

August 7, 2020

Dear Parents, Students, and District Staff Members,

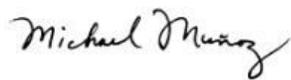
As we all know, these unprecedented times have made us reconsider how we go about educating our students, and the impressive levels of public participation show that we are, indeed, all in this together.

Staff, students, and community partners spent the summer preparing for the return of students in September. This letter will present the Rochester Public School District's base learning model, which will be discussed with greater detail to the School Board on Monday, August 10. You will be able to live stream this meeting and listen to the conversation at [YouTube.com/ISD535](https://www.youtube.com/ISD535).

Throughout the entire school year, RPS will use guidance from state and local health department officials, local medical experts and Minnesota Department of Education to advise our practices. This year's return to school will come with some new protocols and procedures in order to keep everyone safe and healthy. While it will alter certain aspects of the school day, our goal is to maintain a normalized environment where students can learn and teachers can teach.

This plan was created in the best interest of the health and safety of our students and staff, and we are prepared to implement this base learning model following School Board approval.

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.

## **BASE MODEL**

Most elementary students (Pre K - grade 5) and Lincoln K-8 students will receive face-to-face instruction two days per week and distance learning three days per week.

- This approach will accommodate half of the students on campus at a time to maximize social distancing. We will dismiss elementary schools approximately one hour early to allow time for teachers to connect with students who are not in person. Dismissals may be staggered based on bus routing.
- Wherever possible, PreK - grade 5 students will remain with the same students throughout the school day to increase safety of our students and staff.

Most secondary students (grades 6 - 12) will participate in distance learning five days per week. There will be 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 attend school on a custom schedule, based on their individualized needs and the District's capacity to keep students and staff safe. Parents will be contacted by a program administrator to plan for individualized student schedules.

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

- Students will be assigned a certified teacher for their instruction.
- Families who opt their student out of the base learning model to participate in full-time distance learning are committing to distance learning through the first grading period. At that time, families/students may assess whether they would like to change their learning model.
- Families will be asked by their school to make this choice through an electronic form by **Thursday, August 13.** *(More information below in Next Steps For Families)*

## TENTATIVE TIMELINE (pending Board approval)

August 31 - September 1	PreK-12 Instructional Planning Days (no students) <i>This is a change from the District calendar.</i>
September 2 - October 30	<b>Base Learning Model</b> • PreK-Grade 5 Hybrid Learning • Grade 6-12 Distance Learning
By October 16	Announcement of Phase II Plan

*We will re-evaluate this every six weeks and make adjustments as needed. If conditions worsen, the learning models may change before announcement of the next phase.*

## SCHEDULE PREVIEW

The first two weeks of school vary from the overall pattern. Responding to the requests of staff for additional professional development and making connections with families, we have reserved Monday and Tuesday, August 31 and September 1, for additional planning time for all levels. This initial period also includes the planned days off for the Labor Day holiday.

### PreK - Grade 5

Starting with Week 3, Group A will meet in person on Mondays and Tuesdays, Group B will meet in person on Thursdays and Fridays. Students will participate in distance learning the other three days of the week.

Monday 8/31	Tuesday 9/1	Wednesday 9/2	Thursday 9/3	Friday 9/4
Teacher Prep/Professional Development (No School)	Teacher Prep/Professional Development (No School)	Group A in person	Group B in person	No School
Monday 9/7	Tuesday 9/8	Wednesday 9/9	Thursday 9/10	Friday 9/11
Holiday (No School)	Group A in person	Distance Learning for All/Cleaning	Group B in person	Group B in person
Monday 9/14	Tuesday 9/15	Wednesday 9/16	Thursday 9/17	Friday 9/18
Group A in person	Group A in person	Distance Learning for All/Cleaning	Group B in person	Group B in person

Secondary (Grades 6 - 12)

Monday 8/31	Tuesday 9/1	Wednesday 9/2	Thursday 9/3	Friday 9/4
Teacher Prep/Professional Development (No School)	Teacher Prep/Professional Development (No School)	Distance Learning	Distance Learning	No School
Monday 9/7	Tuesday 9/8	Wednesday 9/9	Thursday 9/10	Friday 9/11
Holiday (No School)	Distance Learning	Distance Learning	Distance Learning	Distance Learning
Monday 9/14	Tuesday 9/15	Wednesday 9/16	Thursday 9/17	Friday 9/18
Distance Learning	Distance Learning	Distance Learning	Distance Learning	Distance Learning

### WHY THIS MODEL

Determining our base model has been a complex process, considering expert medical and public health advice, guidance from the Minnesota Departments of Education and Health, and input from our students, families, and staff. Too often, under pandemic circumstances, the solution to one challenge raises a different issue. We believe we have reached a model that balances safety and wellness for all involved, while considering what we can operationally achieve to meet the learning needs of students.

We understand that these changes are indeed significant and that there will be many questions surrounding them. We will be posting common questions and answers on our website, and families are encouraged to contact their school administrator with any additional questions.

### SAFETY

**All students, staff, and visitors that come to District buildings are required to wear face coverings while on campus, remain socially distant from others by six feet whenever possible, consistently use good hand hygiene methods, and complete the [Minnesota Department of Health](#) screening process at home before coming to school.**

Safety of our students and staff remains our top concern. While risk is present everywhere, we know there are things we can do to significantly reduce the likelihood of transmitting the virus.

As we await an effective vaccine, our individual behavior is the most effective defense against spreading the virus. If our goal is to get all students back to their schools, their friends, clubs and activities, field trips, dances, and graduation, the best way to accomplish this is for each of us to do our part in protecting ourselves and others.

Consistently, State and Federal guidance has warned against large gatherings, unrestricted close interactions, and contact with ill individuals. Experts have called for social distancing, hand hygiene, face coverings, extra cleaning, and staying home when sick.

As we open schools for limited in-person instruction for elementary students, it is important that everyone recognizes the role they play in protecting one another.

The Minnesota Department of Education will provide a cloth face covering for each student and staff member. Individuals may wear face coverings of their own, instead, as long as they do not create a distraction to the learning environment.

We have begun applying social distancing signage throughout buildings to support our students and staff in recognizing safer distances between individuals. We are in the process of removing excess furniture to allow sufficient spacing of student learning areas. Our building ventilation systems are being calibrated to meet expert recommendations for greater fresh air levels, including more frequent filter changes and increased air exchange rates throughout the school day.

We will have hand sanitation stations placed in all our classrooms and throughout the common areas in our schools, and students will be encouraged to regularly wash their hands as a way to remove germs, avoid getting sick and prevent the spread of germs to others.

It is absolutely imperative to stay home when experiencing COVID symptoms (e.g., fever, cough, chills, nausea, etc.). Each site will have a dedicated isolation space for any staff or student who becomes ill during the school day until the person is able to safely leave the building. The District works closely with public health on the notification / communication to individuals regarding close contact, exposure, and contact tracing. We also notify families of COVID situations as directed by public health.

Each school will place a heightened emphasis on facility sanitation, including the regular cleaning of touch points, horizontal surface areas and the use of electrostatic sprayers to maintain a clean and healthy school environment. This includes school buses and other vehicles operated on behalf of RPS.

We have limited the capacity of our school buses to fifty-percent capacity, as experts have recommended. Students will sit in designated spots and face coverings will be required for all, unless a medical reason prevents wearing one. We'll load our buses back to front and unload in the opposite order, to reduce contact among riders.

These simple things like extra cleaning, consistent hand-washing, staying home when sick, wearing face coverings, standing at a distance, and limiting close interactions will become our best defense against the virus and keep everyone safe. Now that we know much more about how the virus spreads, we must make the best decisions to protect ourselves and others.

The overall success of this school year will require each of us working closely together, listening to one another's concerns and doing our part to contribute to a positive, healthy and safe school experience.

## **WHAT CAN FAMILIES EXPECT IN HYBRID/DISTANCE LEARNING**

We are committed to providing the best possible experience for our students under the Hybrid/Distance Learning model. Staff will engage in professional development in order to effectively use online learning tools and meet standard expectations for instruction, communication, and feedback.

- The District will use a common online learning platform, Google Suite for Education
- Schools will work with families to best address individual technology needs (*More information below in Next Steps For Families*)
- Classes will take place as if students were in the classroom, with recorded lessons also available; students may not need to remain online for the duration of every class
- Students will receive weekly schedules either on Friday or Monday from their school(s)
- Students will have daily interaction with licensed teachers
- Teachers will apply the same rigor and standards as if students were in person
- Students with needs in English Learning, Special Education, reading and math, etc., will continue to receive instructional support
- Students will receive instruction focused on Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
- Secondary students will earn grades of A, B, Pass, No Credit. Elementary students will continue to receive standards-based feedback
- Families will receive weekly communication from their school(s)

## SCHOOL MEALS

Breakfast and lunch will be available on in-person learning days at elementary schools in the hybrid learning model. In addition, meals will be available for pick-up at designated locations around the district on distance learning days for students at all levels. Normal school meal fees will apply. **Families may apply for free or reduced price school meals [using this form](#).**

## SCHOOL AGE CHILD CARE (Kindergarten through Age 12)

School Age Child Care (SACC) will be available for a fee as capacity allows at each elementary school, for their students before and after school on in-person learning days. Registration for this program began in May and many sites are full at this time. Call the SACC office at (507) 328-4040 for more information.

In addition this fall, child care for school age children of Tier One critical workers will be available on distance learning days at another location.

*Tier One critical workers include essential workers in healthcare and public health; educators and school staff caring for children of any critical worker; law enforcement; public safety and first responders; food and agriculture; judicial branch essential services; National Guard; and child care providers caring for children of any critical worker.*

The school-day portion of care for Tier One critical workers will be offered at no cost, and fees will apply for care before and after the school-day portion.

Children participating in care for Tier One critical workers will be assigned to small groups according to their home elementary school, and will avoid mixing groups as much as possible. SACC will continue the other extensive prevention measures employed successfully for the past several months.

Registration for community Tier One critical workers will begin **Monday, August 17**, at the [Community Education](#) website and will remain open until full. After that, interested families may join a waiting list in case additional space becomes available.

## **RECESS, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

Recess will occur at elementary schools. Students will be required to wash their hands before and after outside time, wear masks, and maintain social distancing. High school athletics will follow the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) guidance. Community Education will offer a mix of in-person and online opportunities. More information regarding other these programs will be shared as it becomes available.

## **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.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR FAMILIES**

### **1. COMPLETE THE TECH, CHILD CARE, MEALS NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Families should complete an assessment for each child enrolled at RPS. For example, if you have two children enrolled, you would fill out the form for child one, and submit. Then, you would complete the form for child two. Families are asked to complete this form **by Thursday, August 13, at 4 PM.**

Click to complete the [NEEDS ASSESSMENT](#). Schools will also be sharing this link with families.

The needs assessment will be reviewed and each school will work to meet the needs of our students/families. You can expect additional communication from your school about how to obtain district-issued technology, as well as from the District regarding childcare and meal access needs.

### **2. IF YOU PLAN TO CHOOSE A DISTANCE LEARNING ONLY MODEL**

Preschool and Elementary school families that are choosing full-time distance learning instead of the hybrid model will receive a Distance Learning Form **from their school**, and are required

to complete this form **by Thursday, August 13, at 4 PM**, so that we may properly register your child in that program. If you have not received the form in your email by the end of the day Monday, August 10, please contact your school directly. If you plan to have your child attend school somewhere other than Rochester Public Schools, please let us know that so that we can have an accurate student count for each site. If you plan for your preschool or elementary child to return to their RPS elementary school in the hybrid model, no further action is needed.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

We will continue to keep you updated with new information. Details of the plan will be shared on Monday, August 10, at the School Board Special Session. You can tune into this meeting and watch live via [YouTube.com/ISD535](https://www.youtube.com/ISD535) beginning at 5 PM. All School Board meetings are recorded and posted on the [School Board Playlist](#) for those who are unable to watch live.