



June 25, 2020: Transitioning Back to School - Update

The long-anticipated [Part 3 Joint Guidance](#) from the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Public Health referenced in our [Community Newsletter](#) last week was released on June 23rd. This 63 page document was released to school districts at the same time as the general public. It provides guidelines for reopening under [Phase 4](#) in the [Restore Illinois Plan](#) and is clear that the decisions and details are left to local school districts to decide. It is important to acknowledge that each school district is facing the challenge of developing a reopening plan that best fits their unique circumstance and best serves their respective school communities.

Since its release, Gower's Transition to In-Person Instruction Committee has been working to determine *what this means* for our school district. Over the last 48 hours, we have participated in follow-up webinars, held a number of in-person and remote meetings, and perhaps most importantly, built in the time to collaborate with our high school district as well as the other six neighboring Pre-K-8 school districts to find ways to team up where it makes sense and strengthen our individual plans by sharing resources and working together. *In other words, you can rest assured that we have been doing our job!*

We know how important schooling is and we are looking forward to having our students back in our buildings. We recognize how much our Community has invested in our schools and in our success and we are committed to an effective reopening and a successful 2020-21 school year. Our Board of Education has been paying close attention to our work, continues to receive updates around our plan, and plays an active role in developing a reopening plan that meets our district motto, *Children at their Best!*

The new state guidelines make it clear that in-person instruction is allowed in Phase 4 when following specific guidelines. This does not mean that the return to school will look the same as it did prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Appropriate social distancing, face coverings, enhanced sanitation measures, and other accommodations will be necessary to ensure the safety of students, staff, and their families. Phase 4 guidelines are listed below with our current status/likely approach provided for each of the requirements:

- **Require use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including face coverings;**
 - We are planning to provide two (2) cloth masks to each student and staff member to help meet the requirement. Parents are encouraged to make provisions for additional face coverings as they see fit.
 - Face shields and other accommodations may be used to meet the face covering requirement.
 - A *Parent Tips and Recommendations* document from our Committee is forthcoming.
- **Prohibit more than 50 individuals from gathering in one space;**
 - This requirement will result in changes to our cafeteria/lunch as well as other large-gatherings.
 - We will need to limit the number of students on our buses to 48 to accommodate space for a driver and another adult (e.g. aide, administrator, etc.) and meet this requirement
 - Parents are encouraged to transport their child(ren) to and from school each day when possible
 - A *Transportation Needs and Request Survey* from our Committee is forthcoming.
- **Require social distancing be observed, as much as possible;**
 - The layout of furniture in each of our classrooms is being rearranged to meet this requirement.
 - Social distancing reminders and markings will be used in common spaces, hallways, etc.
 - A *Parent Tips and Recommendations* document from our Committee is forthcoming.
- **Require that schools conduct symptom screenings and temperature checks or require that individuals self-certify that they are free of symptoms before entering school buildings;**
 - We are working to require parent and employee self-certification (signed document) and only conduct on-site screenings upon request or as needed based on presentation of symptoms.
- **Require an increase in school-wide cleaning and disinfection.**
 - This requirement has been met through a change in cleaning schedules and procedures and will continue throughout the 2020-21 school year.

Children at their Best!



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We will continue to prepare for the reopening of school for Phase 4 In-Person instruction under the state guidelines provided in a way that best meets the needs of our school community. We will continue to pay close attention to the state guidelines and public health data and work with our colleagues and partners at the regional and state level to make adjustments to our plan as needed. And perhaps of most importance, we will continue to communicate with our staff, parents and community as we move forward; using our [Community Update](#) to share more details regarding the return to school as we get closer to our first day of school - scheduled for Friday, August 21, 2020.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or either of our school offices if you have any specific questions or concerns. I thank you for your patience and understanding as we continue further into uncharted territory and thank you for your support of our children and our schools.

On behalf of the Gower Transition to In-Person Committee and with the new Gower Greeting,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Victor Simon III".

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 10, 2020: Transitioning Back to School - Update

First, it is important that each of you know how much we appreciate your patience and support as our Transition to In-Person Instruction Committee continues to shape our approach to the start of the 2020-21 school year. We know there is a high level of angst and uncertainty in our community, and we realize that it doesn't take a whole lot of news coverage or social media to see how the debate around opening schools has heated up nationally.

This update is to simply let you know that planning for an effective start to the 2020-21 school year is our top priority. You can expect a weekly series of Return to School Community Updates to begin next week Thursday and continue through the start of the school year. I expect the *Parent Tips and Recommendations* document as well as the *Transportation Needs Survey* previously referenced to be included as part of this series along with other opportunities for parent feedback. We have the opportunity to share six (6) Weekly Updates prior to our first day of school and will be sure to make effective use of them. If the need arises to share additional updates, we certainly will. We know how important communication is and are fully committed to keeping you up to date as we continue to prepare.

As stated in the [June 25th Community Update](#), the [Joint Guidance](#) from the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Dept. of Public Health is clear that in-person instruction is strongly encouraged and allowed in [Phase 4](#) of the [Restore Illinois Plan](#). This does not mean that we are being forced to open school. This means that the state public health officials have provided specific guidelines for us to follow in order to maintain a safe environment for our children to learn. We expect to reopen school on August 21st with the following guidelines in place:

- 1) Prohibiting more than 50 people from gathering in one space, including buses;
- 2) Requiring students, staff, and limited visitors to wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including face coverings while indoors and outside when social distancing is not maintained;
- 3) Requiring social distancing be observed as much as possible by rearranging our classrooms and managing hallway/common space traffic;
- 4) Requiring our parents to certify that their child is free of Covid-19 symptoms before entering school;
- 5) Carrying out enhanced cleaning and disinfection measures

We will continue to provide more details in our Return to School Community Updates and will continue to pay close attention to the state guidelines and public health data as we prepare for the start of the 2020-21 school year. In the meantime, you may find this [Frequently Asked Questions document](#) helpful. You will notice that it has been revised three times since it was published on June 25th which demonstrates the pace of change we are dealing with.

We are facing a major challenge together and it is not our first time tackling a community-wide issue. For those that remember the [ethylene oxide issue](#) that took over 13 months to resolve, you might recall the importance of the phrase - *Community Problems Require Community Solutions*. I believe the same approach applies here. Please keep an eye out for our Return to School Community Updates and please continue to contact me or either of our school offices if you have any specific questions or concerns.

With the [new Gower Greeting](#),

Victor Simon III
vsimon@gower62.com
Superintendent of Schools



Web Resources:

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