

DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Standard of Excellence

August 18, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are thrilled that the 2020-2021 school year is underway. I have visited schools and witnessed teachers engaged with their students through digital learning. Impressive instruction is taking place online. I applaud our students, parents, teachers and administrators for making the best of our current situation.

As you know, on July 16 the school system made the decision to move the first day of school to August 17 and open the school year with digital learning for all students due to the substantial spread of COVID-19 in Douglas County.

Although we announced that digital learning would take place for the first nine weeks, we have been working to develop a gradual re-entry plan that will allow the option of in-person instruction prior to the end of the first nine weeks for those students who selected the Traditional Learning model. With a gradual re-entry, we feel confident that we can monitor the success of our social distancing and sanitation measures and make adjustments as needed.

Last week, my leadership team and I met with Cobb & Douglas Public Health and presented the safety procedures we will have in place when students return to the buildings. They reviewed our plan and weighed in with additional suggestions. We also presented the plan at our Board of Education meeting on August 17 and received the go-ahead to communicate with our parents and community.

Following is the schedule for our staggered re-entry plan. Please keep in mind that plans can and will be modified depending upon the spread of COVID-19 in the community, a building or a classroom.

August 17 – September 4	Students will receive digital instruction.
September 8	Elementary students who selected the Traditional Learning model will return to school for in-person instruction Tuesday through Thursday, with online lessons from home on Friday. After the week of Labor Day, students will attend school for in-person instruction Monday through Thursday. Students who signed up for School-Based Digital Learning (SBDL) will continue to receive online instruction at home.
September 14	Middle schools will open for in-person instruction Monday through Thursday for those students who selected the Traditional Learning model, with online lessons from home on Friday. Students who signed up for SBDL will continue to receive online instruction at home.
September 21	High schools will open for in-person instruction Monday through Thursday for students who selected the Traditional Learning model, with online lessons from home on Friday. Students who signed up for SBDL will continue to receive online instruction at home.

Please note the following details:

- Custodians will deep clean all buildings on Fridays while students participate in online lessons from home.
- Students will have the option of SBDL Monday through Friday for the entire school year.

- Each school's schedule and procedures may be different when in-person instruction begins. Administrators will send information for their school to parents via email, phone, text, website and social media.

In addition to previously announced procedures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the school buildings, I am pleased to announce an additional safety measure. The school system will hire 150 Teacher Assistants whose purpose will be to reduce class sizes to allow for social distancing. The extra staff members will allow us to spread students throughout the buildings for instruction.

Please also note that we have changed our guidance regarding face coverings. Students, staff members and guests are now required to wear a face covering when on a school bus or in a school building. We will continue to follow guidance from local and state public health departments, and we will add protocols as needed to enhance the safety of our students and staff.

During this time of COVID-19, the goal of the Douglas County School System is to provide a quality education under unusual circumstances. Our amazing administrators, teachers and staff are happy to be back in their classrooms and are excited to once again be engaged with their students. I am grateful that they have a positive outlook, remarkable resilience, an innovative spirit and a "go with the flow" attitude regarding the start of the school year. They are determined to provide the best possible learning experience for our students, whether that is through digital learning or in person.

In closing, I want to thank you, our parents, for your patience during these trying times. I have had many sleepless nights over the past few months as we wrestle with determining the path forward. Please know that we feel the full weight of the decisions we make regarding this school year and we know that our decisions affect families in countless ways. We know that many families must scramble to find childcare and make difficult choices to accommodate the needs of their children and the demands of their jobs during the time of digital learning. I appreciate the emails I have received from parents. The positive messages encourage me, and the ones from unhappy parents make me think about our situation in new and different ways. I value your input.

I also want to thank our Board of Education for their thoughtful guidance when considering the best path forward. They always put the wellbeing of our students and staff first when making decisions.

We know this is yet another change for our parents and students, but we ask that you also be flexible and grant us grace as we work together to provide a plan that will benefit our students and families. I also ask that you and all of your family members do your part to slow the spread of COVID-19 by wearing a face covering in public. As always, I appreciate your support of the Douglas County School System.

Sincerely,

Trent North, Superintendent