

August 6, 2021

Dear Staff, Families, and Community Members,

Summer School Update

We have concluded our summer schools at all three levels. A total of 215 students participated in summer school. The following is the breakdown of students served: PreK-2 - 81 students, Grades 3-5 - 15 students, Grades 6-8 - 43 students, Grades 9-12 - 76 students.

Masking was optional and we did pilot pooled testing. Our Health Service staff ran 16 negative pools. We had zero known COVID-19 cases.

Thank you to the summer school coordinators: Caroline Peinado, Patrick Flynn, Sam Chatto, Shawn Vincent, Valerie Young, and Holly Day. Thank you to our transportation department and food service department for ensuring each day started with a smile and a full belly.

Fall 2021 (5 days a week)

Our full recommended Return to School Plan will be emailed in a separate email today, August 6. It will be posted on our website and Facebook page. August 9 is the School Board meeting at Poland Regional High School auditorium at 6:30PM to approve the Return to School Plan.

This plan was developed with the overarching goal of providing engaging and rigorous instruction to all RSU 16 students.

- RSU 16 believes strongly that the **best instructional environment for students to learn is offered in our classrooms.**
- We are planning for all schools across grades PreK-12 to open with 5 days a week of instruction (4 half days as usual for our PreK program) for all students following our normal school hours per the [approved calendar](#).
- RSU 16 will be offering a fully remote learning program (ReeL) to only those students in **K-6** who are determined to be medically unable to attend school in person due to the risk of exposure to COVID 19 because a vaccine is not yet available for children age 2-11. RSU 16's remote learning program will only last the 2021 - 2022 school year. It will not extend beyond that.
- We will continue to follow all current and future Maine Department of Education and Maine Center Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance by updating our Return to School plan.
- Physical distancing of 3 feet is strongly recommended when possible for PreK-12 schools and adult education programs.
- Schools will be strongly encouraged to participate in the pooled testing program to protect those students for whom a COVID-19 vaccine has not yet been authorized. RSU 16 will participate in pooled testing in the fall. More details about pooled testing, including how parents give consent, will be in future updates.
- We will continue our social-emotional, academic and instructional focus for accelerated student learning, with hiring 7.5 additional staff using ESSER 3 funds. Also, given we are unable to predict the future, we want to make sure we continue to be prepared to meet whatever changing conditions may occur until we are sure the pandemic is finally over.
- The State of Maine will follow the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (U.S. CDC)

updated [face covering guidance](#), which **recommends** that: all people, regardless of vaccination status, wear face coverings in indoor, public settings in areas with “substantial” or “high” levels of community transmission ([map](#) to show transmission); and all teachers, staff, and students in K-12 schools wear face coverings, regardless of vaccination status or community transmission level. Consistent with Maine’s recent approach to COVID-19-related policy and the expiration of the State of Civil Emergency, these changes are recommendations, not requirements.

- Parents/Families/Caregivers may choose when and where their child(ren) wears a face mask in school buildings. Likewise, RSU 16 staff may choose when and where they wear a face mask. To err on the side of caution, RSU 16 strongly recommends that those unvaccinated wear a face mask.
- Per the US CDC [order](#) related to transportation, **all people** on public or private school-provided transport, including buses and vans, are required to wear a mask regardless of vaccination status. [How to Wear and Take Off Your Mask](#) and [Your Guide to Masks](#)
- Vaccinated staff or students who are deemed a close contact to a positive case and who are asymptomatic (showing no symptoms) are not required to quarantine. Please make sure your vaccination record is on file with the school nurse.
- We anticipate that our youngest students, ages 4-11, will not have access to approved COVID-19 vaccine(s) until Fall.
- The Maine CDC’s Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for responding to COVID-19 cases in schools will continue to be required for schools to follow. As updates are made, we will notify the community at large and the updated document will be available on the same website, [found here](#).
- Under the Department of Health and Human Services Declaration of Public Health Emergency (July 28), RSU 16 will comply with the requirement for school administrative units to report the rates of COVID-19 vaccination among school staff serving students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12.

Masking Survey Results

On Friday, July 30 RSU 16 sent a masking survey intended to gather additional data on how staff, parents/caregivers, students, and community members are feeling about mask wearing in RSU 16 buildings. The instructions directed to complete the survey once unless you are employed and also a parent in RSU 16.

