

Superintendent Provides Update Friday Morning on eLearning, Mandated School Days: Full Text, Analysis

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Darien schools Superintendent Alan Addley told parents and district staff in an online message Friday morning that (1) the district's eLearning program is entirely voluntary for students, (2) the program won't count as a substitute for state-mandated school days, (3) although Governor Lamont waived the requirement that districts provide at least 180 days of schooling, that only applies if a district tries to meet the requirement, and (4) possibly for that reason, spring break from April 6 to 10 may be cancelled.

Parts of Addley's statement were difficult to understand. The full text of the statement is at the bottom of this article. Here's our best attempt to explain it, and we're going to attempt to get clarification from Addley or someone else in the district, then update this article.

(1) the district's eLearning program is entirely voluntary for students:

From the second-to-last paragraph:

These activities are voluntary and students are not required to participate.

(2) the program won't count as a substitute for state-mandated school days:

That's because the district won't, at least at this time be applying to the state for a waiver from the 180-school-days mandate.

Again, from the second-to-last paragraph:

The activities are not intended to replace classroom instruction.

Addley's reason for why the district won't be applying for a waiver for the minimum number of school days is complex. Part of it involves what "synchronous" and "asynchronous" online learning means.

What Is 'Synchronous' and 'Asynchronous' Learning?

- Addley's announcement — even though it's sent to non-educators who can't be expected to know education jargon — doesn't define what "synchronous" or "asynchronous" is.
- Here's [a definition](#) from TheBestSchools.org website (boldface and italics added by Darienite.com): "***Synchronous*** learning is online or distance education that happens **in real time**, whereas ***asynchronous*** learning occurs through online channels **without real-time interaction**."

We will ask Addley or the school district to confirm this.

Addley wrote:

- The [Education] commissioner's strong recommendation today was for districts not to conduct remote synchronous learning experiences in lieu of onsite schooling but rather to provide supplemental asynchronous activities. This is a different stance from previous communications from the state Department of Education.
- Reasons for the recommendation focus on the ability of districts to deliver with fidelity the educational services to all students as prescribed by state, local and federal laws. Given this position, the district is not submitting a waiver to provide remote synchronous learning experiences in lieu of on-site schooling.

It appears the superintendent is saying that the state suddenly said real-time online teaching involving student-teacher interactions the way a text or phone call works "synchronous learning") aren't good enough to meet the requirements of state or federal education law.

Instead, the state wants only "asynchronous activities" in online teaching (in which the student accesses material the same way as accessing a website or opening a book). And the state wants this to be "supplemental," which apparently means something other than required education.

All of this, taken together, seems to mean the state won't accept online learning as a substitute for a school day.

Addley said the district's eLearning program combines both synchronous and asynchronous elements. Regarding synchronous learning, he also said the district is not applying for a waiver "to provide remote synchronous learning experiences in lieu of on-site schooling."

He didn't say anything about whether or not the district would apply for a waiver to provide *asynchronous* learning in lieu of regular school days.

But if the asynchronous learning that the state will accept is only "supplemental," as Addley states, and if "supplemental" only means non-required learning (which wasn't clear from Addley's statement), then it seems that wouldn't be good enough to substitute for an in-school day either.

It isn't clear whether or not the district could design an online learning program that the state would approve, either for this two-week period or for the rest of the school year.

Darienite.com will seek clarification from Addley or the school district on that.

(3) although Governor Lamont waived the requirement that districts provide at least 180 days of schooling, that only applies if a district tries to meet the requirement:

Addley wrote:

- Governor Lamont's announcement yesterday that the state is waiving the 180-day requirement still requires districts to attempt to meet this requirement.

It isn't clear what else the district could do, aside from bringing students back into classrooms, that would meet the requirement that it make its best efforts to meet what Addley describes as the state's current

requirements for a 180-day school year.

Darienite.com will seek clarification from Addley or the school district on that.

(4) possibly for that reason, spring break from April 6 to 10 may be cancelled:

Addley wrote:

- At this point, if our district misses any additional days (beyond the 10) it is possible that we may need to use April break as make-up days. Given the exceptionality of the circumstances and the uncertainty of the next several weeks we will continue to monitor this situation and keep families up to date.

Addley may be saying here that because the governor "requires districts to attempt to meet this [180-day] requirement," the district may have to cancel April break, sending students back to school.

Will it be safe enough for students to return to school? We don't know, according to a March 6 article on the National Geographic website:

"Those currently studying the disease say their research is too early to predict how the virus will respond to changing weather."

Full Text:

Dear families and staff,

Yesterday, I spoke the commissioner of education and in the afternoon participated in a statewide conference call for school superintendents. This is an update communication on eLearning and the makeup days in the event that schools were to be closed for a period longer than the ten (10) days from March 12 to March 25.

School Days

Connecticut state statute requires each school district to provide no less than 180 days of school. As previously shared, with one snow day and 10 days of closure due to the Coronavirus, the last day of school would be scheduled for June 30.

Governor Lamont's announcement yesterday that the state is waiving the 180-day requirement still requires districts to attempt to meet this requirement.

At this point, if our district misses any additional days (beyond the 10) it is possible that we may need to use April break as make-up days. Given the exceptionality of the circumstances and the uncertainty of the next several weeks we will continue to monitor this situation and keep families up to date.

eLearning

As you know, our staff has worked tirelessly and creatively over the past weeks to create enrichment experiences that all students will be able to access while schools are closed. eLearning experiences incorporate a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities.

The commissioner's strong recommendation today was for districts not to conduct remote synchronous learning experiences in lieu of onsite schooling but rather to provide supplemental asynchronous activities. This is a different stance from previous communications from the state Department of Education.

Reasons for the recommendation focus on the ability of districts to deliver with fidelity the educational services to all students as prescribed by state, local and federal laws. Given this position, the district is not submitting a waiver to provide remote synchronous learning experiences in lieu of on-site schooling.

Fortunately, our staff was preparing for both eLearning scenarios. In absence of a waiver, our staff has designed rich and varied asynchronous eLearning activities that students can access at their own pace and convenience.

Resources are accessible for all students in both general and special education. The eLearning resources can be accessed from the main page on the district website at 8 a.m. on Monday morning, March 16.

These activities are voluntary and students are not required to participate. The activities are not intended to replace classroom instruction. The goal is to offer opportunities for students to access enrichment, practice skills, and have structure to the day.

Thank you for your continued understanding and assistance as we navigate the next few days and weeks. District administrators will continue to provide you with regular updates while school is out.

Sincerely,

Alan Addley

Dr. Alan Addley Superintendent of Schools