



PLANNING FOR SCHOOL IN FALL 2020
May 11, 2020

****NOTE:** This article is a result of the weekly discussions of the Pearland ISD Return to School Committee. This serves as insight into possible contingency plans the committee is preparing for and these are not being implementing at this time. As the 2020-21 school year approaches, definitive plans will be released.*

Realizing that the current COVID-19 pandemic has radically affected “normal” school operations, and that social distancing restrictions may remain a necessity next school year, Pearland ISD is planning to maximize educational opportunity by planning for 3 intertwined possibilities:

1. On-campus instruction to students - with required social distancing measures in place.
2. Remote/distance learning from home
3. A Hybrid system whereby students are both on campus in smaller numbers and learning through remote methods when away from school.

We have been continuously warned that surges in the pandemic or other realities may require further temporary closures of school campuses next school year. Thus, we must be prepared for a combination of on-campus, distance, and hybrid learning next school year, realizing we may have to make rapid changes to the district’s calendar of instruction.

In our planning efforts, we have established a large “Return to School” committee comprised of leaders and advisors from each major area of district operations. We are meeting on a weekly basis. Here are some of the major issues we are tackling:

TRANSPORTATION:

We must get our kids to and from school on our buses while maintaining social distancing. This reduces the capacity of our buses from as many as 72 passengers to as few as 12 to 18. Our average bus route in 2019/20 carried between 24 and 40 students at one time. School districts can’t double or triple their bus fleet even if there were available drivers to accommodate such a reduction in students per bus. In turn, bus transportation will drive decisions in many areas including daily school schedules. This may also affect optional services such as paid bus service previously available for approximately 1,800 students who use such services while living within 2 miles of their school.

SCHOOL SCHEDULES:

We may need to radically alter daily schedules in different ways. Some of the initial ideas put forward are as follows:

- Monday/Wednesday/Friday on-campus learning and Tuesday/Thursday remote learning, possibly for our **secondary** students (grades 5-12) such that a reduced number of students and staff are on campus each school day.



- Half day classes every day for Elementary students (grades K-4) in order to reduce the number of kids on campus at any one time. Obviously, such an arrangement creates difficult day care needs for the other half of the day – for working parent households. If this is implemented, such an arrangement would require an intricate combination of parents, day care providers, churches, and others.
- High needs special education students will require an everyday presence on our campuses.
- P.E. and recess must be altered to ensure social distancing.
- The impact of the pandemic on all UIL competitions/activities is unknown and may lead to severe restrictions or eliminations of practices, contests, etc.
- It is imperative (unlike the close of this school year) that teachers and staff have regular in-person contact with students so that attendance, accountability and instructional continuity takes place, even if part of the day or week relies on remote learning.

CUSTODIAL SERVICES:

During “normal” school operations, most custodians perform their services after the school day ends. But in this new era, we will need most custodians during the day, cleaning and disinfecting throughout our schools. Our custodial staff will need students and staff to do their part - with hand sanitizers, masks, and methods to clean their respective areas when they arrive and depart.

FOOD SERVICES:

During “normal” operations, students gather en masse in our cafeterias. Instead students may receive meals from the cafeteria or from home - and eat in classrooms. In addition, we may need to prepare box meals for students who are economically disadvantaged and in need at home.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Our teachers and staff have risen to the challenge this semester, in terms of quickly providing remote learning. As someone has said, it is like building an airplane while flying it. But as we go into the 20/21 school year, we must all increase our proficiencies with video conferencing, remote learning, and innovative practices to provide much more robust, accountable, and comprehensive instructional services. We must re-think everything from grading to parent/school relationships in order to ensure our kids maximize their learning at and away from campus.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION/TECHNOLOGY:

The work in this area is too extensive to chronicle in this article. In general, the district is moving toward one software learning platform (Canvas) for Grades Pre-K through 12 – while maintaining the advantages of other “pieces” including elementary school use of “See Saw” and other products. In turn this requires a high level of proficiency in these tools by all of our teachers and instructional personnel. Other learning software products (such as those in the areas of reading and math) must be considered to ensure the highest quality distance learning possible.



C&I is developing new video lessons by model teachers and specialists for district wide use. In turn, the role of teachers throughout the district will change and vary among our ranks – but with a common goal to facilitate one on one interaction and accountability with students so that ALL are engaged and learning.

COMMUNICATIONS:

At present the pandemic predictions seem to change every week. In turn, decisions on our fall opening of school depend on those changing predictions. Thus, the district must balance the critical need for parents and students to know what will occur – against the reality that what we know on Monday may be contradicted by Friday. We must emphasize to all of our community that these plans aim at a moving target.

HUMAN RESOURCES:

The uncertainty of the coming school year could mean significant changes to work calendars and responsibilities, contracts, stipends, etc. For example, if UIL cancels some or all athletic/extra curricular activities, the professionals on dual teacher/coach contracts would see a significant altering of their responsibilities.

SUMMARY:

There is a huge amount of work underway and to be done. Predictions concerning the Pandemic and the resulting decisions made by federal, state, and local authorities will likely determine what and when our district can provide services throughout next year. So we are preparing for a “mixture” of the 3 different scenarios listed at the beginning of this article. There is much more discussion and work to be done before the items listed above are refined, changed, or implemented. That work will continue over the summer.

Our goal is nothing short of producing a World Class response to this challenge, knowing that the new skills developed will be of permanent use regardless of the duration of this current struggle.