

IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION FROM THE FARMINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

August 6, 2020

Dear Farmington Families, Faculty and Staff,

First and foremost, I hope this communication finds you and your family safe and well. Tuesday's storm has impacted families and our community in profound ways. Following the storm, we have attended daily emergency operation meetings with the Town of Farmington's leadership team to support the many needs that are associated with extensive power outages within our community. A Comfort Center will open today at Irving A. Robbins Middle School and the Senior/Community CenteR from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to all community members to provide charging stations, water and snacks within an air conditioned space. Please wear face masks and follow social distancing measures. To stay informed as we continue to face numerous power outages and other issues associated with the recent storm, please visit the Town of Farmington's [Tropical Storm Isaias webpage](#) or sign up for the [Everbridge Community Alert System](#).

I am writing to you to provide an update related to our return to school. I was hoping to release this communication on Tuesday evening, but issues associated with the storm prevented us from sending this letter until today. Last week, Governor Lamont announced increased flexibility within each school district's approach to the return to school. In addition, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), working in collaboration with the Department of Public Health (DPH), provided COVID-19 health data metrics along with other considerations for decision-making when we move from one learning model to another in the coming school year. The health data metrics as well as the other considerations for decision-making are included in the CSDE's document entitled, [Interim Guidance for Decision-Making Regarding the Use of In-Person, Hybrid \(Blended\), or Remote Learning Models](#).

With the increased district-level flexibility, coupled with the information within the newly released health data metrics document, we consulted with the Farmington Valley Health District (FVHD) this week to determine the best approach to Farmington's 2020-2021 return to school.

At this time and in close consultation with the FVHD, the Farmington Public Schools will move to a short-term HYBRID LEARNING MODEL for the start of the school year to transition to a Full In-Person Learning Model by mid to late October.

Families still have the opportunity to exclusively select the temporary FPS Interactive Learning (IL) within the Hybrid Learning Model. As a reminder, please notify your child(ren)'s school(s) if you plan to select temporary remote only learning within our Hybrid Learning Model by August 7, 2020.

Again, we will begin with a short-term Hybrid Learning Model for the start of the school year and transition to Full In-Person Learning Model in a staggered grade level approach if health trends remain low. This would allow us to:

- *Open all schools at the start of the year with approximately 50% of the students attending in-person learning in classrooms and the other 50% of students learning remotely utilizing a weekly rotation; and*
- *Implement a transition timeline to move toward a Full In-Person Learning Model by bringing back identified grade levels for full in-person learning utilizing a weekly staggered approach.*

According to the FVHD, given the multiple layers of mitigation practices that are new to our students, faculty and staff, a slower transition back to a Full In-Person Learning approach is advisable to ensure all members of our school district are properly and consistently implementing these health and safety practices (mask-wearing, handwashing, maximizing social distancing, sanitizing classrooms and schools, K-8 cohorting, etc.) In consultation with the FVHD, the decision to move to a short-term Hybrid Learning Approach to begin the 2020-2021 school year will promote the following:

- **Smooth Transition Back to School:** *Opening in a short-term Hybrid Learning Model allows students, faculty and staff to gain comfort and familiarity with newly established health and safety routines, multiple layers of mitigation practices as well as potential changes in academic scheduling;*
- **Health and Safety:** *The short-term Hybrid Learning Model for opening the school year addresses the most frequent health and safety concerns we have received from our school district community with 50% of students in classrooms at any given time in the first days and weeks of school. This is an additional short-term containment or mitigation strategy on top of multiple other layers of mitigation practices to reduce the risk of illness, especially during the transitional period of bringing students back to school after an extended school closure coupled with summer break. This is similar to the approach other countries have taken that resulted in a successful slower transition students back to school;*
- **Promotes Additional Illness Tracking and Containment Efforts:** *Given Farmington's weekly rotation within the Hybrid Learning Model, it is designed to allow for nine days (including weekends) between cohorts attending in-person learning to allow for ongoing illness monitoring and tracking with a focus on health, safety and containment of illness within the A/B cohorts during the initial days and weeks of school;*
- **Student and Family Familiarity with IL:** *The approach also supports all students becoming familiar with remote learning routines early in September in case we need to quickly shift to FPS Interactive Learning (IL) at any point within the coming school year due to potential changes in health data trends;*
- **Maximizes In-Person Instructional Time:** *A weekly rotation provides more in-person learning time for all learners than other hybrid models we reviewed, promoting continuity of high-quality instruction by maximizing in-person classroom community building as well as establishing learning routines for all students; and*
- **Phased Approach:** *The transition to Full In-Person Learning is a phased approach that allows students, families, faculty and staff time to adjust to school-wide procedures and practices such as arrival, dismissal, lunch, hallway travel, specials, bus travel, etc.*

LOGISTICS OF FARMINGTON'S HYBRID LEARNING MODEL:
(SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, 2020)

As a reminder, here is how the **A/B Cohorts** are organized:

- **Last names beginning in A-K: Cohort A**
- **Last names beginning in L-Z: Cohort B**

If your children have different last names, we will use the last name of your oldest child to determine the group your children will be assigned to.

