



July 17, 2020

Dear Rutland Schools Community:

Here is the latest update on the work being done to plan for school reopening. I write taking the district perspective. Building principals will be communicating separately with more specifics as they pertain to each school.

Please know that we are still in the draft stage of our planning. The Vermont Agency of Education and the Department of Health continue to develop guidelines and expectations for the reopening of school. It is important to realize that we plan reopening with the realistic understanding that cases of COVID-19 will possibly be present in our community during some point in the school year. Our goal is to meet the learning and social and emotional needs of our students while implementing practices that provide our schools with a safe environment.

So what does that look like? Again, the latest document from the state on the reopening of schools is [here](#). Further guidance from the state is arriving on a rolling basis; for instance, new documents found [here](#) and [here](#). Soon to come from the Agency will be information on health screenings and athletics. We revise our plans each time state agencies provide new guidance. Ultimately, all of these decisions are based on recommendations from the Department of Health in the context of the current state of the virus in Vermont. Know that our practices will shift in response to health and safety conditions.

We want to thank those in our community who contributed to our survey of families. That survey (found [here](#)) is still open if you wish to add your thoughts. For your information, a significant outcome revealed that 24% of our families “would prefer a remote learning experience,” while 59% of our families responded that “I would prefer that my child participate on campus at least some of the time.”

In response, our district and our schools are articulating comprehensive documents on school operations. Those documents will be complete in the next few weeks as we await final substantive guidance from the Agency of Education. However, here are some concepts that we can establish as firm, given state recommendations thus far:

Scheduling:

- a) Across the grade levels, we will offer families the option to access education remotely.
- b) At least at the high school level, our schedule will be such that most students will be in-person certain days and remote on others. Details to come.
- c) For our younger students, our goal is to offer families in-person instruction every day. However, as just noted, families will have the choice to commit to a remote setting.

Space and Health Procedures:

- d) Based on state guidance, schools are reconfiguring the use of building space in order to attain smaller learning groups and physical distancing.

- e) Schools are aligning daily practices to state guidance. For instance, schools are committing to ways that redesign movement in buildings and how groups interact. Staff and students will wear facial coverings where developmentally, medically, and behaviorally appropriate. Schools are establishing arrival and departure procedures.
- f) There will be daily health screenings, although that process is being revised at the state level. This will include a temperature check and a screening for COVID-19 symptoms and for close contact with a person who has COVID-19.
- g) Buildings and Grounds staff continue to develop cleaning practices guided by the state.
- h) Visitors to school buildings will be limited. For the most part, the only adults in buildings will be employees or contracted service providers. Parent/ family visits will be limited to the extent necessary. Meetings will take place ideally through video conferencing or over the phone, or in unique circumstances, in designated office areas.

Food service

- i) Cafeterias will not be open for communal meals. Lunch and breakfast opportunities will take place in the classroom through a delivery system unique to each school.

Bussing

- j) Our busses will run, as our family survey indicated that 34% of our families will use a bus for transportation at least some of the time. There is more state guidance coming regarding the specifics of bussing practices. What we know now though is that bus practices will be similar to in-school practices, including drivers and students wearing facial coverings, restrictions on spacing, and regular cleaning of interiors.

Another piece of guidance still to come from the state will explain the steps a school will take if there is a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the building, including steps to closure and subsequent reopening, cleaning, quarantining, and participation in contact tracing through the Vermont Department of Health. Any decisions on school closure must be made through the guidance of the Agency of Education.

Thank you once more for your patience as we develop our plans in response to the rolling guidance of the state agencies. We expect that by the first week in August, many of those decisions at the state level will be finalized. We will be able to provide more details subsequently.

One final takeaway to consider in the next few weeks is that there will be options for your student to choose to attend school remotely or in person, based on your preference. Those details will follow in upcoming communications from the district and each school.

Sincerely,



Bill Olsen, Superintendent