

**PTA PRESIDENTS & CAC MEETING with BOARD OF EDUCATION
OCTOBER 13, 2020
Questions submitted to the BOE**

Questions Hammond Middle School PTA would like us to address.

1) What are the school start times for the 2021-2022 school year and beyond? A few years ago, there was increased conversation and advocacy to have HCPSS to start school later. Starting school later has been scientifically proven to benefit middle and high school students. Having the later school start times during virtual learning was extremely helpful.

The Board of Education is scheduling time on the next quarterly agenda to engage in this discussion. Stay tuned for that discussion and possible decisions resulting from that discussion.

2) When will Hammond High School renovation be completed? Talbot Springs?

The construction projects at both schools remain on schedule. The Hammond HS Renovation and the New Talbot Springs ES are scheduled to be completed in December 2023 and December 2022, respectively.

3) How will you address capacity issues for the 2021-2022 school year? Will HCPSS remain hybrid?

It is too early to determine whether or not the HCPSS will remain in a hybrid instructional model. It is the desire to have students engaged in fully face-to-face instruction in the fall but that is dependent on the state of public health, CDC and local health department guidelines, and other contributing factors. This remains a priority and will be discussed thorough in the coming weeks.

4) What capacity will be acceptable post COVID because pre-COVID reasonable capacity was at 110% for most schools?

Policy 6010 is still under review at this time.

5) With the announcement of the SRO program including a mental health component, how many mental health works will be assigned to each school?

The Board of Education has added 13 mental health therapists and 4 alternative educators to the proposed budget. This staff will support all high schools and Homewood.

Questions Hammond Elementary School PTA would like the Board of Education to address.

1) Our community is concerned about the BOE working on a plan for next fall. Parents and teachers are concerned about being blind-sided like they were with the rapid transition to hybrid learning. When will you announce the plan with the community? There is concern if we are

starting the fall with a hybrid model, families will need months, not weeks, to figure out accommodations for the other days of the week and to decide if they will remain in HoCo schools or look elsewhere.

It is too early to determine whether or not the HCPSS will remain in a hybrid instructional model. It is the desire to have students engaged in fully face-to-face instruction in the fall but that is dependent on the state of public health, CDC and local health department guidelines, and other contributing factors. This remains a priority and will be discussed thoroughly in the coming weeks.

2) How do you plan on dealing with the sub shortages and staff shortages? Lots of schools, including ours, have not been able to hire TE's, permanent subs, room monitors, and recess monitors.

School administrators and our Human Resources department have been working hard to identify and process applicants. Since the jobs described above are all ones that work directly with children, the state of Maryland has mandated several levels of background and previous employer checks that must be completed before someone can be hired. The HR department is working through those steps and we will have more monitors and substitutes soon.

3) Related to the concern for lack of teacher support, is the demands of teaching concurrently students virtually and in-person without adequate staffing. While we understand that there is a learning curve for students and staff, when an in-person student is requiring extensive support, it is adversely affecting all students. When A/B groups start, the number of students in person will increase. However, at any given time on a M, T, Th, or F, at least 75% of students will be virtual. Knowing that there are still many Classroom Monitor positions to fill that may not ever be filled, what plan does the BOE have to support educators with the concurrent virtual/in-person teaching expectation to ensure equity?

Staff has designed and is implementing professional learning as one mechanism of supporting students. Each Wednesday, staff are invited to attend professional learning sessions focused on building skills needed for instructing in a hybrid model. Additionally, support staff and central office staff are available for just-in-time support on other workdays. Curriculum staff continues to develop lessons and resources for most grade levels and courses that are ready to use which saves planning time for teachers.

4) There is concern with the inequity of time being given to in-person special education students and students with IEPs that opt to remain virtual. This is one parent's experience: "I reached out to the school to see if we could come to school for the extra support time on Wednesdays and his reading support group in person and remain virtual for the rest of the time. I was told it was all or nothing, based on county directives. The Wednesday support time and the reading support times are smaller groups, so I am more comfortable sending my child for these portions of the day. Since I am not comfortable sending him 5 days a week, all day, I feel he is getting less instructional time than those opting to come in."

To plan for adequacy of resources and space, we did ask families to make a choice in the schedule (virtual or in person) they would like for their child. This was also to help the system plan for transportation needs and schedules, as necessary. Students who are in person are receiving the instruction concurrently with other students who are receiving instruction virtually. The service time would be the same and always in accordance with the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Alternative Service Delivery (ASDM) plan currently in place. In other words, students who are in person still only receive in person instruction based on the hours delineated in their individual plans. Some students may be receiving additional service time, in person or virtual, because their IEP/ASDM calls for more time than other students' IEPs. Families who select hybrid would be attending school for a reduced number of days and it may be the case that the opportunities to receive special education services in smaller groups both in and outside of the general classroom on these days may alleviate concerns. For additional assistance, please contact your school administrator or special education instructional team leader.

5) Some families have expressed concern that the increased amount of screen time has caused extreme distress for elementary students. Is there consideration about that? Many of these young students are on a screen for 5 hours straight with only a break for lunch. It is way too much for them and for the teachers.

The amount of screen time was a consideration when developing current schedules. Staff will continue to monitor the implementation of the current, hybrid instructional model. Thank you for this feedback.

6) We are hearing of other schools in HoCo having positive cases of COVID already. What if anything is being discussed about increasing protective measures or testing for students and staff? What guidance is being given to quarantine or transition to virtual when cases are confirmed? What guidance is being given to mitigate the spread by not “sprinkling” students into classrooms when a teacher is sent home to quarantine?

Students and staff should remain home if they do not feel well, families should ensure students are healthy enough to attend in-person instruction, parents/guardians should keep their children home if they are experiencing symptom(s) associated with any communicable disease. In addition, parents/guardians are to perform the following COVID-19 health check every day before the student leaves home. A student having any of the following symptoms may not be sent to school:

- *1 of the following:*
 - *New onset cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing;*
 - *New loss of taste or smell; OR*
- *2 of the following:*
 - *Fever over 100.4 or chills within the past 24 hours;*
 - *Fatigue;*
 - *Muscle or body aches;*
 - *Headache;*
 - *Sore throat;*
 - *Congestion or runny nose;*
 - *Chills or shaking chills;*

- Nausea or vomiting;
- Diarrhea

Students and staff are to wear a mask at all times on the bus and at school, except while eating. Reusable, 3-ply cotton face masks and face shields will be provided for students. Families also may choose to provide a mask for their child(ren). CDC recommendations for masks for community use specify non-valved, multi-layer cloth masks to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2. This refers to the use of well-fitting cloth face masks or face masks to cover a person's mouth and nose to prevent spread of respiratory secretions when they are talking, sneezing, or coughing. Students may wear a gaiter if they already have a face mask underneath the gaiter; they cannot be worn alone. It should be noted that some students are unable to wear masks for any of several acceptable reasons, which are addressed on an individual basis. All students are welcome in classrooms and other building spaces, although those who are unable to wear a mask may be moved in/out of specific areas when needed. Please contact your child's teacher or school administrator with any specific concerns.

The correct supply of PPE has been provided to all schools based on the guidelines provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The supply of PPE should not impact any rotation issues as long as staff follow the manufacturer's care and use guidelines of the PPE. Staff will receive two reusable masks and additional supplies have been ordered to be able to provide masks to staff every eight weeks based on manufacturer's guidelines. The following will be provided to schools and offices:

- Nitrile gloves for all staff
- Reusable, 3-ply cotton face masks for all staff and students
- Clear face masks to support individuals with hearing/speech needs
- Supply of disposable masks for school use as needed
- Hand sanitizer
- Desk shields and tabletop sneeze guards, where required
- Face shields for all staff and students
- Disinfectant wipes
- Extra facial tissues
- N95 respirators, for nurses/health assistants^[SEP]

Sufficient quantities of PPE will be provided to meet staff and student needs throughout the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year.

A student determined to be a close contact with a person with verified COVID-19 must quarantine for 14 days per HCHD child care guidelines. A staff member determined to be a close contact with a person with verified COVID-19 must quarantine for 14 days, with the possibility of release at 10 days under certain circumstances. Staff in quarantine must be out of school for the 10-day minimum regardless of a negative test result, while students must remain out of school for a full 14-day quarantine.

Students or staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 shall isolate and not return to school until they have been out at least 10 days from the onset of symptoms or positive test without symptoms, remain fever-free for 24 hours, and show a consistent improvement of symptoms.

Contact tracing is handled by the Howard County Health Department (HCHD), with support from and in coordination with the HCPSS Office of Health Services. Health services investigates close contacts within the school and sends any information to our local HCHD for contact tracing follow up. There are communication processes in place to inform close contacts and the school about a positive case.

We are currently establishing a testing plan. HCPSS has acquired the necessary lab certifications and licensing needed to perform the tests. The health services staff are participating in testing training. This testing program involves testing symptomatic students and staff that consent to testing. We will also test any identified close contacts. We will perform rapid antigen testing with results in about 15 minutes and also utilizing the PCR test to confirm results with results in 2-4 days.

