July 16, 2020: Transitioning Back to School - Update

This is a challenging time for many. Large urban, and in some cases, suburban school districts both near and far are making announcements about a fully remote return to school. Others are announcing a full in-person return. Some are having a public debate with their local unions. Others are battling this out in the social media arena. It must be stated that what is being shared today is subject to change as public health guidance and conditions may change.

Last week, I stated that we would share our Return to School and Reopening Plan. Our plan meets the expectations listed in the recent statement from the Illinois Education Association, the state’s largest education employee’s organization and affiliate of our local Teacher Association (GEA). Our plan follows the State Guidance for the reopening of schools and represents a culmination of effort from many. Our Transition to In-Person Learning Committee, our Administrative Team, Board of Education members, Local Union leaders, Parent Preview & Focus Group, among others, have helped us build and sharpen a flexible plan that serves a diverse community as we continue to prepare for a Smart Start to the 2020-21 school year.

We know how important it is to understand the needs of each of our Gower families; including those that reside in Willowbrook and Burr Ridge, as well as our staff, that come from all parts of the greater Chicagoland area and are proud to serve the Gower Community. The balancing act of meeting such a wide variety of needs is not an easy one. But it is necessary to recognize - especially given the current climate around reopening schools - that it is our intent to make the best decision on behalf of many.

Some of our families have expressed concerns that may require remote access to our eLearning Plan. Others have expressed that they are running out of options and they need their child to return to school and receive in-person services that they depend on. This is precisely why we are asking parents to review the plan, including the Smart Start revisions to the school calendar, and complete the Return to School Parent Preference Survey for each of their children enrolled in Gower School District.

Indicating your preference today does not mean that it is a final decision. It is an indication of your child’s current needs and will help us plan in the weeks to come. This survey will remain open through August 7th to allow parents to change their preference as more details are shared in each of the remaining weeks before the start of the school year. This approach honors and empowers each of our families to make a decision that best suits their needs. We recognize that this situation is ever-changing and know that the needs of each member of your family may be different. We are committed to providing a solution that helps bring our district motto to life - Children at their Best!

We ask that you complete the survey as soon as you are comfortable doing so and continue to keep an eye out for our Return to School Community Updates as well as our Gower West and Gower Middle school newsletters. Future updates are expected to include even greater details about our In-Person and eLearning Plans, Parent Tips and Recommendations, logistical details, and other important information.

With the new Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
vsimon@gower62.com
Superintendent of Schools

Web Resources:
- Illinois State Board of Education - Covid-19 Updates and Resources
- Illinois Department of Public Health - Covid-19 Updates and Resources
- DuPage County Health Department - Covid-19 Updates and Resources

Children at their Best!
July 23, 2020: Transitioning Back to School - Update

The challenges we face continue. School districts are continuing to make adjustments and individual school communities are making sure their voice is represented in local Return to School plans. The same can be said in Gower. This update may not provide all of the answers to questions you may have, but it will bring us a step closer to our Smart Start to the 2020-21 school year and will represent some of the progress made since last week.

Right to the Point/Executive Summary:

- Our Return to School Parent Preference Survey currently indicates a 74% preference for in-person learning
- The Illinois State Board of Education released their updated Remote Learning and Transition Considerations just a few hours ago: Fall 2020 Learning Recommendations
  - Gower was on the Advisory Group that assisted with the development of this document
- Our Return to School and Reopening Plan was approved by the Board of Ed. and is aligned to IDPH/ISBE
- Our Smart Start calendar for 2020-21 was revised and also approved unanimously by the Board of Education
  - The first nine (9) days of school are half-day In-Person Learning/half-day eLearning
  - District-wide eLearning half days each Friday (Aug. 28-Sept. 18); alternating Fridays (Sept. 25-Dec. 18)
- Return to School, Fall 2020 dedicated webpage added to our District and School sites for parent reference
- Gower West, Gower Middle, and Dist. Office Administrators will host virtual Lunch & Learns for parents
  - Join Zoom Meeting: Lunch and Learn - Virtual Office Hours - District Office on July 29 from 12-1pm Mobile: 312.626.6799 US, ID: 874 2414 2574, Passcode: 788837 (watch for school updates)

Our Return to School and Reopening Plan was approved unanimously on Tuesday night by our Board of Education. It was our first in-person meeting since March and gave the Board and guests an opportunity to walk through the plan in the new light of the data provided in the Return to School Parent Preference Survey. Does that mean the plan is etched in stone? Of course not. Everyone involved understands that public health guidance and conditions may change, but this decision gives us solid footing to continue planning for the reopening of school.

The Parent Preference Survey data continues to come in and the entire Team at Gower appreciates the response to the survey since it was launched last week. With 700 entries, or about 80% of our student body, the current preference is **74% for In-Person and 26% for eLearning**. It is critical to point out that the Return to School Parent Preference Survey remains open and we encourage those who have not indicated their preference yet to do so as it helps our ongoing planning process. It is also important to keep in mind that our parents can indicate a change in preference by simply taking the survey again.

Our plan continues to be sharpened by the input we receive from across the Gower Community. It follows the State Guidance for the reopening of schools, and includes ongoing parent feedback, support and input from our staff, and adjustments based on the ISBE Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Given our alignment to the most current state guidelines, I have found that the ISBE FAQ document is one of the most helpful resources to answer many of the parent questions we receive as we continue to share details through our updates.

In response to the number of questions we receive, the administrative team will hold Virtual Lunch & Learn Sessions weekly through the start of the school year. The first of these 1 hr sessions will begin next week with Gower West scheduled for Tuesday, the District Office on Wednesday, and Gower Middle on Thursday. Here is the meeting link for the District Office session for July 29th from 12-1 p.m. Our School Updates will include school specific meeting information. Additionally, we are adding a Return to School Plan webpage on our District and School Websites. This webpage has just been launched, but will serve as a convenient resource for all of the upcoming meeting links and associated materials. Again, we ask that you keep an eye out for ongoing communication and continue to reach out to us with your questions and concerns.

Children at their Best!
As I stated during the Board meeting on Tuesday night, all of our parents and everyone on staff want a Return to School plan that helps keep our students safe. I believe that our Smart Start approach represents our best effort to do just that while still striking the important balance of meeting the needs of many. The following image is a simple cut out of the first two months of the 2020-21 school year as we have scheduled in our plan today. It is important to review the opening two weeks of school as it includes an entirely new type of day on our calendar: an ED’e’ Day. On ED’e’ days (in blue), students are dismissed according to the half-day schedule and spend the afternoon in an eLearning environment. In addition eLearning, or simply ‘e’ days (in purple), are scheduled district-wide for each Friday from Aug. 28 - Sept. 18 and then on alternating Fridays from Sept. 25 - Dec. 18. On these eLearning days, students across the district will engage in learning from a remote setting for the morning session only as our staff will be using the afternoons for ongoing planning.

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We believe that this hybrid approach of ED’e’ days, coupled with the moderate use of district-wide eLearning days, will allow our students and families to ramp up to the restart of school in Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois Plan. We also believe that this Smart Start approach allows our staff to key in on the ‘readiness metrics’ (mask wearing, attendance, behavior, arrival/dismissal, physical spacing, etc.) that will ultimately be used to make an informed decision that moves us from an ED’e’ schedule back to a Full Day schedule. In essence, this is what we mean when we say that we are using a Smart Start schedule. We want to be able to give everyone involved the best opportunity to have a successful start to the 2020-21 school year.

Please complete the Return to School Parent Preference Survey if you have not done so already. Also, please continue to keep an eye out for our Return to School Community Updates as well as our Gower West and Gower Middle school newsletters as we remain committed to providing you with the information you need to make the best decision for your family.

