

Pickens County schools announce reopening plan

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

EASLEY — The School District of Pickens County has released a 30-plus page reopening plan in which six-week schedules containing both face-to-face and online instruction will be used.

"In our first month of school, we will attempt to create a sense of belonging in all grade levels and to prepare for eLearning instruction," school superintendent Danny Merck said in the letter that is set to be sent to parents today. "The first two weeks of school will allow us to gather vital information from teachers, parents and students to adjust moving forward. To protect our students and to make sure we have a healthy workforce, these schedules will be updated periodically as we continue to monitor community

outbreaks of the virus."

Merck added that following the first two weeks of school, which begin Aug. 10, the district expects to alter its daily routines in every school "to provide an even safer environment as we monitor daily the safety and well-being of all students and employees."

The reopening plan states that parents or guardians will have a choice of allowing students to attend school through traditional, virtual or Pickens County Virtual Academy. Should they choose the virtual academy, the superintendent said the district has set the enrollment deadline for July 17.

Under the initial six-week schedule established by the school district, the first two weeks — Aug. 10-14 and Aug. 17-21 — will be for all

SEE PLAN, PAGE A3

School District of Pickens County Instructional Models for 2020-21 school year

Virtual

- Instruction will continue in a modified virtual format as scheduled or during any targeted closure
- Personalized daily instruction and support via Schoology and WebEx

Traditional

- School building(s) open with in-person instruction five days a week
- Schools will develop arrival and dismissal plans to decrease the number of students in common areas
- Full day structure with access to before- and after-school childcare and extracurricular activities

Pickens County Virtual Academy

- Accredited curriculum
- Students attending the Pickens County Virtual Academy will be considered a student within the district
- A School District of Pickens County teacher will be available to assist students
- Requires a commitment to remain with program for a set time period
- A new full-time learning program that will operate year round

Key Safety Precautions

- Bus capacities will be limited in attendance with state guidelines (maximum 39 passengers in elementary; 34 passengers in middle and high schools). Routes will be adjusted accordingly
- Post signs in classrooms, hallways and entrances to communicate how to stop the spread. COVID-19 symptoms, preventative measures including staying home when sick, good hygiene and school/district specific protocols
- Clean and/or disinfect frequently touched surfaces at least daily and shared objects after each use following SDPC Comprehensive Cleaning Program
- Daily health screening will occur for students and staff. A protocol for students and or staff will be established if they feel ill or experience symptoms when they come to school
- Providing hand sanitizer for students and staff. Students and staff will be strongly encouraged to wear masks
- Schools will develop arrival and dismissal plans to decrease the number of students in common areas
- Visitors and volunteers will be limited in buildings to reduce the number of individuals in buildings, offices and classrooms
- Use the master schedule to limit potential exposure: Elementary and middle students will remain with their homeroom students as much as possible; and high schools, will shift to the 4-by-4 daily schedule in order to reduce the number of weekly in-person contacts
- Turn off water fountains. Water bottle filling stations will be available and students and staff may bring water bottles from home

PLAN: 'Attempt to provide as much in-person instruction as possible'

FROM PAGE A1

students at school for face-to-face instruction; Aug. 24-28 only for students in special programs and early childhood (3K-second grades) to attend in person and eLearning online for all other students in grades 3-12; Aug. 31-Sept. 4, eLearning for all, with no students at schools; and Sept. 8-11 and Sept. 14-18 for all students, at school with face-to-face instruction.

Merck said while a schedule has been established, it will have to be fluid.

"We will attempt to provide as much in-person instruction as possible during each six-week schedule, but the flu season, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, may result in more eLearning," Merck said. "If our county continues to receive a high spread rating from DHEC, then it is likely we will continue with the same six-week schedule as the first six weeks."

Merck said the school district has identified students in special programs and early childhood (3K-second grade) as the highest priority for in-person face-to-face instruction. The superintendent added those groups will receive face-to-face instruction at times when other student groups are being taught through intermittent virtual or virtual academy. Students targeted in the special programs group will be notified directly by the school district's special services department.

As far as visitors go, only essential visitors and partners will be allowed to regularly take part in district activities in order to reduce the number of people in buildings. They must also adhere to the same procedures as other adults, including daily symptom checks and wearing of face coverings.

Also included in the plan are cleaning checklists in which custodial crews will clean classrooms and office areas, focusing on disinfecting high-touch areas and conducting regular walkthroughs with supervisors to identify areas requiring additional cleaning.

Small group programming will be allowed, but safety precautions are required to ensure students and staff are safe and that guidelines must be followed.

Specific examples include: installation of foaming hand sanitizer dispensers in each classroom; conducting daily health screens for staff and students; face coverings, such as masks or face shield, for all employees when physical distancing is not possible; bus drivers required and students encouraged to wear face masks or coverings; posted signs throughout buildings promoting safe practices and social distancing;

marking on floors for social distancing in areas where lines typically form; and regular cleaning and disinfecting following the school district's Comprehensive Cleaning Program.

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The district will also follow DHEC and state guidelines as close as possible regarding bus capacity (50 percent) and cleaning procedures in between routes. Assigned seating will be required for all routes and first priority for any shared seats will go to members of the same household.