



EXPLORE. DISCOVER. THRIVE.

Mill River

Unified Union School District

October 9, 2020

Mill River Schools Community,

This is a long message, with a sizable amount of information included. Please take the time to review it in order to be fully aware of the details outlined within. It is intended to outline for you our plans to return to in-person learning. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we have strategically opened our school year with an eye toward long term health and safety for students and staff.

This communication is divided into three sections:

- For Elementary School Families
 - For MRU Families
 - For All Families
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For Elementary School Families

Elementary School Return

The elementary school day will be from 7:45-2:00.

Elementary school students in **grades PK-4 will return to in-person learning on Monday, October 19th.** Because the space available in our schools under the health guidelines allows for it, elementary students will attend school **five days per week**. Principals will begin communicating with families on October 12th about any details that need to be known and understood in order to prepare for the October 19th return.

Elementary school students in **grades 5-6 will return to in-person learning in their respective schools on Monday, November 2nd.** Grades 5-6 will attend school **five days per week**. Principals will begin communicating with families of students in grades 5-6 on or before October 19th about any details that need to be known and understood in order to prepare for the November 2nd return.

*Your next point of contact for details after this email: elementary school principals and individual teachers.

After School Programs

In our elementary schools, After School Programs will begin operating on October 19th. After School Programs will operate from 2:00-5:30 pm daily. Information about signup will be made available no later than October 12th.

*Your next point of contact following this email: cbecker@millriverschools.org

For MRU Families

Mill River Union

The MRU school day will be from 9:30-3:30.

MRU students in **grades 7-12 will return to in-person learning on Monday, November 2nd.** MRU classes will operate on a **hybrid schedule of 2 days in-person and 3 days independent at home.** This schedule is expected to be in place potentially through the remainder of the school year, or until the state health guidelines change. MRU administration will begin communicating with families on or before October 19th about any details that need to be known and understood in order to prepare for the November 2nd return.

Further explaining the MRU hybrid schedule in very basic terms, a student will attend school in-person two days per week (either Mon/Tue or Thu/Fri). Wednesdays will days for teachers to hold office hours to connect with all students to support them in their efforts. The other two days of the week (when a student is not engaged in-person) are set aside for independent student work from home. Students during their at-home days (other than on Wednesdays) will not be scheduled to engage digitally with their teachers, as those teachers will be fully engaged teaching in-person classes.

*Your next point of contact for details after this email: MRU administration and individual teachers.

MRU Fall and Winter Athletics

Due to our return to in-person learning, we will now begin permitting limited spectators at MRU fall athletic competitions effective October 12th. We expect to be allotting tickets through a will call process to home fans (3 per athlete) and away fans (a predetermined number to keep us in compliance with gathering limits and allow for manageable scenarios). The MRU athletic department will be sharing more information directly with athletes and their families soon.

We also expect that some sort of announcement may take place in early November regarding winter sports seasons. At this time, it is safe to assume there are indoor sports that may not be able to compete at all. The current health guidelines do not allow visitors in schools, so the ability for spectators to attend indoor sporting events that are permitted to occur may be restricted by the state. It is also safe to assume that the start of the winter sports season may be delayed compared to normal school years. When information about winter sports is available, we will share it as soon as we are able.

*Your next point of contact following this email: kmaniery@millriverschools.org

For All Families

Remote Learning Option

The survey issued the week of September 28th indicated that 16% of our families may choose to have their child(ren) remain in a remote learning scenario moving forward. **Next Monday (October 12th) I will issue another survey to families asking for commitments in that regard.** The next survey will be focused only on families that seek to have students remain remote. The return date and time for the survey will be Thursday, 10/15 at 3:00 pm.

These are the details you need to be aware of as you contemplate a remote learning decision:

1. All students in all of our schools will continue to receive instruction and learning outcomes in a weekly module based system, meaning that whether remote or in-person, the expected learning outcomes and activities students engage in or complete will be the same through the week.
2. Families that choose the remote system will be expected to have their children remain in the remote learning system until at least January 25th (end of 1st semester at MRU and mid-trimester at the elementaries).
3. With in-person learning as our primary method and focus for instructional delivery, remote learners will have less access to teachers during the course of the week - likely in the neighborhood of 1-2 hours of direct interaction (either individually or with small groups) with a teacher over the course of a week. If your student is likely to require more teacher interaction in order for them (and you) to feel fully connected and successful in their learning experience, please consider carefully whether remote learning is the correct option for your family or your child.
4. A student would be permitted to shift between in-person and remote learning in the event of an extended illness or quarantine if necessary, but shifting between the two models would not generally be an option beyond those medical dynamics or a significant changes in family circumstances.

