



MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SCHOOL REOPENING PLAN

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Introduction

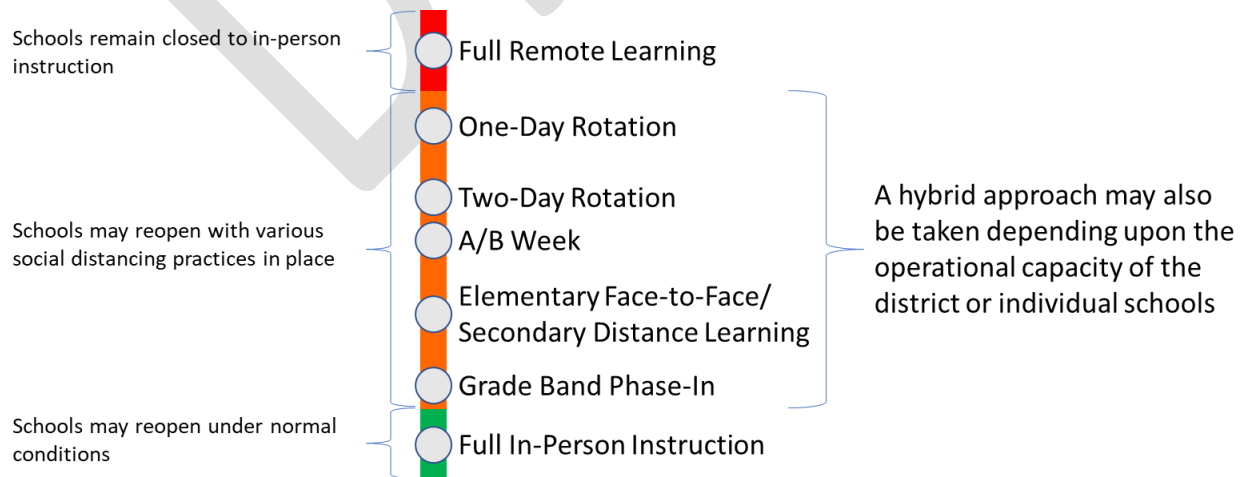
Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is committed to ensuring that all students receive a quality education. We know that COVID-19 has interrupted and changed how we deliver instruction to students. The pandemic has also created uncertainties as to what K-12 education will look like in the near future. In-person instruction has already been canceled in the state of Wisconsin for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

MPS has been tracking the state’s efforts to slow the spread of the virus and the state’s ability to meet the gating criteria provided by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to determine the state’s ability to return to “normal” operations. MPS also remains in constant communication with state and local health officials regarding the community’s ability to return to normal life, as well as with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) regarding the K-12 educational landscape for the 2020-2021 school year and beyond.

MPS continues to discuss the new K-12 educational landscape with area school districts, as well as with member school districts of the Council of the Great City Schools. MPS also has researched and reviewed considerations and best practices outlined in plans from other states, school districts, and other educational bodies. We continue to identify issues and concerns, as well as find best practices to make sure that the needs of all students are met. This reentry plan outlines processes and procedures that can be implemented for the upcoming school year, and can also be utilized as a roadmap for future school closures.

Instructional Programming Options Being Considered

Because of the uncertainties regarding how instruction will look in the 2020-2021 school year, MPS has designed programming options for continued instruction that will fit the three anticipated impact scenarios of the COVID-19 pandemic: 1) total school closure, 2) schools reopen with social distancing requirements, or 3) total resumption of in-person instruction. The programming options are designed to fit the spectrum of potential impact scenarios as illustrated below.



Scenario #1: Schools remain closed to in-person instruction

Currently, schools in Wisconsin are closed to in-person instruction for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. It remains unclear whether the COVID-19 pandemic will force schools to remain closed for part or all of the 2020-2021 school year. State and local health officials continue to monitor the effects of the coronavirus in our community to guide their decision-making.

While strides have been made to slow the spread of the virus, health officials warn that the speed of the virus' spread could increase in the near future. Should the virus spread as rapidly as previously experienced, or perhaps even more rapidly, we can expect state and local health officials to take the drastic step of closing schools again. Should schools be closed to in-person instruction, MPS will need to be prepared to offer virtual learning options in the 2020-2021 school year.

Programming Option: Full Remote Learning

Under a school closure order, all students would continue remote learning. Because students learn best with face-to-face instruction, MPS would seek to maximize synchronous distance learning opportunities for students in the remote learning curriculum. Teachers and other school-based staff may return to school buildings to ensure efficiency and equity in virtual instruction, particularly synchronous virtual instruction, unless orders from state or local health officials prohibit staff return.

