

Superintendent's School Reopening Message 8-5-2020

Dear Captain Isaac Paine Families,

Thank you all for your feedback and the thoughtful responses to our evolving School Reopening Plan. The first guiding principle in the planning process continues to be ensuring the health and safety for our students and the entire educational community, while concurrently serving all students in high quality, rigorous, equitable, and personalized learning environments. The information upon which our plan is built continues to evolve. We thank you for your ongoing flexibility as we continue to refine our plans based on new information. For example, revised state guidance now requires all children to wear masks in school.

Parental Choice

During a statewide conversation with Superintendents, the Governor's Office, and the RI Department of Education, we shared an idea that came up internally and during a parent forum about offering choice to our families on how to return to school next year. The school committee discussed this idea on Tuesday, August 4th. The idea was well received by school committee members, state officials, and a number of other districts.

Four years ago Captain Isaac Paine Elementary School was one of two schools in RI to receive a Lighthouse Grant to advance personalization. Similarly, this past Spring Ponaganset High School was one of two high schools in RI to receive an XQ+RI Implementation Grant to rethink our high school. A main component of our grant is to personalize education for all students. Similarly, we are trying to personalize our approach to reopening schools to the extent possible for our families and students. The family survey we conducted received 950 responses. Based on the information available at the time of the survey our families expressed the following preferences:

- 36.05% want 100% in-person (with restricted movement, face masks, and as much distancing as possible);
- 44.62% want a hybrid model (50% or 25%) alternating between in-person and distance learning;
- 17.22% want 100% distance learning (with some changes -a structured daily schedule, structured lessons, etc.; and
- 2.11% want to homeschool their child/children.

In order to meet individual student and family needs in Foster and Foster-Glocester Schools we plan to offer options for families to exercise choice about how their children return to schools for 2020-2021 - to the extent it is safely possible within CDC, RIDE, and RIDOH guidelines. We will offer options for:

- 100% in-person learning groups (five days a week);
- hybrid learning groups (students rotate between in person and virtual learning every 2 days); and
- 100% virtual learning groups (five days a week)

Note: We are offering the option to select a hybrid learning experience because members of our community expressed strong interest in a hybrid model on the family survey. If the state requires students to participate in 100% full in-person learning or 100% virtual learning, we will contract families who select hybrid learning to select one of the state approved options.

Mandatory In-Person, Hybrid, Virtual Registration Process

Families will need to explicitly register for 100% full in-person, hybrid learning, or 100% full virtual learning through an online registration process.

Links to the registration page and additional background information are at the bottom of this document.

As stated above, our first guiding principle in the planning process continues to be ensuring the health and safety for our students and the entire educational community while concurrently serving all students in high quality, rigorous, equitable, and personalized learning environments. It is important to note that if 100% of our students chose full in-person learning every day then we will not be able to maintain 6' feet of social distance between students. Current state guidance does permit less than 6' of distance when students are wearing masks. We hope to honor the choices made by individual families; however, we cannot guarantee that we can if too many families elect full in-person learning every day.

Mandatory Opt-In Transportation Registration Process

As we continue the planning for the safe reopening of school on August 31, 2020 we are striving to comply with state and federal transportation guidance. This guidance requires social distancing on buses, every student to wear a mask at all times, and students to sit in assigned seats that all face forward. These guidance documents limit the number of students who may ride a school bus at one time. The state also recommends that parents make arrangements to drive their children to school (potentially arranging carpools), or to pursue other options.

Parents of eligible students, who know they NEED a school bus, must OPT-IN for transportation for the school year. This will help our bus companies plan more precise bus routes. If parents/guardians do not register for bus transportation, those students will NOT be included on the bus rosters to allow for more efficient and accurate planning of routes.

Links to the registration page and additional background information are at the bottom of this document.

Table 1 below illustrates how the application of family choice might work in a perfect scenario. With relatively equal balancing among the three options, all families will be able to select their primary choice and student enrollment on any given day would allow for maximum social distancing.

Table 1

Days of the Week	Student Enrollment for In-Person Learning (25% total)	Student Enrollment for Hybrid Learning (50% Total) (Group A = 25%) (Group B = 25%)		Student Enrollment for Virtual Learning (25% Total)	Total Students in School
Tuesday / Wednesday	25% In-person	Group A = 25% In-Person	Group B = 25% Virtual	25% Virtual	50% In-Person
Thursday / Friday	25% In-person	Group A = 25% Virtual	Group B = 25% In-Person	25% Virtual	50% In-Person

Table 2 below illustrates how the application of family choice might work in a less desirable scenario. With large disparities among the three options student enrollment on any given day would not allow for maximum social distancing and may result in parents not receiving their primary choice.