*Your next steps following this email: look for the survey to be issued Monday 10/12. Other specific questions about how the remote process might look at an individual school should be directed to the school principal.

Special Education/IEP Services

Students who have been accessing IEP services at MRU since the start of the school year will transition as follows:

- Elementary students in grades PK-6 who are receiving IEP services will be contacted by special education staff to coordinate the services that will be effective October 19th and beyond.
- Students in grades 7-12 receiving in-person services will continue receiving those services as they have been at MRU until November 2nd.
- MRU parents will be contacted by special education staff to coordinate services that will be effective November 2nd, when MRU in-person learning resumes.

*Your next steps after this email: special education staff will be in contact with you.

Health Screenings and Staying Home when Sick

We are required to screen all students and staff before they enter the school (or school bus) each day. That process involves taking a temperature and the individual responding to questions about their health and potential exposure to COVID-19. Our experience with offering in-person IEP services at MRU throughout September and early October revealed to us that there are students and staff every day that do not pass the screenings or that exhibit symptoms while at school that might be COVID-related. We are required to send these individuals home and they have to stay home on timelines that are in accordance with protocols from the Department of Health. That situation at times is very frustrating to parents. Please understand that if your child shows or reports any symptoms of illness they will be sent home. This is not negotiable and applies to school district staff as well. Staying home when sick or showing any symptoms of being sick is critical to protect your family's time and the overall health of our community.

*Your next point of contact following this email: byounce@millriverschools.org

Facial Coverings/Masks

Students and staff are required to wear two-layer cloth facial coverings at school in accordance with the state's health guidelines. A growing body of evidence indicates that the following facial coverings are not as effective at protecting people from the spread of an individual's respiratory droplets:

- Gaiters / Bandannas
- Masks with valves built into them
- Single-layer coverings

The district will therefore require that, effective Monday November 2nd, gaiters, bandannas, single-layer coverings and masks with valves will not be permitted as acceptable facial coverings.

Elementary students who arrive at school during the weeks prior wearing gaiters, bandannas, single-layer coverings or masks with valves will be provided with a suitable alternative of the correct size to utilize until they are able to acquire an acceptable facial covering.

*Your next point of contact following this email: individual school principals.

Social Distancing & Visitors

The health guidelines that we are required to follow for schools essentially require the following as it relates to social distancing:

- Students PreK-6th: distance of between 3'-6' must be maintained. Our classrooms and interactions will be designed with these guidelines in effect.
- Students 7th-12th: distance of at least 6' must be maintained. Our classrooms and interactions will be designed with these guidelines in effect.
- All adults: distance of at least 6' must be maintained.

Additionally, the health guidelines stipulate that visitors are not allowed in schools. In the event that an individual (not student or district employee) does need to enter a school, they will be required to wear facial coverings, participate in the required health screening, and limit their access to the school office.

*Your next point of contact following this email: individual school principals

Meals Impact

We have approval until December 31st to continue providing meals free of charge to students. This means that students who are in-person will be able to access free meals (not including additional a la carte items at MRU) at least until December 31st. Students who opt to remain in remote learning will still have access to meals pickup in some capacity, with details to be determined soon.

*Your next point of contact following this email: bhill@millriverschools.org

Transportation

Transportation systems will change as we prepare for the October 19th return of PK-4th grade students.

Based on an elementary school day of 7:45-2:00, our elementary school bus routes have been updated and will be posted to our website and shared with families by principals on Monday, October 12th. KDG-4th grade students will follow the bus schedules as they are posted on effective October 19th.

Transportation systems will expand on November 2nd, when grades 5-12 return to in-person learning. Grades 5-6 will utilize the new elementary bus routes as they already exist at that time. New MRU routes, based on a MRU school day of 9:30-3:30, will be posted online and shared by MRU administration on October 19th. These new routes are those that students in grades 7-12 will begin utilizing on November 2nd.