MPS would coordinate with DPI to ensure instructional requirements are being met, or to seek waivers for any requirements that cannot be met by virtual instruction. Virtual learning would continue until it was deemed appropriate for the safe return of students to school buildings for face-to-face instruction by state or local health officials.

Scenario #2: Schools may reopen with various social distancing practices in place

Currently, health experts expect the coronavirus to remain active for some time, primarily due to a lack of a vaccine or an effective drug treatment option. Given the social distancing guidance – a requirement currently in the City of Milwaukee – for slowing the spread of the virus, MPS will likely need to implement social distancing practices for face-to-face instruction.

One of the most important measures to consider is the ability to reduce class size to reduce the risks to the health and safety of students and staff. However, the appropriate social distancing measures for the upcoming school year are not fully known, since health experts may adjust social distancing guidelines based on the impact of the virus at that time and as they gain a better understanding of the virus in general.

The following programming options seek to reduce school student populations by dividing students into groups that come on different days or weeks in order to reduce class size to meet the needs of social distancing. A discussion of additional operational considerations follows in a later section.

Programming Option #1: One-Day Rotation

Students report to school one full day a week over a four-day-a-week rotation at all levels (Elementary, Middle and High). Students would be provided assignments to support their learning on the days in which they do not report to school that could include printed instructional materials, virtual learning, or a combination.

This approach maximizes social distancing by effectively opening the school to one-fourth of the student population each day. The fifth day of the week will offer remote learning options for all students, but it also allows for planned days off, professional development, records days, etc. Students can be properly spaced within classrooms, and the smaller population increases the effectiveness of social distancing practices in hallways, cafeterias, and other common areas.

Programming Option #2: Two-Day Rotation

All students report to school two full days a week over a four-day-a-week rotation (e.g., Group A reports Monday/Wednesday and Group B reports Tuesday/Thursday) at all grade levels. Students would be provided assignments to support their learning on the days in which they do not report to school that could include printed instructional materials, virtual learning, or a combination.

This approach allows schools to implement effective social distancing practices as the school will effectively open for one-half of the student population each day. The fifth day of the week will offer remote learning options for all students, but it also allows for planned days off, professional development, records days, etc. Students can likely still be properly spaced within classrooms, and proper social distancing practices can be implemented in hallways, cafeterias, and other common areas, though this will require more logistical planning over the one-day rotation option given the greater number of students that will be in a school building.

Programming Option #3: A/B Week

Half of the student population would report to school for five full days each week, while the remaining half of the school population participates in remote learning at home. The student population would alternate between each week. All grade bands would be included. Students would be provided assignments to support their learning on the days in which they do not report to school that could include printed instructional materials, remote learning, or a combination. MPS's calendars should be followed for planned days off, professional development, records days, etc., though some deviations may be necessary to ensure all students receive adequate instructional opportunities.

Similar to the two-day rotation, this approach allows schools to implement effective social distancing practices as the school will effectively open for one-half of the student population each day of the week. Students can still be properly spaced within classrooms, and proper social distancing practices can be implemented in hallways, cafeterias, and other common areas, but again, this will require more logistical planning over the one-day rotation option given the greater number of students that will be in a school building.

Programming Option #4: Elementary Face-to-Face/Secondary Distance Learning

Elementary students would start school first and attend five full days a week, spread out across multiple buildings to support social distancing and to reduce the student-teacher ratio. Secondary students would engage in remote learning. This would continue until it is deemed appropriate by the public health officials that it is safe to relax the social distancing. Once it is deemed safe, elementary students would transition back to their home school and secondary students would start face-to-face instruction at their school.

This option reduces student population within the schools, but with a more focused, research-based approach to decision-making regarding virtual versus face-to-face instruction. Research shows that elementary-grade students struggle the most with remote learning, and high school students are least impacted negatively by remote learning. Because of this, utilizing the limited classroom capacity that social distancing protocols create to offer face-to-face instruction to elementary-grade students may help to lessen the negative impact on our young children and smooth the educational opportunity and growth across all grade bands.

Programming Option #5: Grade Band Phase-In

MPS currently operates on a two-calendar system, which has a natural phase-in with Early Start Calendar schools beginning two weeks before Traditional Start Calendar schools. While research suggests that elementary students benefit the most from face-to-face instruction – and therefore best practice dictates that elementary students be returned to face-to-face instruction as quickly as possible – the current structure of MPS’s two-calendar system and restrictions in state law do not allow for a grade band phase-in to begin with the elementary grades under the current two-calendar system.

For MPS, the two-calendar system would be followed to allow a phase-in. However, MPS may further implement a grade band phase-in within each school to better accommodate the return of students and to review and adjust the district’s social distancing practices being implemented. Under the grade band phase-in, the expectation is that schools may return to full student capacity for face-to-face instruction within a matter of weeks from the start of the school year.

