as more questions are presented, this document will be updated accordingly.

### Opening of the 2020-2021 School Year

#### ➤ ***Why is ACPS reopening schools through virtual learning?***

- We created a hybrid model that had many similarities to other Maryland district hybrid plans. As with other districts, ACPS faced safety challenges as well as operational and transportation challenges all of which needed to be managed for in-person models. The safety challenges include the increased requirements for cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing, increased health standards for health rooms, creation of and staffing of isolation rooms, social distancing protocols within the classroom, requirements of the use of masks for all students and staff during the entire school day with the exception of the lunch period, and the limit on the number of students who could be safely and reasonably transported or even placed in classrooms.

#### ➤ ***Will students return to their classrooms this year?***

- We share a commitment to providing a hybrid or traditional schooling model when it is deemed a feasible and safe option for our school communities. We will monitor the system's ability to adjust this plan, taking into consideration guidance from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), Allegany County Health Department (ACHD), and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). It may be possible in the near future to offer in-school learning for small numbers of students at a time within a cohort in their home schools.

#### ➤ ***Why are students reporting to school after Labor Day, but teachers are reporting on August 19th?***

- The calendar modification is needed to ensure the distribution of necessary technology laptops or Chrome books to those students who need a device, as well to facilitate Schoology training sessions for parents and students over the next few weeks. Teachers will report earlier for staff development and teacher work time.

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## Instructional Technology

- ***Will all my children be given technology to use during the virtual learning?***
  - Yes. If you have several school age children, ACPS will lend the parent a device for each student. Parents/students are not required to borrow an ACPS device if the family already has a technology device or devices within the home that they would prefer to use.
- ***Last year, devices were only available for students in Grades 3-5. Is that the case this year?***
  - No. All students in grades PreK-2 will also be provided with a technology device if it is needed.
- ***How will technology devices be distributed to students?***
  - Each school principal has been directed to coordinate distribution of technology devices, as well as the inventory for all devices that will be borrowed by parents/students. Distribution will occur later in August/early September. If students maintained a loaner device over the summer, the student will maintain the device.
- ***Are parents still able to request a mobile hotspot to assist with connectivity issues?***
  - Parents/guardians will request a hotspot from the school as they did in the spring and summer. Please contact the school principal. Hotspots only work well in areas where cellular service exists. If a student can't gain Internet access at home, ACPS has provided community hotspots at fire halls and churches as well as drive up external access at the schools.
- ***Will the district pay for my Internet bill?***
  - No. A device will be loaned to the student, if needed, but the district will not pay for Internet. The district, however, will loan a hotspot to assist with connectivity.
- ***How will it be handled if a family doesn't have any connectivity to be online?***
  - This will be handled on a case-by-case basis. The first consideration will be to determine if the connectivity issue can be resolved. Please note that access points have also been set up at various locations in the county as well as at various school sites.

## Instruction

- ***Are children required to be online during the morning each day of school?***
  - It is optimal if students are able to attend their virtual classes when they are offered during the modified student schedule. If it is not possible for younger elementary children because of childcare issues, then the parent is able to access the lessons, which will be archived for a period up to five days so that the parent/student can see the lesson and participate in the activities. This is only recommended for children who need the additional support of their parents to access Schoology. If at all possible, students should attend their virtual classes in real time.
  - We are also examining the possibility of offering an evening virtual school to students whose parents must work during the regular school hours. If the ACPS ascertains that this is feasible, parents will be informed of the alternative instructional hours.
  - It may also be possible in the near future to offer in-school learning for small numbers of students within a cohort in the school at a time.
- ***Will the virtual assignments be age appropriate?***
  - Teachers are required to deliver the ACPS curriculum aligned to the Maryland College and Career Readiness Standards. If you or your child has difficulty understanding a lesson or assignment, please contact the teacher during his/her office hours or contact the school principal. You may also contact the instructional supervisor for additional support.
- ***How will student attendance be taken within the virtual learning environment?***
  - Attendance will be taken via Schoology and recorded in Aspen. It is recognized, however, that Schoology cannot be the only tool used to track attendance in order to ensure equity for all students, as some students may not be able to log in consistently to Schoology because of a variety of family constraints. School administrators have been directed to coordinate daily phone contacts with students/parents who did not log in to Schoology to determine if students were able to engage in learning activities for their classes.
- ***How will students be graded within the virtual learning environment?***
  - The normal ACPS grading system will be used with teachers assigning grades for assessments, classwork, and homework. A guidance document has been prepared for teachers regarding grading in the virtual learning environment. The guidance document will be posted on the ACPS website in the near future.
- ***How do I contact my child's teacher(s)?***
  - Teachers will have a designated office hour. It is recommended, if possible, that students/parents use the Schoology platform message system as a primary way to contact teachers. If that is not possible, you may call the school to reach a teacher, and/or you may

