



Gaston Public Schools

District 511JT – 300 Park St. Gaston, OR 97119

www.gastonk12.org

July 29, 2020

Subject: Gaston School District to start the school year with virtual instruction

Dear Gaston School District Community;

We continue to monitor the ongoing spread of COVID-19 in our county and state while planning for the 2020-21 school year. A lot has changed since we first closed our school buildings to prevent the spread of COVID-19: New research from around the world has helped us understand COVID-19 a lot more, and health experts in our local county and from across the state have now developed guidance for how to safely reopen school buildings.

Importantly, countries that have managed to safely reopen school buildings have done so with declining infection rates and on-demand testing. Presently, Oregon has neither. The escalating infection rates of the past few weeks make it clear the pandemic is not yet under control.

County-specific metrics [released by the governor, Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Department of Education](#) further warn of the risk in reopening our school buildings too soon.

Given these factors, Gaston School District will begin the 2020-21 school year in a “Comprehensive Distance Learning” model on September 1st.

For many that this is a disheartening message to receive. There’s nothing we all want more than to be together again in our schools. There is no replacement for the learning that takes place in person in a school setting. We look forward to experiencing that again (as I’m sure you do too). We will reevaluate this decision on a periodic basis based on state and county-level metrics. Currently, we expect to be in a comprehensive distance learning framework through the first quarter of the school year.

We know distance learning presents its own set of challenges, as we experienced this spring. Many students and families struggled physically, emotionally, and professionally in a remote setting. Parent and staff feedback in a recent survey indicated that the distance learning model used last spring was not successful for *all*. As a district, state and nation, we were in a reactionary mode and developed the best system we could, with our limited training and resources for distance learning. Distance learning this fall will be different. We will create this system proactively, with time and experience on our side. Here is a small list of some of those differences:

- We have more time to plan. We will offer professional development to our staff and schedule virtual training sessions for parents and students.
- We will have a standards aligned, rigorous curriculum, for our Pre-K -12 students. We will be using “Acellus” as our online curriculum for K-12th graders (we are still working on PK curriculum). This will be the same model that many of the districts in the northwest region of Oregon will be offering their students.
- We will have a universal learning management platform, CANVAS, for all Pre-K -12th grade students. This platform will offer one login page where students and parents can access all the remote learning resources they need.
- We will have daily check in with students, and create a daily schedule for all learners.
- We will not be using a Pass/Incomplete grading system and will reinstate the standard grading system.
- We will provide breakfast and lunch for students.
- We will use time in our instructional day to teach and reinforce the behaviors that students will need to practice when they return to the school buildings. Mask wearing, social distancing, hand washing.... Will become part of our curriculum in preparation for our Hybrid model.

I know with this decision there will come with many questions and concerns. Please continue to use info@gastonk12.org email address to submit questions you have. The district will be using these questions to create a FAQ concerning the 2020-2021 school year. The FAQ page will be posted on our district website, www.gastonk12.org. I will be hosting virtual meetings and sending out frequent written updates, via our website and Facebook page.

Our district leadership team will continue to work with staff, students, and families as we reshape our fall plans for this current, very unfortunate reality. I am thankful for your continued patience and flexibility as we work out our new systems together, looking forward to returning the in-person instruction in the future, as guidelines indicate a safe return to school.

Looking Forward,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan McKenzie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' and 'M'.

Susy McKenzie
Gaston School District Superintendent