System Reopening Plan

The Habersham County School System remains on track for bringing students back to real classrooms on September 8th. Nearly 90% of our families have indicated that they want their students in real classrooms. As a school system, we have worked hard to provide this option for those that have chosen it.

The most up to date version of the Habersham County School System reopening plan can be found on our system homepage (habershamschools.com). This plan is a living document and is subject to change at any time during the school year. When the school system receives new guidance from the Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Department of Public Health or the Governor’s Office, changes may be made to the plan.

Our school administrators, teachers, and staff are working diligently to implement our system plan at the school level. Our entire team here in the Habersham County School System is working hard to make it possible for students to return to real classrooms safely. Our teachers and administrators are working together to ensure that as much social distancing as possible can take place in our schools and classrooms. Each school is working through how to handle social distancing in multiple situations. The bottom line is that we are going to be able to do more social distancing in schools than some of us may have anticipated. Furthermore, we are very pleased with the number of staff members who are choosing to wear a face covering in the school buildings when they are unable to socially distance themselves. Our approach to not mandate face coverings is paying off with our staff. Some have commented that they are thankful the school system did not mandate the wearing of face coverings but that they are making their own decision to wear one because it is what is best for them and others. I expect we will receive a similar response from our parents and students when our schools open.

Our custodians are receiving specialized training in how to mitigate COVID-19. Classrooms will be sanitized more frequently than they have ever been. Teachers are clearing out their classrooms to allow for maximum social distancing. Middle School and elementary students will stay in pods during the school day to minimize the opportunity to spread illness. Our schools are developing excellent plans for recess, cafeterias, transitions, and arrival/dismissal. Larger meeting spaces will be utilized as much as possible in each building. As a result of increased recess, outdoor PE, and more outdoor learning, students will spend more time outside this year than they ever have.

As we continue working to reopen our schools for students, it is important that our parents are patient and that we continue to have relationships built on trust and respect. We are all in this together and I have confidence that we will get through this together. American ingenuity and the American spirit always find a way, and we have plenty of that ingenuity and spirit right here in Habersham County, Georgia.
Virtual Plan Updated August 10, 2020

Comments from Superintendent Matthew Cooper
As a public school system we have a responsibility to meet the learning choices of all students and parents. Nearly 90% of our families have indicated that they want their students in real classrooms. As a school system, we should work hard to provide this option for those that choose it. We also have parents who have chosen the virtual option and we are working to provide the best virtual learning platform possible for these families. At the end of the day, parents must choose. The school system is only providing options. Parents must make the best choice for their current situation.

*We strongly recommend that parents who have children with health issues consider the virtual option for at least the first semester.*

Comments from Pam Dalton, Director of Virtual Learning and Secondary Schools
As of today, we have 89% of our families who have requested in-person classes and 11% who have requested virtual classes. Because of these numbers, we have been able to accommodate our virtual requests without forming a separate school. Students will be allowed to continue enrollment in their assigned schools while participating in the virtual learning program.

Misty Turpin, a former principal in Habersham County and an expert in instructional technology and software, has offered to coordinate the virtual learning program. We have full confidence in Ms. Turpin’s ability to provide great service to our parents and students in this role. Misty can be reached at 706-778-2020, should virtual parents have specific questions.

The new virtual learning program will be different from the “Learning from Home” plan that was implemented in the spring. The new virtual program will be more rigorous, and with more accountability and daily attendance expectations. Grading of student work will also be handled differently.

Primarily, our school system will use the Pearson Connexus learning platform. The curriculum and learning activities will be provided through Pearson Connexus, but managed by Habersham County teachers. We are pleased to announce that, in almost all situations, Habersham County teachers will be serving Habersham County students. *(In some instances, Georgia Virtual School may be used when staffing or teacher certification is an issue based on student requests.)*

Pearson Connexus is not a new program in Habersham County. For several years Pearson has been used in our system. We have had exemplary service from Pearson. They provide a high level of customer service, teacher training, and ongoing support. Their curriculum is rigorous, while remaining flexible so that it can be tailored to meet the needs of individual students. We found Connexus to be a far superior choice to meet Habersham County’s needs when compared to other options.

*It is important to note that the virtual learning environment, by its very nature, looks different than the in-person classroom setting.* It is not possible in all situations to replicate in a virtual environment the exact services that are available in a face-to-face setting. The courses and services offered will not always be identical. Parents of students with special needs will work closely with special education staff and administrators to determine how best to meet the needs of each child. Special circumstances will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
Our elementary and middle school students will be enrolled in 4 core classes: English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Our high school students will be offered 4 classes each semester, which will include a limited number of electives, based on specific requirements for graduation. Students enrolled in our virtual learning program who are in good standing and meet eligibility requirements may be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities. Parents should speak with the principal of their child’s school in order to discuss specifics about eligibility for extracurricular participation.

Although virtual class time will vary based on grade level and the needs of each individual student, an average amount of time required in the virtual environment is 60-90 minutes per day for English Language Arts, 45-60 minutes per day for math, 45-60 minutes per day for social studies, and 45-60 minutes per day for science. Scheduling is flexible for Connexus, but teachers may require students to be online at a certain time each day/week for live learning sessions.

Each student in the virtual learning program needs consistent, reliable Internet access and a laptop, desktop, tablet or Chromebook device. Chromebooks can be provided by the schools and will be distributed at a later date by the student’s home school. Parents will receive additional information about Chromebook distribution as we near the first day of school. Smartphones are not recommended.

Parents choosing virtual learning for their children will be expected to sign a one-semester agreement form. No exceptions will be made to the one-semester commitment.