

Open Topics Forum Questions and Answers

November 10, 2020

COVID-19-Related Questions - All Levels

Q. Can the District make the week before and or after Thanksgiving and New Year's remote only to prevent undisclosed travel-related COVID transmission? Or two weeks before or after?

A. The District and Board of Education have discussed the possibility, and will continue to evaluate the possibility of doing so based on positive case numbers in the District and community.

Q. What is Rye doing to make full-time schooling happen? It seems like other school districts are able to do this. Why not us?

A. The RCSD is eager to return to full-time schooling when it is safe to do so. Many safety measures have been put in place and are successfully preventing COVID-19 transmission in our schools. We must abide by the six-foot social distancing requirement mandated by the State, and recently reinforced by [County Executive George Latimer](#) in a press statement. The District does not have the space necessary to bring back all students simultaneously while maintaining this six-foot distance. Other Districts have lower enrollment numbers and/or larger buildings, or have moved older students to remote learning to enable other grade levels to return full-time. We continue to explore ways to improve our hybrid model and increase live teaching for students.

Q. Is the biggest impediment to getting back to school the 6 foot distancing requirement?

A. For the RCSD, yes given our significant space limitations.

Q. Can the District consider asking for a 3 foot requirement versus 6 foot distancing requirement as some Long Island schools have done ? Or use physical barriers?

A. The District could ask, but at a recent press conference, [County Executive George Latimer reiterated the importance of six-feet versus three-feet distancing](#), so it seems unlikely to succeed. Physical barriers are not considered by the state to be an acceptable substitute for the six feet of distance.

Q. What progress is being made in using the cafeteria and gym and library for additional classroom space?

A. At the Middle/High School building, the gyms, cafeterias, the Performing Arts Center and Multipurpose Room are all being used at capacity for lunch and classroom space throughout the day. Weather permitting, classes are held outside. At the elementary schools, we are using the larger spaces for instruction and for the delivery of remote classes.

Q. Are permits in process for more space?

A. The District does not have any additional space or alternate facilities available to us at this time. If new space became available for use by the school district, we would be obliged to follow the New York State Education Department approval process which would require architectural drawings and appropriate municipal permits prior to submission for approval. Since we do not have any additional space or

alternate facilities available to us, there is no approval process to follow. If additional space or alternate facilities became available then we would work toward approval.

Q. Is there a plan to get staff and students back to school full time once the 6-foot social distancing requirement and other impediments are removed?

A. Yes, and the District will be ready to implement it quickly.

Q. Will it take extra days to reconfigure the schools when we can return full time?

A. Depending on when we are given the “green light” to return to school, desks will need to be reconfigured and cafeterias at the elementary schools reopened, but there’s no reason to think this couldn’t happen very quickly.

Q. Can there be more in-person instruction?

A. The District is in the process of a discussion about reopening, including offering more in-person instruction. The District will be surveying parents and faculty to explore comfort levels/interest in more in-person time in schools. The District is also holding parent, teacher and student focus groups for the same purpose. The District will use this information to inform decisions about more in-person instruction.

Q. What supports are provided to dual career or single parent families without the resources to supplement hybrid learning? Can the community pitch in to help families in need?

A. The District has been working with our community-based organizations like KIDSPACE, Rye Recreation, and the Rye YMCA to develop options for working families.

Q. When will parent feedback/opinions on the challenges/successes of the hybrid model be solicited?

A. The District is finalizing a survey about reopening that asks for parent feedback on the hybrid model. The District is also holding focus group sessions around the same topic that will solicit feedback. Parents can always send feedback or questions to feedback@ryeschools.org.

Q. What do the remote learning numbers look like for the next quarter. Does this figure mean we can bring some students back for more time in school?

A. At this point in time, it does not appear as if the number of students learning remotely is significant enough to allow more students to return to the building.

Q. How many positive cases, quarantined teachers and staff have there been?

A. The number changes daily. A good resource is the COVID-19 report card website linked [here](#). The District reports positive cases to the State daily and they are visible on the website. As for the number of quarantined teachers/staff, there have been approximately 135 as of December 1.

Q. How can we mitigate the number of teachers required to quarantine in the future?

A. The best way to prevent needing to quarantine faculty/staff are the same protocols you hear often: remaining socially-distanced, mask-wearing, staying home when sick, handwashing, etc. We continually remind both faculty and students of these health protections.

Q. What are the protocols for family members of quarantined students?

A. The Westchester County Department of Health has said that family members of quarantined students do not need to quarantine themselves unless they are exhibiting signs and symptoms of COVID-19. For more information, see number four on the document linked [here](#).

