



**Wednesday, February 24, 2021**

Dear PPS Parents,

I wanted to take this opportunity to share several important updates. First and foremost, this week, we publicly confirmed our commitment to begin returning students to in-person learning based on new support categories beginning Tuesday, April 6. This timeline and approach were approved in a Board resolution on Wednesday, January 27. **As a first step, families can expect to receive communications notifying them of the support category in which their child has been placed beginning this week and into next.** Those families in the highest need categories will be asked to complete a brief survey online or over the phone to capture parent comfort levels and desire for in-person hybrid learning. All remaining families will be surveyed by mid-March.

Secondly, I want to let you know that we not only hear the concerns and frustrations of our families, but we are also listening. We know first-hand how it can be very confusing and frustrating for many of our families to understand and stay up-to-date with all of the ever-moving changes with our District. **The safe return for students and staff remains a top priority. Another priority is our finances.**

Right now, PPS is approaching a budget crisis that has us running out of cash by the end of 2022. While most of the District's budget is expended on schools, specifically staff and benefits, we are currently considering multiple options to address the fiscal challenges of the District. Our adjusted 2021 budget is \$673.8 million and includes an operating deficit of \$39.4 million.

This is why, in fall 2020, we held a series of public workshops and meetings with our Board of Directors related to our budget challenges and progress with the *Imagine PPS* strategic plan. During these public sessions, we presented several considerations to reduce expenditures through reductions in our workforce and District footprint. The plan to modernize our footprint was presented on February 1. The proposed plan included the recommended closure of seven schools and the creation of two new schools. **Please know there was zero intent to blindside the community.** We would never close schools or make changes that would impact families, students and staff without community input and direction. In my tenure as your Superintendent, I have always engaged you. I believe your input is a critical linchpin to our planning.

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, we will start a series of City Schools Budget Engagement Sessions for the public, beginning with our next Parent Advisory Committee. The discussion will be streamed live on the District's Facebook page and website. The Engagement Session will follow a budget update presentation that will be provided to our Board Monday, March 1. I invite you to watch both meetings. Links will be available on the homepage of our website, [www.pghschools.org](http://www.pghschools.org). **Additional information about the support categories, the parent survey, and school district preparedness is available below.**

Yours in education,

Anthony D. Hamlet, Ed. D., Superintendent of Schools

**IMPORTANT UPDATES:**

**Support Categories Based on Need**

Per the Board’s resolution, **students are now be placed in new student-support categories based on need.** The support categories are based on multiple data points from the first semester (Q1 and Q2), including attendance, performance data in math and English Language Arts, and other factors including Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Strengths, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 plan or English language services. The criteria were established by the District to equitably identify students who are struggling most.

Support categories are defined as follows:

<b>Support Category</b>	<b>Support Category Description</b>	<b>Return to In-Person Hybrid Instruction Date</b>
<b>4</b>	Students not demonstrating progress and/or in Kindergarten or PreKindergarten	Tuesday, April 6*
<b>3</b>	Students demonstrating some progress in eLearning.	Monday, April 26*
<b>2</b>	Students demonstrating progress in eLearning.	To Be Determined
<b>1</b>	Students demonstrating positive progress in eLearning.	To Be Determined

*\*Due to the in-person hybrid instruction model, students may return on the date noted above or on the Thursday of the week. This will be determined at the school level.*

Students in Support Categories 4 and 3 will return to school on an AA/BB schedule. Students on the AA schedule will attend school on Monday and Tuesday (AA). Students on the BB schedule will attend school on Thursday and Friday. Students at Pittsburgh Pioneer and Pittsburgh Conroy will attend four days a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday). Schools will work with families to identify which days of the week their child will return for in-person hybrid learning. School buildings will be closed each Wednesday for further cleaning and disinfecting of facilities.

**Parent Survey**

Families will be asked to complete a survey online or over the phone for each child in their household. Families in Category 4 & 3 will receive their survey 1<sup>st</sup>. All families will their survey by mid-March. Pre-Kindergarten families will only receive a phone call from their child’s teacher. A personalized survey link has been created for every student K-12. Since the link is personalized for each child, families should not share the link or use it for another child in their household. If families receive the link and are unable to click and open it, they are asked to cut and paste it into an internet browser such as Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, etc.



### **New CDC Guidelines Confirm PPS Readiness for In-Person Instruction**

After a robust review of the new Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines recently posted on February 12, I am confident that the District meets and exceeds the mitigation strategies outlined in their updated guidance. The updated guidelines conveyed five (5) Mitigation Strategies to reduce transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in schools. Based on the guidance, Pittsburgh Public Schools has in place the layered mitigation strategies deemed essential elements for safe K-12 in-person instruction, including:

- Universal and correct use of masks
- Physical distancing
- Handwashing and respiratory etiquette
- Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities
- Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the health department