

March 4, 2021

District families,

In my previous communication about the secondary schools' transition to four days of face-to-face instruction, I indicated that we were considering Monday, March 15 as the possible transition date to this model.

We have spent the days since then examining the logistics of the switch and listening to the comments and questions of our staff and families. We came to realize that a little more time was needed to ensure a smooth rollout to this new model.

We are now ready to announce that the official start date will be Monday, March 22.

This additional week is needed for teachers to adjust their plans and pedagogy to the new instructional model, for students to adjust their home and work schedules to the new daily routines, and for building administrators to navigate the numerous logistical challenges before them.

We appreciate your participation in the Thought Exchanges. Your comments and questions helped guide our decision-making processes. I encourage you to read through the Frequently Asked Questions document, which is attached to this email and posted to the [COVID-19 Updates webpage](#) (Grade 6 staff and families please pay special attention to the FAQ regarding your weekly schedule). Additional questions should be directed to your building administrators.

This has been a year unlike any other, but I am humbled to witness the fortitude and grace with which the Northern community has responded to its many challenges. Our move toward this four-day model is a positive step toward a return to normal. Thank you for joining us in this journey.

In education,

Steve Kirkpatrick
Superintendent of Schools

Secondary Four Days F2F Model

Frequently Asked Questions

(posted March 4, 2021)

What does the four days a week model look like and how is it different than the current cohort model?

Our four days per week model will have all students in grades 7-12 attending school, face-to-face, Monday-Thursday. Friday will continue to be a remote learning day with students completing asynchronous assignments.

This differs from the current hybrid model where most grade 7-12 students attend face-to-face two times per week in separate cohorts.

How does the four-day model affect Grade 6 students currently attending five days of face-to-face instruction?

Sixth grade students will attend the Middle School 4.5 days per week. More specifically, Monday-Thursday will be full days and Friday will be a half-day with an 11:00 am dismissal.

The reason for this is our 7th and 8th grade teachers, as well as our creative arts (elective) teachers, have been providing coverages for 6th grade teachers throughout the week. This was possible because only 50% of 7th and 8th grade students were in the building each day.

One of those coverages was to provide time for 6th grade teachers to create their weekly lessons in our Learning Management System (Schoology). These lessons are still needed so we can provide education to our students who are required to stay home for 10 to 20 school days for covid-related reasons. The only time we could carve out for 6th grade teachers to complete these lessons in the new model are Friday afternoons.

It is hard to take even half a day away from 6th graders, but in this case the reduction was necessary for the greater good of getting all middle school students back for more face-to-face instruction.

Why is this change scheduled to start on Monday, March 22, and not the start of the 4th marking period?

Now that COVID conditions are steadily improving, it is our desire to transition to more face-to-face instruction as soon as possible. More face-to-face instruction is beneficial to our students for academic, social, and emotional reasons. While we are committed to moving as expeditiously as possible, we also needed to consider the time needed to overcome the logistical challenges of such a transition. March 22 is the date best suited to meet both those criteria. Waiting for the start of the 4th marking period was not tenable as that is still a month away (April 5).

Why are students only coming back four days and not five days a week for face-to-face instruction?

If a school building isn't occupied for three consecutive days, as would be the case from Friday to Sunday, we are able to reset the number of COVID cases in that building over the 14-day rolling period back to zero. That significantly reduces the likelihood of an extended mandated closure. That is an important option to be able to exercise if needed. Students coming in on Friday, takes that critical opportunity away.

In addition, while teachers provide remote instruction on Fridays, this day also affords teachers time to create their Monday through Friday asynchronous lessons that they must have ready for students that are absent from school for quarantine or isolation. Teachers also provide office hours, enrichment, and remediation opportunities for students on Fridays.

Is it safe to increase our student population density at the high school and middle school?

Based on our data and contact tracing from September 8 to March 1, we have no evidence of COVID transmissions occurring in school. Several other local school districts have been in full face-to-face instruction since the beginning of the year with great success. All districts are moving toward opening their schools to more face-to-face instruction as COVID numbers improve.

Will we still close according to the Department of Health School Closure Matrix?

Yes, Northern, like all school districts that wanted to avoid remote-only instructional models had to sign an attestation form from the state in November verifying that we would follow the recommendation of PDE's school closure recommendations, which can be found [HERE](#). However, should our County move from substantial to either moderate or low transmission levels, we are no longer required to close according to the matrix.

Will students, staff, and all visitors still be required to wear a mask in the building and on district-provided transportation?

Yes. Northern, like all school districts that wanted to avoid remote-only instructional models had to sign an attestation form from the state in November verifying that we would follow the Governor's Face Covering order. This face covering order remains in effect regardless of the county's transmission level.

What options do families have for their secondary student(s)' education once the four-day model is in place?

Students have two options; they can follow the four-day face to face model, or they can enroll in our district cyber program NOLA. *(See next question for options for qualifying grade 11 or 12 students.)*

What if I have a co-op, internship, or dual enrollment experience that conflicts with a four-day school week?

Students are excused from school attendance for the periods of time that they are engaged in school-sponsored experiences like those described above, just as they would be under non-COVID conditions. For these situations, students must work with their principal to document an exemption and develop a plan.

Will the social distancing, cleaning, and sanitizing expectations be different in the four-day model?

Cleaning and sanitizing expectations will not change. Mostly empty buildings on Friday will afford our custodial team additional opportunities for thorough cleaning and sanitizing. We anticipate that in classes with more than 20 students, social distancing will be less than six feet, which is permitted under Department of Health guidelines.

What is the plan for lunch periods?

The lunch periods will continue as they are now. Additional cashiers will be added on an as needed basis. We will be social distancing to six feet at lunches by utilizing adjacent and nearby spaces (and outdoors as the weather permits) to spread students out.

What's the plan for vo-tech students with Cumberland Perry Area Vocational Technical School still in the 2-day cohort model?

Our grade 10-12 vo-tech students will attend Northern High School Monday through Thursday for their morning periods. They will be transported to the vo-tech for their two weekly face to face days. The High School administration will provide details regarding the two afternoons per week when our vo-tech students do not go to vo-tech.

Will bus transportation be different in the four-day model?

No, bus pick up and drop off times will be the same. Students will continue to wear masks on the bus.

Will close contacts increase with the increase in the number of students in the school?

If and when a case appears in school, it is possible that more students will be identified as close contacts (within six feet for 15 minutes or more) in the new model. To mitigate against exposure, teachers will create a static seating chart and minimize movement in the classroom.

Will there be field trips in the spring?

We will continue our practice of not sending our students/staff on field trips, unless they are a curricular necessity.