Q. If a student tests positive, and you need to contact trace and quarantine teachers, can't they be tested and return to work after one week of negative per Cuomo's travel rule?

A. Governor Cuomo's travel rule does not apply to quarantine related to exposure to a positive case. The rule for exposure to a positive individual remains a 14-day mandatory quarantine. The CDC has issued new guidance on quarantine; the District is waiting for the New York State DOH to adopt this guidance.

Q. What is the status of the survey and focus groups regarding reopening schools? How can parents participate?

A. The survey will be released shortly via email. Focus groups are taking place throughout December. Individual school parent organizations assisted the District identifying parents for those focus groups.

Q. What is the process for electing hybrid or remote for January?

A. Parents/Guardians should reach out to their school principal if they wish to change their student's status for the next quarter or semester. Otherwise, they need do nothing. Parents must receive a confirmation from the principal to change their status. The High School recently announced a new policy wherein students may attend class remotely on any given day.

Q. When will we have a sense of what the next school year will look like in terms of hybrid versus full time?

A. The District administration and Board sincerely hope that school next year will be full-time. Unfortunately, we are not sure when we will be able to make that determination.

Sports

Q. Will there be varsity ice hockey this year?

A. The District follows the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) guidance about all sports. On November 17, NYSPHSAA announced that the start date for high risk winter sports (basketball, competitive cheer, **ice hockey** and wrestling) will be moved to January 4, 2021. Until authorization is granted by state officials, NYSPHSAA member schools are not permitted to participate in sports determined to be high risk by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH).

High School

Q. Is it possible to get Wednesday back for instruction? Alternating Wednesdays?

A. The District is in the process of a discussion about reopening, including offering more in-person instruction. The District will be surveying parents and faculty to explore comfort levels/interest in more in-person time in schools. The District is also holding parent focus groups for the same purpose. The District will use this information to inform decisions about more in-person instruction.

Q. Has the 60 hour community service requirement at the High School been relaxed this year?

A. Students are still required to fulfill 60 hours of community service over the course of their high school career for graduation but it is not credit-bearing.

Q. PE Curriculum this year seems project-heavy - why is this the case? Can this be lessened?

A. There are challenges to certain courses in remote learning and we are always in search of new and better curricula.

Q. What are the plans for Graduation? Prom?

A. The District is working with the High School Leadership Council to plan for senior celebrations for the spring. We very much hope to be able to celebrate our seniors and their accomplishments in person.

Middle School

Q. Why is the Middle School closed for two weeks?

A. The Middle School was closed due to the number of faculty and staff required to quarantine after exposure to a COVID-19 positive individual. There were not enough faculty and staff to safely open the building for students.

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Q. Is there a plan for improving the guidance department? Guidance counselors are not able to help students select courses at the Middle School level.

A. At the Middle School, the counselors meet with all students (6-8) in a classroom session. They review all course selections and walk them through the scheduling process. Students have a week to review their course selections with their parents. Parents are notified in advance of this process.

This year, the Middle School is currently developing a new scheduling process. We plan on creating a Google Form and a corresponding video for students/parents to choose their courses. The school will begin this process in January.

Elementary Schools

Q. Why are some Districts (ex, Scarsdale) able to return kids K-2 to full time, and not us?

A. Scarsdale opted to return K-2 students to in-person schooling by making high school students fully-remote, thus freeing up the physical space needed. The administration and Board of Education do not believe that to be an appropriate approach here in Rye.

Q. Can Wednesdays be in-person?

A. The District is in the process of a discussion about reopening, including offering more in-person instruction. The District will be surveying parents and faculty to explore comfort levels/interest in more in-person time in schools. The District is holding parent focus groups for the same purpose. The District will use this information to inform decisions about more in-person instruction.

Q. If elementary schools have to go remote for two weeks, what will instruction look like? Will it be the same - synchronous learning for 2 hours and 20 minutes? Are teachers prepared?

A. Teachers are prepared to move to remote learning at short notice. A necessary shift to remote learning for a two week period would follow the regular hybrid schule virtually.

Q. Why didn't the District disclose that elementary school kids with specials that meet twice in a cycle can have an asynchronous class for one of those sessions?

A. That information is contained in the Remote Learning Guidelines document the District distributed to parents and faculty.

Q. Can supplemental materials for online learning be distributed? Visuals and manipulatives?

A. Our teachers distribute supplemental materials to families when needed or requested. Feel free to contact your child's teacher for any supplemental materials.

Q. Can we extend the day for more time in school?

A. The District is in the process of a discussion about reopening, including offering more in-person instruction. The District will be surveying parents and faculty to explore comfort levels/interest in more in-person time in schools. The District is also holding parent focus groups for the same purpose. The District will use this information to inform decisions about more in-person instruction.

Q. Are there any creative ideas for bringing back K-2 or K-5 students?

A. Other Districts have been able to bring more young students back into the classroom by moving older students remote to free up physical space. The Administration and Board do not believe this is an appropriate solution in Rye. The District is considering a number of potential options for providing more in-school time for elementary school students.

Q. What is the District's policy about Chromebook use during in-class time? It's surprising to see kids using Chromebooks when face to face time is so valuable.

A. Teachers do try to limit the amount of time that students spend on Chromebooks when they are in the classroom, but sometimes it can't be avoided if the class is working on a project that requires an app or other technology.

Curriculum-related Questions

Q. What percentage of curriculum does RCSD project to cover this year?

A. We are carefully monitoring our pacing, and meet regularly with our teachers, staff developers, and administrators. We have made light adjustments in each unit to ensure the most important aspects of each are taught. We are confident that we will make good progress in our curriculum this year.

Q. What are the plans to catch children up to grade level next year?

A. We are aiming for students to be ready for the next grade level at the end of the year. We are providing on-going assessments and reviews of our units to ensure that we are meeting the critical NY State Standards so that students will be ready. For students who require additional support to meet these goals, we offer academic support. The elementary support is being done in the classroom, while we gather more information and reassess students to determine the potential for pull-out services. Students requiring additional support attend literacy or math labs at the MS and the Tutoring Center or Learning Center at the HS.

Q. How are we addressing the introduction of the Haskins Lab literacy approach and the integration of this approach to already-existing literacy strategies?

A. The first year of our partnership with the Haskins Lab is focused on Tier 3 intervention services. AIS teachers are currently working with Haskins consultants on developing a deep understanding of the intervention program while implementing it with a small number of monitored students. The next phase of the work will be clarified with our Haskins partners as we progress through the school year.

Q. Will the District consider adding a Level 4 ASL class?

A. The District is evaluating all of its world language offerings at all levels, including ASL, and will consider modifying courses based on student needs and staffing availability.

Special Education Questions

Q. What is the plan to help students succeed in High School-level co-taught classes this year? In following years?

A. At the High School, we strongly believe that an inclusive setting represents our best opportunity to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. This year, we are implementing a new curriculum and approach in our ESCs which is designed to more closely support students' learning in their core classes. The Pupil Personnel Services department has also been actively monitoring students and working to modify interventions for individual students as needed.

Q. Is there a plan to expand co-taught classes in the High School?

A. We are committed to continual improvement of our Integrated Co Teaching Program at Rye High School. Depending on the needs of our student population, we will certainly modify the Integrated Co teaching offerings.

Q. Why was a phonics program selected without considering SPEC when ICT is in use at elementary schools?

A. The selection of the District's elementary word study programming was made by the District Literacy Committee which incorporated general and special education teachers, staff developers, parents and administrators. The needs of all students were taken into consideration as part of the review and selection process. We also know that not every child fits the mold for a particular program and that skill level of teachers and knowledge of effective interventions is critically important in ensuring success for all of our students. Our new partnership with the Haskins Lab is helping to improve the skill and knowledge base of our teachers.

Q. Is there a plan for improving the High School guidance department? The guidance counselors serve to help traditional students get admitted to college, what about non-traditional students?

A. Shift would be a more appropriate description than improvement. The counseling department has done a phenomenal job at what it had been tasked with doing. We have already begun making adjustments which will expand their focus beyond college-admissions counseling toward an approach more consistent with NYSSCA's Comprehensive Model for school counseling.

Q. Is there a plan to improve tools such as the Spider Web to assist students in selecting courses?

A. While we are not familiar with the use of Spider Web, we will continue to work to enhance the options available for course selection through PowerSchool and are working with the counselors and Department Coordinators at the High School to help enhance student understanding of the options available to them and how to select the best courses for each student. Thank you for the suggested resource.

Q. Is there a plan to revamp the Managing Your Future course to accommodate all students?

A. The curriculum for Managing Your Future is currently being rewritten. The approval to rewrite the course occurred last spring at Curriculum Council.

Q. Will the District add a transition counselor at the High School?

A. Supporting students in their transition from 8th to 9th grade has already been identified as an area for clear improvement. Beginning with the incoming class of 2025, there will be an articulated transition program from spring of their 8th grade year, through the entire first semester of the freshman year. Within the structured continuum we are designing, we do not feel that a dedicated transition counselor would be the best approach.

