



October 16, 2020

Dear CPS Families,

Our top priority has always been to provide students with a world-class education while keeping our CPS communities healthy and safe. Thanks to the hard work of our educators and school leaders, our students' online learning experience has improved dramatically since the spring. However, it cannot replace a traditional classroom, especially for our youngest learners and students enrolled in moderate and intensive cluster programs who cannot be served well enough in any remote learning format. As a matter of equity, it is critically important that we push ourselves and look for opportunities to offer in-person learning to ensure our students can continue to learn and thrive.

Ensuring equity and protecting our most vulnerable students

While our students' overall attendance and engagement levels has been strong this school year considering the challenges our students have had to overcome, the declining enrollment and attendance data that we have seen among our students in pre-k and cluster programs is unacceptable. Consistent with trends that we have seen across the country, pre-k students, students in cluster programs, and Black and Latinx students are engaging at significantly lower rates than in previous years. It is evident that online learning is not working for many of our students, and we must explore every possible opportunity to safely bring students back to school.

The availability of safe, in-person instruction for our most vulnerable students is an issue of equity, and that means that we — educators, families, and students — must address this issue head-on and provide our highest-need students with a safe and supportive learning environment. While we will begin the second quarter learning at home, our goal is to reopen school buildings for pre-k and students enrolled in moderate and intensive cluster programs later in the second quarter.

Welcoming students back to school buildings in a safe and responsible manner

Beginning with our youngest learners who would benefit most from in-person learning, our phased reopening would welcome students in pre-k and most students in cluster programs for five days a week of in-person learning. Some specialty schools may follow a hybrid model in order to allow for social distancing.

Since the spring, the district has taken the extensive measures outlined below to ensure the health and safety of our students. Should schools reopen, students and staff will notice a variety of new safety measures including health screeners, temperature checks, strict adherence to social distancing, and a requirement to wear face coverings at all times. According to our public health officials, the limited class size of our pre-k program (15 students) allows for proper social distancing, and in-person instruction can be provided safely. Many daycares and preschools have been open since the spring with very few cases of COVID-19 transmission, and national data has shown that schools do not seem to be a significant source of transmission.



Parents of students who are enrolled in cluster programs have also told us that online learning is particularly difficult for their children, and reopening cluster programs in schools will allow us to provide critical in-person therapeutic services for our students.

Families with children in pre-k or enrolled in moderate and intensive cluster programs

Beginning next week, the district will send an intent form to all families with children in pre-k or cluster programming seeking to understand their desire to return to in-person learning. To ensure that schools are staffed and have adequate time to plan for reopening, it's important that we know how many families are comfortable sending children back to school. Families will have until October 28 to complete the intent form. Families who choose to continue learning at home will not be able to enroll in in-person learning until the third quarter. **Please ensure your school has the most up-to-date contact information for your family to ensure you receive the form.**

Listening to families and additional opportunities to engage this fall

As we have committed from the beginning, we would only consider reopening schools if our public health officials believed it was safe to do so. However, we recognize and support our families' right to make a decision that best fits their needs. We have asked our school leaders to begin conversations with their pre-k and cluster families to gain a better understanding of their needs. Later this fall, we will engage the community about potentially expanding in-person learning for additional grades in January 2021 after the district has fully operationalized the new policies and procedures that will be common in our schools.

The health and safety of our students and staff remains our top priority, and we will continue to work closely with public health officials to ensure we are following the latest public health guidance.

We thank you for all that you have done to make learning at home a success. **Please complete the intent form by October 28 if you have a child in pre-k or a cluster program.** For additional information, please visit cps.edu/reopening2020.

Sincerely,

Janice K. Jackson, EdD
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Schools

LaTanya D. McDade
Chief Education Officer
Chicago Public Schools

Additional information on pre-k and cluster programming and health and safety protocols

Providing a safe and clean learning environment

The Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) supports the phased reopening of schools given the relative stability of the public health situation at this time. Aligned with [guidance](#) from the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, CDPH will support in-person instruction while the city's [COVID-19 test positivity rate](#) remains below five percent.

While a level of risk exists for any public gathering, the district has developed a comprehensive plan that includes health and safety policies and procedures aligned to local, state, and federal guidance.

Measures established in our [Reopening Framework](#) include:

- **Face Coverings:** Cloth face coverings will be provided to all staff and students and required at all times.
- **Pods:** Students and educators will be grouped into stable pods or small class sizes to minimize exposure to other students, allow for social distancing in classrooms, and support contact tracing
- **Daily Screenings:** Temperature checks, hand washing, and daily health screenings are required before students enter the classroom.
- **Testing:** To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, the district will ensure that any student or staff member who is symptomatic or a close contact of someone who tested positive has access to a free COVID-19 test.
- **Contact Tracing:** To help reduce the transmission of COVID-19, CPS has hired dedicated staff to support the intake of cases and provide proper notification. CPS will work in coordination with CDPH to ensure that those identified as close contacts have rapid contact tracing and are connected to city resources such as monitoring and testing.
- **Additional Custodians:** To ensure comprehensive cleaning protocols are completed every day, the district is hiring 400 additional custodians.
- **Sanitizer and Soap:** The district invested over \$3.5 million to secure over 50,000 hand sanitizer dispensers in all high-traffic areas and soap dispensers to support regular hand washing and sanitizing.
- **Disinfectant Wipes:** The district allocated over \$2 million to purchase 86,000 containers of EPA approved disinfectant wipes for classrooms, offices and other high-touch areas.
- **Hospital-Grade Disinfectant Sprayers:** Every CPS school has a hospital-grade mister spray unit that will evenly apply EPA-approved disinfectant for maximum disinfection.
- **Community Notifications:** CPS adopted consistent procedures and community notification protocols developed by CDPH to respond to any confirmed cases of COVID-19. To ensure public awareness, the district is tracking confirmed COVID cases at cps.edu/school-reopening-2020.
- **Sneeze Guards and Signage:** All schools installed sneeze guards and other physical barriers to protect staff when visitors arrive, and posted signage throughout school facilities to emphasize new policies and procedures.

In addition to these measures, the district has begun an audit of all schools to ensure every classroom is properly ventilated and inspected by an independent industrial hygienist. These assessments will be completed by early November, and we will make reports publicly available following completion of the

review. Any classroom that does not have proper ventilation — meaning consistent fresh air intake and exhaust, aligned with national best practices to increase airflow in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 — will be addressed or closed until repairs are completed.

Pre-k and Cluster Programming

Under the district’s proposal, all pre-k students in full-day, half-day, and tuition-based pre-k programs would attend school five days a week. Families who are not ready to come back can choose to opt out by completing the intent form and their child would receive a combination of live and independent learning outlined in the chart below.

Pre-k in-person learning (In-person class size is up to 15 students)	
Full-day programs	7 hours per day, 5 days per week
Half-day programs	2.5-3 hours per day, 5 days per week *Please note, third shift programs will remain virtual
Tuition-based programs	10 hours per day, 5 days per week
At-home learning (For families who opt out of in-person learning)	
Virtual learning	60 minutes of real-time instruction and 90 minutes of independent learning activities per day

Most students in cluster programs would receive in-person instruction five days a week. However, due to social distancing requirements, some schools may follow a hybrid model to allow for social distancing and ensure a safe learning environment. All IEP requirements will be followed.

Staff supporting cluster programs will also be provided with appropriate task-specific PPE including gloves, gowns, face coverings, and shields.