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Dr. Lesli Myers-Small, Superintendent of Schools
Board of Education, Members
RCSD Central Office
131 West Broad Street
Rochester, New York 14614

July 30, 2020

RE: COVID-19 New York State Ed School Opening Guidelines

This letter reflects our position based upon review of the *Reopening Guidance* submitted to school districts from the New York State Education Department and the *RCSD's Reopening Plan* being submitted to the State.

Surely the safest plan for staff and students is to teach remotely. However, understanding concerns from parents and students who are hoping for some form of In-Person Learning, we see a Hybrid model as the only feasible option given the State requirements for social distancing and the limited building space available. In-Person Learning for *all* students *every day* would be a nightmare to administer, and virtually impossible given transportation constraints, the need for constant and timely disinfection, the cost of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), etc.

Given that the District has decided to submit a preference toward the Hybrid plan, our response is based upon that plan, with the caveat that we will advocate for the safety and well-being of our members no matter which plan is selected or approved.

- The District should use extreme caution when it comes to the issue of requiring staff to physically report to work. The safest approach would be to inform supervisors that, if employees under their supervision can perform work from home, then they should continue to do so. This will lessen the risk of infection due to unnecessary and unwarranted contact.

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- Main offices in schools will need to be modified with plastic barriers to protect clerical staff from potential exposure to the virus, with an adequate number of pens for sign-in logs (and bins designated for dirty and clean bins). Unruly students cannot congregate in offices for clerical staff to supervise. The job of a typical RCSD clerical employee is incredibly demanding, with an increased number of tasks being dumped upon them, all in conjunction with a myriad of interruptions from students, parents, and staff throughout the workday. Many have children of their own and are struggling to make ends meet. The work they perform will be even more critical due to the added responsibility of maintaining records used for contact tracing and increasing communication with parents.
- Attendance Assistants and Home School Assistants provide vital support to students with chronic absenteeism; educating families on emotional support systems. Twenty (20) Home School Assistants in the Attendance department were cut over the past year. Given that families are now dealing with additional issues created by COVID-19, the District will need all hands on deck to keep students who are dealing with social emotional issues engaged in remote or in-person learning.
- The current time frame allotted to clean classrooms with existing custodial staff leaves little time to do anything more than empty the garbage and dust mop the floor. The new requirements include disinfecting tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, railings, phones, keyboards and tablets, faucets and sinks, toilets and restrooms frequently throughout the day. Add to that, routine cleaning of playground and shared athletic equipment, cleaning of school health offices, and the likelihood that students will be eating in the classroom. This will require an untold number of custodial staff trained in the use of disinfectants and an inordinate amount of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Cleaning logs that include the date, time, and scope of the cleaning also need to be maintained. Heating and air conditioning filters require more attention. Plant Maintenance and Custodial staff have been essential to the upkeep of building and grounds during a time of instability.
- Enough cannot be said about the food service workers and truck drivers who have been on the front lines feeding the community throughout the pandemic, including during the hot summer months. Under the NYS guidelines, the District is required to feed enrolled students regardless of whether or not the learning is in-person or remote. Building administrators should comply with instructions set forth by the Department of Food Services and relayed to them by managers and cashiers who are trained in processes and procedures that are rooted in DOH regulations. A Nutritionist is also vital to have on staff in order to handle food allergy concerns.
- Effective delivery of occupational therapy and physical therapy services require therapists to engage with students in close proximity and may involve physical contact. Occupational and Physical Therapists should be provided with face shields and gowns to protect eyes and clothing as students will breathe more heavily while participating in

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physical activities. Appropriate space should be allotted to allow effective delivery of services and to protect students and staff. Uniform procedures need to be followed in each building without deviation.

- School Safety Officers perform difficult tasks that involve direct contact with students. With the elimination of School Resource Officer positions and an increase in responsibility due to COVID-19, School Safety Officers have never been more vital to the safety and well-being of students and staff.
- Never has it been more apparent that the District needs to increase its own transportation fleet and rely less upon outside contractors. There is a shortage of drivers and transportation is having a difficult time getting applicants, with six (6) positions currently vacant.

Members of BENTE/AFSCME Local 2419 have been working throughout the pandemic and have been committed to the RCSD, physically reporting to work during a time when little was known about the pandemic. Originally, the use of masks was not being championed by health officials. But the Union, not knowing what impact the virus had on our workers, insisted upon the District supplying the PPE requested. To the District's credit, the Operations department found a way to provide all workers with masks. Today, masks are a requirement in the State guidelines.

We were there from the beginning, and we will abide by the District's decision to be there if any form of In-Person Learning is required. The RCSD should make the same commitment to the support staff as the support staff have made to the RCSD. While County workers received hazard pay, our members were on the front lines receiving regular pay. They should not feel as though even their regular pay is threatened.

Therefore, please take note of the Union's position with regard to us collectively supporting the plan submitted to the State. The Union will advocate for the District's commitment to:


- Comply with all Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines set forth by New York State
- Provide plastic barriers in locations wherever possible without violating building and/or fire codes, such as main offices and entrances
- Continue to pay support staff throughout the pandemic (we ask for the same commitment we received from both the Superintendent and the Board of Education last year)
- Negotiate with Union leadership any changes to shifts, hours, or work locations so that a fair and uniform process can be established for all workers
- Bargain the impact with Union leadership if additional duties are being contemplated for certain job titles that could result in an increased risk of exposure
- Negotiate with Union leadership any changes to the 2020-2021 school calendar
- Inform all staff of leaves available for those in the high risk category or living with a person in the high risk category

- Help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure social distancing by providing a Bus Attendant on all RCSD owned buses and having them perform temperature checks prior to students entering the bus
- Initiate a Paid Training program for inside and outside personnel to recruit more Bus Drivers and fill available vacancies; pursue streamlined bus driver licensing process in NYS guidelines; stagger bell times so more work can be done in-house
- Enforce the wearing of masks and all other safety guidelines

Finally, we appreciate being afforded the opportunity to participate on the Operations (Mike Schmidt) and Health and Safety (Erin Graupman) Committees, as this has alleviated some of our concerns. It has also made us aware of the hard work that a lot of District employees have put into ensuring the safety of all employees. The committees have been willing to take our opinions into consideration and have modified items at our request. To her credit, Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small has also met with the bargaining units and will continue to meet with us bi-weekly.

We will continue to work through these Committees and through HCI and Labor Relations to address our concerns, but we felt it important that the Leadership of the District understand and appreciate what our members have been doing throughout the pandemic.

Respectfully Submitted,



Daniel DiClemente, President
BENTE/AFSCME Local 2419

“The Support Staff that Supports Students”