

Collier County Public Schools Models Moving Forward

By: Superintendent Dr. Kamela Patton

To understand what is next when it comes to educating our community's children, it is important to understand where we have been. All 50+ campuses within Collier County Public Schools (CCPS) opened in August 2020 and all have remained open this school year thanks to tremendous efforts in providing layers of health and safety measures for the benefit of students, staff, and our community. Limiting the spread of COVID-19 and keeping our schools open remains a collective responsibility.

One year ago, school and district staff worked tirelessly to pivot to virtual learning. CCPS was one of four districts that did not return from spring break due to campus closures, but quickly rallied to ensure our students and teachers had what was needed to continue strong teaching and learning. The District made sure each student's household had at least one laptop computer and Internet access. This past summer, CCPS accelerated the "Collier Connect" initiative and assigned a device to all Pre-K through 12th grade students. This "one-to-one" connectivity allows learning to continue both at school and at home.

A focus on embracing new instructional technology prior to COVID-19 positioned CCPS for this unprecedented year. Many teachers were already using document cameras to record "on demand" lessons. Classrooms were already equipped with audio enhancement equipment, which reduces teacher voice fatigue and extends audio equity so everyone in the room can hear clearly. This investment proved especially valuable with desks now spaced wall-to-wall and with some students joining classes virtually. One positive aspect of the pandemic has been the district-wide transition to the online Canvas Learning Management System — used by more than 90% of higher education institutions in the U.S. — which strengthens our strategic focus to ensure students graduate college, career, and life ready.

I am so proud of how CCPS worked with the Florida Department of Health-Collier and local medical experts to find ways to safely open schools and preserve the student experience. Schools have been hosting and taking part in academic competitions, fine arts performances, and athletic competitions with limited seating prioritizing students and their families. CCPS utilized live video broadcasts for sports — like high school football — so more people could follow their favorite neighborhood public school teams. We are thrilled to continue to preserve the student experience for our students; especially when you look around the nation and see that many students are still not even back in school, let alone having these experiences.

CCPS offered families choices of both on-campus and innovative virtual learning options. Currently, approximately 90% of our students are learning on campus, a significant rise from 60% at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Currently, the state average of on-campus learning is 65% and the national average is 39%.

Consistent with state and national trends, students at all levels have experienced learning loss linked to circumstances resulting from the pandemic. CCPS has been working to limit impacts and accelerate student achievement by increasing access and decreasing barriers. Our efforts include an even greater emphasis on targeted professional learning for teachers to strengthen classroom instruction, providing differentiated supports based on individual student needs, as well as mental health supports for students and families. Moving ahead, CCPS is intervening to address learning losses and planning an expansion of summer programming, including bridge programs to strengthen math and reading skills for students transitioning to middle or high school. Credit and course recovery classes will include Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills to build resilience in students. Executive functioning skills — like time management, organization, and prioritization — will be embedded in programming to strengthen students' life readiness skills. School administrators and instructional staff continue to make changes to instructional delivery based on student progress monitoring and continue to develop new local assessment tools to make “just-in-time” adjustments.

Educators did not go to college to prepare for contact tracing, social distancing, and sanitizing surfaces; however, they have all risen to meet these challenges! We thank our parents and many community partners for your continued support. Our community can be proud that CCPS remains committed to safely operating our schools and using innovative approaches to keep student achievement moving forward.