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# Philly promises public school students will have internet access as coronavirus keeps classes online

by [Kristen A. Graham](#), Updated: July 29, 2020



MONICA HERNDON / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



## Editor's Note

News about the coronavirus is changing quickly. The latest information can be found at [inquirer.com/coronavirus](http://inquirer.com/coronavirus)

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Every Philadelphia School District student will have the tools to access digital learning in September, Superintendent William R. Hite Jr. said Wednesday, pledging to connect the [thousands of families who lacked internet access](#) this spring when schools first went remote.

“Every student that needs it will have it,” Hite said.

He said the city, district officials, and internet service providers are hammering out details, which he hopes to announce soon. The school system will also continue to make free Chromebooks available for loan to any district student that needs one.

## CORONAVIRUS COVERAGE

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Fleshing out the district’s back-to-school plan, which will have [students attend school fully virtually at least through Nov. 17](#), Hite said that parts of school buildings, as well as city recreation centers and libraries, would likely be opened to provide child care for families who need it. Child-care details, including capacity at such locations, remain unclear.

The superintendent also said that while teachers will not be expected back in buildings, those who want to teach from schools will likely be given the green light to do so.

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“We’re already getting requests from some teachers who have said, ‘Can I do this from my classroom?’” Hite said during a news conference.

Teachers will offer lessons that students will be expected to access in real time but will also assign small-group work and work for students to complete on their own, Hite said. Attendance will be taken, and grades will be given.

“This is not going to look like review and enrichment like we did in the spring,” Hite said. “This is going to be school. The days are going to be more structured. What we’re asking teachers to do is going to be more structured.”

Hite said that it may be possible, once teachers are back in classrooms, to broadcast their lessons to remote students but that “we are considering multiple paths.”

Meals and mental health services will be available for all students even during remote instruction.

» **READ MORE:** [Philly public schools will stay all-online at least until November](#)

The new version of Hite’s back-to-school plan was announced Tuesday after [intense pushback forced him to scrap a plan](#) that would have brought most students into schools two days a week.

“The fears around the virus and the surging case counts created a dynamic we were not anticipating,” the superintendent said.

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The school board is expected to sign off on Hite's plan. A vote is scheduled for Thursday.

Students who need special services and therapies will receive them all remotely under the plan.

"It is very complex, but we're going to open with different services than we had in the spring to ensure that we can do as much as possible so that every student is receiving their services," said Malika Savoy Brooks, the district's academic chief.

While students are out of buildings, the district will expand the number of capital projects and environmental remediation work it has planned, Hite said.

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## What you should know about coronavirus

Updated: August 3, 2020 — 8:08 AM

### How many cases have there been?

There have been about 18.1 million confirmed cases and 690,000 deaths globally. In the United States, there have been about 4.67 million confirmed cases and 154,900 deaths.

### What are the symptoms?

Like other respiratory infections, symptoms of coronavirus can include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Here is an [in-depth description](#).

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If public health indicators allow, Hite wants students to get back to in-person instruction in the district's second marking period, with a hybrid in-person and digital model. (Officials said a 100% remote model would be available for those families uncomfortable with sending their children to school, though it may not allow for students to be taught by educators from their assigned school.)

Hite emphasized that he worries about the effects of children missing more school.

"I also worry about the socialization that children are missing at a critically important age," particularly elementary-age children, Hite said. Teenagers have reached out, too, he said, begging him not to let the school year be entirely virtual.

"Our young adults aren't equipped to remain isolated, and keeping them in isolation is problematic," the superintendent said.

Prekindergarten students enrolled in district-run programs will begin the year virtually, Hite said Wednesday. But the district's decision does not affect children enrolled in city-funded prekindergarten programs run by other providers.

The district has provided some guidance to the 86 charter schools it authorizes around reopening, but each individual school is responsible for its own plan. Many intend to follow the public school system, but others are opting for models that bring some students back to school for all or part of the week.

Philadelphia School District teachers are scheduled to return to work Aug. 24. Students' first day of school will be Sept. 2, pushed back from Aug. 31, if the board approves Hite's proposed calendar changes.

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