

December 11, 2020

Dear DCSD Families,

As you know, state and national health experts and elected officials have been stating that students should be in school even as positivity rates are at high levels in our communities. We agree that schools are safe and the COVID-19 transmission rates in schools are low, but health experts and elected officials fail to address the real reason why schools are not open: schools do not have enough staff members available (including substitutes, bus drivers, and nutrition services personnel) to support in-person learning at every level five days per week. This is mainly due to staff members being ill with COVID-19 or other seasonal illnesses, or being included in quarantines.

We hear our community members when they express sadness and frustration about students not being in school. We share your concerns about missed academic, social-emotional learning experiences, as well as other social experiences and milestones. We believe we must do all we can to get students back in school even as COVID-19 positivity rates are currently high in our community.

We also take seriously our role in protecting the health and safety of students, staff, and the community when schools are open. Per state public health orders, schools are required to follow quarantine and other Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and Tri-County Health Department procedures. These protocols are working and have kept COVID-19 transmission rates within our schools extremely low. However, the protocols have also resulted in the quarantining of staff members including teachers, bus drivers, kitchen workers, office staff, etc., resulting in not having enough staff at our schools to keep our students safe and engaged in learning.

Yesterday, we shared our initial return to school plans with our Board of Education and they provided their support of these plans. Today, we're pleased to share with you what we currently have in store for our students following Winter Break. Please keep in mind that the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be unpredictable -- everything is subject to change. We know that having an idea of when your child can return to school is critical for planning and preparing.

DCSD students will return to full, in-person learning or hybrid learning via the following phased approach.

Between each phase, DCSD will evaluate its organizational stability to ensure the school district can add another level of schools to in-person or hybrid learning and still remain fully able to operate. Our goal is to ensure that we do everything possible to

keep students in their learning model so we can avoid transitioning back and forth from in-person or hybrid learning to remote learning.

Phase 1: Preschool, Elementary School, and Center-Based Students at the Middle and High School Levels.

January 4, 2021

- Previously scheduled non-student day for all DCSD students as the district calendar shows. Preschool and elementary staff prepare for the return to full in-person learning

January 5, 2021

- DCSD preschools and elementary schools return to full, **in-person** learning five days a week
- DCSD middle and high schools return to full **remote** learning five days a week
- DCSD's most impacted/at-risk students in center-based programs at the middle and high school levels return to in-person learning four days a week
- Plum Creek Academy starts in-person learning four days a week (Fridays remote)
- Bridge Program (18-21) starts in-person learning four days a week (Fridays remote)
- DC Oakes, Eagle Academy, and DC Support Center start remote learning
- eDCSD begins with all virtual learning

January 11, 2021

- eDCSD returns to blended schedule

January 18, 2021

- DC Oakes and Eagle Academy begin hybrid schedule
- DC Support Center begins in-person learning four days a week (Fridays remote)

If we are able to keep enough staff members in preschool and elementary schools and believe the school system can support bringing all staff and students back to middle schools, we will move to Phase 2. If not, we will postpone Phase 2. We will keep our families and staff informed as we monitor the data.

TENTATIVE Phase 2: Middle Schools

January 19, 2021

- Board of Education Meeting - Prepare and Plan for Middle School Return

January 25-February 1, 2021

- Middle Schools return to hybrid learning between January 25 and February 1
- DCSD's most impacted/at-risk students in center-based programs at the middle and high school levels continue with in-person learning four days a week

If we are able to keep enough staff members in preschool, elementary, and middle schools and believe the school system can support bringing all staff and students back to high schools, we will move to Phase 3. If not, we will postpone Phase 3. We will keep our families and staff informed as we monitor the data.

TENTATIVE Phase 3: High Schools

February 16, 2021

- Board of Education Meeting - Prepare and Plan for High School Return

February 22 - March 1, 2021

- High Schools return to hybrid learning between February 22 and March 1
- DCSD's most impacted/at-risk students in center-based programs at the middle and high school levels continue with in-person learning four days a week

At any time, if too many staff members are infected and/or quarantined due to COVID-19 exposure and are therefore not available to come to work in schools every day, we may need to shift individual schools or entire groups of schools back to remote learning.

Phase 4: Return all students to full in-person learning

Timeframe to be determined.

Increased community spread and the resulting quarantines are the biggest obstacles to a return to full in-person learning.

You can help us get all students back to full in-person learning by:

1. **Contacting Governor Polis and encouraging him to provide schools with needed supports.**

Governor Polis has publicly said that he believes schools are safe and should be open for in-person learning. We appreciate his support for our efforts, but we

need his help to make that happen. DCSD and other metro area school districts are working with the Governor and his newly formed Back-To-School Task Force to address the obstacles to in-person learning. [Email or call the Governor's Office](#) and encourage him to:

- Prioritize educators to receive a vaccine after healthcare workers, first responders, and those who are immunocompromised/high risk, which would greatly increase our ability to have enough staff members available to work in schools every day regardless of sustained COVID-19 spread in the community.
- Provide free or low-cost test kits, personnel, and required training so that schools can offer free, ongoing saliva COVID-19 testing to students and staff.
- Address the guidelines for quarantine protocols giving schools more flexibility and reducing the number of healthy staff and students placed in quarantine.

1. Applying to be a substitute teacher, bus driver, or kitchen worker.

The Colorado Department of Education has temporarily created a one-year substitute teacher authorization that only requires applicants to have a high school diploma or equivalent (and a clean background check). [To learn more and apply click here](#). Applicants need to apply for licensure and background checks with CDE and also complete a hiring process in DCSD (including fingerprinting processes). Note CDE's online application system will be down during Winter Break (December 23 - January 5).

DCSD also has a variety of job openings for bus drivers and assistants, kitchen workers, maintenance staff, nursing staff, etc. Visit www.dcsdk12.org/careers to learn more and to apply.

1. Continuing to follow health protocols and guidance, and keeping your children home when showing any symptoms of illness.

[Click here](#) to view a helpful At-Home Symptom Screening Tool to use as a reference when determining whether your child should go to school.

Like you, we are feeling "COVID-19 fatigue". It's difficult to continue to explain to our children why they cannot be in school or participate in activities with friends. It's tiresome to continue to avoid gatherings with loved ones and to wear a face covering in public. But now is not the time to give up. With vaccines on the horizon, we are

incredibly hopeful that the COVID-19 pandemic will be a thing of the past by the time we start the 2021-2022 school year. Together we can, and will get through this.

Sincerely,

Corey Wise

Interim Superintendent

Douglas County School District