



First Week of School FAQs

As expected in any school district, the first few days can be filled with questions and concerns from parents, students and stakeholders. This is also the time when our team must come together to address these questions and concerns with urgency and respect.

The following is a compilation of questions submitted by a concerned citizen. Recognizing that others may have some of the same questions, we opted to share and post this document widely to ensure accurate information is being relayed. Please be sure to visit www.GarySchools.org for regular updates and information about the Gary Community School Corporation.

1. Why are elementary students in school until 3:45 p.m. instead of 2:30 p.m. as in previous years?

The additional hour of instruction was designed to address the learning loss students across the District experienced during virtual learning as a result of COVID-19. In addition, the Gary Community School Corporation previously had the shortest school day in the state of Indiana. The additional hour of instruction now places us on par with other school districts.

2. There were some parents of elementary students who were not aware of “Late Start Wednesdays” where school starts at 9:00 a.m. rather than 8:00 a.m. Why weren’t they notified?

Late start Wednesdays have been in existence since the 2020-21 school year. It was developed to give our faculty one hour to come together for professional development, which translates into improved instruction for our students. Reminders of late start Wednesday were sent to parents and guardians via robocall, email, social media, the Skyward student information system and posted on the District website.

3. During the first 4 days of school, many students did not have their schedules and sat in the gym and surge are at West Side Leadership Academy for the entire school day. Some of these areas did not have air. What happened?

A small portion of seniors and new enrollees were in the gymnasium on August 10 and 11th only. Some of the students had not previously registered, so their schedules were not in the system. Other students had scheduling conflicts that needed to be rectified. Lastly, there was an influx of new students seeking to enroll who needed schedules created.

Our team diligently ensured that students were assigned classes that align with the credits needed for graduation. All students have been placed in appropriate classes, and we thank families for their patience and apologize for the inconvenience.

Going forward, we strongly encourage that parents register their students prior to the start of school, and the District will continue to conduct early outreach to assist families with enrollment.

4. **We are hearing that some teachers have 40+ students in one classroom with no assistance along with no class rosters or grade level curriculum. It has also been stated that some classrooms only have 15 to 20 desks and chairs. Is this the case?**

There are no classrooms with 40+ students. The average class size is 25-30. All students have chairs and desks, and teachers have rosters and course curricula. In addition, there are paraprofessionals in classrooms where assistance is needed.

5. **Is it true that lunch time for students is rushed and no movement is allowed for 45 minutes?**

Lunch time for students is occurring at the normally scheduled times, and students are given ample amount of time (45 minutes) to finish eating. Due to COVID restrictions, social distancing is being implemented, but students are allowed to move about in a safe manner.

6. **Is it true that the majority of Gary security staff who knew the students, had built trust with them, shared mutual respect for each other were terminated and replaced with security staff from East Chicago, without justification?**

The officers in our schools are from the Gary Police Department and hail from all over our community. No one was “replaced without justification.” It is the expectation that all officers respect our students and build positive relationships in every building.

7. **Is it true that some students who are involved in a fight, refuse to go to class, or disrespect/threaten school staff receive no consequences and are allowed to remain in the school because the administrators are concerned about “their numbers” being too low for a daily attendance bonus?**

Incidents where students are disruptive, fight or display disrespectful behavior are addressed by security and school administration as appropriate on a case-by-case basis. There are programs, behavioral specialists and resource officers in place to assist with the needs of our students and all staff either has already or will go through restorative justice training to further build positive relationships with students. In addition, the District has a code of conduct in place that staff and students are expected to follow. There is no such thing as a “daily attendance bonus.”

We also recognize that students have not been in the buildings for more than a year, and there will be a short period where they are re-adjusting to school regulations and overall conduct expectations.

8. **The new “seminar” course recently added, which is why the school day is longer, has no purpose and has accomplished nothing for teachers and students.**

The school day is longer due to the addition of reading and math blocks. The additional hour of The newly implemented Seminar component is actually an enrichment course that offers SAT prep and other resources for graduation pathways. It is a required, accredited class needed for graduation.

- 9. On Thursday 8/12/2021, Mr. Robert Buggs, President of the Gary Public School Advisory Board, was handcuffed with his hands behind him, escorted from West Side Leadership Academy and placed in a squad car for 45 minutes before being uncuffed & released, for trying to inquire about the safety of students. Is this what happened?**

On Thursday, August 12, 2021, Advisory Board President Robert Buggs and advisory board member James Piggee entered West Side Leadership Academy and refused to follow the visitor check-in protocol, which requires presentation of valid identification. In the presence of children, Mr. Buggs shouted profane and threatening remarks to the security staff and administrators for not granting his freedom to walk the halls all while demanding to be arrested.

While Mr. Buggs was not arrested, he has been warned that any further display of this type of behavior will not be tolerated in school buildings. The incident was also captured on video, along with a second day last week where he once again had to be escorted from school property for disruptive behavior.

All visitors are expected to adhere to the rules that are in place, particularly in a season of a pandemic.

- 10. As of 8-13-2021, some students, citywide, grade K-12 still did not know what bus they were to ride because the bus transportation office did not have the schedules prepared. What happened?**

Bus schedules were distributed later than anticipated, and the District owns this misstep. The influx of new students contributed to the revision of many bus routes at the last minute.

In addition, there is a shortage of bus drivers, not only in our District, but across the nation. We are currently working with the City of Gary, local organizations, the faith community and transportation companies to develop a solution to our transportation challenges. It is unfortunate that our current bus contractor only advised us of their driver shortage on Friday, August 13 leaving District officials to help solve their dilemma.

Pay incentives are also being offered in hopes that more individuals will apply to become bus drivers. The updated bus routes are now posted on our website at www.GarySchools.org, and thank our community partners for assisting with our new transportation plan.

- 11. On the first day of public school in Gary, no adults were allowed in any schools who were not on staff, and no adults had the opportunity to meet teachers. Is this true?**

Parents were allowed in buildings on the first day (see District Facebook page for live coverage and pictures of parents in buildings) and are allowed in the school buildings overall. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, school visits in classrooms must be pre-arranged. In addition, we ask that all visitors follow the check-in protocol and comply with the request to present valid identification and report to the main office in order to gain entry into any school building.

12. The decision was made by someone to make September 9, 2021, “City Wide Open House” for ALL Gary Public Schools. This is not good for parents without transportation or those who have students in more than one school.

The Districtwide Open House set for September 9th is virtual and will be available for later viewing for those who are unable to view the online event live.

We thank the parents, students and community stakeholders for their patience and support as we work through the aforementioned challenges. We are determined to provide the best educational experience for our children because they deserve it!