



August 26, 2021

Dear Parents, Friends, and Colleagues:

We welcome everyone back from a pleasant summer. We at the Rutland City Public Schools are eager to begin a new school year!

I write to briefly outline the approach that the district will take regarding mitigation strategies in response to the continued COVID-19 pandemic and the Delta variant. Please know that our decisions on the proper response toward keeping our school communities healthy and safe have always been and will be based on the guidance offered by the Agency of Education (AOE) and the Department of Health (VDH).

The overarching strategy this year from both of those agencies is to encourage vaccination for COVID-19. Know that there are free vaccination clinics found all over the state, including two at Rutland High School on September 9 and September 30. The link for information on those and other clinics is here: <https://www.healthvermont.gov/covid-19/vaccine/getting-covid-19-vaccine>

The AOE/ VDH also provided mitigation recommendations for schools, found [here](#). In [follow-up guidance](#), the AOE spoke to both the authority and the obligation of schools and districts, based on statute (16 V.S.A. § 563, 16 V.S.A. 242), to implement mitigation measures to protect the health and safety of our students and staff. To use the language of the memo, “districts owe students a duty of ordinary care to prevent students from being exposed to unreasonable risk, from which it is foreseeable that injury is likely to occur” (16 V.S.A. § 834). Districts are also allowed to refuse to admit a student who does not comply with mitigation measures, as is the case with attendance requirements.

With that in mind, and again, following the guidance of AOE/ VDH, and ultimately with the health of our school communities at the center of our planning, the following list will be our practice in our schools:

- 1) Schools will follow the normal regulatory framework for determining student attendance and student days. Attendance is generally determined by a student’s physical presence in a school building’s classroom.
- 2) Students and staff who are sick should stay home, including those who are in quarantine due to close contact with an individual with COVID-19.
- 3) For the first 10 instructional days of the school year, schools will require universal masking of all students and staff when indoors. After those 10 days...
- 4) The AOE plans to measure the percentage of eligible students who are vaccinated. If after the first 10 instructional days, a school building reaches an eligible student vaccination rate of 80% (two doses of a two-dose vaccine), and depending on input from AOE/ VDH, the mandate to wear masks may become a strong recommendation rather than a requirement. Currently with only students age 12 and up eligible for a vaccine,

this would only apply to Stafford Technical Center, Rutland High School, and Rutland Middle School.

- 5) Masks continue to be required for students younger than age 12 until vaccine availability changes, or until the AOE/ VDH shift recommendations.
- 6) With permission, masks may be removed for instructional or operational purposes.
- 7) Masks are currently required for all bus passengers per federal regulation, regardless of age or vaccination status.
- 8) Students who do not wear masks as mandated will be prevented from entering school, resulting in an unexcused absence. Students who do not comply with safety rules while in school may face progressive discipline.
- 9) Students may seek a mask exemption based on a very limited set of conditions relating to disability or impairment. This requires medical substantiation of the condition and the specific accommodation sought in order to receive some variation of the masking requirement or some sort of alternative educational program. That decision will be made on a case-by-case basis, through consideration of the student's team in each building. Generally speaking, the team will follow the guidelines for exemptions provided by VDH.
- 10) Currently, our schools are open on a limited basis for visitors wearing masks. However, the district maintains the right to restrict parent and community access to school buildings for anyone refusing to wear a mask. There is no right for parents to enter school for the purposes of opposing masking. If necessary, parents can still access school staff through telephone, email, and video conferencing.
- 11) RCPS will continue to participate in contact tracing as requested by AOE/ VDH.
- 12) Surveillance testing will be offered through AOE/ VDH for both students and staff. More information will follow.

Please know that state guidance could change, depending on the state of the virus and vaccine eligibility. The district intends to follow the state and federal guidance that is provided to us by medical experts.

Again, school districts have by law both the right and the duty to implement reasonable health and safety measures. This is particularly true given the prevailing circumstances with COVID-19 transmission and illness. The purpose for all of these mitigation measures is the health and safety of our staff, students, and ultimately our community. Like last year, we want to keep our schools open. That benefits Rutland, our local economy, and our daily life. We appreciate both your support and collaboration in implementing these measures.

Sincerely,



Bill Olsen, Superintendent