FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 14, 2020

DCSD Re-Opening Plan: Delayed Start, Open with Distance/Remote Learning Model

STONE MOUNTAIN, Ga. – DeKalb County School District Superintendent Cheryl Watson-Harris presented the District’s re-opening plan during yesterday’s Board of Education meeting.

The current plan recommends that the school board delay the start of the 2020-2021 school year to Aug. 17, 2020, and open schools with distance/remote learning model to account for the current substantial spread of COVID-19. The Board approved the delayed start date.

Updated assessments and plan adjustments will be shared on a monthly basis.

The District plan incorporated current guidance from the Georgia Department of Public Health, DeKalb County Board of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE), Metropolitan Regional Educational Service Agency (MRESA) in collaboration with superintendents, and local and state government officials. Community feedback from the stakeholder input survey, which generated 39,574 responses from parents, students and employees, also informed the plan.

“The safety of our students and employees is the top priority for DeKalb County School District, and at this time we are recommending a distance/remote learning model to begin the year,” said Superintendent Cheryl Watson-Harris. “Given the substantial spread in our area right now, this option is our best choice, but it will be re-evaluated on a regular basis. Students, teachers and employees will also be receiving more resources to support them in a remote setting.”

The district is purchasing 1:1 Chromebooks to ensure students in grades Pre-K through 12 have access to a device. Students and parents will be able to view modules to learn how to successfully use software resources, including but not limited to VERGE and Microsoft TEAMS.
DCSD will also provide VERGE and Microsoft TEAMS access to school counselors to conduct guidance sessions, as well as continue to provide Youth Mental Health First Aid 101 Training for staff. Schools and teachers are empowered to select alternative tools such as Zoom and Google Classroom and will communicate appropriate resources to their students and parents.

Staring July 14, 12-month employees will start back through a hybrid approach, to prepare for the opening of schools. DCSD is developing staggered schedules that will allow teachers, support personnel, and students to safely access instructional resources and/or checkout devices in preparation for the beginning of the school year.

DCSD is also creating professional development materials to support teachers and leaders, including trauma, implicit bias, social-emotional learning, inclusion and appropriate use of digital and online learning tools and systems. Professional development sessions will be provided to share best practices and strategies to effectively teach and monitor student progress in a remote learning environment.

Teachers will have the opportunity to participate in synchronous and asynchronous learning that focuses on how to use Microsoft Teams and Zoom to facilitate direct instruction, promote student engagement, and provide targeted interventions and support through video conferencing.

The district is planning a variety of healthy meals, which meet federal guidelines for each grade level, for breakfast, lunch and snack/supper (as applicable). The Nutrition Department will collaborate with the Transportation Department to deliver meals along school bus routes for families that lack access to transportation.

The plan calls for the learning model to match the associated disease spread in the community. With low or no spread, a traditional model will be used. With minimal or moderate spread, either traditional, hybrid or distance/remote learning will be used. Currently, the area is experiencing substantial spread, so a distance/remote-learning model is recommended.

The district will continuously monitor the current COVID-19 data and assess the level of spread to determine if and when the current learning model should be adjusted. The assessments will be presented during board meetings on Sept. 14, Oct. 19, Nov. 9, and Dec. 7, 2020.

The community input survey showed that most employees (70 percent) and parents (59 percent) are uncomfortable with a traditional learning model to start the year. Hybrid models and distance/remote models were more comfortable options for both groups. Students indicated a greater comfort with a traditional model.

Click here to review the entire plan presentation https://www.dekalbschoolsga.org/documents/plan-presentation.pdf, including details about updated cleaning and maintenance protocols.