Table 2

Days of the Week	Student Enrollment for In-Person Learning (60% total)	Student Enrollment for Hybrid Learning (30% Total) (Group A = 15%) (Group B = 15%)		Student Enrollment for Virtual Learning (25% Total)	Total Students in School
Tuesday / Wednesday	60% In-person	Group A = 15% In-Person	Group B = 15% Virtual	10% Virtual	75% In-Person
Thursday / Friday	60% In-person	Group A = 15% Virtual	Group B = 15% In-Person	10% Virtual	75% In-Person

Trying to offer this level of family choice does present some notable logistical and organizational challenges, but it is a challenge we are willing to undertake with the intent of providing the best learning experience possible for our students. Typically, under normal circumstances, we spend the summer months planning for the smooth opening of school. Opening schools with three separate options with only a few weeks of planning will be challenging at best. If the planning is too challenging, or the numbers do not balance appropriately, we will let you know and adjust accordingly.

Again, we hope to accommodate each family's preferred choice for returning to school. However, if more families select options that would result in more students being present on a given day than we can safely accommodate while adhering to safety

protocols and social distancing guidelines then we will work with families to schedule them into a hybrid or virtual option.

We think it makes sense logistically to structure the reopening of schools for the 2020-21 school year in phases. This is the same strategy that was used at the state level to reopen Rhode Island. Teachers spend time at the start of each year establishing classroom rituals and routines e.g., lining students up for the bathroom, moving students to the rug, dismissal procedures, etc. This year teachers, staff, and students will need to learn procedures for social distancing, walking in corridors, eating lunch, participating in physical education, etc. It is far easier to ensure that students understand and master these protocols when teaching them to a group of 10-12 students than it is to do so with a group of 20-24 students. This is one of the reasons we do not believe it is prudent to have 100% of the students return on day one.

Closing Thoughts

On August 31st, and throughout the school year, Foster and Foster-Glocester Regional Schools will implement the school reopening model determined appropriate by the RI Department of Education and the Rhode Island Department of Health. Ultimately, the state will determine, based on a variety of metrics, in what ways schools will reopen and stay open during the 2020-2021 school year. It remains quite possible that we will start the school year with full or partial in-person learning, and at some point, the state may declare that all schools shift to 100% virtual learning if state-derived metrics indicate this shift is necessary.

I would like to emphasize that the learning environment in 2020-2021 will **not** be the same as it was last fall for our students, staff, teachers and families. Students who are engaged in 100% virtual learning and hybrid learning will not have the same connection to other students, teachers, staff, and instruction that made our school community a family. Similarly, students engaged in 100% in-person learning will not be returning to the schools identical to the ones they left. Students will not be able to gather in large groups, desks will be socially distanced in classrooms, and **everyone will be required to wear masks**. Similarly, students will sit 6' apart in the cafeteria instead of gathering together in groups. These are not the learning experiences we would purposefully design for our student; however, they are the experiences we will need to implement for the next 3, 6, or 9 months while our state and country grapple with COVID-19.

We ask our parents/guardians to help prepare your children for the reality that schools and classrooms across the country will look and feel different for some or all of the 2020-2021 school year. The first time students wear a mask for more than six hours should not be the first day of school. We suggest parents/guardians have children who do not have underlying medical conditions practice wearing a mask for periods of time and gradually increase that time as the school year approaches.

Regardless of the option selected by families, our teachers, staff, and administrators will continue to work tirelessly to support students in their learning. As the year progresses,

we will evaluate our implementation plans and make adjustments to protocols and procedures when possible. We ask for your continued patience and partnership through the summer and next year as we work through glitches that will undoubtedly occur as we roll out and refine a whole new model of education for our students and families.

Sincerely,
Michael Barnes,
Superintendent

Registration Form for Captain Isaac Paine School

To access the registration form for Transportation, 100% in-person learning, hybrid learning, or virtual learning please click

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeIK1dJ7aNYFaW39nYPYOPCAJpmcQnAM3zne3qwqrbz19L2Fg/viewform>