

Darien Public Schools - Administrative Offices

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November 13, 2020

Dear Families,

Good Friday afternoon everyone. I hope this communication finds you and your family safe and healthy as we continue to navigate education during a pandemic. Your continued partnership is appreciated as we work to prioritize student learning as well as the health and safety of our school and the larger community.

Health Data and School Operations

As you may be aware, we closely follow the weekly State and local metrics that are published every Thursday. Yesterday's data reflects virus increases in both Fairfield County and Town metrics:

- Fairfield County cases have increased this week to 34/100k representing the red zone.
- Darien cases have increased this week to 13.5 /100K representing the orange zone.
- 80% of the State is in the red zone, including all communities that border Darien.

The county and local metrics represent a trajectory that is expected to continue. As a result, in collaboration and consultation with the District COVID Response Team, the COVID Compliance Liaison, our Health Director and District Medical Advisor, the decision was made to implement a step down process from the current learning model. While this continues to be a fluid situation that is subject to change, the nature and timing of the first step down is as follows:

- Commencing Monday, November 16, DHS will move to Hybrid Learning
- Commencing Monday, November 16, Fitch Academy will remain in the Full In-Person model
- Commencing Monday, November 16, MMS will move to Hybrid Learning
- Elementary schools will remain in the Full In-Person model

The secondary school principals will follow up this communication with additional information in preparation for hybrid learning on Monday.

Special Education and Specialized Learning Programs

All Specialized Special Education Programs will continue to meet in person Monday through Thursday and a half day on Friday during Hybrid Learning. This includes the DLC programs at Hindley and Ox Ridge Elementary Schools, the Early Learning Program at Tokeneke, Royle and Ox Ridge Elementary Schools, the ALC and AIM Programs at Middlesex Middle School and the Excel Program at Darien High School.

Step Down Model Rationale

As mentioned in previous communications, these decisions are not made lightly or independent from the latest metrics and our medical advisors. Consideration of health, safety, and student learning serve as the primary drivers of decision making. Science continues to support that risk is lower for full in person learning at the elementary level. In addition to our ability to cohort our elementary students, younger children are less susceptible to acquire and transmit the virus. The step down reduces building density in our secondary schools where cohorting is most difficult and the risk of acquiring and transmitting the virus are greatest. While still a challenge, our learners at the secondary can make the transition to hybrid learning with greater ease while maintaining high levels of learning.

Should the metrics continue on the expected trajectory and Darien moves to the red zone and Fairfield County remains in the red, in consultation with our medical advisors we will consider whether or not the secondary schools should move to full remote and the elementary schools move to hybrid.

Gatherings, Sports and Other Organized Activities

Health experts report attendance in school is not the major contributing factor to the spread of COVID-19. Keeping our schools open (Hybrid or Full In-Person) will require an ongoing collective community effort to follow recommended State guidelines and mitigation strategies regarding social gatherings, sports and other organized activities.

Time spent with asymptomatic, or pre-symptomatic, non-household contacts increases the risk of unknowingly transmitting COVID-19. The State has implemented [new restrictions](#) related to social gatherings, limiting both indoor and outdoor gatherings to a maximum of 10 people. [The State Department of Health](#) has also issued an advisory to residents to remain at home between the hours of 10:00 pm and 5:00 am to further limit the spread of the Coronavirus.

If sports and other after-school activities are important to your family, please adhere to adequate mitigation strategies, such as physical distancing and masking when not playing. Traveling to out-of-state tournaments where teams gather from other areas subjects your athlete to unknown risks, not to mention the travel quarantine rules. Further, consider minimizing interactions with team members - avoid carpooling, team meals and celebrations. Current State guidance recommends all members of a team, and those on any opposing team, be quarantined if there is a positive case.

Holiday Safety and Travel Precautions

As the holiday season quickly approaches, there are several things that you can do to mitigate the further spread of the virus and keep schools open. The following information will help keep you, your families and the greater Darien community safe.

All non-essential travel has been discouraged by public health authorities. This includes travel outside of Connecticut, as well as hosting visitors from other states. If you must travel, please carefully review all of the information on the [CT Travel Advisory](#) webpage. The current Connecticut guidelines require residents to self-quarantine for 14 days, or obtain an RT-PCR test upon arrival, from the last date of contact in a state or country identified by the State of Connecticut in its travel advisory as being a source of high community spread. You must also report your return to Connecticut through the Department of Public Health website, or risk being subjected to a \$500 fine.

If you must travel to one of the areas affected by the CT Travel Advisory, please contact your school administrators to request the remote learning option for your child in order to comply with the quarantine or testing requirements as outlined in the travel advisory.

Snow Days

Despite a mild November, inclement weather could be upon us any day. The State Department of Education is permitting the use of snow days as remote learning days. Regardless of learning model (In-Person, Hybrid, or Remote) our first official snow day of the year will be a traditional "school is canceled" snow day. Subsequent snow days will be remote learning days. Extenuating circumstances such as widespread power outages may determine the need for additional traditional snow days where there is no school and added days to the school calendar will result.

We will continue to plan and work collaboratively with you to ensure the health and safety of all stakeholders in our school community. Thank you for your understanding and assistance as we make this next transition and please remain vigilant in practicing health and safety measures that will keep the community safe and our schools open.

Have a nice weekend everyone,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Addley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline under the name "Addley".

Alan Addley, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools