

Commack UFSD

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Re-opening of Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As you know, the District has engaged in a very detailed and comprehensive review of all guidance and requirements associated with re-opening “brick and mortar” schools, and other educational alternatives (remote learning/hybrid models), this September, 2020. First and foremost, in our minds was, and continues to be, how we provide in-person instruction safely! To assist with the process, we formed a Re-Opening Task Force that quickly identified areas in need of attention so that we could open our doors as safely as possible.

Immediately following the Task Force recommendations, a set of re-opening plans were developed. These plans have been presented publicly several times (see <https://www.commackschools.org/Downloads/7-15-20BOEpresentation.pdf>).

As you may be aware, the District’s plans must adhere to the Department of Health and State Education Department guidance. Therefore, we have painstakingly reviewed the guidance and regulations (some are quite complex and intricate) and determined that there were three (3) models for consideration with the most desirable, given the pandemic, being the *Commack Model*. However, simultaneously we needed to reduce ridership on buses and vans for Kindergarten to Grade 5 by 50% so that there would only be one child per seat in an effort to run the *Commack Model*. So, we asked parents who could, to “opt-out” of transportation.

You did it!
There were enough parents who opted-out of transportation for us to offer the *Commack Model* and ALL K to 5 students will be able to attend “brick and mortar” schools beginning in September of 2020 (as long as the COVID rate doesn’t go above 9% at which time the Governor will close schools again)

PRELIMINARY

The Commack Model

Every Day Elementary, A/B Secondary School

Contingent on Resolving Transportation Issues

Elementary Every Day On Site Instruction (Example)

- Elementary classes are divided into two groups (A & B)
- AM: Classroom teacher will provide group A with core instruction focusing on literacy and mathematics
- Lunch in Classroom or Designated Social Distancing Areas
- PM: Classroom teacher will provide group B with core instruction focusing on literacy and mathematics
- Special Area Classes, Enrichment, Movement in the Arts, Mandated Services, and time to complete reinforcement materials with support will be provided for Group A in the PM and Group B in the AM

Secondary Every Other Day On Site Instruction (Example)

- On Site:**
 - 50% Capacity (students would attend every other day)
 - Extended Periods (teachers change classes whenever possible)
 - Students will be scheduled in “cohorts” and as often as possible remain in the same room throughout the day.
 - Lunch in Classrooms or Designated Social Distancing Areas
- eLearning:**
 - Students will engage in live Virtual Electives, Art, Music, Health, PE, etc.
 - In addition, Students will complete reinforcement materials and engage in live virtual meetings.
 - Standardized schedules for virtual instruction will be provided to students.

Keep in mind we must still get State approval to run this model (we anticipate approval)!

Below are responses to the numerous questions that have been posed to the District over the last several months as we engaged in the planning necessary for the re-opening of school.

Health & Safety

Will students be required to wear face coverings?

Students will be required to wear face coverings when not seated at their desks (i.e., hallways, restrooms, buses, common areas), and when they cannot maintain social distancing. Students may wear masks all day if they choose. However, every desk will have a clear protective shield. The lightweight, removable sneeze guard installs on student desks and creates a see-through barrier. These barriers are easily disinfected with the disinfecting misters and can be wiped with a baby wipe.

How will Commack's COVID App work?

Parents will receive an email, text, and/or push notification periodically in order to complete the health screening. However, a schedule will be published before the start of school.

That's a good question - The app will supply a list of names to the school, prior to school opening for the day, of students whose parents didn't enter information into the app. The information will be immediate.

How and when will student temperatures be taken?

The District encourages parents/guardians to take their child(ren)'s temperature before departing for school. Parents/guardians will also be asked to complete an attestation on the Commack COVID app confirming that their child does not have a temperature above 100.0 F. Additionally, upon entry into the school building, students' temperatures will be taken by walking through a temperature scanner.

Bus Supervision –Will students be required to wear a face-covering on the school bus, and how will this be enforced?

All students will be required to wear a face-covering on the bus and will be seated one in a seat, unless two students are from the same household.

We will be reinforcing bus rules in our schools, and we ask that families do the same at home to help ensure the safety of our bus riders. Know that every bus is equipped with a camera that will be used to identify students who break social distancing rules and/or remove their face covering. We will be enforcing a three-strike policy for offenders. Strike one results in a one-week bus suspension. Two strikes result in a two-week bus suspension. Three strikes will result in students being suspended from the bus for the remainder of the year. Please note, students

who are unable to medically tolerate a face covering for a proven reason will be provided accommodations.

How will the District deal with medically high-risk students'/ family members?

The District will work with families to accommodate the needs of all students. If you completed the return to school survey and answered, "you do not plan on sending your child to school" please anticipate follow-up written communication from the District. If you did not complete the survey, please email sgoldberg@commack.k12.ny.us, and Mrs. Goldberg will assist you in the process.

What happens if anyone in the school tests positive for COVID? Does everyone in the school need to quarantine for 14 days?

If anyone tests positive for COVID-19, it will be immediately reported to the Department of Health. The DOH will assess the situation and make the appropriate recommendations regarding cleaning, disinfecting, and possible self-quarantine of others and/or possible closing of the facility or portion thereof. Know that the District will notify the school community and, if necessary, the Superintendent can make the determination to close a portion of or entire building in the name of safety.

If one person has COVID, does the entire school get shut down? Is there rapid testing available if that happens?

The Department of Health will make the determination (along with the Superintendent) regarding school closures. It is possible that a room, a wing, or the entire school could be closed for a period of time, depending on the tracing of the individual's contact with others and travel within the building. As far as rapid testing, schools will not be testing students or staff. That is the purview of the State, County or an individual's private physician.

Sneeze Guards: Are the desks and sneeze guards going to be thoroughly cleaned/ disinfected between classes?

Generally speaking, all students will remain in the same room throughout the day with teachers traveling from room to room. Otherwise, the rooms will be disinfected when a new group is to enter the room.

Sneeze Guards: Why are we installing Sneeze Guards?

The Department of Health and the Center for Disease Control as well as State guidelines, highly recommend face coverings whenever students are unable to socially distance. We recognize this is challenging for some individuals, even when they are at their desk. Given the nature of teaching and learning, teachers in elementary schools may need to move about the room, assisting and supporting students. The nature of younger children in particular, means they may inadvertently move their desks, which will minimize social distancing; sneeze guards will help protect students in this event. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in the event the infection rate in the area rises, schools without protective barriers may be required to insist students wear masks all day when in school.

Sneezing: What if a student stands up and sneezes outside of the sneeze guard or sneezes on people on purpose?

We will be doing a great deal of educating children on hygiene, which will include the best way to sneeze, and/or cough, etc. However, this is not foolproof, which is why students must wear masks whenever not seated at their desks. Regarding students who purposely sneeze without a mask or being behind a sneeze guard, we will immediately bring the full weight of the Code of Conduct on said student. We realize this is reactionary, and again will insist that students keep their masks on whenever they get up from their desk or not behind a sneeze guard, which are designed to block incoming droplets as well as outgoing.

Will students stay in the same class all day to minimize possible exposure?

In sum and substance, in elementary school (K to 5), students will stay in one class all day with specials (art, music, etc.) being “Zoomed” or special area teachers rotating in when possible. Teachers will take precautions as they move from room to room, and cleaning protocols have been put in place as well. In the secondary schools, students will stay in the same room as much as possible, and the majority of specials will likely be remote on the day students are not in “brick and mortar” schools. Teachers, curriculum specialists, and building administrators are working out the granular details of student schedules to minimize hallway movement. Please know that it is unlikely that the secondary school students will be in the same room all day.

Will students be wearing masks in the hallways? Will they stay in one classroom to avoid hallway travel?

Students will remain in one classroom as much as possible (more difficult in the HS). However, whenever up from their desk, they must wear a mask.

Will Physical Education be required? If so, how would that work?

Physical Education is required. However, it will be significantly modified. We are working on programs similar to our Movement in the Arts program, which allows students a level of movement without coming into contact with others, allows 6 feet for social distancing and supports at least the basic precept of Physical Education – the State will allow this programming during the pandemic.

Lunch is a big question mark. How are kids not going to sneeze or “shed” on each other with no social distancing at lunch? Or, will the kids eat lunch at their desks?

Social distancing will be adhered to at all times; there are no masks. We have yet to fully design lunch programs, but it is possible students will be eating at their desks.

The COVID app, nice in theory. But, many people don’t tell the truth. How will you deal with that?

Again, we understand this is not foolproof, but we must believe that our fellow citizens will do the right thing in an effort to keep everyone healthy. Further, we will have temperature checks before anyone can enter a school.

Will there be separate nursing areas for kids who are sick and kids who get hurt?

Yes, we will have a quarantine area for anyone suspected of being exposed to COVID or demonstrating symptoms (these individuals will be picked up by a family member as soon as practical). The nurse’s office will remain in use for general injuries, medication dispersal, and/or general illnesses.

How will food allergies be addressed if students are eating in the classroom?

All buildings will be required to follow the District’s Allergy Plan. We will continue to follow the guidelines in the plan to ensure the safety and well-being of our students and staff.

Will students share supplies?

Students will not be sharing supplies.

How will bathrooms, classrooms, and buses be properly disinfected?

Our facilities will be disinfected several times a day in accordance with CDC guidelines. This includes utilizing hospital grade disinfecting solutions and electrostatic disinfectant sprayers. The District will maintain cleaning schedules, daily logs, and redeploy the necessary staff to ensure the guidelines are met.

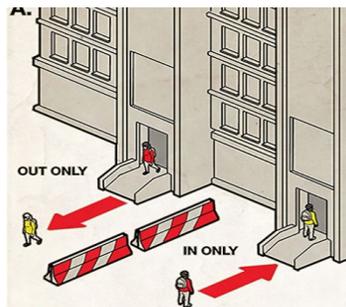


What type of filters are in each of the buildings' vents?

All existing HVAC RTU's (rooftop units), which can be upgraded to MERV 13 filtration, will be. However, the majority of our classrooms have "uni-vents" which draw fresh air from the outside and provide heat in the winter.

Will there be several entry/exit points for children so that hundreds of children don't go through one entry at a time?

Each school will communicate their plans for student arrival and dismissal to ensure the safety and well-being of our staff, students, and parents/guardians. Be assured that schools will take into account the staggered arrival and dismissal times, the number of students for each time period and assure that proper CDC and DOH protocols are followed at all times.



Will there be monitors in the bathrooms?

There will be NO monitors in bathrooms

Will Commack mandate a COVID vaccine?

Commack Schools cannot mandate that your child be vaccinated. However, if the State or Federal government mandates COVID vaccinations to return to school, we will likely be charged with enforcing such.

Schedule

Will the hours of the school day remain the same?

The District is making every effort to keep the arrival and dismissal of school as close to the regular times as possible.

What does A/B day schedule mean?

An A/B day schedule is “every other day” schedule. For example, if your child is placed in the A schedule he/she would attend school Monday, Wednesday and Friday on the first week and Tuesday and Thursday the next week. This would repeat itself every two weeks. If your child is placed on B schedule, he/she would attend Tuesday and Thursday the first week and Monday, Wednesday and Friday the second week.

- On the days students are not in “brick and mortar” school they will have regularly scheduled live, remote instruction. Attendance will be taken, participation will be accounted for and students will be graded for any and all online classes.

Why use an A/B Schedule as opposed to attending school Monday and Tuesday or Thursday and Friday every week for secondary students?

At this time, we put together the most comprehensive program designed to keep students engaged daily both academically as well as socially. In short, our program will allow students to be in “brick and mortar” schools every other day and have a set schedule of remote learning opportunities on the days they are not in the building. In this manner they are not out of the school building 5 of 7 days each week and continuity of program and social interactions can more readily be achieved.

Will the District schedule secondary school siblings and neighbors on the same day so they can carpool together?

We will make every attempt to have siblings attend on the same day. However, given the variables (grades, courses, electives, etc) it may be challenging to group siblings in this manner. We understand this will be very challenging and we are doing everything we can to support parents during these trying times.

Will secondary students have set days or a rolling schedule?

If we are able to return to in-person instruction students will be on an A/B day schedule. For example, a secondary student may attend onsite on A days and have a virtual learning day on B days. This will be an every other day schedule. Some weeks there will be 3 A days in a week and 2 B days and then the following week there will be 2 A days and 3 B days.

Why can't secondary students attend school every day with half in the morning and half in the afternoon?

Guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting of school facilities between uses such as an AM/PM model cannot be met. Further, transportation costs, lack of additional buses and drivers and the extra staffing needed to run morning and afternoon schedules would also preclude us from running an AM/PM schedule.

Will drop off and pickup times be staggered if I provide transportation?

Each school will communicate their plans for student arrival and dismissal to ensure the safety and well-being for our staff, students, and parents/guardians. However, when there will be too many cars, drop-off and dismissal will be staggered and we will make every possible allowance for parents who have to be at "two places at once."

Is this the plan for the whole year, or can it change and go back to the old "normal" schedule?

Although conditions may change, it is unlikely that COVID will subside to the degree necessary to remove social distancing requirements allowing us to return to a "normal" schedule. However, it is possible that infection rates could rise enough that we are forced to move to a long-term remote model. For example, schools will close if the regional infection rate rises over 9% after August 1 (utilizing a seven-day average). If schools close, the District will implement a remote learning plan.

Schools Will Close if Regional Infection Rate Rises Over 9 Percent After August 1 (using a 7-day average)

Long-Term Remote Learning (eLearning)

Standardization of Remote Learning

- Schedule
- Shift in Instructional Practice
 - Small Group Instruction
 - Mini-Lessons
- Attendance
- Participation
- Grading
- Assessments
- Communication/Feedback

- **Block Scheduling Elementary – Live Virtual Instruction (Example)**
 - AM: Live Core Instruction focusing on literacy and mathematics
 - Lunch
 - PM: Live Special Area Classes and All Support Classes
- **Scheduling Secondary – Live Virtual Instruction (Example)**
 - Course specific live lesson schedules will be developed and established for the duration of remote learning.
 - The majority of lessons will be live. However, some may be prerecorded, content and course specific.

Transportation

Is the opt-out for bussing only for K-5?

Yes. The opt-out for bussing is only for K-5. Since secondary students are on an alternating day schedule, there will be enough seats for all students to have their own.

If we need a bus in the PM but not AM, is that possible?

The District will continue to work with your family to accommodate your transportation needs. Please contact our Transportation Department at 631-912-2020 for further information.

Instruction

How will the elementary school day work and where will we get the teachers?

Classes will have approximately 50% fewer students per section in 20-21 than they did last year. This doubles the number of sections. Therefore, in the elementary schools, “regular” classroom teachers will teach the core subjects to approximately 15 students in the morning and a different set of 15 students in the afternoon. When students are not with their “regular” classroom teachers, they will be in class with another teacher (reading, art, music, etc.). These teachers may teach their subject area, they may facilitate a remote lesson with another content area teacher, assist students with assignments and more. We recognize that this is not ideal. However, given that we are moving from 100, K to 5 classrooms to 200, K to 5 classrooms, this is the best model. Otherwise we would have to furlough some staff in order to hire 100 classroom teachers (if we could find 100 high quality candidates) this would damage our special area programs such as art, music, PE, tech and more irreparably; we don’t want to lose amazing teachers; and given that this is likely a one (1) year model, it was deemed that this is the best alternative.

What happens to Band, Orchestra and Chorus?

In order to ensure student groupings are as static as possible and reduce movement where possible, students in Band, Orchestra and Chorus will be remote (we are exploring new and progressive ways to do this). Please note, the music department continues to work on options for some in-person instruction after the school year gets started.

Will students be able to move during the day if PE is virtual?

The physical education staff is working to ensure that students will be able to move at various times during the school day. There will be opportunities built into the school day that will allow for physical breaks, Movement in the Arts, and other activities that allow for social distancing.

Will remote learning be available for families who do not want to send their children to school?

Yes, if you were unable to avail yourself of the survey, please contact 631-912-2009 and they will assist you in determining what accommodations (remote/home instruction) best meet the needs of your child(ren).

Will students with special needs attend school every day?

Our Special Education Office is working on a plan in which students with disabilities may attend school every day depending on the educational program specified on the student's IEP. For now, all students in self-contained classes will be able to attend school every day.

Will students receive reading services and when will they be provided?

Reading services will be provided to elementary students during the school day. Please know that given the circumstances these services may look different. Reading services for students in secondary schools will be driven by student schedules and may be during the regular school day or provided remotely. Again, given the circumstances, these services will look different than they did prior to COVID.

For the children who receive special education services in secondary education. How are these related services going to be offered?

Secondary students will receive related services onsite. However, this may impact their participation in other classes.

Will Wilson Tech be available?

Wilson Tech has shared with the District that they do plan on opening every day for on-site instruction. Commack High School is working with Wilson Tech to create schedules for those students who are registered to attend.

Will SCOPE be available?

At this time, SCOPE will be available for before and after care.

Will NYS Regents be exempt again, if we continue with every other day schedule at the middle school and high school?

At this time, we do not know if the State will administer Regents exams. However, we will proceed in such a way as to attempt to assure student success.

Will all students be required to use a Chromebook?

The District is pleased to announce a new 1:1 Chromebook initiative where EVERY child will receive a Chromebook for use! As part of their instruction, teachers will be utilizing Chromebooks and Google Classroom to enhance their curriculum and support student use of Chromebooks at home during remote instruction.

If we have to move to remote instruction, what will that schedule look like?

If we are to move to remote instruction for a few days a child's schedule will remain the same as it is for on-site learning – they will simply meet the teacher online. If the school is closed for an extended period of time further information regarding scheduling will be communicated. If we do need to provide remote instruction for an extended period of time the District is committed to a schedule, live instruction/interaction between students and teachers, defined grading structures, and attendance/participation requirements.

General

Will there be Kindergarten Orientation?

The District recognizes the importance of Kindergarten Orientation for our students and their parents/guardians. We are working on a plan for Kindergarten Orientation. Once the plan is finalized we will share the information with our incoming Kindergarten families.

How will the District accommodate families where both parents work?

The District recognizes that two working parents/guardians can be difficult. One of the driving forces in our decision to have elementary students attend school every day is to accommodate working families.

Can students buy lunch or will they have to bring their own?

The District is working with our food service distributor, Whitson's, to ensure that students will still be able to purchase lunch. Further, free and reduced lunch recipients will be provided lunch every day, even remote days.

Why can't we use Commack buildings that are not utilized as remote learning centers so kids can go to school every day at the secondary?

Please be aware, we have five (5) rental buildings with a total of approximately 100-110 classrooms, each of which has tenants with leases. Further, we have approximately 3,500 secondary students. If our class sizes are reduced by approximately 50% that means relocating about 1,750 students to other sites. If we are to socially distance 1,750 students, we would need approximately 135 classrooms; there would need to be a significant increase in staff including instructional, custodial, and security staff; and we would need to provide socially distanced transportation (as we've mentioned several times, there is a shortage of bus drivers and a dearth of buses – we would need approximately 80 at \$100,000 per year for a total of \$8M for buses alone).

How does the no parent rule impact the PTA? Will there be no book fairs, holiday boutique etc.?

The District is limiting visitors to essential and/or necessary functions (i.e. picking up your child). This means parents or any visitors will not be present in classrooms, hallways, or other areas. We will make a determination later about whether we can manage book fairs etc.

Are secondary school students sitting in the same classroom all day long?

According to the re-opening guidance from the New York State Education Department schools should create schedules in which students will be grouped in cohorts and allow for limited movement. There may be some instances in which students will need to move to a different classroom for a class such as Science to allow for access to a Science lab set-up. Throughout the day, secondary students will be provided with opportunities to safely interact with their peers and allow for breaks.

Will students have the opportunity to have outside recess or engage in activities outside?

Students will have opportunities, weather permitting, to go outside for lunch and lessons as designed by the school and/or teacher. Otherwise, we are working on other means of outside recreation that are safe based on the age of students and available facilities.

Will secondary students have access to their lockers?

At this time secondary students will not have access to their lockers.

Will schools offer extracurricular activities and athletics?

Each school building will be identifying which extracurricular activities that the school offers to see which, if any, will be able to be offered based on all of the safety guidelines established by the NYSED, DOH, CDC, and the District. Please be aware that the District does not make the decision regarding athletics for both middle and high school. We are awaiting further guidance from Section XI.

Driver Education

At this time, it is anticipated that driver's education will not be offered.