

June 26, 2020

Dear Parents, Caregivers, and Staff,

I hope you are well and enjoying the early days of summer with your families. As promised, I wanted to update you on information from the State of Connecticut regarding re-entry to school in the fall. Based on current COVID data trends at the State level, Governor Lamont announced at a recent press conference that the State's school reopening plan recommends that all students and staff return to school in the fall.

While additional details are expected to be published on Monday, June 29, the reopening plan, "ADAPT, ADVANCE, ACHIEVE: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together" highlights six principles that will inform school re-entry plans at the district level:

1. Safeguarding the health & safety of students and staff.
2. Allowing all students the opportunity to return into the classrooms full time starting in the fall.
3. Monitoring the school populations and, when necessary, potentially cancelling classes in the future to appropriately contain COVID-19 spread.
4. Emphasizing equity, access, and support to the students and communities who are emerging from this historic disruption.
5. Fostering strong two-way communication with partners such as families, educators, and staff.
6. Factoring into decisions about reopening the challenges to the physical safety and social-emotional well-being of our students when they are not in school.

Dr. Miguel Cardona, the Commissioner of Education, provided districts with a one-page summary and a set of informational slides that I have **attached** for your review. While current health information has been increasingly positive, school districts across the State have been asked to prepare for alternative phases/options (See below - Level 1, 2, and 3), should a resurgence of COVID cases occur. School districts will return in the fall at Level 1 with defined health and safety guidance protocols and infection mitigation strategies in place (e.g., enhanced cleaning and sanitizing, hand washing, masks, and social distancing). However, a district might need to "ramp down" to Level 2 or Level 3 if local health conditions change.

**Level 1:** All students coming back to school in the fall.

**Level 2:** Creating a "hybrid model" (some in-person & some distance learning).

**Level 3:** All students on distance learning.

The Commissioner has also requested that superintendents have available an option for families to keep their child(ren) on distance learning only, particularly for students with medical conditions.

The information from the State will guide the active planning taking place within Newtown's Re-Entry Committee and subcommittee groups. As I have previously communicated, our work is centered around *facilities, governance, school operations, social/emotional, instruction & technology, and wellness*. We continue to post minutes from our meetings (and video recordings), but please feel free to reach out to my office with a question at 203-426-7621.

I will be setting up virtual office hours in July for Q & A with parents or staff who have questions. However, all Newtown parents and staff will continue to receive timely updates as we formulate a more specific re-entry plan for Newtown that employs health and safety protocols for the safety of our entire school community.

Respectfully,

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent



# ADAPT, ADVANCE, ACHIEVE:

## Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together

The following is an executive summary of the plan to be provided for Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) as they begin planning for the fall.

Due to positive containment efforts in Connecticut, reopening schools in person can be successfully achieved based upon current data. Connecticut has determined it is appropriate to plan a consistent approach to the operating model (schedule), but be prepared to modify plans as necessary. Maximizing in-person instructional time after the current period of disruption is critical. However, given the uncertainty planning for reopening months from now, schools must be prepared to modify their reopening model to support a partial reopening if the public health data changes.

We are hearing from our students, right here in Connecticut that going to school

“gives them a reason to wake up in the morning.”

### FALL REOPENING MODEL:

LEAs should plan to have all students, in all districts, return to schoolhouses for full-time instruction at the beginning of 2020-2021, so long as public health data continues to support this model. This model will be supported with more intensive mitigation strategies and specific monitoring, containment and class cancellation plans.

As Connecticut schools plan to reopen, the guidance and considerations outlined in this document are grounded in six guiding principles:

1. Safeguarding the health & safety of students and staff;
2. Allowing *all* students the opportunity to return into the classrooms *full time* starting in the fall;
3. Monitoring the school populations and, when necessary, potentially cancelling classes in the future to appropriately contain COVID-19 spread;
4. Emphasizing equity, access, and support to the students and communities who are emerging from this historic disruption;
5. Fostering strong two-way communication with partners such as families, educators and staff; and
6. Factoring into decisions about reopening the challenges to the physical safety and social-emotional well-being of our students when they are not in school.

### Main Operational Considerations



#### Cohorting:

Emphasize grouping students by the same class/group of students and teacher (into a cohort) so each team functions independently as much as possible. Consider this methodology by grade levels. Placing students in cohorts is strongly encouraged for grades K-8, and encouraged where feasible for grades 9-12.



#### Transportation:

Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) should plan for buses to operate close to capacity with heightened health and safety protocols, including requiring all students and operators wear face coverings. Plans must be developed to activate increased social distancing protocols based upon community spread.



#### Social Distancing and Facilities:

Review building space and reconfigure available classroom space, such as gymnasiums and auditoriums, to maximize social distancing, consistent with public health guidelines in place at that time.



#### Face Coverings:

All staff and students will be expected to wear a protective face covering or face mask that completely covers the nose and mouth when inside the school building, except for certain exceptions including when teachers are providing instruction.



