
July 21, 2020

Dear ZPS Families,

Thank you for enduring this pandemic world with such care, respect, and grace while making the best out of a very difficult situation. Normally in July, we are planning back to school events, announcing class lists, setting bus routes, attending band, athletic, and performing arts camps, participating in Zeeland Recreation activities, and enjoying family gatherings. We are most calm and confident when life has routine, is predictable, and when we can plan ahead with some certainty. Life right now is anything but predictable. We all have our moments of anxiety, of course, and hopefully we can fall back on our West Michigan style of taking care of each other and ourselves.

Like you, most plans we make at ZPS during this time are good for about a week. At the same time, we are making long-term contingency plans for every imaginable forecast, depending on how the world around us changes. All of our plans seek ways to focus on the relational side of school. It is the teacher/student relationship, the student/student relationship, and non-classroom activities that make education special. We also understand that in this COVID pandemic, In-Person learning is not necessarily the preferred option for everyone right now. For those families, we are putting the finishing touches on Z-Connect Online, an alternative learning option.

As West Michigan continues to contain the pandemic and has progressed to Phase 4, it is highly probable that ZPS will open this fall for In-Person education. To do so, Michigan must remain at Phase 4 or higher (scale is 1 - 6) and our District Preparedness Plan must match the [Michigan Safe Schools Roadmap](#). This Roadmap was developed by an impressive bipartisan committee that included top health, business, and education experts (see pages 4-6 of the Roadmap link). Please know that we, along with every other public, private, or charter school and district in the state, are required to follow the executive orders. We appreciate your understanding regarding these restrictions this pandemic has placed upon all of us.

Beginning September 1, ZPS plans to offer both In-Person and Z-Connect Online learning options.

Both options will focus on new instruction and academic progression, as opposed to the virtual learning of last spring when we reinforced what was learned in person earlier in the year.

Over 100 ZPS staff have participated in numerous legal, education and health based webinars, Zoom sessions, and both regional and state-wide meetings. We have studied more supporting documents than we can count. Additionally, four ZPS Focus Groups met twice weekly for the past month to consider your survey responses, evaluate the Requirements, Strongly Recommended and Recommended practices as outlined in the Roadmap for Phases 3, 4, and 5. Focus Groups were: Instruction/Curriculum & Technology; Wellness & Social-Emotional Support, including social equity; Facilities & Operations; and Communication & Extra Curricular. Their work was forwarded to a ZPS team made up of the chairpersons of each Focus Group, the Zeeland Education Association leadership, and the ZPS administrative team, with significant input from the Ottawa County Health Department. At the same time, all of us have been meeting with local counterparts from most Ottawa County districts and schools. Ottawa County is in this together.

Below are a few details on what to expect for Phases 3, 4, and 5.

PHASE 3: If Michigan falls back to Phase 3:

- All Michigan schools will provide teaching and learning through virtual means.
- ZPS plans to engage virtual learning techniques while in Phase 4, in case Michigan falls to Phase 3. We will all be better prepared than we were last spring. Teachers will be available to address both the academic and social-emotional needs of students. Special education instruction and therapy will continue virtually. Devices will be provided to all students from the beginning of the school year in order for them to be prepared if Michigan should transition back to Phase 3.
- ZPS will be using an online platform called Seesaw for students in Young 5's - 2nd grade and Google Classroom in grades 3rd - 12th to assist with instruction.
- Food distribution will be provided.
- Z-Kids will continue primarily for families of essential workers.
- Athletics, performing arts, after-school activities, inter-school activities, and busing are postponed.

PHASE 4: Statewide & ZPS (Michigan is currently in Phase 4)

- In-Person instruction is approved.
- Face coverings are required for all staff and students grades PK-12 when on a school bus, in hallways and indoor common areas.
- Face coverings are required for all staff and students grades 6 and up at all times inside a school building, except for eating and drinking.
- Face coverings are not required in the classroom for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 5, allowing students to remain with their classmates throughout the day preventing close contact with students in other classes. ZPS will meet all necessary requirements to coordinate with this plan.
- Face coverings may be waived for specific medical diagnoses. We anticipate further guidance and procedural detail.
- Indoor assemblies may only include one classroom.
- Athletics will be determined by the MHSAA. (next update expected July 24)
- ZPS will follow the Roadmap's required protocols for hygiene, cleaning, athletics, screening, testing protocols, food service, and busing. Additionally, ZPS will meet all possible Strongly Recommended and Recommended protocols in the Roadmap.
- ZPS is adding additional custodial services at the elementary level.
- ZPS is adding extensive streaming services at many performing arts and athletic venues, as well a portable streaming system for elementary programs, in case patron/spectator attendance is limited.
- Z-Kids will resume.
- ZPS Early Childhood Center will be open for teaching and learning.
- ZQuest K-8 school will start September 1 and will follow the traditional ZPS calendar.
- Volunteers are not yet permitted in Michigan schools while in Phase 4.
- ZPS will offer Z-Connect Online, an option for any student or family not yet ready to return to school (prior surveys indicated 6 - 8 % would choose this option).

PHASE 5: What to expect if Michigan advances to Phase 5:

- In-Person and Z-Connect Online instruction continues.
- Most of the Safety Requirements in phase 4 (above) become Safety Recommendations, thus allowing ZPS flexibility that meets our needs. It is difficult to predict this perfectly at this time.
- Volunteers may return to the ZPS team at school buildings.

Beginning September 1, Zeeland Public Schools will provide the two learning options for students. Parents will receive information on the two options with an electronic reply form on July 31. This survey will ask you to choose In-Person or Z-Connect Online for each of your students.

Option 1: Attend ZPS In-Person

ZPS will be fully prepared to offer In-Person instruction following the guidelines required by the [Michigan Safe Schools Roadmap](#) for Phases 4 through 6.

The Roadmap requirements include details such as health screening, masks and personal protective equipment, building sterilization and cleaning techniques, social distancing, and smaller cohorts of students. More detailed information on these safety measures will be developed by ZPS and will be included in our July 31 letter.

Students enrolled in this path will be expected to commit to the In-Person experience for a minimum of 18 weeks. An opportunity to switch to Z-Connect Online will be available at the semester change. ZPS will also work with families if extenuating circumstances arise.

All currently enrolled students will automatically be enrolled in Option 1, In-Person instruction. If you plan to follow Option 1, you do not need to reply to the form being emailed to you on July 31.

Option 2: Attend Z-Connect Online

ZPS will also offer Z-Connect Online, an online learning option for students whose families are not yet comfortable sending their child(ren) back to school while the pandemic is still active. It's important to note that **this online option will be very different compared to what was offered in the spring of this year**. At that time, remote instruction was a temporary emergency shift with minimal time to prepare, and focused on reinforcing prior knowledge.

We realize there are some who prefer an online option to include a blend of live virtual teaching and recorded lessons with a teacher who is accessible to support both the academic and social-emotional needs of the students. The Z-Connect Online option provided by ZPS will offer those features and will mirror a school experience as much as possible focused on academic progression. Special education instruction and services will be provided to eligible students. In addition, meals will be available for interested students.

Families who wish to enroll in Option 2, Z-Connect Online, must select this option by August 7. A form to do so will be emailed on July 31. Students enrolled in this path will be expected to commit to the Z-Connect Online experience for a minimum of 18 weeks. An opportunity to switch back to In-Person learning will be available at the semester change. ZPS will also work with families if extenuating circumstances arise.

If you do not sign up for Z-Connect Online, your child(ren) will automatically be enrolled in Option 1, In-Person Learning.

ZPS is working diligently to refine both the In-Person and Z-Connect Online learning plans. A full FAQ is in the works and will be provided July 31 to assist you in making the best enrollment choice for your family.

Zeeland Public Schools remains steadfast in our commitment to *Safe, Valued, Loved & Learning*. As we continue to navigate through these difficult times, please know that our commitment to our community remains focused on every child's academic, social, and emotional success.

Learning For Life!

Calvin De Kuiper
Superintendent