



PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

Thank you all for your patience as we develop plans for the fall. We are extremely grateful for the trust you give us every year in educating your children. As we build plans for this fall it is crystal clear that there has never been a time when we have needed, and will rely upon, your trust and patience more. As we all work together to educate our children safely it is important to remember that we are all in this together and we will need to make some sacrifices in order to educate our children. This fall will look different, but that does not mean that we will not hold the same high standards for education. A child's education is essential and we need to do all we can to ensure that the students in Portland can safely access quality education, whether that is in-person or at home.

Portland Public Schools is committed to:

- Offer quality education experiences in the safest environment possible
- Comply with all the requirements of each phase of the Michigan Return to School Roadmap and guidance from the Ionia County Health Department
- Provide educational options for families that will allow for either in-person or virtual education at all grade levels
- Provide teaching and support staff the resources needed to safely and effectively deliver both in-person and virtual education
- Work as a team with our families by using clear and consistent communication, setting realistic expectations, and providing consistency across the district

There is not one area of education that has not or will not be affected by COVID-19. Our plans and protocols are numerous. We will have a lot to cover in the next few weeks with staff, parents, and students. This letter starts our communication with families and will be followed up with several more. I ask all of you reading this letter to read, digest, re-read, and then ask for clarification. My communication will remain at the district level as our principals will start to send out communication on building specific items. Once our teachers are back and students are scheduled in their classes they too will send out communication to families. Again, please read, digest, re-read, and then ask clarifying questions. The sooner we all understand the specifics, the sooner we can get to educating students safely. While all of our logistical planning is not finalized we can share several items. With every communication we send out, please recognize that the guidance we need to follow can change daily. As that guidance changes, we will adjust as a district and communicate out those changes.

Portland is a special place and I am confident that our community will work together for our students to ensure that all students have access to quality education and support this year.

MI Safe Start Plan Phases

Our educational plans for this school year will be based on our regions (2 and 5) current phase of the [MI Safe Start Plan](#). We are located in both region 2 and 5 and therefore will need to follow the region with the most restrictive phase. If either region is in phases 1 - 3 then the district will not be allowed to have in-person instruction. Therefore, in phases 1 - 3 the district will offer distance learning to all of our students. When our regions reach phases 4 - 6 we will be allowed to have in-person instruction. The district understands that not every family is ready to return to in-person instruction. Therefore, we will provide families with the option to either return to in-person instruction or select a virtual option for their children. All families should be prepared for either their child or the entire district to need to move to virtual instruction at some point during the school year. Families should begin planning on what they would do as our region's phase moves up or down throughout the year. There is a realistic possibility that we could move in and out of phases 3 - 5 during the 2020-2021 school year.

Instructional Programming During Phase 4 - 6

Currently, the district's region is in phase 4 of MI Safe Start Plan which allows for us to have in-person instruction. For the 2020-2021 school year, when the district is in phase 4 - 6, students will be provided with two options; in-person or virtual instruction. The district will have a one week window starting August 12th for families to sign up for virtual instruction. All other families will be automatically enrolled in in-person instruction.

In-Person Instruction

The [MI Safe Schools Return to School Roadmap](#) has numerous requirements that need to be met in order for us to return students to in-person instruction. The district continues to work through all of the plans needed to implement all requirements. While it is impossible for the district to eliminate all risk we can, with the support of our parents and students, minimize risk. Those families who wish to return to in-person instruction should know the following:

- PPS students will be expected to attend on all scheduled days. PPS will not run a blended or hybrid schedule.
- The school calendar may be adjusted in order to support staff and students to gradually and safely return to school. Any calendar changes will be communicated immediately after finalized.
- The school start and end times will not change but drop off/pick up times and locations will be different from previous years. Students will not be allowed to be dropped off outside prescribed drop-off times for each building.
- PPS will follow the required items within the Return to School Roadmap for face coverings. Please see *Face Coverings* below for more details.
- In order to decrease the number of students in classes we will do as much as we can to balance class sizes. Teacher/Class requests may not be honored and class changes, including in the elementary, may occur after the school year starts. Students schedules will not be finalized until we know how many students have enrolled in the virtual option. Strict social distancing will not be feasible as we return to school. We will make every effort to encourage social distancing.
- In-person instruction will be different from previous years. Breaks, lunches, class times/length, and student movement through the building will all be scheduled differently in order to minimize risk by cohorting students and decreasing interaction.
- Students will utilize our new learning management system, Brightspace, in and out of class. This will allow for both virtual and in-person students to receive the same

educational resources and will make any possible required transition to virtual easier.

- Sharing of supplies will not be allowed and students should be prepared for school with their own supplies.
- In all grade levels, teachers are encouraged, when feasible, to take their students outside during class time. Elementary buildings will still have recess.

Virtual Instruction

Virtual curriculum and instruction will be developed and delivered by Portland Public School teachers. Every teacher will run a virtual classroom and we will divide virtual students across all of our teachers. This will allow for in-person classes to also have balanced smaller enrollments. The district will have a one week window starting August 12th for families to sign up for virtual instruction. Once signed up, parents will need to fill out and sign required paperwork needed by the district for virtual students before the start of the school year. Those families who wish to enroll their child in virtual instruction should know the following:

- Students will be required to have reliable internet access at home. While the district will have devices for students to check out at home, it is highly encouraged for students to have their own device.
- Virtual instruction will be asynchronous (*no live instruction*) but teachers may have some synchronous (*live instruction*) learning opportunities for students.
- Courses will be teacher-paced not student-paced. Students will have schedules with required deadlines.
- Completing virtual classes will require independent learning and support at home. Students will interact with teachers via email/message through Brightspace. Students will not receive immediate feedback.
- All course requirements will need to be met for students to progress to the next grade level.
- Virtual curriculum will have the same level of requirements and work as that of in-person instruction. Depending on the abilities of the child and support at home, time spent in virtual may exceed that of in-person instruction.
- Once committed to virtual instruction, students will be required to stay in virtual instruction until the end of the 1st semester.

Moving Between Virtual and In-Person

The district will have a two week window once the school year starts for families to move from in-person to virtual or vice versa. Once that two week window is complete students will be required to stay in that program until the end of the 1st semester (01/15/21).

Student Devices/Internet

The district will have devices available during the school day for in-person instruction and will also have devices available for students to check out for virtual instruction. For either option, it is highly recommended that students have their own device (laptop, chromebook). At this time the district does not have enough Chromebooks for every student to be assigned their own device. This will require multiple students to use the same chromebook during the day. The logistics regarding sharing and cleaning of devices is difficult. We have over 500 chromebooks on order since this spring, but those devices will not be in-district until after school starts.

Internet access is going to be one of the biggest hurdles for families wishing to select the virtual option. There is no avenue available for the district to provide families with internet access. It is highly encouraged that ALL families look into their internet options for this school year. There are

many scenarios where a student, class, school, or district may be required to move to distance learning. Last spring the district added wireless internet access to our parking lots. We are working on more outdoor access points for this year as well.

Transportation

The district will provide transportation to in-district families as we have done in previous years. The Michigan Return to School Roadmap requires all staff and students preschool through grade twelve to wear a facial covering while on a school bus, if medically feasible. All students will have assigned seats and will be seated with family members first. When weather allows, we will have windows open to increase air flow. Busses will be sanitized between routes. Social distancing will not be possible on the bus. Those families with the ability to transport their children to school are encouraged to do so.

Health Assessments

Any student attending in-person instruction will need to assess their health before leaving for school. We need all families to take this process seriously. The best way for us to maintain in-person instruction is if you assess your student for any COVID-19 symptoms each morning. Under no circumstances should students displaying any symptoms come to school until they are symptom free. The district will provide more guidance on this process from the Ionia County Health Department as we get closer to the start of the school year.

Facial Coverings

In phase 4 the Michigan Return to School Roadmap requires: All staff to wear a facial covering at all times except during meals and if medically feasible. Students preschool through grade five will need a facial covering in hallways and indoor common areas but will not need one in their classroom. It is our intention to limit the movement of these students to the greatest degree possible, thereby reducing the time facial coverings are required. Students in grades 6-12 are required to wear a facial covering at all times except during meals. For fit and comfort reasons, it is our expectation that families provide their students with their own washable/reusable facial covering. To the extent that facial coverings are consistent with school dress codes and do not cause a disruption to the learning environment, the personalization of facial coverings is welcome. A limited number of disposable masks will be available for students who either forget or are unable to purchase their own face covering. In phase 5 the requirement for face masks will be relaxed and only strongly recommended.

Not Able to Medically Tolerate a Face Covering

It may not be medically feasible for some staff and students to wear a face mask. In this case the district will require a medical professional's written documentation. You can request a form from the district by contacting your child's school or by following this link: [Medically Vulnerable Form](#) It is highly recommended to get this form completed now as there may be a wait or different process needed by your personal doctor. Those that medically cannot tolerate a face mask will be encouraged to wear a face shield if the use of a face shield is medically tolerated. Any student without a properly completed Medically Vulnerable Form is expected to follow the requirements of the Roadmap as it applies to face coverings.

Cleaning

The Return to School Roadmap has several requirements for cleaning if the district plans to return to in-person instruction during phase 4. Those requirements become highly recommended when in phase 5. The district has increased our cleaning staff, supplies, and equipment for next school year to ensure that we can complete the requirements for phase 4 and maintain that cleaning routine through the entirety of the school year even if we move to phase 5.

Visitors

During phase 4 visitors will not be allowed in the building. Parents are encouraged to handle all business through email, calls, or virtual meetings. Students being picked up or dropped off may do so at the front door without parents entering the building. If this is not possible, visitors will only be allowed in the main office, will be required to wear a mask, and will need to complete a health screening before entering the building. During phase 5 we will continue to encourage all school business to be handled remotely but the district may allow visitors.

Extracurricular Activities

While in Phase 4, indoor spectator events are suspended, outdoor events are limited to 100 people, and people not part of the same household must maintain six feet of separation from one another. The Athletic Department is working to develop plans for co- and extracurricular activities that are consistent with the Return to School Roadmap and MHSAA guidelines and recommendations. All students, virtual or in-person, may participate in co- and extracurricular activities as long as our region is in phase 4 or better and the district offers in-person instruction. No co- and extracurricular activities are permitted in phases 1- 3.

All of us understand that there will be positives and negatives to this school year. We are committed to making the best out of this situation. We ask that you are patient and provide feedback so that we can grow as a district. Please help us keep your child engaged in their school work. As a team we can accomplish anything.

Sincerely,

William Heath
Superintendent
Portland Public Schools



STAY SAFE AND STAY HEALTHY!