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
ysimon@gower62.com
Superintendent of Schools

Web Resources:
- Illinois State Board of Education - Covid-19 Updates and Resources
- Illinois Department of Public Health - Covid-19 Updates and Resources
- DuPage County Health Department - Covid-19 Updates and Resources
July 30, 2020: Return to School - Update

“We’re in this Together” means exactly that, and we appreciate your ongoing patience, feedback, and support. Your feedback on the ‘summary/bullet list’ format from last week’s Community Update was positive so we are taking it a step further this week to get right to the point. We know how much the Gower Community invests in our schools and want to be sure that we provide the information you need to make the best decision for your family.

Right to the Point:

- There have been no significant changes to our Return to School and Reopening Plan as previously shared
- Public health conditions and public health guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan
- Our Return to School Parent Preference Survey data, to date, indicates a 74% preference for in-person learning with close to 500 families sharing their preference for the start of the year (~85% completion)
  - Gower West has an 88% completion rate (454/518 expected) with 72% indicating in-person
  - Gower Middle has an 81% completion rate (301/373 expected) with 75% indicating in-person
- Our Return to School Parent Preference Survey remains open: Please complete the survey if you have not done so already. If your preference has changed, simply fill out a new survey.
- The ISBE Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document is helpful to understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind our local Return to School and Reopening Plan
  - A Gower School District Parent FAQ is expected to be included in our Community Update next week as we are grouping common questions from the virtual Lunch & Learns and ongoing feedback
- Our Smart Start calendar allows us to focus on and develop a sense of connectedness with all of our students
  - The first nine (9) days of school are half-day In-Person/half-day eLearning (ED’s Days or hybrid)
  - District-wide eLearning half-days each Fri. (Aug. 28-Sept. 18); alternating Fri. (Sept. 25-Dec. 18)
  - A final decision to transition to a full day schedule on Sept. 8th - or extend the ED’s Days - will be made on Sept. 3rd in consultation and coordination with our local teachers’ union
  - “...you can’t touch their minds until you touch their hearts” - is Gower’s easter egg/lasting contribution placed in the Fall 2020 Learning Recommendations from the Illinois State Board of Education (p. 76)
- Recent attention has been given to the recent joint statement from the Illinois Federation of Teachers and the Illinois Educators Association. I am pleased to share that our local union has been involved throughout the process and agree that our current approach abides by the safety measures outlined in official guidance
- We continue to receive questions about our eLearning plan. It is important to remember that the emphasis on the ‘e’ in our eLearning plan is for ‘engagement’.
  - Our staff are working hard and planning for an eLearning experience that will ‘look and feel’ different than the abrupt transition in the spring (more synchronous and more interactive)
- Visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials and upcoming virtual Lunch & Learn login info.
  - A Parent Checklist from the CDC has been added to help plan for the return to in-person learning

Our Smart Start approach allows our students, families, and staff to ramp up to the restart of school in Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois Plan and gives us the ability to make an informed decision about when to move to a Full Day. We understand that public health conditions and guidelines may change and could result in more restrictions (e.g. Split Schedule or Full Remote). If this occurs, changes to our plan will be recommended. We remain committed to working together to ensure that our plan is the best fit for our school community and ask that you continue reading our updates and newsletters and continue reaching out to us with your questions and concerns.

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
vsimon@gower62.com
Superintendent of Schools
August 6, 2020: Return to School - Update

Today marks the two week period before our students and families set their alarms to wake up for the First Day of School. We have done everything we can to ensure that our Return to School Plan meets the needs of our entire school community. Our families have the ability to exercise options. Our staff have been involved in the design of the plan from the start. Our local teachers’ union has thoroughly reviewed the plan, helped build it, and continue to share their support for our approach to reopening. And perhaps most importantly of all, our students, both in-person and eLearners, will be met with the same same goal in mind - making sure that what we do in and around our classrooms helps bring our school motto to life: Children at their Best!

Over the next 14 days it is important to do everything that YOU can to ensure a Smart Start to the school year. Practice the 3W’s - Wash your hands. Wear your mask. Watch your distance. Take another look at our Return to School webpage and the CDC Parent Checklist. Follow the Illinois Department of Public Health guidelines. And above all, continue to make good decisions that help keep you, your family, and the rest of our community safe.

Updates:

- We expect student schedules and bus information to be mailed home next week
  - The COVID-19 Symptom Free Self-Certification/Student Entry Card will be required to enter school/use our bus service (DAY 1 Self-Certification Card will be included in mailing)
- Please use the next two weeks to prepare for the Return to School. Practice the 3W’s (Wash. Wear. Watch.)
- Our local teachers’ union has thoroughly reviewed, helped build, and remains in strong support of the plan
- Final call to complete our Return to School Parent Preference Survey that will remain open through the weekend. If your preference has changed, simply fill out a new survey.
  - To date, parents indicate a 74% preference for in-person learning (90% parent completion rate)
  - Gower West now has a 93% completion rate (492/528 expected) with 71% indicating in-person
  - Gower Middle now has an 86% completion rate (319/371 expected) with 78% indicating in-person
- The ISBE Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document was updated on August 6th and continues to be helpful to understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind our local Return to School and Reopening Plan
- The Gower School District Parent FAQ can be found on our Return to School webpage
- Our Smart Start calendar allows us to extend the default ED’e’ (half-days) if needed
  - Readiness Metrics will be used to determine when a transition to full-day with lunch is appropriate
  - A final decision to transition to a full day schedule or not will be made by Sept. 3ed
- Visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials and upcoming virtual Lunch & Learn login info.
  - A Parent Checklist from the CDC has been added to help plan for the return to in-person learning
- Public health conditions and public health guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

We know this school year will be different and there will be important lessons learned along the way. I believe that some of what we learn and what we do in and around PK-12 schools will stick around in a post-COVID public school era for years to come. I also believe - and have seen first-hand in Gower - that “community challenges are met with community solutions”. We have a plan and we are ready to put it into motion and adjust as needed. We ask that you remain especially vigilant over these next two weeks to help us ensure a Smart Start. Stay safe. Stay informed. Stay connected. And, to take a page from our Capturing Kids’ Hearts model, Be What You Want To See.

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
vsimon@gower62.com
Superintendent of Schools

Children at their Best!
August 13, 2020: Return to School - Update

The finishing touches are taking place at each of our schools in preparation for the First Day of School. We have done everything we can to ensure that our Return to School Plan meets the needs of our entire school community. Families new to our community were on the Gower West campus today for appointment-based walkthroughs and to receive an important and appropriate welcome. Many of our visitors took advantage of parking at our Gower Middle Campus to shuttle on one of our buses for a new family bus orientation as well. This was a great way to test our procedures while being mindful of the 3W’s - Wash your hands. Wear your mask. Watch your distance.

Updates:

- Your child will need the **DAY ONE Student Entry Card** to ride a bus or enter school on the first day
  - The DAY ONE Card is being mailed home in batches today and tomorrow with Student Schedules, Class Assignments, Bus Route Information, and eLearner Info. - PLEASE WATCH YOUR MAIL.
- If your child is starting the year as an eLearner, information about DAY ONE login and meeting times will be emailed/posted by their Teacher(s) as part of our Teacher Institute Schedule on Aug 18th and 19th
- Our **Smart Start Calendar** allows us to extend the default ED’er (half-days) if needed
  - **Readiness Metrics** will be used to determine when a transition to full-day with lunch is appropriate
  - A final decision to transition to a full day schedule or not will be made by Sept. 3rd
- The **IDPH Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** document was initially posted on Aug. 12th, and provides additional guidance on the important questions of Management of Illnesses, School Closure, and Contact Tracing
- The **ISBE Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** and the **Gower School District Parent FAQ** documents are helpful to understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ behind our local Return to School and Reopening Plan
- Be sure to visit our **Return to School webpage** for reference materials related to our reopening plan
- Our Return to School Plan continues to be aligned to the **IDPH and ISBE Joint Guidance**
- Public health conditions and public health guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

As stated, this year will be different. Running an in-person and eLearning system simultaneously has not been done before. Our motivated and talented staff, along with an engaged and supportive school community, has been - and will continue to be - what separates us from many. Perhaps the following statement, shared as a joint public comment from our Board of Education during our meeting on Aug 11th best captures the efforts of the Gower School Community in its entirety as we prepare to begin an unprecedented school year.

This past year has been a trying time for communities across the globe. Navigating the challenges involved in providing effective instruction while maintaining a strong sense of community within school districts has pushed our nation’s educational institutions to their limits. The Gower 62 School District has proven itself to be a consistent example of stability, collaboration, and thoughtfulness grounded in a strong sense of community throughout this all. The tremendous efforts that have been, and remain, in place from all parties involved have helped maintain a cohesive and collaborative relationship across our local district. Open lines of communication, along with countless efforts to elicit feedback from various stakeholders, have helped to shape the reopening plan and have offered comfort and understanding to parents every step of the way. At a time when there is no clear right answer as to how to reopen school, the following quote by author Mark Twain comes to mind: “Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.” The Gower 62 Board of Education affirms its gratitude and pride in the Gower Team and the Gower Community for always doing its best to “do right.”

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
Superintendent of Schools

Children at their Best!
August 20, 2020: Return to School - Update - THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL IS TOMORROW

The finishing touches are behind us and our staff are ready for the first day of school tomorrow. I am proud of them. The eagerness is palpable. Despite the challenges that we have faced and the challenges that we might face moving forward, our focus has not changed - meeting the educational needs of our community.

Day 1 will not be perfect. Day 2 will be better. Be patient with us. If a bus is a bit behind schedule, it will be okay. If a link doesn’t work or a virtual connection, we will figure it out and be here to help. And if the parent drop-off takes a bit longer and is full of nervous energy, that’s because it probably is. And that too, is okay. This school year will be different. We have known that for months now. When I use the phrase, ‘Community Problems Require Community Solutions’, it is out of great respect for the Gower Community and the sense of ‘community’ at large.

A community is built to lift each other up; not tear each other down. Our default simply has to be finding a way to help and make things better; not to criticize and jeer from afar. These last six months have been difficult for many. Those directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and those trying to pick up the pieces and reassemble a sense of normalcy. Our residents of Burr Ridge may be familiar with the slogan, “The Cure is US”, as promoted by our village. I believe it captures the spirit of how we see ‘Community’ in Gower and the importance of pulling together to move forward.

Yes, we have concerns. Yes the guidelines from IDPH and ISBE are updated often. And yes, they are difficult to keep up with. But it can be done. Local doctors and nurses have reached out to us with tips for months. They have reminded us about an important perspective from the front line: that by following the safety guidelines in place we can remain safe. To be clear, opening tomorrow does not mean that we will remain open all year. And it does not mean that a full-day schedule is guaranteed on Sept. 8th. Our previous Community Updates have covered this. If there is a positive COVID-19 case in our school, we will initiate contact with the Local Health Department (that process has been tested and works), communicate with our families, and provide notification to anyone that may need to isolate or quarantine as a result. If it is determined that a temporary school closure, or an ‘adaptive pause’, is required to complete contact tracing and the necessary cleaning and disinfecting, then we will absolutely do so. And if the conditions call for ‘pivoting’ to a fully remote eLearning environment for the long term, we stand ready.

I realize that any COVID-19 related closure from this point forward will cause great difficulty for many. But the reality is that it may occur. And if so, we will deal with it the same way we have dealt with the updated guidance that was published today, last week, and the week before that. We will be deliberate and thoughtful. We will communicate with you directly. We will respond - not react - with the best interests of our students and staff in mind.

