

Dear Head Start Parents:

The question on everyone's mind is how schools will safely reopen as the number of coronavirus cases continues to rise, especially now that we are beginning to see more cases among young children.

Like schools all across the country, Institute of Community Services, Inc. Project Head Start has been working since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to determine how to safely reopen our Head Start centers. We will continue to follow the guidance of public health experts to develop best practices for proper spacing and distancing, sanitizing and disinfecting, and the use of masks and hand sanitizer to help keep our Head Start students, families, and employees safe, however, even with those things in place, we must be mindful that there are many outside factors that we cannot control and we cannot eliminate all risks.

Given the steady rise of COVID-19 in Mississippi, especially throughout the fourteen counties, which we serve; which has some of the highest number of cases in the state, we have decided to delay the start of school until August 31, 2020.

The decision to delay the start of school was based on a number of factors. In addition to the recent spike in coronavirus cases and an increased occurrence in young children, a larger number of parents expressed serious concerns about their children returning to Head Start at this time. We thought it was extremely important to make sure that staff had enough time to make adjustments in the classroom to ensure the proper distancing and receive intense training on how to provide quality instruction in a safe manner to help slow the spread of COVID-19.

From August 31 to December 18, all Head Start students will participate in virtual learning. Head Start children and families will receive live video instructions, online learning tools, and small group support. Teachers and center administrators are already back at work putting all of the tools together to offer our students a quality learning experience and provide our families with the training and support needed to make sure every child's learning needs are met.

If the COVID-19 virus lessens its effect upon the state, things are subject to change; such as, from October 5, 2020, until December 18th, 2020 -students will attend schools in person on Mondays thru Thursdays and participate in virtual learning on Friday. To comply with the social distancing guidelines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, we will have to reduce the number of students per classroom. Priority for in-person attendance will be given to four-year-old students, students who require in-person therapy, students who receive Special Education services or IEP supports that cannot be delivered online, students who receive services as English Learners, and students supported by McKinney Vento – students experiencing homelessness or unstable housing. The virtual learning option will remain available to families who do not wish to have their children return to the classroom.

Beginning January 4, 2021 until the end of the school year, we plan to transition to a traditional model where students return to the classroom full time for in-person learning.

As you know, the coronavirus pandemic is a rapidly evolving health crisis that continues to present a lot of uncertainty. We cannot predict infection patterns, surges, or potential shutdowns imposed by the local, state or federal governments. As such, please remember that the plans and timelines to reopen our Head Start centers can and may change at any time. However, we are working to ensure that our children do not miss a single day of instruction if we are ordered to close.