

Summary of Mr. Schofield's Video

Good Morning,

As we draw closer to the month of August, I would like to focus on three areas: our back to school plan, our survey providing families with a choice of instructional model, and our calendar for the first 15 days of school.

As of today, we plan to offer in-person (brick and mortar) instruction in all of our school buildings when the school year begins. I have said it several times over the past three months: we must learn to coexist with COVID-19. However, I have also said that in times of unprecedented change like the one we are now experiencing, we have an opportunity to become better than we were before. These are challenging times, but I believe we can emerge from this having developed better ways to serve our students and our community.

Our Waterwheel Committees have been meeting to develop and refine our back to school plan.

Outreach and Communications: We will continue to push out information to our families on a regular basis through our website, Infinite Campus emails, and social media platforms. In the near future, we will share a FAQ document regarding our return to school. As you have questions, please send them to us and we will do our best to provide answers.

Mental and Physical Well-Being: We are very concerned about the mental and physical well-being of our students and staff. This committee is working hard with others to have systems in place to support those children and adults who are struggling with anxiety during these days of so many unknowns. We will provide them with resources. Additionally, we are training 250 staff members in trauma and mental health awareness.

Instruction: We are offering our families two options: in-person (brick and mortar) instruction and virtual. A survey will be sent to all parents so that they can indicate their preference. Parents will also be able to specify if they are undecided. Those who have yet to make a decision will have until August 21. Please note that the virtual option will look differently than what we did this spring with our School-from-Home initiative. The video accompanying our survey explains in more detail.

Maintenance and Operations: There will be no traditional open house this year. Students in kindergarten, 6th grade, 9th grade, and students new to Hall County, will be allowed to come on site for orientation. All other students will have orientation online--provided by their respective schools. Additionally, we will limit the number of visitors on campus this year. For example, outside snacks for birthday parties will not be permitted. It is not that we do not want to partner with you. Rather, we are doing our best to protect all students and staff by limiting outside exposure.

All of our team members will be required to wear face coverings while working with students and staff. At a minimum, students will be strongly encouraged to wear face coverings. We have not reached a final determination as to whether we will mandate face coverings for students.

We are going to have mandatory training sessions for students and staff on handwashing, social distancing, and proper wearing of face coverings.

Technology: Dr. Turpin and his team have been hard at work to ensure that we have additional “hot-spots” on campus for internet connections. Additionally, extra Chromebooks will be on hand. We must be ready to pivot and provide in-home instruction should a school or classroom have to go home for several days due to an exposure. I want to remind families that a virtual learning experience will not compare to face-to-face instruction, but we will do our best to provide a rich and robust learning experience.

Facilities: We will be cleaning and sanitizing all of our buildings: restrooms, hallways, touch points, equipment, and classrooms—during before and after the instructional day. Signage will be on floors and in hallways to assist with traffic flow and social distancing. When entering our facilities, all staff members will undergo temperature checks. We are also looking into ways of effectively checking the temperatures of students. Isolation rooms will be required for all of our schools should a student or staff member have a fever or display symptoms of COVID-19.

As I mentioned earlier, a survey will come out soon to families providing an opportunity to select an instructional model: in-person (brick and mortar) or virtual. Unlike many districts, we are not requiring families to make a final decision at this time. However, if families know their preference now, indicating so on the survey will help us prepare. Please let us know on the survey if you are undecided.

Finally, I would like to speak with you about the first 15 days of school (see calendar). Please note the dates you see are subject to change. For example, the state may intervene and tell us we cannot begin school until later. In planning this calendar, we heard our leadership loud and clear: we need more time to prepare; thus, we have extended preplanning. We need time to train staff members on our safety protocols. We need time to prepare students for the possibility of blended learning should a school need to close down for a period of time. We need time to train our staff members on mental health awareness. These will be our points of focus for the first week of preplanning.

On day 8 of preplanning, we will bring half of our student body into the building and have a full school day that allows students to experience our safety protocols and procedures. We will repeat that process for the other half of the student body on day 9. The following day, there will be no school, but rather, another day of preplanning with staff so that we can regroup and refine our plan. We will make modifications necessary to ensure that we are doing all we can to keep students and staff as safe as possible.

On the following Monday, we begin full days of school with the entire student body. That Friday, day 15, if they have not done so already, parents will be expected to make a decision as to whether they would like to have in-person instruction or a virtual learning experience.

If you have not received your survey, please contact your school’s principal. I also ask that you continue to refer to our district webpage and Facebook page for updates. Moreover, I must remind everyone: please understand that dates on our calendar can change due to forces beyond our control.

We are committed to providing a safe learning environment that will allow our students to thrive, not merely survive. We want to offer you options, and we want to work with you to become a better school system. We have to be willing to work together, to give and take, to be flexible. Rest assured we are going to do our very best to protect students and staff. We look forward to a great school year in the Hall County School District.