We work in the world of maybe and mights. We plan, and often hope for, the what ifs. We focus on the potential of each student - their dreams, their growth, their future. We see our students becoming successful adults from the very first day they walk into our school from the ages of 3 to 14. We stay the course to provide a safe, caring, and positive experience for every student that we teach. There are bumps along the way for every - single - one of them. We guide them, encourage them, and help them identify and overcome challenges. We are vigilant and we advocate for our students. Why? Because it matters. Because we love what we do. Because we are passionate about our work. And because we understand that the road less traveled, although difficult, may be the best course. We are Teachers!

- Stay home if you are sick & be mindful of the 3W’s - Wash hands. Wear a mask. Watch distance.
- Your child will need the DAY ONE Student Entry Card to ride a bus or enter school on the first day
- If your child is starting the year as an eLearner, use the DAY ONE login information sent home
- Be sure to visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials related to our reopening plan
- Public health conditions and guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
Superintendent of Schools

Children at their Best!
August 27, 2020: Return to School - Update: - Remember, tomorrow is an eLearning Day - Smart Start!

- We have had ONE (1) known positive case among our student body/staff since we started Aug. 21st
  - Districtwide notification was sent (8/26) and the situation was handled in accordance with our Return to School Plan and IDPH COVID-19 Exclusion Guidance
- Various students/staff have gone/stayed home with COVID-19-like symptoms and have followed protocol (e.g. alternate diagnosis and/or negative COVID-19 test) for a safe return to school/work
  - IDPH COVID-19 Exclusion Guidance helps clarify how such decisions are being made
- Our Week 1 Readiness Metrics indicate that we are currently NOT READY for a full-day schedule
  - A decision to extend our ED’e Half Day period beyond Sept. 8th will be made on Sept. 3rd
  - Our Readiness Metrics are a critical element of our Smart Start approach and used to include and amplify the voices of our Teachers and Staff across a 2-week period
  - Our staff remain committed to providing a safe learning environment while balancing the wide range of needs across our entire school community
- The CDC webpage, Operating Schools During COVID, was updated on Aug 21st and provides a range of strategies for schools to employ that align the actions we are taking with the current, county-level Community Spread of COVID-19 (minimal to moderate transmission in DuPage)
- Stay home if you are sick & be mindful of the 3W’s: Wash hands, Wear a mask, Watch your distance
- Be sure to visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials related to our reopening plan
- Public health conditions and guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

I do recognize that my Community Updates have been more focused on in-person learning and procedures for a number of weeks now. That does not mean that our eLearners are in any way less important or not being focused on. Every - Single - Student is important to us and I continue to ask for your patience and grace on behalf of our staff who are working hard to make something happen with close to no prior experience. And that holds true for our in-person program too. Exactly zero teachers in Gower have taught under these conditions before. They have been doing it for five days now. Exactly zero teachers in Gower have taught in-person and remote classes simultaneously before. They have been doing that now for five days as well. Progress over perfection is our reality.

COVID-19 has relegated everyone on staff to novice status. Despite the wealth of experience our staff - including me - has gained over the course of years and in some cases decades of service, are new at this. Being a novice in anything can be frustrating and overwhelming for everyone involved. It can bring a sense of hopelessness and an urge to quit. But there is another side. Novice status invites an eagerness to try. To see things differently and to discover new paths. The words resilience and grit get thrown around a lot in education these days and COVID-19 is forcing all of us to translate these words into action at the community level. I can't say this enough, and the recent statewide rules related to mask-wearing while dining out is yet another reminder - Community Problems Require Community Solutions.

I'm not one to look for excuses or give them. I see the word ‘fail’ as the First Attempt In Learning. We have high expectations in Gower. And having high expectations comes with pros and cons. Some pros: We are quick to offer our hand outward to help and do not throw them up in despair. We think outside of the box and try to find a way. Some cons: We are our own worst critics. We do not want to disappoint anyone. And we aim to get it all right the first time. From my view, we are getting there. I see heroes in action. Teachers and staff that understand the importance of what we are doing and working hard. Driving and riding our buses. Keeping our buildings clean and sanitized. Working in our classrooms. Balancing demands throughout the day to teach; to comfort; to connect; and to put out the small fires while remaining in-position to tackle the big ones. By far, the positive feedback and support from our Community has been overwhelming, and I am thankful for that. We all are. I am simply saying, ‘We hear you, and we will not stop trying to meet the wide range of needs across the Gower Community.’

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
Superintendent of Schools

Children at their Best!
September 3, 2020: Return to School - Update: - Remember, tomorrow is an eLearning Day - Smart Start!

Please be EXTRA SAFE this long weekend - especially if traveling and BE MINDFUL of the 3W’s

By YOU continuing to do YOUR part, WE can keep doing OUR part

- Students, Staff and Parents have been understanding, flexible, willing and able. They embody every bit and more of the meaning behind Community Problems Require Community Solutions
- We have had TWO (2) known positive cases since we started school on Aug. 21st
  - Low Risk Notification sent 8-26 in accordance with IDPH Exclusion Guidance
  - Low Risk Notification sent 8-30 in accordance with IDPH Exclusion Guidance
- Various students and staff have gone/stayed home with COVID-19-like symptoms, or as a Close Contact to a known COVID-19 case, and have followed protocol for a safe return to school or work
- After our second week of our Smart Start approach to reopening school, our internal Readiness Metrics indicate that we are PARTIALLY READY for a full-day schedule:
  - Gower West: 3rd and 4th grade will begin their full day schedule, next week, on Tuesday, Sept. 8th and will continue in full-day until further notice
    - We plan for 2nd grade to begin their full day schedule on Monday, Sept. 14th
      - 2nd grade will follow the ED’e’ schedule next week
    - We plan for 1st grade to begin their full day schedule on Monday, Sept. 21st
      - 1st grade will follow the ED’e’ schedule for the next two weeks
    - PreK and Kindergarten will continue to follow their half-day schedule to allow our youngest learners more time to adjust (current schedules are under review)
  - Gower Middle: 5th grade will begin their full day schedule, next week, on Tuesday, Sept. 8th and will continue in full-day until further notice
    - We plan for 6th-8th grade to begin their full day schedule on Monday, Sept. 21st
      - 6th-8th grade will follow the ED’e’ schedule for the next two weeks
  - School Principals will share more detailed information in their Weekly Updates tomorrow and will be sure to include grade-specific schedule and lunch information for those transitioning to a full day schedule next week
- We will reserve the option to move individual grade levels to a full day schedule earlier if possible
- Be sure to visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials related to our reopening plan
- Our local Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document was updated on Sept. 2nd
- Stay home if you are sick & be mindful of the 3W’s: Wash your hands Wear your mask Watch your distance
- Public health conditions and guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
Superintendent of Schools

Children at their Best!
September 10, 2020: Return to School - Update: - Remember, tomorrow is an eLearning Day - Smart Start!

Looking ahead and planning is important. It is the reason we were able to open school on time, in-person, and have been able to remain open. We also know that planning even further into the future is critical and will help ensure that Gower continues to be a destination district. We’ve been doing that! The proposed addition at Gower West is a good example of looking far ahead and preparing for the future.

Please visit our Campus Projects and Referendum page to see what we have planned for Gower West. This project will be on the ballot Nov. 3rd and we want to make sure our community is informed.

