

SPRING 2021: FAQs:

Are after-school programs still available for students who return to in-person instruction?

Programming is limited because of staff availability. Contact your school's main office staff for more information and program availability.

Will teachers/staff be provided with any support or professional development to prepare for the return to the school year in fall?

The Talent Development Department is finalizing professional development plans for the summer. PD will be focused on supporting teachers as they prepare for the upcoming school year. We'll share more information when it's finalized.

I want my student to keep his teacher. Will there be an opportunity for a family to change or update their decision if their teacher is being moved into an in-person classroom?

No. All decisions made by the April 5 deadline must remain for the rest of this school year.

Will students or staff be required to have a temperature check before entering the building each day?

Temperature screenings are no longer recommended or required, according to the Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Department of Public Health. Tools will still be available for students and staff who want to take their temperature.

Can staff have input on whether a student should stay remote?

Principals were encouraged to reach out to families of students who are not finding success in a remote-only instructional setting to encourage them to connect in-person. Work with your building leadership to discuss individual students.

How will social distancing be enforced in cafeterias? How will meals be provided?

While capacity guidelines have changed, students will continue to remain six feet apart while dining and encouraged to sit facing forward. Assigned seats are required, and students will be grouped into cohorts -- or smaller groups -- to minimize student crossover. Most guidelines remain unchanged from the start of the school year: Students will wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before eating. Each student will receive one pre-packaged meal and one carton of milk. All meals will be served in a pre-packaged container and placed on carts for distribution. Students are still welcome to bring lunch from home. Building administrators may designate outdoor dining areas or additional areas in the school for meal service.

Will schools that require uniforms require them for students returning to in-person instruction?

Yes. Families returning to in person learning who need assistance with uniforms should reach out to the building administration.

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Spring Back-to-School Plans: FAQs

Should all families contact their school's main office staff? Or only families who want to change from their current choice?

Only families who want to change their current enrollment choice should contact their school's main office staff.

Why is the district making a schedule change with only six weeks left in the school year? Why not implement it sooner, or wait until the fall for another change?

Earlier this month the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Public Health shared new information about health guidelines, including updates to social distancing. We want to get our students back in person as quickly as possible -- keeping in mind the fact that all our staff won't be fully vaccinated until the middle of April. While there isn't much time left in the school year, we are encouraging any meaningful, face-to-face connection we can reintroduce before the end of this school year. We also want to get students back into a routine of attending school in-person, and lay the groundwork for a summer school program to continue to connect students to resources and support to ensure they have a successful transition into the next grade level and the next school year.

How will social distancing be implemented with additional students added to classes?

New guidance from the Illinois Department of Public Health has adjusted social distancing guidelines. Staff should remain six feet away from students whenever possible. Students must remain at least three feet away from other students whenever possible. At all times, students and staff will continue to be required to wear face coverings or masks, and they must be worn appropriately at all times when people are unable to socially distance.

How will current class sizes be affected starting April 19?

We won't know until after families make their choice. Class sizes will depend on the demand at each school and at each grade level. We're working with our leadership team and local health professionals to follow updated health and safety guidelines.

Will parents/families be notified how many students will be in their class before they commit to returning?

Probably not. We won't know how class sizes will be affected until we know how many

students plan to return to in-person instruction. Class sizes will be limited based on what's outlined in the teacher union contract -- which varies, depending on grade level and subject matter -- and by social distancing guidelines.

Will remote-only elementary students remain with their current teacher if they move to in-person instruction?

We're working through those details now, and it's possible we won't know for sure until we know what the demand is. That demand could also depend on each school and each grade level. At this time, it would be safe to anticipate that a student who changes from remote-only to in-person instruction would also have a different teacher for the remainder of the school year.

Will remote-only elementary students who continue with remote learning keep their current teacher?

Some students could be assigned to a new teacher, even if they remain in a remote-only class -- however that's not our goal, and a change is unlikely. We won't know for sure until we know what the demand is. That demand could also depend on each school and each grade level. We're working with the administration and the Rockford Education Association to cause the least amount of disruption as possible to our teachers and their classroom assignments.

Will remote-only teachers remain remote for the rest of the school year? In some cases, remote-only teachers have students assigned from several schools in their classroom.

We're working with the administration and the Rockford Education Association to cause the least amount of disruption to our teachers and their classroom assignments. Our goal is to bring students back in-person. We also want to move as few teachers as possible from remote-only instruction to in-person instruction. We know that changes for both students and staff are difficult. We will do what we can to minimize that change.

Why not change only middle and high school plans, and leave elementary plans alone for the rest of this school year?

In light of the new guidance, we want families to have a choice. Many elementary families have had students on a waitlist to return to in-person instruction, and we want to bring them back as safely as possible. Now we're able to do that, based on new safety guidelines.

I'm a staff member who has not been able to get the vaccine. What should I do to get vaccinated ahead of April 19?

Send an email to Health Services Administrator Roni Sturm, roni.sturm@rps205.com. You can also connect with the Winnebago County Health Department to receive the vaccine through one of their clinics: covid19@wchd.org or 815-319-6705. You can [follow this link to register for the vaccine](#).

How will MAP or IAR testing be affected by this switch?

Our schools are preparing assessment schedules now to test both remote and in-person students for ACCESS, IAR and ISA (Illinois Science Assessment). Because the Illinois State Board of Education has extended the testing window for several weeks, there is a longer testing window to accommodate the needs of any students who transition during testing time. We're aiming to complete testing for most students ahead of a transition.

Why weren't staff notified earlier of this discussion and decision, instead of finding out the same day as families?

While we've been considering an invitation to return to in-person instruction for some time, our plans were accelerated by updated guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Department of Public Health. We wanted to share our big picture plans as early as possible and still provide enough time to collect feedback from our staff, families and students to finalize details. We're in that process now. Feedback shared via Let's Talk has helped our administrators discuss additional ideas and develop this list of frequently asked questions.

What kind of preparation will schools do ahead of students' return?

We're working on updating our staff handbook and family handbook that outline expectations, plans and responsibilities for students and staff. We'll share that information as soon as it's finalized.

What are the consequences for not wearing a mask for staff and for students?

Students who refuse to appropriately wear a mask may face consequences outlined in the Student Code of Conduct. Staff who refuse to appropriately wear a mask may face disciplinary action.

Will cleaning protocols be updated? How will those be enforced?

Extended cleaning protocols have been in place all year to support all in-person instruction. The district's custodial contractor is responsible for the majority of cleaning, including high-touch areas (like keyboards, toilets, door handles) and cleaning to accommodate lunch schedules. The district also provides EPA-registered disinfectants and auxiliary cleaning supplies in every classroom. Shared supplies are regularly disinfected. Static computers, like those in computer labs, are subject to nightly cleaning and disinfection. Staff assist with cleaning between student use for computers and other shared materials and supplies. The Facilities' Senior Custodial Manager and her team, in conjunction with the facilities management team, is responsible for ensuring cleaning is completed effectively. Staff should reach out to the facilities team with specific concerns.

Could ESL teachers return to work with their former students April 19 to provide much-needed instruction?

Families have until April 5 to make their selection to return in-person. Once those lists are finalized, we'll have a better idea of how ESL students and teachers may be

impacted and how we'll adjust to meet the students' needs. We have a team dedicated to this work and communication.

Many classroom teachers don't have materials or furniture to accommodate additional students. How will teachers be accommodated to support their additional students?

These needs will be unique to each teacher or classroom. Principals will work with teachers to ensure the materials and furniture can be provided to meet students' needs.

Why can't secondary teachers be assigned to teach remote-only or in-person only, similar to how elementary staff have been assigned?

Unfortunately we don't have the staff to accommodate that schedule, especially because of our course offerings and electives.

What is the plan for Wednesdays?

There will be no change for early childhood or elementary schools. District leaders are working through plans now for middle schools and high schools. Parents should expect at least a half-day attendance every Wednesday for all students. That time will be required for all students and dedicated to intervention, work completion, connections with counselors, and reassessment, among others. We'll release more details as they become available.

Will students and staff still be required to quarantine if they're exposed to COVID-19? Will contact tracing continue?

Contact tracing will continue just as it has all school year. The rest of the answer is complicated: Staff who have been fully vaccinated -- and are at least two weeks past their second shot -- will not be required to quarantine simply if they are a close contact to someone who recently tested positive for COVID-19. Any fully vaccinated staff who are symptomatic still must quarantine. Any staff or students who have not been vaccinated will still be required to quarantine if they come in close contact with anyone who recently tested positive for COVID-19.

What are the plans for bilingual classrooms or blended classrooms?

We understand the unique needs in these classrooms. District leaders will work closely with principals and teachers in these specific rooms to maintain as much continuity and consistency as possible for students.

Will students and staff still be sent home if they have any potential COVID-related symptoms?

Yes. We're still prioritizing health and safety. Our practice all school year has been to isolate students or staff if they display any potential COVID-19 symptoms.

What is the district doing to address airflow in each school building and classroom?

HVAC systems have been optimized to provide the safest operation. If there are specific air quality concerns, please reach out to the facilities team. Because of the time of year, windows may be opened to help introduce additional outdoor air into classrooms and

our schools. Additional long-term air quality upgrades are under consideration, as well. District air handling systems are under continuous review, and stand-alone air purification units may be provided to supplement existing air supply systems.

What will the school hours be?

Classes will return to the pre-pandemic schedule. [Follow this link for the list of school start and dismissal times.](#)

How long will classes be for middle and high school students? Would we continue with 25-minute class periods?

Class periods will return to 50-minutes, and students will follow the pre-pandemic schedule.

Would transportation be provided to families who have declined it so far this school year, if they agree to attend in-person for the rest of the school year?

Yes. That's part of the reason we need families to commit to in-person or remote by April 5. Bus routes must be developed for any additional students.

How do I request transportation?

Call the Transportation Department: 815-966-3700 for eligibility information and to request the transportation form that must be completed before a bus route is assigned.

How will grades be reflected for students who spent most of the school year in a remote-only class before transitioning into in-person for the very end of the year? Which teacher would complete that student's assessment and report card?

A transition protocol for elementary students who switch from remote to in-person is being developed now. There will be a working group around this specific issue and guidance will be released as soon as possible.

My family and I have relocated during the pandemic to a different attendance zone. Would my child switch to a different school if they return to in-person? Would transportation be provided to their current assigned school instead of the new school?

The Welcome Center staff will review options with families when they visit to change their address. Transportation would not be available if the family chooses to stay at their original assignment; transportation would only be provided to the new assigned school, as long as they live outside of the school walk zone.

My student has been remote-only all school year, so their vaccinations and health screenings are not up-to-date. Do they need to be updated before returning to school in-person?

Yes. Students must complete all required health screenings and vaccinations. [Follow this link for the 2020-21 immunizations checklist.](#)

My high school student did not purchase a parking permit because they were remote-only and it hasn't been needed. Would parking permits be required now?

Yes, parking permits are required but will be prorated for the remainder of the year. The total cost for the remainder of the year is \$15.63. Work with your school's main office to secure a parking permit.

How will lunches be provided to middle and high school students?

Students will be provided with both breakfast and lunch daily. We'll share more details about what that looks like soon.

How will breakfast and lunch change -- if at all -- based on the new guidelines?

Students must continue to be at least six feet apart, and they should face forward when possible.

Can staff have lunch together?

Staff must remain at least six feet apart while eating or drinking. While the guidelines share new information for vaccinated staff, all staff -- regardless of vaccination status -- must remain at least six feet apart during lunch. It is still encouraged to eat privately when possible.

Will middle school remote learners be able to stay in class with in-person students?

Yes. At middle and high schools, students who are remote-only will connect and attend classes virtually at the same time as their classmates who are at school for in-person instruction.

Will students be allowed to use lockers again?

No, students will still not be allowed to use lockers. We want to continue to limit any congregating or crowding in the hallways.

Are bus drivers able to be vaccinated, just as teachers were able to receive the vaccine if they wanted it?

Yes. All RPS 205 staff and contractors were allowed the opportunity to receive the COVID-19 vaccine with support from the Winnebago County Health Department.

Will a vaccine be required before a student can return to school?

No. The district is not requiring any staff or students receive the vaccine at this time.

How will the district prepare for the social emotional impact of students returning to school?

District leaders are working through plans now. We will likely continue to use Wednesdays -- the shortened schedule -- as an opportunity for students to connect to receive what they need. WIN Wednesdays -- or What I Need Wednesdays -- will provide students with whatever additional support they need to help close out the school year.

Will volunteers, tutors and visitors be allowed to return to our schools starting April 19?

Volunteers and tutors will be allowed into schools if they are there to support student

programs. Our preference is for the volunteers and tutors to be fully vaccinated. Visitors will still be restricted.

What kind of resources -- such as school supplies -- will be required or provided to students returning to in-person from remote learning?

This may vary by school and classroom. Teachers and principals will work together to ensure students have the learning materials and supplies they need.

What will the fall look like?

The administration is still developing those plans.