

# SOUTH WINDSOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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D R E A M . A C H I E V E . I N S P I R E .

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Dear Families:

I recognize that families who are following news reporting and press conferences relating to Connecticut's plan for reopening schools may find it challenging to track the many changes that have occurred in recent weeks. As a result, I am providing a high-level summary of the recent changes in state guidance to school districts. Without question, we are living not only in a time of great uncertainty, but also of extreme fluidity where information given one day can change the next. It is frustrating for all of us, but it is simply the reality of this unprecedented time for schools.

Since my last communication to families, we have received new guidance from the state which resulted in changes to the instructional model/schedule we will implement at the start of school on September 8<sup>th</sup> as well as changes to our original plan for the first week of school. The purpose of this letter is two-fold: 1) to provide an overview of the changing guidance from the state, and 2) to communicate how this new guidance has changed our plan for reopening schools.

## **High Level Summary of Changes in State Guidance**

- On Thursday, June 25, all Connecticut superintendents were directed to plan to re-open schools with full-time, five days a week, in-person learning. School districts were advised to adhere to the state's 180 school day requirement.
- On Tuesday, July 14, the State Department of Education announced that the 180-day requirement would be lowered to 177 days in order to support three additional days of training for teachers prior to students returning to school. This announcement resulted in South Windsor changing its first day of school to Tuesday, September 8.
- On Friday, July 24, all superintendents submitted re-opening plans to the state.
- On Monday, July 27, just 48 hours after the plans were submitted, superintendents learned through a press conference that there was a reversal in the decision to have a statewide coordinated effort for the reopening of schools. It was announced that the model with which to reopen schools would be a local decision. Superintendents would no longer be required to open full-time and would have the flexibility to open in a hybrid model.
- On Friday, July 31, the State Department of Education held a conference call for all school superintendents. During that call, we were told to expect a survey through which we were to identify how we would be opening schools. We were told we must submit by the following Friday, August 7. In a follow up email, they moved up the declaration date to Wednesday, August 5.

I share the timeline of these changes because I know it has been challenging to follow this in the press. I also share it to provide the context in which superintendents are being asked to make decisions and the timelines to which we are being asked to adhere.

## Changes to South Windsor’s School Reopening Instructional Model

### 1. Hybrid Model of Instruction

The state’s most recent messaging has encouraged districts to reduce the “density” of students on school buses, in classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias as much as possible. Therefore, in consultation with our local health department and consistent with most Hartford area school districts, **all South Windsor schools will open in a hybrid model.** A hybrid model is a mitigation strategy that reduces the number of students present at school at any one time: when one cohort attends school in person, the other cohort will be “attending” classes virtually, and vice versa. This allows for a greater chance of successfully keeping students socially distanced, something that is simply not possible when all students attend on the same day.

While a Hybrid model offers students the opportunity to still participate in limited in-person instruction, parents should understand that there is still the option of participating in 100% distance learning from home. More information about selecting your choice of instructional model is provided under “Reopening Registration Form” on page 4.

In addition to reducing the sheer number of students, we are also being advised to keep student cohorts together to the extent practicable. As a result, under the hybrid model, students are being grouped into two cohorts based on the letter of students’ last names:

**Cohort 1:** Last names A through K      **Cohort 2:** Last names L through Z

Blended family households who have children with different last names will be cohorted by household. Students participating in Optional Distance Learning from home (regardless of last name) will be identified as **Cohort 3** “Distance.” The following chart outlines when each cohort is learning at school and when each cohort is learning from home.

K-12 Hybrid Instructional Model *				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Cohort 1 (A-K) In School	Cohort 1 (A-K) In School	All students learn from home independently. See description below.	Cohort 2 (L-Z) In School	Cohort 2 (L-Z) In School
Cohort 2 (L-Z) At Home	Cohort 2 (L-Z) At Home		Cohort 1 (A-K) At Home	Cohort 1 (A-K) At Home
Cohort 3: Distance At Home	Cohort 3: Distance At Home		Cohort 3: Distance At Home	Cohort 3: Distance At Home

*\*Details regarding the Hybrid model for Preschool and Young Adult Academy families will be sent separately.*

**What happens on Wednesdays during this Hybrid schedule?** On Wednesdays, all K-12 students will learn from home and work independently. This will provide a break from the expectation of following a prescribed schedule. Students will have time to work on assignments, participate in asynchronous activities, or seek extra help. Special education, intervention and English Learner services/supports will be provided, as appropriate. Teachers will report to school to provide virtual extra help and teacher office hours as needed. Teachers will also meet for professional development and planning. At-home

independent learning on Wednesdays will also allow us to conduct a deep cleaning of all school buildings between cohorts of students.

**How long will schools operate using the Hybrid model?** We cannot state with any certainty today how long it will be advisable to remain in the hybrid model. Guidance from the state that provides metrics for schools and local health departments to use when making decisions about operating schools can be viewed [here](#). It is possible that if the health metrics in Connecticut improve, we will be able to shift from the hybrid model to full-time in-person learning for all students. It is also possible that health metrics will dictate that we remain in the hybrid model for the foreseeable future. It may even be possible that within weeks of schools reopening, a rise in COVID-19 cases in our region could cause schools to shift to full distance learning until community spread is contained.

## 2. Shortened School Day

For the month of September, we are shortening the school day by 90 minutes. Each school will be dismissed 90 minutes earlier than the usual dismissal time. We will reassess the need for the early dismissal at the close of September and determine if this practice is necessary to continue into October.

We are shortening the day for a variety of reasons. We have heard from many parents regarding their concern for students being required to wear a mask all day at school, even with “mask breaks.” The new routines and social distancing requirements at school will be challenging for students. We believe the shortened day will mitigate these concerns, albeit slightly.

Teachers have the herculean task of providing instruction to the cohort of students in front of them at school, the cohort of students who are learning from home in a hybrid model, and the cohort of students who are opting for distance learning five days week. This will not be easy. Closing the school day 90 minutes earlier will allow them to better serve the needs of all their students and ensure an improved distance learning experience for everyone.

Finally, a shortened day will provide greater flexibility for scheduling some instruction “after school” that will occur virtually under present circumstances (e.g., instrumental music).

Shortened School Day Schedule - September		
School	Start Time	Dismissal Time
SWHS	7:25	12:30
TEMS	8:05	1:10
ET, PRS and PV	8:45	1:50
OH	9:15	2:20
Preschool - AM	9:00	11:30
Preschool - PM	12:00	2:30
Project Worth	9:00	2:00

## 3. Revised First Week of School Schedule

Now that we are opening in a hybrid model we are no longer going to open schools under the staggered approach referenced in my July 16 letter. As shown below, Cohort 1 (A-K) will report to school on Tuesday, September 8 and Wednesday, September 9; Cohort 2 (L-Z) will report on Thursday, September 10 and Friday, September 11. Preschool will hold AM classes on September 8, and PM classes on September 9; there will be no preschool classes on Thursday or Friday of the first week of school.

First Week of School Schedule			
Tuesday September 8	Wednesday September 9	Thursday September 10	Friday September 11
<b>K-12 (All Schools)</b> Cohort 1 (A-K): In School Cohort 2 (L-Z): At Home Cohort 3 Distance: At Home	<b>K-12 (All Schools)</b> Cohort 1 (A-K): In School Cohort 2 (L-Z): At Home Cohort 3 Distance: At Home	<b>K-12 (All Schools)</b> Cohort 1 (A-K): At Home Cohort 2 (L-Z): In School Cohort 3 Distance: At Home	<b>K-12 (All Schools)</b> Cohort 1 (A-K): At Home Cohort 2 (L-Z): In School Cohort 3 Distance: At Home
<b>POP/IPOP</b> AM Classes only	<b>POP/IPOP</b> PM Classes only	<b>POP/IPOP</b> No classes	<b>POP/IPOP</b> No classes

## Distance Learning

We know you have many questions regarding the ways in which distance learning will be different from last spring. While many of the details regarding changes to distance learning at each level will be communicated by principals, it is important to note that students who elect optional, full time distance learning will virtually attend all of their classes, just like those students who will be participating in the hybrid schedule. The difference is, they will be attending all of their classes virtually and will not be reporting to school.

## Reopening Registration Form – Deadline Extended

On July 28, you received an email from your child’s principal asking you to complete a “[Reopening Registration Form](#)” through PowerSchool. The form asked you to respond to two questions – one regarding bus transportation, and one regarding the mode of instruction you are choosing for your child (either “In Person Instruction” or “Optional Distance Learning” at home). Due to the widespread power outage, as well as the shift to a hybrid model, we have extended the deadline to next **Friday, August 14**. If this new information has caused you to reevaluate your decision, you may change your selection by logging into your PowerSchool Parent Portal account. (Please note: the “In-Person” option is the same as “Hybrid.”) **If you have not yet completed the form, it is critical for our planning that you do so before next Friday.**

## Final Thoughts

We recognize this information will raise many questions not answered in this communication. Parents and caregivers can expect a communication from their child’s principal early next week. Because the details differ by level (elementary, middle and high), we believe families will be better served if the school-specific, detailed information about daily routines and schedules comes from school principals. Please know that we also recognize the burden a hybrid model places on families as it relates to work and child care needs. We do not enter into a hybrid model lightly, but the safety of students and staff must remain our highest priority. We hope to return to full-time, in-person learning as soon as it can be done safely, but until then we must take the necessary precautions advised by state and local health officials.

I thank you for your continued patience as we navigate this challenging time for students, families, and staff.

Sincerely,



Kate Carter, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools