

Clark, Marlene

From: Dr. Michael Shibley and Michael Cuneo <noreply@rockfordschools.org>
Sent: Friday, September 11, 2020 12:45 PM
To: Clark, Marlene
Subject: Important Transportation Information

Dear Rockford Parents,

Transportation has been working toward the first day of face-to-face learning and, like everyone, we have had to make many adjustments to our operations. Safely transporting students is one of the most important things we do so, while these changes may not affect everyone, we want you to be aware of them. Those who have been directly impacted have already been notified, but we feel it is important for all parents to have this information.

Driver shortage. The ongoing shortage of bus drivers throughout the country affects most if not all school districts. We are always looking to be as efficient as possible, but the shortage has required us to dig even deeper to operate with the limited resources we have. This sometimes results in consolidating or eliminating bus routes. The challenges are further increased due to the requirement to have fewer students on buses to allow for distancing. We will appreciate your patience, understanding, and flexibility more than ever this year.

We are currently in the process of hiring and certifying new drivers so hope to have them join our team within the next few weeks. If you are interested or know of anyone interested in helping us transport our precious cargo, we would love to connect with you. Please contact the Transportation Department at 616-863-6328. RPS will facilitate and cover the cost of training.

Possible last-minute route changes/cancellations. All RPS staff, including bus drivers, are required to conduct a wellness self-screening before reporting to work. Any staff experiencing symptoms of illness must stay home. Because of the ongoing driver shortage, this may unfortunately result in some last-minute route changes or cancellations. In the event your child's route is impacted, we will notify you via text message and email by 5:30 AM for secondary students and 6:30 AM for elementary students.

Bus registration. Several weeks ago, we notified families of the need to register students who will be riding on the bus. This was necessary for route planning so we can assure we are meeting the new safety requirements set forth in the Governor's Roadmap. For contact tracing purposes, students may be assigned to one route only and their pick-up/drop-off locations must be the same.

Transportation delays. First and foremost, you have our assurance that students will not be penalized for being late to school. Getting students to school this year will be a very fluid process and your child's principal will extend grace for delays as a result of late or canceled routes.

Parent transportation. We anticipate an increase in the number of parents choosing to drive their children to and from school. If you choose to do this, please use the designated pick-up and drop-off area at your child's school. Even if there are long lines, please be patient and use

the designated area as these have been designed for safety. Again, students will not be penalized for arriving late to school.

New walk zones. We have had to temporarily expand some of the walk zones for students attending schools where walking is a safe option. Families affected have been notified and we hope to resume transportation for those students as soon as we are able to expand our team of drivers.

Staggered pick-up times. This measure only affects certain routes and those families have already been notified. However, it is possible we may need to expand this to other areas, so we want to make you aware in the event that happens.

We have had to stagger pick-up times on some of our more populated routes in order to limit the number of students on buses. Students on these routes will be assigned one of two pick-up times.

For example at the secondary level, buses will enter a neighborhood, pick up middle school students, and drop them off at the middle school. The bus will then return to the neighborhood to pick up 9th-12th grade students and transport them to the Freshman Center and High School. Buses will be marked to indicate whether they are picking up middle (grades 6-8) or high school (grades 9-12) students so students know if they are to enter the bus.

A similar procedure will be used for some of the elementary schools. Students impacted will be assigned Load 1 or 2. One bus may go out, pick up students in a neighborhood, take them to their school, then return to pick up the next group. Impacted families will be provided information so students will know what to do.

Bus safety. Ensuring a safe fleet of buses has been a longstanding priority for our district. Additional safety protocols relative to distancing, use of hand sanitizer and face coverings, no food or gum, and additional cleaning protocols and sanitization of buses will provide additional safety for riders. Please remind your children of these new measures, which are also outlined in the videos sent to families.

This is a lot of information but we feel it is important for you to understand the full picture when we ask for your patience. Although there are limits to what we can do this year, there is nothing more important than the safety of your children. You have our assurance that we will do our best to accommodate families despite these unusual challenges.

Sincerely,

Michael S. Shibler, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Michael A. Cuneo
Assistant Superintendent of Finance

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