



7/13/2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Many of you participated in the survey which the school district issued a few weeks ago regarding our plans for the re-opening of Thomas County Schools this fall. We very much appreciate your input, and we have utilized it as we have developed our plans for the new school year.

The earlier survey was a non-binding interest survey. As the start of the school year is approaching, we need to begin assigning students to instructional programs and classes. Therefore, the time has come for you and your family to make a decision about which educational option you will choose for your child(ren) for the fall of 2020.

In our earlier survey, about 80% of the parents indicated that they would like for their children to return to the traditional classroom. The other 20% of the respondents indicated that they were not yet comfortable returning their child to school and wanted to at least explore digital options for their children before making a final decision. Because the Thomas County School System wishes to meet the educational needs of all students while being responsive to parental concerns, the system is offering three educational options for students this fall.

This correspondence is intended to give you additional information about your options and to request that you select the educational program that you desire for your child for the fall.

We would like to hear from everyone by Friday, July 17. If we have not heard from you by Friday, July 17, someone from our school system will attempt to contact you. **If you do not complete the online registration process and if we are unable to reach you, your child will be assigned to the traditional school program,** the option chosen by most parents for their children.

First, a couple of important details: In order to give us time to make sure that we are ready to receive students in each of our programs, **the start of the school year for students has been delayed until Monday, August 10.** Teachers will return as originally scheduled on July 27, but students will return on August 10.

Second, whether you are planning for your child to return to traditional school or if you want to select a home-based option, we urge you to choose a Thomas County School System program. Many non-public schools are promoting on-line programs for K-12 students. If you select one of those programs, your local school system will not be able to support your child in the way that we can do when you are enrolled in the programs that are under our jurisdiction. We have worked hard to provide an option to meet each family's needs and preferences, and we would like to have an opportunity to speak with you before you commit to any program that is not offered through our school system. Only those students who enroll in a program offered through Thomas County Schools will be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities sponsored by our school system.



Here is a little more information about our three options.

The Traditional Option: The traditional program will be very similar to the way our schools have functioned in the past with a few adjustments that are intended to protect the health and safety of our students and staff until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. These guidelines will be enhanced or relaxed based upon the spread rate of the virus within our area and as dictated by health professionals and/or state officials. Here are a few of the guidelines that we will follow:

- **Students will be required to wear masks or other facial coverings over their noses and mouths while they are on a school bus and when they are in hallways, drop-off or pick-up areas, or other common areas.** Wearing the masks will be **encouraged** in classrooms and other smaller settings. There is strong scientific evidence to document that face masks reduce the spread of the virus. The school system will provide each student with two reusable, washable masks. Students may also provide their own masks. It will be the parent's responsibility to launder reusable face masks so that students will have a clean one each day. The school system will provide disposable face masks for students who lose or forget their masks. We will not permit the wearing of face masks to become a disciplinary issue. Students who do not wear them will be reminded of the requirement and offered an opportunity to comply. Students who refuse to wear a mask where required will be sent home until they are ready to comply. Students who have a medical reason not to wear facial coverings may be exempted if they present a note signed (original signature required - not stamped) by a medical doctor (M.D.) stating the reason that the student should not wear a mask. Parents who do not feel that they can support this requirement should select one of our digital learning options.
- Staff members will wear masks in hallways and commons areas and will have the option to wear masks and/or face shields in classrooms. Some of our staff members have underlying health conditions which warrant special precautions.
- As long as public health guidance discourages large group assemblies of students, hot breakfast and lunch meals will be served in the classrooms rather than the cafeteria. Meal choices will be limited, but we will make accommodations for students who have allergies or other special dietary needs.
- The temperatures of all students and staff members will be checked upon their arrival at school each day. Anyone with a temperature above 100.4 will be sent home and referred for medical evaluation. There will be a designated area at each school for those with elevated temperatures to wait for transportation. This area will be sanitized frequently.
- Parents will be expected to keep students who have a fever at home until the student is fever free without medication to lower the temperature for 72 hours.
- Visitors to the school will be limited. Parents participating in meetings with staff members will be screened for temperature and asked to answer routine COVID-19 screening questions before proceeding into the school.
- Water fountains will be closed. Students will be encouraged to bring a water bottle from home. We are working with school partners who may provide reusable water bottles for students. Water bottles and/or bottled water will be provided for students who do not have a water bottle.



- Hand sanitizer will be provided in classrooms and on school buses. The school system will implement enhanced cleaning protocols in all classrooms, restrooms, and on school buses. Students will be allowed to bring hand sanitizer from home if they would like to bring their own.
- We will enhance the digital component of all of our instructional programs to prepare students for online instruction should in-person instruction be interrupted by short-term or long-term classroom or school closures that may be made necessary due to developing health situations. Students will be oriented to on-line learning programs and platforms early in the year and will use them as enhancements to in-person instruction so that any transition to home-based instruction would be as seamless as possible. In the event of a classroom, school, or district closure, the regularly assigned teacher will support home-based instruction until school reopens.
- Students will be assigned seats on school buses.

