



# Regional School Unit No. 18

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RSU 18 Staff, Students and Parents,

After seven days of school being in session, I already know that with the dedication and talent of our amazing staff and the cooperation from our students and their families, we can and will be successful this year. I have spoken or emailed with many of you over the past two weeks and the opinions on a few specific safety protocols (namely masking) vary greatly. I appreciate all of you who have reached out to me, and I respect the different opinions that I hear.

What I am asking you to do is: focus on our goal of keeping our students in school. Whether you like the masking rule or not, whether you think it is helping curb the spread of COVID-19 or not, it is helping us meet the goal of keeping students in school. Since school has started, we have had 10 instances where a person has been in school then found out they were positive for COVID-19. In each case we have done our contact tracing to determine who we must quarantine. Even though we have identified over 65 students who have been identified as close contacts, less than 25% of them have had to quarantine and miss school. The times when we do have to quarantine students have been either from being a close contact at lunch or after school during events when masks are not worn, and distancing requirements have not been met.

We are keeping our students in school as much as we possibly can.

We are tracking our own district data, and we are regularly reviewing data from the CDC. I want our schools to be back to normal. As a rule, our district always tries to respect parents' rights to make decision about their children. But in the last two years the same goals have been used to make decisions: 1. Keep our students in school to provide them with the education they need and deserve and 2. Keep our students and staff safe. Sticking to these guiding principles has helped our district be one of the most successful in the state.

A couple popular questions this past week:

“Why can't masking be a parent's choice? If their child is a close contact without a mask, they will accept the quarantine. If the parent chooses to have their child wear a mask, then that child will not have to quarantine.” This is a great question. The answer: If we allow parents to have this choice, then we must quarantine all close contacts, even if they are wearing a mask. So, if we want to keep our students in school, we must have the universal masking rule in place.

“When will our district consider changing this practice?” Another great question. If the CDC / DOE gives us flexibility of giving parents the option, we would consider this. Or if we reach a time when the number of students who would be forced to quarantine decreases significantly, we would also consider making a change. I know people would prefer a timeline, but I can't give you that right now.

We are better together. That means having everyone in school, and it also means everyone working together to support the entire RSU 18 community. We have had a great start to the school year, thank you all!