

VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Vernon Elementary School Students Will Return to School Fulltime October 13

(VERNON, Connecticut) – Vernon’s elementary schools will transition to fulltime, in-person learning on Tuesday, October 13, 2020, Vernon Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joseph P. Macary said this week.

Vernon has been successful with its COVID-19 mitigation strategies and state Department of Public Health metrics show the risk of COVID-19 infection is low in Vernon, Dr. Macary said.

“For me, there’s a sense of urgency with our students in kindergarten, first grade, second grade and third grade,” Dr. Macary said. “There’s a huge learning loss.”

Schools always struggle with the regression that occurs during summer vacation, but it’s even more urgent now due to the coronavirus pandemic and the shutdown of schools last spring, Dr. Macary said.

“We talk about the summer regression – that’s usually eight or nine weeks,” he said. “However, we haven’t had normal school for 22 weeks. We know there’s regression and loss of learning, mainly because students are only going to school two days a week.”

Vernon has been operating with a hybrid program since schools opened. One cohort of elementary school students attends school Monday and Tuesday and a second cohort attends Thursday and Friday. All students attend school virtually on Wednesday while schools are carefully cleaned.

About 70 percent of Vernon elementary school students are attending school. The rest are engaged in fulltime virtual learning at home and will be able to continue doing so, Dr. Macary said.

Some students are anxious to get back to school fulltime.

The Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.

“I’d just love to go for the full five days,” said Caleb Asiedu, a fifth grader at Northeast School. “Every day, I really just can’t wait to go to school.”

“I like to play and learn stuff,” Dev Patel, a first grader at Northeast said.

“I want to hang out with my friends,” added Northeast third grader Bentley Gochee.

Dr. Macary could not agree more.

“Students learn better when they’re in school and that’s why we want everybody back in school,” Dr. Macary said. “Our teachers have worked heroically to engage our students through virtual learning, but it’s just not the same as being in a classroom.”

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Robert Testa said that while virtual learning is getting better and better, it’s difficult for teachers to give students the one-on-one attention they need if they are struggling with a concept.

“Some students need extra help with the foundational skills of reading, understanding numbers and learning how to decode words, especially in the primary grades,” Mr. Testa said. “Learning is more teacher-directed in those grades. As you get older, school is more student-directed.”

About 70 percent of Vernon’s elementary school students are expected to return to school fulltime on October 13. Students will have mask breaks through the day and social distancing will be maintained.

“Our goal is to get students to mastery in reading comprehension and numeracy skills by third grade,” Dr. Macary said. “If we can achieve that then the likelihood of their success in middle school and beyond grows tenfold. The early learning is critical for us.”

So far there is no timeline to have Vernon Center Middle School and Rockville High School return to fulltime in-person learning, Dr. Macary said. But it’s likely Vernon Center Middle School students will return to school fulltime first, he said. The school schedules will be altered to enhance learning.

Dr. Macary briefed the Board of Education on his plan Monday night and board members asked good questions and provided feedback on the plan.

There is an enhanced cleaning regimen at each school and that combined with the district’s mitigation strategies should allow officials to reach the critical balance of leaning and safety.

“We are following the state Department of Public Health’s guidelines for cleaning and sanitizing every day,” Dr. Macary said. “The schools are now cleaner than they’ve ever been.”

The mitigation strategies include:

- Face coverings at all times for students and staff
- Regular hand-washing for students in bathrooms
- Reconfigured water fountains to avoid germs
- Sanitizing and cleaning all tabletops and desks
- Cohorting of students and contact tracing
- Twice daily cleaning of high-touch areas
- Self-monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms
- Social distancing, maximizing where feasible

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- Visual markers and positioning in hallways
- No public entry and limited visitors
- Bagged breakfast and lunches in the cafeteria
- Enhanced building cleaning every day

“In Vernon we believe in a whole child approach to learning and that’s academic, social and emotional,” Dr. Macary said. “The only way you can give all three of those is in a school setting, where you have the teacher providing the academics, you can socialize with your friends and get emotional support from our support staff.”

Teaching and parenting are hard jobs, and it’s not fair to ask parents to educate their children. That’s the school system’s job, Dr. Macary said.

“We’re here to serve our students and we need to do our jobs,” he said.

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