

## **Athletics**

Just like last year, fans will have the option of wearing a mask if they choose and they will have the option of socially distancing themselves at events. The Georgia High School Association, which governs school athletics in our state, has not prohibited athletic practices and events up to this point nor have they mandated any mitigation practices. This association carries a lot of weight with school administrators and coaches in our state. Their guidance has kept the door open for athletic events to continue this year. A primary factor for our decisions related to athletic events is the fact that both participation and attendance is completely voluntary. The key word here is voluntary.

## **COVID-19 Response Plan**

Our COVID-19 response plan is posted to our system website. We will follow the guidelines in this document and also consult with public health when encountering situations with the virus. We are taking reasonable precautions to address the virus. Please note that this response plan provides minimal guidelines for our schools in how they should respond to the virus. The system plan does not and cannot address the specifics of every situation. Many of the details must be worked out at the school level. Our Principals are able to make adjustments to their plans as needed at the school level. In the Habersham County School System, students and staff that test positive for Covid-19 are required to isolate according to public health guidelines. Our school system is also continuing to implement contact tracing to identify those who may have been exposed to the positive person. We have heard that some school systems in Georgia are not quarantining close contacts but we believe this is important to mitigating the virus in our schools.

## **Data Sharing**

We are making every effort to buffer our students from the angst and mental trauma associated with the virus. We are also working hard to keep things as normal as possible for our students. We realize things are not normal for adults but we should all do our best to keep things normal for our children. We believe that the posting of numbers is counterproductive to these goals. We believe it is best for parents to make school decisions based on the health conditions of their children, not how many cases are in a school on a given day. Parents of children with health issues should give real consideration to the virtual option, but at the end of the day it is the parent's decision and we will honor it. While we do not plan to go back to last year's practice of reporting on our website we are still being transparent in sharing numbers of cases with those who want that information.

Parents can email our Director of Nursing Crystal Holcomb to request a weekly number of positive cases in a particular school.

Director Holcomb can be reached at [cbholcomb@habershamschools.com](mailto:cbholcomb@habershamschools.com)

Our Principals have also been instructed to share weekly numbers upon request.

## **We are currently in a surge, but the situation will improve. Despite increased cases our students are doing well.**

While we are going through a period where the number of cases is higher, the data continues to show that the virus poses minimal risk to healthy students. We plan to continue offering in-person instruction for students. School is without a doubt the best place for healthy students.

## **Virtual option is available for those students with health issues or for those who do not agree with the way we are handling the virus**

School is without a doubt the best place for healthy students, however, we do currently offer a virtual option for students with health issues. The virtual option is also available for parents who do not feel safe sending their children to school or who do not agree with the way we are handling the virus. If parents are interested in the virtual option they can contact their principal.

### **Staff Situation**

Our staff have had and will continue to have the opportunity to be vaccinated. We are hopeful that more of our staff members will take the vaccine. This is far and away the most beneficial step that can be taken right now. More staff receiving the vaccine will further protect those staff who may be at risk and will result in fewer staff being placed in quarantine and missing time with their students. The county health department has been great in helping get our staff vaccinated. They have made it clear that our staff members can show up at any time and can receive the vaccine of their choice. We did a vaccine clinic for staff at Wilbanks Middle School several weeks ago. We are offering another **vaccine clinic at Habersham Central High School on Aug. 31st 3:30 to 6:00 p.m.** This will also be an opportunity for staff to get their second dose if needed.

### **Moving Forward**

We will continue to monitor the entire situation and we will adjust our responses as needed. We are very optimistic that the current surge in cases will subside in the near future. Despite the current surge, we remain steadfast in our commitment to our parents and students to keep all schools open. Returning to a virtual option for even a temporary period would be detrimental to thousands of students and families. We will not panic or overreact to the current surge in cases. The bottom line is that we are planning to have school each day and our students will have the opportunity to learn. As superintendent, I have stood firm in my belief that school is the best and safest place for most students. That belief has not changed.