

1. PLAN FOR AND INVEST IN EXPANDED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Beginning with summer 2020 (and planning now for summer 2021), we must make high quality (evidence based), multi-week summer learning available FIRST to those black, brown and poor students who have disengaged during COVID and fallen farthest behind. These students will have missed at least three (3) months of learning.

We should also be negotiating and seeking waivers now to strategically extend the school year – starting earlier, offering longer school days with afterschool and Saturday programming -- and perhaps a longer school year as needed to support learning.

2. ENSURE THAT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE STUDENTS

We cannot return to business as usual and simply double down on curriculum that has failed to close gaps in the past. We must explore options for evidence based, engaging and stimulating learning and credit recovery that captures student imagination and meaningfully prepares them for future opportunity.

The COVID shuttering forced us to be creative. Let's continue to foster and encourage creative solutions to catching students up and keeping them on track. While relying on online learning, consistency of platform (ZOOM, MyMCPS, Google Classroom) is critical for clarity and ease of access.

Consider allowing teachers to deviate from the standard curriculum and use remaining weeks and summer, or when brick and mortar learning resumes to fill gaps in foundational learning (reading and math on grade level) so students return readier to embrace new learning.

3. DEPLOY RESOURCES TO EFFECTIVELY AND EQUITABLY SERVE VULNERABLE STUDENTS

Para-educators, reading specialists, and other non-classroom based educators should all be deployed to serve learning. In other districts para educators are assigned to make daily contact with students who do not engage online. Reading specialists can be doing targeted 1:1 instruction with black, brown and poor students. For current and rising seniors, immediately deploy HS counselors and College/Career Information Counselors (CCIC) to actively support completion of college applications, FAFSA forms and resumes/applications for entry to work for graduates.

When we return to school buildings, we must also give priority to the most vulnerable students. If we confront reduced schedules and smaller class sizes for ongoing health concerns—the first students back in school buildings must be those who have lost the most ground because they could not benefit from online learning. Moreover, in the transition, we must consider using all our buildings regardless of cluster and traditional assignment to make room for these most vulnerable learners who require the structure of school to learn. We must also commit to assigning teachers throughout the district as needed to create smaller classes and permit reduced schedules and ensure that we put our most diverse and effective teachers in front of our most vulnerable learners.

Moreover, this crisis has only intensified the need for black and brown and poor students, to have access to effective and diverse teachers, and attend schools led by effective and diverse leaders committed to providing equitable access to opportunities and resources and that these teachers and leaders must be supported to succeed.

4. PREPARE TO ADDRESS THE TRAUMA STUDENTS EXPERIENCED DURING COVID

COVID devastated black, brown and poor communities. Students and families experienced and witnessed illness and death. They were hungry and isolated. They were neglected. We must be ready to recognize and respond to those experiences when our most vulnerable students return to school. We must be prepared with robust social and emotional interventions that will be vital to help ready students to return to learning. Specific and relevant training in creating trauma-informed classroom environments that support social emotional well-being and that unlocks the potential of PPWs as well as counselors will be crucial (similar to the Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning).

5. ENSURE THAT TEACHERS HAVE TIME AND SUPPORT TO MEET NEW DEMANDS

Teachers, many of whom have their own children at home, are being asked to develop new skills; to adapt curriculum to new platforms and develop mastery tools often without adequate time or support. We cannot expect our teachers to prepare for a radically different return to school without more robust and enhanced professional development and substantial time for planning.

6. SHELTER THE HIGHEST NEEDS SCHOOLS FROM DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT

The future is uncertain. As we make difficult budget and personnel decisions, it is imperative to evaluate the impact of any change on our highest need learners. We must guard against disproportionate staff transitions at our highest needs schools. Any reductions implemented “across the board” are likely to disproportionately disadvantage the least resourced schools. We must use an equity lens in implementing change. And we must ensure that we have our most effective principals leading the recovery in our most disadvantaged communities.

7. DEDICATE LEADER(S) TO EXCLUSIVELY PLANNING FOR RECOVERY

MCPS should free an executive or administrative leader (or two) to focus exclusively on strategically mapping out the recovery phase including re-imagining how we educate our most vulnerable students who have disconnected during COVID. Responding to immediate needs for food and Chromebooks have been necessary priorities but they are all consuming. Without freeing some executive leader from the press of current demands to focus on the future, we will miss the chance to re-imagine effectively. In addition, MCPS should now be surveying the possible impact of increased teacher retirements post COVID-19 to avoid a shortage and to avoid a disproportionate impact on high need schools.

8. SET ACCOUNTABILITY TARGETS TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF RECOVERY

We cannot fail. If we do not effectively address the loss of learning that has aggravated already entrenched achievement gaps, we will lose a generation of students. To be successful we must hold ourselves accountable. MCPS must set ambitious but achievable goals, establish intermediate targets, and monitor progress towards re-engaging all students, but particularly black, brown and poor students so that they catch up and get back on track for educational success.