

# 2020-21 REOPENING PLAN

Preparing for a Safe Return to School

*Proposal in Accordance with  
Adapt, Advance, Achieve:  
Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together.*

July 24, 2020

Date of Submission:	07/24/20
LEA Name:	Norwalk Public Schools
Reopening Plan Point of Contact:	Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Schools
Contact Email:	<a href="mailto:estrellaa@norwalkps.org">estrellaa@norwalkps.org</a>
Contact Phone:	203.515.4400
LEA COVID-19 Health and Safety Compliance Liaison:	Dr. Frank Costanzo, Chief of School Operations
Liaison Email:	<a href="mailto:costanzof@norwalkps.org">costanzof@norwalkps.org</a>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	Page 3
II.	PRIORITIES	Page 5
	Fall Reopening Model	Page 5
	Planning for Students Who Temporarily Choose Not to Participate	Page 7
	School Liaison, Communications and Data Collection	Page 8
III.	OPERATIONS PLAN	Page 9
	Facilities	Page 9
	Daily Operations	Page 9
	Child Nutrition	Page 11
	Transportation	Page 12
IV.	HEALTH PRACTICES & PROTOCOLS	Page 12
	NPS Protocols	Page 12
	Social Distancing	Page 13
	Use of Face Coverings, Masks and Shields	Page 13
V.	HEALTH MONITORING PLAN	Page 13
VI.	CONTAINMENT PLAN	Page 14
	Exposure Tracing, Isolation, Dismissal	Page 14
VII.	CANCELLATION OF CLASSES, REMOTE LEARNING AND REOPENING	Page 14
VIII.	ACADEMICS: SPECIAL EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LEARNERS	Page 15
IX.	FAMILY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	Page 19
X.	STAFFING AND PERSONNEL	Page 22
XI.	FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	Page 22

## I. INTRODUCTION

This document contains the Norwalk Public Schools 2020-2021 Reopening Plan. The plan was designed by the Norwalk Public Schools Reopening Task Force, a group comprised of district and school leaders, local community health experts, teachers, staff, parents, community leaders, and individuals from partner organizations.

The Task Force's charge includes the design of three educational learning models during the 2020-2021 school year that will ensure the health and wellbeing of students and staff; maximize student academic growth, and social emotional learning; emphasize equity and access; provide supports to teachers and staff; and assure operational and financial stability for the Board of Education.

The Task Force began meeting weekly in July, after the district launched in-person and virtual summer school. It includes active subcommittees researching and designing in specific areas including:

- Co-curricular (athletics, band, extra-curricular, camps etc.)
- Educational Plans/Models
- Family and Community Engagement
- Finance
- Food Service
- Health and Safety
- School Facilities
- Special Education
- Transportation
- Technology
- Talent and Staffing

### Education Planning for 2020-2021

-  Minimal COVID spread:  
Full In-person Learning Model for PreK-12  
with Virtual Option for Families Opting Out
-  Moderate COVID spread:  
Hybrid In-person/Virtual Learning Model  
to Reduce Density by 50%, with Virtual  
Option for Families Opting Out
-  High COVID spread:  
Full Virtual Learning Model

Depending upon the community spread level (minimal, moderate, high) of COVID-19 at any point during the next school year as determined by health experts, the district will, in consultation with the Norwalk Health Director and Connecticut State Department of Education, implement a full in-person learning plan, hybrid in-person/remote learning model, or a full remote learning model. A full-time, synchronistic, virtual option will be made available to families (Pre-K-12) who opt out of in-person learning. Families may determine to opt into or out of the virtual program at any point during the course of the school year.

## NPS School Reopening Task Force Members

Dr. Alexandra Estrella	Superintendent, Co-Chair
Dr. Frank Costanzo	Chief of School Operations, Co-Chair
<b>District Office:</b>	
Dr. Brenda Myers	Chief Academic Officer
Brenda Wilcox Williams	Chief Communications Officer
Yvette Goorevitch	Chief of Specialized Learning and Student Services
Ralph Valenzisi	Chief of Digital Learning and Development
Tom Hamilton	Chief Financial Officer
Javier Padilla	Chief Talent Officer
Joseph Rodriguez	Senior Manager, Talent Office
Sandra Faioes	Director of School Improvement
Helene Becker	English Learner Education
JoAnn Malinowski	School Health Coordinator
<b>High School:</b>	
Reginald Roberts	Principal
Douglas Marchetti	Athletic Director
Julie Parham	Director
Chris Rivera	Band Director, NFT
Scott Hurwitz	Principal
<b>Middle School:</b>	
Joseph Vellucci	Principal
Elizabeth Amaral	Assistant Principal
Mary Yordon	Norwalk Federation of Teachers
<b>PreK &amp; Elementary School:</b>	
Medard Thomas	Principal
Elizabeth Chahine	Principal
Theresa Rangel	Principal
Dr. Sara-Jane Henry	Curriculum and Instruction Site Director
Tina Saunders	Teacher, NFT
Jaime Zyla	Early Childhood
<b>Paraeducator:</b>	
Christina Webb	Special Education, NFEP
<b>*Parents:</b>	
David Heuvelman	Special Education
Andrew Todd	Nathan Hale Middle School
Tracy Barclay	Roton Middle School
Michelle Robinson	Ponus Ridge Middle School
Doreen Anderson	Norwalk High School
Caitlin Engle	Naramake Elementary School
Iliana Zuniga	West Rocks Middle School
<b>Operational Partners:</b>	
Deanna D'Amore	Norwalk Health Department
Lamond Daniels	Norwalk Department of Community Services
Lt. Terry Blake	Norwalk Police Department/SROs
Brenda Penn-Williams	Norwalk NAACP
M.J. Chironna	Norwalk ACTS

This report has been developed following the preliminary guidance and considerations contained within the CSDE's, [Connecticut School ReOpening Plan - Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together.](#)

## II. PRIORITIES

### FALL REOPENING MODEL

The Norwalk Public Schools Reopening Plan prioritizes the assumption that all students return to in-person learning in school for full-time instruction at the beginning of 2020-21, as long as the public health data continues to support this model. This model, outlined in this document, is supported with additional mitigation strategies and monitor, containment, and class cancellation plans if needed for a quick transition to a hybrid model. Families who choose not to return to in-person learning will have a virtual learning option available at all grade levels.

