

Dear Friends and Families of River School,

School is scheduled to start on Monday, August 30, 2021, and I know that people are excited to return to some sense of normalcy but I also understand that parents have questions and that some people are anxious about returning to River School. I am happy to report that due to the hard work and collaborative efforts of Berrien County Superintendents, the Berrien County Health Department, District Administration, and the Sodus Township School District #5 Board of Education, that I am able to release the 2021-2022 Return to Learn Plan, which is available on the River School website (www.riverschoolk8.org).

This plan is designed with the intent to provide a safe and secure in-person learning environment for all students and staff while continuing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Regardless of your individual beliefs, please understand that River School continues to recognize COVID-19 as a public health crisis. However, it is not only our responsibility to keep staff and students safe, it is also our responsibility to focus on the best educational practices to ensure high levels of learning. As a public school district, we must comply with local, state, and federal laws to ensure continued financial support.

A key feature of this year's Return to Learn Plan will be "flexible mitigation" meaning that additional mitigation measures "may" or "will" be implemented as transmission rates increase. As transmission rates decline, so too would mitigation strategies. With this in mind, regular communication between the school district and families will be critical. Right now, transmission rates in the county and within the community are currently low. If they remain low, then we have confidence the upcoming school year will look and feel very much like a typical (pre-covid) school year.

Below are some specific details of the plan that would be implemented if transmission rates remain low.

- Schools will open and operate on a full, daily schedule with in-person instruction being the only option at River School.
- Staff, students, volunteers, and visitors will **NOT** be required to wear face coverings, regardless of one's vaccination status. Face coverings will be optional. While no longer mandated, local and state public health officials recommend that individuals continue to wear a mask in indoor public settings. We also anticipate that the Director of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and/or the Director of the Berrien County Health Department would issue a face covering order if high levels of community transmission return, with which we would comply as a public school district.
- School transportation is considered public transportation and under federal order, **ALL** people riding public transportation (school buses/vans) **are required** to wear a face covering. This applies to school outings and field trips.
- Students and staff will **NOT** be tested for COVID-19 unless mandated by the Michigan High School Athletic Association, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services or the Berrien County Health Department.
- COVID-19 vaccinations are **NOT** required for school enrollment or attendance. The district encourages staff and students to become vaccinated, yet the district is **NOT** requiring staff or students to be vaccinated. Vaccinations are now widely available for anyone 12 and older.
- While public health officials expect positive cases of COVID-19 to be far more infrequent, people who do test positive will need to isolate for 10 days and until symptom-free, and any students or staff who are not vaccinated and are designated a close contact to a positive COVID-19 case will have to quarantine for 10 days.
- Students will be able to engage in athletic, enrichment, and extracurricular activities before and after the school day. Students in grades 6-8 may participate in athletics through Eau Claire Public Schools.

- Our River School teachers in all grades will teach and reinforce handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and BPS will provide the necessary hygiene supplies including soap, hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, paper towels, etc.
- Parents are encouraged to self-screen their student(s) before sending them to school. **DO NOT SEND YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL IF THEY ARE SICK!**
- The district will continue to offer free breakfast and lunch services for ALL students during the 2021-2022 school year.
- River School has reliable cleaning protocols in place that support safety and wellness and mitigate environmental health risks. All cleaning protocols and products meet industry standards and recommendations set by governmental health organizations. These rigorous standards apply to classrooms, office spaces, food preparation areas, common areas, and hard surfaces (*including desks, light switches, and doors*) in every building.

The above guidelines will remain in effect as long as there are Low transmission levels of COVID cases. Local health officials expect case levels to remain low due to the protective effects of vaccinations and antibodies derived from prior exposure. If transmission rates rise, then increased mitigation measures will be implemented in line with mandates by local, state, or federal agencies and in as inclusive and as uniformly as possible. **As a reference point, in Berrien County, the county only met the Substantial Transmission (orange) threshold for less than 30 school days and High Transmission (red) for less than 10 school days.**

As one of the public school districts in Berrien County, we will continue to partner with our colleagues. There are synergies to our collaboration and, thus, we will continue to align our actions where and when appropriate. That said, it is the students and staff of River School that we serve and any actions we take will be those that most effectively support the safety and well-being of all our students and staff while complying with rules, laws or emergency orders established by local, state, or federal agencies.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to email those questions to llausch@riverschoolk8.org or contact me directly at 269-861-5857.

Thank you for your cooperation and support of River School.

Educationally yours,

Laura Lausch, Principal