

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF OKALOOSA COUNTY

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
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Dear Parents,

June 15, 2020

Long before the 2019-2020 school year ended, we began considering what Okaloosa Schools would look like next fall for students, families and staff. Many variables exist with some of these certain to change over the next two months. We'll be reviewing all of the guidance on reopening schools that has come from the Governor, the Florida Department of Education and the Department of Health. And, we realize that our best plans for school next fall will be developed using not only this guidance, but also with input from you.

To that end, we recently conducted a survey of our parents that brought in over 5,000 responses. Based on guidance from the Florida Department of Education and your feedback, we're making plans to open schools next fall on our scheduled start date of August 11<sup>th</sup>. However, we're still studying all of the details involved with safely re-opening our schools, and we respect that families have wide-ranging opinions about what that means. Many families will be eager for their children to return to school as normally as possible while others will be more hesitant and may prefer an online option. This is a new environment, and there is no right or wrong, only what works best for your child.

## Here are some things that we are planning to have in place this fall:

- School campuses will be open for a traditional start to the academic school year on August 11<sup>th</sup> with health and safety precautions in place.
- A full-time online option will be available for those who do not wish to return to their school building at the beginning of the year. The plan right now is for online students to stay connected to their school and to be taught by teachers from that school, if feasible. In order to manage our staffing and scheduling, we would require families who choose an online option to remain with that model likely through the end of a semester.
- Recognizing that now is too soon for many parents to make a final decision, we will publish a "decision date" in July for parents to let schools know what option they've chosen.
- Prior to the "decision date", we'll provide you with more specific information plans about what we'll be doing inside our school buildings so that you can make an informed decision.

Many factors are being considered by our Reopening Schools Work Group that is studying this issue, and we will continue to work closely with the local health department and our community to seek input. I wanted to be sure to share our current thoughts with our parents so you know what we are considering at this time. Some of the things that will be addressed include the following:

- **What will bus transportation look like?** We know that we do not have enough buses or drivers to space students six feet apart. Most of the parents whose children ride school buses who responded to our survey said they would permit their children to ride a bus with safety precautions taken, understanding that current levels of social distancing would be impossible to maintain. Hand sanitizer is already located on every bus, and masks, either voluntary or mandatory, and some level of health screening, could be part of the plan.

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- **What about lunch?** One option to reduce the crowds in a cafeteria is to let students eat in the classroom, but it's not as simple as that. Students have to be supervised at all times. In a cafeteria, we can supervise a larger number of students with fewer adults. In classrooms, we wouldn't typically have enough staff to monitor students while still allowing school employees time to eat their own lunches, so we are looking at creative ways to address the issue.
- **What about cleaning and sanitizing our rooms and classroom materials?** Classrooms and common areas will receive enhanced, more frequent cleaning. We're working now to stockpile effective, student-friendly cleaning supplies and wipes for classrooms and other areas. Everyone will likely need to play a role in keeping the classrooms clean, and we're evaluating the best ways to do that throughout the day. Of course, hand sanitizer will continue to be available in all classrooms and school buses, and we'll always encourage regular handwashing at school for students and employees.
- **How will schools control large group gatherings?** We could limit assemblies at the beginning of the school year, to include pep rallies at middle and high schools or move them to outside venues if appropriate. We intend to have sports and extracurricular activities as part of the school year and will monitor information from the Florida High School Activities Association (FHSAA) and other state groups for guidance to ensure the safety of our students, coaches and supporters. In certain schools, hallways can get crowded during class change. We can't simply let students walk on the outside of buildings to get to the next hallway due to student safety concerns. Staggering class change times and creating hallway patterns could provide some relief.
- **What about masks?** Parents should have the right to choose whether or not their child wears a mask. Employees will have that ability as well. By August, will state or local officials mandate they be worn in schools? That's not the case at this time, but things could change. Instruction would certainly be impacted by the use of masks. Could face shields or barriers between desks be used if needed in some instances?
- **What about a possible "second wave" of COVID-19 later in the fall?** If we're directed to shift back to a virtual model later in the fall, we'll have to be prepared to distribute devices and provide internet access like we did in the spring. We have the time to evaluate curriculum now to identify the best options for our students should the need arise.

These are just a few of the challenges that we will be developing solutions for in the coming weeks. We are committed to keeping you up-to-date as plans are further developed so that you can make an informed decision for your student. For now, I hope that you and your family have a safe and enjoyable summer, and I look forward to welcoming each of our students back safely this fall.

Marcus D. Chambers  
Superintendent