Connecticut State Department of Education

# Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together



@CTDepartmentOfEducation



@EducateCT

# We are in a health pandemic and education emergency

Health and safety, as well as access and equity must inform our efforts

## Developing a plan required input

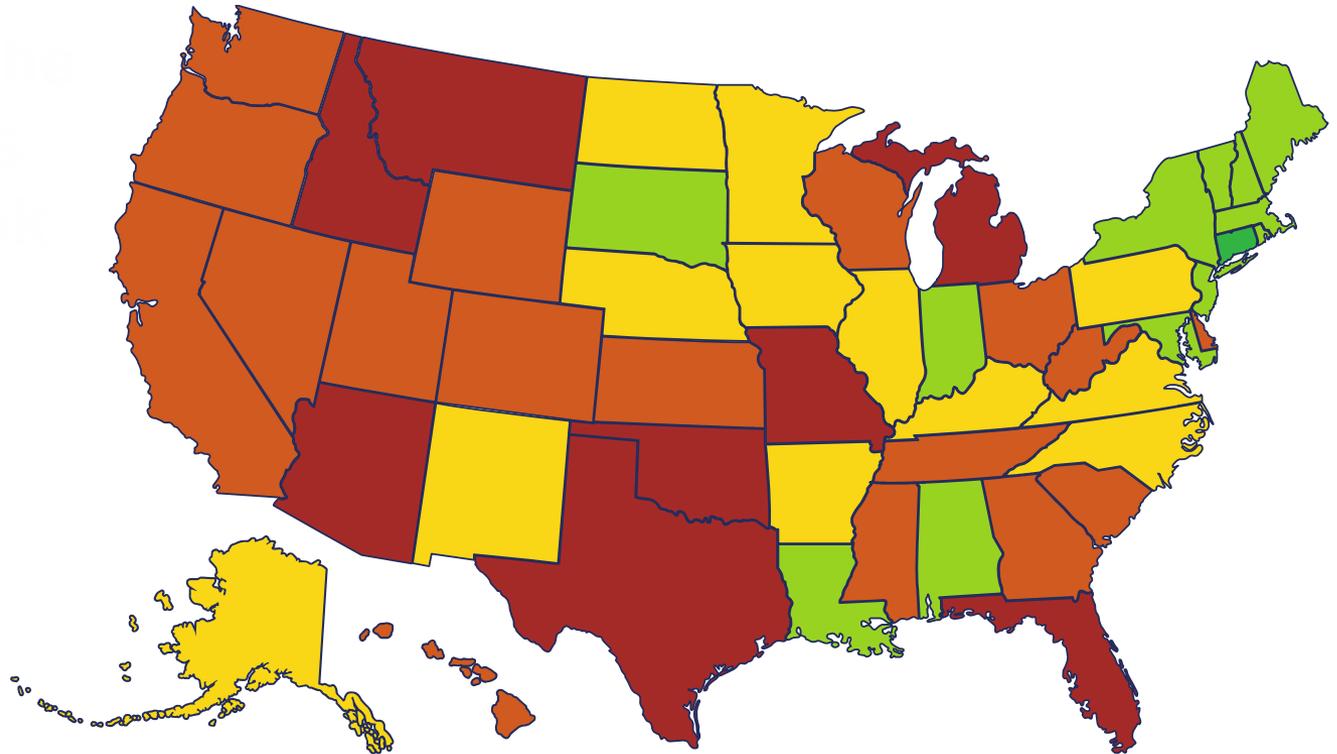
- Over 23,000 citizens
- Over 16,000 students
- ReOpen Task Force
- Regional Advisory Teams

## What we consistently heard:

- Emotional well-being must be considered
- Schools are a structured, safe place in many cases
- Students missed school



# Connecticut's Progress





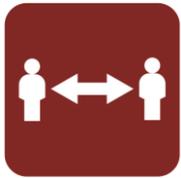
# Guiding Principles

- Safeguarding the health and safety of students and staff;
- Allowing all students the opportunity to return into school full time starting in the fall;
- Monitoring the school, students, and staff and, when necessary, potentially canceling classes in the future to appropriately contain COVID-19 spread;
- Emphasizing equity, access, to support the students and communities who are emerging from this historic disruption;
- Fostering strong two-way communication with partners; and
- Factoring the physical safety, social-emotional well-being, and the mental health needs of our students when they are not in school.



# Operational Considerations

- Districts should plan for fall reopening with in-school return for all students, every day.
- Health and safety guidance protocols and infection mitigation strategies will be emphasized:



Maximize  
Social Distancing



Frequent hand  
washing/use of hand  
sanitizer



Face coverings that  
completely cover the  
nose and mouth



Enhanced  
cleaning/disinfection  
of spaces/surfaces

- Plan subject to change based on developing health conditions



# Classrooms and Buses

## CLASSROOMS

- Cohorting
  - Strongly encouraged, Grades K–8
  - Encouraged where feasible, Grades 9–12
- Maximize social distancing
- Facial coverings – mandatory for staff and students during school day when inside the school building
- Frequent handwashing
- Enhanced cleaning

## BUSES

- Facial coverings – mandatory for drivers and students
- Monitors encouraged for fall, particularly for younger grades
- Social distancing activated based on COVID community spread
  - **No Spread**  
Full Capacity
  - **Minimal Spread**  
Full Capacity, Heightened Health & Safety Protocols
  - **Moderate Spread**  
Reduced Capacity and Social distancing



# Ramping Up, Ramping Down

- CT data trends positively; we can plan optimistically for fall reopening
- Districts should prepare plans for full reopening
- Alternative plans should be prepared (hybrid model with fewer students and enhanced remote learning) in the event of future increases in community spread
- COVID-19 Community Spread will determine Ramp Down to promote health and safety regionally and throughout CT





# Adapt, Advance, Achieve

- This is the first step to reopening
- Plans will change based on COVID spread (or developing health conditions)
- Flexibility will be the only constant
- Comprehensive Plan details will be publicly released Monday
- Updates & supplements will be informed with input from partners

**CT students deserve the  
best opportunity for success!**