1. Is there still a consideration for getting air purifiers to help with ventilation/clean air issues inside school buildings? There are various studies backing up the value of these devices and other Maryland counties went forward with purchasing these for their schools. I recall that in one of the meetings regarding reopening they decided that the cost was too high. However, I would like to know the estimated cost and how much the cost would be as a percentage of HCPSS annual maintenance budget. My assumption is that in the grand scheme of things it is not that big of a cost point and given that most students are too young to be vaccinated this would be a benefit to schools beyond just this Spring.

In general, we do not recommend the use of these filters because:

- 1. Our HVAC systems were designed to bring in sufficient outside air. We have also in our COVID response gone back through our systems to verify proper operation and have made repairs accordingly. For example, the HVAC systems for HCPSS buildings provide approximately six (6) room air changes per hours, or one (1) room air change every 10 minutes.*
- 2. Noise levels of the purifiers can be undesirable making teaching more difficult.*
- 3. They have the potential to increase the distance that droplet nuclei can travel due to the fact that they can create undesirable airflow patterns in (large) rooms actually defeating their intended purpose.*

The only places that these items are being used is in our health / isolation rooms due to the nature of those areas.

Additional Questions after the meeting:

1) What are the procedures for schools when there is a positive Covid-19 case?

With the return of students and staff to classrooms and extracurricular activities, it is critical that everyone strictly follows the health guidance in place to keep HCPSS students and staff safe and able to continue to provide in-person opportunities.

HCPSS developed protocols for responding to positive cases in schools in conjunction with the Howard County Health Department (HCHD). HCHD performs contact tracings on Howard

County residents who test positive for COVID-19, and HCPSS is notified of a positive case if there is a public health risk to the school community as determined through the contact tracing process. A Health Department Investigator is assigned to each case and informs close contacts who may have been exposed.

If you believe you have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or are a close contact with someone with COVID-19 symptoms, including anyone who lives in your home, please stay home from school, and contact your School Nurse and Principal immediately.

The Maryland Department of Health defines a COVID-19-like illness as when a person has any one of the following: cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, new loss of taste or smell; OR at least two of the following: fever of 100.4 degrees or higher (measured or subjective), chills or shaking chills, muscle aches, sore throat, headache, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, and congestion or runny nose.

Please review this checklist every morning before leaving for work, and by going to work in-person, you are attesting to the fact that you do not have any of these symptoms. In alignment with guidance from MDH, should you become symptomatic during the school day, you will be evaluated by the nurse and sent home if needed with direction regarding isolation and quarantine. If you are a close contact of a symptomatic child or staff member, you will be sent home and provided guidance regarding quarantine. Staff sent home from school may receive letters from the Howard County Health Department regarding your particular situation. HCPSS Health Services staff members work closely with HCHD to ensure that anyone who may have been exposed is contacted. Additionally, school administrators collaborate with staff from the HCPSS Health Services, School Management and Instructional Leadership, and Communications offices to issue communications to the appropriate communities. This messaging is guided by HCHD recommendations and is strictly aligned with regulations defined by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, or HIPAA, to protect the medical privacy of individuals.

There is nothing more important to us than the safety and health of our students, our staff, and their families. These guidelines were developed in conjunction with the State of Maryland and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Thank you for working with us to keep our students safe.

2. What does the Recovery Team that Mr. LeMon and Dr. Martirano mention specifically address?

Information regarding the Recovery Team:

- *The Recovery Team is made up of representatives from all the divisions:*
- *They try to forecast issues that will need to be addressed by the school system as a whole or different divisions*
- *They often begin discussions and work on things that other divisions will take responsibility for and the complete*
 - *some examples are: School Readiness Checklist, Quick Response Team (for confirmed COVID Cases), fall and spring instructional models*

- *They respond to issues brought forward by team members for input or development*

3. When will the lessons learned document that Dr. Martirano mention be shared with the community?

Our after-action report will be created and shared by the end of this school year. If that timeline changes, we will let you know.

4. When can Camp Inclusion happen? Will it be held outdoors?

Camp Inclusion is not an HCPSS operated program. usually runs right after the HCPSS Extended School Year services are over. This camp is usually the month of August for middle and high school students, and, to our knowledge, it runs all day. The location has been FQMS in the past, but we have no knowledge of their plans for this summer. See information on their website <http://www.campinclusion.org/about-us.html> for contact information and an electronic form to submit a request.

5. What is the status of senior activities including the prom and after prom?

More information will be forthcoming regarding senior activities including the prom and after prom. Dr. Martirano will provide updates at the Board of Education Meeting on March 25.