

Education

What Will Learning Look Like This Fall? That Depends On The School.

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By [Adriana Cardona-Maguigad](#)

July 1, 6 a.m. CT



Schools across the Chicago area, including Jahn Elementary School on Chicago's North Side, are thinking through ways to safely reopen this fall. Kate N. Grossman / WBEZ



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With just two months before the school year starts again, Chicago-area public and private school officials are figuring out back-to-school plans for a year in which COVID-19 will undoubtedly still be with us.

With Illinois now in Phase 4 of its reopening plan, Gov. JB Pritzker last week gave schools the [go-ahead to reopen](#) this fall under certain conditions. New guidelines



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Beyond that, details on how to provide instruction will be decided by each school and district. For now, there appear to be two main options on the table: full-day in-person instruction or a combination of in-person and remote learning.

Close to normal?

The Archdiocese of Chicago has already said it wants to move ahead with a school year as close to normal as possible. The archdiocese has more than 200 Catholic schools and more than 70,000 students in Cook and Lake counties.



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“At this point, it is our intent to enable all of our students to return to school in the fall and to be there for full school days,” said Jim Rigg, superintendent of Catholic schools for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Rigg said his team conducted 15 listening sessions with more than 130 parents. They are still working out specifics, but their plan includes looking after teachers with health concerns and increased communication with teachers and parents.

Rigg also expects additional spending, especially on things like cleaning products and personal protective equipment.

To cover the new costs, Rigg anticipates getting federal coronavirus relief funding and maintaining strong fundraising efforts, despite the challenges imposed by the



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A hybrid model

Many other schools, like Roycemore, a small independent school in Evanston, are looking at a hybrid model that combines in-person and remote learning. They're also considering offering online only or in-person only options based on parent preference.

Roycemore has 217 students from preschool to 12th grade. Aside from ramping up school cleanliness, school officials say students in earlier grades will be in separate parts of the schools, desks will be placed six feet apart, windows will be wide open if weather permits and students will have camp chairs if class is moved outdoors. Students also will have lunch boxes and will be expected to eat at their desks instead of the cafeteria.

The school will also offer remote learning if needed.

“We are providing these multiple options and this flexible opportunity for families, recognizing that every family has different needs,” said Adrienne Finley Odell, the head of Roycemore School. “Some of them may have a grandparent living at home.”

She's also anticipating huge investments, especially in cleaning.

“It's thousands of dollars that we are going to have to spend in additional expenses for disinfection and cleaning and even protection [equipment],” she said.

Chicago's plan due out soon

In Chicago Public Schools, a district with more than 600 schools, it's still unclear



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their preferences now. CPS CEO Janice Jackson last week said a more concrete plan will come out in a few weeks.

“It will be a draft and there will be a couple of weeks for parents and community members to weigh in,” Jackson said. “We will also instruct schools to put together their own specific plans that they are going to be sharing with their local school councils.”

At Burroughs Elementary on the Southwest Side, principal Richard Morris already has recommendations. For one, he said, the school buildings have to be clean at all times. School cleanliness is something CPS has had big problems with in the past.

Morris is aware of the difficult task ahead. “Every building is different, every school has different populations. So it will be really hard to manage it from the top,” he said.

At Burroughs, he said teachers want in-person instruction, but they also want to feel safe. He likes the idea of a staggered schedule with some in-school and remote instruction. That model could work, he said, as long as students have guaranteed access to high-speed internet, something that was a challenge when school buildings closed in March.

“If we come back in the fall after two more months and we still have kids who can’t connect anywhere, that to me will be a big failure,” Morris said.

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Mayor Lori Lightfoot recently acknowledged many students lagged behind



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computers. She and Jackson recently announced plans to offer free high-speed internet to more than 100,000 low-income CPS students for four years starting this summer using public and private dollars.

“We now know, as we should have known prior to this, that having a device and access to broadband is as essential as we thought textbooks were in the 1980s,” Jackson said.

State officials say that’s a key component because moving forward, if infections rise, all schools will need to be nimble and transition back quickly to full-time remote learning.

Adriana Cardona-Maguigad covers education for WBEZ. Follow her on Twitter [@WBEZeducation](#) and [@AdrianaCardMag](#).



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