

April 13, 2021

Dear RSU 16 Families, Staff, Community Members, and Students,

On April 5 and April 6, we held two separate Listening Sessions for staff and parents, community members, and students. This provided an opportunity for verbal input about returning to five days a week instruction for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year beginning in May. Our next step was to gather information from parents, students, and employees through an official survey on returning to 5 days a week in-person instruction for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year.

After rewatching the Listening Sessions recordings, reading email correspondence, analyzing all of the official survey data, monitoring and tracking the recent COVID-19 positive cases in our school, community, county and state, weighing the risks of the virus and the social emotional health toll the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our staff, students, schools, families, and district, and the academic, transportation and meal service changes to student and staff schedules and routines - The most prudent decision to make at this time is to stay the course for the remainder of the school year and plan for the full return of all our students in the Fall. We feel with school employees receiving the vaccine and vaccines being available for all Mainers 16 years and older, the conditions and environment in the Fall will allow us to have a fresh start with the new school year, avoiding the major disruptions to students, families, schools and communities, this kind of decision would involve. Furthermore, we will be asking the principals of each school to immediately evaluate expanding each school's cohort C program, by identifying those students in the greatest academic risk and invite them into cohort C, thus expanding teacher contact time for those students with the greatest need. Additionally, the VL5 program will continue without any disruptions for the remainder of this current school year.

It is important to note that during this process everyone's opinion was heard and considered when we made this decision, and while you may or may not agree with or might be disappointed or relieved with this recommendation, please know that RSU 16 is fully committed to returning to full-time five days a week in-person instruction, for the coming school year starting on September 1, 2021.

On Thursday, April 15, 2021 we will ask the RSU 16 School Board to approve the Superintendent's recommendation to stay in the hybrid model of education for the remainder of this current school year, and to approve the return to full-time five days a week for the 2021-2022 school year, pending approval of a plan to return to five days a week in-person instruction that will be presented in August 2021. Please know this decision was not easy and will no doubt be scrutinized, but the number one responsibility of the leaders of RSU 16 is to provide the safest educational environment possible for all our students and staff. In our opinion, at this time, this decision does exactly that.

Sincerely,

Ken and Amy