

Ridgewood Elementary Schools Phase 1 Update

October 20, 2020

Dear Elementary School Families,

We are in our sixth week of school and are certainly celebrating a successful start. Watching our students develop into a rhythm of routine, learning new concepts and making new friends along the way, the entire elementary staff feels proud of what we have achieved through the implementation of our current hybrid and fully remote models! The elementary principals have the benefit of seeing the successes firsthand (coupled with the challenge of working through the hiccups as they arise), and want to share some updated information with you. In addition, there are common questions that are echoed across the schools that we will also address below. As always, thank you for your support as we work hard to continue to deliver an excellent education to the students of RPS during an epic event that is truly requiring everyone to rise to the occasion!

How are the students tolerating wearing their masks?

We have been pleased at how well students have been able to tolerate their masks and how respectful they've been of the rules. Our teachers give them brief mask breaks for snack (usually outside) and perhaps a short break if they're sitting outside, socially distanced, during something like read aloud. We appreciate that our students come with their masks every day!

How can I find out how my child is doing?

Teachers are in the process of setting up their fall parent-teacher goal-setting conferences. These meetings will be held virtually this year. They are always a valuable time for parents and teachers to share information and set goals for the student. Additionally, you are always welcome to reach out to your child's teacher via email, phone, or Google Meet to address any questions or concerns you may have.

Are the students academically behind where they should be?

This question can be answered specifically about your child by his/her teacher, but in general, we are finding that students are meeting benchmarks we typically see at this time of year. Teachers, parents, and administrators had questions last spring about what the fall might be like, but we have been pleased to see where the students entered, academically-speaking, and that we have been able to focus on moving forward with our grade level curricula.

Has the curriculum been changed or slowed down?

Some slight modifications have been made in an effort to respond to any remote learning lag and to meet student needs. Due to the fact that some students are enrolled in different schools, we have emphasized with our teachers how important it is for us to follow pacing guides in each subject area. The pacing guides were created by our Supervisor of Elementary Education and the teachers are following them and planning together in teams. In addition, during in-school days, teachers have 4 solid, uninterrupted hours of instruction with a small group of students. That time is extremely valuable!

My child received Basic Skills Instruction last year. How is that happening this year?

Each school has an Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS) team that has been meeting since September. Teachers and parents begin the process of securing support for students by sharing concerns with the I&RS team. Through I&RS, students can be recommended for Basic Skills Instruction (BSI) and that too is already underway in each of our schools.

What can my child do if he/she finishes work early on at-home days?

Teachers often have extra work that students can do, but most importantly we would love each student to make sure he/she is taking the time to do his/her best work before saying, "I'm done!" This practice is something we work on continually in school and can be frustrating for all parties involved! It is important to share with your child's teacher if he/she tends to finish all the work early. Extra projects and work can be available as well as online tools such as Typing Pals, RAZ Kids, and math facts practice, which are all beneficial. In addition, we are planning to provide a weekly tip for parents to support you while you are supporting your child at home.

Why aren't elementary teachers live streaming their lessons?

We will begin a live streaming pilot on November 9 in one subject area per day at each grade. Prior to that we are ensuring that teachers have the proper equipment and the time necessary to determine which content makes sense to stream to students. We want to make sure it's developmentally appropriate and educationally effective. As an administrative team, we have visited other districts to observe how they are implementing their hybrid and remote models as well as to observe if and how they are using livestream instruction. We know it won't be perfect or easy, so we're trying to weigh the benefits carefully and move forward thoughtfully. Before November 9, you will receive information from us that will specifically address the livestream pilot for our elementary students.

Will students come for a full day soon?

As shared at the Board of Education meeting on October 19, this is not going to happen in the very near future. Most importantly, we want to do everything possible to make sure that our students and staff are healthy and safe. The biggest challenges we face with a full day are introducing lunchtime and taking live specials away from the at-home days in order to provide teachers with their contractual prep time. Given the upcoming holiday / travel season and the risks for spread that might come along with those events, our primary focus is keeping our current model of school intact!

Are there any changes to the day planned for Phase 2 other than possibly changing/extending time?

The six elementary principals have been meeting frequently each week since school opened, talking about Phase 1 implementation and sharing ideas for Phase 2. We have visited other districts to observe their models and we have collected feedback from our own teachers and parents. Among our hopes for Phase 2 is to re-open playgrounds, re-open school libraries for book borrowing, find safe opportunities for learning centers in Grades K-1, and, if the pilot goes well, to find effective opportunities to introduce livestream instruction. We continue to meet weekly and we will make suggestions and changes as needed and as appropriate.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this document. We sincerely hope we have addressed most, if not all, of your questions. We will continue to work towards our common goal of having all students and staff back in school full time. In the meantime, we will do our best to keep everyone safe, happy, and learning!

Sincerely,

The Elementary Principal Team

Mary Ferreri, Caroline Hoffman, Lorna Oates-Santos, Brian Ross, Jean Schoenlank, Paul Semendinger