

April 15, 2020

Dear MCS Families,

In some ways, the time that has passed since March 16 has felt like a blur; in other ways, that same time has felt like an eternity. Either way, through the uplifting moments and the most trying of times, you and your family have been on our minds and in our hearts. For what you have done these past nine weeks to support your student and partner with our staff, I am forever grateful.

I also understand, as we approach May 22, it's time to look forward and prepare for the future. The purpose of this email is to outline our approach to the opening of school, acknowledging the great uncertainty. We are strategically and aggressively planning for a variety of scenarios, while recognizing that our approach must be nimble enough to accommodate the personal needs of students, families, and staff, as well as the ever-changing dynamics COVID-19 creates in our world.

To that end, MCS is planning for three scenarios:

### **Schools Open**

In collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Cobb & Douglas Public Health, the Georgia Department of Education, the Governor's Office, metro Atlanta-area superintendents, and other state and local agencies, it is possible our school doors may open once again and we resume an in-person, Monday-Friday school schedule. If we are able to do such, you can expect MCS to implement a variety of strategies recommended by health experts to protect the safety of our students and staff. Examples may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Strategic placement of school desks to increase social distancing in classrooms
- One-way walk patterns in hallways
- Increased hand-sanitizer bottles/stations in classrooms and hallways
- Masks may be worn by students and staff
- Limiting large groups of students in areas such as cafeterias, gyms, etc.
- Students eating in classrooms or outside, rather than in the cafeteria

There are many other potential considerations – the purpose of this email is not to provide a comprehensive list; rather, I simply want you to know that whatever strategies we implement will be done in collaboration with health experts. We are ordering supplies and developing school protocols now so we can be as prepared as possible.

Lastly, it is worth noting that we expect some students may choose, for medical reasons or personal preferences, not to return to school. We will be prepared to personalize distance learning through Schoology and other resources for these students.

### **Schools Remain Closed**

If it is deemed unsafe to open schools, we will turn back to Schoology and other digital resources to provide some continuity of learning. As you know, we are currently gathering family feedback through [our survey](#), [Zoom sessions](#), and email responses. The same feedback will be solicited from our teachers and school leaders. This comprehensive and qualitative review is intended to acknowledge what has worked in recent months and, equally important, what needs to improve if our schools remain closed.

I understand the difficulties that come from starting our school year in front of computer screens. One of the dynamics that made the school closures more bearable was the fact our students and teachers had developed relationships for eight months before we had to close for ten weeks. These relationships will be different if that first introduction is via Schoology or Zoom. I also acknowledge the incredible burden school closure places on your family and the families of our staff.

### **Hybrid Model**

Another possible scenario is we land somewhere in the middle between “open” and “closed” – a hybrid approach that implements more aggressive social distancing strategies but still allows for some classroom learning between teachers and students. There are a variety of hybrid scenarios being implemented throughout the world – we are developing multiple options in order to get feedback from health experts on which is the safest approach given the trajectory of COVID-19. The different options being developed take into consideration the health and safety of staff and students, quality of teaching and learning, and the undeniable impact our school schedule has on the personal and professional lives of our MCS families and staff.

At this point, it would be premature to commit to a specific scenario (and, if I’m being honest, I don’t need a flood of emails with opinions on which model is preferred). I commit to you, as we have done with every twist and turn along the journey, transparent and frequent communication. Please know I deeply understand and respect how such decisions impact your family, our students, and this community.

Lastly, I understand that you want to know our plan as soon as possible so you can prepare. In conversations with various health experts, I have been advised that June 1, 2020, will be an important date in better understanding the trajectory of COVID-19. By this time, we will see how Georgia and metro-Atlanta have responded to the Governor’s executive order in late April modifying the “shelter-in-place” provisions. Further, we will have more information regarding how health data in other countries, many of which are weeks or months ahead of our community, was impacted by the reopening of schools. All of this data, along with continued input from health experts, will be critical to our decision in Marietta.

I promise that I will provide you with an update no later than June 5. While I may not be able to commit to a specific scenario or list of safety protocols by this date, I will share our most current plans to best care for our students and our staff.

In closing, I thank you for helping your student push through to May 22. I am incredibly proud of the resilience and dedication that our students have demonstrated during the last nine weeks, and I truly appreciate the role you have played in their success.

In this together,  
Grant

Grant Rivera, Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
Marietta City Schools