

REOPENING RUSH-HENRIETTA

In March 2020, New York public schools closed buildings and grounds for the remainder of the school year in response to COVID-19. Four months later, in July, Gov. Cuomo announced that school districts would be allowed to reopen for in-person classes in September if infection rates remain at 5 percent or lower in a given region that is in Phase 4 of the state's reopening plan.

As Rush-Henrietta contemplates reopening for the 2020-2021 school year, district leaders have prepared a reopening plan using the most recent guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, New York State Department of Health, New York State Education Department, Monroe County Department of Health, and the Reopening Rush-Henrietta task force. The latter group, led by the superintendent, includes parents, Board of Education members, instructional and non-instructional staff, administrators, and bargaining-unit leaders.

We know this is an emotional and anxiety-inducing time for everyone in our school community, and we recognize the stress that reopening - in any form - places on our students, families, and employees. It is important that we balance the risks of COVID-19 with the harm from continued school closure, which is impacting physical and mental health. Another significant consideration is the risk of COVID-19 to our employees, many of whom are within the identified high-risk population.

As we plan, the health and safety of students, families, and staff members remain of the utmost importance. The infection rate, spread of the virus, and the response to it in our region is at the forefront of our decision-making as we move to open schools. It is not possible to remove all risk of infection and disease now that COVID-19 is well established, but many measures will be put in place to minimize these risks for all. Mitigation of these risks, while allowing some level of a return to school, will be needed for the foreseeable future. So, too, will be the support of our community.

Please be assured that Rush-Henrietta is committed to pursuing the district priority of equity and inclusion as we strive to meet the complex needs of our families during this challenging time.

School districts statewide are reopening knowing that this is a constantly evolving situation. The plans we create now and plan to implement in September are subject to change at any time based on new guidance and directives from the state and county.

WHAT FAMILIES CAN EXPECT IN SEPTEMBER

Rush-Henrietta is prioritizing efforts to give students an increased level of in-person instruction, while offering remote-learning options, as well. Because of the need to use physical distancing, the district has developed a plan that allows students at all grade levels to attend school two days a week. Students will take part in virtual learning during the remaining three weekdays. We believe it is important for students to make personal connections with their teachers and peers, and that is why the district did not suggest a five-day-a-week, remote-learning experience for all.

Highlights:

- Most students will attend school in-person two days each week, and participate in virtual learning three days per week. Some students, including those in the special education program, may attend more often. The only exception is if a family chooses to have their child learn remotely 100 percent of the time. Instructions for choosing that option will be shared soon.
- A health screening process will be implemented and proper hygiene practices will be taught at school.
- Face coverings will be required any time six-foot distancing cannot be maintained. This includes buses and hallways. Most classrooms are set up so that face coverings do not need to be worn during instructional time.
- Buses will operate at a reduced capacity to allow for distancing. Typically, there will be one person per seat. Students living in the same household are encouraged to sit together on the bus.

INSTRUCTION MODEL

Rush-Henrietta students at all grade levels will return to school following what the state calls a hybrid model. This involves a mixture of in-school instruction and virtual learning at home. Teachers will use blended-learning methodologies and will receive additional professional development throughout the school year to help make this effort a success.

In-person instructional days will follow normal school times and schedules, with the exception of when subjects/specials can not adhere to state regulations. Virtual learning days allow for students and teachers to participate in a variety of lesson types and learning outcomes. Flexibility will be considered when designing lessons in a remote model to accommodate parent schedules, availability of technology, or other barriers for families.

District curriculum and pacing have been adjusted to adhere to this new instructional approach. Teachers will continue to report student progress, attendance, and grades on a quarterly basis.

SCHOOL SCHEDULES

Students will be placed into one of four groups. Think of these as smaller learning communities. Families with students at multiple levels will attend school on the same days.

Group 1: Students with last names in the first half of the alphabet (A-K) will attend in-person Monday/Thursday and participate in virtual learning Tuesday/Wednesday/Friday.

Group 2: Students with last names in the second half of the alphabet (L-Z) will attend in-person Tuesday/Friday and participate in virtual learning Monday/Wednesday/Thursday.

Group 3: In-person Monday/Tuesday/Thursday/Friday and virtual Wednesday. This cohort is specifically for students who need additional support and more in-person instruction: New York State Alternate Assessment students, self-contained special education classes, and students attending the alternative education program at the Webster Learning Center.

Group 4: Remote instruction from home Monday-Friday. This cohort will be by parent request only.

There may be adjustments to the alphabetical breaks (A-K, L-Z) to balance particular groups. Classroom assignments, schedules, and groups will be communicated in mid-to-late August.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

During the opening weeks of school, students will be given district assessments or screeners to inform teachers of academic gaps. These assessments will help ensure students will receive proper academic intervention services or inform classroom teachers of instructional gaps.

ESTABLISHING CLIMATE OF SAFETY, COMFORT, AND ROUTINE

During the first few weeks of school, teachers and building administrators will review health and safety protocols with all students. Processes will be put in place to maximize instruction while, at the same time, prioritizing the health and well-being of students and staff. Our instructional and mental health staff will work collaboratively to focus on social-emotional and mental-health support for students, whether they are learning in-person or remotely. Staff will work with our students to establish norms and routines regarding both methods of learning.

KEEPING OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY SAFE

Last winter, Rush-Henrietta instituted additional cleaning protocols. These will continue to be followed. At the same time, we are significantly enhancing our efforts. For example, we ordered 24 backpack, high-efficiency, electrostatic sanitizers. These allow us to disinfect all classrooms, hallways, and common areas each night after the regular cleaning is complete. In addition, we ordered compact compressor foggers for each bus. Drivers will use these to disinfect buses at the end of each shift. In addition, Lexan - a cousin of Plexiglass - is being installed to create a see-through barrier where necessary.

TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

Busing will be provided for all students. Each student must wear a facial covering while riding on a Rush-Henrietta bus. Our goal is to have one person per seat, although students living in the same household may sit together. We continue to encourage families that are able to provide transportation for their child to and from school to do so.

For additional information, please visit www.rhnet.org/reopenFAQ.