send the teacher an email to schedule a phone conference. If you are unable to reach a teacher, please call the school office and speak to an administrator or counselor.

- ***Am I allowed to meet with the school principal or a teacher in person?***
  - It is highly recommended that a virtual meeting is held. However, if the principal is able to coordinate an in-person conference, ensuring that all social distancing protocols are adhered to and that all participants wear the required mask or cloth face covering, then the principal is allow to determine if an in-person conference is feasible. An appointment must be made prior to any in-person requests with the school principal or his/her designee.
- ***How will CTE students receive their skill training?***
  - Students will begin the school year with virtual learning in their skill areas. It may be possible in the near future to offer in-school learning for students in the skill areas since these students are in a cohort and typically have a skill area enrollment of 15 or below.
- ***How will learning be handled for P-TECH students?***
  - P-TECH students will also take their classes through virtual learning. Coursework from ACM will also be handled online. Students may need to be able to access teleconferencing tools such as Brightspace, Schoology, and Zoom. Teachers will provide guidance to P-TECH students who are taking college courses.

## Student Services

- ***How will meals be distributed during the virtual learning?***
  - Meals will still be distributed daily from 12:00-1:30 p.m. at each school location. Parents/students may report to the school site closest to their home. The same procedure will be followed that has occurred since the closure of schools in March.
- ***How will students and parents learn Schoology, the new Learning Management System?***
  - Parents/students will be invited to attend hands-on sessions at various school sites in the upcoming weeks. Videos, tutorials, and a Help Desk will also be available for parents, students, and staff. Schoology also offers 24-7 support.
- ***What is going to happen with Athletics and Extracurricular activities in ACPS?***
  - The Maryland Public Secondary Schools Athletic Association (MPSSAA), in consultation with the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), and the Public School Superintendent Association of Maryland (PSSAM) announced on August 3 that they have decided to postpone the 2020 high school fall

and winter competition season during the first semester. This decision comes in light of the recent announcements of Maryland school systems to begin education virtually. All in-person ACPS athletics and extracurricular activities are postponed until further notice. Extra-curricular activities that can take place through a fully virtual format will be considered.

## Special Education

- ***My child has an IEP. How will his/her services be handled in a virtual environment?***
  - Special education and related service personnel will work with general education teachers to deliver specially designed instruction aligned to the goals and objectives on each student's IEP, in order to provide access to the same virtual curriculum in which general education students will participate. Services will be delivered through an online platform. Additional support can be provided to parents through contact with the special education teacher through email, phone calls, etc.
- ***What will be the support for special education and one on one therapy?***
  - Special education and related services (speech, OT, PT, etc.) will be provided in a virtual format through an online platform, with additional support provided to parents through contact with the special education teacher and related service provider through email , phone calls, etc.
- ***Will any alternatives be set up for special education students who need additional structure?***
  - ACPS hopes to begin bringing in small groups of special education students for instruction and related services in the near future. There is currently no set timeline; however, ACPS will continue to evaluate the situation in order to begin this process in as timely a manner as possible based on current health and safety guidelines.
- ***Please provide specific information on how special education services will be facilitated.***
  - IEP teams will continue to meet with families to review and revise IEPs. Special education teachers and related service providers will continue to track student progress on IEP goals, in order to adjust instruction as necessary for students to meet goals and demonstrate growth.