Scenario #3: Schools may reopen under normal conditions

As the COVID-19 pandemic picture for the upcoming school year becomes clearer, it may be possible that school operations may return to normal, to include full face-to-face instruction. If

this is a possibility, MPS will be ready to offer high quality face-to-face instruction on both the Early Start and Traditional Calendars.

Programming Option: Full In-Person Instruction

The full in-person instructional model is the traditional model used by MPS whereby face-to-face instruction is utilized in the classroom setting. This programming option foresees all students being able to return to the classroom setting in the upcoming school year.

Because studies show that students learn best with face-to-face instruction, MPS will make every effort to offer instruction in the traditional classroom setting for the full 2020-2021 school year. However, MPS may need to be flexible to start the upcoming school year. For example, should a return to traditional classroom instruction not be possible until September, MPS will need to be prepared to deviate from its two-calendar system and offer instruction to all students on a one-calendar system.

Other Academic Considerations

As we consider programming options for the upcoming school year, it will be important to also consider how specific academic offerings and supports fit within the modified schedule. For example, special education services will continue to be provided in accordance with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), but IEP teams may need to meet to review the potential impact that an alternative programming option, with reduced or possibly no face-to-face instruction, may have on implementation of a child's IEP. Similarly, MPS will need to ensure that English learners have equal access to instructional opportunities. It will be important to work through these academic considerations for the programming option MPS will implement.

Other Operational Considerations

In reviewing the various programming options for the 2020-2021 school year, MPS needs to consider other areas that will impact the instructional day beyond the method of instruction or classroom composition. There are many factors that contribute to successful school operations, and properly planning and accounting for the other operational aspects that may be affected by alterations to the school schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic will be essential to ensure successful implementation. Some of these considerations are discussed in more detail below.

Technology Considerations

MPS needs to plan for the technological needs of students as it weighs the programming options for the 2020-2021 school year. Most of the programming options being considered (full remote, one-day rotation, two-day rotation, A/B week) require all students to engage in virtual instruction, so it will be important to ensure all students have access to technology. Chromebook distribution to students will be a critical component to a successful remote learning

implementation. Students who have already received a Chromebook this school year would continue to use that Chromebook in the upcoming school year if remote learning continues.

A grade band phase-in should require only a portion of the student population to have access to technology, and a return to full classroom instruction should not require additional technology accommodations beyond what MPS typically provides each year. However, it is still important to plan for technology access for all students even with these programming options because there is no guarantee that how we start the school year will be the same way we finish the school year.

MPS needs to be prepared to move to remote instruction should state or local officials close schools due to increased community spread of the coronavirus, for example. Thus, MPS must plan remote learning options for the upcoming school year, whether it be the primary programming option or a contingency option.

As MPS continues to assess technological needs for the upcoming school year, some other considerations that need to be reviewed are as follows:

- Adequate supply of technology devices
- Internet Access/Accessibility
- Security
- Possible need to add or replace virtual platforms
- Staffing of IT
- On-going professional development

Transportation Considerations

In reviewing programming options for the 2020-2021 school year, MPS must account for the transportation needs that come with the programming option and balance those needs against any transportation constraints. For example, if social distancing practices will be needed within schools, it is expected that social distancing practices will be needed on school buses. Depending upon the specific social distancing requirements, the social distancing practices could reduce average bus loads to as low as one-quarter of normal operational load.

MPS may need additional buses to accommodate reduced bus loads with the number of students expected to return to school each day under some programming options, such as the two-day rotation or A/B Week options. The one-day rotation option may better accommodate the reduced bus loads with current bus service levels, but there are logistical nuances that may even make this option require additional buses.

Initial projections from MPS Business and Transportation Services show as much as a four-fold increase in the number of buses needed to provide appropriate transportation services to students while properly implementing social distancing practices on school buses, depending on the option selected. Such an increase cannot currently be accommodated by the bus companies with whom MPS has contract relationships, and even if the drastic increase in service could be

accommodated, the increased bus service would result in a drastic increase in transportation costs that MPS likely could not account for in its current budget.

Alternatively, MPS is exploring alterations to bus service to better accommodate the busing needs of certain programming options, such as implementing a three-tier or four-tier busing system. MPS may need to consider a departure from the current busing model if a substantial increase in bus service will be needed. For example, MPS could pursue a “neighborhood schools” approach whereby transportation needs may fall to the family to provide, and where the family cannot provide their own transportation the student can be accepted into their neighborhood school to eliminate the need for bus transportation. This “neighborhood schools” approach should alleviate many of the transportation constraints that social distancing protocols would cause.

