

October 16, 2020

Dear Parents, Students, and District Staff Members,

We began the start of our school year with a carefully designed plan that was in the best interest of the health and safety of our students and staff. These unprecedented times have made us reconsider how we go about educating our students, and the impressive levels of collaboration with our parents, guardians, students, partners, and staff show that we are, indeed, all in this together.

To date, Rochester Public Schools (RPS) has relied upon and used guidance from state and local health department officials, local medical experts and Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to advise our practices. We will continue to reference this data, as well as our own data now that we have been implementing our base learning model for six weeks.

We promised an update regarding Phase II of our Return to Learn plan by MEA Break. RPS staff and our families want our students safely back in school. Unfortunately, the county and District data continue to trend the wrong direction. For the health and safety of our community, RPS will not be adjusting our learning model at this time. This may be disappointing news to some, but based on the current information available to us, this is the best decision for our students and staff.

This document covers:

- Translations
- Continuation of Base Model Summary
- COVID-19 Data by State, County, and District
- Child Care & Free Child Care for Critical Workers (CCfCW)
- School Meals
- School Calendars
- Next Steps for Families
- Visitors

Be well,



Michael Munoz
Superintendent

TRANSLATIONS

The following document is also available in [Arabic](#), [Hmong](#), [Khmer](#), [Somali](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#).

Para asistencia en español, por favor marque al 328-4241.

Za pomoc na bosanskom jeziku pozovite 328-4243

"إذا رغبت في الحصول على هذه المعلومات باللغة العربية يرجى الإتصال بقسم الترجمة علي الرقم 328- 4246"

Haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad hesho macluumaadkaan oo ku qoran Soomaali, fadlan la soo xiriir waaxda EL(bartaha ingariiska) 328 4247.

CONTINUATION OF THE BASE MODEL

Our base model has balanced safety and wellness for all involved and considered what we can operationally achieve to meet the learning needs of students.

- Most elementary students (Pre K - grade 5) and Lincoln K-8 students will continue to receive face-to-face instruction two days per week and distance learning three days per week.
- Most secondary students (grades 6 - 12) will participate in distance learning five days per week. There are still opportunities for secondary students to receive in-person support by appointment, in areas such as academics, technology, and mental health.
- Some PreK, elementary, and secondary students in special programs (e.g. Intensive Special Education, Project SEARCH, RAIL, etc.) will continue to attend school on a custom schedule, based on their individualized needs and the District's capacity to keep students and staff safe.

RPS students can choose to participate in full-time distance learning if they are medically vulnerable or otherwise unable to continue in the hybrid model. In this case, families can expect:

- Students will be assigned a certified teacher for their instruction.
- Families may opt to switch their learning model (from Distance Learning to hybrid or vice versa at Pre K - grade 5, plus Lincoln K- 8) and should contact their school principal by Friday, October 23 if they want to switch.

- Every attempt will be made to implement new placements by Monday, November 2. If you choose to move to Distance Learning your child will be assigned to a fully licensed teacher who may or may not be a teacher at your home school.

COVID-19 DATA BY STATE, COUNTY, AND DISTRICT

The District's COVID-19 Advisory Team consists of experts from Olmsted County Public Health (OCPH), Mayo Clinic, School Board, District Cabinet, union leadership, District COVID-19 Coordinators, and the Superintendent. This group meets every two weeks to discuss data, effectiveness of mitigation efforts, and communication needs. The purpose of the team is to review data that will protect our students and staff, with the ultimate goal of bringing our entire District back together, in-person, safely.

One segment of data that RPS utilizes in making decisions is the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) [Data for K-12 Schools: 14-day COVID-19 Case Rate County by County](#). The key takeaway from this data is that the 14-day average for Olmsted County was 12.74 cases per 10,000 at the end of the week on September 5. The latest data shows that we have nearly doubled this case rate in Olmsted County to 24.50 as of October 3. This is the latest data released on Thursday, October 15.

Another segment of data that we utilize is the [county's data dashboard](#). Here RPS focuses on the daily new cases, percentage positive, and the percentage of known community exposure. To date, this data shows the trend lines of new cases continuing to increase week over week from the start of the school year, as well as the increase in percentage of "unknown community exposure". The last data point, community exposure, is important because the key to mitigation is knowing what precautions to take in addition to knowing where the exposure originated.

Finally, we utilize our District's data, both with the number of COVID-19 cases, and operation data in order to effectively meet the learning needs of the students. Since July 24, the District has been involved with, or worked on, 86 positive COVID-19 cases involving students and staff. Since the start of the school year, there have been 68 positive cases, which has led to quarantining 200+ students and staff across the majority of our buildings. On the positive side, our mitigation efforts, such as hand-washing, mask-wearing, and social distancing appear to be keeping person-to-person transmission low within the schools.

In addition to case data, we consider the operational impact with our ability to meet our students' learning needs. For example, we have to consider that the impact of a positive case at the secondary level could involve a significantly higher number of staff and students. This is because elementary students in the hybrid model are able to learn in "pods" of up to 15 students and one or more adults. Since students remain with their pods throughout the day, a positive case typically impacts 1-2 pods plus their teacher. At the secondary level, student schedules do not allow a pod model, and a positive case could impact many more students and multiple teachers. With our community transmission level having nearly doubled this fall, this was another factor we considered.

CHILD CARE & FREE CHILD CARE FOR CRITICAL WORKERS (CCfCW)

We are currently preparing the phase II registration process for child care for Tier One critical workers at John Adams Middle School. We will begin accepting registrations on Tuesday, October 20, for care starting in November. Parents will do this through the regular School Age Child Care [registration system](#).

Care is available for children on approved contracts only. All contracts will remain pending until approved. Applying updated guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education, we will approve contracts in the following priority order, as space allows:

1. Households where **all** parents/guardians in the household are Tier One critical workers who are required to be at work
2. As space allows, households with **at least one** parent/guardian Tier One critical worker who is required to be at work
3. As space allows, households without Tier One critical workers

MDE defines Free Child Care for Critical Workers (CCfCW) as, "The school-age care for children of critical workers is intended for extreme circumstances in which no parent or guardian is at home, due to employment as a critical worker. If it is a two-parent household and one is not a critical worker, a school is not required to provide free school-age care to the family, but the school could choose to provide the care, if they have the capacity to do so while ensuring health and safety requirements can still be met."

SCHOOL MEALS

RPS will continue to offer [Drive-through and Walk-up meals for students](#). All meals will be served free of charge to all children 18 years old and younger. Meals will consist of a hot lunch (a cold breakfast will also be included) Monday through Friday 11:30-12:30 PM at the following locations:

- Mayo High School
1420 11th Ave SE (North Parking Lot Door 2C)
- John Marshall High School
1510 14 St NW (East Side Door 8)
- Riverside Elementary
506 5th Ave SE (Front Entrance)
- Sunset Terrace Elementary
1707 9th Ave NW (Front Entrance)

Also, it is not too late for families to apply for free or reduced price school meals [using this form](#). We strongly encourage all families to complete this form by December 1 because it will impact District funding for the 2021-2022 school year.

SCHOOL CALENDARS

[School calendars](#), including ABC/special area calendars, have been updated to reflect elementary, middle, and high school schedules in this current learning model. If the learning model changes, these calendars may be updated.

NEXT STEPS FOR FAMILIES

The COVID-19 Advisory Team will continue to meet on a regular basis. In another six-weeks, we will provide an update on phase III of the learning model. This will occur on or before November 23, with some transition time between models. [Governor Walz's Executive Order 20-82](#) allows school districts to cancel classes for up to five days in order to shift between models. At this time, it is premature for RPS to detail what a transition between models could look like.

Elementary Families:

- Please contact your building principal to adjust your model if you choose, as shared above in the Continuation of Base Model section.

Middle and High School Families:

- Our middle and high school families can expect a survey next week regarding whether or not they intend to go to school in a hybrid learning model if/when this model is an option.

SAFETY

The most important actions each of us can take to further protect ourselves and our families include:

- Staying home if you are sick
- Washing your hands often with soap and water; covering your cough and sneeze; avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- Practicing self-care by eating a healthy diet and taking time to rest
- Frequently cleaning all commonly touched surfaces
- Wearing proper face coverings
- Avoiding large gatherings

Students and staff are required to complete the [MDH Screening Tool](#) at home each morning. Students and staff experiencing one of the more common symptoms or two or more of the less common symptoms with no other diagnosis to explain the symptoms, should talk to their health care provider about being tested for COVID-19, and stay home from school.

COVID-19 symptoms are currently separated out into two groups by MDH.

- Symptoms that are more common to COVID:
 - Fever of 100.4 or greater
 - New onset and/or worsening cough
 - Difficulty breathing
 - New loss of taste or smell
- Symptoms that are less common to COVID:
 - Sore throat
 - Nausea

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Chills
- Muscle pain
- Excessive fatigue
- New onset of severe headache
- New onset of nasal congestion or runny nose

VISITORS

During hybrid learning, buildings will restrict non-essential visitors and volunteers. Parents will be asked to make appointments for in-person meetings or participate in meetings online. Visitors and volunteers are an integral part of our daily school experience and look forward to welcoming visitors and volunteers back when it is safe to do so.