#### Education Plan

Norwalk Public Schools will reopen with instructional schedules and models that are flexible and based on current transmission levels. We understand that we may start the school under one model, and as new information becomes available about health and safety, we may need to transition to a different model. We have designed our reopening plan to ensure transitions between risk levels are seamless and predictable with daily schedules, teacher and course assignments, curricular expectations and technology integration, and assessment and grading practices remaining constant.

#### Teacher/Course Assignments

**All elementary students** are enrolled in a school by grade level and assigned a teacher. The teacher becomes the primary cohort and the grade level becomes the secondary cohort. All services for students are provided in the classroom or offered remotely. Students with Disabilities are grouped into class cohorts adhering to the 50/50 LRE guidance from SDE and special education teachers are assigned to classes to ensure full hours of IEPs addressing goals are met via a push in model to support cohort groupings.

**All middle school students** are enrolled in a school by grade level and house. They have an assigned middle school schedule for all subjects. During remote or face-to-face learning each student will maintain the same schedule, courses and teachers. SWDs are grouped into class cohorts adhering to the 50/50 LRE guidance from SDE and special education teachers are assigned to classes to ensure full hours of IEPs addressing goals are met via a push in model to support cohort groupings.

**All high school students** are enrolled by grade level. Each student will maintain the same schedule, courses and teachers during remote and face-to-face learning. SWDs are grouped

into class cohorts adhering to the 50/50 LRE guidance from SDE and special education teachers are assigned to classes to ensure full hours of IEPs addressing goals are met via a push in model to support cohort groupings.

All students will also be given the option to enroll in a full-time virtual learning.

### Curricular Expectations

Norwalk Public Schools has developed an articulated curriculum sequence for all disciplines that guides the sequence of instruction and prioritizes the learning outcomes. The curriculum is aligned with a series of resources including digital resources and access to a wide range of text. The arts, health and physical education remain a critical part of the curriculum and are delivered both face-to-face and remotely, with specific attention to safety. Social emotional learning is a daily element of learning each day to support our students, build competencies and connections and to meet the emotional needs of our students.

Instructional routines and protocols underscore our daily classroom practices. Tools like “thinking maps,” shared reading and project-based learning are consistently part of the lesson design. Individual learning kits are developed so that students have the tactical resources they need to complete assignments, work artistically and visually build concepts.

### Technology Integration

Daily instruction includes blended learning opportunities. All students have a 1-to-1 device with access to supported software programs. The consistent use of technology is key to supporting students if the risk level requires more remote learning. In the blended learning model teachers establish course content in a learning management tool such as Google classroom, Nearpod or Seesaw. Students also use online resources to support their learning, conduct simulations, access text, build projects, and share their writing and performances.

During remote learning, students have daily synchronistic time with their teacher as well as specific learning assignments, small group instruction and one-to-one conferring. Daily reading and writing are foundational to each learning plan.

### Assessment and Grading Practices

Our schools follow a systemic cycle of assessment, including initial screening and benchmarking, ongoing progress monitoring, and the daily use of formative and summative classroom assessment in order to inform instruction and gauge student learning. We analyze student data to identify shifts and changes in instruction to meet student needs and to implement intervention strategies.

Our classroom assessment practices rely on analyzing student work in all disciplines. Students need opportunities for revision and feedback in order to improve their learning and to show growth. Each classroom assessment is used as part of the grading and reporting system. Parents will continue to receive student progress reports and report cards and high school credits and grades will be reported on student transcripts.



Standardized assessments are used to benchmark student growth and achievement. The district uses AIMSwebplus and NWEA. The district administers all required state assessments. Students receiving IEP services or in tiered interventions in reading, math or writing will participate in continuous progress monitoring using CBMs, in addition to the benchmark and student growth measures.

### **STUDENTS WHO TEMPORARILY CHOOSE NOT TO PARTICIPATE: VIRTUAL LEARNING**

To support students who opt into attending school virtually for the 2020-20201 school year, NPS families will be given the option to enroll their students in virtual learning. Families will be asked to fill out a Reopening Registration form in August to select their choice.

#### **Structure and scheduling of classrooms**

Students will follow the same class schedule, with the same teachers and classmates that they would in the face-to-face model. This will allow for a seamless transition back into the face-to-face model, and also allow for teachers to follow a similar model to their traditional classroom, in case there is another shutdown of schools and all students are virtual.

Requests for virtual learning students to return to in-person, face-to-face instruction will be granted immediately, once the district has verified that all health guidelines have been met.

Students with disabilities will be provided with service hours via an integrated co-teaching approach where appropriate. Additional hours for related services will be provided in addition to the live instruction within general education.

#### **Instructional components and support**

There will be online office hours scheduled for teachers at the beginning and end of the teaching day in order to receive technical and instructional support.

