



Muscle Shoals City Schools

"Providing opportunities for all students to obtain wisdom and achieve their greatest potential!"

Dr. Chad Holden
Superintendent

Dr. Denise Woods
Assistant Superintendent

July 2, 2020

Dear MSCS families,

When schools in Alabama and across the nation closed in March, I doubt many of us would have predicted all of the challenges our country has faced in recent months related to COVID19. It has been a struggle for so many, but as I said at our graduation ceremony on June 18th, I hope and believe that we will emerge on the other side of this global pandemic, a better and stronger society.

I am sure many of you watched with great anticipation last Friday as State Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey revealed the state's "Roadmap to Reopening Alabama Schools." Our administrative team continues to digest the information and formulate a local plan that we will communicate with you in the coming weeks.

Let me also say that I am optimistic about school reopening this fall. I know the term "normal" has new meaning for all of us in terms of how we live, work, learn, and play, but I think I can safely say that we are all eager to return to some sense of "normal," whatever that may be for the coming year. I am also encouraged by the Alabama Department of Public Health's risk indicator dashboard released on Tuesday that places Colbert County as one of only five Alabama counties considered "low risk" due to 14 days of a decreasing trajectory of COVID19 cases.

With that being said, it is important that we do not let our guard down. We cannot be fooled by a digital map showing "low risk" or the color green into thinking that we are out of danger. COVID19 is still very real and prevalent in our society. It is important that we do the easy things like social distancing, wearing a mask in public, and washing our hands as often as we can.

Now, as I begin my first official week as superintendent, I want to provide some information that will help you prepare for the reopening of school in August. If you haven't already, be sure to complete the 2020 Return to School Survey. The information provided to us by your responses is vital as we make plans to reopen school and provide the high quality educational experiences you expect from MSCS. The survey can be found on the main page of the district website at www.msos.k12.al.us.

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On Wednesday, July 1, the Muscle Shoals Board of Education held a special called meeting to consider revising the 2020-2021 academic calendar. The Board approved changing the first day of school for students from Thursday, August 6th to Monday, August 10th. This will provide our employees the entire week of August 3rd through August 7th to prepare for the return of students. During this week, teachers will also receive appropriate professional development for a variety of learning modes that will occur this year, including in-person, virtual, and a combination of both (some are calling this “a hybrid”).

I want to assure you that our administrative team is working diligently to consider all aspects of the state department’s Roadmap to Reopening and how to implement this guidance where appropriate in the Muscle Shoals City Schools.

I do want to address ten of the most frequently asked questions at this point. I believe this will help you as you make decisions about what is best for your child.

1. Will Muscle Shoals offer in-person, virtual, and hybrid course offerings this fall? Yes, but parents will have to choose by July 15th which educational option they prefer for their children and make a semester-long commitment. Students will not be able to weave in and out of in-person learning. A student who chooses the virtual option will remain virtual for at least one semester with the option to return to in-person learning in January. The most confusing aspect of the state’s Roadmap for Reopening is the “hybrid” option, which does not have a common definition across the state. Our local definition of “hybrid” is that in-person learning will have virtual/digital components. It does not mean that a student can choose in-person and virtual at the same time in a single course, moving in and out of that course as they choose. The only exception to that would be a student who is forced to quarantine after a positive COVID19 test or an exposure. A student who is quarantined will be permitted to return to in-person learning when safe to do so.

2. Will Muscle Shoals have increased cleaning protocols? Yes. During a typical flu season, our schools are fogged for germs twice a week. When school opens in the fall, we will increase fogging to a daily routine until further notice from the Alabama Department of Public Health and district leadership.

3. Will my child get to eat in the cafeteria or have P.E.? This one is a little trickier to answer. Our meal service will consist mainly of “grab and go” and/or pre-boxed meals to start school. The traditional “buffet style” where everyone touches the same serving spoon will not be permitted. Principals are currently considering ways that students can eat in the cafeterias, perhaps at 50% capacity like restaurants are doing now with workers wearing masks and facial shields. This may not be possible at every school but know we are considering ways to do that, such as a rotating schedule. We do intend to offer P.E., but like the cafeteria, we are considering alternatives to traditional (large) P.E. classes. We are making plans for smaller classes in the gyms, on playgrounds, and trying to keep a particular group of students together and separate from other classes of children.

