News Alert
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, May 1, 2020

M-DCPS SOARs to Prevent Academic Regression and Develops Contingency Plans For Future Reopening of Schools

The health crisis caused by COVID-19 (coronavirus) led to the unprecedented closure of schools for the fourth quarter of the 2019-2020 school year. The development of best practices to reopen schools, as the crisis continues to loom, is a historic undertaking. While Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) is fully prepared for a regular 2020-2021 school year, the District is also actively preparing for a host of contingency plans that must be considered.

Click HERE for video message from Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools.

Contingency Plans for Reopening Schools

The District is currently convening a work group, which will be comprised primarily of education and public health experts, to assist in gathering input and formulating reccomendations for reopening schools, with the understanding that these plans may change depending on how the pandemic evolves.

Elements the work group will review include:

- **Density reduction and operational design efficiencies of schools:** strategic leveraging of existing square footage to maximize social distancing and safety recommendations related to the use of gymnasiums, cafeterias, and other large common areas.

- **Transportation:** modification of bus routes and other options to allow for social distancing.

- **Hybrid/Blended Learning Models:** a blended physical return-to-school model that accounts for the likely preference of some parents to continue distance learning once schools reopen; staggered start and transition class times; efforts to reduce density in hallways/common areas through scheduling and one-way corridors; and additional outdoor classroom options.

- **Protocols for Wellness, Health Screenings, Health Reporting**: provision and usage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for students and staff; daily temperature checks before entering school buses and school buildings; reporting of illness by students and their familes, and employees; vaccination requirements; personal hygiene protocol including mandatory handwashing schedules; and enhanced social-emotional and mental health supports for students.

- **Establishment of M-DCPS Chief Health Officer:** outline of specific duties of this new, pending position related to school reopening contingency plans and overall District health protocols.

The District will present the findings and recommendations of the work group to the School Board in June 2020.

Securing Opportunities for Academic Recovery (SOAR)

While M-DCPS has worked diligently to ensure a seamless transition from classroom to home-based learning, a considerable academic regression is likely to occur due to the dramatic shift in learning environments, specifically for students who are struggling.

When students, educators, and administrators return to school in the Fall, the classrooms may be different and potentially marked by larger equity gaps, substantial learning loss for many students, and exacerbated economic challenges for traditionally marginalized families and communities. While it is difficult to speculate on what missing months of school may mean for student achievement, research on summer learning loss has provided important insight on how to address some potential impacts of this extended pause in traditional classroom instruction once students return to school.

The Securing Opportunities for Academic Recovery plan, also known by the acronym SOAR, is the District's newly-developed strategic initiative to mitigate learning loss for some of its most fragile students.

"SOAR attempts to turn this highly disruptive health crisis into an educational opportunity for students who have carried multi-year achievement and performance deficits", said Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools. "These students will be strategically identified and provided with significant and meaningful expanded learning opportunities during the summer and into the 2020-2021 school year."

SOAR is comprised of three phases - Recover, Regain, and Restart:

- **Recover:** During this phase, the District will provide students with opportunities for summer reading, remediation, credit/course recovery, and extended school year services from June 8 – July 10. This will closely mirror the traditional summer school program, but will be conducted virtually. Students with disabilities, students with an excessive amount of absences, and students who did not actively participate in distance learning will be engaged during this phase.

- **Regain:** This phase will address the unique circumstances of current 9th grade Algebra students and 10th grade English Language Arts students who did not have the opportunity to take the state assessments required for graduation. The District will provide these students with virtual test preparation and tutoring to enable them to achieve proficiency on these tests in early Fall, when the state will offer the tests again. Additionally, during this phase, all students will have access to the District's E-Learning Toolbox and Academic Challenges, via the student portals, as is customary. All M-DCPS students will also have access to the vast digital content the District

licenses to assist students who are on grade level to enrich their learning and continue to challenge themselves during the summer months.