Here are some additional details about how Farmington's Hybrid Learning Model will work in the first weeks of school as we transition to a Full In-Person Learning Model by the middle to end of October. Please remember,

this plan is subject to change if we experience changes in COVID-19 health trends in the coming days and weeks:

First Week of School (September 2-4):

	September 2, 2020	September 3, 2020	September 4, 2020
<u>TYPE OF DAY</u>	EARLY RELEASE DAY	EARLY RELEASE DAY	EARLY RELEASE DAY
Cohort attending in-person learning	A Cohort	B Cohort	B Cohort
Cohort engaged in remote <u>Interactive Learning (IL)</u>	B Cohort	A Cohort	A Cohort

This approach allows both cohorts to meet in-person during the first week of school. The B cohort meets twice in this week because Cohort B’s first week of in-person learning is the week of September 14. We have prioritized establishing strong learning routines and community building within the first days of school.

First Four Weeks of School (Short Term Hybrid Learning Approach- September 8-25)

Week	Cohort Attending In-Person Learning	Cohort Engaged in FPS Interactive Learning (IL)	Lunch Served Daily for both In-Person and IL. Is Grab and Go Lunch available for families in need engaging in K-12 IL on any given school day?
September 2-4	SEE CHART ABOVE	SEE CHART ABOVE	Yes
September 8-11 (September 7 is a Day Off--No School)	A Cohort	B Cohort	Yes
September 14-18	B Cohort	A Cohort	Yes
September 21-25	A Cohort	B Cohort	Yes

The gradual transition to a Full In-Person Learning Model will allow us to ease into the school year with mask-wearing and all other mitigation practices in place. It also allows students to build predictable routines in both in-person learning and IL. Lastly, we will monitor health trends through the first few weeks of school prior to bringing both cohorts together in a staggered approach to a Full In-Person Learning Model in October.

As highlighted in [Farmington’s Draft Return to School plan](#), please make **emergency back up plans** for your family as we may need to quickly shift from one learning model to another at any point during the coming year due to COVID-19 health trends. You should contact [EXCL](#) if you are in need of childcare within the Hybrid

Learning Model so that EXCL can adequately prepare for the coming school year. Please know that EXCL has caps on how many students can attend childcare due to facility capacities. So, please contact EXCL to discuss your childcare needs as soon as possible.

Tentative* Staggered Transition Plan by Grade Level to Full In-Person Learning if Health Trends Remain Low (September 29- October 30):

Week	Cohort Attending In-Person Learning	Cohort Engaged in FPS Interactive Learning (IL)	Possible (Not Yet Finalized) Staggered Full In-Person Return PreK-12	Lunch Served Daily for both In-Person and IL. Is Grab and Go Lunch available for families in need engaging in K-12 IL on any given school day?
September 29-October 2 (September 28 is a Day Off--No School)	B Cohort	A Cohort	<i>Grades PreK-4 (Elementary Schools) Transition to Full In-Person Return</i>	Yes
October 5-9	A Cohort	B Cohort	<i>Grades 5-8 (WW and IARI) Transition to Full In-Person Return</i>	Yes
October 13-16 (October 12 is a Day Off-No School)	B Cohort	A Cohort	<i>Grades 9-12 (FHS) Transition to Full In-Person Return</i>	Yes
October 19-23	Possible Pre-K-12 Full In-Person	Possible Pre-K Full In-Person		Yes
October 26-30	Possible PreK-12 Full In-Person	Possible PreK-12 Full In-Person		Yes

As highlighted above, we hope to be engaged in a Full PreK-12 In-Person Learning Model by mid to late October with a continued component of remote only learning for students with medical concerns or for other reasons.

****Please remember that dates and the staggered return to Full In-Person Learning are subject to change given “real time” COVID-19 health trends, unexpected issues and/or other factors.***

INSTRUCTIONAL FEATURES OF FARMINGTON'S HYBRID LEARNING MODEL

(See the *FPS Return to School* plan for more details):

Brief Description: Half (50%) of the students will be in a live classroom setting and half (50%) will be in our FPS Interactive Learning program at home. The groups will switch from in-person learning to FPS Interactive Learning on a weekly basis.

