



# SUFFOLK PUBLIC SCHOOLS



*Dr. John B. Gordon III, Superintendent*

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SPS Community:

I wanted to take the time to connect with all of you as we prepare for the end of the first nine weeks and plan for the second nine weeks. To say that there has been a lot of change would be an understatement. From me personally to all of you, I would like to say thank you.

Yesterday, our school board decided to take another vote on Educate and Innovate at the November 12, 2020 school board meeting. Due to this meeting happening so close to our original proposed return date for students in grades PreK-5 of November 16, 2020, we will need to make some adjustments. In our new proposal, students in grades PreK-5 would now return on November 30, 2020, and students in grades 6-12 would now return on January 4, 2020. We believe that this is a good compromise for some of our board members' concerns while also providing instructional staff with adequate time to prepare for the transition to the Hybrid plan, specifically the "Hybrid 3."

Since the October 8, 2020 school board meeting, we have expanded our Hybrid Learning Model for secondary instruction into three Options: Hybrid 45, Hybrid Flip, and Hybrid Sync.

- Hybrid 45-Teachers will instruct hybrid (face to face) students during the first 45 minutes of the block and instruct virtual students the second 45 minutes of the block. Hybrid students will work on assignments and projects in class while teachers conduct live instruction with virtual students. Virtual students will spend the first 45 minutes of the block viewing lessons, completing anticipatory activities, and reviewing previously taught skills. As an example, using our current survey data of 64% of students choosing hybrid instruction and 36% choosing virtual, an average 25 student classroom would have the following breakdown in our 50% enrollment model: Cohort A: 8 Students, Cohort B: 8 Students, Virtual: 9 students.
- Hybrid Flip-Teachers will provide pre-recorded direct instruction activities before the class meeting. Live instruction will include applied, collaborative practice with hybrid and virtual students in small groups. Teachers can bring student groups (both hybrid and virtual) together to close the class.

- Hybrid Sync-Teachers will instruct virtual and hybrid students simultaneously utilizing technology currently available. Teachers will monitor and respond to both hybrid and virtual students throughout the period or learning block.

All secondary instructional staff will receive professional learning in the upcoming weeks on each of these three models and will have the flexibility to determine which model works best for each secondary subject and period. Instructional staff members will be responsible for communicating their choice to parents and students, and we require teachers to maintain that instructional choice for the duration of hybrid instruction. Although we have provided instructional staff with flexibility in using multiple visual platforms (The Big Blue Button, Google Meet, Zoom), your specific feedback suggests that these platforms have been challenging to alternate and use. We want to make sure that instructional staff choices are clear when using the Hybrid 3 learning model.

At the elementary level, we will continue with our original plan of having select virtual instructors per grade level for those students that chose the virtual model. We understand that this has created some anxiety for some families as there would be a chance that their students could have a new teacher. However, as we stated at the school board retreat, the student's original teacher will still be involved in the student's instruction. Both teachers would collaborate to best fit the needs of all students. We are also currently working on additional tutorial videos and resources to help our younger scholars improve their keyboarding and technology skills, along with their ability to navigate platforms.

Regardless of when our students return to school, we were always going to recommend a hybrid format. Suffolk Public Schools will not return students to school in a full five day a week setting until the total number of cases per 100,000 and the overall positivity rate for the city of Suffolk are both in the "green" or "low." We are currently in the "moderate" range for the total number of cases, and the "low" range for the positivity rate, which follows the guidance from the Virginia Department of Health for hybrid instruction being the suggested model for instruction.

We also know that our student's return to school has been a hot topic discussed throughout the Suffolk community. Especially on Social media, specifically Facebook. There have been too many instances where comments and conversations have become confrontational, overly aggressive and have caused a divide in the city. We tried to avoid a division between parents and teachers, and each other when we first began to discuss the Educate and Innovate plan in July. If you are looking for information related to Suffolk Public Schools, please visit the Suffolk Public Schools Facebook page, website, or other social media applications. These options are the only source for accurate and official information related to the school division.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention the upcoming election day. As you know, the school board unanimously approved our recommendation to convert November 3, 2020, from a teacher workday to a full staff holiday. Nine of our buildings are being used as polling places, and we have select employees responsible for opening and maintaining our facilities on this date. Please understand that these upcoming elections have also created additional levels of stress for both students and staff, and there is anxiety about potential revenue shortfalls that normally would be geared towards education due to a reduction in overall sales revenue and lottery funds.

Suffolk Public Schools will be proactive in ensuring that we have the financial stability and a budget plan in place as we have started the 2021-2022 budget process.

Please continue to take care of yourself and stay safe. Part of the message that you will continue to hear me discuss is the need to unify our city. I honestly believe it starts with us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John B. Gordon III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Dr. John B. Gordon III  
*Division Superintendent*