



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

RICHARDSON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Where all students connect, learn, grow and succeed

August 24, 2020

Richardson ISD Teachers, Parents, Students and Staff,

I'm writing to update you on RISD's plans to resume face to face instruction next month. Our team has been moving forward over the last 5 weeks with plans to begin in-person instruction on September 8 for all students instead of beginning in-person instruction on August 19 as the RISD calendar originally intended. Delaying face to face school until September 8 was based on a July order from our Dallas County public health authority closing schools until that time. That order was issued during a period of record high cases and metrics within Dallas County, and although it was later amended from an order to a recommendation as cases and metrics began receding, our team believed it was prudent to remain with our delayed start of in-person school based on that advice.

Over the last month, working with data provided by Dallas County, RISD has been able to develop and track school district-specific data related to positive cases within RISD's portion of the much larger Dallas County. New cases within RISD's portion of Dallas County continue to be lower than some other portions of Dallas County, and this is one factor that we continue to monitor and consider as part of our decision making process. During the planning to return to face to face learning, RISD has also consulted with the City of Richardson Health Authority, which has consistently cited the social and emotional impact that the isolation created by the pandemic has had on children. We have been encouraged to weigh the emotional health of students carefully as another factor when determining the need for extending closures.

After our initial days of virtual learning, it is clear that many of our youngest learners, and their caregivers, are often struggling with asynchronous virtual learning. Students in PK-3 are at the most critical stage of their academic development, and most need and benefit from a face to face classroom setting with a professional teacher. Early childhood literacy is essential to the academic success of students, and our youngest learners are impacted more than other students are by the "COVID academic slide" from the spring. Despite valiant efforts at remote learning in the spring, our educators feel that most students have experienced a deficit in their learning as a result of the pandemic. Virtual instruction this year is superior to what RISD was able to offer on short notice in the spring, but for many students, face to face learning is the most effective option, and students who are denied that option are falling farther behind.

We are aware of the most recent updated recommendations for school districts in Dallas County to remain closed to in-person instruction beyond the September 8 date of the previous recommendation, and have evaluated those recommendations as part of all of the factors the district has considered when weighing this decision. Based on the extensive health and risk mitigation protocols that RISD is planning for in-person learning, which are based on recommendations from national, state and local health authorities; feedback from RISD teachers, parents and employees; recommendations from both Dallas County and City of Richardson health authorities; the current lower level of COVID activity within RISD

boundaries compared to Dallas County as a whole; the social and emotional impact on students from continued isolation from peers; and RISD's belief as educators that the continued academic impact of delaying face to face instruction is increasingly detrimental to students; RISD will be resuming face to face instruction as follows:

- Students in grades PK-6 and Centralized Special Education Programs, whose parents have chosen face to face instruction will resume in-person instruction on Tuesday, **September 8**, which will represent a delay of three weeks from RISD's original in-person start date.
- Students in grades 7-8 whose parents have chosen face to face instruction will resume in-person instruction on Monday, **September 14**, which will represent a delay of four weeks from RISD's original in-person start date.
- Students in grades 9-12 whose parents have chosen face to face instruction will resume in-person instruction on Monday, **September 21**, which will represent a delay of five weeks from RISD's original in-person start date.
- Students whose parents have chosen virtual instruction will continue to receive virtual instruction in the same format that they have since school began on August 19. In advance of each nine-week grading period, every student and family will have an opportunity to choose to continue in their current learning framework or transition to the other option.

The logistics of face coverings, scheduling and managing the movement of cohorts of students, limiting school-related entrances/exits, screening of staff and students, and maintaining social distancing protocols become more complex as grade levels rise, so the additional delay for older students will allow staff to evaluate best practices from the implementation of protocols in lower grades and revise planning as needed before older students return in person. In addition, as transmission rates among high school students more closely resemble those of adults, this delay in the return to face to face instruction for those students was made in acknowledgement of the most recent Dallas County recommendations.

RISD will continue to work with health authorities to conduct contact tracing in the event of positive cases in a school or activity among students or staff, with exclusion and quarantining as necessary and consistent with CDC guidelines. Per our district Return to School Blueprint, RISD will consult with health authorities about the possibility of temporary classroom, activity, or school closures if multiple positive cases were to dictate those decisions. In the event that becomes necessary, having started our first three weeks with 100% virtual instruction will be an invaluable experience as students and teachers will be able to more seamlessly transition back to virtual instruction, if needed.

It is more critical now than ever before that we as adults follow health and social distancing protocols and model those expectations for the children of our community. As well, this is a time that our classroom teachers need all of the empathy, support, and cooperation that it is possible to give, not just from students, but also from our parents and everyone in our community who values education and the well-being of those who make it possible.

I appreciate your continued support as we continue to navigate this unprecedeted time together.

Jeannie Stone, Ed.D.
Superintendent