	Week A	Week B
Last Names A-K	In-Person Learning	FPS Interactive Learning
Last Names L-Z	FPS Interactive Learning	In-Person Learning

	<p>In-Person Learning Model: Children will attend school Monday - Friday during their assigned week, following the regular school calendar and schedule, in their assigned school, following the guidance outlined in this document. The core features of this model are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students who pass their health self-assessment attend school in person. ● Students adhere to all social distancing guidelines and follow all mitigation strategies. ● Teachers maintain a Google Classroom to organize all student assignments and to provide feedback. ● Teachers offer a mix of synchronous (live) and asynchronous (material posted in Google Classroom) experiences. Synchronous learning will be favored in this model. ● When possible, teachers use outdoor or larger spaces to increase social distancing. ● Teachers use webcams to livestream parts of the lesson so students at home can participate. Specialists will work with teachers to provide modifications, when needed.
	<p>FPS Interactive Learning: In the alternative weeks, your child will log in to school Monday - Friday, following the regular school calendar and the schedule provided by his/her school. The core features of this model are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students connect online in real-time. ● Students follow their regular schedule and attendance is taken. ● Teachers offer a mix of synchronous (live) and asynchronous (material posted in Google Classroom) experiences. Synchronous learning will be favored in this model. ● Synchronous instruction is achieved through a student's engagement with the class through Google Meets. ● Students complete all work through our Google Classroom platform where the teacher organizes all student assignments and provides feedback. ● Parents/Caretakers are available for younger students to help with activities. ● Special education, intervention, and English Learner services will be provided through synchronous learning on a designated schedule.

Throughout our planning process, we have taken an approach of flexibility and adaptability while prioritizing the health and safety of all members of our school district community due to the uncertainties that the pandemic

presents to our school district and community. This decision was made in consultation with the FVHD and with a great deal of thought and a thorough review of all of the current information and resources available to us. We know that we have varied opinions on the best approach to our return to school and we have deeply studied and reflected upon the benefits and challenges of each approach. Although no one learning model will be met with 100% satisfaction, we believe we are making an informed and thoughtful decision for the transition back to school. Essentially, a Hybrid Learning Model has all of the same elements described within our Full In-Person Learning Model with the primary shift being 50% instead of 100% of students attending in-person learning at any given time within the first days and weeks of school. As previously stated, this approach is a transition to a Full In-Person Learning Model to ensure we are employing all available health and safety mitigation practices in a thoughtful manner for the start of the school year.

Please review the important dates and family resources for preparing for the return to school included below. Thank you for your partnership, patience and understanding as we continue to carefully and thoughtfully navigate our return to school with an emphasis on the health and safety of all members of our school district community. Stay safe and well during the coming days and I look forward to connecting with you next week with additional return to school updates to keep all members of our school district community informed.

With appreciation,
Kathy
Superintendent

FPS IMPORTANT DATES:

- **August 7, 2020:** *IMPORTANT: Families must notify their school in writing if they are selecting temporary remote learning only within our Hybrid Learning Model by this date for planning purposes. We are unable to finalize class lists without this information.*
- **August 7, 2020:** *Alternate Transportation Forms Due*
- **Week of August 3, 2020:** *Virtual Family Informational Sessions (dates and times sent to families from each school)---WE WILL BE RESCHEDULING SESSIONS THAT WERE POSTPONED DUE TO POWER OUTAGES.*
- **Week of August 10:** *School-Day Instructional Schedules Shared with Families (also available on our website*
- **Week of August 17:** *Release of the District Information Booklet; policies, bus runs, class lists, etc.*

FAMILY RESOURCES (Transitioning Back to School):

- **Mask wearing:** Help your child become comfortable with **mask wearing and social distancing** throughout the summer. By creating routines for mask wearing and social distancing, students will be more comfortable with these practices when we return to school.
- **Set Up a Space at Home for Learning:** Begin to set up a **dedicated space in your home for IL** for each one of your children. This should be a quiet area of your home that is designated for remote learning and/or homework completion. All supplies (chromebook, paper, pencils, crayons, etc.) should be available in this IL area.
- **Watch Return to School Videos Together:** The school district will be sending videos home in the coming days about various elements of our return to school. Please watch these videos with your child(ren) to ensure a smooth transition to school.
- **Hand Washing, Good Hygiene and Respiratory Etiquette Routines:** Continue to focus upon **hand washing and hand sanitizing routines** with your child(ren). **Respiratory etiquette** is also important to practice with children. These are essential mitigation practices that reduce the risk of the spread of illness creating better outcomes for our entire community.
- **Talking to Children About the Return to School:** We have posted several resources on our Return to School social emotional learning page at <https://www.fpsct.org/returntoschool/sel>. The annual return to school is an exciting experience for students. It can also be a time that students feel a high level of uncertainty and worry. Together and in partnership, we plan to transition our students back to school with optimism and care to ensure a smooth back to school return. The Elementary and Secondary Family Summary Sheets were shared with you last week to provide more insights about our return to school and assist with preparing both children and families for our 2020-2021 return to school.