



October 9, 2020

Dear Rutland Schools Community:

We want to provide you an update on school reopening, as well as to highlight important information concerning the months to come.

First, congratulations! Despite the challenges of the global pandemic, together we made it through five weeks of school with great success. Although some practices are different, we are happy to see that school feels like school again. Touring buildings, I see students working hard, learning, and enjoying their time with friends. I also see students learning remotely while connected to their classes and their teachers. We are proud of our students for demonstrating these components of the district vision statement: *...resilient community of critical thinkers who learn with purpose, create innovative and responsible solutions...*

So we thank our students. We thank our staff in all places who are so dedicated to making this work. And we especially want to thank our family partners who support our schools and guide these young people. This would not work without the collaboration of all. Thank you!

With that in mind, we aim for the next milestone, a successful October. As the Agency of Education and the Department of Health emphasized, the key to keeping our schools open is for a community to follow the guidelines and practices provided to us by our state's leadership. Effective facial coverings, hand hygiene, distancing, and avoiding large gatherings are critically important in all of our daily lives. Following the [weekly travel guidance](#) from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development is a practice we must take, especially as we near the holidays. Think also about how to have a safe Halloween, considering the CDC guidance on the holiday [here](#).

You have heard of districts in suburban areas like Greater Boston where schools had to close because of off-campus gatherings or daily practices that put people at risk of exposure. We do not want that to happen here. We want to keep our schools open. As community members and as parents, please continue the excellent vigilance that you provide in order to maintain our success.

It is likely that you have heard of the few instances in Vermont in which members of a school community tested positive for the virus. Reality tells us that the same could happen here. That is why as we enter the colder months, it is so important that we follow the state's health guidance. Although they are due to be revised, we include the latest edition [here](#) for your reference. Please be aware that in the season of colds and flu, it is possible that we may have to switch back solely to remote learning if we are challenged in staffing one or more buildings. We expect that staff and students will not come to school if individuals experience symptoms of sickness. That possibly could put enough strain on our staffing to temporarily close a building. We say that to be transparent about how the winter may progress.

Finally, we have long talked about eliminating “snow days” if we could develop a culture, the tools, and a process that could keep learning happening during inclement weather. We now have those components in place, with enough practice last spring to make remote learning a reality. Our intention is that in significant situations of inclement weather that make learning in school a potential safety issue, we will transition to remote setting for the time period necessary. Our notification process will remain the same. If we expect a significant weather event that makes travel to school dangerous, we will inform the usual media outlets, use our messaging systems, and declare that school will take place remotely. This means that teachers will instruct students using distance learning tools just as they had done in the spring and in recent weeks. Of course, attendance is expected and required.

Depending on the weather conditions, school meals may not be provided. Our intention is to do so if possible, but our ability will be very much dependent on the timing and severity of the weather. If there are opportunities to provide meals in a remote setting, we will communicate instructions on how to gain access to them.

Please also know that while we consider a snow or ice storm the time when this commonly happens, there may be other adverse weather situations or natural disruptions in which we could move a school to a remote setting so that no learning time is lost. For instance, consider the effect of a pipe bursting in a building, or if a heating system fails. As well, a common practice in the warmer parts of the country where schools are not equipped with adequate air conditioning is to call a “heat day.” While in my memory those are exceedingly rare in our state, there have been a few days in the past in which the [heat index](#) rose to levels deemed dangerous. If we see this to be the case, especially during this time of wearing masks, we would consider moving learning to a remote setting, with adequate warning for parents and families.

Again, a sincere thanks for the wonderful start for our schools. Please know: as well as we plan, and as purposeful as our students are, we cannot do this successfully without your help. Thank you all for your support in these challenging times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Olsen".

Bill Olsen, Superintendent