



July 8, 2020

Dear Parents:

In June, the Florida Department of Education released a document called “Re-opening Florida’s Schools and the CARES Act: Closing Achievement Gaps and Creating Safe Spaces for Learning”. The theory of action behind the re-opening is as follows:

1. Presume the re-opening of school campuses, safely.
2. Open schools with a moral purpose – closing achievement gaps.
3. Florida can only hit its economic stride if schools are open.
4. To ensure safety, take a “dimmer switch” (step-by-step) approach rather than flip the light switch approach.

To prepare for the re-opening of schools in August, Walton County has utilized Florida’s “dimmer switch” approach. This model started with allowing small groups of students back in schools in June, added more students and activities in July, and ultimately helps prepare for re-opening fully in August. The following is a timeline of our phased process:

June 1	SPICE restarted at four schools with 180 students (for essential workers and our employees’ families).
June 15	Athletics and other specific extra-curricular activities restarted on select campuses with approximately 500 students.
June 22	Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten began a summer class at one school with ten students.
July 6	Summer Bridge, which provides additional support to students, began on 16 campuses with approximately 500 students.
August 10	First day of the 2020-2021 school year

With the knowledge gained in June and July, the State of Florida is opening all school campuses in August for a traditional start to the academic year; however, re-opening ultimately must be driven by local data and with the goal of restoring optimal conditions for learning. Based on that, Walton County is being proactive and keeping a watchful eye on many data points, including the number and location of COVID-19 cases, CDC and state guidelines, and Florida’s phase system. If state, health, and emergency management experts continue to give us the go ahead to start schools, Walton will begin the 2020-2021 school year on August 10th.

“Preparing the Whole Child for a Life of Success”

We know brick and mortar schools will not look the same when we return. We know things will be different, and we are working daily to ensure the best procedures and innovative ideas are in place for your children and our employees. In May, a local task force was created to prepare for the re-opening of schools. The task force, which includes stakeholders from the Florida Department of Health and Walton County Emergency Management, helped vet a re-opening document for our schools. The plan is a lengthy, internal document written as directions for employees, but we have coupled that document with a Frequently Asked Questions handout for parents. Both documents were written after reading numerous state, county, and school level safety plans as well as guidance documents from health organizations and the CDC. Many hours have been spent to not only write the plan but to think through the actual processes and procedures that the plan directs.

Even with a safety plan, we do recognize that parents and our community will still have concerns. Due to this, the WCSD is providing two additional educational options for parents if traditional schooling is not the best fit for your family at this time. First, we are providing, as we have in the past, access to our Walton Virtual School (WVS). WVS can be done from home through enrollment in WVS. Second, a newer option, called Innovative Learning, will be offered as well. This new option, which was released Monday, July 6th through Emergency Order No. 2020-EO-06 by the Florida Commissioner of Education, allows districts flexibility in providing instruction to students who remain at home while still enrolled in a Walton County school. As the district fully explores this new option, more information will be provided in the days to come.

Please continue to check back next week as we release a detailed explanation of our three educational options. With additional, detailed information and class offerings, parents will be able to choose the option that best fits their families' needs. Once a decision is made for each child, we are asking that all families complete a "Student Intent Form for the 2020-2021 School Year" for each child who attended the WCSD last school year. The survey will allow us to better plan for August as parents declare their intentions. **Student Intent Forms will be due Monday, July 20th.**

Thank you for being patient and supportive with us as we navigate these uncharted waters. Because our current situation is fluid, please continue to check back for any changes or updates that may occur over the coming weeks. Please always know that the safety of your children is our number one priority. All of our decisions will be based on what is best for our students. If you have questions or concerns, please text 850.204.9667 or call 850.892.1100.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "A. Russell Hughes".

A. Russell Hughes
Superintendent of Schools