

July 8, 2020

Dear Families,

I hope you are having a restful summer so far, and staying healthy and safe. I am writing today to share important information about the fall, when school will start up again for the 2020-2021 school year. At the conclusion of this note you will find this information organized by topic, including school scheduling, health and safety protocols, and more. Please bookmark schools.nyc.gov/returntoschool2020, where more information is available, and which will be regularly updated as we get closer to reopening.

Our commitment to health and safety drives everything that we do. It drove the transition to remote learning this past March, when we knew that closing school buildings was essential to flattening the curve of COVID-19 infection across New York City. It was profoundly challenging, but you and your children handled it with unbelievable grace and effort, and school communities came together to make it work in historic fashion.

Now, almost four months later, our commitment to health and safety will drive us into the new school year. We have been through so much together, and as we look ahead to September, we see the big picture: the continuing rise in cases across the country; current guidance from City, State, and Federal health authorities; and the knowledge that as the trajectory of the virus continues to evolve, the guidance we must follow will also evolve. When it does, we have to be ready, and prepared to adapt. We've also received over 400,000 responses from families and students to a survey asking about preferences and concerns for the upcoming year, and your input has been critical in our planning.

Taken together, this picture demands we begin the 2020-21 school year in an unprecedented way—including new health protocols, physical distancing, and more. Make no mistake: New York City students will still be learning 5 days a week. A major difference is that we are preparing to deliver their education through a blended learning model. Blended learning means students will be taught on-site in school for part of the week, and will attend school remotely on the other days of the week.

Any family can also choose all-remote learning, for any reason. But we know that the majority of families want as much in-person instruction as is safely possible, and we will work to maximize it at every turn, consistent with health and safety requirements. We will continue to lead with the lens of equity and excellence, giving your child what they need to excel—and recognizing the ways that will be different from each of their classmates, especially in a time of crisis. We will not look away from the ways this virus has further magnified the effects of systemic racism in our communities. We will continue to explore opportunities to directly correct structural inequities—like closing the digital divide.

Our plans must be nimble so we can adjust and update as needed, as the public health landscape continues to evolve. We are also awaiting guidance from the State of New York, and we will be closely coordinating with them once it is released. All of the most up-to-date information will be available at schools.nyc.gov/returntoschool2020, and at the end of this letter are the most important takeaways for you at this moment. Please remember that this guidance may change as public health conditions evolve.

In closing, I want to say that I'm excited, and I'm anxious—just like you. I know that blending in-person and remote learning feels like an improvement over the all-remote experience of the last three months, but still comes with many questions and concerns. We will work with you every step of the way to answer questions around



sibling scheduling, transportation, what happens if there's a confirmed case in a school, and more. I'm committed to doing everything I can to make this easy for you—and I will not compromise on health and safety.

I always say that New York City has the best students, families, and staff in the world—and that nothing will ever change that. A safe return to schools in the fall, and the broader safety of our whole city, will require we consistently work together as partners—DOE staff, families, and students. Together we can ensure that the 1.1 million students—your children—in the NYC public school system get the education they deserve in the safest, most supportive environments possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard A. Carranza'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'R' at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail that loops back under the name.

Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education

Return to School 2020: Critical Information

Overall Guidance

- The 2020-21 school year will start in September 2020. We will announce details about the first day of school in the coming weeks.
- NYC students will be learning 5 days a week, whether in-person in school buildings or remotely at home.
- We are maximizing in-person instruction as much as possible given health and safety guidance, which includes social distancing. Students will return in either a blended learning model (a combination of remote learning from home, and in-person instruction in school buildings), or a fully remote learning model from home, if you so choose.
- Health officials have made clear that following basic safety protocols are key to reducing the spread of COVID-19: social distancing, face coverings (masks), handwashing, and staying home when sick.

Developing Your Child's Schedule

As of now, given current health and safety guidance, we will not be able to have 100% of students present in a school building on any given day. You should expect to hear from your school in August regarding your child's specific schedule.

Under the blended learning model, students will be taught on-site in school buildings for part of the week, and will learn remotely from home on the other days of the week.

- Schools will choose a schedule from a limited number of models that take into account the space constraints of their school buildings, and that prioritize consistency for parents and students in their scheduling.
- You can expect your child or children to be in school one to two consistent days per week, with additional in-person days on a rotating schedule based on groups or cohorts of students.
- Schools will make every effort to safely conduct as much instruction in-person as possible, and your principal will communicate your child's schedule with you in August.

We know that there are families who may not feel comfortable going back into school buildings in the fall. You can elect to choose all-remote learning for your child; a web form will be shared with you on July 15 that will allow you to select that preference by August 7. Families who have chosen fully remote learning at the beginning of the school year will be allowed to transition back into in-person instruction on a quarterly basis. Once the school year begins, families can choose to go fully remote at any time.

New Health and Safety Protocols

- All people (including students and adults) in a school building should remain at least 6 feet apart at all times, including in classrooms, common areas, and during lunch periods.
- Face coverings will be required for all students, staff, and visitors while inside buildings. Disposable face coverings will be provided to students and staff who need them.
 - Exceptions will be made for those who cannot wear masks for developmental reasons, including based on their age.

- Students and staff will have increased access to handwashing and sanitizer. Schools will be supplied with additional cleaning supplies, including hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes.
- All schools will identify a space to be equipped as an Isolation Room in the event a student or staff member becomes ill while at school.
- Our buildings will be deep-cleaned on a nightly basis with electrostatic disinfectant sprayers, and HVAC systems are being upgraded to ensure better ventilation.

Equity and Excellence: Our Continued Commitment

Our vision of educational equity and excellence for all students persists even during this time of crisis. We are laser focused on helping your child achieve academic excellence by providing key academic, social-emotional, and other supports to unlock their full potential to learn—no matter who they are. We remain focused on high-quality, tailored instruction for every student. In addition, here is some of what we will do to help our children reach their highest potential:

- We will allow time for students to readjust to being in school buildings, and to adapt to changes.
- We will integrate social-emotional learning and trauma-informed care into core academic instruction, and all New York City public schools will prioritize access to mental health supports throughout the 2020-2021 school year.
- For students with IEPs, this fall we will continue to offer in-person services to all who opt to receive in-person services to the greatest extent possible.
- Multilingual learners will receive an instructional program that will ensure continued progress in both their language development and content area knowledge.

Keeping You Informed

As we finalize plans for a school year like no other in our history, we know how important it is that our students, families, and staff have the information they need to prepare. We know that for each piece of information we are providing, more questions can emerge. Please visit the Return to School 2020 webpage at schools.nyc.gov/returntoschool2020 on a regular basis for the latest updates.

Throughout the summer we will continue to engage with families, students, and community leaders—both centrally through the DOE and within each school community.

- Centrally, the DOE will host a series of online Family & Student Information Sessions to answer any questions or concerns that families may have. The first of these will be held on July 16. More details and a full calendar will be available at schools.nyc.gov/returntoschool2020.
- We will be convening community and advocate roundtable meetings, briefings with elected officials and Community Education Council leaders, and more.
- Specific guidance will be coming soon for families with children enrolled in CBO-based early childhood programs.