

Rainier School District #13

28168 Old Rainier Road | Rainier, OR 97048

Tel: (503) 556-3777 | Fax: (503) 556-3778

September 23, 2021

Rainier School District Community,

Let me begin by thanking each of you for the part you have played in getting the 2021-22 school year off to a good start. As we planned for the school year this summer, we were confident that this year would be easier and better than last year. On one hand, we were correct; having students back for in-person learning has been an incredible improvement for our students and staff. On the other hand, with the mask and vaccine mandates from the Oregon Health Authority, teacher and bus driver shortages across the state (and nation), and additional requirements from the Oregon Department of Education, we began this year with some major challenges.

The purpose of this letter is to update our community on the status of our school district, current needs, important dates, and how the Rainier School District community can help. In challenging times such as these, I find it important to communicate what is going on as well as how we can help. While we have an incredible new leadership team across the district, the learning curve has been steep and I feel it imperative to get some important information out to the community. Please know, misinformation or lack of information is never our intent, but our priority and focus has been on getting students to school, in-person and now with almost two weeks under our belt, I hope I can provide some clarity.

Staffing

School Districts across the state are experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers, staff, and bus drivers. At Rainier School District I am excited that most of our positions are filled with highly qualified staff who want nothing more than to support the success of our students. There have, however, been two teaching positions at the high school and one at the elementary that we have been unable to fill. Additionally, our transportation provider is struggling with a smaller workforce than necessary to meet our needs.

This shortage impacts us in a variety of ways. Without all of the necessary teaching positions filled, the district has had to get creative in offering courses necessary for graduation and for our college-bound students. While receiving credits through online courses is not ideal, students will be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to graduate and move on to their post-high school goals. Next, with fewer teachers at the high school level, results in class sizes that are larger than ideal. This is an unavoidable situation which we are looking for creative solutions to solve. Additionally, the lack of drivers has created scheduling conflicts for some of our extracurricular activities but through collaborative problem-solving, I think we have addressed the issues.

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How can you help? If you (or someone you know) are interested in a position within Rainier School District we have an updated list of positions available at Rainier.k12.or.us. Please consider spreading the word. Additionally, Midco has open positions if you are interested in driving a school bus.

Pandemic Preparedness

As we prepared for the school year, we knew we were doing so during the height of the Delta Variant and would need to plan accordingly. The school district has had many positive COVID cases amongst our students and staff. The moment we are informed of potential exposure, our district nurse and public health collaborate to determine the necessary course of action. We know that it can be frustrating, but we are required to follow their guidance which oftentimes results in quarantining those who are at risk of exposure. This takes students away from their teachers, and staff unable to support student learning; but it also is a strategy to mitigate the risks of community-spread.

If your child is sent home due to potential exposure, a positive test, or COVID symptoms, please know we will support you in any way we can. There is no judgement or blame around required quarantines. Rather, we must continue to do our part to keep every child and employee safe. When under quarantine, please contact your child's school or teacher(s) and we will support you in developing a plan to get the necessary make-up work, learning materials so your child does not fall behind.

How can you help? I recognize that the pandemic has become overly politicized and I am asking that as we navigate the challenges that this school year has presented, we each do the following:

- 1) Treat your child's school, teacher, administrator, and others with grace and understanding as we are simply doing what is necessary to limit the impact of COVID-19 on our community.
- 2) Please keep yourself or child(ren) home if any symptoms are present.
- 3) Please wear a mask when around others.
- 4) Talk to your doctor about the vaccine and contact the Rainier Health Clinic or our district nurse (Danielle_nelson@rsd.k12.or.us) if you are interested in receiving a vaccination.

Important Dates

On September 7, 2021, Oregon Department of Education issued an additional School Health Advisory that extends through October 1, 2021. The advisory requests the following:

- All eligible youth and adults who come in contact with school-aged children should get vaccinated to reduce spread in the school community.
- Families with school-aged children and educators should limit gatherings and non-essential activities.

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- Schools should reduce extracurricular activities and consider holding activities outdoors to the extent possible and implementing additional precautions like face coverings and physical distancing.
- Schools should hold beginning of the year events (open house, meet the teacher night, etc.) virtually rather than in-person.

While the health advisory has temporarily put a pause to some events, we are working on creative solutions to ensure students have exciting opportunities (dances, assemblies, etc.) while taking steps to reduce the risk of spread within the school community. I will be working with district staff and students over the coming days to provide the community with an accurate and up-to-date calendar of events which will be located on either the Hudson Park Elementary or Rainier Junior Senior High School Website (District events will show on both websites) and clicking on “Calendar”. Beginning October 1, calendars will be updated to reflect all events for the coming month.

How can you help? When it comes to events there are often rumors about when events will occur (and whether or not they will be cancelled). Please give us your patience as we update the website. We will work tirelessly to provide more information which should decrease confusion. Our sincerest apologies.

Conclusion

It comes as no surprise that this year will have its very own challenges; like none we have been faced with before. Please remember that change is often not pleasant but it is almost always necessary as we continue to find ways to improve Rainier School District. Understanding that change is inevitable, but our response to changes have an impact on its implementation is critical. I will do everything I can to provide as much information as I am able when things change; understanding that with information, comes understanding.

Regardless of the mandates, challenges, and confusion facing our students, families, and staff I am deeply committed to this year being a great year! I hope you share in this commitment and look forward to working with each to ensure every child receives the best education; every day.

Your partner in Education,



Dr. Joseph Hatrick
Superintendent