

Middle and high school students in Hazelwood return to classroom after year of virtual learning



HAZELWOOD, Mo. — Back to school in April? It may sound odd but this school year has been anything but normal. Hazelwood, the largest district in north St. Louis County is giving middle and high school students the option to return to the classroom. Students have been learning from home for more than a year, since March 2020. The school district is allowing families to choose between a full-time virtual option or a full-time in-person learning. No hybrid plan is available.

The district reports that about 6,375 of its 17,000 students are choosing to return to school this year. That means a majority of students are choosing to continue 100% virtual learning through the rest of the school year.

Officials with the school district said there were a few reasons so many students chose to stay virtual. Some households have family members with health conditions that put them in a higher risk category for serious illness connected to COVID-19. Some families are taking a "wait and see" approach with in-person learning. And other families reported that their children are thriving in virtual school. Middle and high school students are the last to return to the building. The district started bringing back its younger students in late March and early April.

The district said it's implemented CDC mitigation strategies, including social distancing, masks, sanitizing stations and plexiglass barriers on desks.

Editors Note: On Monday morning, the district updated the number of students choosing to return to classroom to roughly 6,300. Previously the district said it was about 6,200 students.

Kirksey named Ritenour's new football coach



Yarmon Kirksey has finally reached his goal of becoming a head coach after 21 years as an assistant.

Kirksey was introduced as Ritenour's football coach Monday afternoon. He replaces Kyle Wagner, who resigned after one season to become the head coach at Sikeston. Wagner was hired at Ritenour in March of 2020 but didn't get to coach the Huskies on the field until last month when they took part in the alternate fall season offered by the Missouri State High School Activities Association. Ritenour finished 1-3 this spring.

Kirksey's hire was approved by Ritenour's board of education Thursday. He met superintendent Chris Kilbride at the Huskies final spring game Friday night. But it wasn't until Monday when his phone turned into a parade of well wishes and congratulations that it became real.

"It didn't really hit me until today," Kirksey said with a laugh.

It took a few days to sink in, but when you've waited as long as Kirksey has that's to be expected. He spent 19 years at Webster Groves under longtime coach Cliff Ice. The last two years he was on Carl Reed's staff at Lutheran North. In that time he was part of three state championship teams and two state runners-up.

"At this point in my career I've accomplished everything I can accomplish as an assistant," Kirksey said.

A 1996 Hazelwood Central graduate, he played for John Pukala, who had Ice on staff as an assistant. When Ice was hired to take over Webster Groves, he reached out to Kirksey, who then was a senior at Harris Stowe.

Ice brought on Kirksey to be his junior varsity head coach. "It was a really good situation," Kirksey said.

HOUSTON



TEXANS



Name: Christian Kirksey

Position: Linebacker

Height, Weight: 6-2, 235

Hometown: St. Louis, Missouri

School: Iowa

Get to know Christian:

- Kirksey, drafted in the third round of the 2014 NFL Draft, played six seasons for the Cleveland Browns (2014-19). He played in 73 games with 54 starts, recording 463 tackles (288 solo), 11.5 sacks, two interceptions, 17 passes defensed, four forced fumbles and three fumble recoveries.
- He was the only player in the NFL to rank in the top five in the league in tackles in both 2016 and 2017. Kirksey totaled the most solo tackles (171) and second-most total tackles (281) in the NFL during that two-year span.
- Kirksey is the youngest of seven children to Elmer and Patrice Kirksey. He used to sing in the choir and play drums. He still plays the drums in his free time.
- During his four-year career at Iowa (2010-13), Kirksey returned two interceptions for a touchdown and one fumble for a score. He became just the third player in school history to record at least three career defensive touchdowns.
- Kirksey served as a defensive captain for the Iowa Hawkeyes and a team captain for the Browns in 2018.
- At Hazelwood East High School in St. Louis, Kirksey lettered in track and helped lead the team to the 2008 state championship.
- As a rookie, Kirksey became the infamous glitch linebacker in the EA Sports video game Madden NFL 15. His character went viral after being placed on the Tennessee Titans Ultimate Team, measuring just 1-foot, 2-inches tall.

<https://www.houstontexans.com/news/meet-lb-christian-kirksey>

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