

From 8/7/20 Greenwich Time

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Greenwich-based Whitby may be one of the first schools in area to reopen

GREENWICH — In Montessori schools, children are encouraged to learn by touching materials and engaging in an activity.

And with that active exploration by students in mind, the Whitby School, a Greenwich-based independent school offering Montessori and International Baccalaureate programs, said it is putting a premium on safety and social distancing as it prepares to reopen its classrooms later this month.

“Will things look different when the students come back to school? Absolutely,” Head of School Jack Creeden said in a statement. “However, what’s not changing is the Whitby spirit and the entire community’s dedication to continuity of learning and meeting the social-emotional needs of our students, their families, faculty and staff.”

Like other schools, Whitby’s classrooms have been closed since mid-March due to the COVID-19 outbreak. But now it will be the first school to reopen its building, as it welcomes students back for the first day of school on Aug. 26.

“The physical layout of the classrooms may change, but how we deliver our Montessori and International Baccalaureate programs is not changing, and are even enhanced by lessons learned from distance learning,” Creeden said.



Jack Creeden is the head of school at Whitby, a private school in Greenwich.

Photo: Contributed /

The co-educational independent school, which serves children ages 18 months through Grade 8, will start the new school year with three half-days. That will allow students to reestablish relationships with classmates and teachers, and become

familiar with changes in routines due to safety guidelines put in place to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

The first day of on-campus instruction is scheduled for Sept. 1.

The school is especially emphasizing safety as prepares to open its campus soon. Masks are required for everyone in kindergarten and older as well as for staff and teachers. And only students, faculty and staff members will be allowed in the buildings to minimize risk.

Parents can take a look at some of the changes in the buildings via a video tour given by Creeden that is posted on the Whitby website. He points out many of the steps taken on campus — from spacing out desks to placing hand sanitizing stations near doors.

Physical space inside the school has been “reimagined,” school officials said, which creates spaces within rooms for smaller groups or cohorts of students and teachers to minimize contact with others.

Whitby is also implementing a zoning plan so the Whitby Montessori Children’s House, Lower School and Middle School groups stay within specific areas of the campus. Additionally, cohort areas will include social distancing markers on the floors as visual cues, similar to what is seen in supermarkets, school officials said.

The school’s facilities team is reconfiguring the classrooms to provide the 6-foot minimum between desks and work stations for social distancing. Plexiglass dividers will be added to the two-person workspaces to promote collaboration, but with safety in mind, the school said.

Whitby is also planning for outdoor classrooms on its 30-acre campus and making a 20-foot by 40-foot tent complete with desks and chairs available. Also, a new tiered seating area is under construction in Whitby’s Audubon-certified school habitat area.

Acknowledging that a COVID-19 outbreak in the area or in the state may require schools to close during the scholastic year, Whitby said it is prepared to toggle between in-class learning, distance learning, and a hybrid model for students who may have to self-quarantine during part of the school year.

To prepare for such measures, Whitby said its teachers have designed their curriculum so that they can deliver continuity in lessons and quickly pivot between delivery methods.

Entrance and exit doors will be designated as one-way to control the flow of students in and out of the buildings to achieve physical distancing. Staggered arrival and departure times are also planned.

Hand-sanitizers will be available at all entrances, with disposable wipes placed in all classrooms, offices, bathrooms and other shared facilities for wiping down surfaces, Whitby officials said.

Students, faculty and staff will be reminded to wash their hands frequently, with the youngest students assisted to ensure proper washing, the school said.

Before arriving at Whitby each morning, all faculty and staff members will be asked to self-assess their health condition, based on a checklist provided by the school. Anyone failing the assessment is required to remain at home.

The school will monitor the health of all students, faculty and staff, and those who may be sick or symptomatic will be asked to stay home or to leave school immediately.

In the case of a COVID-19 infection, Whitby will require any infected student or faculty/staff member to quarantine for 14 days.

Whitby also has developed a distance learning model should it be directed to transfer to such a model by state authorities.

For more information on the Whitby School, visit www.whitbyschool.org. More information on its reopening plan is available at www.whitbyschool.org/school-reopening-plan

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