#### **Technology integration**

Teachers will use Google Classroom, Nearpod or Seesaw as the repository for content, lessons and assignments. Teacher will use either Google Meet or Microsoft Teams as their video platform and method of recording lessons. A list of approved applications will be available through our single user sign on tool (Classlink) and tutorials will be available for teachers and parents.

#### **Scheduling for special areas, arts and physical education**

All schools K-12 will continue to provide all students access to Visual and Performing Arts, instrumental music lessons and physical education.

#### **Parent Engagement and Support**

Teachers will communicate with students and parents via a chosen method daily (eg, email, Seesaw, etc). The method will depend on the student's grade level. Parents will have a resource page populated with tutorials for digital literacy support in both English and Spanish.



NPS will have online office hours for parents that will include instructional support, translation services and technical support.

## SCHOOL LIAISON, COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS AND DATA COLLECTION

### School Liaison

Dr. Frank Costanzo, Chief of School Operations, has been designated as Norwalk's COVID-19 Health and Safety Compliance Liaison, responsible for engaging with students, parents, faculty, staff and administrators to answer questions or concerns about health and safety requirements.

### Communications

Norwalk Public Schools has a robust communication system in place for both regular and urgent communications. Districtwide communications are always translated into English and Spanish. With an increasing population of families (220 students) who identify Haitian-Creole as a primary language, the district is also identifying translation resources, bilingual staff and volunteers, and community networks to ensure those families are informed and connected.

Urgent messages, as well as up-to-date policies and protocols, will be communicated through multiple channels that families and staff rely on for information from the district, including

- SchoolMessenger e-blast, robocalls and text messages
- District and school websites
- Official Facebook and Twitter feeds, with messages amplified by shares from schools, PTO/As, and other parent organizations for both English and Spanish speakers
- Traditional and online media newspaper, TV, radio

Districtwide and staff newsletters are produced in alternating weeks during the school year and with special editions over the summer. As circumstances require, the district will transition to more frequent newsletters. Both parent and staff newsletters were produced weekly during distance learning in the spring to cover the unprecedented and evolving news, and to support distance learning. The district's distribution list includes city, state, community and faith-based leaders to enable them to assist with reaching all constituents.

The Norwalk Public Schools plan will be available on the district website as well as each school's website. A dedicated section created in the Spring specifically to support distance learning, as well as a separate one to support special education families, will be refreshed with updated information for Fall reopening. Materials posted to our website will be ADA compliant.

Other communication outreach on reopening and COVID-19 will include town hall-style webinar meetings hosted by the Superintendent, podcasts, fact sheets, FAQs and infographics. For more information, see the Family and Community Engagement Section.

### Data Collection

The district worked with Panorama to create and distribute two separate surveys this month, one for all parents and guardians, and another for all staff. The surveys collected valuable information on family and staff needs and preferences on the process for reopening schools and input for supporting students in the upcoming academic year. Participation rates were very high, with a 47% response rate for parents and 71% response rate for staff.

A Reopening Enrollment Form will be sent to all families in early August to identify student specific information about whether a student will return to in-person learning or opt instead for distance learning. So that families can make an informed decision, the form will be accompanied by information about instruction and health and safety protocols that the district will put in place.

The district will continue to work with Panorama in the fall and beyond for getting parent and staff feedback.

NPS will also conduct short, single topic “pulse” surveys via district newsletters for two-way communication and data collection.

## III. OPERATIONS PLAN

### FACILITIES

- Classroom layouts will maintain a minimum of 6 feet where feasible
- We expect to repurpose the gym, auditorium, cafeteria. If the school requires additional space, we investigating options, although availability is limited and would be expensive.
- Protocols maintain that teachers will remain 6 feet from students, and when not possible, the teacher will wear the appropriate PPE.
- All signs and messages are standardized per CDC guidelines, including handwashing, physical distancing, no sharing, and have been fastened to walls and floors, in Spanish and English. Additional signage at the high schools will be put in place as extra measures due to the larger cohorts.
- Training for staff will take place during our Professional Development days prior to the opening of schools. This will include webinars, live Zooms, and will allow time for questions and answers. Staff will have the opportunity to practice these protocols at their sites prior to opening.
- ECS will provide training modules created by NPS to all substitutes.

### DAILY OPERATIONS

#### Cohorts

Where feasible, the district will establish cohorts within the school population.

- Elementary schools will have classroom cohorts. When feasible, instructors push-in. Secondary cohorts may be necessary for services.
- Middle school cohorts will be by grade and house and when feasible have instructors push-in.
- High school cohorting is challenging. Our plan will attempt to cohort by grade level.
- Assistance will be provided by staff as students disembark buses on arrival to school to maintain assigned points of entry based on cohort assignments.

### Operations Procedures for Before- and After-School

**Elementary schools** will only provide before and after childcare for days students are in school. Each school will work exclusively with one sole provider with whom there is already an established partnership.

- Each organization must adhere to the approved health and safety protocol and must submit their health and safety program proposal to Dr. Costanzo for review and approval.
- No outside enrichment providers will be allowed at the elementary school level.

**Middle School** enrichment and sports will be offered by school teachers who will need to apply to offer an afterschool activity.

- Each school will work exclusively with one sole provider with whom there is already an established partnership. Each organization must adhere to the approved health and safety protocol and must submit their health and safety program proposal to Dr. Costanzo for review and approval.
- No additional outside enrichment providers will be allowed at the middle school level.
- Middle school afterschool will only be offered for days students are in-school, cohorted by grade level with groups of 10-12.
- All performances (theatre, music, instrumental etc.) will be done virtually.
- No travel permitted at the elementary or middle school level (no field trips or leaving the school campus).

**High School** sports, arts and all clubs will be offered.

- Schools will not be rented out or to be used by any outside organization.
- NPS will follow CIAC established guidelines (all sports are played within Connecticut, no traveling outside Connecticut).
- Marching band rehearsal will not cap student involvement; however, students will be divided up into cohorts of 10-12 students spread out along their rehearsal space (field/parking lot). Bands will follow US Bands guidelines.
- All performances will remain in Connecticut (no traveling outside the state).
- All other clubs will be offered by high school teachers only.
- Students will be limited to groups of 10-12.

- Teachers will need to apply to offer an afterschool activity.
- If students are learning remotely, they will still be allowed to attend afterschool activities. For those families, transportation is responsibility of individual family.
- Spectator attendance will follow the FCIAC/CIAC guidelines.

**Virtual Afterschool:** Schools may offer virtual afterschool options, taught online and contracted out to organizations offering online opportunities.

- High school students on virtual learning can still participate in-person in team sports or music programming at their school.
- Where applicable, those high school students who join from virtual learning will be cohorted together in their activity.

## CHILD NUTRITION

Meals will be available every day to all students in both virtual and in-person learning. All meals will meet all the necessary meal pattern guidelines provided by the state.

Norwalk Public Schools will continue to accept and process all meal applications. The Norwalk Public Schools Determining Official, Jill Kress, will process the meal applications both online and in paper forms. Once the application has been determined, it is entered into the NutriKids point of sale system, which will then transfer to our serving lines at the school level. Parents are notified within 10 days via a letter sent home to families to notify them of their child's eligibility.

Students will use a touchless system to swipe their personal bar code and the meal will register as paid, free, or reduced depending on the eligibility which was determined on the student application.

Grab & Go meals will be available for students engaged in virtual learning, to be served from one of 10 tent sites set up throughout the district this Spring. Parents can pick up the student meal and let the staff member know the student name to be entered into the meal system. Staff members will scan the barcode associated with name for claiming purposes.

Norwalk Public Schools will continue to use our point of sale system for counting and claiming meals for reimbursement. The online claim form from the NutriKids point of sale system will be used to enter all meals on the COLYAR site to ensure all claims are processed correctly.

## Transportation

Low Transmission Risk	Moderate Transmission Risk
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will be scheduled on buses based on the eligibility, enrollment and bus capacity, not to exceed industry standard but operating at no more than 80% capacity</li> <li>• Proposed Bus Paraprofessionals will be scheduled to assist on elementary buses for younger students, to maintain health and safety protocols, HS/MS students will be expected to use honor system</li> <li>• A supply of disposable masks will be provided to students who arrive at the bus stop without one</li> <li>• Students are currently assigned to seats based on their loading and unloading on the bus, this is a route scheduling practice, first stop on seated to the back of the bus, loading back to front, unloading front to back</li> <li>• School staff will be assigned to assist students on arrival to unload buses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operating at 50% capacity, students will be scheduled on alternating days based on the proposed educational plan</li> <li>• Students will be scheduled to an assigned seat based on their loading and unloading on the bus, siblings will be seated together and alternating rows will be occupied</li> <li>• Proposed Bus Paraprofessionals will be scheduled to assist on elementary buses for younger students, to maintain health and safety protocols, MS/HS students will expected to use honor system</li> <li>• A supply of disposable masks will be provided to students who arrive at the bus stop without one</li> <li>• Students are currently assigned seats based on their loading and unloading on the bus, this is a route scheduling practice currently being applied for summer school</li> <li>• School staff will be assigned to assist students on arrival to unload buses</li> </ul>

## IV. HEALTH PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS

Age and stakeholder appropriate practices and protocols have been developed in partnership with the Norwalk Health Department, our medical advisor, and in accordance with all CDC and CSDE recommendations. Plans for the Fall will be informed by practices and protocols developed and activated for in-person Summer school learning.

- Teachers will engage in instructing students in these protocols and practicing these routines.
- Set aside time at the beginning of the school year, as well as frequent reminders, to review and assess, and reeducate if deficient and assess again at least once a month (duration will depend on age group) the new policies and protocols with all [staff](#) and [students](#).
- Communications plan includes signage, webinars for families, staff, and students, making resources available, and allotting practice time for staff and students.

- All supplies meet the CDC and State Health Department guidelines. School and offices have been stocked and reserves are currently being built.
- Protocol for a [single point of contact](#).
- [Communication to families](#) about a child that may have symptoms consistent to Covid-19.
- Students or staff should [stay home](#) if he or she is feeling sick or has recently had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 (14 days).
- Staff and students who have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 should also [stay home and monitor their health](#) (14 days)
- [Staff and students that tested positive can return to school when:](#)
- CDC's criteria can help inform when [employees](#) should return to work:
  - If they have been sick with COVID-19
  - [If they have recently had close contact with a person with COVID-19](#)

### Social Distancing

- Classrooms have been engineered to maintain the appropriate social distancing between desks. Signage helps to maintain appropriate social distancing in all areas.
- School operations, such as transitions, arrival, dismissal, and drills have been modified to maximize distancing between groups.

### Use of Face Coverings, Masks, and Face Shields

- [NPS Face Mask Protocol](#)
- [Face Mask Exemption](#)
- NPS has additional masks on hand for students and staff to ensure that everyone in our schools, buses, and sites are abiding by the face mask protocol.
- Additional masks are on hand on buses and at school entrances, additional PPE available at all school nurse's offices.

