

MT. BLUE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHESTERVILLE – FARMINGTON – INDUSTRY – NEW SHARON – NEW VINEYARD – STARKS – TEMPLE – VIENNA – WELD – WILTON
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“Public Schools not only serve the public, they make the public.”

TO: RSU 9 Parents & Guardians
FROM: Christian M. Elkington, Superintendent
RE: Important Mask and Calendar Updates!
DATE: 8-13-2021

Over the last month, the RSU 9 Administrative Team, like you, have been watching the dangerous public health twists and turns resulting from the COVID variants that seem to be taking over. As many school districts, we hoped to receive more guidance from Maine CDC and the Maine Dept. of Ed. that would help us determine our next steps in reopening our schools safely. At the same time, we have been speaking with our school board about the safety measures we feel are needed, based on the current science and medical advice, as we watch the spread of COVID build around our country and now in our state.

All of our planning is based on having every student in school every day! In order to do this, we must keep our schools as safe as possible from COVID and from having to quarantine our students and staff. As you saw last year we were able to keep our schools open under our Hybrid approach and also were able to send a minimal number of students' home to quarantine, unlike others. We were also able to run spring afterschool activities with little to no interruption. This is because we followed the recommendations of Maine CDC and made the health and safety of our students and staff our #1 priority.

With less than three weeks to go before RSU 9 is supposed to start school I have asked our school board to make some decisions regarding our final steps to reopen our schools. My apologies for not getting this information to you more quickly, but unfortunately guidance up to now has been incomplete. I know the earlier you have clear information the better you are able to plan and prepare and that you will have many questions as there are so many moving pieces we *all* must consider.

Masks in School – Was discussed at the July 27th board meeting and, based on the recommendations of Maine CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics, our school board voted *that masks/face shields will be required for staff and students in grades PreK-8 to start our school year.*

On August 10th, our school board voted to support a full return to universal indoor masking for all students in grades pre-K through 12th grade, with the exception of students and staff in grades 9-12 who are vaccinated. They will have the option of wearing shields only indoors as vaccinations are available for all of these grade levels with many taking advantage.

Masks will not be required outdoors. Students and staff on buses must continue to wear masks as mandated by the updated ME DOE [reopening plans and procedures](#).

New Quarantine Expectations – Yesterday, August 12, 2021, the Maine CDC and the Maine DOE came out with new recommendations which further support students being and staying in school. Please see the link above. Close Contacts continue to be required to quarantine for 10 days from school and school activities after COVID-19 exposure. The only exceptions are if at least one of the following conditions applies to the close contact:

- 1.) The close contact (staff or student) is vaccinated and if the exposure occurred more than 14 days after the individual's completion of the vaccine series. If the exposure occurred after vaccination but prior to the 14 days, the close contact must quarantine for the full-time period: or
- 2.) The close contact (staff or student) has a previous positive COVID-19 test result (molecular or antigen) collected

within 90 days of the exposure: or

- 3.) The close contact (staff or student) participates in weekly school pooled testing and the exposure was a school exposure; or
- 4.) The school has a mandatory masking policy. If so, then an exposed classroom **student** does not need to quarantine from regular school-day activities when the student close contact was at least 3 feet from an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) provided that the school enforces consistent and correct use of well-fitting masks and no direct physical contact occurred.

(Exception #4 is limited to classroom exposures only. Exposures that occur in buses, cafeterias, and school-sponsored activities are not eligible for exception #4. The exception does not apply to teachers, staff or other adults in the classroom.)

Opportunities for you to speak directly with me about our reopening plans – Are scheduled for this coming week. I will do my best to answer questions that parents and guardians have in these one hour, in-person, outside meetings and will provide parents & guardians with the information we now have and clarify as best as possible what's happening in this constantly changing situation. I will also discuss where RSU 9 is with our reopening plans including what our mask wearing and social distancing requirements will be and why, including the need for Social Emotional Learning (SEL) supports for our students resulting from the need to wear masks and our plans to provide needed mask breaks. Questions and answers will be compiled from these sessions and will be made available on the district website for those who are unable to attend. These meetings will be outside weather permitting with an alternative ZOOM option if we can't.

- 8-17-2021 5:30pm Academy Hill School, 7:00pm W.G. Mallet School
- 8-18-2021 5:30pm Cascade Brook School, 7:00pm Mt. Blue Middle School
- 8-19-2021 5:30pm Cape Cod Hill School, 7:00pm Mt. Blue High School.

A change in the start of our 2021-2022 School Year – Has been approved by our school board. We are adding two staff planning days at the beginning of the school year in order to help prepare staff to deal with the ramifications of:

- the alarming spread of the COVID Delta Variant
- adjustments needed to deal with the large number of staff openings (51 at this time)
- late delivery of some materials, equipment and the need for some extra time for projects to be completed
- the extra Social Emotional Learning support our students will need as we continue to deal with COVID.

We will not be turning student days into staff days, but are adding two staff days to begin the school year and for the student year to start a little later. The updated RSU 9 2021-2022 School Schedule is now:

- School staff days starting on Tuesday, Aug. 31st and run through Friday, Sept. 3rd
- K – Grade 9 students starting on Tuesday, Sept. 7th
- Grades 10-12 students starting on Wednesday, Sept. 8th
- Three student days being added to the end of our 2021-2022 School Year.

A short extension for Remote Learning Interest – If you are interested in having your student be considered for full remote learning for the 21/22 school year, please complete this [interest survey](#) by the end of the day Sunday, 8/15/21. We have a limited number of slots available through the Western Maine Remote Academy and we will be reviewing applicants based on previous successful online learning. Families will be notified by 8/20/21 as to whether their student(s) have been accepted for this remote learning option and next steps. Please email Laura Columbia (lcolumbia@mtbluersd.org) if you have any questions.

Please know that I, like you, was hoping for a better, more positive and “normal” start to our school year. The lack of vaccinations in some parts of our country, the spread of new variants, and rise in numbers of COVID infected people of all ages have put a detour into the start we all had hoped and initially planned for. You have my word that we will do our best to minimize the health risk in order to take care of our most precious resource, our students, along with our other precious resource, our staff, in the upcoming school year! If we all do our best to follow our State’s guidance and recommendations both now and until we beat this Pandemic then the phrase “As Maine goes, so goes the Nation!” will return for the right reasons. The plans we are putting in place are to do everything we can to make sure that Hybrid Learning and quarantining will not be what drives RSU 9 in the year to come.

Thanks for listening and please look for my next update coming soon!