

Hamden Public Schools
Reopening Schools FAQs – August 14, 2020

The following are answers to some of the most frequently asked questions related to Hamden Public Schools' reopening plan. You can find more details by viewing our [Transitional Reopening Plan](#).

1. What is Hamden's plan for reopening schools?

Hamden has recently submitted its plan for reopening schools to the State of Connecticut. As required, three models were included in our reopening plan:

1. **Full in-school:** all students attend school as in any year, with full school days, 5 days per week
2. **Hybrid:** some in-school learning, some at-home distance learning, with students attending in-school between two and four days per week, 5.5 hours per day
3. **Full at-home distance learning:** students learn fully at home, with teacher facilitated lessons

The Hamden BOE and district administration determined that the best way to begin opening schools was in the hybrid model.

2. Why has Hamden decided to open with a hybrid model?

With safety of students and staff at the forefront of our plan, Hamden has decided to begin school with our Hybrid model. The hybrid model has fewer students in our buildings on any given day, allowing for smaller learning groups of students and fewer interactions with others. It is our hope that by opening in the way described in our hybrid model, we will be able to institute and adjust as necessary our safety protocols, and be confident in our ability to bring back students to full days and weeks of school within our buildings (should health conditions warrant a full opening).

What precautions are being put into place to make it safe for my child to attend school?

Many safety protocols are being put in place to make our schools as safe as possible for students and staff. The safety measures are based on the most current recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as well as state and local health authorities. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Wearing of masks by students and staff at all times (with breaks, in safe ways)
- Social distancing (one way halls, positioning of desks, markings indicating appropriate spacing)
- Frequent and strategic cleaning
- Creating small learning cohorts of students
- Limiting sharing of resources
- Frequent hand washing and multiple hand disinfectant stations
- Instruction to students and staff about "staying healthy" behaviors

3. I understand everyone in the building will be required to wear masks. Can my child wear any mask? Will the school provide masks?

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.

4. NEW What if some students won't keep their masks on when in school?

No one will be allowed in our buildings without a mask/face covering. If a student refuses to wear a mask, the student's parents will be notified and the student will be sent home. Students not willing to comply with the requirement to wear a mask can participate in full distance learning.

5. How will my child learn on days s/he is at home?

Every student will be provided with a device (chromebook for grades K-8, laptop for grades 9-12) 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 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.

6. How will food service be handled safely?

To ensure that student meals are served and eaten in safe environments, Whitsons has redone their menu to include only foods that can be packaged "to go." Students will go to the cafeteria in small groups to pick up their meals (or meals will be brought to classrooms in some cases for logistical reasons), then eat in classrooms or other areas where they can be distanced from others.

7. My child receives special education services. Will the services specified in his/her IEP or 504 Plan still be provided?

Students with IEPs or 504 plans will continue to receive services to meet their individual needs. However, in distance learning, this may be implemented differently than it would be if students were in school as before the pandemic. Every effort will be made to meet each student's unique needs through in-school and/or remote learning using synchronous and asynchronous technologies as appropriate. Accommodations included in IEPs and 504 plans will continue to be instituted to the extent possible.

8. I work and need childcare with shorter school days and on at-home learning days. How is the district helping families with this?

The district has made arrangements with *Right at School* and the *Hamden YMCA* to make programming available for these times. Contact Hamden YMCA's Darrell Brackeen at dbrackeen@cccymca.org or Right At School's Katie Blake at katie.blake@rightatschool for more information.

9. What is happening with Hamden Athletics?

We are following decisions of CIAC (Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference) related to our athletics programs. At the present time, CIAC is planning to hold fall sports. Hamden teams have been separated into cohorts and is limiting the number of students together at one time.

If CIAC does continue with its plan to go forward with some or all sports and athletic competitions, Hamden is prepared to conduct team practices and games with recommended safety guidelines implemented.

10. What is First Student doing to keep students healthy while traveling to-and-from school on buses?

First Student has created the [Start Safe program](#), which includes many protocols and procedures to increase transportation safety during the pandemic. Besides requiring mask wearing and implementing social distancing on the bus, First Student has put in place many cleaning and sanitizing measures, and is working with staff to ensure school transportation is conducted with minimal risk. [Read more on the First Student Website, and read tips for your child in the Start Safe Parent Toolkit.](#)

11. I understand I may choose to keep my child at home and that the district will then provide full distance learning for him/her. How do I sign up my child for this option?

The Governor has stated that parents can choose to keep their children home and that school districts will provide at-home learning for these students. Hamden's model for at-home distance learning will follow the same schedule as students learning in school, and will include synchronous (live) and asynchronous instruction and learning activities through Google Classroom. If this is the option you want for your child, please notify your child's school by August 14.

12. If I decide I want my child to participate in full distance learning through Hamden Public Schools, is this the same as "homeschooling" my child?

No. Home-schooling is a different option for any Connecticut family that has always been available. With home-schooling, your child is not enrolled as a Hamden Public School student. If you decide to home-school your child, you will be responsible for all curriculum, instruction, materials and assessments related to your child's education. If this is your choice, you must notify Hamden Public Schools of your decision to home-school your child.

13. NEW Can I change my mind and put my child into full distance learning instead of the hybrid model, or switch from the hybrid model to full distance learning at some point during the year?

Yes. If you change your decision, you may switch to/from the hybrid model to/from full distance learning. You must notify your child's school about your decision. It will take a few days to implement the change, and your child's teacher or school will inform you when the change will take place.

14. I heard that parents are not allowed into school buildings. Is this true?

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.

15. REVISED What is my child's exact schedule? Which days will he/she be in school and which days will be distance learning days? (Note: Times may shift slightly from those listed.)

Most schools will open at their normally scheduled times, and end 5 ½ hours later:

- Church Street, Dunbar Hill, Helen Street, Shepherd Glen: 8:04 AM - 1:34 PM
- Bear Path, Ridge Hill, Spring Glen, West Woods: 8:34 AM - 2:04 PM
- Hamden Middle School: HMS's start and end times are still being decided, pending bus transportation considerations, but will be approximately 7:45 AM - 1:15 PM
- Hamden High School: 7:31 AM - 1:03 PM
- HCLC: 8:00 AM - 1:45 PM

Elementary students will be in school four days per week, for 5.5 hours per day. One day will be at-home learning. The day of the week that students will be at home is as follows:

- Kindergarten - Monday at home distance learning
- Grades 1 and 2 - Tuesday at home distance learning
- Grades 3 and 4 - Wednesday at home distance learning
- Grade 5 - Thursday at home distance learning
- Grade 6 - Friday at home distance learning

Part of in-school days, students will be in specials and working on their chromebooks independently with supervision.

IIC and ALsC classroom students will follow the same opening and closing times as the schools they attend. All IIC and ALsC students will be in-school Tuesday thru Friday with Monday as a distance learning day. This is true regardless of the grade the student is in or the school he/she attends.

Secondary students will be divided into two groups, attending school two days per week one week and three days per week the next week, or the reverse. Students whose last name starts with letters A-K are in one group, and students whose last name starts with letters L-Z are in the other group. The days not in school will be at-home distance learning that incorporates live and asynchronous learning activities. Each day includes 5.5 hours of instruction/learning activities.

HCLC students will receive instruction Monday-Thursday in school, and Friday will be at-home distance learning with live and asynchronous learning activities and instruction.

Specific schedules for each student are expected to be finalized about two weeks before school begins.

16. Is the distance learning that will be provided different than it was in the spring?

Yes, there will be significant changes. When we suddenly closed schools last March, it was completely unexpected and happened quickly. Since the time we began distance learning however, our teachers have increased their knowledge of technologies used in learning, and we have learned a lot from students, parents and teachers about what works best when learning remotely. We know better which tools are most effective and which strategies and types of activities keep students engaged. Our plan incorporates what we have learned to create powerful learning experiences for students when learning remotely, including live instruction.

17. How will social distancing work in schools?

As much as possible, students will be grouped in small learning cohorts, which enables students to interact with fewer people in the day. At the secondary level, students will be divided into two groups, with only half the student population in school at one time.

