

Red Wing Public Schools
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School Board Meeting Agenda Item

Topic: Return to School (Updated)
Contact(s):
Presenter(s): Karsten Anderson, Superintendent

Nature of Action Requested by Board

Board action
Board information or scheduled report

Background Information

Education Minnesota Survey Results about Returning to School

Education Minnesota conducted a survey of its members about their opinions about returning to school. The administrative team reviewed survey results before the last regular school board meeting, but the information—which was submitted after the posting deadline—was not included in that meeting's board packet. The survey is included as an attachment.

Mask-Wearing During Activities

During the February 16th board meeting, a board member expressed concerns about athletes wearing masks appropriately. After the meeting, Paul Hartmann, Activities Director, reminded winter coaches of face covering expectations during practices and games.

Social Distancing

For grades K-4, we are planning to follow the 6-foot social distancing guidelines. For grades 5-12, we are planning to follow the recommended 3-foot guidelines between students and 6-foot guidelines when possible between adults and students. Shanda Jorgenson, the district's health and safety consultant, will be available to answer questions.

Food Services at RWHS

This is an important issue as we bring students back to more in-person learning, especially at the high school that relies on the lunchroom. Shanda Jorgenson, Brent Lexvold, and George Nemanich developed a plan that allows use of the cafeteria with students being assigned seats. Principal Nemanich is also committing additional people to help food service staff clean between lunch periods and Director Lexvold will provide enough cleaning supplies for all assigned people to use.

5th and 6th Grade Class Sizes and Online-Only Teachers

Currently, the district is planning to have 5th and 6th grade online-only students assigned to online-only teachers so teachers have one mode of teaching. There have been at least two parents requesting that their online-only students stay with their current teacher.

The district can hire online-only teachers for the remainder of this year or assign teachers to the role and hire replacements for them, if needed. At this time, the preference is to hire online-only teachers instead of reassigning so fewer students have a change in teachers. An elementary principal will lead the interview process to select candidates.

As of February 26th:

- Class sizes for 5th grade in-person classes range from 17-23 and the online-only class has 20 students, but we are waiting to hear from the families of three students.
- Class sizes for most 6th grade in-person classes range from 17-22, but two classes have 12 and 15 students. There are 33 online-only students with four more undecided.

Vaccinations

Before additional students return to school, all staff members will have been offered the first dose of the vaccine and many will have received both doses.

Due to inclement weather throughout much of the United State during one week in February, many staff members were not able to receive their first dosage of the vaccine as originally planned. As a result, we have 266 individuals receiving their second dose during the week of March 22nd, the first week 7th, 8th, and 12th graders return to school in the 4+1 model. The 266 individuals are categorized as follows:

- 131 teachers
- 31 paraprofessionals
- 22 cooks
- 25 custodians
- 15 bus drivers
- 7 office staff workers
- 2 Kids Junction workers
- 1 Community Education workers
- 8 administrators
- 24 substitutes

Staff members can choose to receive their vaccines in Zumbrota (typically on Wednesdays), Red Wing (typically on Thursdays), and Cannon Falls (typically on Fridays), but the county is not able to tell us when/where employees are receiving the vaccine. Symptoms generally begin 24-72 hours after the second dose, and some estimates are 30% of employees miss work after the second dose.

Superintendent Anderson believes it is likely that we will not be able to conduct school in-person on Friday, March 26th and possibly on Thursday, March 25th. The recommendation is to have a transition day for planning on Friday, March 26th. Alternatively, a Distance Learning Day could be held on that day, but some classes may not have a teacher able to oversee classroom work.

Timing Issues

The February 16th recommendation for returning high school students back to school called for 7th, 8th, and 12th graders coming back on April 5th (start of 4th quarter) and 9th, 10th, and 11th graders coming back on April 19th. At the time, staggered start times were required by the State.

During the February 16th meeting, the board approved a plan calling for 7th, 8th, and 12th graders to return on March 22nd and 9th, 10th, and 11th graders coming back on April 5th. Staggered start times were incorporated because of state requirements.

On February 17th—the day after board approval of the Return to School Plan—the state withdrew the requirement for staggered starts. I received multiple requests for all RWHS students to return on March 8th or 22nd and other requests to have all RWHS students start on April 5th. Principal Nemanich submitted the attached message to me about the possibility of moving the start date for high school students to April 5th.

Because we have already notified parents, Superintendent Anderson supports maintaining the current plan adopted by the board but will support any adjustments as approved by the board.

Staff Mental Health

A board member asked about how administrators are checking in with staff members about their mental health, especially as more students return to in-person learning. Administrators are not trained to assess mental health of adults or children, but they can suggest resources and provide other assistance.

The administrative team will be discussing this issue during the week of March 8th, but here is a synopsis of what different buildings are currently doing:

- At the elementary schools, leaders routinely check-in with staff members as they complete rounds throughout their building on most student days. Some buildings have areas such as the “Calming Cave” aimed at providing space to decompress. Leaders also visited with staff members about room configurations and other concerns. Wednesdays are often good times to visit with staff members because of increased flexibility on those days.
- At the high school, Principal Nemanich explained that all three administrators complete building rounds throughout the day and regularly check-in with employees. There is also a stress room in the building aimed at providing space to decompress.
- Employees may access the Employee Assistance Program to discuss a variety of issues with people from outside the organization.

Recommendation

See recommendation(s) under each section.