4. **What about crowds and athletic events?** The more we can limit interaction with other people, the better we can mitigate the spread of the virus. This type of thinking goes for any program or event that is crowded or congested. I have charged principals with thinking on everything they do that involves a crowd or congestion, and I have told them to either 1) do it differently or 2) don't do it at all. This includes parent night, meet the teacher, fall festivals, concerts, school orientations, etc. For the time being, I am suspending all daytime student assemblies where social distancing cannot be achieved. We are evaluating our protocols for crowds at athletic events as we await guidance from the AHSAA, which will meet again on July 7th on the status of athletics. At present, the athletic association is preparing for fall sports, but expect changes with regard to the health guidelines we are observing in other areas of our lives.

5. **Will health precautions be taken on school buses?** Yes. Our buses will be sanitized daily just like our classrooms. On days when the weather is nice, students will be allowed (encouraged) to walk to and from the Muscle Shoals Career Academy with proper supervision as they cross Brown Street. In inclement weather, our buses will make additional trips if necessary if crowding on the bus is an issue. Hand sanitizer will be available, and students will be encouraged to wear a mask while riding the bus. Having a mask available and wearing it on our short in-system routes is an easy thing that we can do to help slow the spread of the virus.

6. **What other health precautions are the schools taking? Will the school take temperatures every morning?** We will not take every child's temperature to start the day. The screening process begins at home with parents checking temperatures daily. A child with a temperature of 100.4 shall remain at home and will not be permitted to return to school for 72 hours **after** the temperature is back to normal. When students feel well enough to complete assignments at home, learning will continue using virtual/digital tools. Additionally, our staffs will be trained to identify the signs and symptoms of COVID19. We have purchased additional contactless thermometers and other nursing supplies and will increase screenings at school. Well kids who come to the nurse to take daily medications will report to different areas from those exhibiting any symptoms of sickness.

7. **Will the school limit visitors to campuses?** Yes. Per state health guidelines, schools will limit non-school personnel from entering our buildings and interacting with our students. Parents and guardians are encouraged to conduct school business via phone or email as much as possible. For the time being, we will restrict parents/grandparents and others from coming to eat lunch with their children and/or family members attending class parties. Our hope is that these restrictions are short-lived, but they are necessary for the health and safety of our children. We love visitors, but this is one of those sacrifices we need to make in the age of COVID19.

8. **Will my child have to wear a mask at school?** No, but they are certainly welcome (and encouraged) to do so. Our employees, in certain close situations, will wear masks and/or facial shields. Students, however, will not be required to mask. I would recommend that students bring their own mask so that they can place it on if they find themselves in a crowded situation.

9. **What about field trips?** For the time being, I am suspending all daytime field trips. This is another one of those sacrifices that we need to make right now until it is safe to resume class field trips. At present, this does not include athletics, band, or other after school travel that may occur in conjunction with a contest or performance. We are continuing to digest the state's guidance on bus transportation and consider what other changes, if any, we need to make.

10. **Will arrival and dismissal be different this fall?** Yes, our principals are considering this question and making plans to alleviate crowding and congestion at the beginning and end of the school day. This includes traffic, as well as, assembling in gyms, cafeterias, and hallways where social distancing may be difficult as students arrive and/or leave. They will communicate more about this topic as we draw closer to the start of school, but this is one of those areas where an abundance of patience, cooperation, and understanding will be necessary.

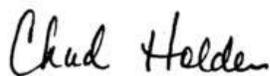
I know this information is overwhelming. It is no different for school leaders, teachers, and support professionals who are about to embark upon the most challenging year ever. I appreciate the opportunity to begin the conversation with you about how we plan to reopen schools this fall and do our very best to keep your children safe and healthy in their educational environments.

Despite the challenges we face, I believe this can also be an extraordinary year as we are forced to "do school" in new and innovative ways. As we write the next chapter of success for the Muscle Shoals City Schools, we invite you to join us. We plan to take our system to new heights, but we need your help.

We cannot and we will not allow COVID19 to slow our momentum! I sincerely hope you and your family enjoy the upcoming 4th of July holiday.

Go Trojans!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chad Holden".

Chad Holden, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Education