The Remote Classroom Option: We have introduced the term “remote classroom” to refer to the on-line learning option that is most like a traditional classroom. This option will provide a Thomas County teacher or a group of teachers for each student. These teachers will teach from a classroom at the grade-level appropriate school and will originate daily, live interactive lessons on-line.

Remote Classrooms will follow the school system calendar and schedule. Parents selecting this option should commit to provide each of their children a structured setting where he or she can participate in daily lessons that will last the majority of the regular school day.

Students will be expected to log-on with a camera and microphone capable device provided by the system and will participate in classroom activities very much the same as they would if they were in school. Students participating in the remote classroom will have scheduled times each school day to logon and participate in interactive lessons. Parents will be expected to monitor young children and support the teacher’s classroom expectations. The school system will provide a Chromebook to students who select this option. Reliable Internet connectivity is required for this option. The school system will make reasonable efforts to assist families with gaining internet connectivity, but we are aware that there are some areas of our county that do not have reliable internet or internet at all. Getting students to a location where they can have daily internet activity will be the parents’ responsibility. If you do not have internet service and would like to explore your options, please contact the Buzz Line at 229-413-1234.

The remote classroom option for Pre-K and kindergarten students will feature shortened days with on-line reading and math lessons designed to teach pre-kindergarten skills and prepare students for the next grade. Parents or guardians selecting this option should plan to have an adult support the student each day as they complete the online classes. Parents should plan to spend additional time beyond the online classes reading with their children.

In grades PK-4, one or more teachers will be assigned to teach the remote academic and exploratory classes. Each student will be assigned to a specific teacher. In grades PK-2, students



will have the same teacher for all academic classes. In grades 3 and 4, students will have two teachers for their academic subjects just as they would with the traditional classroom option.

In grades 5-8, students will have a different teacher for each academic subject. Remote learning students will have exploratory options including Spanish, computer applications, health, and physical education.

In grades 9-12, students will have a normal high school schedule with a separate teacher for each subject. Selected teachers at Thomas County Central High School will have one or more sections of their schedules assigned to teach students remotely. Courses from each academic area and most elective areas will be offered, but the selections will be limited. Students and parents will work with the school counselors to develop each student's schedule and to keep the student on track for graduation.

Students selecting the remote classroom option should expect to stay in their remote classes for at least one nine weeks. Students may transition between remote and in-person classes at the change of each grading period.

Students choosing the remote classroom option will have Thomas County teachers who teach daily at their assigned school. They will be available for in-person or on-line meetings with students and parents and will provide other academic support as needed. Students and parents will have access to and support from school counselors and administrators to help solve problems that arise just as they would if they were taking classes in the school building.

Students taking remote classes may participate in extracurricular activities sponsored by the school system. School meals will also be provided for students enrolled in the Remote Classroom option.

The Virtual School Option: The virtual school option provides an opportunity for students to take classes through an external provider who partners with Thomas County Schools. K-12 and Georgia Virtual School are Thomas County's current virtual school partners. **Students who participate in a virtual school option through Thomas County Schools will remain enrolled in the school system and will be eligible to participate in extracurricular activities sponsored by the school system. School meals will also be provided for students enrolled in the Virtual School option.** Virtual school classes are taught by teachers who are NOT Thomas County employees. The format of these classes can vary depending upon the grade level and subject. Many of these classes are nonsynchronous, meaning that all students do not have to participate in the lessons at the same time. Many of the lessons are pre-recorded or are text or digitally based. These classes typically require a heightened level of student self-discipline and motivation or a higher level of parental involvement and coaching as there is less consistent teacher involvement than in either the traditional or remote classroom models. Thomas County administrators have no supervisory authority over teachers in the virtual school model. Parents and students will work via computer or over the phone with the online teachers to resolve any issues that may arise. For more information about virtual school options, contact Thomas County Schools' Virtual Schools Coordinator, Mrs. Cara Hankinson at 229-225-4380, ext. 166. Parents deciding for their child to enroll in the virtual school option should plan for their students



to stay in this program for at least a full semester (half year). We trust that we have provided an option to meet the needs of every student. If you have any questions about which option to select for your child(ren), please call the Buzz Line at 229-413-1234. Someone from our system will be happy to answer your questions and help you select the option that is best for your child.

Once you have made a decision, please complete the online registration form found at this link by Friday, July 17: [Thomas County Schools Instructional Option Registration Form](#).

We would like to receive a registration for all students, but students for whom no registration is received will be enrolled in the traditional option. We will endeavor to make space available in the desired instructional model for all students whose registrations are received by Friday, July 17. Registrations received after July 17 will be assigned to an instructional model based on parental choice **and** availability of space. The traditional option will always be available to students.

We are always happy to talk with you by phone or in person to resolve any concerns that you have about your child's education and safety. We are committed to providing an educational option that is right for every child.

Thank you for your support of Thomas County Schools.

Sincerely,

Lisa Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent