

For Immediate Release

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Ripon Area School District Releases Roadmap to Re-entry Plan

Ripon - Ripon Area School District (RASD) shared plans for school this fall with staff, parents, and the Board of Education on July 20. The three top priorities to guide the roadmap were: the safety of students and staff, the ability to be flexible and financially responsible, and responding to RASD parents' preference for traditional classroom learning. The district leadership team designed the plan based on recommendations from Fond du Lac County, the CDC, state, and local health officials as well as feedback from RASD parents and staff collected through a week-long survey.

The roadmap outlines different models of learning with elementary students primarily doing in-person learning with significant protocols recommended by health officials. Middle school and high school students will participate in a blended-learning model while also incorporating the same protocols. These models are designed to be fluid as students may need to be moved between the models based on positive COVID-19 cases within the community or individual schools with a preference for traditional classroom learning in a safe and healthy environment.

Elementary students will begin the school year using the in-person Learning model with the ability to transition to the virtual learning model should it be necessary to do so. Families can choose to start their school year with the virtual model if that works best for them. Elementary students will be divided into cohorts for the first week only. Students with last names beginning with A-M will only attend on Tuesday and Wednesday that week. Students with last names beginning with N-Z will only attend on Thursday and Friday. This is to allow time for students to practice the new safety procedures related to COVID. Beginning September 8 students will attend each day.

The plan also removes the Wednesday Late Start schedule and shortens the school day with students in K - Grade 2 wrapping up their day at 2:32 p.m. and Grade 3 - 5 ending at 2:35 p.m. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) Minute's Waiver lends flexibility to districts to deliver instruction

during the pandemic. These changes are designed for staff to support students who may be learning virtually and allow time for additional cleaning each day.

At the end of the school day, students who ride the bus home will board the bus before it heads to the middle school and high school to pick up the remaining riders. Parents will have the option to have their child attend a new offering through our BRAVE program for immediate and free after school care until 3:30 pm. At that time, parents may pick up their child(ren) or sign up for the more comprehensive BRAVE Community Learning Center Program which runs until approximately 5:30 pm.

Middle school and high school students will begin the school year in the blended learning model. This means learning will take place by blending instruction between in-person and virtual. To reduce the number of students and staff in the combined facility and adhere to health department social distancing guidelines, students will be assigned to one of two Cohorts. Cohort A will attend in-person on Monday and Thursday while Cohort B learns virtually on those days. On the flip-side, Cohort B will attend in-person on Tuesday and Friday while Cohort A uses the Virtual Model. Wednesdays will be a virtual learning day for all students while teachers use the time to prepare for upcoming lessons and custodial staff deep clean the building.

Lunch will be provided through a closed campus while the school is utilizing the blended-learning model. Students attending in-person will be required to stay at school for lunch either bringing their food with them or choosing to participate in the school lunch program with modifications of the commons space and food service logistics. The start and end times of the school day will remain unchanged with school beginning at 7:50 a.m. and ending at 3:07 p.m

All school buildings will follow protocols based on recommendations from Fond du Lac County and local health officials to include creating space for distancing by removing furniture, spreading students and staff out as much as possible throughout the building. The intent is to keep classes of students together while minimizing the need for large group activities or instruction. Daily and weekly cleaning protocols will be increased with hand sanitizing stations and continued instruction to students about hygiene and proper handwashing.

Symptom screening and temperature checks will take place at the point of entry into a school building. For the safety of everyone, parents are asked to keep their children home if they are not feeling well. Only essential visitors who are screened in the same manner as staff and students will be permitted into buildings. The use of lockers will be limited and any minimal shared supplies will be sanitized between uses. Entrance and exit doors will be established and pedestrian flow within the buildings will be strategic to maintain distance from others. Drinking water will be available only through bottle filling stations with one-time use cups for those without water bottles.

Face masks are required for students and staff in middle school and high school classrooms, hallways, restrooms, and common areas as physical distancing will be difficult. At the elementary level, masks are also required for staff and students in hallways, restrooms, and common areas. Elementary students however, would not be required to wear masks in their individual classrooms when in their desks and physically distant from other students. Elementary staff will wear masks in classrooms when moving between desks to assist students.

Bus transportation will be available. Masks will be required for all riders and drivers with fewer students per seat where possible. Students will be assigned seats, with students from the same household sitting together and all students sitting near the window to physical distance when possible. Buses will be disinfected following each route.

Anyone wishing to utilize a shuttle bus are encouraged to only sign up if they plan to use the service on a weekly basis which will allow for better logistics and contact tracking. Avoiding the use of shuttle buses if possible will minimize total contacts for riders. Prior to shuttle students boarding, all shuttle buses will be disinfected once they are empty after the main morning routes. This may cause two shuttle buses to arrive late to school. Elementary students will be picked up first after school so no shuttle will be running from the middle school and high school to the elementary buildings.

The district will be notified by the respective County Health Department when there is an identified positive case of COVID in one of the district's schools. District staff will identify any students and staff who have been in close contact with the infected person for more than 15 minutes during any of the past few days. These individuals will be required to begin a 14-day quarantine immediately and

will receive a call from the health department within 48 hours. The district will alert all families in the district that a positive case was identified in a particular school.

Superintendent Mary Whitrock shared, “The re-entry plan is a framework and principals will be working with their staff to develop more specific protocols based on the needs of the students in each of their buildings. This is a work in progress and will be updated as more information becomes available and adjusted based on the number of positive cases in our area and in our schools. Our top priority is the safety of our students and staff as we work to move towards bringing our students back to school.”

School Board President Gary Rodman noted, “The Board spent considerable time at our July meeting discussing the plan. Members asked an extensive series of questions in an effort to understand the multifaceted nature of returning to face to face learning this Fall. The plan offers flexibility to parents in terms of how they want their children to learn this Fall. It’s a dynamic plan that allows the district to adapt to a fluid situation with regard to the pandemic. The Board appreciates the efforts of the district’s leadership team to devise a plan to address a very complicated and ever-changing situation. It became clear that the various units within the district contributed to and took ownership of their parts of the plan, and the Board is grateful for their work as well.”

The plan is available on the [Roadmap to Re-entry Page](#) under the Families tab of the district website at www.ripon.k12.wi.us. Additional information will be added to the page as more details are determined. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document will be added soon to address questions received from parents. Since this is a fluid situation, the district is anticipating that answers to questions as they arise will be added to provide ongoing information.

Any comments or questions, please contact Dr. Mary Whitrock at (920) 748-4600.

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