

## Darien Public Schools - Administrative Offices

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August 11, 2020

Dear Families:

At last night's Board of Education meeting the administration presented and discussed *Darien's Reopening Plan* for our schools. The recording of the meeting may be accessed via the following link:

<http://www.darienps.org/apps/video/watch.jsp?v=10071244>

The administration has continued to revise the plan during the past few weeks in response to the latest information received from the Connecticut State Department of Education and The Department of Public Health. Additionally, feedback from all stakeholders including the Board of Education, local health officials, staff, and parents proved extremely helpful and is reflected throughout the plan.

Thank you for your patience, participation and support as the staff conducted its work. In the midst of this public health crisis, difficult decisions have been made for the health and safety of students and staff with the best available metrics and in consultation with the town's Director of Health and District Medical Advisor. Where possible, in collaboration with surrounding towns, we have aligned elements of the plan's design.

This communication describes the main highlights of the District plan to reopen in the fall. The complete plan may be accessed on the District website.

**Learning Model:** The first day of school will be Thursday, September 3. All schools will reopen in a Hybrid Learning Model and will transition to a full In-Person Model on Tuesday, September 29. The hybrid model will provide a transitional reentry for students and staff. The Hybrid Model includes:

*Elementary Schools:* Students with surnames A-K will attend school on Monday and Wednesday. Students with surnames L-Z will learn at home on Monday and Wednesday and will experience a parallel schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. Students with surnames L-Z will attend school on Tuesday and Thursday. Students with surnames A-K will learn at home on Tuesday and Thursday and will experience a parallel schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning activities.

*Middle School:* Students with surnames A-K will attend school on Monday and Wednesday. Students with surnames L-Z will learn at home on Monday and Wednesday and will experience a parallel schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning activities. Students with surnames L-Z will attend school on Tuesday and Thursday. Students with surnames A-K will learn at home on

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High School: Students with surnames A-K will attend school on Monday and Tuesday. Students with surnames L-Z will learn at home on Monday and Tuesday and will experience a parallel schedule with synchronous learning activities. Students with surnames L-Z will attend school on Wednesday and Thursday. Students with surnames A-K will learn at home on Wednesday and Thursday and will experience a parallel schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning activities.

For Fridays across the Hybrid, In-Person and Remote learning models: students will have a shortened day of learning. For the Hybrid and Remote Learning models, students will be remote learning for half a day from home. For the In-Person model: students will follow our district shortened day transportation schedule. This will allow for additional cleaning of the school buildings and support on-going professional learning for staff.

Additional information about the Hybrid models and daily schedules will be communicated in writing by the principals and discussed in one of the upcoming scheduled meetings.

**Communication:** A series of Zoom meetings are scheduled over the next two weeks for parents to learn more about the specifics of the plan and schedules in the various schools. Parents are invited to attend any of these upcoming meetings. All the meetings will be recorded and posted on the District website:

- Friday, August 14 @ 10:00 Special Education (DLC, ALC, Aim, Excel)
- Friday, August 14 @ 12:00 Early Learning Program
- Monday, August 17 @ 2:00 General Session: Health & Safety Protocols
- Monday, August 17 @ 3:15 Elementary
- Tuesday, August 18 @ 12:00 Middle School
- Tuesday, August 18 @ 2:00 High School

Starting this week, parents can expect to receive regular communication from principals. Weekly correspondence will continue from Central Services. By the end of the day on Thursday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, the District website will serve as the communication hub for information regarding the reopening plan. It can be accessed at: [https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=456085&type=d](https://www.darienps.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=456085&type=d)

**Special Services:** The Special Education Department has been working diligently with building level administrators to prepare for the reopening. Staff has been working to ensure the provision of special education services are in alignment with the Hybrid schedules in all buildings. Hybrid reopening practices are established for The Early Learning Program (ELP), Specialized Learning Programs (DLC, ALC, AIM, CORE, and Excel), Specially Designed Instructional Programs (Resource Room, Learning Center), Co-Teaching and Related Services. In the hybrid model, ELP students and Specialized Learning Programs (DLC, ALC, AIM, CORE, and Excel) will receive services four days a week.

**Cohorting & Physical Distancing:** Cohorting and physical distancing are two measures the District will prioritize in order to maximize conditions for safe learning environments for students and staff. Students who ride the bus will have a transportation cohort in addition to the cohorts they are assigned during the school day.

*Elementary:* Each school-based grade level is considered a cohort. Within the cohort students are assigned to an individual classroom. At times, students in a grade level cohort might be grouped, across classrooms, to provide targeted instructional support (e.g. special education, related services, SRBI etc.)

*Middle School:* Students within each team will be grouped as a cohort to experience core academic classes with the same subset of their peers (with few exceptions) from their cohort. Some students from different cohorts will come together in order to provide appropriate academic support and enrichment.

*High School:* Cohorting at the high school is not possible. In order to minimize the number of individuals each student and teacher comes into contact with each day, the high school will operate on a block schedule with four classes meeting each school day. Additional practices to maximize social distancing through class schedule development will be implemented. The Open Ends policy is being expanded to include grades 9-11 and an Open Campus policy for seniors will help reduce the number of students with free periods in the building.

To support physical distancing within classrooms, student desks all face the same direction. In classrooms with tables, plexiglass partitions will be placed on tables to provide students an individualized workspace. Throughout all schools, space has been creatively and strategically utilized in order to maximize physical distancing.

In the Hybrid Model, students will be physically distanced at six feet apart while wearing masks. The In-Person model utilizes the three feet recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics with mask wearing.

**Health & Safety:** The health and safety of students and staff are paramount when returning to In-Person learning during this pandemic. As the body of COVID-19 research and science expands, recommendations from infectious disease and public health experts will evolve accordingly. The District will continue to collaborate with our Director of Nursing, the Darien Department of Health Director and State health officials to monitor current disease levels and the latest recommendations to establish practices based on current scientific data to support a healthy learning environment for all.

Specific COVID-10 exclusion and contact tracing plans will be posted on the District website by Thursday. Practices will be updated as new guidance is received.

An isolation room will be established in each school building to separate individuals who are exhibiting symptoms of a contagious illness from those who are not, to minimize risk of transmission of any infectious disease.

Here is some general guidance as you make preparations for the start of school year:

- Find a multilayered, cotton mask your child likes (design, fit, feel.)
- Start having your child wear the mask as much as possible when in public.
- Model mask wearing, be positive about it, make it fun.
- Teach children how to wash their hands for 20 seconds (videos available on YouTube that are child friendly.)
- Encourage children to avoid touching their face (eyes, mouth, nose.)
- Make a reliable backup plan in case your child needs to be picked up from school unexpectedly and you are unable to come right away (share this plan with the school and your child.)
- If you have traveled to an area included in the travel ban, you must quarantine at home for 2 weeks; testing is not an option to return to school.
- Keep sick children home and communicate with your school nurse if your or your medical provider suspect COVID-19.

**Parent Opt Out Survey:** The State has provided a provision that allows families to opt out of in school learning. Early this summer, you completed a survey indicating whether your child(ren) will return to school in the fall. Given we have now determined how the District is reopening, the survey will be readministered. Look for the survey in an email tomorrow. Students who opt out will experience a parallel class schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning activities.

**Student Drop-Off & Busing:** Parents are encouraged to provide transportation to and from school for their children. If you are driving your child to school, we appreciate your assistance and understanding in arriving to school as close to the start of school as possible. For physically distancing and cohorting purposes, the schools cannot provide supervision before school. For families who are eligible and opt for bus transportation, buses will operate at near full capacity to start the school year with all students and drivers required to wear face masks while riding the bus. Students will board the bus back to front except for those requiring other seats due to medical conditions, and those in grades K-1 who will continue to sit near the front of the bus for safety reasons. Buses will be disinfected with Zoono-Z71 which provides protection for up to thirty days. Buses will also be disinfected after each tier with bleach and water on touch points such as handrails and seats. Drivers will have daily temperature checks to ensure no driver has a temperature above 100 degrees. Upon arrival to school, students will be dismissed from the bus and go directly to their homeroom/scheduled class at their respective school. We anticipate bus routes to be published no later than August 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Grading:** The regular grading practices will be in place at the elementary schools, middle school and high school. Curriculum content may be modified to accommodate the three learning models (In-Person, Hybrid, Remote).

**Food Services:** In partnership with our new food service provider, Chartwells, the District is now using Nutrislice to publish school menus to an interactive website and a free smartphone app. Monthly menus will include nutrition information and can be filtered for common food allergens like nuts, wheat, and dairy.

Nutrislice allows parents or students to place orders a week in advance, the night before, or in the morning on the same day. Nutrislice provides for meals that are prepared and served in the safest way possible for students and staff alike. Menus will be live at the end of August. Simply download the Nutrislice app on your smart phone and find Darien Public Schools. Using your computer, visit [darienps.nutrislice.com](https://darienps.nutrislice.com). Select your preferred school(s). Should you have any questions, please email Meghan Bendish, Chartwells Director of Dining Services at [mbendish@darienps.org](mailto:mbendish@darienps.org)

In the Hybrid learning model, meals will be preordered. Lunch will primarily be pre-packaged options served in the classroom for elementary students, in the gym and cafeteria for middle school students and in the classrooms and cafeteria for high school students.

**Extracurricular Activities & Athletics:** School clubs and activities will take place remotely, either before or after the school day as scheduled by the advisor and participants. When deemed safe and appropriate, proposals for on campus meetings may be reviewed between building administration and activity advisors. The District is following Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference participation and safety guidelines for high school athletics. Additional details will be posted on the district website on Thursday.

With your continued partnership over the next few weeks, the schools and staff will be ready to welcome back our students with excitement, confidence and solid preparation. Thank you for your participation and support along the way as we prepare for a safe return to school for our students and staff.

Sincerely,

*Alan*

Alan Addley, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools