



NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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December 15, 2020

Dear Parents and Staff,

I hope you and your families are well. I wanted to take a moment and update you on our plan to return to school on January 4th, ongoing options for remote learning, and future snow days.

We understand this has been an incredibly challenging year, and we want both our students and staff to return to school and regain a sense of normalcy. As I have shared, we know through experience that schools are safe places with low risk due to the efforts we have put into mitigation strategies and required protocols. In collaboration with our department of health, we continue to review cases/trends in the community and its impact on our schools, including key staffing issues that support a full and safe operation of our schools.

Over the last week, we have worked with staff, leaders, parents and community members to find solutions to some of the staffing issues we faced. I want to thank parents who have offered their services as substitute teachers and other needed support personnel. Thanks to our PTA Presidents as well in their ongoing efforts to put out the word in the community.

Two important changes should be noted: the CDC moved to a 10-day quarantine (vs. a 14 day), and we are expecting subsequent guidance from the Department of Public Health. The Connecticut State Department of Education recently provided additional flexibility for the hiring of substitutes. With these changes, we believe we can plan for a return to school following winter break and are confident we will be able to staff schools adequately in order to ensure a safe learning environment.

Please review the plans for both K-6 and 7-12 below:

Return to School

- **K-6** – return to a **full in-person model on January 4th**. Wednesdays will remain a three-hour early release to allow teachers the time necessary to plan for both in-person and remote learners (Cohort D).
- **7-12** – return to school in **Hybrid on January 4th** with a fully remote Wednesday. However, our goal is to return to a **full in-person model on January 19th**. Principals and staff will use the time upon return to ensure all social distancing and mitigation strategies are in place, as well as coordinate implementation of the in-person schedule previously presented to the BOE. This will include a daily early release with a “Grab and Go” style lunch with some class time completed remotely in the afternoons. Principals at NMS and NHS will send out specific information pertaining to the schedule, and any necessary changes that might need to be made, prior to January 19th.

Cohort D - parents will continue to determine whether they intend to opt for full remote learning for their children. We ask if you are making a change from in-person learner to remote learner (or remote to in-person), you notify your school principal.

We will continue to share information about COVID cases and other pertinent information for parents and staff on our website, including useful articles and resources as they relate to the safety of schools. You can also visit the CT DPH (Department of Public Health) website at the following link: <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus>.

Snow Day Plan

The BOE approved a snow day plan that allows for the use of remote learning for some of our snow days. As part of our plan, the first two weather-related days that warrant a closure will be regular snow days. No remote learning will occur. After the first two closures, we will make every effort to use remote learning so we can count the day as a regular school day. Please review the **attachment** for further details and the conditions that apply.

As you might be aware, we are looking at a potential storm later this week (Thursday). A regular snow day (with communication via phone and email) will be sent if a snow day is officially called. **If a snow day is called this week, no remote learning will be scheduled.** Please note that following a storm, a delayed opening may be necessary since we have teachers who work out of their classrooms and students that are transported to other locations (private, parochial, tech schools).

We want nothing more than to return our students to school for consistent and sustained learning, and we appreciate your patience as we put forward plans for all levels. If you have any questions about our plan to return to school or any other issues, please don't hesitate to reach out to building leaders or me at 203-426-7621.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent

SNOW DAY EXPECTATIONS

- First two weather-related closures will remain true snow days.
- Following the first two closures, the district will determine, based on the timing of the impending storm and other factors, whether a remote learning day will be used to count as a regular school day.
- This decision will depend on the timing and advanced notice of a storm so we can ensure students have access to devices.
- When the district is alerted to potential weather for the following day, we will ensure students bring home devices as necessary.
- A storm may impact widespread power outages or other issues that may make remote learning in Newtown impossible. If this occurs, the regular school messenger will alert staff and parents that it is a snow day (no remote learning).
- Administrators should be sure that all teachers are on line for the adequate number of hours (synchronous) as outlined in the remote learning plan.
- Remote learning schedule for emergencies will follow the regular remote learning plan.
- Remote learning for snow days will align with guidance from the State of CT Dept. of Education (number of hours and mix of both asynchronous/synchronous learning opportunities).
- Parents should also follow the same attendance protocols (calling in to the school regarding student absences) on snow days when remote learning is in place.
- Teachers should follow the protocols for absences and/or emergency situations so the district can ensure continuity of instruction (substitute teacher, lesson plans, etc.).