

# RCSD survey shows low confidence in going back

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Were this a regular year, students and families would be thinking about shopping for notebooks and planning for back-to-school nights.

Instead, under the shadow of COVID- 19, they’re more likely debating the state’s recently released guidelines and requirements for reopening schools.

But the Rochester City School Dis-

trict wanted to hear more. So it surveyed parents, students and staff to find out their opinions on reopening.

Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small said that the district decided to create the survey to use in tandem with guidance and regulations provided by the state and health officials in determining the course of action for RCSD this upcoming year. “We needed to receive feedback and hear from our families what their thoughts were (about) how the pandemic (has) affected their family,” Myers- Small said, adding that the survey also sought to find parents’ feelings on remote learning and in-person learning.

Myers-Small said that just under 2,000 parents responded to the survey.

Though the survey is not the only factor RCSD is considering, Myers-Small said that it will help to inform the district as it moves forward.

RCSD published the results on Monday.

Of those surveyed, only 17.7% of RCSD staffers were comfortable returning to school buildings in the fall, with 12.3% saying that they

staffers will be paid to be at home.

The district outlines situations in which personnel might be closer than 6 feet, including custodial and maintenance work, bus maintenance and repairs, and food preparation and distribution. For small spaces, RCSD said that only one person will be allowed in a space at a time unless all occupants are wearing face coverings, in which case occupancy will still be kept under 50% of maximum capacity. Examples of this include elevators, copy rooms, storage spaces and vehicles.

If the model outlined in the document is the one that RCSD ultimately chooses, staff and school visitors can expect daily health assessments for the virus. If they answer yes to any of the health questions, indicating that they may be symptomatic, they will not be permitted to enter the building. Staff will be asked to leave, contact a health care professional and to contact Human Resources. If they are sick they must notify HR and their supervisor.

Though the document doesn’t share specific plans for each model, RCSD indicates that they are reviewing hybrid models.

were “strongly confident” in returning. The rest of those surveyed were not confident (35.4%) or unsure (34.6%).

Of the families surveyed, 23% said that they would not send their children back to school until there is a vaccine available; 36.3% of families were not confident in sending their children back to school, while 11.7% were confident and 7% were strongly confident.

Students responded similarly to parents, with 23.4% of students saying that they would not go back to school until a vaccine is available, 27.1% of students stating they were not confident in returning to school buildings, 15.9% of students saying they were confident and 11.5% strongly confident that they would return.

**No good answer**

Jonathan Marsh, a father of three, is a RCSD parent who took the reopening survey.

Marsh said that the survey asked parents for their opinions about in-person, hybrid or fully distance learning. Parents, he said, were asked to rank their preferences and to share how reopening schools would impact their daily schedules.

Though he said that he is quite comfortable allowing his son to return to school in person, Marsh added the caveat that his situation is unique. Marsh said that his oldest son’s classroom will only have 18 students and, because his child is a preschooler, transportation is not an issue.

Still, Marsh understands that other parents, especially parents of older children who could be in more crowded classes or school buildings, may not share his feelings.

He said his son’s school “is a different situation than what a high school would look like, so I feel for parents with kids that age.”

Marsh said that, while distance learning was OK, it cannot replace the real thing. Still, his primary concern is ensuring that whatever decision is made is the healthiest one. Monroe County’s relatively low COVID-19 rate helps ease at least some worry.

“Within the hybrid model, students will be grouped in a heterogeneous manner to ensure inclusiveness, equity, and access for all,” the document reads. “Groups will be balanced across all demographics and sub group categories as outlined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Whenever possible, the groups will be determined based on households within a given school.”

RCSD is also considering specific support for students with disabilities “who might require more frequent face-to-face contact with teachers to minimize regression of skills.”

For those students, RCSD is considering a hybrid model of classes with six to 15 students. Those students could meet with their teachers for “up to four continuous days, with one day of distance learning,” the document says. “Students with Disabilities who receive their instruction in a general education setting must also receive Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in accordance with their Individualized Education Program (IEP). RCSD must carefully plan for the programmatic needs and service delivery model for all Students with Disabilities to ensure necessary supports are provided.”

The document also highlights support services for students or staff who are grieving the loss of staff, students or family.

In the case of a death or deaths, they will contact Student Support Services to initiate a trauma, illness, grief (TIG) team. If the school community as a whole has experienced a death — for example, if a student or staffer dies — TIG will establish “safe rooms” as needed. Safe rooms will be used for counseling services. Faculty and staff will be able to access counseling services through employee assistance programs. Staff will also be trained in identifying symptoms in students and communicating to students that counseling services are available. The district will provide educational materials on loss, grief and coping mechanisms.

School safety and security will ask “how to handle commemorations, memorial activities and permanent marker establishment, if allowed” and “determine how memorial activities will strike a balance among honoring a loss, resuming school activities and class routines, return to schedules and maintaining hope for the future facilities.”

“We’re not talking about Houston, we’re not talking about Florida. We’re in a pretty good position here in New York state,” he said. “That’s where I am with it, but I know a lot of parents don’t even want to think about sending their kids (to school) because we don’t know the long-term impacts if you were to catch it. There’s a lot of unknowns about it, so it’s hard. I don’t think there’s a good answer.”

**RCSD’s plan announced**

With the survey now closed, the RCSD’s reopening plan has been announced — but it’s important to note that this plan is not final.

“Our initial plans to return to school include three scenarios — in-person learning, digital learning, and a hybrid of a return to brick-and-mortar buildings while some students will still engage in digital learning. No final decisions have been made, as we are working closely and collaboratively with area superintendents on back-to-school plans,” Myers-Small said in the plan.

RCSD is committing to ensuring 6 feet between staff at all times unless there is a reason for a shorter distance. In those instances, staff must wear coverings that cover both the nose and the mouth. The district will provide face coverings and hand hygiene stations for employees. Where soap and water are not available, the district will provide hand sanitizer.

RCSD will not allow sick staffers to stay at work. The document does not say whether or not sick

TIG will also provide “consultation to building-level mental health teams around supports (safety, trauma and anxiety) and resources” and “buildinglevel support as appropriate and related to the death of a student, family member or staff member.”

Because of the unexpected extended school closure, RCSD is planning on addressing educational gaps that might have occurred. The district is doing so by identifying “key priority standards and skills that students must know and be able to demonstrate understanding in order to be successful with the new learning expected.” RCSD will also identify new instructional strategies that will be used in both in-person and distance learning situations.

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