

**To:** Montgomery College Employees  
**From:** Dr. Charlene M. Dukes, Interim President  
**Subject:** **Return-to-Campus Plans, Regrouping, and Phasing in Telework**  
**Date:** October 14, 2021

As we approach full return to College campuses and worksites on November 8, I know that we are all preparing in our own ways to re-enter our offices and workspaces on a regular basis. The College has continued to prioritize the health and safety of the College community in preparing for this transition. It has been a year and a half since we were all regularly working together on campuses and worksites at the same time. Staggered, hybrid work schedules were a temporary adaptation to reduce health risks. These precautions allowed us to respond during the height of coronavirus infections. Now that infection rates have stabilized and our vaccine mandate is in place—along with the continuing mask requirement and coronavirus testing—our workplaces are considerably safer than they were at the start of the pandemic.

With this in mind, I want to share a decision regarding employee regular telework and remote work. As you know, regular telework plans are an annual agreement between the College and employees in eligible positions. The College has been a leader in innovative flexible work policy and will continue to be committed to such options. While collectively, many employees have been working from home regularly since March 2020, no individual, documented telework plans have been in effect since March 2020. As we return fully on November 8, regular telework agreements are again possible. However, because it is so important that we can regroup after the pandemic experience of extensive remote working, the College will phase in telework agreements starting November 8 with a maximum of one day per week for employees in eligible positions. Employees must request teleworking through the standard process and can begin once the request is approved.

We are taking this approach in order to better assess the impact of the pandemic on our traditional telework practices. As students return in increasing numbers to our classrooms and employees return to workspaces, we need to re-assess which needs are best met by in-person collaboration and which might still be served virtually. This decision will not impact current class schedules, which will continue throughout the semester in the same status in which they began. Regular telework agreements of up to three days maximum per week will be available for employees in eligible positions on February 21, 2022. Such employees will need to have these agreements approved under the standard processes as laid out by the Office of Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management. The February timetable—four weeks into the spring semester—will give the College ample time to assess spring trends.

While many of us have become comfortable with working from home during the pandemic, our student needs have changed as health metrics have improved and our fellow higher ed institutions have returned to in-person working. Many students want to return to face-to-face learning and support, for social and psychological reasons. More importantly, others learn better that way. As

an institution the College needs to respond to these trends. In the spring we plan to offer 70 percent of our classes face-to-face—barring a deterioration in local COVID-19 metrics. We need to prepare ourselves and our systems for a robust registration and orientation period in advance.

Thus far, enrollment at the College has not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels this fall, posing a fiscal challenge that must be addressed. Some colleges that have more quickly offered in-person services have seen a healthier rebound to their enrollment and Montgomery College needs to grow towards this level of recovery. So, as we prepare for the spring semester the College is taking these steps in order to regain its footing—both operationally and from an enrollment perspective.

Another key aspect of this decision is the future of work at Montgomery College. Prior to the pandemic, we were primarily an in-person organization. During the pandemic we became primarily a virtual organization. After the pandemic, in all likelihood, we will be a hybrid organization. Gearing up for a hybrid workplace requires technology prowess but is about more than just technology—it's also about relationships and work processes. The phasing in of full telework will help us to better grapple with and adapt to these changes.

I realize there may be some concern as we take our first steps back—this continues to be a time of uncertainty, but we will advance together and with heightened attention to safety and health, as we have throughout the pandemic. Any significant increases in county infections or signs of a new variant locally will be carefully watched and appropriate steps taken in response. Health and safety continue to be our highest priority.

I continue to be grateful for our dedicated staff who worked in person throughout the worst of the pandemic. These employees spanned many departments, and, for them, this next step will not be a significant change to their work experiences. I hope we can look to them for guidance on how to manage concerns some of us may feel about returning. We ask for your patience as we navigate the next phase of our learning and working environments and assess the best ways to be responsive to our students, our community, and each other.

Thank you for all you do for Montgomery College and for your dedication to the College's mission to empower our students to change their lives.