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Darien Schools to Open Sept 3-4 'Hybrid' Virtual/In-School, Then Full-Time In-School Sept 29

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Categories : [Education](#), [Healthy Living](#)

Tagged as : [Back to School 2020](#), [Coronavirus 2020](#), [COVID-19 2020](#), [Darien Public Schools](#), [Darien Public Schools 2020-2021](#)

Date : August 11, 2020

Darien schools will open Sept. 3 and 4, with students going to school two days a week and being taught online for other days, schools Superintendent Alan Addley told the Board of Education on Monday night.

Then, Addley said, on Sept. 29, about three weeks later, the schools will be open "full-time," with students going five days a week. Fridays will be half days throughout the school year, with students learning remotely, on-line.

Addley described a complicated "hybrid" plan of online schooling mixed with days in school buildings, which he said prioritized safety for students, teachers and staff. That initial period of mixed online/in-person

education was made part of the plan after Addley spoke with various union representatives. Addley said.

When schools do open, in general, each school will be split into two groups by alphabetized last name. At the elementary and middle school level, one half will be going to school Mondays and Wednesdays and the other half going Tuesdays and Thursdays. At the high school level, half the students will go to school on Mondays and Tuesdays, the other half on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Splitting student bodies by last name allows families to have all students at school or at home at once, something many parents had asked for, Addley said.

SEE ALSO

— The (2 hour, 37 minute) video of the meeting, [here](#)

— Addley's letter to parents, sent Tuesday evening (at the bottom of this article)

Students in the Early Learning Program (ELP) and many special education students will be coming to school Mondays through Thursdays.

During the hybrid period, Thursday, Sept. 3 to Monday, Sept. 28, students who are learning from home will have camera access to the same classes attended by students who are in-school, "with the camera trained on the classroom for the entire period," Addley said.

The teachers will teach both sets of students at once, but for certain amounts of class time, the students at home will be doing independent work and those in class will be working (apparently at a safe distance) with other students in smaller groups, Addley said.

Parents have the option to have students learn remotely, online, Addley said, but he said the school district strongly discourages it because remote learning isn't considered as good as learning in school. Parents also have the option of withdrawing children from public schools for home-schooling, in which case the students would no longer be considered part of the Darien school district.

The state has released guidelines for school districts to follow in opening schools and keeping them open when the number of COVID-19 cases goes up or down. Fairfield County and Darien already fall below the guidelines for even a hybrid school model, Addley said.

Addley said he and district officials decided on starting the school year with about three weeks of the hybrid model to allow teachers, staff and students to acclimate to the new anti-COVID-19 rules for schools.

About 35 teachers have told the school district they have particular health needs that make them worry about returning to school buildings to teach, Marjorie Cion, the district director of human resources, told the board.

The district is discussing the teachers' concerns individually and plans to offer ways to keep them safe — actions required by the Americans with Disabilities Act — but some may not return to school this school year, she said.

"I don't believe there will be [as many as] 35 teachers who do not come back to work," Cion said. "I believe a majority of those teachers we will be able to accommodate with a variety of accommodations."

The CIAC announced Monday that the league's high school football games will be rescheduled for a spring season, Addley said.

The state Department of Public Health has also issued detailed guidelines for school districts to follow on what to do if a student or district employee has COVID-19, believes he or she might have it, if a person or family in the district recently traveled to a state with a worse outbreak of COVID-19 or if they were close to someone with COVID-19.

Grading of students will be done on the same plan as before the pandemic closed school buildings, Christopher Tranberg, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and development, told the board. But he said teachers are being told to start slowly in assessing students.

If the state mandates or makes recommendations on any of that, Tranberg expects to be among the first to know: He sits on the state's Assessment and Accountability Committee for the state Department of Education.

The school district is spending \$1,441,637 on COVID-19-related matters, Addley said.

The district may set up tents at the high school to allow for sufficient distancing between students, but tents at other schools were not recommended by district officials, he said, and between the buildings, some portable classrooms and possible tents, the district seems to have enough space to accommodate social distancing across all grade levels, he said.

Further Communication

On Wednesday, Aug. 12, both the detailed three-page statement from the state Public Health Department together with one or more examples of a health-risk situation will be posted on the district website, along with a list of frequently asked questions about the school reopening plan and a description of the plan itself, Addley said.

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Addley said the school district soon will be sending parents more information in an upcoming email as well as holding meetings for parents, teachers and other employees.

"We will continue to communicate with our school community on a weekly basis," Addley said. That means school principals and the special education services department will communicate with parents, he said.

He specified these dates for the meetings:

Friday, Aug. 14 — A meeting for those in support services for the Early Learning Program and for Special Education

Monday, Aug. 17 — A meeting featuring the town's medical advisor along with Darien Health Director David Knauf

Monday Aug. 17 and Wednesday, Aug. 19 — various meetings for parents of children each school and "building level"

Thursday, Sept. 3 and Friday, Sept. 4 — One day or the other, first day of school for each of the halves of the student bodies at Darien schools. Each day will be a half-day of school, and the Friday session will be the only Friday this school year where students will be in school.

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.

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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 Tuesday and Thursday and will experience a parallel schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning activities.

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:

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? 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 13th, 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

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

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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 28th.

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. Select your preferred school(s). Should you have any questions, please email Meghan Bendish, Chartwells Director of Dining Services at mbendish@darienps.org

In the Hybrid learning model, meals will be preordered. Lunch will primarily be prepackaged 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,

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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