

Good Evening Gates County Public School Families:

As you know, Governor Cooper has implemented a three-phased approach to slowly lift restrictions while combating COVID-19, protecting North Carolinians and working together to recover the economy. In order to secure the safety and protection of children and their families across the state, Governor Cooper, in collaboration with the NC State Board of Education (NCSBE) and the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), closed public school buildings for in-person instruction through the 2019 – 2020 school year.

Since then, the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has worked closely with NCDPI and NCSBE to meet the nutritional, educational and child care needs of students during school closure, and plan for safely reopening schools for the 2020-2021 school year. Throughout the process, school, child care, child nutrition, and community leaders and stakeholders have been engaged to share ideas and provide input.

With reopening schools on the horizon, the Gates County administrative team has been in ongoing contact with the Governor's Office, the State Board, and DPI in their development of the StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit (K-12) for families, students, and local education leaders.

The Toolkit lays out a comprehensive set of baseline educational and health practices that all public schools must follow to minimize risk of exposure to COVID-19 for students, staff, and families.

Key information inside the Toolkit, illustrates how schools are directed to plan for reopening under three potential scenarios:

- ✓ Plan A: Minimal Social Distancing,
- ✓ Plan B: Moderate Social Distancing; or
- ✓ Plan C: Remote Learning Only

The Toolkit was developed using the most current CDC Guidance for Schools at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html> (this site is posted on our website) and includes requirements and recommended detail practices for eight areas:

- Social Distancing and Minimizing Exposure;
- Cloth Face Coverings;
- Protecting Vulnerable Populations;
- Cleaning and Hygiene;
- Monitoring for Symptoms;
- Handling Suspected, Presumptive or Confirmed Positive Cases of COVID-19;
- Communication and Combating Misinformation;

- Water and Ventilation Systems;
- Transportation; and
- Coping and Resilience.

Additionally, the Toolkit ...

- Includes a sample screening symptom checklist in English and Spanish,
- Provides a flow chart and protocol for handling suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19
- Information on infection control supplies and PPE schools may need. Of note, we have confirmed that State Emergency Management will be providing face shields, thermometers, surgical masks, and gowns for all public-school nurses and individuals delegated to perform medical tasks. We've arranged for convenience contracts for other supplies such as cloth face coverings and hand sanitizer to facilitate purchasing by public schools.

I know you have so many questions about what that means for the next school year, and we are working on answers. On July 1, 2020, the Governor's Office, the State Board, and DPI plan to announce which plan, Plan A, Plan B, or Plan C, school districts across the state will follow.

We would love your feedback on the current school closing. Please fill out the survey which is located on the webpage by June 22. Your participation is crucial to help us to finalize our plans so we can get specific details about the 2020-21 school year to our entire community as soon as possible.

Respectfully,

Dr. Barry Williams, Superintendent of Schools  
& the Gates County Board of Education