In every classroom, all extra furniture has been removed and desks have been separated to at least 6 feet apart. Other areas of schools, like gyms and cafeterias, are being converted to instructional classrooms to enable social distancing.

Many hallways will be “one way” and student class dismissals will be staggered to minimize interactions with other students. Markings on the floor will help students and staff maintain safe distances from each other.

18. With schools reopening to students and staff, why is it that the Board of Education is continuing to hold its meetings virtually?

We are going to great lengths to provide structures and create student and staff routines that allow for safe reopening of schools. These structures and routines include but are not limited to social distancing, limiting of numbers people in a classroom/building at one time, targeted cleaning and closing our buildings to all besides students and staff. These same structures would be compromised by opening the building to the public, and we would be unable to maintain them if the general public were allowed in our buildings. In addition, it should be noted that Board meetings have never been as well attended as they have been since they have been available to

community members through Zoom, and public input has also increased since hosting meetings virtually.

19. If I don't want my children to go back to school buildings at all during the pandemic, do I have to "home-school" them?

No. Hamden will offer a full distance learning option to parents who choose to keep their children home, with Hamden Public Schools maintaining responsibility for providing instruction and learning activities. If you prefer to home-school your children independently from Hamden Public Schools, you will be responsible for deciding what your children will learn and for providing instruction, learning activities, materials, resources and assessments.

20. What is happening with high-stakes testing like SAT and SBAC?

We will follow the state's and College Board's instructions for providing high-stakes assessments to students. Decisions about testing protocols and dates are still being discussed.

21. Will there be extra-curricular activities at HMS and HHS?

When schools first reopen, a limited number of clubs and extra-curricular activities will be offered. Most of these activities will be held in real-time, but virtually. Information about when and how to participate will be publicized to students at the relevant grade levels.

22. Will 6th graders be attending school at Wintergreen School?

No. The original draft reopening plan called for all district 6th graders to attend school at Wintergreen School. However, the final plan states that 6th grade students will remain at their home designated schools.

23. What will happen if students or staff present with symptoms at school?

Our plan describes in detail the steps to be followed if someone in a building is sick and/or diagnosed with COVID-19. Briefly, the plan calls for immediate isolation of anyone presenting with symptoms, with the school nurse / Health Liaison overseeing the implementation of next steps. QVHD will consult with us about the need for a closure and the length of closure if needed, as well as contact tracing and notification to families impacted. All families will be made aware of an outbreak at the school. As always, HIPPA (privacy) laws will be followed.

Specific requirements to return to school for those testing positive for COVID (students or staff) are described in our plan.

24. NEW What is the plan for HCLC students?

Students who attend HCLC will be in-school four days-a-week and at-home one day-a-week in distance learning:

- Students schedules on **Monday through Thursday** will be:
 - 8:00 – 1:45 (7 period day), or
 - 8:00 – 1:00 (6 period day)
- Students schedules on **Friday** will be:
 - Distance learning through Google Classroom, which includes live and asynchronous instruction and activities
- Elective classes typically taken at HHS will be done through distance learning at HCLC to the extent possible.
- In-person classes will include a small number of students, within limits described in our reopening plan, to allow for appropriate social distancing.
- Transitions between classes will be done using outdoor routes through exterior classroom doors to the extent possible.

- Lunch will take place from 11:00 – 11:25, with appropriate social distancing and held outdoors when appropriate.

25. NEW I understand live video and audio will be part of the new distance learning experiences. What does this mean?

During some parts of at-home instruction, teachers will be providing students with live-streaming video of instruction and other aspects of classes. As part of live lesson elements, students will be able to interact with teachers and other students who may be in school or at home. All student devices will allow for video and audio receipt and transmission within Google Classroom and Zoom. Only HPS staff and students in each class will be able to view or participate in these video and audio elements.

When students are learning in at-home distance learning, it is expected that they will participate in the same ways as if they were in school, with appropriate language, dress and behavior. Students should consider live at-home distance learning the same as if they were in the physical classroom.

More information will be sent to families as it is available. Please continue to check our Website and watch for email from the district or your child's school.