

## Family Update - 11.12.20

TO: MPS Families

FROM: Minneapolis Public Schools

**SUBJECT: Nov. 12 family update – Long, but worth the read**

### Dear MPS Families:

Earlier this week we announced MPS will remain in Phase 2: Distance Learning, at least until January. More information on that is below.

In addition, Tuesday night the Minneapolis Board of Education approved several changes that will impact students and families beginning in the 2021-22 school year. One was about school start and end times, and the other about future graduation requirements.

We encourage everyone to read through the information in this update despite its length.

This update includes information on:

- [5 Phases to Safe Learning](#)
- [Changes to school start and end times \(2021-22 school year\)](#)
- [New ethnic studies graduation requirement \(For 2025 graduates\)](#)
- [School Request timeline and process](#)

### 5 Phases to Safe Learning

On Monday, we announced modifications to our [5 Phases to Safe Learning](#). MPS has maintained one of the most cautious stances in keeping staff and students safe from COVID-19 by remaining in distance learning.

Last month, we were excited to begin some in-person student support at six schools for about 250 kids. These supports provided after-school tutoring and other services for some of our students who need them most. While we have been pleased to offer these supports, the recent significant rise in COVID-19 rates requires that we pause those supports—and move the dial back—in order to ensure the safety of those staff and students. In addition to after-school in-person student supports, after-school Community Education services will also be temporarily discontinued.

This data-driven decision was made in consultation with our COVID Regional Support Team, which includes colleagues from the City of Minneapolis Health Department and the Minnesota Department of Health. Athletic practices and games will continue following MPS's COVID-19 safety plan and under plans established by the MSHSL.

MPS will continue to [operate in Phase 2](#) with Essential School-Age Care for families and a very limited number of staff in school buildings. MPS is also reviewing Governor Walz's most recent Executive Order 20-94 as it relates to our continued service to students.

You might remember we previously said MPS hoped to move to Phase 3 of our 5 Phases to Safe Learning as early as Nov. 9. Given the [rising COVID-19 cases in our community](#), however, that will not be possible until further notice. We are advised by our Regional Support Team that we must first get to well below 50 cases per 10,000 (at most 42), then stay there for 3-5 days. From there, the support team is recommending a waiting period of 28 days, two incubation periods, to ensure that rates have stabilized before considering a phase change. At this writing, we are at nearly 66 cases per 10,000.

At the same time, we know a number of our students do not thrive in distance learning. That's why all year we've been planning and acting on ways to make our schools safer for students whenever we are able to return to learning in-person.

[We've taken actions](#) to improve indoor air quality and increase building ventilation rates, distributed and have reserves of face coverings and personal protective equipment, installed Plexiglas barriers, developed enhanced cleaning and disinfecting procedures, and are planning transportation, building and classroom readiness for social distancing. We've also prepared training on COVID health and safety and on cleaning and disinfecting that is required for all staff before they return to a school building.

Lots of hard work has been done to create safe learning environments for our students. We will continue thinking about the best ways to keep students and staff safe while we remain in distance learning so that when it's possible to move the dial in our 5 Phases, we can hit the ground running.

## **Changes to school start and end times**

Last night, the MPS Board of Education approved new school start and end times (bell times) beginning in school year 2021-22. Crafting a district-wide bell time schedule is a complex process, where one start time impacts the next one. The new bell time schedule meets three overarching goals for our district:

1. Increasing participation in after-school programming, particularly for those schools with a higher concentration of families receiving educational benefits, as after-school activities have been shown to have a direct correlation to student achievement and sense of belonging.
2. Reducing transportation costs so that savings can be reinvested.
3. Improving on-time arrivals at schools.

This new bell time schedule also reflects the programming and grade configuration changes as a part of the District Comprehensive Design. Minneapolis Kids, Community Education and

Extended Learning will begin to review their programming so families have access to high quality enrichment and childcare before and after school.

Please check out the [Bell Time Schedule website](#) to learn more about the approved schedule, see [all schools' new start and end times](#), and [review Frequently Asked Questions](#).

### **New ethnic studies graduation requirement**

Tuesday night the Board of Education also voted to make a one-semester ethnic studies course a requirement of graduation, beginning with 9th graders in school year 2021-22. The discipline of ethnic studies emerged in the Civil Rights Movement and is tied to the much longer history of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) demands for racial and educational justice.

Students, families, and community members have been publicly advocating for ethnic studies in MPS since at least the 1970s. Ethnic studies courses were previously offered for elective credit at various schools. This new policy means all students, beginning with those graduating in 2025, will have the opportunity to choose from a menu of ethnic studies courses. This change does not impact students in 10th-12th grade next year.

Thank you to all who have continued to demand justice and worked to keep the ethnic studies conversation alive in Minneapolis. From private conversations to public advocacy work, this change only happened as a result of many voices coming together. For more information about ethnic studies and course offerings in Minneapolis Public Schools, [please see our website](#).

### **School Request timeline and process**

Although it feels like the 2020-21 school year has just gotten going, it's already time to think about school choices for the 2021-22 school year. The School Request Season is the time of year when families with children ready to begin High Five or Kindergarten, or students who will change schools, submit a request for school for the following school year. This year's School Request Season will begin on Saturday, Dec. 5, when our request website will go live and families can begin submitting school requests. Families that submit their school request by Feb. 7, 2021, will have the best chance of placement at their top-requested school.

This year, families can expect a new and improved website to search for schools and understand their options. In addition, there will be a virtual kickoff event Dec. 5 to share important information about the school request process, school changes for the 2021-22 school year, and what's going to be offered at MPS's exciting new magnet schools. During the School Request Season, schools will also hold virtual open houses so families can discover what makes MPS schools a great option.

Student Placement Services will support families through this process and provide regular updates. Student Placement will be closed for in-person support from Nov. 16 through Nov. 30 to prepare for the launch of the 2021-22 School Request Season. Individuals can still receive support via phone or email. [Visit the Student Placement website for contact details](#).

**REMINDER: Resources for those experiencing housing instability**

Nowhere to call home? Living in temporary housing due to a lack of affordable options? You may be protected under the McKinney-Vento Act. Our website has more information and resources to support housing stability at [hhmfc.mpls.k12.mn.us](http://hhmfc.mpls.k12.mn.us).

In addition, Governor Walz declared a Peacetime Emergency, which includes a pause on most evictions. If you are facing an eviction, learn about your rights with free legal help by visiting Homeline at [homelinemn.org](http://homelinemn.org) or Legal Aid at [mylegalaid.org/get-help](http://mylegalaid.org/get-help).

Also, remember rent is still due during the statewide moratorium on evictions. Take advantage of assistance to make sure unpaid rent doesn't add up. [Apply now for Hennepin County emergency rent help](#) if you've lost income due to COVID-19.