

Dear ASD Families,

As we are experiencing a decrease in a case counts across Anchorage since the spike of COVID-19 in July, ASD has begun its planning for the next phase of schooling if a transition to school becomes possible. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) support the return of students to in-school education if the health and mitigation conditions permit. We know our community is experiencing the pandemic differently; therefore, we are taking this time early on to address your needs and questions.

ASD has learned and will continue to learn a great deal about COVID-19. We are confident that while we cannot eliminate the virus, we can effectively mitigate its spread using the most up-to-date information and best practices from the medical and science experts from around the world. ASD commits to meeting daily to assess the safety concerns and present conditions in our schools and community.

The District's plan is in concert with guidelines set forth by the CDC, AAP, the State of Alaska, the Municipality of Anchorage and others. Additionally, District leadership has consulted both local and state health officials and has incorporated their input into its planning. Please look to our website for the detailed information on the guidance resources.

While the rolling average case count has been and remains a key piece of information in determining whether school should be held in person or online, the CDC and AAP suggest it should not be the only factor in determining reopening of school buildings. Rather, this data point is a start for a holistic decision-making process which must consider a host of other factors that assist in understanding the nature of the community spread. Additionally, it helps to provide a more accurate threat assessment for our students and staff. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- The specific nature of the community virus transmission
- The District's ability to mitigate virus spread through robust safety protocols
- The District's sanitization procedures
- The District's response plan when someone gets sick

ASD's plan considers other risks for which the American Academy of Pediatrics has evidenced in regard to students' wellbeing when school is not open for face-to-face classes:

- The impact on social-emotional needs
- The impact on behavioral and mental health
- The absence or reduction of critical services (e.g. school lunch programs, special education services, after-school programs, mental health services)

Of note, ASD has revised its plan of utilizing a 50 percent, hybrid model in lieu of new Harvard research which suggests that hybrid models may actually increase the viral spread. Further analysis by the District also suggested that the hybrid model would be overly complicated for families, would create higher workloads for staff, and would

present significant challenges for busing. As a result, the District's revised plan includes one medium-risk plan in which students attend school five days a week for 5.5 hours each day. We are in the process of balancing our class sizes to keep the class counts as low as possible.

Re-Entry Plan Overview

The District will phase students back into school buildings gradually starting with elementary and high-needs students. Here is the basic framework of the plan:

Voluntary Reading Tutoring:

- Will begin September 28 for Grades 1 & 2 students who opt in at selected schools based on equity of access and need

Elementary Schools:

- In-person classes will resume on October 19 for Pre-K – Grade 6
- All students will attend school five days a week for 5.5 hours each day (no alphabet-based cohorts)
- The school day will begin at 9:30 a.m. for comprehensive elementary schools

Self-Contained Special Education Programs:

- Programs will resume in school buildings on October 19 for Pre-K – Grade 12

Middle School*:

- In-person classes will resume for first-year middle school students on November 12-13. (Grade 6 or 7 depending on the school)
- November 12-13 will provide valuable transition time for first-year students
- In-person classes resume for all other middle school students on November 16
- Special and Alternative schools with middle / high school students will resume November 16
- All students will attend school five days a week for 5.5 hours each day
- The school day will begin at 8:45 a.m. for comprehensive middle schools

* The four-week gap between Elementary and Middle School re-entry allows time to adjust to elementary school logistics and safety protocols, and will only occur if safety practices and viral conditions permit.

High School:

- In-person classes will resume January 4, 2021
- Coincides with the start of the second semester
- High school will continue with the quarter model
- All students will attend school five days a week for 5.5 hours each day
- The school day will begin at 8 a.m. for comprehensive high schools

Special, Alternative, and Charter Schools:

Since charter and special/alternative schools often have a combination of elementary and secondary grade levels, specific re-entry dates may differ. A detailed list of schools and their re-entry dates will be forthcoming.

More Information to Follow

It is important to reiterate that this is an overview of the plan and that this plan not only impacts students and families, but teachers and administrators at each of our schools. The District understands there will be many questions about safely bringing students and educators back into buildings.

The District currently has working groups of administrators, teachers, and other staff members working through multiple topics including class size, staffing, substitute teachers, training on safety protocols and PPE requirements, COVID response procedures, busing, and food services. Training sessions will be provided prior to our return to address to our staff and parent needs.

New information will be forthcoming from the District and through school channels. The ASD website will be updated frequently with information pertaining to the school re-entry plan.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the education of EVERY ASD student.

~Anchorage School District