

A message from the Howell County MO. K-8 School District Superintendents

We want to share with our students, parents, employees, and communities that we have been, and will continue to be, developing plans and protocols for a return to a regular and seated school term for the 2020-21 school year beginning in August and continuing with limited or no interruptions until May 2021. Having school is, no doubt, first and foremost an academic endeavor that will always be our primary focus. However, there are also many other aspects of the student experience that go along with having school (social interactions, food security, a sense of purpose, a sense of routine and focus, etc.) that are both positive and irreplaceable for kids, families and communities in Howell County.

As school leaders who also have spouses and/or our own children on our campuses daily; we do not want to be perceived as indifferent to the safety of our parents and communities concerning COVID-19. We are not under any preconceptions that Howell County is immune or will not feel the impact from COVID-19 in our rural communities. We, as a group, met with Howell County's Health Department Director, Chris Gilliam last week seeking guidance for reopening our schools in August, and we intend to follow his guidance and suggestions for opening and having school. No person can guarantee that our schools will never see a case of COVID-19. **We believe that extended school closures as the ultimate precaution (and standard practice) against COVID-19 is certainly not in the best educational interests of our students, and is not the logical and practical path forward on an indefinite basis for Howell County students under present conditions!** So many of our students lack the infrastructure that would enable them to learn from home that anything other than seated school (with appropriate precautions) is not a real, viable, long-term option.

As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, we have been communicating and coordinating with the Howell County Health Department in developing protocols related to COVID-19 in conjunction with Missouri DESE and other state-wide agencies on best practices to control, limit, and mitigate COVID-19 in the school setting. These protocols are still being fine-tuned at this time, but will focus on multiple daily incidence of sanitation practices specifically related to airborne and surface control of viruses and bacteria. Everyone entering the buildings will have their temperature checked and those with a fever will be sent home immediately. Many procedures are being implemented in each of our districts to address all areas of our campuses and to ensure our communities and families that additional measures are being taken above and beyond the pre-COVID-19 world's normal procedures.

All of these protocols and plans are being prepared with the goal of establishing a safe perimeter for students and employees once they enter our campus buildings. We also want to be clear that we are telling our parents and communities with this message that it would be physically impossible for us to guarantee a constant six feet of social distance for every student and employee for the entire school day, although that is our goal. Once an individual passes the initial entry protocols and has been allowed to enter the building, we intend to provide the same world-class instruction we have provided in the past, albeit with some limited modifications and changes in routines that focus on virus and bacteria control and spacing/distancing of students, as practical.

Thanks to each of you for helping to make this difficult enough in normal times job easier for us now when it is more difficult than ever. With your help and assistance, we will get through these hard times and continue to produce student learning that is better than ever before!

Signature Page

Wayne Hewitt

Superintendent Glenwood

Charley Weltering

Glenwood President of the Board

Don Sybow

Fairview Superintendent

Ben Mart

Fairview President of the Board

John R. Bee

Junction Hill Superintendent

J. E. Hill

Junction Hill President of the Board

Maurice Hally

Howell Valley Superintendent

Chris Stoltz

Howell Valley President of the Board

Melanie Bunn

Richards Superintendent

Prin L. Vonder

Richards President of the Board

Signatures indicate an acknowledgment and support for Howell County K-8 Schools' "Back to School" initiative during the COVID-19 era. July, 2020.