

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Superintendent Mary Whitrock

whitrockm@ripon.k12.wi.us

(920) 748-4600

Ripon Area School District Reacts to DPI Education Forward Plan

Ripon, WI - The Ripon Area School District is currently reviewing the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) Education Forward Plan which was recently released on June 22, 2020. The Education Forward Plan is intended to provide guidance to the 421 school districts, 26 independent charter schools, and 792 private schools serving a school-age population of over 1,000,000 students in Wisconsin as they plan for a safe return to in-person instruction in the wake of COVID-19.

In the plan, State Superintendent Carolyn Stanford Taylor noted "Under state law, school districts determine the operations of their buildings and the learning environment. Risk mitigation and health factors will drive decisions regarding school operations. While I expect schools to reopen this fall, they will undoubtedly look different. There will need to be social distancing, new cleaning and disinfecting procedures, and changes to how educators deliver instruction. There will be students who are not able to return to school due to health concerns and students and staff who may be quarantined due to exposure. This means every school district will need to plan for both school operations on campus and remote learning."

Since its release, district officials have been reviewing the 87-page document. Ripon Superintendent Mary Whitrock has attended virtual meetings with hundreds of superintendents across the state as well as attending a meeting with the Fond du Lac County Health officials and public and private school leaders from across Fond du Lac County. The district leadership met on June 23 to launch a team aimed at providing ongoing guidance in the

ever-changing educational landscape with three teams addressing teaching and learning; district operations; and culture and wellness.

Dr. Whitrock shared the district priorities remain the same “RASD strives to:

- keep our staff and students safe and healthy;
- deliver solid instruction knowing face-to-face enhances student growth;
- support our local economy by retaining all employees; and
- supporting parents and taxpayers by providing safe care for young students.”

As a district, Ripon will be using the guidance in the document and recommendations from the Fond du Lac Health Department to prepare for September. Dr. Whitrock shared, “Our plan will likely include screening students and staff prior to entering the building to minimize initial risk and then provide for social distancing to the greatest extent possible throughout the entire day. We will be working to keep groups of students as small as possible, though recognize it might not be to the level recommended in the DPI plan which sets a 10:1 student-teacher ratio. It is likely that at certain points during the day students will be required to wear masks and staff will wear masks or face shields. Busing, recess, and lunch will likely look different too.”

Dr. Whitrock said “No decisions have been made about actual schedules. While the document noted different hybrid models, it is more likely that the county health department will help districts move between face-to-face, hybrid and virtual plans based on positive cases of COVID-19 that are found in the local community and any of the district’s schools. We will need to be very flexible and fluid in our design. Students who are home quarantining would be virtual while other students continue face-to-face so a blended model is most likely to be in place rather than a complete district-wide shutdown. The Fond du Lac County Health Department is telling us our work will be all about mitigating risk. They noted most districts will likely experience positive cases of COVID impacting our schools. The goal is to do everything possible to reduce the risk of spread within the school and during the school day. We recognize we can’t control

what happens when students are together outside of school. That is why the daily screening is so important as well as sending students with any symptoms home prior to joining their classmates in the classroom.”

“The district will be putting out a parent and staff survey in the next week or so to ensure we hear from parents and staff as we develop our district plan. We want to balance safe practices with practical efforts so students and staff are able to be safe and learn. Parents know their unique situation and the health needs of their child(ren) and family. As with snow days where parents may keep their child home even if we have school on a bad weather day, it is likely we will continue to offer a virtual option for parents who just aren’t ready to send their child(ren) back to school or due to other health complications or exposure to COVID may need to have their child(ren) out of school.”

Any questions about the event should be directed to Superintendent Mary Whitrock at (920) 748-6400.

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