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# Richmond Consolidated School

July 29, 2020

Dear RCS Community – Students, Families, and Staff,

We are writing with an update on our planning process for the start of a new school year. We are tentatively scheduled to resume student learning on September 15, 2020 pending School Committee approval. The state gave all districts 10 additional days for faculty and staff to plan at the beginning of the year.

Our planning process is guided by a vigilant monitoring of public health data in Massachusetts, and we are encouraged that indicators about the virus continue to move in the right direction. The Commonwealth’s careful and disciplined approach has enabled our state gradually to begin reopening, in part because of strong compliance with health and safety precautions. We are applying those lessons to begin safely reopening our public schools.

The Massachusetts Department of Education has directed districts to submit by July 31, 2020, a preliminary plan that addresses the feasibility of three options for serving students at the start of the school year. Those options include a full return to daily, in-person attendance, a hybrid plan combining in-school learning with some remote learning, and finally, a 100% remote learning program. Each district’s final plan, approved by the School Committee, is due to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) by August 10. Given the significant changes these plans will require in the way schools operate, we also must negotiate our proposal with all employee unions impacted: teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff.

Of course, we know that under normal circumstances, students would be best served in schools every day, interacting with their peers and engaged in live classroom learning. While our educators and families worked incredibly hard last spring to implement remote learning, we know that approach presented enormous challenges, did not reach all students (particularly those with the greatest needs), and is not an adequate substitute for in-person interaction with teachers. When out of school, our students also lack access to all of the academic, mental, and physical supports that help ensure their social-emotional well-being, particularly in navigating the effects of trauma during these tremendously challenging times. Therefore, we believe our families and students deserve more than a fully remote learning plan.



In order to adhere to the school re-opening guidance provided by DESE, consistent with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Pediatric Association, we also do not believe we can safely meet physical distancing requirements with all students and staff in the buildings at the same time. **However, we do believe we can make significant changes in our school schedules and operating procedures to make a partial return to in-person learning both safe and successful.** This approach will require strategies to ensure physical distancing, as well as a series of other critical health and safety measures, including wearing face coverings, washing hands frequently, cleaning and sanitizing facilities, screening regularly for symptoms of illness, and staying home from school when sick, among others. Our planning process includes a comprehensive set of strategies and investments to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus.

As a result, we will pursue negotiations for a hybrid learning plan, which would bring the students back into school buildings for in-person instruction in smaller, socially distanced groups on a rotating basis, combined with a robust remote learning program on the days students are not scheduled to be physically in school. This plan also enables us to bring a subset of students in greatest need of in-person instruction and support, particularly students with disabilities, back to school every day – but also in smaller, distanced settings with all other precautions in place.

We recognize that the circumstances of every family and staff member are different, and that no plan ultimately will satisfy everyone in our community. We are working diligently to explore every option available to us, that we remain guided by the science to keep our students and staff safe and healthy, and that we will be prepared to make adjustments along the way if the public health conditions or other variables change over time.

As we move closer to a final plan, we welcome additional input and feedback from all of our stakeholders. Your initial survey responses were helpful and a follow up survey is coming later today. We invite you to share your questions, comments, and ideas to help inform and strengthen our plans. Also, we have scheduled two community forums on Google Meet. Please join one if you are able- links will be sent:

Monday 8/3 at 10 AM and Tuesday 8/4 at 8 AM

We will keep you informed about our progress in developing a final plan and in our negotiations with the unions. We will continue to post updates on our website and social media. I am confident that we can prioritize both safety and learning as we prepare for the start of a successful school year. Thank you for your patience and cooperation in these difficult times.

Stay well,

Peter Dillon, Ed.D. and Jill Pompei, Ed.S.

