

Darienite

News for Darien

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Superintendent: All Schools Back in Session in a Delayed Opening on Monday

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Darien schools reopen this Monday, Jan. 3, although on a two-hour delayed opening, Superintendent Alan Addley announced late Thursday in a message to parents and school staff.

Addley also said that five days of remote learning will be available to students tested positive for COVID-19 or who have symptoms of it or who have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19 or who have been in contact with a household with a COVID-19 positive resident.

The two-hour delay, Addley said, would "provide teachers with the opportunity to prepare remote and in-person learning for their students."

A total of 78 students and/or staff have tested positive for COVID-19 in the eight days since Addley's previous message to parents and staff, he said.

"Due to the overwhelming number of cases being reported across the district, we will be revising our COVID Dashboard to reflect only new cases reported and total number of cases for the school year," the superintendent said.

Addley said he expects some of the one million test kits that the state is distributing through schools to be delivered to the school district in early January.

"Inevitably, we will continue to face challenges as we plan to open our schools after the holidays and as COVID cases continue to rise," he wrote.

"The district medical team will continue to meet, closely monitor the situation, and make decisions for the health and safety of our students and staff. We will advise you should any circumstances change over the weekend."

Full Text of Addley's Letter

Dec. 30, 2021

Dear Families & Staff,

Good afternoon and I hope this finds your family in good health and enjoying the last few days of the holiday break.

Presently, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is not granting schools permission to count remote learning as school days. I have discussed and reviewed this matter in person with the commissioner. As such, the district is making preparations for a full in-person return to school on Monday, Jan. 3.

The district continues to monitor the rising number of staff and student cases. 72 cases have been reported since our last communication to you on Dec. 22, 2021. As expected, the Omicron variant is proving to be highly contagious and spreading among the most mitigated environments to include the school setting.

Fortunately, the degree of illness ranges from mild to moderate and has not resulted in large numbers of hospitalizations. This is especially true for those who are fully vaccinated, and if eligible, boosted. Additionally, it has become extremely challenging to locate testing in a timely manner.

Further, the CDC revised their published isolation and quarantine recommendations on Monday, Dec. 27. We are still waiting for guidance from the State Department of Health (DPH) and the State Department of Education about how these changes will be adopted in the school setting.

While we await further guidance, the district medical team met today to formulate a plan for the coming week(s). At this time, we will continue to follow the most restrictive isolation and quarantine guidelines.

To continue to mitigate the spread of COVID in our schools and concentrate our efforts in providing the healthiest learning environment possible, we will quarantine all individuals who are exhibiting any symptom(s) of COVID.

Additionally, we will be:

1. Encouraging testing for COVID for those who are symptomatic; however in the absence of timely testing, we will assume those with any symptom(s) are COVID positive and require isolation
2. Providing remote teaching and learning opportunities for five (5) consecutive days for:
 - a. Individuals who are experiencing any symptom(s) of COVID with or without proof of a positive test
 - b. Any individuals who report exposure to a household or social contact to an individual who has tested positive for COVID
3. Suspending targeted contact tracing in order for nurses to assess sick individuals and communicate broad messages to families regarding cases, and counsel and educate staff and parents regarding isolation and quarantine procedures.

Parents should continue to report all student absences to the absentee line and the school will contact you. This remote learning option for quarantined students is not available for extended vacations or other unrelated reasons.

Given the expected but undetermined number of students to be quarantined, Monday, Jan. 3 will be a two-hour delayed opening schedule to provide teachers with the opportunity to prepare remote and in-person learning for their students.

COVID Dashboard: Due to the overwhelming number of cases being reported across the district, we will be revising our COVID Dashboard to reflect only new cases reported and total number of cases for the school year.

COVID-19 Test Kits: In addition to the test kits designated for town distribution (originally scheduled for delivery yesterday), the governor also announced that the state purchased an additional one million iHealth kits that will be distributed to K-12 schools statewide. The State Department of Education is working with the Department of Public Health for distribution logistics and guidance to schools. Schools are expected to receive information early in the new year.

Inevitably, we will continue to face challenges as we plan to open our schools after the holidays and as COVID cases continue to rise. The district medical team will continue to meet, closely monitor the situation, and make decisions for the health and safety of our students and staff. We will advise you should any circumstances change over the weekend.

Thank you for your continued understanding and support as we navigate these uncertain times.

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Wishing your family a healthy start to the New Year.

Sincerely,

Alan

Alan Addley, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools