

## MCCPTA Statement Regarding the MCPS Reopening and Use of Outdoor Spaces

MCCPTA urges MCPS to formalize templates for use of outdoor spaces to ensure students have multiple opportunities each day to meet in outside spaces. Further, MCCPTA calls on MCPS to publish clear plans to ensure students are sufficiently spaced during unmasked activities. The [MCPS 21-22 Reopening Guide](#), released Friday, August 13, 2021, includes several broad statements related to the use of outdoor spaces, but falls short of providing explicit instruction for, and details of the kind of support available to, schools regarding use of these spaces.

Further, it is not clear whether MCPS will provide the necessary support and materials to ensure every student, regardless of zip code, will be afforded similar opportunities to engage in outside spaces. MCCPTA urges MCPS to provide more specificity to school administrators regarding the use of outdoor spaces, and to ensure that the implementation is not ad hoc and left primarily up to individual school-based administrators. The current vague approach articulated in the Reopening Guide is likely to lead to inconsistent implementation across the County schools and will exacerbate equity issues, as some leaders create robust plans and creative solutions while others await direction from MCPS – leaving kids inside and at higher risk.

MCCPTA recognizes with 208 schools [spanning more than 3,000 acres](#), no two school footprints are alike. With no “one size fits all” solution, MCCPTA calls on MCPS to create specific, publicly available guidelines to help each school leader evaluate their options and involve local stakeholders, and make clear the support resources available. If MCPS will collaborate more directly with MCCPTA, PTAs and other stakeholders can better help overcome challenges for implementation.

Guidelines for school leaders should include:

- How to evaluate your school grounds for ideal space for outdoor lunch.
- How to involve stakeholders in your school community for successful implementation.
- Parameters for how parents opt students out of eating outdoors. Suggestions for indoor models for these few students.
- Best practices for staffing outdoor lunch and managing students outdoors.
- Clear procedure for how schools can request additional staffing support.
- Parameters for schools using parent volunteers to support outdoor lunch supervision.
- Specific contingency plans when weather prohibits use of outdoor spaces.
- Streamlined pathways for acquisition of resources and infrastructure to extend use of outdoors on less-desirable days.

These plans should be dynamic, allowing for changes and upgrades, as the weather (and vaccine option for our younger students) changes.