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Important COVID Update

Dear RCPS Families,

While we have implemented additional mitigation strategies to limit the spread of COVID as well as limit quarantines, we need to do more to create a new system where disjointed scheduling, late notices, and large numbers of students and staff being quarantined does not happen regularly. This has created a very tumultuous start for all. We share in your frustration in navigating what is truly a new, different landscape than what we handled so well last year.

We have heard your concerns and frustrations as parents, teachers, staff, and community members, and are also grappling with conflicting information from our guiding agencies. While we had hoped for flexibility with the calendar and schedule, we are unable to bring back distance learning days (Wonderful Wednesdays), as we are only allowed 10 days of unscheduled distance learning days for the entire school year, unless our VDH managers deem a temporary closure necessary to contain an outbreak. Schools must provide 5 days of in-person learning to all students. After consulting with VDH, their advice is not to close the schools right as they feel our current protocols have been more than appropriate. However, with the high number of flu cases as well as additional COVID cases being reported this week, we feel it is imperative to provide time for the current quarantine/exposure cycle to end (August 30), allow time for our children and staff who are sick to stay home and recover, as well as provide time to revamp current mitigation strategies so that we can provide a better structure for consistency of in-person learning for all involved.

Therefore, RCPS will switch to distance learning for the remainder of this week, August 24-August 27. All students, who have not otherwise been advised to quarantine, will be able to begin in-person instruction again on August 30th. All after school activities are also canceled. Now that Canvas is up and running, your child should receive instructions on how to access distance learning materials from their teachers. They will be reaching out to you this week to outline expectations.

The major additional mitigation strategies that will be implemented prior to students' return are as follows:

1. Universal masking is in place since the 1% threshold has been triggered
 - a. All students and staff, regardless of vaccination status, must wear a mask for in-person learning
 - b. Exempted students must provide medical documentation for an alternative accommodation or wear a mask for at least the next 30 days. After 30 days, case rates will be reexamined to see if the exemptions for in-person learning can be put back in to place (case rates drop for at least 2 consecutive weeks under 1% threshold).
 - c. Exempted students who are not able to provide documentation are approved to continue on a distance-learning schedule until case rates are consistently steady under the threshold.

2. RCES scheduling will be revamped to return to our model of limited switching between classes

3. Seating in classrooms is being currently reconfigured at RCES and RCHS to optimize distance and limit exposure and quarantine
4. An expansion of our localized contact tracing team in order to respond even more quickly to cases as they arise
5. The opening of our Valley Health Telehealth Wellness Center will provide point of care services to students at school (diagnostics and tracing can start immediately). To sign up for this service, fill out the forms at <https://www.valleyhealthlink.com/about-us/school-based-telehealth-visits/>
6. Additional cleaning between equipment usage, high contact areas, and restrooms
7. The creation of a COVID dashboard to be frequently updated rather than sending individual notices each time a positive is recorded

Now, please understand that once these measures are in place, the risk of contracting COVID or being quarantined is not gone. We need everyone to work together to limit exposure and make smart decisions to keep us all safe. Once these new practices are in place, RCPS, as a rule, will not issue changes to modality or closures based on single case incidences. So, unless you or your child are identified as a close contact and asked to quarantine, or unless VDH or the state issues a closure order, you can expect RCPS to be open. It is a difficult message for children to grasp when they've had such a wonderful summer of normalcy, and even harder to convey when the rest of the state and regular programs continue without regulation as normal, but as educators, we will do our best to establish a consistent structure of teaching and learning that prioritizes the health and safety of all our students and staff.

Since RCES and RCHS are distance learning days, rather than fully closed, **we are able to offer drive thru pick-up for the entire week's worth of breakfast and lunch for students.** This will take place tomorrow, **Tuesday, August 24th, from 10-11 am at both schools.** RCES families can pick up in the student pick up lane area in the back of the elementary school and RCHS families can pick up at the student drop off area at the back of the high school during this time. If you would like more information about the meal pickup or have any questions, please call or text our meal access hotline at (540)-671-0153.

As always, thank you for your feedback, your constructive criticism, and your dedication to our shared goal of providing the best education possible during challenging times.

Warmly,



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