

Dear Simsbury Parents/Guardians,

As you know, this summer has been all about developing and readjusting our plans to reopen the Simsbury Public Schools with an emphasis on safety, high-quality instruction, social/emotional support, and equity. We thank you for your continued support and honest feedback. Now that we are into August, we have reached a point where we need families to make a commitment about their intentions for sending their child/children to in-person schooling a few weeks from now. With that important decision in mind, we can now announce our plans for opening the school year in Simsbury.

Through discussions with the Farmington Valley Health District, my Central Office team, and school principals, we believe the best path forward is to open the school year in our hybrid model ([sample schedule](#)). This plan will ease the transition back to school for staff and students and set the foundation for an effective transition into full in-person learning. The plan includes the following:

- Open all schools at the start of the year in the hybrid model that has been communicated in our [Plan for Reopening](#) document where approximately 50% of the students attend school on a given day and 50% learn remotely. This will be achieved by creating two cohorts. The "A" cohort will be those students who have the last name A-Len. The "B" cohort will be those students who have the last name Leo-Z.
- We will be creating a specific timeline to get all K-6 schools to full in-person learning by the end of October by bringing back identified grade levels in two-week intervals. We will prioritize our primary grades to return earliest. A more detailed phase-in plan will be shared with you next week.
- For grades 7-12, we will commit to the hybrid model for the first six weeks of the school year and revisit the plan before Columbus Day weekend.

While there are certainly complexities to this model for staff and students, we believe that, at this time, it is the right choice for opening our schools for a variety of reasons:

- Opening in a hybrid allows both teachers and students to gain comfort with the new environment and establish routines with mitigation strategies in a more manageable way due to the decreased density of students in the buildings.
- Social distancing measures will be more manageable with a 50% reduction in student enrollment at the onset of the year.
- The phased approach to full in-person learning at the elementary level allows schools some time to adjust to complex school-wide procedures for arrival, recess, lunch, dismissal, etc. over a longer period of time.
- This model lessens the density at the secondary level where cohorting of students as a mitigation strategy is more complicated than in our K-6 schools. Hybrid models for secondary schools seem to be the consensus across the state at this time.

With either of these in-person options (hybrid or full return), parents who are simply not comfortable have the ability to choose not to send their children to school and instead have them participate fully in distance learning. In addition to the information contained in the district plan and the letter you received from principals, we wanted to give you a very brief summary about what it means to make a distance learning choice before you send your final response. Elementary — In grades K-6, we plan to group students who are participating in distance learning in grade level classes that will be taught by a certified staff member dedicated to that role. These students will be removed from their assigned class at their home school for the duration of their participation in distance learning. The distance learning grade level group will consist of students from across all five elementary schools.

Secondary (HJMS and SHS) — In grades 7-12, students participating in distance learning will be expected to log in to their assigned classrooms in real time and participate in instruction to the greatest extent possible — recognizing that there will be limitations related to student engagement in this virtual environment. Depending on the numbers involved, students choosing full-time distance learning may be grouped together in courses where that makes sense and is possible. Given the variety of courses and teachers that students have in secondary school, we believe that this method of signing in to view/participate in live classes is the most feasible direction for distance learning at this time.

When we surveyed parents/guardians about their intentions last month, we gave them an "unsure" option. For purposes of planning our staffing and classroom needs, we now must ask for a firm decision. Please respond to the [Simsbury Return to School Survey](#), filling it out separately for each child. The deadline for responding is this Friday, August 7, 2020.

Thank you, in advance, for your timely response to this essential inquiry. Please know that the faith and responsiveness of this community is what continues to fuel us during these challenging times.

Regards,

Matt Curtis
Superintendent