



March 24, 2021

Dear HCPS Families,

This past Monday, March 22, we welcomed about two thousand more students back to campuses. I am pleased to announce that at a special work session last night, the HCPS School Board approved the next phase, which is to return all elementary and middle school students to in-person learning four days a week beginning Monday, April 26.

Any family that wants their student to continue learning remotely will have that option.

From the beginning, we have followed the guidance of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Last Friday, the CDC updated its guidance to acknowledge the scientific validity of 3-foot social distancing with caveats such as monitoring community transmission and requiring everyone to wear masks. In addition to the new CDC guidance, the following steps allow us to enter this next phase in April:

1. Covid-19 case numbers and testing positivity rates are trending down in our region. In Harrisonburg they have plateaued, but this appears to be due to a spike at JMU.
2. We have learned a great deal about basic mitigation by having a carefully adjusted and increasing number of students on campuses since last August.
3. We have implemented enhanced mitigation such as installing true HEPA air filters and repairing and adjusting HVAC systems to circulate more fresh air.
4. We have designed and constructed outdoor learning spaces to assist with social distancing and access to fresh air. (This work is being done in phases.)
5. The CDC amended its guidance on physical distancing on school buses, so that we can now seat two students to a bench with fresh air circulation.
6. And, finally, over the past months, we have created a culture of safety and shared responsibility.

Dates to keep in mind:

- No school for grades K-8 on April 22 and 23 to prepare for the return of students.
- School holidays will remain on May 13 and May 31.
- The last day of school will be June 9.

This next phase, beginning in April, is a significant step towards the "normal" we all miss. We appreciate your strong support and look forward to the day when we can welcome *all* students back to our buildings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael G. Richards'.

Michael G. Richards, Ed.D.
Superintendent