Dear Somerset ISD Families and Students:

We certainly hope that your summer has been restful and family-focused. The tradition in Somerset has been to *Start and Stay Strong*! Our team has embraced the last few months of uncertainty as an opportunity to actively model and prepare for the district’s August 24th back-to-school date. It is important that our families and students understand how we are preparing to launch the new year and the options available for instruction; therefore, details are included in this guidance document.

Somerset ISD will offer both face-to-face and remote/virtual learning options for students. If parents select remote/virtual learning, an online survey must be completed for preliminary registration. The survey may be accessed through the district’s website. Face-to-face instruction registration will occur in August.

The following page describes our instructional options for all campuses. Please note that all information is preliminary and subject to change based on state and local health and education decisions.

The goal is to start strong with plans and systems that are safe, healthy, and rigorous, yet provide peace of mind throughout the 2020-2021 school year. As the situation unfolds, we will continue to navigate and act on decisions that are in the best interest of our school community and pledge to keep you informed about these decisions moving forward.

Together, we will ensure that Somerset ISD’s students and staff emerge stronger than ever.

Help us *Start and Stay Somerset Strong!*
If class size restrictions are lifted, all staggered schedules will be eliminated.
Start and Stay Strong!  Back-to-School Guidance

TEA Requirement: Providing Notice

Somerset ISD is providing notice to parents, families, and the community regarding back-to-school plans and instruction through this initial document. As further required, one week prior to the start of school, a plan to mitigate COVID-19 will be disseminated via Skyward to all families and posted on the district and school websites. Preliminary information is posted in this guidance and is subject to change based on state and local decisions.

COVID-19 Response Team – Somerset ISD has developed a COVID-19 Response Team to respond to concerns and communicate district decisions. Members of the team and email addresses are noted below:

<table>
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TEA Requirement: Prevent and Mitigate

Somerset ISD must identify and implement practices to prevent the virus from entering the school and mitigate or reduce the likely spread inside the school; therefore, district practices and guidelines have been established for various areas noted below:

Health and Safety Guidance

- Social and Emotional Well-Being – Students’ social and emotional well-being are a top priority. Together, schools and families can support your child during this challenging time. With the endless COVID coverage, it is natural for your child to experience some changes in behavior and mood. Counselors and staff will continue to work closely with families and students to ease the stress. Keeping routines predictable, sharing COVID facts that are age-appropriate, making time to listen and share feelings, and reaching out to us for support are all important. We are here for you and your child(ren).

- Masks – Schools are expected to comply with the Governor’s Executive Order for wearing masks or face shields, where this is most developmentally appropriate. All adults are required to wear masks when in the building, classroom, and/or office with others. Exceptions to this requirement include lunch breaks with appropriate social distancing. Classroom teachers may use face shields and social distancing when providing direct instruction in the classroom. During classroom monitoring and circulations, masks are required.

Students are required to wear masks when riding the bus and are during the school day. Exceptions to this requirement include during meals and other activities. For example, it may be impractical for students to wear
masks or face shields while participating in some non-UIL athletic or other extracurricular activities. When it is impractical for students to wear masks or face shields during those activities, schools must require students, teachers, staff, and visitors to wear masks or face shields when entering and exiting facilities and practice areas and when not actively engaging in those activities. Schools may, for example, allow students who are actively exercising to remove masks or face shields, as long as they maintain at least six feet of distance from other students, teachers, and staff who are not wearing masks or face shields. However, schools must require students, teachers, and staff to wear masks or face shields as they arrange themselves in positions that will allow them to maintain safe distancing.

It is recommended that masks be rotated and thoroughly cleaned daily. Sharing of masks with other family members is extremely risky and discouraged.

- **Handwashing/Sanitizing** - Students and staff are required to use hand sanitizer when entering a bus, building, classroom, and/or office. Frequent handwashing and sanitizing will also be incorporated in the daily schedules. Each classroom will be provided with sanitation kits that will be used during transitions. Buses, classrooms, and other common areas within the school will be thoroughly disinfected daily and deep cleaning schedules will be regularly conducted.

- **Temperature Checks/Screening** – Per Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines, initial monitoring of symptoms begins at home. Individuals who are feeling ill, including symptoms like fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, abdominal pain, fatigue, muscle aches, or headache, should stay at home and consult with a medical professional regarding school participation.

Temperatures will be taken for each student before boarding the bus. If a student’s temperature is at or above 100°F, the student will not be allowed on the bus and will be given a medical/safety informational form with guidelines that must be followed before he/she is allowed to return to school. For students who are dropped off by parents, temperatures will be taken before the student is allowed in the campus. If a student’s temperature is at or above 100°F, the student will not be allowed to stay in school and will be given a medical/safety informational form which, again, must be followed before he/she is allowed to return to school. In some instances, a release from a medical professional may be required.

TEA Guidance is as follows for students:

“Parents must ensure they do not send a child to school on campus if the child has COVID-19 symptoms (as listed in this document) or is lab-confirmed with COVID-19, and instead should opt to receive remote instruction until the below conditions for re-entry are met. Parents may also opt to have their students receive remote instruction if their child has had close contact with an individual who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19 until the 14-day incubation period has passed. School systems may consider screening students for COVID-19 as well. Screening is accomplished by asking questions by phone or other electronic methods and/or in person. The screening questions should also be asked of a student’s parent if that parent will be dropping off or picking up their child from inside the school.”

Teachers and staff are required to self-monitor. The self-screening should include teachers and staff taking their own temperature. Teachers and staff must report to the school system if they themselves have COVID-19 symptoms or are lab-confirmed with COVID-19, and, if so, they must remain off campus until they meet the criteria for re-entry as noted below. Additionally, they must report to the school system if they have had close contact with an individual.
who is lab-confirmed with COVID-19, as defined at the end of this document, and, if so, must remain off campus until the 14-day incubation period has passed.

Nurses are staffed at each school and Somerset ISD also employs a Health Services Coordinator, Ms. Yvette Trevino. These individuals have been trained to support and assist with health and safety matters.

- **Social Distancing** – Staff and students will maintain six feet of social distancing in indoor and outdoor settings, to the extent possible. Classrooms will be arranged to allow for six feet of space between seating areas, as feasible, and transitions will be limited in the elementary campuses. Staggered school start and dismissal times, along with passing periods will be used. Students will be assigned to classroom and student cohorts to minimize their interactions with others.

- **Personal Protective Equipment** – Staff and students are expected to provide their own masks. If individuals need assistance with this matter, the district will have equipment, e.g., masks, sanitizers, etc., available. Fans will be prohibited to minimize additional air circulation.

- **Students with Health Conditions** – Parents and families know their child’s needs. While we are taking all measure to ensure each student’s safety, parents must place their child’s health needs first. Remote learning options are discussed later.

- **COVID-19 Cases** – Somerset ISD will take all safety precautions. However, if a student or staff member tests positive, the cohort will shift to remote learning for 14 days (includes weekends). If a student or staff member has been in close and/or prolonged contact with someone who has tested positive, the cohort will move to remote instruction for a minimum of three days to allow for additional sanitation/disinfecting and monitoring. Staff and students who test positive and/or were directly exposed will not be permitted to return to school until they are cleared by a medical professional. While this may cause an added burden on families, our goal is health and safety for all students.

TEA Guidance on Individuals Confirmed or Suspected with COVID-19:

*Any individuals who themselves either:*

(a) are lab-confirmed to have COVID-19; or
(b) experience the symptoms of COVID-19 (listed below) must stay at home throughout the infection period, and cannot return to campus until the school system screens the individual to determine any of the below conditions for campus re-entry have been met:

- In the case of an individual who was diagnosed with COVID-19, the individual may return to school when all three of the following criteria are met:
  i. at least three days (72 hours) have passed since recovery (resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications);
  ii. the individual has improvement in symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and iii. at least ten days have passed since symptoms first appeared.

- In the case of an individual who has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and who is not evaluated by a medical professional or tested for COVID-19, such individual is assumed to have COVID-19, and the
individual may not return to the campus until the individual has completed the same three-step set of criteria listed above.

If the individual has symptoms that could be COVID-19 and wants to return to school before completing the above stay at home period, the individual must either (a) obtain a medical professional’s note clearing the individual for return based on an alternative diagnosis or (b) receive two separate confirmations at least 24 hours apart that they are free of COVID via acute infection tests at an approved COVID-19 testing location found at https://tdem.texas.gov/covid-19/.

Campuses and Classrooms

- **Cohorts** – In elementary schools, students and staff will be assigned to cohorts or groups that will stay together for defined periods of time. Each cohort will use common areas, such as cafeterias, gyms, playgrounds, etc., together as a group. This concept is intended to minimize the interactions of cohorts with other students and staff.

- **Visitors, Drop-off, and Pick-up** – All campus visits must be scheduled via an appointment. Sanitizing will occur after each parent meeting. The number of visitors in the school will be limited to ensure that students are safe; therefore, alternative meeting options may be scheduled, including virtual meetings. Each school will have procedures in place for daily drop-off and pick-up. This information will be communicated prior to the first day of school.

  Traditional campus events such as Open House, Parent Nights, etc., have been temporarily suspended. Once the COVID situation has flatlined, we will reevaluate how to proceed with these activities. Campuses will use other means to keep parents and families up-to-date and engaged in their child’s learning, including online platforms.

- **Classroom Configurations** – Somerset ISD will arrange student learning spaces six feet apart, as feasible. In some instances, common areas may be used for instruction with similar distancing.

- **Restrooms and Water Fountains** – Students’ physical needs are extremely important. Social distancing and hand washing will remain the priorities during restroom breaks. Because water dispensers have shared surfaces, these will be disabled/turned off. Students will be provided with other options for hydration. Further information will be communicated prior to the start of the school year.

- **Materials and Supplies** – Students will be expected to use their own materials and supplies which will be kept in individually-assigned boxes. Sharing of materials will not be allowed. In instances where technology, books, calculators, etc., are used with multiple students, proper sanitation protocols will be enforced.

  For early childhood classrooms, nap mats will be spaced out according to physical distancing guidelines and will be sanitized daily.

- **Backpacks and Other Personal Items** – For the first few weeks of school, elementary students will not be permitted to bring backpacks and other personal items from home. All supplies will be kept in the classroom to minimize contact. Additional guidance will be provided regarding students enrolled in junior high and high school campuses.
• **Additional Instructors in Classrooms** – In certain instances, additional staff members may be assigned to classrooms to instruct specific students. These individuals will sanitize prior to entering and exiting the classroom, and masks will be required as they interact with students using social distancing.

• **Class Transitions for Secondary Campuses** – We are currently developing guidance regarding cohort models for junior high and high school campuses, particularly since students engaged in a face-to-face instructional model are still expected to attend classes to receive credit.

• **Field Trips** – Campuses will refrain from scheduling field trips and other academic/social events until further notice.

**Instructional Models**

• **Face-to-Face Instruction and Remote/Virtual Learning** – Our goal is to **Start and Stay Strong**! While Somerset ISD is taking multiple precautions to protect both students and staff in school operations, we will offer parents the option for either face-to-face or remote/virtual learning. In both instances, students are expected to participate and remain engaged in high quality instruction. Each of these options is described below:
  
  o **Face-to-Face Instruction** – Students attend school daily, as with the regular school year, and follow safety, sanitation, and social distancing expectations.
  
  o **Remote/Virtual Learning** – Students participate in classroom instruction via remote/virtual learning and are expected to complete and submit assignments as communicated by the remote/virtual learning teacher(s). This home-learning model is an extension of the classroom and includes the same high-level expectations for participation and assignments as face-to-face.

In both models, the campuses must provide instruction in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for the required grade level/subject/course. Monitoring student learning and progress remains integral to the success of the students. This includes attendance, grades, formative/summative assessments, and other monitoring systems that help teachers know how students are making progress.

Unless otherwise noted by the campus administrator, once a commitment to the instructional model has been communicated by the parent/family, a request must be submitted in writing to shift to the other model. These transitions must be approved and processed by the school and may take up to two weeks. Attendance in the current model is mandatory.

Remote/virtual instruction will be delivered through asynchronous instruction that does not require having the instructor and student engaged at the same time. In this method, students learn from instruction that is not necessarily being delivered in-person or in real time. This type of instruction may include various forms of digital and online learning, such as prerecorded video lessons or game-based learning tasks that students complete on their own, and pre-assigned work and formative assessments made available to students on paper. The instructional method must address the required curriculum, per TEC, §28.002.

• **Attendance** – District funding and resources are linked to attendance. Attendance will be taken each day for both face-to-face and remote/virtual learning to ensure that students are actively engaged. During remote/virtual instruction, students are expected to participate and fully engage as communicated by the teacher to receive attendance credit. The **Somerset ISD Remote/Virtual Learning Agreement** further details expectations for attendance and academic credit.
In addition, per Texas Education Code (TEC), §25.092, students must attend 90% of the days a course is offered in order to be awarded credit for the course and/or to be promoted to the next grade. This requirement remains in force during the 2020-21 school year. This requirement applies to both face-to-face and remote/virtual instruction.

- **Grading** – State law requires each district to adopt its own grading policies. This policy must require a classroom teacher to assign a grade that reflects the student’s relative mastery of an assignment. Somerset ISD grading policies are published annually in the Student Handbook. Progress reports and report cards, along with parent conferences, will be used to communicate each student’s progress and performance.

- **State and Local Testing** – All students are expected to follow state and local testing requirements, whether participating in face-to-face or remote/virtual instruction.

**Meals and Transportation**

- **Meals** – Somerset ISD must comply with child nutrition guidelines.
  - **Breakfast and Lunch at Elementary Schools** - Pre-Kindergarten through 6th Grade – Meals will be served in the classrooms.
  - **Breakfast and Lunch at Secondary Schools** - Junior High, High School, and ZECLA – Grab and Go meals will be provided as students enter the schools and students will eat in designated areas adhering to social distancing.

- **Transportation** - Temperatures will be taken for each student before boarding the bus. If a student’s temperature is at or above 100°, the student will not be allowed on the bus and will be given a medical/safety informational form with guidelines that must be followed before he/she is allowed to return school.

  Seating arrangements will be established to comply with TEA’s social distancing requirements for school transportation. Buses will be disinfected daily.

**Electives: Band, Mariachi, P.E., CTE Courses, Other Electives: Dance, Cheer, etc.**

- **Band/Mariachi** – Students participating in these programs are require to have their own instrument. The district is looking at options for non-wind instruments such as guitars, violins, etc. Protocols established by U.I.L. will be followed for band and mariachi, including marching, competitions, etc.

- **P.E.** – Details are being developed for P.E. programs to align with the TEKS course expectations and U.I.L. COVID guidelines for athletics.

- **CTE Courses** – CTE courses include hands-on experiences. Social distancing and sanitation requirements will be further defined and communicated prior to the beginning of school. Students enrolled in advanced, hands-on CTE courses must enroll in a face-to-face instructional model. Remote/virtual learning is only available for “principles” courses in CTE.

- **Other Electives: Dance, Cheer, etc.** – Each course will be reviewed individually to ensure that social distancing and sanitation requirements are established and communicated prior to the beginning of school.
Special Programs

• Program Participation and Services – Students currently participating in special program services, e.g., special education, 504, Bilingual/ESL, etc., will continue to receive services whether through face-to-face or remote/virtual learning. Parent meetings may be held using virtual meeting platforms.

• Evaluations and Testing – District protocols have been established to evaluate students who have been referred for special programs. Social distancing and/or personal protective equipment (PPE) will be used, as appropriate.

Extracurricular and After-School Program

• Extracurricular Programs – Each program will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine implementation guidelines. Program sponsors will provide information to students and parents/families as information is available.

• After-School Program – The after-school program will be available on the first day of instruction for face-to-face students only. Pre-registration will be required through the athletics department. This program will follow the same sanitation and social distancing requirements established during the regular instructional day.

TEA Requirement: Respond

Somerset ISD must identify and implement responsive actions to address the situation if there are lab-confirmed cases in a school.

Required Actions if Individuals with Lab-Confirmed Cases Have Been in a School

1. If an individual who has been in a school is lab-confirmed to have COVID-19, the school must notify its local health department, in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations, including confidentiality requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

2. Schools must close off areas that are heavily used by the individual with the lab-confirmed case (student, teacher, or staff) until the non-porous surfaces in those areas can be disinfected, unless more than 3 days have already passed since that person was on campus.

3. Consistent with school notification requirements for other communicable diseases, and consistent with legal confidentiality requirements, schools must notify all teachers, staff, and families of all students in a school if a lab-confirmed COVID-19 case is identified among students, teachers or staff who participate on any on campus activities.