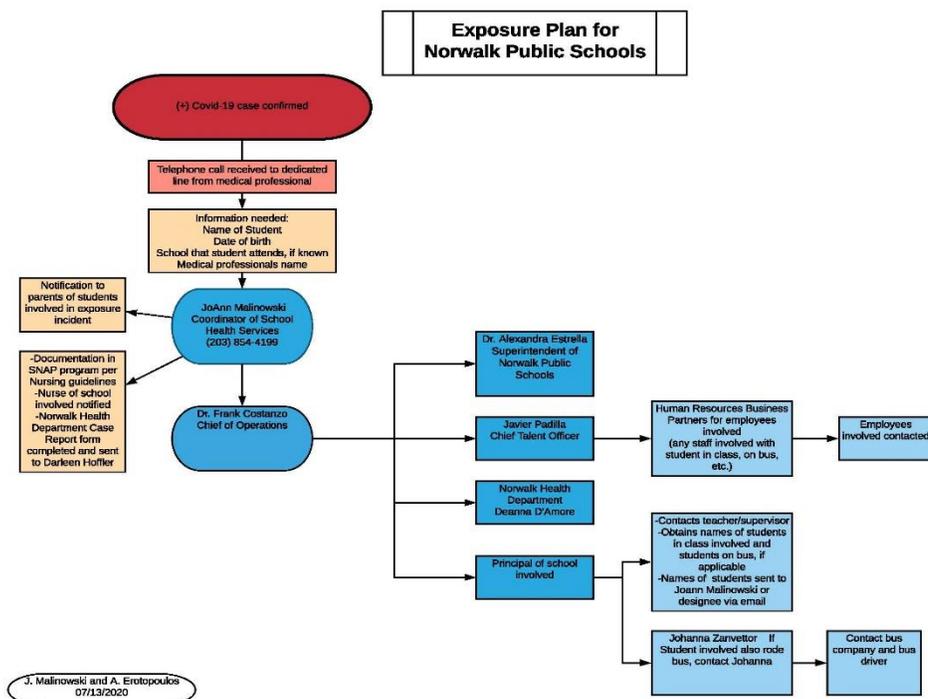
## V. HEALTH MONITORING PLAN

For individuals who present signs of Covid-19 or may have been exposed to a person that is Covid-19 positive:

- [Staff and students will be instructed to stay home](#), per CDC guidelines, if they have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#) for 10 days.
- Staff and students who have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with COVID-19 should also [stay home and monitor their health](#) for 14 days
- [Staff and students that tested positive can return to school when:](#)
  - He or she has remained in quarantine for 10 days, he or she continues to have no fever for 24 hours, and after presenting a signed note from a medical provider clearing them to return to work/school.

## VI. CONTAINMENT PLAN

### Exposure Tracing, Isolation, Dismissal



- If staff or a student is ill with symptoms related to COVID-19, the [School Nurse Protocol](#) will be activated.
- Staff or students who present [symptoms consistent with Covid-19](#) will be sent home.
- A Case Report form will be completed for every student who has a laboratory confirmed positive COVID-19 test (form provided by Norwalk Health Department). Upon completion, this form will be sent to Norwalk Health Department to begin contact tracing.
- Any student or staff who appears to have symptoms that possibly could be COVID-19 will be instructed to contact their primary medical doctor for evaluation.

## VII. CANCELLATION OF CLASSES, REMOTE LEARNING & REOPENING PLAN

During a period of minimal or moderate community spread of COVID-19, if there is a positive case within a school, staff and students may be dismissed for two days to allow time for the officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the school and for custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facility.

- The Superintendent will make the decision to close in consultation with the Medical Advisor and Director of Health.
- This determination will be on a case by case basis.

Working closely with the Norwalk Health Department, NPS will monitor for additional guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Public Health for community and school-based indicators to assist with the decision-making on cancellation of classes and distance learning.

### Future Planning for Remote Blended Learning

If it becomes required to transition to a 50% reduction in density model (Orange Plan), all Pre-K-5 students would attend school in-person five days per week. ELLs and SPED students would also receive an in-person learning program. At this time, NPS would plan for grade 6-12 students to learn remotely in the orange model. ELLs and SPED students would receive an in-person learning program. Plans are under development that will repurpose high schools and potentially middle schools to house 4th and 5th grade learners.

NPS surveyed families following Spring distance learning to gather feedback on the experience with remote learning. Feedback was incorporated into our Summer learning plan and will be incorporated in our plans in the event that the risk level rises and schools need to transition to orange (moderate risk) or red (high risk) operations.

To ensure distance learning continues despite a closure, every NPS student will receive a device and internet access. All the materials will have a digital format and be available for all students.

## VIII. ACADEMICS – SPECIAL EDUCATION AND ENGLISH LEARNERS

### Special Education: Responsibilities for FAPE

Norwalk Public Schools has developed a reopening plan with the understanding that there has been no waiver of requirements under IDEA. The plan addresses implementation of IEPs to assure FAPE in the least restrictive environment while focusing on health and safety precautions. The District has placed a priority to provide a 5 day per week in person instruction for SWDs to assure that service hours on the IEP are provided to address individual goals. Any modification to the service hours or goals will be made by the PPT process, which will be based upon data and/or re-evaluations as necessary. Parents may opt into virtual instruction and specialized instruction. Related services will be provided via synchronous instruction.

### **Special Education: Least Restrictive Environments: Recognizing that SWDs are general education students first. Commitment to accommodations, UDL and Access**

Recognizing that SWDs are general education students first, the plan assures access to general education curriculum and classrooms to the greatest extent appropriate. Continuing our focused work on effective co-teaching strategies and UDL, special education staff service will provide push-in services including co-teaching, in-class, small group and individual work to the greatest extent possible. Accommodations via UDL supported by the special education department are available to all students. This work has begun in earnest during COVID closures by including accommodations of all C/I materials and strategies with links to accommodations and modifications for each stage of planning. Equipment to safely engineer classrooms including flexible soundproof partitions and cameras such as swivl cameras or cameras on devices are included in the plan to assure access to live instruction in appropriate environments while maximizing cohort groupings and minimizing interactions across classes for service providers. Related services will be provided by synchronous interventions.

### **Special Education: Planning for Implementation based upon severity of need**

The District's plan focuses on the severity of need and the unique circumstances of individual students. The District's plan has assessed student needs as follows:

#### **Students with Mild Disabilities**

- Students have six or less special education (exclusive of related services) hours on IEP.
- These students will follow their class cohort in general education.
- Schedule of special education supports and related services will be integrated into classroom instruction (in person or hybrid).
- Implementation within the school day within the general education setting.
- Consider amendments to IEPs regarding location of services.
- Provide continuous progress monitoring.

#### **Students with Moderate Disabilities**

- Students have more than 6 hours on the IEP (exclusive related service hours).
- May participate in two cohorts in hybrid model to allow full-time in person instruction and to receive full implementation of IEP service hours.
- If cohort and density requirements are needed, we will consider use of cameras in co-taught classrooms.
- Related services will be provided by synchronous interventions.
- Consider amendments to IEPs regarding location of services.
- Re-assess as necessary if students may require a change in the level of services.
- Provide continuous progress monitoring.
- It is recognized that should a hybrid model be required, the commitment to provide 5 day per week services to SWDs may have a fiscal impact as students may participate in

two cohorts in balanced groups thus creating breakage in group size required to ensure density requirements.

### Students with Severe Disabilities

- Students spend 80% of the school day or more in special education settings (Special Classes, Special Schools) students form their own cohort.
- Related services provide push-in services in an “engineered classroom” or will be provided by synchronous interventions.
- Individual access to general education within a second cohort will be scheduled to meet the LRE recommendations of the IEP to the greatest degree feasible.
- Work with families to assure access to wrap around services by collaboration with other State agencies (DSS, DDS, DCF, BRS) and community-based agencies.
- Provide continuous progress monitoring and on-going data collection. Individual decisions about scheduling of general education participation will be made to assure safe cohort groupings.
- Individualized alternatives to community-based transition program implementation will be made in consultation with parents and students and IEP amendments will follow the PPT process should the risk level prohibit students from participating in community work sites or on site at NCC (Project SEARCH).

### Special Education: Special Considerations Regarding Face Masks

Parents, students and special education staff will be provided support and consultation to assist SWDs and other students based upon need to learn to use face coverings and follow safety protocols. This work will be led by the District’s 8 BCBA’s. Social Stories have been developed in multiple languages and have been implemented during ESY to assist SWDs to tolerate face coverings and follow safety protocols of distancing and hygiene. Individual plans will be developed for students with more intense needs that allow for a slow schedule to assist students to tolerate the protocols. While implementing the protocols, the goal is for 15 minutes on, 5 minutes off for the younger students (Pre-K through 2) until they can tolerate 30 minutes on and 5 minutes off. Students in grades 3-12 will follow the same protocol until they can tolerate 1 hour on and 5 minutes off, exclusive of lunch.

Specific protocols following health and safety guidelines will be followed for face mask exceptions and in consultation with parents and treating physicians, individual protocols will be developed to assist all students to tolerate face coverings and other safety protocols unless there is a clear medical prohibition from doing so such as a student with a trach or other physical or medical considerations. The district views this as a life skill learning opportunity. Individual amendments to IEPs may be considered to include this goal.

Full PPE protections including shields for staff and plexiglass partitions in the classrooms will be used when children cannot wear face coverings due to medical exceptions and distance requirements cannot be maintained or intensive behavior plans are required.

Outreach to families of students with medical needs will be provided two weeks before school reopens to assist families to obtain documentation regarding medication and treatment considerations.

In person individualized evaluations will be completed with full PPE and plexiglass protections while risk factors are considered to be mild or moderate. PPTs will continue to be implemented virtually to the greatest degree possible to reduce in school meetings. Additional information regarding Special Education Process and Process, procedures, communication and compliance across the risk levels can be found here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1pYcNKDVu1cw\\_StogF-uNZXhOILYsY7PIF-j4Wr5CqVg/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1pYcNKDVu1cw_StogF-uNZXhOILYsY7PIF-j4Wr5CqVg/edit#gid=0)

### English Learners

In order to ensure that we adhere to all statewide EL identification and parental notification procedures, we have moved our EL Welcome Center to a bigger venue so that we can serve families safely with social distancing and other protocols in place. After reviewing Home Language Surveys, at the EL Welcome Center we screen all potential ELs, interview families about the past education of their children, and explain the program options so that they can make informed choices for their children.

English learners continue to have access to the general education curriculum as well as to supplemental language support services, provided by teachers certified in TESOL and Bilingual Education along with bilingual instructional aides.

At the elementary level, EL staff are assigned to as few grade-level cohorts as possible, and to as few classrooms within the grade level, as possible. This is accomplished by clustering ELs into designated classrooms per grade level so that the EL staff can provide services in the classroom setting using effective co-teaching strategies to the greatest extent appropriate. In a blended or remote situation, EL staff provide the same services by co-teaching with general education staff and providing supplemental small group instruction using online tools.

Engineered classrooms using flexible sound-proof partitions will allow for flexible small group instruction within the classroom reducing the need for pull outs across the school building.

At the middle school level, EL staff will be assigned to the “houses” in which ELs are assigned, and continue to provide direct EL instruction as well as support in content-area classes, either in person or remotely using online tools. At the high school level, we will continue to offer our wide array of EL and sheltered classes, either in person or remotely, using online tools.

Bilingual certified teachers and bilingual instructional aides will continue to provide the required bilingual supports, either in person or remotely. Students in our dual language program will continue to receive content instruction in both English and Spanish.

We recognize that all teachers must use effective strategies and supports to help ELs understand lesson material and succeed academically. We have been providing professional learning on this topic for several years, but given this new academic environment, we recognize the need for even more support for teachers. To that end, we are preparing to provide robust online professional learning opportunities for all staff to become better equipped to serve our EL population either in person or remotely.

During the closure of schools in the Spring, we learned that we must communicate with parents using a variety of means in order to ensure that all parents have access to information sent out by the district. To that end, we employ the use of the internet, robocalls, personal phone calls, and traditional mail so that parents receive information in a variety of ways. We will provide information in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole which to serve the vast majority of our school community. When we need to communicate with parents who do not speak these languages, we employ the use of Language Line and other interpretation and translation services.

Because most of our EL families speak Spanish, we have given many of our Spanish-speaking staff district phone numbers so that they can communicate easily with families. In the Fall, we will distribute district phone numbers to more bilingual staff.

We serve dually-identified students (ELs with special needs) by providing both EL and special education services, either in person or remotely, as required by students' IEPs. EL and special education staff collaborate to ensure that student needs are met. We provide translated special education reports and interpreters at PPT and other parent meetings, as needed.

We continue to serve the social/emotional needs of ELs by maintaining our relationship with the Mid-Fairfield Child Guidance agency which has been providing clinical and referral services to our EL students and families in need. Besides conducting trauma counseling, they have been providing professional learning sessions to staff on trauma-informed care and will continue to do so in the upcoming school year.

## IX. FAMILY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

### Family Support and Communication

Norwalk Public Schools complies with state and federal family engagement requirements, including those specific to our Title I schools.

School Governance Councils, already established at every Norwalk school, will continue to meet either virtually, or in-person as public health conditions allow. Schools will review and communicate school-parent compacts, two-way parent-teacher communications will be established between family members and school staff, and every effort will be made to ensure families are involved in school activities.

Working with their SGCs and PTO/As, each school will modify afterschool and evening in-person events, including parent welcomes on the first day of school, open houses and back-to-school nights, to comply with any applicable guidelines for indoor or outdoor events, and all city and district health protocols as outlined in this document.

Emphasis will be placed on providing families with clear and ongoing communications in multiple languages about what to expect, during and prior to reopening. Communications will be both proactive and responsive. This will include:

### **Website and Webinars**

- Town hall-style webinars hosted by the Superintendent, including one scheduled for July 29 to brief families and staff on this proposal.
- The Norwalk Public Schools Reopening plan will be available on the district website as well as each school's website. A dedicated section created in the Spring specifically to support Distance Learning, as well as a separate one to support special education families, will be refreshed with updated information for Fall reopening.
- Facebook Live sessions devoted to a specific topic, especially SEL.

### **Print**

- A visual, printed Guide to School Reopening will specifically focus on information parents need to know, created in multiple languages. It will be mailed in August to all families.

### **Digital Media**

- Podcasts are being created to highlight topics that the Reopening Task Force is working on.
- A back-to-school edition of the districtwide newsletter and staff newsletter will be dedicated to reopening. Subsequent issues will provide updates.

### **Phone, Email and In-Person**

- The district's general phone lines and email accounts are staffed by bilingual communications staffers who will have materials and information available to respond to or redirect inquiries.
- The ELL Welcome Center will have materials available to respond to or redirect inquiries.

### **Social Media**

- Social media accounts will be scheduled 2-3 times per week to provide updates and direct people to information.
- Facebook and Twitter are monitored to identify misinformation and trends, and staff can respond to individuals or group trends.

### Community Networks

- Formal and informal community networks will be used to assist in reaching all segments of the community.
- Parent groups and volunteers will extend the reach of social.
- Community partners and organizations, including Norwalk ACTS, Norwalk NAACP, the Unidad Latino Network, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Norwalk Immigration Coalition, and faith-based organizations, will be provided with parent-related communications materials to enable their support in reaching all segments of the community.

### Media Outreach

- Announcements and press releases provided to traditional and online media.

### Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health

All students across all conditions will be provided with daily SEL instructional opportunities. In grades Pre-K to 3, 15 minutes daily SEL intervention will be provided. In grades 4-12+, 30 minutes will be provided daily and embedded into the instructional curriculum to the greatest extent appropriate. SEL interventions will be age appropriate using several resources already available in the District including RULER, BPIS, Rethink SEL, Second Step and Restorative Practices. Specific focus on teaching tolerance and social justice will be embedded into this work.

Social Workers and School Counselors will continue to reach out to students and families who have not been fully engaged via personal outreach and follow up.

Bilingual paraprofessionals and the District's Bilingual SW Ombudsperson for Special Education will provide outreach to engage families who require individualized assistance whose home language is not English.

A tiered approach to mental health support in schools will be provided by social workers, psychologists and school counselors using research-based interventions including DBT strategies and intensive supports via Rethink SEL consistent with CASEL protocols.

Coordination with our community partners including Norwalk ACTS, the District's convening agent, will provide training to all staff in trauma informed care. Consultation will be provided to families and staff to identify self-care techniques and a standardized risk assessment protocol to identify students and families who may need wrap around care or a higher level of community based mental health treatment.

In addition, based on the NPS families' response to the Panorama Reopening Survey, community-based organizations will provide virtual workshops for families to address their social and emotional needs.

## IX. STAFFING AND PERSONNEL

In compliance with the state guidance, we are preparing for all employees to return to work when schools reopen. We will comply with all wage and hour regulations, including FLSA, FMLA, OSHA, unemployment compensation, and the new Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

We are developing clear and succinct one-page flyers to communicate rights and options available to employees should they need information on any of these benefits and rights.

The district has conducted an employee survey to enable us to assess how to engage a full roster of staff, including a potential substitute plan, and whether stipends or changes in substitute pay is required to support the needs of the school. Benchmark data includes:

1. Preparing for Return to School
2. Instructional Preferences
3. Return-to-School Professional Needs, and
4. Social-Emotional Well-Being.

The data will be used to align our current resources to the needs and priorities of the district. This will highlight any potential talent gaps so that action plans can be developed. We also want to understand the preferences of our employees, in order to leverage and maximize skills.

We partner with a service provider to ensure there is a robust pool of substitutes in the event we experience an influx of resignations, leaves, or requests for accommodations. Finally, we are exploring the financial impact on developing creative ways to extend hours for paraeducators or other critical staff.

## X. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is abundantly clear that re-opening the Norwalk Public Schools under any of the scenarios (low COVID-19 spread, moderate COVID-19 spread, or high COVID-19 spread) will impose considerable additional costs on the Norwalk Public Schools, and these additional costs were not included in the FY 2020-21 NPS approved operating budget. As such, these additional costs are presently *unfunded but anticipated expenses of reopening school*.

There is considerable uncertainty over the final projected costs of reopening, because the reopening plan is fluid and subject to revision based on changing conditions and evolving guidance from the Connecticut State Department of Education and from State and local health authorities. The availability, pricing, and delivery schedule for various commodities and services that may be needed to support the reopening plan are matters of considerable uncertainty, as school districts throughout the country scramble to procure the same items. In addition, the ability to recruit, hire and pay for the additional staff that may be necessary to support this plan is also an area of considerable uncertainty.

From the standpoint of paying for this plan, it is imperative that the Norwalk Public Schools work closely with our Federal, State, and City partners to identify and secure the additional resources necessary to fund the final approved reopening plan. NPS will certainly need to scour its existing approved budget to identify areas where the pandemic has resulted in budget savings that can be re-programmed to support the COVID-19 reopening plan. But it is apparent that the magnitude of the cost of the reopening plan will greatly exceed any such internal budget savings that can be identified. Therefore, we believe it will be critical for the Federal and State governments to assist Norwalk Public Schools (and other school districts) with covering the extraordinary costs of reopening.

In the absence of significant additional funding from Federal, State, or City sources, the District will be unable to cover these extraordinary costs without making draconian cuts to many existing district programs and services.

Norwalk Public Schools responded to a CSDE fiscal reopening survey on 7/17/20 prior to the completion of the District's reopening plan. The Norwalk Public Schools estimated the costs of reopening schools in Norwalk under the "minimal spread" scenario as follows:

#### SUMMARY COSTS OF REOPENING

Description	District Personnel Costs	Non-Personnel costs
Academics (instructional materials, supplies & contracted services)	\$ 11,000,000	\$ 720,000
Building, Cleaning, Health, PPE	\$ 1,418,675	\$ 2,118,308
Student Support (SEL, nutrition)	\$ 3,010,960	\$ 460,302
Technology (Hardware, Software, Maint)	\$ 557,200	\$ 786,000
Transportation	\$ 1,574,700	\$ -
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 17,561,535</b>	<b>\$ 4,084,610</b>

The district anticipates that additional costs will be incurred in a variety of areas, including the following:

- Additional teaching and paraprofessional staff may be required in order to reduce classroom density necessary to maintain appropriate social distancing;
- Bus monitors will be needed to ensure that students wear their masks while on school buses;
- Additional nursing and nursing support staff will be needed to monitor isolation rooms, conduct health assessments, and manage health protocols within NPS school buildings;
- Additional leased classroom space may be required in order to reduce density and maintain appropriate social distancing;

- Additional classroom materials will be needed in order to avoid materials sharing among students (classroom books, art materials, science materials, etc.)
- Additional technology, including technology staffing, hardware, software, licensing, video conferencing, internet access and phone lines will be needed to support student learning under the three separate scenarios and to support the development of a virtual learning option for parents who opt out of in-person education for their student;
- Enhanced building cleaning and sanitizing will be necessary, resulting in increased staff costs, contracted services costs, and material/supply costs.
- Extensive Personal Protective Equipment, including masks, gloves, gowns, face shields, and plexiglass shields and partitions will be necessary to have on-hand.
- School furniture will need to be replaced, where classrooms rely upon multi-person tables, rather than individual desks. Temporary partitions will be necessary so that larger spaces, such as gymnasiums, auditoriums, and cafeterias can be converted to temporary classroom space.
- Touchless devices, meal carts, and tents for Food Services will need to be procured.
- Hand sanitizing dispensers and sanitizing produce for each classroom will be needed;
- Additional social and emotional support will be needed for students in the current environment, necessitating the need for more social workers and counselors.
- Additional Specialized Learning staff will be needed to cover services in a manner consistent with reduced cohorts and groupings.
- Additional Specialized Learning evaluations and make up services are anticipated in the current environment.