



NEWS RELEASE

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Gwinnett County Public Schools updates plan for Fall 2020 to include new start date of Aug. 12 and mask requirement

During a special called meeting on July 7, 2020, the Gwinnett County Board of Education and Gwinnett County Public Schools CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks discussed plans for the coming school year and made the following decisions:

- 1. Delay the start of school year in Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) until August 12**, giving the district additional time to review and adjust its return to school plans to best meet students' needs and to reflect the most updated guidance from public health officials.
- 2. Require GCPS employees and students, and visitors to school facilities, to wear masks or face coverings.** Medical professionals recommend social distancing and the wearing of a mask or face covering as two primary steps to minimize the spread of COVID-19. As social distancing will be a challenge in schools and on school buses, GCPS is asking those who attend and/or work at its schools— as well as those who drive buses and work in other GCPS facilities— to wear a face covering or mask to minimize the spread of illness, and keep students and staff members safe. A lower incidence of illness also will contribute to schools being able to return to normal operations. If a student is not willing to wear a mask or face covering, he or she should consider digital learning. Accommodations will be made for students or employees unable to wear a mask for documented health reasons.
- 3. Increase pre-planning time for teachers by adding five days.** In addition to traditional pre-planning activities, this extended pre-planning period will allow time to:
 - o orient all staff on COVID-19 prevention protocols for the classroom and school-at-large;
 - o provide additional professional learning to support more effective digital instruction;
 - o extend training in social-emotional and culturally responsive instruction;

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The Mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools

is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.

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It is the policy of Gwinnett County Public Schools not to discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion, national origin, age, or disability in any employment practice, educational program, or any other program, activity, or service.

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- support new GCPS employees as they join the district;
- complete schedules for students and teachers to reflect needed instructional or logistical changes;
- meet with families of students whose IEPs and 504 plans had annual reviews that were delayed due to school closures;
- plan for virtual “Meet Your Teacher” and “Open House” events;
- hold orientation meetings for new GCPS students choosing full-time digital instruction.

4. **Cancel the Class of 2020 in-person graduations scheduled for July 13-19.**

The district held virtual high school graduations in May, noting at that time that it would hold in-person graduation ceremonies in July *if* conditions allowed. Plans moved forward to hold the ceremonies but the recent surge in COVID-19 cases in Gwinnett County led district leaders to make the difficult decision to cancel these ceremonies.

“In making these decisions, the Board and school district staff did their due diligence and reviewed all relevant information concerning our people’s health, safety, and educational needs,” says **CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks**. “We balanced what we learned in that review with what we heard from parents and our employees in the feedback we asked them to provide. Ultimately, we made our decisions based on what we believe is in the overall best interest of the district’s students, families, and staff. In the weeks to come, we will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation in Gwinnett County and, if necessary, will revise our plans as conditions warrant.”

On June 25, the district announced it would allow parents to choose between in-person or digital instruction for their children for the first semester of the 2020-21 school year. **The survey allowing the enrolling parent of each child to make that decision remains open through July 12.** That information, coupled with ongoing review of the current and anticipated COVID-19 situation in Gwinnett County, will guide school district leaders as they continue to assess and respond to COVID-19 and adjust plans as needed for the coming school year.

GCPS leaders are in close conversation with public health officials and remain committed to decision-making that prioritizes student and staff safety while giving families the flexibility to make choices that are best for them.

All staff will report on their regularly scheduled dates.