By YOU continuing to do YOUR part, WE can keep doing OUR part

- We have had TWO (2) known positive cases since we started school on Aug. 21st
  - Low Risk Notification sent 8-26 in accordance with IDPH Exclusion Guidance
  - Low Risk Notification sent 8-30 in accordance with IDPH Exclusion Guidance
- Various students and staff have gone/stayed home with COVID-19-like symptoms, or as a Close Contact to a known COVID-19 case, and have followed protocol for a safe return to school or work
  - Important note: IDPH Exclusion Guidance is expected to be updated in the coming days to allow the return from quarantine to be managed at the school level as they have been in Gower
  - Our Confirmation of Quarantine Completion Form has been added in response
- Our Smart Start approach to reopening school will continue next week as scheduled with:
  - Gower West: 2nd grade will begin their full day schedule next week, Monday, Sept. 14th, and will continue in full-day until further notice
    - We plan for 1st grade to begin their full day schedule on Monday, Sept. 21st
      - 1st grade will follow the ED’e’ schedule next week
    - PreK and Kindergarten will continue to follow their half-day schedule to allow our youngest learners more time to adjust (current schedules are under review)
  - Gower Middle: We plan for 6th-8th grade to begin their full day schedule on Mon., Sept. 21st
    - 6th-8th grade will follow the ED’e’ schedule next week
    - School Principals will share more detailed information in their Weekly Updates and will be sure to include grade-specific schedule and lunch information for those transitioning to a full day schedule
- Local area school districts have visited Gower to prepare for their own return to in-person plans
- Be sure to visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials related to our reopening plan
- Stay home if you are sick & be mindful of the 3W’s: Wash your hands - Wear your mask - Watch your distance
- Public health conditions and guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
Superintendent of Schools

Children at their Best!
Sept. 17, 2020: Return to School Update: Tomorrow is an eLearning Day! Review our Smart Start Calendar!

Since last week’s update, a number of parents have shared how surprised they were to read about the proposed addition at Gower West. Our Board of Education has been working hard to keep moving forward on this important Future Ready project despite the challenges of an extended school closure and being one of few school districts to reopen for in-person learning weeks ago.

To learn more, please visit our Campus Projects and Referendum webpage and consider joining the Gower Foundation’s Superintendent Chat later tonight at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom to hear about our efforts to date and answer any questions - RSVP here. The PTO is also hosting a fundraiser at Buona Beef from 5-10 p.m. tonight so it can very easily become an ‘all-things-Gower’ kind of night! The Foundation is planning to post a recording of tonight’s meeting on their website and has additional Chats set up for Oct. 1, Oct. 15, and Oct. 29; all ahead of the November 3rd Election where you will see Gower on the ballot!

By YOU continuing to do YOUR part, WE can keep doing OUR part!

- We have had THREE (3) known positive cases since we started school on Aug. 21st
  - The most recent case and subsequent Low Risk Notification - 9-17-20 was sent earlier today
  - Any future cases will be reported in accordance with IDPH Exclusion Guidance
- Our Smart Start approach to reopening school will continue as scheduled:
  - There is no eLearning Friday scheduled next week (They are now alternating Fridays through Dec.)
  - Gower West: 1st grade will begin their full day schedule next week, Monday, Sept. 21st
    - PreK and Kindergarten will continue to follow their half-day schedule until further notice
  - Gower Middle: 6th-8th grade will begin their full day schedule on Monday, Sept. 21st
  - School Principals will continue their Weekly Updates to share more detailed information that is school/grade level-specific and especially useful for those transitioning to a full day schedule
- New CDC Guidance was released on Sept. 15th and is designed to help school districts make decisions about their reopening plans - The guidance affirms our Return to School Plan and Smart Start approach and should help other districts tease out the differences between ‘it’s not safe’ and ‘we’re just not quite ready’
- As stated in our July 10th, Community Update, we made a commitment to provide weekly district updates through the start of the school year. Today marks our 10th issue in this Return to School Update series
  - We will return to our monthly, Community Update schedule each Thursday after our regularly scheduled Board meeting beginning next week and will share any COVID-19 notifications as needed
- Be sure to visit our Return to School webpage for reference materials related to our reopening plan
- Stay home if you are sick & be mindful of the 3W’s: Wash your hands, Wear your mask, Watch your distance
- Public health conditions and guidance may change and could cause a change to our plan

With the Gower Greeting,

Victor Simon III
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