



**St. Mary's County Public Schools
Central Administration**

Office of the Superintendent
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Dr. J. Scott Smith
Superintendent

September 16, 2020

Dear SMCPS Families:

On Monday, September 14, 2020, the Chief of Staff was notified of an employee at George Washington Carver Elementary School (GWCES) who tested positive for COVID-19 as a result of participating in a non-school related social event outside of St. Mary's County. Through the process of contact tracing, and in coordination with the St. Mary's County Health Department (SMCHD), several employees at multiple sites who attended the event and others considered close contacts were placed under quarantine and sent for testing. Testing revealed that additional school system employees who participated in the social event were positive for COVID-19. As a result, GWCES will be closed for all staff through Friday, September 18, 2020. GWCES teachers will continue to provide instruction through the Schoology platform during this time. This decision was made in full consultation with local public health officials. As a further precaution, St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) will begin immediate mitigation efforts for the school building to include extensive cleaning. Food and meal services at this site will also be closed at GWCES through Friday.

Throughout this process, we have been steadfast in our commitment to using objective data to help us make the best decisions. We have been monitoring COVID testing positivity rates and working closely with the SMCHD to understand levels of community spread as Maryland settles into Phase Three of the reopening process and restrictions are removed. With all this considered and keeping the safety of our staff and students at the center of all our decisions we will be revising our student return date and **will remain in virtual learning through the end of the 1st Quarter for the majority of our students.** At the upcoming Board of Education meeting on Wednesday, September 23, we will communicate revised dates for returning special populations of students to in-person learning in October before all students return for the second marking period, Monday, November 2, 2020. We will continue to work with the SMCHD to monitor community health data and make decisions based on this information.

I realize this is a deep disappointment to those eager to get back to some semblance of normal but we can't introduce students to our schools until we are confident we can minimize exposure and we all understand the consequences of high risk activities such as large social gatherings, eating indoors at restaurants, visiting bars, or going to the movies. All these activities are allowed but they increase the possibility of exposure and contracting a virus that can incubate up to 14 days. We will continue to stress that we all practice social distancing, wear masks, wash hands, and use hand sanitizer not only for ourselves but for all those around us. Our children are depending on us.

For more information about COVID-19, visit www.smchd.org/coronavirus. If you have symptoms (such as fever, cough, loss of taste, or trouble breathing) please stay home and avoid contact with others. For more information about symptoms and where to access testing sites locally, please visit www.smchd.org/covid-19-testing.

Sincerely,

J. Scott Smith, Ed.D.
Superintendent