



# OLD SAYBROOK MIDDLE SCHOOL

60 Sheffield Street, Old Saybrook, Connecticut 06475

**Krista Bauchman, Ed.D.**

Principal

Old Saybrook Middle School

**Matthew J. Walton**

Associate Principal

Old Saybrook Middle School

March 5, 2021

Dear Families,

The purpose of this letter is to redefine and clarify the parameters and expectations for school attendance across our district. We feel it is essential to ensure continuity as much as possible, as well as maintain consistency and lessen hardships for families and staff. We believe our trusted partnership between families and schools has allowed us to keep doors open and students and staff safe. We are so appreciative of your on-going support.

Providing distance learning has given students the ability to be connected to peers and staff, while engaging in the learning process. For those students and families who have specific and/or chronic health concerns, as well as students and teachers needing to go into quarantine, having the distance learning platform has been essential. We continue to experience new challenges as the pandemic evolves and families have asked us for specific clarification regarding students participating in distance learning when they are ill, vacationing, and/or quarantining after vacation.

Hearing the need for clarification we consulted the State's guidance before clarifying the District's stance on use of distance learning. We will be using the following attendance guidelines for illness, vacationing, and quarantining after vacation:

- **Illness:** Students who are home ill should rest and regain their health in order to return to school as soon as possible. Moving forward, it should not be expected that a request for remote learning can be accommodated for short absences. There is, and always has been, a process for accommodating students who need to be out of school for health reasons for longer periods of time.
- **Vacations:** Distance learning will not be offered to families who are vacationing. If a family decides to travel, students will make up their work upon return to school.
- **Quarantine as a result of vacation:** Students who need to quarantine, as a result of vacationing, will not be permitted to participate in distance learning. Students will make up their work upon return to school.
- **Minimum length of Distance Learning:** As stated above, changing a student's identified educational platform to Distance Learning is for long-term needs that are primarily health-related. Distance learning is designed to accommodate illness, high risk health issues for students and family members or school-imposed quarantines because of close contact. It is a hardship for staff to pivot from remote to in-person learning, especially at the lower grades. Though they are more than willing to try, it often takes time away from students in the classroom or instructional planning for

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**the day. To be fair to our staff and students, we will not honor requests to change to remote learning for a short period of time for reasons other than those stated above.**

**NOTE: When extenuating circumstances arise, we will discuss with families on a case-by-case basis.**

Lastly, we would like to share the State's attendance guidance that aided us in setting the above guidelines. Below is an excerpt regarding tracking daily attendance. As you will read, districts have been asked to set, "clear, quantifiable limits . . ."

1. *Can a student who otherwise should have attended school in-person on a given day, be permitted to participate remotely and counted as being "in attendance" for that specific day? Yes, but within reason. Knowing which students will attend in-person or remotely on any given school day is critical for educators to plan instruction and for the school building to effectively manage health and safety protocols. However, there are legitimate situations when an in-person student can be permitted to switch to learning remotely for one or more school days. For example, the student may need to quarantine for two weeks due to potential contact with a positive COVID case, or the student may have a concerning symptom making it reasonable for the parent to determine that it is best to keep the student home for monitoring. In such situations, the district may authorize a switch to remote learning for that student for a specific day or days; such a student who meets the 1/2 day attendance threshold on those remote days can be reported as "in attendance." Such flexibility will allow the student to remain engaged with the learning. However, the CSDE recommends that districts construe this flexibility narrowly and establish clear protocols for situations that warrant such a shift (e.g., district required quarantining, written authorization from parent regarding illness symptoms). Districts may choose to offer this flexibility to students for reasons beyond health/safety and illness symptoms; however, in those instances, districts are strongly advised to establish clear, quantifiable limits on such flexibility (e.g., no more than three instances during the year) so as to not create a situation where students are choosing the days they wish to attend school in-person.*

If you have any questions regarding this clarification, please reach out to building principals.

Sincerely,

Krista Bauchman

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