

## **Darien School District Announces COVID-19 Policies for Keeping Students and Staff Safe**

**Author :** David Gurliacci

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**Date :** March 6, 2020

The nursing director for Darien Public Schools sent an email to parents early Friday evening announcing policies for when students traveling abroad would have to wait to come back to school, along with several other safety policies related to the COVID-19 Coronavirus.

The long letter touched on several other subjects relating to combatting the spread of the epidemic. It provided more details on: cleaning procedures for schools to protect students against the virus; what teachers are doing to keep students from spreading any virus they might have; and what symptoms nurses would look at in deciding which students and staff would need to stay out of school.

"Consistent with the CDC's [recommendations](#), the district is requiring a 14-day voluntary quarantine period for all travelers from CDC [Level 3 countries](#), including Italy and South Korea, before they return to any Darien school campus," Alicia V. Casucci, the district's director of nursing services, said in the emailed

letter.

Although Casucci used the phrase "voluntary quarantine," she also said the district is "requiring" a two-week quarantine for students — at least insofar as it applies to students returning to any school campus.

### **Countering Rumors About Traveling Students**

**Casucci mentioned that there have been rumors in the school district about students returning home, and she asked parents not to share them. She said:**

- "[O]ver the past few days district administrators and teachers have received several calls and emails regarding concerns about students and families who traveled to Italy and other locations over February break.
- "While the district is not able to disclose any specific information about any one student or staff member, what can be shared is that no student or staff member is being monitored for, has been suspected of having or has needed testing for coronavirus. [...] For the benefit of all, we encourage you to avoid sharing unsubstantiated reports."

Casucci

Teachers will encourage students to avoid close contact with other students, including "close face-to-face collaboration" — even including avoiding high-fives. Some teachers might encourage students to replace them with "toe or elbow taps," she said.

Casucci also had advice for parents in talking to children about the situation, including asking parents to avoid rumors. She also said:

"When speaking to your children about COVID-19 do your best to remain calm and reassuring, speak factually and remind them health and school officials are doing everything they can to keep everyone healthy. Our teachers and staff will do the same."

### **Full Text of the Announcement**

*This email, addressed to "families," was sent at 6:35 p.m., Friday, March 6:*

Dear families,

The district continues to carefully monitor the status of COVID-19 in our area and beyond. We are committed to keeping our school environment as healthy as possible.

In an effort to mitigate the risk of transmission of any communicable infection in our schools, we have scrutinized our building cleaning procedures, teaching strategies to include classroom hygiene and student/staff exclusion practices. A summary of the actions we are taking is outlined below.

***CLEANING PROCEDURES:***

Our custodial staff is taking extra steps to enhance our standard cleaning procedures for all of our school buildings to include:

- Wiping down “touchpoint” areas (door knobs/handles, railings, fixtures, keyboards and more) with state approved disinfectant solution
- Wiping desktops, at least daily, with state approved disinfectant solution
- Installing signs to encourage hand washing in all bathrooms
- Having custodians ensure all bathrooms are fully stocked with and adequate supply of soap and paper towels daily, and replenish as needed throughout the day
- Supplying each teacher with a spray bottle, with state approved sanitizer, and disposable towels for touchpoint cleaning, as needed, throughout the day

***TEACHING STRATEGIES AND CLASSROOM HYGIENE:***

Our teaching staff is also committed to assisting with infection control efforts by:

- Wiping touchpoint areas with approved sanitizer, as needed, throughout the day
- Encouraging students and providing the time and opportunity for students to wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds often, especially prior to eating snack and lunch
- Providing students with hand wipes when washing hands with soap and water is not feasible
- Teaching and encouraging students to cover coughs with tissue or elbow
- Teaching and encouraging students to dispose of tissues immediately in trash receptacle
- Utilizing creative and innovative morning greetings, such as toe or elbow taps instead of shaking hands or “high-fives”
- Creating ways to interact with peers that limit close face-to-face collaboration
- Recognizing symptoms of illness and sending student to nurse for evaluation

***STUDENT AND STAFF EXCLUSION FOR ILLNESS:***

Our school nurses are experts in infection control and illness. The nurses will continue to evaluate students who are ill and monitor absenteeism. Your continued cooperation with the same is appreciated.

The nurses will exclude students and staff for the following:

- Fever greater than 100.4 degrees F
- Excessive, uncontrolled cough, with or without fever

- Difficulty breathing or unexplained shortness of breath
- Reddened throat, with or without fever
- Vomiting and diarrhea, with or without fever
- Copious nasal discharge, with or without fever
- Excessive fatigue, body aches, ill appearance, with or without fever

***TRAVEL:***

With February break behind us, April break on the horizon, and many parents who travel within and outside of the United States for work, it is necessary to address concerns around domestic and foreign travel.

The district has been, and will continue to, monitor and follow the CDC, U.S. Department of State and the Connecticut Department of Public Health guidance for students and staff returning to school and work after travel.

Consistent with the CDC's [recommendations](#), the district is requiring a 14-day voluntary quarantine period for all travelers from CDC [Level 3 countries](#), including Italy and South Korea, before they return to any Darien school campus. The district will continue to follow all travel advisories and update quarantine recommendations as they evolve per the CDC guidelines.

We strongly encourage you to consider all future travel and greatly appreciate your fidelity upon returning to Darien by adhering to all travel advisories. This is for the health and safety of all.

***EMOTIONAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS:***

When a new report of COVID-19 surfaces, especially when those reports are in our area, it is worrisome and distressing for all, especially our students. Please remember that in times of uncertainty, children depend on trusted adults to help them feel safe and secure.

When speaking to your children about COVID-19 do your best to remain calm and reassuring, speak factually and remind them health and school officials are doing everything they can to keep everyone healthy. Our teachers and staff will do the same.

If you are interested in learning more about how to talk to your children about COVID-19, the National Association of School Psychologists has published a comprehensive parent resource that can be found [here](#).

It is also important to note, over the past few days district administrators and teachers have received several calls and emails regarding concerns about students and families who traveled to Italy and other locations over February break.

While the district is not able to disclose any specific information about any one student or staff member, what can be shared is that no student or staff member is being monitored for, has been suspected of having or has

needed testing for coronavirus.

Please be mindful of the negative impact unfounded rumors have for our children, families and staff. For the benefit of all, we encourage you to avoid sharing unsubstantiated reports.

[***CONCLUDING***]

The district will continue to update you weekly, or more often if necessary.

In the meantime, we encourage you to wash your hands with soap and water, cover your cough/sneezes, stay home and keep children home when ill, avoid sick individuals and consider getting a flu vaccine if you have not done so already.

Please continue to feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have about COVID-19 or any other health issue affecting your family.

Best,

*Alicia V. Casucci*, APRN, CPNP, NCSN

Director of Nursing Services

Darien Public Schools

[acasucci@darienps.org](mailto:acasucci@darienps.org)

***Editor's note:*** *This email is republished here word-for-word (with one exception — we've left out her phone number, which Casucci provided at the end). We've made editorial style changes, such as changes in paragraph breaks.*