

August 13, 2021

It is hard to believe we are about to begin another school year. I will begin my tenth year as your Superintendent and my 30th year in education. It is hard to imagine what the world has been through since March, 2020. There are many things in life that we no longer take for granted thanks to the COVID pandemic. Fortunately, we are able to make final plans to open for in-person instruction on August 19th.

Since the conclusion of the 2020-21 school year, there have been some changes to protocols for how our school year will progress. We plan to offer in-person five days per week learning as we did last year. Students in grades 7-12 will also have a virtual learning option. The Oklahoma legislature passed a law last spring making it difficult to mandate wearing of masks in public schools. Without an emergency declaration by our Governor, schools cannot require masks to be worn by students or staff. This change removes a major mitigation tool we used to successfully remain open for in-person instruction last year. With COVID numbers climbing locally, we strongly urge parents to be diligent in their daily health screening as provided in our protocols as well as encourage their children to wear masks while on the school bus or in school.

If a positive case of COVID has been reported, we will continue to contact trace the students and staff to determine who has potentially been exposed to COVID. Those individuals will be advised of the exposure and provided options for a potential change in their learning environment. The latest protocols provided by the district include a COVID symptom assessment tool which indicates conditions where a COVID test would be recommended. Without the ability to mandate the wearing of masks, the greatest tool available to our district to prevent an outbreak at school is parents assuming their responsibility for the daily health screen and making sure their child stays home if they are feeling ill.

I've been watching enrollment very carefully. Last year, we lost a large number of students across the district. Efforts were made to identify where those students were receiving their education. Many of them went to virtual online charter schools. As we continue enrollment, we are seeing a large number of enrollees across the district indicating they did not attend GPS last year but plan to do so in 2021-22. Presumably, we are getting students back who we lost last year. Also, based on the input of our community, we increased the number of all-day Pre-K offerings dramatically.

I'm excited and anxious about the influx of students who were not with us a year ago. The excitement comes from reuniting students with their friends in an environment where learning can take place. The anxiety centers around meeting the students who were away from us where they are academically. I know we have many young learners who we will find behind and catching them up will be our task.

Moving on from COVID for a moment, you may have noticed that ODOT recently began a sidewalk project along Noble Ave. This project is expected to take 90 days to complete and will run from Central Elementary to Drexel St. This construction will potentially disrupt students walking to school. ODOT staff have assured us the safety of our students will be their priority. They will be directing walking students along the best path to our schools based on the conditions at the time. Principals will be using their normal methods of communication to let students and their families know about the construction

status. If your child typically walks along the affected route, please visit with them about following the instructions of the ODOT staff.

We moved mountains to keep our schools open last year when many districts around us did not. Our goals haven't changed because we know our students need to be in school. The daily health screener is now our best weapon to keep COVID out of our buildings along with the judgement of our parents. We are truly in this together. Working together has never been more important for the good of all. Let's make this a great year! GO BLUEJAYS!!!