

January 22, 2021

Dear RUSD Staff and Families,

I wanted to reach out to you all to share some thoughts and facts about where we currently stand in Rescue regarding the new directives disseminated on January 14, 2021. Some of you were able to participate in our special board meeting on Wednesday afternoon, but many were not, so I will share what we discussed and also make sure some of the questions are clarified and answered so we are all on the same page.

First of all, I want you to know that my heart aches for our families and our staff as we face challenge after challenge. I have heard many, many stories of hardship, agony, frustration, and worries faced by our families and staff who are trying to juggle work, school, children, family, health, and life in general. Many of our staff and administration have children too, and are facing the same struggles. Our staff has worked very hard to provide in person learning opportunities as well as online learning opportunities, and our Unions continue working alongside district administration and the Board to have as much face to face interaction with our students as possible. We are all working together in this regard. I truly wish I could take all this away and get our students back to school full time right now.

I also want our families to understand that our Board has no recourse and no authority to ignore the directives put forth by California Department of Public Health (CDPH) on January 14<sup>th</sup>. It is entirely out of our Board's hands. CDPH has been given executive authority to make emergency orders to protect the health and safety of the people and that is what they have done. We must function within those parameters and operate in alignment with these mandates. With that said, we also know that the intention of the Safe Schools for All was to support districts and help districts reopen, but unfortunately most districts are still closed in complete distance learning. While this document will actually help those districts open to a hybrid status, we, on the other hand, have had the incredible ability and opportunity to be open for in person learning since August. These directives unintentionally hurt our opportunity to open more fully **for now**. The main issue for us is the 4-foot mandate. It is impossible to maintain 4 feet distance between every chair with a full classroom of students. We literally measured classrooms to see if we could. A question was raised about why now is this being followed? The previous document used words like "as practicable", "may", "should", "is recommended", etc. The current document states that "Under no circumstances should distance between student chairs be less than 4 feet." There is no wiggle room in that statement. Additionally, we reached out to legal counsel and School Insurance Authority to request their opinion on this topic and they concurred. We have no choice right now but to adhere to the directive.

Could this document change? **YES**. Do we know a timeframe for a revision? **NO**. I do know that there are numerous advocacy groups, such as Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), California School Board Association (CSBA), our superintendent group in El Dorado County, El Dorado County Office of Education (EDCOE), Small School Districts' Association (SSDA), El Dorado County Public Health (EDCPH), and others, working hard with Governor Newsom, legislators, State Board of Education (SBE), and CDPH to seek revision of the document so that the directives support all districts instead of just some.

With that said, how do we navigate under these latest directives? One of the main questions asked is about mask wearing. Please note the clarification below:

1. **What masks are allowed for students in grades TK-8?** All students must wear a mask or gator unless exempted with a doctor's note due to a health issue. If the student has a doctor's note

exempting him/her from wearing a mask, they must wear a face shield with a drape. *The glittery mesh masks that are thin and relatively see-through are NOT allowed for anyone to wear, as they are not considered protection from particulates. Primary teachers, speech pathologists, and other staff may wear a face shield with a drape when teaching phonics or other such lessons requiring students to see how the adult forms a word or sound.*

As with all things these days, information changes almost by the minute. These changes make it vital that we are always prepared to pivot in very short order. I know this makes it extremely challenging and difficult to plan and be prepared. We need to all give ourselves and others grace and remember that we all are doing our very best under these very stressful circumstances.

**Additionally, our COVID cases for this week are noted below.** Remember that if your child was in a stable group with a positive case, you would have received a personal phone call or a personal email.

19<sup>th</sup>: 1 presumed positive student at Rescue Elementary, with 1 quarantined staff member.

20<sup>th</sup>: 1 positive student at Rescue Elementary who had not been at school since Christmas, so no quarantines were necessary.

21<sup>st</sup>: 1 positive student at Jackson, with no quarantines needed.

1 positive staff member at Jackson, with both stable groups quarantined (12 students total), as well as two other staff members.

1 positive student at Rescue, with two other students quarantined, and one additional staff member quarantined.

22<sup>nd</sup>: 1 positive student at Lake Forest, but the student has not been at school, so no one had to be quarantined.

**Another important announcement is regarding the weather. As you know, we may have snow next week. I will send out a phone announcement by 6:30 am each morning next week if we are not going to be able to have school due to snow. We are hoping it won't be necessary to close school, but we need to be prepared in case.**

We will continue working with our staff to meet our student and family needs, no matter what else comes our way. We look forward to the day we can open fully for in-person instruction, as soon as CDPH revises their directives. Thank you for continuing this journey with us. ***I do believe we will come through stronger on the other side.***

Most sincerely,  
Cheryl Olson