



# GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

BLANDFORD · CHESTER · HUNTINGTON · MIDDLEFIELD · MONTGOMERY · RUSSELL  
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Dear members of the Gateway Regional School District Community,

The district was tasked with creating three models for a potential return of students to school for the 2020-2021 school year in a manner that accounted for the COVID-19 Pandemic. These were:

- a full return to an **in-school model** for all children;
- a **hybrid model** where some students attend on some days and other students on other days;
- and a fully **remote model** where students would receive all of their instruction online.

To complete this Herculean task in an effective manner, while receiving guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) that was released over the course of several weeks, the district created three working groups. The “District” group concentrated on items such as school safety, health, nutrition, transportation, and budgeting while the “Elementary” and “Secondary” groups concentrated on how we would effectively teach our students under the three models. I commend all of the volunteers that served on these committees (staff, parents, community members, and town officials) for their hours of dedicated service that included much collaboration, problem-solving, innovative ideas, and keeping in mind the safety of our students and staff.

The work of these groups and all DESE guidelines can be found on the district’s website at [www.grsd.org](http://www.grsd.org). Specific information regarding the implementation of this plan will be provided to families in a separate document. The DESE is requiring a two-step reporting process and the first report or initial plan can be found on the [district webpage](#) that outlines some of our findings and recommendations.

After weeks of efforts in reviewing information from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), surveying parents and staff members, negotiating the details with our unions, and taking input from the broader community, the district has determined that a modified hybrid model that will return students to in-person learning in a phased and structured manner was the most effective in getting students to return to school safely. The major findings are:

1. Due to state busing recommendations and staffing limitations, we are **unable to return all students** to an in-school model;
2. As DESE has essentially mandated a 10-day time period at the beginning of school to provide time for staff to prepare for all three models of instruction, students will not begin the school year until **Sept. 15th**;
3. To ensure that we can, if needed, move to full-remote instruction, we will begin the students’ school year with a week of fully remote learning;

4. To ensure that the district can safely return students to school under all applicable guidelines and regulations, we will be returning in several phases with the **most vulnerable students returning first**, followed by kindergarten and first-grade students, then the remainder of elementary students, then middle school students, and finally high school students (the timeline and criteria for implementing these phases are currently being determined);
5. The district will start with a **four-day week** (Monday/Tuesday and Thursday/Friday) for in-school learning with the most vulnerable students, kindergarten and first-grade students returning physically for the four days and being remote on the fifth day (Wednesday) with other grades physically returning on an A/B schedule by town (i.e., certain towns' students will return on Monday/Tuesday while others return on Thursday/Friday);
6. While not physically in school, all students on the hybrid model or the fully remote model will be required to participate online in the format and under the requirements currently being finalized and which will be much more stringent than this spring (following DESE guidelines);
7. All students and staff members will be required to wear a cloth **face mask** and maintain a **six-foot social distancing** as part of the agreement by families to have their students physically return to school;
8. Any student may **opt for fully remote learning** at home if they are not comfortable returning to school in-person under these requirements;
9. Remote learning for everyone will occur in the event of any school cancellations.

The final and more detailed plan will be released once it is approved by DESE in the coming days. Once this is accepted, the district will be providing additional details to families regarding remote learning, the distribution of technology, class assignments, bus information, and a wide range of other information and resources to help students and families navigate the process. We will also be asking parents/guardians to complete another survey for the purposes of planning our return to school.

Should you have any questions after reviewing this letter and the materials on the website, please don't hesitate to contact myself, your student's building principal, or Kurt Garivaltis, our director of Pupil Services.

Sincerely,

*Dr. David B. Hopson*