



September 30, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We will soon complete our first month of the 2020-2021 school year. I am so very proud of our students and the way that they have responded to the opening of the school year and the many new routines that we have implemented to help keep them and our staff healthy.

I am also very thankful for our dedicated school system employees who are going beyond the call of duty every day to make sure that all of our children have a safe place to work, learn, and have fun.

I am humbled by the trust that you as parents have placed in us, and I appreciate the confidence that you have shown in us as you have enrolled your child with us this year. We dedicate ourselves to earning that trust each day, and you have my assurance that every decision we make is focused on maintaining a safe and healthy school for your child to attend.

We were glad to be able to offer our families choices in instructional formats this year to address each child's and each family's situation. Nearly three-fourths of our students are attending on-campus, traditional classes this school year with the remaining participating in our remote classroom or virtual school options. We welcome our remote and virtual students back into the traditional classrooms whenever that choice seems right for each family.

Whether your child is participating on campus or through one of our online options, we are very thankful to have them as a part of Thomas County Schools.

To our families with students attending on campus, we need your continued help to maintain the health and safety for our students and staff.

- Please make sure that the contact information we have on file for your child(ren) is up-to-date. You can check this within Parent Portal or by contacting your child's school. This includes current phone numbers and addresses for you and any additional contacts.
- If your child has been diagnosed with COVID-19, suspected to have COVID-19, or was exposed/has been in close contact with someone that currently has or had COVID-19, please adhere to the Georgia Department of Health (GaDPH) and school guidelines and keep your child at home until you are told that it is safe for him or her to return. If your child has a need to quarantine or isolate as a result of exposure outside the school and if the school system is not aware of your child's situation, please contact Christy Glass, our System Lead COVID-19 Nurse at 229-225-4380 (office), 229-289-5660 (cell), or cglass@tcjackets.net, so that she can make sure that we are supporting your child.

In order to ensure our community is provided with the most recent and accurate COVID-19 system data going forward, weekly status reports will be published on Fridays by the end of the day. Each report will include the total number of **new** districtwide COVID-19 cases as well as the total number of **new** quarantine cases for employees and students. The reports can be accessed on our system website at www.tcjackets.net. In accordance with the Georgia

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Department of Public Health's Administrative Order, schools work diligently to ensure that proper guidelines are followed to isolate the student/staff diagnosed with COVID-19, identify close contacts, and sanitize appropriate areas of the school.

Our school system has worked closely with local public health officials to continually monitor all reports of positive tests for COVID-19, symptoms related to COVID-19, and potential exposures to positive cases. When there is a positive student or employee case reported, the following steps are taken:

- Our System Contact Tracing Team is immediately notified of any positive COVID-19 case. Christy Glass, our System Lead COVID-19 Nurse, handles all reported student COVID-19 positive cases and student quarantine cases. Brecca Pope, our Director of Administrative Services, handles the COVID-19 and close contact cases involving any system employees.
- The Team members work with the Thomas County Health Department to notify direct contacts and handle each case according to the GaDPH guidelines. Individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 are instructed to isolate for a minimum of 10 days and until symptom-free for at least 24 hours. Thorough interviews of staff and students are conducted to contact trace each case individually. Close contacts of positive cases are identified through contact tracing and are informed to quarantine for 14 days. Per GaDPH guidelines, direct or close contacts are identified as being within six feet of someone who tested positive for COVID-19 for a cumulative 15 minutes or more in a 24 hour period. In order to maintain privacy and confidentiality, the names of individuals are not shared when notifying direct contacts, and only those who are affected will be contacted. If employees or parents do not receive a call from one of our Contact Tracing Team members or from the Thomas County Health Department, the employee or child was not directly exposed or did not have close contact as defined by the GaDPH guidelines.

Today, we are publishing our COVID-19 data for the past three weeks. In our most recent data for the week of September 21-25, you will notice the number of cases within the school system is very low. The positive case count is about two tenths of one percent for students (2 students out of a 1000) and less than one percent for staff. Around 2.5 percent of our students have been quarantined due to exposure to someone with COVID-19, whether that exposure occurred at school or elsewhere in the community. Even though these numbers are very low, we take every case seriously and will continue to work diligently until the COVID-19 threat subsides.

We greatly appreciate your continued support and cooperation in helping to follow the GaDPH and school guidelines that are in place to help us all. Our system is very fortunate to have parents and guardians who are as involved and deeply committed to their children's education, health, and safety and well-being as our Jacket family is. As the year continues to unfold, and we continue to face the challenges that 2020 has brought us, please remember, Thomas County Schools is your system and Thomas County is our community. Even in the face of pandemics and uncertainty, we are forever united to support our students and community. Again, thank you for your continued support and trust. We are in this together and will be stronger as a result. In all times, we will always be **One Jacket Family**.

Sincerely,

Lisa Williams, Ed.D.
Superintendent