



October 6, 2020

MBS Family,

Mountain Brook Schools has relied on the Jefferson County Department of Health, Alabama State Department of Education, and Alabama Department of Public Health throughout the school reopening process. The guidance provided by these agencies has enabled our school district to make informed decisions that prioritize the health and safety of our school community while ensuring the continued provision of an effective, challenging, and engaging education.

Up to this point in the 2020-2021 school year, implementing a hybrid schedule at the secondary level and a cohort model at the elementary level has given us the best opportunity to accomplish both of those objectives. But it has never been our intention to maintain these schedules long-term. We know our students learn best when they are in classrooms interacting with their teachers and peers daily, and we are aware of the impact created by the dearth of such interaction at the secondary level. We understand this pandemic has been challenging for our students' mental and socio-emotional health and academic progress. Our school district has worked diligently to overcome those challenges and remains committed to returning our students safely to school on a full-time basis.

We have monitored metrics in conjunction with the JCDH to guide our path forward. While the [metrics we shared with you](#) have not been met, there is an observable downward trend. Metrics can be found on the [Alabama Department of Public Health website](#) and are updated weekly. Our progress toward these metrics, combined with new guidance from the JCDH and our unwavering desire to meet the needs of our school community, tells us that we are ready to enter the next phase of our reopening process.

The [JCDH on Monday released guidance](#) stating that it is now reasonable to consider a more flexible approach in reopening our secondary schools. In light of this news, we are targeting Monday, Oct. 19, as the day on which we increase the student capacity at Mountain Brook Junior High and Mountain Brook High School to 100%.

In our new schedule, secondary students will attend school on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, with a virtual day scheduled for Wednesday. Since our teachers are supporting traditional and virtual learners simultaneously, the virtual day will allow them time to plan and support both groups of students. It also will provide opportunities for students to continue their learning and receive support and intervention to combat the challenges of the first nine weeks. Furthermore, a virtual day will give our custodial staff extra time to clean our buildings thoroughly.

Mountain Brook Schools will continue to evaluate new data and stay flexible in our planning as we move toward the ultimate goal of bringing our students back to school full-time later this semester. Please note this schedule shift doesn't change our district's commitment to masking, distancing, and practicing good hygiene. The health and safety of our students, faculty, staff, and all of their families remain our top priority as we open our schools more fully.

As we prepare to enter the next phase of reopening, we understand we will soon encounter a new set of challenges, some of which are beyond our control. We will do everything in our power to keep students spaced as far apart as possible in all situations but acknowledge that space constraints in our buildings may make it difficult to maintain 6 feet of distance at all times. Since our school district must follow quarantine procedures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that identify individuals as close contacts if they are within 6 feet of a positive COVID-19 case for 15 minutes or longer, we could see a rise in the number of quarantine-related absences.

There is no ideal situation in this pandemic season, and we realize every family must make the best decision for their children. As we move forward, Mountain Brook Schools will continue to offer a full-time virtual option for all students in kindergarten to 12th grade. Any student who is interested in transitioning to the virtual option should notify their school by the end of the day on Sunday, Oct. 11. Those who opt into the virtual program will remain enrolled in the program through the end of the first semester. Virtual students interested in transitioning back to the traditional format on Monday, Oct. 19, also should notify their school by the end of the day on Sunday, Oct. 11.

The strict safety guidelines and procedures outlined in our plan remain largely unchanged from the previous version. Our schools will continue to follow them closely to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. We cannot, however, stop this virus on our own. COVID-19 requires all of us to join together, take the necessary precautions, and confront this task as a community united by concern for one another.

I understand this continues to be a trying time for all of us. Please know that we are committed to doing our best and working with you to provide our students an effective, challenging, and engaging education regardless of the barriers we all must overcome.

Dicky Barlow, Ed. D.  
Superintendent