

Darien Public Schools - Administrative Offices

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November 21, 2020

Dear Families & Staff,

Good afternoon. I trust this finds you in good health and enjoying a nice fall weekend. These continue to be challenging times for our community requiring our collective resilience while paying close attention to public health data and safety protocols.

Health Data and School Operations

As mentioned in previous communications, the health and safety of all students and staff continues to serve as the primary drivers of decision making in collaboration with health officials. This week's COVID metrics reflect virus increases in Fairfield County, Town and State metrics:

- Fairfield County cases have increased this week to 34/100k representing the red zone.
- Darien cases have increased this week to 26.3 /100K representing the red zone.
- The school district has 11 COVID-19 cases and 195 people in quarantine impacting all schools and Central Services.
- 86% of the State is now in the red zone, including all communities that border Darien.

After attending a Superintendents' Meeting with the Connecticut Department of Public Health(CDPH) on Friday morning and upon consultation with the COVID Compliance Liaison, our Health Director and District Medical Advisor, the District will continue with our current learning model:

- DHS will remain in Hybrid Learning
- Fitch Academy will remain in the Full In-Person model
- MMS will remain in Hybrid Learning
- Elementary schools will remain in the Full In-Person model
- All Specialized Special Education Programs (DLC, ELP, ALC & AIM) will continue to meet in person Monday through Thursday and a half day on Friday during Hybrid Learning.

We will continue to consult our medical advisors on a regular basis. Should it be necessary, the schools are ready to transition to hybrid and/or remote learning models.

Rationale

While Darien moved to the red zone this week and Fairfield County remains in the red, State and school medical advisors presently concur that:

- CDPH & CSDE recommends keeping school open (in some capacity) as long as possible
- School settings are not contributing to virus spread in the community

- The school setting provides a more controlled and safer setting for staff and students
- Transmission inside schools is a rare event even in communities with elevated transmission rates
- The rate of COVID cases in the faculty and students is lower than that of the community
- Elementary schools provide a greater ability to cohort elementary students
- Our youngest children are less susceptible to acquire and transmit the virus
- Our youngest students have the greatest need for in-person learning

Should the State, county and local metrics continue on the rise, in consultation with our medical advisors, we will consider whether or not to implement other mitigation strategies including switching to a different learning model. Additionally, cancellations and/or changes in learning modes may be necessary due to inadequate staffing due to COVID-19 cases, sickness or quarantining. Thank you for the number of community members who recently signed up to do substitute teaching!

Holiday Safety and Travel Precautions

Please review the [DPS COVID-19 Newsletter](#) for information regarding celebrating and traveling this holiday season. This newsletter offers CT Travel Advisory information that will be helpful in making plans to keep you, your family, and our community safe. 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. As the holidays approach it will be particularly important as a town community that we adhere to recommended health practices.

Recent Cancellations & Snow Days

Thank you to the community for your understanding and accommodation of last week's school closures due to the storm. Recently we informed you the first official snow day of the year would result in a school cancellation. Unexpectedly, we experienced a school cancellation this past Monday; hence, subsequent school cancellation days or "snow days" will be days for remote learning. Moving forward, it is also plausible that we might experience other extenuating circumstances such as widespread power outages that may determine the need to cancel school with no remote learning options. These circumstances would require the addition of school days to the school calendar.

Inclement Weather School Closures, Delays & Early Dismissals

In anticipation of the future weather changes it is important that all of your personal information is accurate and updated in Aspen. If you have not already done so, to ensure you receive notifications, please update Aspen with your personal information as soon as possible. The following describe possible weather modifications to the regular school day:

- **Morning Emergency Dismissal:** all schools will dismiss during the morning hours.
 - Darien High School will dismiss at 10:30am
 - Middlesex Middle School will dismiss at 10:30am
 - Hindley, Royle and Tokeneke will dismiss at 11:00am
 - Holmes and Ox Ridge will dismiss at 11:30am
 - ELP 8:30am start will dismiss at 10:00am/ ELP 9:30am start will be closed

- **Afternoon Emergency Dismissal:** all schools will dismiss during the afternoon hours.
 - Darien High School will dismiss at 12:20pm
 - Middlesex Middle School will dismiss at 12:25pm
 - Hindley, Royle and Tokeneke will dismiss at 1:00pm
 - Holmes and Ox Ridge will dismiss at 1:25pm
 - ELP will dismiss at 12:00pm

- **Delayed Opening:** all schools will start TWO HOURS later than normal. Buses will be running approximately two hours later than normal. Early Learning Program will be DELAYED BY TWO HOURS AND TEN MINUTES.
 - Darien High School will open at 9:40am
 - Middlesex Middle School will open at 9:55am
 - Hindley, Royle and Tokeneke will open at 10:25am
 - Holmes and Ox Ridge will open at 11:00am
 - ELP 8:30am start begins at 10:40, 9:30 start begins at 11:40am

- **School Closure:** In most cases, you will receive communication by 5:30am the morning of the closing. You can expect to hear about modifications to the school day through email, phone and/or text. In addition, the district webpage and news channels will also be alerted of any school modifications. All activities on school closure days are canceled unless otherwise noted.

Your continued flexibility is appreciated as we work together each day to combat this health crisis and to provide our children with the highest quality education. We ask again that you remain vigilant in practicing health and safety measures that will keep the community safe and our schools open.

Enjoy the remainder of the weekend,

Sincerely,

Alan Addley, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools