

Preston FAQs for the Hybrid Model Opening

For Monday, August 31, 2020

Please be aware that responses to the questions below can be modified or substantially changed at any time based on state, regional, or local events, guidance, and decisions.

Introduction:

Preston Public School's original re-opening plan was submitted to the Governor on July 24th. We presented a full face to face plan, a full virtual plan, and a hybrid plan. On July 27th, the Governor and the Commissioner of Education determined that District Superintendents should set their own plans with state guidance. Dr. S. is working closely with our Leadership Team, our SEL Team, and Patrick McCormick, the Health Director at Uncas Health.

Six addenda have been added to the state's recommendations since July 27th. These addenda can be found on our website attached to the original plan.

Things are evolving continuously. Preston's reopening plan was created with the health and safety of our staff members and students as its primary focus.

Our local statics remain relatively low. Since March 2020 there are twenty-seven positive cases of COVID-19 recorded in Preston. We are very fortunate compared to many areas in the country.

R.I., Mass., and N.J. have all delayed the opening of their schools. Preston has decided to open with a hybrid model on August 31st, although the option of postponing the opening remains a possibility for many reasons.

The hybrid model is being used by 80% of districts in our region, including NFA. One cohort of students will attend school face to face on Mondays and Tuesdays. Another cohort will attend school on Thursdays and Fridays. Specials will also take place on school days. All students will participate virtually on Wednesday to enable the buildings to be deep cleaned.

- There will be instruction every school day.
- There will be live contact with students by teachers every day.

We are providing staff with three days of professional development at the start of the school year from August 24 to the 26th. This PD will revolve around Social Emotional Learning, safety and well-being, and staff opportunities to collaborate on designing learning experiences for students.

The Preston Public Schools hybrid model allows for better contact tracing and will reduce material contact. It also allows students and teachers to develop a relationship with one another.

Families do have the option to have their children participate in full virtual learning. Core subjects will be taught and not necessarily by the student's assigned teacher. The initial deadline for requesting this model is **Monday, August 24, 2020**. However, a family may decide to choose the full virtual model at any time. The commitment for full virtual will be by the trimester. There will not be an option to move back and forth between virtual and hybrid in person during the trimester. A form can be downloaded from the school website to sign up.

Preston Public Schools is aware that daycare is a significant concern for many parents. We have published a list of daycares in the area, with openings, on the district webpage. We are also examining other possible solutions.

The listed questions below are issued in no particular order and will be updated and added to periodically.

Q. What will the first week of school be like, from August 31 to September 4.

A. The first week of school will be the Hybrid Model. For the first week, all four in-person instructional days will early dismissal at the regular early dismissal time (12:45 PM PPMS, 1 PM PVMS).

Q. How will a positive case of the COVID-19 virus be handled?

A. There is a specific procedure now in place developed by the state that describes how the district will respond to any positive cases in our schools. Addenda 5 from the state describes details and can be found on our webpage as part of our original planning document. Parents will be informed of any positive cases that occur. Anyone with symptoms in school will be isolated, and their families will be contacted.

Q. How do parents know what to purchase for virtual learning materials?

A. The District will supply all that is needed for learning materials for students. We ordered 225 Chromebooks for students and 20 new teacher laptops to fill out a compliment of computers that should allow for one to one for every student.

Q. How much time will students spend outside?

A. Some learning will take place outside, but there will be sun protection, and the temperature will be taken into consideration at all times. Fresh air circulation and outdoor activities are encouraged.

Q. Will there be more "live" virtual teaching?

A. Yes. Improvements will be made to the virtual learning that occurred in the Spring. There will be some synchronized teaching (teachers interacting live with students), and some recorded lessons along with asynchronous learning (students doing assignments

and using virtual learning tools). The process will be formally reviewed after one month to see if further improvements need to be made. However, we also expect individual teachers to move forward with their own innovations.

Q. What will we do for students' social-emotional health?

A. Faculty and staff will participate in SEL PD continually to support students. We understand that students want to see their friends and that virtual learning may increase their stress levels. Parents are encouraged to contact their assigned teacher, school principals, or school psychologist if they have personal concerns related to their child. The district has also registered for the YALE social-emotional virtual class that all staff can access through the year. Further, using faculty meetings and team meetings, the teachers and paraeducators will continually review and improve SEL strategies and programming.

Q. How will we handle special education services?

A. All 504's and IEP expectations will be met. Services will be provided with protective equipment in place. Speech, OT, and PT will all be provided. We purchased masks with clear centers so that they can be used during speech. IEP's will be met. If there are challenges related to IEP implementation, parents will be contacted.

Q. Will students carry backpacks all day at PPMS?

A. Yes, lockers are too close together. The district just received seven boxes of donated backpacks that are available as needed.

Q. What will PPMS do about cell phones?

A. Phones will be collected and individually packaged during the day to avoid contamination.

Q. Will students carry coats and lunches with them along with backpacks?

A. Yes. Students will carry all their personal belongings with them each day.

Q. If a student chooses full virtual learning, will he or she be able to participate in music instruction?

A. Yes, music teachers are currently planning virtual lessons. If the hybrid model is chosen, students will be able to have lessons in small groups in large areas like the cafeteria (no full band or chorus per CT guidelines).

Q. When will schedules go out?

A. The initial schedule and class lists are out now. Principals issued letters explaining the schedules. The elementary school is dividing cohorts generally using the alphabet. The middle school is sending grade 6 on Monday and Tuesday. Grade 8 on Thursday and Friday and grade 7 will be split in half. If the middle school divided the cohorts alphabetically, teachers would not have enough time to support virtual learning along with face to face learning. Teachers need time for face to face support as well as virtual

help. The district has the ability to attempt to match up sibling schedules. Sibling schedules will match for those parents with students in both schools.

Q. Is there the possibility we will transition back to face to face learning?

A. The district will monitor data closely to make that determination. All decisions related to the transition in either direction, full in person or full virtual, will be made in conjunction with local superintendents, local programs, district-level health personnel, and specifically guided by our local health authority.

Q. Will after school activities be held?

A. There will be no after school activities for right now, possibly later on during the year.

Q. Are staff having their temperatures taken every day?

A. Our local health authority confirmed that temperature taking is not a very effective strategy. Home health assessments conducted by families and staff before they come to school is very helpful. No one should come to school if they feel ill. Staff will self-monitor at home before coming in to work. Preston has two full-time nurses available to support all medical issues.

Q: Has Preston considered a multi-schedule program (some go to school 9-1, others 1-6)?

A: Preston would have to double our staff to do so. We do not have the capacity to do so. However, we are continuously looking at various options to create a high functioning learning schedule for students.

Q. How will Pre K and Kindergarten be handled?

A. There are different rules in place for PK and K students as compared to grades 1-8 students. Pre-K and Kindergarten students require closer interactions with teachers. These students will attend school face to face, 4 days a week. Centers will be cleaned and rotated as will books and other materials. Teachers and Paraeducators will wear masks, aprons, and face shields as necessary. These students will learn about wearing masks and will be encouraged to do so, but are not required to do so. (Recent research suggests that children over 2 have the capacity to learn how to wear masks). Students in grades 1-8 must wear masks, but there will be mask breaks, the opportunity for outdoor classrooms (tents), and lunch breaks. These breaks will be managed by the classroom teacher.

Q: Will masks be required at Preston Public Schools?

A: All Preston Public School students and employees will be required to wear a mask. Students, grades Pre-K, and Kindergarten will be encouraged, but not required, to wear a mask. Any mask that covers the nose and face can be worn. The same rules/policies

that apply to appropriate school clothing will apply – so masks that contain images or words that could be considered hurtful or offensive are not permitted. If a student does not have a mask or forgets his/her mask on a given day, one will be provided upon entering the school. “Mask breaks” will be provided.

Q: How can we be assured that PPE will be used appropriately by students and adults?

A: We will educate students, staff, and parents on the proper usage of face coverings, as well as how to maintain them for effectiveness. We will have signage posted throughout buildings and sent to families to remind them of proper safety practices.

Q: What measures will you take to socially distance students while at school?

A: Every classroom has been redesigned to maximize space and distance between each student. We will utilize outdoor spaces when possible, limit large gatherings, and control student movement. Administrators will create site-based procedures for community restrooms and confined spaces to allow for social distancing and proper handwashing.

Q: Will the water fountains be turned off?

A: To avoid virus transmission our water fountains have been disabled. Students will need to bring water bottles from home. However, students will be able to purchase water at lunchtime.

Q: How often will my school be cleaned?

A: Schools will be cleaned daily, focusing on major high-touch entry points in common areas such as doorknobs, handles, elevator buttons, stairwell railings, light switches, and soap dispensers. Custodial staff will disinfect using proper cleaning products with microfiber cloths to spray and wipe down objects. Custodial staff will create a schedule to clean cafeteria tables, bathrooms, and classrooms throughout the day. In addition, PPS will go through a deep clean process every Wednesday while all students are virtual. If additional deep cleaning is needed, Saturdays will be used.

Q: Will parents or visitors be allowed in the building?

A: In order to limit the number of people in our buildings, keep students in smaller learning cohorts and separate from outsiders, and keep buildings clean and secure, no one but students and staff members will be allowed into our school buildings. Drop-off and pick-up of students will be done from cars, school buses, or at the entrance of the

school and described to parents when the school year begins. Appointments must be made for important meetings.

Q: How will the cohorts be separated at Preston Veterans Memorial School?

A: We will follow a hybrid model. The way this model will work at PVMS is Group A will attend school on Mondays and Tuesdays. Group B will attend school on Thursdays and Fridays. Group A will learn virtually on Thursdays and Fridays and Group B will learn virtually on Mondays and Tuesdays. All students will learn virtually on Wednesdays. **ALL pre-K and K students will be here on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.** Class lists with students' first names and last initial with an indicator if they are in Group A or Group B. Efforts have been made to coordinate all siblings on the same days (including with middle school students).

Q: How will the cohorts be separated at Preston Plains Middle School?

A: If your child is in 6th grade, he or she will attend school in person on Mondays and Tuesdays. If your child is in 8th grade, he or she will attend school in person on Thursdays and Fridays. If your child is in 7th grade, he or she will attend school in person based on his or her section; 7-1 attends on Thursdays and Fridays, sections 7-2 and 7-3 attend on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Q: What are the size restrictions on cohorts?

A: A cohort is defined as a group or team of students and educators with consistent members that stay together throughout certain periods of the school day. The purpose of the cohort model is to limit the number of students who are exposed to COVID-19 if there is community transmission in the school and assist with effective contact tracing. While there is no definitive numerical restriction on cohort size except as defined via contract, cohorts should be kept as stable as practicable.

Q: How will my child learn on days s/he is at home?

A: Students will be provided with a device (Chromebook for grades 3-8) that will be used at home and at school. Teachers will provide synchronous (live) and asynchronous instruction and learning activities to students through Google Classroom/ SeeSaw on days when students are learning from home. Each student will be expected to bring his/her device to school every in-school day and bring it home for charging and for at-home learning.

Q: Will State assessments be put on hold?

A: No, not at this time. As the Commissioner of Education stated, it is important especially this year for us to assess our students on the state assessment to help us monitor the long-term trends in student achievement and growth so that we can bring support/resources where it is most needed. At the same time, we are advocating that for 2020–21, though we should try our best to administer the state assessment, we should not use it for formal district/school accountability purposes. This will require federal approval.

Q: Will the District tell families when someone in their student’s classroom or school becomes ill with COVID-19?

A: The sharing of health information is governed by HIPAA privacy regulations, so the District is restricted in how much detail can be shared. However, if someone in their child’s cohort becomes ill or is diagnosed with COVID-19, parents/guardians will be kept apprised to the extent possible, including notice to self-quarantine.

Q: How will attendance be taken during distance & hybrid learning?

A: Attendance will be taken by teachers during daily instruction. Incentives for perfect attendance are set aside.

A FINAL NOTE: We find ourselves in a unique, fluid, and dynamic situation. Things are constantly changing. It is very important to stay in contact with your educators. Check our website, our Facebook page, Blackboard Connect messages, and other communication messages for updates..

Thank you, everyone, for your patience and continued support during these unique and challenging times.