The survey had 1,232 responses. The following percentages selected each statement.

20.2% or 249 responses: I believe that masks in schools should be mandatory at all times for vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

13.5% or 166 responses: I believe that masks in schools should be mandatory at all times for unvaccinated people.

56.4% or 695 responses: I believe that masks in schools should be optional at all times for vaccinated and unvaccinated people.

9.9% or 122 responses: I believe that masks in schools should be optional at all times for vaccinated people.

862 identified as "parent/guardian/caregiver of RSU 16 student" which brought them to this question:

If masks are required in RSU 16 schools, then your children will:

72.9% or 628 Attend in-person instruction

9.6% or 83 Homeschool

17.5% or 151 Seek out other options (ReeL program, Superintendent agreement, private school, etc)

If masks are NOT required in RSU 16 schools, then your children will:

92% or 793 Attend in-person instruction

3.1% or 27 Homeschool

4.9% or 42 Seek out other options (ReeL program, Superintendent agreement, private school, etc)

Save the Dates

Our final summer Family, Community, and Staff Update will be published on August 20.

August 9 is the School Board meeting at Poland Regional High School auditorium at 6:30PM to approve the Return to School Plan. This is an in-person meeting with no option to join remotely. Masks are strongly recommended for those unvaccinated.

ReeL referral forms are due to the school principal by August 10, 2021. A referral for consideration will not be accepted after the deadline.

Transportation

An electronic form was sent to all families on July 30th. Transportation will **only** be provided for students whose families reply using this form to opt-in to transportation by close of **business today, August 6th**.

For those families who opt into transportation and who also want their children's bus stop to be located someplace other than at their residence, Daycare/Alternate Transportation Request Forms are available from school offices and from our transportation director, Fred Barlow (fbarlow@rsu16.org). If you choose to return this hard-copy form, it must be received by close of business today, August 6th, to enable the different daycare/alternate bus stop to begin on the first day of classes. All Daycare/Alternate Transportation forms from previous school years have expired.

Pooled Testing

What is pooled testing?

Pooling can test 25 people using one test. All students in a class, pod, or cohort swab their own noses and place their swabs in a single tube (that's the pooling step). The samples in that tube are then run as a single sample, using one test. [See it in action here.](#)

RSU 16's Medical Advisor Dr. Nathan Raby explains, "I strongly recommend that every family consider giving consent for their child to participate in pooled COVID testing. The test allows us to "pool" one combined sample from all participating children in a classroom. This single "pooled" sample will allow us to screen multiple participants for COVID-19 at once. If this test comes back positive, a rapid antigen test is done on all participating children in that classroom. Three outcomes are possible for the children in this classroom setting.

If a participating child's rapid antigen test comes back positive, they have a COVID-19 diagnosis and they will need to quarantine based on current CDC recommendations.

If a participating child's rapid antigen test comes back negative, they are able to continue in-person classroom instruction assuming they do not develop symptoms of COVID-19.

Those children NOT participating in pooled covid testing will ALL need to quarantine if any child in their classroom is determined to be COVID-19 positive from the rapid antigen tests performed after the positive pooled COVID-19 test.

For those parents concerned about a consistent schedule/routine for their child, it makes the most sense to participate to avoid virtual learning for their child in the event of a positive case in their classroom.

Pooled testing allows us to more accurately get a sense of how COVID-19 is spreading within and outside of our school (the prevalence of disease in our RSU). It allows us to be proactive in keeping our children safe instead of reactive to symptomatic children who come down with COVID-19. This type of testing is easy and an integral part of RSU 16's plan to keep our children as safe as possible for our 2021-2022 academic school year."

Why are we asking all families to complete the Meal Application Form if meals are no charge?

The family income data provided by the application informs key funding for school resources. This includes school meal reimbursements, funding for Title I programs, funding and resources for afterschool programs, State subsidy, funding for special education, teacher loan forgiveness.

How can I complete the Meal Benefit Application? The **COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL** application is available to print, complete and return to your school or you can complete the online form at www.SchoolLunchApp.com. If you have difficulty accessing either of these methods, the form can also be sent home with a student...just contact your school's office to make the request. If you have any questions please contact Ellen Dore, RSU 16 Food Service Director, edore@rsu16.org, 207-998-5400 ext 107.

Sincerely,
Ken Healey and Amy Hediger