



### **Board of Directors**

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Travis W. Hanson

## 2020-21 Reopening Plan

When the start of school arrives in early September, some five and a half months will have passed since teachers enjoyed the opportunity to connect with children in classrooms. It's clear that for both our staff and for the families we serve, the coronavirus pandemic has not only been disruptive, it's been incredibly difficult and impactful - we miss seeing and working with children in our schools!

In recent weeks we have worked diligently to gather feedback from a variety of stakeholders (community and staff), engaged in considerable research, and shared many administrative and board discussions contemplating how to create the best possible educational experience for kids and families amidst the challenging circumstances presented by the coronavirus pandemic. We've also continued to work collaboratively with our neighboring school districts, as well as with guidance from regional and state health and education agencies in the process of constructing the best possible plan to serve the Deer Park community.

After much deliberation about the seriousness of the pandemic and the desire to meet the needs of our students, families, and community, and on behalf of Deer Park's leadership team – and with strong support of our staff – I recommend the board approve the following options for students to choose from in the 2020-21 school year.

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- **In-Person learning** delivered in a split/rotating schedule in which students will be divided into two groups (Blue & Gold), attending school two days one week and three days the next. Days when students are not attending in-person will be considered school days and each building will communicate learning expectations and available support structures. Student's in need of additional in-person service (i.e. – students with disabilities) may have the ability to attend on a more normal four or five-day schedule.
  - **Remote/distance learning** delivered in a fully online model, using Deer Park teachers dedicated to providing a robust and engaging learning experience for students using proven remote learning tools. The experience will offer both synchronous, teacher-led online experiences and activities, as well as asynchronous learning structures allowing students to access and complete assignments/tasks on a more flexible schedule.
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Deer Park's return to school planning processes were rooted in the following guiding principles:

- **Return to school planning and decision making must prioritize the health and safety of our students, staff, and our community.** Our reopening plan, and each consideration detailed here within, endeavors to strike the right balance between *public health* (attending to pandemic-related concerns) and *public welfare* (attending to the social, emotional, educational and familial needs of all involved).
- **Maximize opportunities for face-to-face learning.** Schools bring a variety of benefits to children, but each child benefits differently from school. For some children, school is purely a place of learning. For others, school is an important social outlet. For some children with special needs, school is a source of necessary and vital services. For other children, school provides one or two of their daily meals. For some families, schools provide care for children, allowing parents who are essential employees to work and provide for their families. Ultimately, and in listening to feedback from a considerable number of families in Deer Park, the most equitable and effective approach to meeting the learning needs of the greatest number continues to be an in-person educational model.
- **Each of our students and families have unique needs – one educational model will not effectively serve families amidst the challenges presented by the pandemic.** We understand that some of our families will not be ready to send their children back to an in-person educational model this fall (for many different reasons). Deer Park's distance learning (online) offering will be a meaningful and robust remote learning option, and while distance learning requires both a unique instructional approach along with discipline and dedication from the student, *it will not be a second-rate or inferior alternative to an in-person curriculum.*
- **Understanding the fluid nature of the situation, we are designing these models to be flexible and adaptable.** When a return to in-person instruction is possible for all students, it is our aim to minimize the impact of the transition back to the classroom from a distance learning model. Likewise, should local circumstances related to the pandemic change significantly or should state government and/or health authorities require a move to a fully remote learning model at any point during the school year, we understand the need to shift students quickly and seamlessly from any level of in-person experience, to a distance learning model.

**Precautions and protocols that safeguard the health and wellness of students and staff are paramount.**

School routines will look different this fall – given the present state of pandemic in our region, it must be so. Administrators and board members considered many options and reviewed a great deal of guidelines and recommendations from regional, state, and national sources before approaching a final plan. Ultimately, this recommendation was influenced by consideration of the following information from the Centers for Disease Control, the American Association of Pediatrics, and Pediatric Infectious Diseases Physicians at Arnold Palmer Hospital-Orlando Health, AdventHealth for Children, and Nemours Children's Hospital:

- **The SARS-CoV-2 virus is here to stay:** The medical community and scientists agree that SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19, will remain a concerning part of our healthcare landscape for the foreseeable future. There is no indication that SARS-CoV-2 will fade away. Control of the virus will not happen spontaneously. *Schools can and must begin equipping and re-training immediately, starting small and in realistic and manageable ways to implement protocols and processes that allow for a return to in-person educational models that don't lead to outbreaks.*
- **The epidemiological definition of a SARS-CoV-2 exposure has been defined:** The CDC defines a potential SARS-CoV-2 transmission event as 15 minutes of exposure within 6 feet *without the benefit*

*of masks*. Thus, SARS-CoV-2 is not transmitted by individuals crossing paths in the hallway, during a short trip on an elevator, or across a classroom, especially when masks are worn and hand hygiene is observed.

- **The vast majority of children with COVID-19 infection have positive outcomes:** Unlike adults who experience more significant symptoms with COVID-19 (and at a higher rate), children – and especially younger children – with COVID-19 do very well and have few, if any, symptoms. While SARS-CoV-2 infection rates can be high among children, many children with COVID-19 are asymptomatic. Few require medical care. Very few are hospitalized. COVID-19-related fatalities in children are extremely rare.
- **School staff face the highest risk of severe COVID-19:** Unlike children, who most often have an asymptomatic or mild infection with SARS-CoV-2, adults can develop moderate to severe COVID-19. Therefore, prevention of SARS-CoV-2 infection of teachers and staff should be an important objective for school districts as they consider reopening their schools. SARS-CoV-2 infection of teachers and staff at school can be greatly minimized by social distancing, masking, and meticulous hand hygiene.
- **Young children transmit SARS-CoV-2 inefficiently:** Scientists and medical professionals have shared that preadolescent children transmit SARS-CoV-2 inefficiently. Thus, while enforcing mask-wearing and social distancing among young children is challenging, the children themselves pose a low risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to adults.

Each of the aforementioned were considered along with knowledge of the research that *when in-person educational opportunities are limited or altogether absent, disproportionate harm is caused to students with disabilities, students from low-income families, and others in at-risk environments*. Many of these families and students are less likely to have access to private instruction and care – and may be more likely to rely on school resources to meet basic needs, such as food programs, special-education services, and counseling. Additionally, many of our most vulnerable and a considerable number of families throughout our rural and semi-rural district lack viable connectivity options and are unable to access opportunities for remote/distance learning. These inherent inequities and the presence of wide gaps in educational opportunity were greatly concerning to many in our school district and to our board. The potential risk and harm children might face and the disparate impact of limiting educational options weighed heavily on our leadership team and was a persistent topic in the board’s deliberations in recent weeks.

Therefore, and with understanding that the Governor, the State Dept. of Health, and the regional health jurisdictions chose to leave final decisions about the scope of educational services up to local school boards, and with significant feedback from parents and our staff regarding the need for in-person options, an in-person option along with fully-remote educational services presents our school district with the best opportunity to serve the greatest number of families in our community.

Nevertheless, we must not just expect, but demand and enforce strict adherence to PPE (masks and shields) and daily health screening requirements, while simultaneously creating a school setting and daily protocols that help maintain six-foot physical distancing to the extent possible. As it will be in most schools that choose to offer opportunities for in-person instruction, distancing requirements will necessitate that we have fewer students in each of our classrooms; in fact, this was the primary driver behind the more cautious and measured approach of implementing the split schedule in all grades K-12.

While attending to the **requirements** and **recommendations** provided to schools by Washington’s State Dept. of Health and Dept. of Labor and Industries detailing expectations for returning to school ([WA. State Dept. of](#)

[Health K12 Guidance](#) and [Dept. of Labor and Industries](#)), our schools will also implement enhanced safety and cleaning protocols to ensure we're providing safest learning and working environment possible. The following guidance from the CDC and Washington's Department of Health will be a daily expectation of staff in each building. In the case of our secondary schools, where students typically move about the building more frequently, extra precautions and measures will be taken to limit movement and more regularly clean hard surfaces.

- **Cleaning** throughout the day: *removes* germs, dirt, and impurities
- **Sanitizing** at opportune and appropriate times during the school day: *reduces* the number of germs on surfaces or objects to a safe level, as judged by public health standards or requirements
- **Disinfecting** each night after students and staff depart: *kills* germs that remain on surfaces or objects. Our custodians use specific chemicals to kill germs on surfaces or objects – these chemicals are **not** generally used during the school day.

It's important to recognize that sanitizing or disinfecting without cleaning first will reduce how well these chemicals work and may leave more germs on the surface. Additionally, sanitizing and disinfecting process are not intended to *clean* dirty surfaces or remove germs (should be done *prior to* disinfecting surfaces), but by killing germs on a surface *after cleaning*, we can further lower the risk of spreading infection.

Additionally, the following are examples of (but not an exhaustive list of) enhanced practices and protocols incorporated in our return to school plan:

- New and higher-intensity cleaning protocols for all buses
- Grouping/cohorting students to minimize exposure and allow for contact tracing, where possible.
- Clear communication of expectations related to in-person attendance (in this initial phase, it will be vitally important that even mild symptoms of sickness are treated as a reason to stay home)
- Establish clear protocols and parameters for health screening to include isolation processes and management of students/staff who show signs of sickness onsite.
- Regularly designated handwashing breaks throughout the school day.
- Mealtime modifications: Provide "breakfast in the classroom" and provide "grab and go" meal options for lunch that allow for delivery and consumption in classrooms and not in large, co-mingled groups in school cafeterias.
- Optimize ventilation and airflow in school buildings by increasing use of outdoor air to dilute any presence of indoor contaminants.

**Many have asked and need clarification about the district's protocols and processes related to the following (and many similar) questions: *What if someone develops signs of COVID-19 while at school? How should students or staff approach returning to school after testing positive for COVID-19? What are the environmental cleaning procedures after a suspected or confirmed case is identified?***

In addressing each of these important questions, we see no reason to deviate from the thorough recommendations and guidance provided to us by the [Washington State Dept. of Health](#) in their document detailing parameters for reopening and offering in-person instruction in K-12 schools.

Further details related to screening procedures and processes, contact investigation, contact tracing, and quarantine of close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases are all in process and will be shared soon. Deer Park used an app-based attestation (symptom-checking) process for employees working on-site throughout the

weeks of summer; we had great success in our limited pilot, and plan to partner with Qualtrics to offer our staff and parents a simple, easy, and efficient application (phone or web) to communicate symptom-checking processes and overall health. Qualtrics provides industry leading software for gathering feedback and connecting organizations to information with automated and integrated workflows. The Qualtrics screening solution will take parents/guardians just seconds to complete from a smart phone or computer. For families lacking any form of connectivity and for whom the digital solution is not viable, we are developing a paper-based attestation solution. Finally, each building will have processes in place to perform on-site screening and symptom-checking on a daily basis.

Going forward we will need, and will deeply appreciate, the partnership of our families as we navigate this new reality the pandemic has forced upon us. Our collective efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19 and our ability to combat local transmission of the virus in our schools will ultimately determine our ability to continue to offer an in-person experience to our students and families.

### **Athletics/Activities:**

At this time, all athletics and activities programs have been suspended. We recognize and embrace that a wide and diverse offering of athletics and activities programs are a vital component of a comprehensive education and play an important role in the holistic growth and development of the children we serve. That said, our return to school plan necessarily prioritizes school-day educational opportunities over extracurricular activities and other discretionary activities. We look forward to ongoing partnership with the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association as they consider a safe return to interscholastic athletics, modifying and adapting their schedule for athletics seasons and competitions.

We will continue to track and share their guidance in the weeks and months ahead. Likewise, we will approach with caution any future decision to resume normal operation of various clubs and activities programs in Deer Park Schools. Only when we've demonstrated success in our limited school-day educational program will we consider the prospect of expanding local operations (use of district facilities) and allowing activities and clubs to resume operations. Where feasible, advisors may choose to explore the possibility of continuing limited offerings (clubs and activities) using online conferencing and learning tools.

District leadership and teachers will share ongoing refinements and increasing levels of detail about every aspect of our plan over the next few weeks and as we approach the first day of school. Most specifically, and of importance to many, we aim to provide additional detail regarding our plans for supporting students learning remotely. Interactive webinars will include demonstrations of the platform as well as a deeper dive into the consumable materials and best of breed tools being incorporated into our distance learning plans.

### **School Calendar:**

Finally, our leadership team has discussed two fairly minor, but important changes to the school calendar; each would have an impact on the first week of the 2020-21 school year. First, is the possibility that our normal fall conference days (late November, just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday) could be moved into the first week of school. It seems a bit overwhelming, and perhaps unrealistic, to rush into a school new year where school routines, new expectations, and new protocols are present in every building.

Thus, rather than expect students and staff to dive into a new and in some ways peculiar new environment on Sept. 2, we've considered using conference days already built into the calendar to help provide a smooth

transition into the school year. If implemented, Sept. 2 – 4 would be days where families (parents/guardians and students) could enter classrooms to meet with teachers (that is, 3 to 5 people in a classroom, physically distanced and with PPE) to discuss protocols, expectations, and instructional approaches for the 2020-21 school year. Additionally, this opportunity would provide teachers and staff with a more gradual transition back into school routines amidst these new circumstances. As mentioned previously, all state requirements, as well as district protocols and procedures would be required for these small group conferences. If families are uncomfortable with a face-to-face conference, we anticipate offering opportunities for online conferences.

Second, but less likely, is the potential of delaying the start of the school year - waiting to begin until Monday Sept. 7, after the Labor Day weekend. This decision would be largely the result of needing additional time to ensure the district is fully prepared to deliver on the learning options provided to families. This option could also incorporate the September conference day scenario mentioned above. We plan to update families just as soon as possible as we discuss these scenarios internally.

# Deer Park School District

Split/Rotating Schedule (Blue & Gold)

Week 1

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Blue	Gold	Blue	Blue	Gold

Week 2

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Blue	Gold	Gold	Blue	Gold