



August 1, 2021

Dear Thomas County Schools Parents and Guardians,

I hope this letter finds you and your families safe and well-rested as we approach the start of yet another exciting school year. I would like to start the new 2021-2022 school year by saying, “Thank You.” You are to be commended for your flexibility, hard work, and dedication to your student and our school system during the most challenging past year that we have faced thus far. Even in the midst of the pandemic, we had many accomplishments to celebrate, and we were able to FINISH the 2020-2021 school year STRONG!

We are so grateful and excited that the majority of our students are planning to attend in person this school year. We recognize that students benefit most from in-person learning. However, as an instructional alternative, we will continue to offer our virtual program option for students in grades K-12 who meet the eligibility requirements. If you are interested in a virtual option for your child, please visit the [Thomas County Virtual Program website](#) for more information or contact Cara Hankinson, our System Virtual Coordinator, at 229-225-4380.

As this school year begins and our students return on Monday, August 9, 2021, I want to make you aware of the COVID protocols that our system will follow. We will continue to monitor COVID data throughout the year. Should transmission rates increase in our schools and/or public health orders change, we will adjust our protocols as necessary.

As you may know, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released updated guidance for K-12 schools. The CDC currently **recommends** universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

Since the release of the updated CDC guidance, the Thomas County School Board has voted to recommend, but not require, masks in our school buildings for the 2021-2022 school year. Please keep in mind that this is a recommendation and not a mandate. As a system, we will honor the decision of parents when it comes to their child(ren) wearing or not wearing a mask in school. This same reasoning applies to employees and visitors. The decision of wearing a mask in the school buildings will be left up to each individual. Each school will have masks available for students and staff who choose to wear one indoors. Masks will not be required for any outside school functions or events.

Due to a U.S. Department of Transportation and CDC order requiring masks to be worn on school buses, Thomas County Schools will require masks on our buses. Masks will be available for any student who needs one. Our buses will be cleaned twice a day. Assigned seating will be required on our school buses.

Hand sanitizer stations will be available throughout all facilities and on school buses.

We will continue to follow the Georgia Department of Health (GaDPH) recommendations for our contact tracing protocols. Seating charts will continue to be required for classrooms and buses for contact tracing

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purposes. Individuals exposed to a positive case, who have been fully vaccinated along with those who have been diagnosed with COVID within the last 90 days and are symptom-free, will not be required to quarantine.

Schools will be cleaned before, during, and after school on a daily basis.

Water fountains and bottle refill stations will be available for use.

To start the school year, school cafeterias will follow a modified schedule.

Please help monitor your child for symptoms and keep him or her home from school if he or she is experiencing any of the following symptoms:

Difficulty breathing  
Shortness of breath  
Vomiting  
Diarrhea  
Fever of 100.4 or higher  
New loss of taste or smell  
Has tested positive for COVID

Currently, Thomas County's COVID community spread rate is considered to be in the **High Transmission Rate Category**, and we need to all do our part in helping to reduce it.

The CDC's most recent mask recommendation was based on newly learned evidence of the COVID-19 Delta variant. Archbold Memorial Hospital recently shared the following information regarding the COVID-19 Delta variant.

The COVID-19 Delta variant is:

- Described by the World Health Agency as the "fastest and fittest coronavirus strain yet"
- More transmissible than previous COVID-19 variants (studies suggest the Delta variant is 60% more transmissible than the Alpha variant)
- More lethal in people of all ages
- Delta variant may present with symptoms similar to a common cold such as headache, nasal congestion, runny nose, and sore throat
- The current COVID-19 vaccines offer a safe and reliable path to immunity against both the older strains of coronavirus and against emerging strains, especially the new delta variant (Grier, 2021)

As our community, state, and nation strive to return to a sense of normalcy, I would like to encourage everyone who has not yet received the COVID vaccine to please do so, if you are eligible.

Archbold is hosting a COVID vaccine walk-in clinic on Wednesday, August 4, 2021, from 10:00 A.M. - 6:00 P.M. in the Williams Auditorium in the East Tower at Archbold Memorial Hospital. Archbold will be administering the Pfizer vaccine to all adults and children 12 years and older with a parent or guardian's consent. No appointments are required.

If students are unable to take advantage of Archbold's August 4 vaccine walk-in clinic, we are also partnering with Archbold to provide another opportunity for students 12 years of age and older to receive the COVID vaccine at their school on Friday, August 20, 2021. The vaccine consent forms will be sent home during Open House or on the first day of school and need to be returned on Wednesday, August 18,



# THOMAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

Dr. Lisa Williams, Superintendent

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2021, if you want your child to receive the vaccine.

Our teachers, support staff, and system and school leaders have worked diligently to be ready to welcome our students back into our buildings for an exciting start to an amazing school year. We look forward to seeing our families during our Open House events this week. We encourage everyone to drive safely, watch for pedestrians, and mind the speed limit through our school zones, especially during school hours.

We will continue to keep you updated on any changes to our COVID protocols as the need arises. This letter along with additional back-to-school information and COVID resources are available on our [2021-2022 Back-to-School Information webpage](#). Please continue to review our system and school websites along with our social media platforms for updates.

Thank you for your continued support for Thomas County Schools.

Sincerely,

Lisa Williams, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

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