For all bus routes, please be reminded that health screenings must occur before each student boards the school bus. Students who do not pass health screenings will be required to return home. If a parent has left the bus stop area, the bus will wait at the side of the road until the student who is unable to board is picked up by a parent. Please stay with your student if possible until they have been successfully screened.

On our buses, each student will be required to sit in an assigned seat on board the school bus in order to assist with contact tracing needs when they arise. Students will be spaced out as much as possible based on the number of students on the bus.

Also for all bus routes, we have been directed that the state guidelines require school bus windows to be open in all weather for the best possible air flow on board the school bus. Please make sure that students are dressed accordingly for school buses that are assured to be very chilly as the weather turns.

Stafford Technical Center students will continue to be provided transportation based on the days of the week they are attending STC. Due to the complexity of the STC and MRU schedules, MRU Guidance Staff will be directly in contact with the families of all STC students very soon in order to overview the schedule and transportation dynamics.

*Your next point of contact following this email for transportation questions is as follows:

- Check millriverschools.org website for bus route information on 10/12/2020
- Look for information from principals about school-specific information
- For questions about overall transportation operations, including stops and times, contact:
gmarcy@millriverschools.org OR kmanier@millriverschools.org

Indoor Air Quality

We have equipment currently deployed to gauge indoor air quality in our schools. If that equipment identifies specific areas of concern we will probe further into any issues that emerge. Our HVAC systems currently meet all expectations established by the state's health guidance and we are in the process of converting to higher grade air filters in the systems in each of our schools. Additionally, our nursing office locations and required isolation rooms in schools have been relocated to ensure that we meet requirements for filtration and ventilation.

*Your next point of contact following this email: gmarcy@millriverschools.org

Staffing and Substitutes

We are very vulnerable in terms of having all employee positions filled and adequate substitutes available when needed. All of our substitutes will be trained in accordance with the protocols that we have in place, but our initial surveys of substitutes indicate that availability is lower than in normal circumstances. We currently have enough bus drivers and custodians to operate our systems, but in the event of illness or lack of availability our systems do become compromised in terms of transporting students and keeping school buildings fully sanitized and clean. We sincerely hope that we do not ever arrive at a point in time where a lack of available staff requires us to close down in-person learning for a short or long term. But, it is a definite possibility. Please be aware that this may occur and we are doing everything possible to avoid it. If you are interested in potentially working as a substitute teacher, please contact us.

*Your next point of contact following this email: ajones@millriverschools.org (substitutes) OR gmarcy@millriverschools.org (custodians/bus drivers)

Inclement Weather Days

While it is a bit early to be talking about snow days and other inclement weather, those days in Vermont will come very quickly. The state has established regulations that do permit a school district that has remote learning protocols in place (as we do) to utilize remote learning systems on inclement weather days without having to add extra days to the end of the school year. We anticipate that there is a good likelihood that we will utilize this practice as weather days start to develop. It will require advance planning and communication in order to work, and at times we will not be able to accomplish remote learning on bad weather days and will simply need to announce a typical "snow day" where no school activities take place. On inclement weather days when we are learning remotely we also will be planning to make meals available whenever it is possible to do so from a safety standpoint. The mechanics of that have not been determined yet, but will be shared when it becomes a reality.

*Your next point of contact following this email: dyounce@millriverschools.org

The Future

As we prepare for a phased-in return to classrooms, there is no way for us to know what the future holds. Seasons changing and more activities statewide moving indoors bring unknowns in the context of the virus. Decisions that people will make about their personal lives and gathering with friends and family will have an impact. The coming holiday season and potential that some individuals choose to travel and deal with required quarantines may affect all kinds of things, including virus prevalence, availability of students and staff, and our ability to operate schools and keep them staffed. Our return back to the classrooms has been and will continue to be strategic and geared toward long term success for the school year. Our fervent request, for every member of our community, is that you continue to be vigilant. We are fortunate that the conditions in Vermont are what they have been. It is up to all of us to keep it that way. Thanks for joining us in that effort.

*Your next point of contact following this email: dyounce@millriverschools.org

Thank you - sincerely.

Dave Younce
Superintendent of Schools