

DRAFT Plan to be presented to BOE 6.28.21

RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DRAFT SAFE RETURN TO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION AND
CONTINUITY OF SERVICES PLAN

FOR

THE CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN,
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EMERGENCY RELIEF FUND

JUNE 23, 2021

Introduction

The Ridgefield Public Schools (RPS) spent the 2020-21 school year with its eye on the health and well-being of its community members, and searching for every opportunity to maximize students' learning experiences. Whether in-person, hybrid, or remotely, RPS sought for innovative ways to connect with students and families, and further to support all students' connections with their peers and trusted educators. Many lessons were learned from the last school year amidst COVID, and those lessons will influence the design of a safe return for all students and faculty/staff at the end of August 2021.

This "Safe Return" plan is only the beginning of the RPS's plans for the 2021-22 school year. The Connecticut State Department of Education requires all districts to design this plan to focus on two main components: **(1) health/safety strategies, and (2) continuity of services**. Further, districts are required to communicate this plan to its community stakeholders to elicit public feedback beginning on June 23, 2021, and periodically thereafter.

This document will serve as a starting point, and will include broad strokes more than itemized details. We learned a great deal during our reopening planning process last year, including the importance of being clear in our communications. Given this, we will only share in this plan what we know for certain as of today. The Ridgefield community can expect more specific details about their child/children's safe return to school from district and school leadership throughout the summer. Given the changing (but optimistic) trajectory of this pandemic, we will not know until later in the summer months exact answers to all health and safety mitigation strategies. District leadership will continue to monitor the rates of COVID locally, as well as stay connected to the guidance from the Connecticut Department of Health (CT DPH) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

One component of our reopening planning before and during last school year that we are very proud of is our collaboration with faculty and community members. We solicited input throughout each step, through a range of avenues, and have been incredibly grateful for the participation of parents, staff, faculty, students, and community neighbors.

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This plan will not include a system of committees as we had designed last summer, but will offer stakeholders opportunities to weigh in and provide us with their best thinking.

Health and Safety Strategies

The CSDE requires all districts to include their mitigation strategy for each of the categories listed below. ***Please bear in mind that the information shared here is based on CT DPH guidance and/or *CSDE requirements as of June 23, 2021.*** The use and application of these strategies are subject to change depending on the evolution of the pandemic, local case rates, and CT DPH and CDC guidance.

Mitigation Strategy	Ridgefield Response
Universal and correct wearing of masks	*Students and staff will wear masks while inside school buildings and on the bus.
Physical distancing (e.g. including use of cohorts)	Classrooms will aim for three feet distance between students, and three to six feet where possible. Three feet distance may not be feasible in all environments/classrooms. RPS does not plan to separate students into cohorts as it did for 2020-21.
Handwashing and respiratory etiquette	Students and staff will be asked to wash hands regularly, provided opportunities and time to do so, and hand sanitizer will be available throughout when soap and water washing is not feasible.
Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities	Daytime and evening custodial cleaning routines will continue, including an emphasis on cleaning high touch point areas.
Contact tracing, isolation, quarantining	Contact tracing efforts will continue to take place when a case of COVID-19 occurs within RPS or at an RPS event. The district will continue to use the RPS COVID Data Tracker website to update the community of case rates, and quarantine impacts. Students and staff with symptoms of

	<p>COVID-19 will require isolation within the school building or campus prior to going home.</p> <p>Staff and students who are vaccinated and are not displaying symptoms of COVID-19 will not have to quarantine if they have been exposed to an individual with COVID-19.</p> <p>Unvaccinated students and staff will have to follow CT DPH quarantine guidelines.</p>
Diagnostic screening and testing	<p>RPS will not conduct COVID-19 screening and testing, but will communicate with community members opportunities locally for testing.</p>
Efforts to provide vaccinations to those school community members who are eligible	<p>Should the need arise, RPS will collaborate with the Ridgefield Department of Public Health to facilitate vaccination efforts, as well as provide information to school community members regarding local vaccination sites.</p>
Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to health and safety policies	<p>Face shields will be made available to those staff members who work with students who are unable to wear masks due to the nature of their disability.</p>

Continuity of Services

It would be impossible to plan for continuity of services without providing context for what RPS believes is at the core of “continuity” - time and proximity. RPS will begin with the following in order to aim for continuity of instruction for students:

- 1. During the 2020-21 school year, RPS reduced the school day by twenty minutes at the beginning and again at the end of each school day in order to facilitate a staggered arrival and dismissal. For the 2021-22 school year, RPS will return to a full school day, adding back into the day the 40 minutes of time that was reduced during the 2020-21 school year.**
- 2. A hybrid option will not be made available for students to begin the 2021-22 school year. If the case rates of COVID-19 change significantly than the current trajectory, this option may be revisited.**
- 3. A fully remote/virtual option will not be made available to students. Those students who have medical complications whose doctors believe are unable to physically attend school may consult with their school administration and nurse regarding learning program options.**

Social and Emotional Wellness

The safe return for students and the ability for students to be available to learn is contingent on not only a physically safe environment, but also an emotionally and socially safe one, as well. To this end, all schools will open the year with a focus on students’ mental wellness, curating school environments that focus on the learner first, instead of the academic content. Schools will regularly assess students’ emotional and social well-being, implement proactive social/emotional learning supports, as well as layers of interventions for those students who require more assistance.

Academic Needs

Any strong instructional cycle includes three main steps: (1) assessment, (2) targeted instruction, (3) re-assessment. For the coming school year, our professionals will rely on this cycle heavily, as a means to ensure that students are being “met where they are” with regards to their academic and communicative knowledge and skills. Even with the

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strides made between remote and in-person instruction during the 2020-21 school year after three months of school closure the spring before, it is expected that many students will be returning this fall with knowledge gaps, misunderstandings about concepts, and perhaps even a lack of confidence in their skills. Teachers will work in grade levels, content area departments, and within intervention and special services teams to study student performance, the design of units of study, and their own instructional practices to ensure they are responsive to students.

In addition, RPS has begun and will continue the following with the goal of assisting students in making progress:

- Summer services/programming for students identified for intervention via Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), English Learners (ELs) and credit recovery
- Intervention professional development for educators to address student academic gaps
- Summer Bridge Program for 2022
- Extended day opportunities available for students before/after school
- Providing school leaders with resources necessary to address the needs of their individual schools
- Planning for activities during long-term closures
- Tracking student attendance and improving student engagement
- Providing information and assistance to parents and families on how they can support students
- Access and equity for all students through the purchase of technology

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Public Feedback

The district has benefited greatly from the feedback provided throughout the last twelve months regarding its reopening (and staying open) efforts. We hope the community will continue to engage with the district this summer and coming school year similarly. To this end, we will be inviting community members to email us their input via a new email address: safereturn@ridgefieldps.net. The emails received last school year lead to phone calls, changes to our plan, and adjustments to how we communicate with faculty/staff, parents, students, and community members. Many emails lead to phone calls, virtual meetings, and district leadership discussions. We hope to use this new email inbox in the same manner.

Separately, we will be surveying parents, students, and faculty/staff this summer with specific questions about our safe return plans.

Lastly, this plan will be reviewed, revised when necessary, and posted publicly, at minimum, at the following dates in time:

- August 23, 2021
- December 23, 2021
- June 23, 2022
- December 23, 2022
- June 23, 2023