Q. Is there a possibility of hiring a guidance counselor who can serve students who receive special education services, or to train staff to advise students on test accommodations, options for schools, other future opportunities?

A. Separating all students with disabilities and grouping them on a self-contained caseload runs directly counter to our belief in the benefit of an inclusive educational framework. Changes have already been made to ensure that counselors will have better access to the information necessary to support our designated students and that they will be able to actively participate in all CSE meetings. As part of our pivot toward the Comprehensive Model described earlier, training will also be provided in post-secondary opportunities for students with special needs.

Q. Would the District consider offering a conversational class in Spanish/French/Mandarin for students with language-based disabilities?

A. The District is evaluating all of its world language offerings at all levels, including ASL, and will consider modifying courses based on student needs and staffing availability.

Q. Would the District consider creating an Inclusion for Special Education task force, similar to the new task force on race?

A. Not too long ago, the District had a special education task force that conducted research and made recommendations for improving special education programming in the school district. As a result the District has implemented and continues to expand Integrated Co Teaching at the elementary level. Identified areas of improvement are still being followed and updates are provided periodically to the BOE. The Race, Inclusivity and Community Task Force is not just focused on race, but on inclusivity for all in the Rye City School District, including students with disabilities.

Race Inclusivity and Community Task Force

Q. Does the BOE/Administration believe that 'solving for outcome,' e.g. equality of outcome is an important part of its mandate?

A. The Race, Inclusivity and Community Task Force is composed of volunteer representatives from across the Rye community. Students, alumni, faculty, staff, and community members are working to identify what needs to change in our school community in order to ensure equitable, inclusive experiences for all who walk through the doors of our schools. The work of the task force for this year is gathering data. There is no mandate beyond gathering data and developing an understanding of the student experience in our schools.

Q. Will members of the RIC Task Force be nominated annually?

A. Task force members are volunteers; they are not nominated. At some point there will be a call for new members and that will be communicated publicly.

Q. After reading about the Steinhart Center at NYU, it seems clear that they have strong and biased opinions. Why would the Board choose to pay for and receive biased advice?

A. The Steinhart School's Metropolitan Center is a highly-regarded organization in the field of race equity. They work with a number of area school districts, including 15 in Westchester County. The District chose to work with it based on the good experience and opinion of other school districts and their boards of education.

In 2018, The New York State Education Department (NYSED) convened a panel of experts and adopted a guidance document called a "Framework for Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education," linked here:

<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf>

The Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center, Dr. David Kirkland, who is also Steinhart's Vice Dean of Equity, Belonging, and Community Action, led the work of creating the framework on behalf of the NYSED. More about the panel and the development of the framework can be found here:

<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework>

For more information on the Metropolitan Center, click here:

[Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools](#)

For more information on Dr. David Kirkland, click here:

[Dr. David Kirkland](#)

Q. How much money has been paid to the Steinhardt Center to date, how much is budgeted to be paid, and can the contract be terminated on short notice without penalty?

A. The District's contract with the Steinhardt Center can be found on the publicly accessible [BoardDocs website](#). The total contract amount is \$31,125. The contract can be terminated by either party with 60 days notice.

Q. Why was the Race Inclusivity and Community task force created?

A. The task force was created in response to a large number of posts to an Instagram account called BIPOCatRye that detailed alleged instances of mistreatment and racism at Rye City School District Schools. The school district is legally required to research and address all such allegations.

In 2018, NYSED convened a panel of experts and adopted a culturally responsive guidance document called a "Framework for Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education," linked here:

<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf>

More about the panel and the development of the framework can be found here:

<http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework>

In June, the Board of Education decided to address the issues raised by the BIPOCatrye page by creating a "Race, Inclusivity, and Community Task Force" to begin and pursue a conversation that explores the issues of racism, inclusivity, equity, and community in our schools. The task force consists of students/alumni, faculty, and community members.

Q. How will the RCSD assure transparency in the Task Force's collecting and analyzing data?

A. The District will share the data; it will be presented and discussed publicly.

Q. Will racial attacks propagated on white students be reported and will they be protected from such attacks?

A. Yes. All District students are entitled to the same protections, regardless of color, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Q. When will the RCSD discuss the book, *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo?

A. There is no planned book talk. The book was shared with all faculty and staff at the start of the school knowing that we would be working toward discussions about race and inclusivity in the Rye City Schools. On October 27, 2020, the Board of Education held a book talk about the book *How to be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi. To watch the video, click [here](#). The discussion begins at 1:14.

