

# From buses to lunches to classrooms: WCSD's school year will look a lot different this time

[Jim Krajewski](#) Reno Gazette Journal

Students, parents, teachers and administrators knew this would be a much different school year.

On Monday, school district officials charged with keeping students safe, fed and on track spoke about how those changes will play out during a media tour of various Washoe County School District facilities.

There are more than 100 schools in the district, and changes implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic look at everything from buses to lunches and more.

Here's what the changes look like.

## Health

Margaret Allen, director of WCSD health services, said if any elementary student is positive for COVID-19, they will ensure the class will be excluded from in-person instruction.

The Washoe County Health Department will be notified, and they will conduct contact tracing to see who the student has been in contact with.

She said parents should not send children to school if they have any symptoms of COVID-19. If so, the student will be sent home and asked to isolate for at least 10 days, then must be off any fever-reducing medication for at least 24 hours.

She said people should not spend more than 10 minutes in close contact while at school. Students in all grades will have to wear masks all day.

The school district will supply masks and cleaning supplies for teachers.

Adam Searcy, director of facilities for WCSD, said a cleaning agent that had been questioned as being dangerous will not be used. He said all classes will have a soap and water cleaner that kills the coronavirus.

## School buses

Seating will be much more limited on buses this year, due to the Washoe County Health District mandate that limits occupancy to 50 percent of fire code and 50 people max.

Buses vary in size, from 72-90 students, so this fall each bus will be carrying about half that many.

Routes have also been modified, so what was in place last school year is not necessarily how it will be this fall.

Each bus has hand sanitizer, and students will have to wear masks. Students will be assigned seats. Loading areas will also be larger and conducted from back to front.

Parents are also asked to register their students who will be using the bus this year at the WCSD website.

Students are also advised to dress warmly. Once fall sets in, mornings can be chilly. Windows and roof vents will be open to allow airflow and reduce possible contamination.

Rick Martin, transportation director of WCSD, said buses will be cleaned and disinfected before and after each route. The high-touch areas will be disinfected after every run.

Martin said there are 373 buses in use, and the district is short about 35 drivers heading into the first week. Drivers will wear masks and face shields.

He said parents are being asked to assess their children's health before going to school and reiterated that parents should not send them to school if they show signs of illness.

## **Nutrition**

Lianka Soliz, director of WCSD nutrition services, said choices will be limited for menu items this year in order to keep lines moving swiftly.

Students will still be able to get meals to-go for distance learning. Distribution sites will be announced later this week.

Soliz said students will likely be eating in classrooms or outside, in addition to lunchrooms to limit occupancy.

With many students choosing the distance-learning option, there will not be as many meals served as in recent years. Soliz said that could affect federal funding for food services.

"When you go from 64,000 students in seats to potentially, 40 or 50,000, we're really not sure what that first day is going to look like, but obviously could affect our federal reimbursement for free or reduced-price meals," Soliz said.

She said elementary students will have two or three entree choices, down from four or five; and middle and high school students will have about four or five entree choices, down from as many as 12.

She said parents should sign up online for free or reduced-price meals.

## **Counselors**

Katherine Loudon, the WCSD counseling coordinator, said the district received \$4.6 million in funding from the state and federal government to put towards expansion and continuation of safe school professionals and social workers.

Loudon said students can pick up when their parents are stressed about current events and that can lead to their own anxiety.

The WCSD family wellness website provides many good resources families, she said.

"Multiple departments put a lot of effort into finding resources for parents and others who are looking for information related to what we are doing," Loudon said.

School counselors will do in-person or virtual counseling with students, depending on the size of their office and if the student is distance-learning.

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