We are currently working with the bus companies to be able to provide adequate service in the fall. In addition to the concerns raised above, other considerations that need to be addressed include the following:

- The availability of bus drivers
- The process for cleaning/sanitizing buses, including high touch areas
- The need to reevaluate bus policies and procedures if students have issues with spitting, biting or other behaviors that could spread COVID-19
- The need for drivers to attend in-service prior to student transport to discuss any revised policies and procedures and how to clean the bus
- The need for route adjustments and any additional costs
- The possible need for multiple predetermined arrival/drop-off/pick-up locations to limit large gatherings
- The need for a contingency plan in the event a student or driver tests positive for COVID-19

Facilities Considerations

In determining the appropriate programming option for the upcoming school year, it is important to consider facility capacity for any deviation from the traditional classroom arrangement. For example, should social distancing be needed in schools, the setup of classrooms will need to be reevaluated to ensure proper distancing is maintained while students are present and seated in class. Additionally, cleaning and sanitizing guidelines will need to be assessed when scheduling the school-based instructional day to ensure the feasibility of the guidelines being implemented and followed.

When considering the facility needs of the various programming options, MPS will also need to analyze staffing needs to ensure that there are sufficient staffing levels to accommodate the revised classroom structure. For example, implementing social distancing practices in the school may require more classrooms to be operational simultaneously compared to the traditional classroom setup. In such a case, it will be imperative to assess the number of teachers and support staff needed to properly provide high quality instruction to all students.

As the facility-based requirements are considered further, it will be helpful to review some of the following:

- Possible need for personal protective equipment (availability, cost, training on usage)
- Stock of cleaning/disinfecting supplies for every facility
- Procedures for assessing daily cleaning needs
- Procedures for social distancing in common areas, to include restrooms
- Determine if locker use will be allowed during the day, possibly at staggered times
- Determine distance and flow paths through facility and consider floor markings
- Determine if pre-designated entry and exit paths will be utilized
- Consider need for additional signage

Nutrition Considerations

In considering the programming options, MPS will need to address potential issues beyond the classroom. As mentioned in the facilities discussion, for example, MPS will likely need to implement procedures and protocols for social distancing in common areas, such as cafeterias. MPS will need to review the breakfast and lunch processes as well.

As the nutrition plan is further developed, some considerations that will need to be addressed are as follows:

- Assess current facilities and identify current capacity for volume of meal service
- Consider staggered lunch and mealtimes or having students eat in classrooms with proper cleaning protocols
- Assess staffing needs
- Assess changes in food needs (ordering/stocking) to ensure they are consistent with the number of children in school

Next Steps

We will continue to assess the viability of the programming options listed above while accounting for the other operational considerations discussed. We appreciate the perspectives of our stakeholders as we make these tough decisions during uncertain times, so we will be convening stakeholder groups to review the programming options as well.

The stakeholder groups that will be convened include:

- Principals
- Teachers
- MTEA, Local 420, PAMPS, ASC
- District Advisory Council (DAC)
- Student council group

In addition, the stakeholder groups can assist with fleshing out additional considerations for reentry of students to school buildings. Some of these considerations follow, but the stakeholder groups likely will add to the list of considerations that will have to be addressed.

Other Reopening Guidelines for Consideration

- Communications
 - Determine how faculty and staff will receive timely, consistent information regarding return-to-work
 - Determine communication and outreach methods to students and parents for notification of programming changes
- Other districtwide considerations
 - Modified school calendar
 - Hours and minutes of instruction
 - Approval from DPI for options chosen
- Other school-based considerations
 - Determine number of visitors who are granted access to the facilities
 - Staggered dismissal
 - Alternative plans for afterschool programs
- Other class-based considerations
 - Determine if class changes are static (students remain in room, teachers change classrooms) or fluid (students change classrooms)
 - Consider synchronous opt-in (e.g., for two-day rotation or A/B week)
- Review health and safety procedures
 - Identify faculty/staff shortages due to staff sickness, staff taking care of child, staff caring for sick relative or loss of staff family member, resignations of faculty/staff, retirement of faculty/staff, staff loss of life
 - Determine if face coverings are to be utilized by faculty/staff/students
 - Review procedures for sending ill persons home from the school facility
- Additional considerations may be needed to accommodate students with special needs including underlying health conditions such as asthma, respiratory illness, etc.
- Mental Health
 - Support services for any loss of life of staff or families, including educational materials on loss and grief available to staff and students
 - Communicate to staff that EAP is available
 - Staff training for information on signs and symptoms to observe in students and others
 - Communicate counseling services available to students
 - Trauma support teams may need to expand beyond 53206
 - Identify families in need of long term physical and mental health support and provide resources to families