

The Hall County School District understands families of students want to know what school will look like as we begin the 2020-21 school year. Our plan for returning to school consists of six critical areas: Outreach and Communication, Mental and Physical Wellness, Instruction, Operations, Technology, and Facilities (see Waterwheel diagram). Committees for each area are meeting regularly to develop specific details and protocols, taking into consideration guidance from health officials, as well as information gathered from surveys shared with students, parents, and Hall County School District team members. As soon as a solid plan is in place that best meets the needs of students, we will release the plan to our families and stakeholders.

In March of this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our district initiated and followed a School-from-Home instructional model in order to continue the learning process for our 28,000 students. This model also allowed us to do our part in protecting the health of our stakeholders and community. We are proud of the effort put forth by everyone involved during a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty. We ended the school year well given the circumstances.

However, the district feels it is in the best interest of students and families that we return to an in-person instructional model beginning on August 7, the first day of school for students. With that in mind, school will certainly look differently than it did before COVID-19. We have learned a great deal over the past several months, and a number of new practices will be in place to protect the health of our students and staff. Because there appears to be no cure or vaccine forthcoming in the near future, we must learn to live and learn alongside of COVID-19.

Returning to our schools in-person, with new safety protocols in place, is important for several reasons:

1. Parents need children to return to school so that they, in turn, can return to work. The negative financial impact as result of the shelter-in-place order was devastating for some families.
2. The School-from-Home model maintains some level of learning in the short term, but over extended periods of time, students run the risk of falling behind in numeracy and literacy—especially our youngest learners and those whose families struggle financially. We cannot allow them to fall further behind in their learning.
3. Schools provide critical support systems to students who suffer emotional and physical trauma. Due to the pandemic, many of these students have been cut off from caring adults and trained professionals at our schools who provide resources that contribute to student safety and well-being. We must reconnect these students to an adequate level of stability and support.

The district is well aware that living and learning alongside of COVID-19 poses many challenges that will require us to be flexible. At any given moment, due to ever-changing conditions, some schools, and possibly some classes, may have to return to a School-from-Home model of instruction for a period of time. Additionally, we understand that for some families, in-person instruction at schools will simply not be possible. In those situations, we will work with families and do our best to support them so that learning continues for students.

There are no guarantees that our plan will be perfect; there will certainly be surprises and unexpected challenges. Frankly, this will likely be the most challenging school year of recent memory. However, one thing is for certain: When August 7 arrives, there will be 3,400 team members at the Hall County School District working hard to ensure that your child is loved, cared for, and receiving the best education possible, for we are striving to be *the most caring place on Earth*.

We thank you for your patience, support, and for trusting us with the care and learning of your children.
Look for more details in the near future.

Sincerely,

Will Schofield