- **Restart:** Contingent on guidelines issued by federal and state public health authorities, M-DCPS intends to open schools early, on July 27, specifically for students demonstrating low levels of academic performance, as well as for students with disabilities, and English language learners. During this time, the identified students will receive intense instruction on the skills needed in core academic areas for their new grade level, so they are poised to be academically successful. During this phase, the District is also planning to expand the number of schools that participate in the extended school day program, and to begin Saturday School earlier in the year to maximize instructional time. If schools must remain closed during this phase, these plans will be converted to a virtual model.

Distance Learning and Attendance Update

Distance learning continues to be in full swing at M-DCPS, with an average daily attendance of more than 92 percent this week. Nearly 100 percent of students have logged onto the portal since April 6. An updated distance learning information guide, containing answers to frequently asked questions can be found at covid19.dadeschools.net.

The District has delivered 114,000 digital devices, including phones with Wi-Fi that serve as hotspots. Schools continue actively engaging students who have not confirmed the availability of a device at home through calls, emails, and in some cases, when necessary, by conducting home visits, while following social distancing guidelines. M-DCPS' partner, Comcast, also recently announced an extension of free usage of its public Wi-Fi hotspots through June 30.

Class of 2020 Graduations

After taking into account feedback from seniors and other stakeholders, including parents, the District announced it will hold virtual graduation ceremonies at the end of this school year, followed by senior recognition activities with all of the pomp and circumstance seniors have earned, when conditions improve, either later in the summer or in the winter, depending on the guidance of medical experts.

For the virtual graduations, the District is making every effort to follow the graduation dates and times that have already been scheduled, though some flexibility may be required. A final graduation schedule will be released next week. All ceremonies will be broadcast online, and some media partners have committed to showcasing some of these events as well. The virtual graduations will include students, as well as school, region, and District administrators and Board Members. During each ceremony, the photo of each graduating senior will be displayed while the student's name is announced. Parents and guests will also have the opportunity to remotely attend virtual graduation ceremonies.

M-DCPS also launched an innovative marketing campaign to publicly celebrate the accomplishments of seniors, both on social media and through partnerships with the Miami Herald and local television stations. Click here to learn more.

Advocacy for Financial Relief

The District is advocating, at both the state and federal levels, for adequate funding to mitigate the financial impact of the health crisis. Superintendent Carvalho and 61 other large school district superintendents co-signed a letter sent to Congress to lobby for augmented funding to K-12 systems, due to increases in need for digital devices, academic supports, meals, and other modifications to the traditional school year.

Resources for Families

The M-DCPS Parent Academy offers a variety of resources for families to support distance learning in English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole. These resources include a Virtual Campus that features pre-recorded webinars on how to use a variety of online programs; Family Matters, which provides guidance on topics like mental health, vaping, and online learning resources; Virtual Family Fund, which provides links to enriching family activities; and School Meals to assist families in locating the closest M-DCPS meal distribution site. Visit www.parentacademymiami.com for these resources and more.

M-DCPS Telephone Support Lines:

(Monday – Friday, from 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.)

- **District Emergency Operations**: 305-995-3000
- **Distance Learning**: 305-995-HELP (4357)
- **Adult and Career/Technical Education**: 305-558-8000
- **Mental Health Services** for students/parents: 305-995-7100
- **Project UP-START** for students experiencing unstable housing: 305-995-1729
- **Employee Assistance Program**: 305-995-7111

M-DCPS Online Resources:

- http://covid19.dadeschools.net/ - Provides continual updates on M-DCPS actions connected to the coronavirus outbreak.
- http://distancelearning.dadeschools.net/ - Includes information on free Comcast Internet as well as digital tools and tutorials for educators and students.
- http://icp.dadeschools.net/ - Provides the M-DCPS framework for distance learning for pre-K-12 students.
- www.careerinayear.com and www.adulteducationworks.com – Provide information on career/technical and adult distance learning options.

For the most up-to-date information, please download the Dadeschools mobile app to your iPhone or Android device. Follow us on Twitter @mdcps and @miamisup, on Instagram @miamischools and @miamisup, and on Facebook at MiamiSchools and AlbertoCarvalho

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