

District Status Report

30 October

2020-2021 Report #18

The purpose for the weekly Status Report is to communicate to members of the School Board important and meaningful information relevant to the business of the school district. The Report is available to the public on the school district's website. Please contact me at 417-2602 if you have any questions regarding information contained in the Status Report. I would also appreciate hearing from you on ways I can improve the Report and make it more meaningful and informative for you.

Dale

Our Mission

**Empowering students with
knowledge and skills to succeed.**

Our Vision

**To be the school district of choice, inspiring
excellence in academics, arts, and activities.**

Information – Communication – Correspondence

1. News From Around the State and Beyond

Sports: [What one school district's decision to let them play means for the rest of Minnesota](#)
[Online kindergarten could have long-term impact](#)

2. COVID-19 County Case Rate and Learning Models – We continue to monitor closely the county case rates as well as our quarantine and positive cases in the school district. As I mentioned in the staff and family updates yesterday (Thursday), we have experienced an increase in the number of quarantines and positive cases involving students and staff. While I am hopeful we can continue with *Hybrid Learning* for the Secondary School, staffing is our greatest challenge right now.

At the same time that we are having to consider moving to *distance learning* for the Secondary School due to multiple factors, there continues to be interest in considering a move to *in-person* at the Elementary School. You will see below communication I had this week with two parents centered around the desire to get all elementary students back in-person every day. There was also a concern regarding a lack of communication on my part which I am trying to address. I am sharing the communications as examples of questions being presented by parents and so the Board is aware of my general responses.

Based on the Board's discussion at the last School Board meeting, the Board will be convened when it is believed there is data to support a potential move to a different model. However, in the case that the data supports making a timely move to *distance-learning* due to an increase in quarantines/cases and/or inadequate staffing, I will work with the Board Chair in making that decision as there will not be time to convene the Board. Board members can give me a call with questions or they can also contact Board Chair Rick Schultz. A request for the Board to convene to review the case rate and current learning models should be forwarded to Mr. Schultz.

Individual Parent Communications from This Week

Question -- Lack of Communication -- I am writing you to ask for more information on our children's school schedule. The last email that I received from you was in late September stating that school would be going to twice a week in October. When will you be updating us on the plans for the future? When are your every other week school board meetings on the covid issue as stated by the MN Governor? I feel that you have not had great communication with us parents since this whole thing began back in March. With being in a small community and hearing that the other schools around us have elementary going 4 to 5 days a week. Or that the parents receive a weekly or bi-weekly updates it is very upsetting.

Response

Thank you for your email. I appreciate your willingness to share your concerns regarding a lack of communication. I am including my assistant on this so that she can check to see if you are on the list to receive school district communications as there have been a couple more since the communication you referenced which I believe was September 23. You can also find COVID-19 related district communications and information at <https://www.nrheg.k12.mn.us/domain/700>. Since the September 23 update, I have sent out two other updates on October 1 and October 22. I acknowledge there were three weeks between these two communications which was the longest period of time between updates since July 23. I had also sent out a September 30 communication specific to an update on our health offices.

Our school board meets one time each month and it has included an update on the school learning models at each meeting.

Regarding your comment that surrounding schools having elementary going 4 to 5 days a week, we are aware of a number of elementary schools who might be in the *Hybrid Learning* model, but are still able to accommodate several grade levels *in-person* while following the *Hybrid* safety guidelines of distancing and the 50% maximum capacity. Early on in our planning, the Elementary School staff determined it did not have the space in order to safely distance with all students in attendance. Up to this point, our learning model decisions have been based on the positive case data for Waseca County as it has had the highest case rate out of our three counties since the start of the school year. Even though the three Waseca County school districts have had elementary schools in *Hybrid Learning*, the other two Waseca County school districts (Waseca and JWP) have been able to accommodate multiple elementary grade levels *in-person* as they have been able to create the required space. I am including Elementary Principal Doug Anderson on this email as he would be able to visit further with you about the space limitations at the Elementary School and any other questions you may have regarding the Elementary School learning model(s).

MDE provides a *Safe Learning Model Look-Up* on its website that you can view the learning model in place for any school district and school in the state at [Enter the Safe Learning Model Look-Up system](#) or <https://education.mn.gov/Maps/covidlookup/search.html>.

Thank you again for sharing your concerns about a lack of communication. While we have attempted to keep families informed with any new or changing information regarding county-wide case rates, learning models, safety guidelines, etc., we need to continue to improve.

Thank you for all you are doing to keep yourself, your family and those around you safe. Do not hesitate to contact me, our principals or teachers with questions.

Question -- Elementary School Hybrid Learning Model -- The question I have had for months now is why are the surrounding elementary schools going 4 or 5 days a week and ours go 2?

Response

Our present learning models for each building since the start of the school year has been determined in large part by the case rates for Waseca County as that has been the county with the highest case rates and it is also the county with the highest percentage of our students as residents. We also continue to follow Freeborn and Steele case rate data, but our learning model decisions have been primarily driven by Waseca County up to this point. This is why all three Waseca County school districts currently are in Hybrid Learning K-12.

However, as you reference Waseca brings all K-3 students in four days a week, they are able to do that because they have space to socially distance 6 feet or more in their classrooms and meet all Hybrid Learning model safety requirements. JWP Public Schools has been able to accommodate all their elementary grade levels in-person under the Hybrid model as they also have determined they have the space needed to distance and remain under the 50% capacity requirement. Early on in the planning, Mr. Anderson and the Elementary School staff determined the building did not have the space in order to safely distance with all students in attendance. The Elementary School did prioritize having all Kindergarten students attend in person the four days each week, but the classes are still split throughout the day since there is not space to accommodate all the students in the Kindergarten classroom at the same time.

Other school districts around us that reside in different counties may not be under the Hybrid Learning model and not need to follow the Hybrid safety protocol. However, there are school districts around us who have determined they have the space in their classrooms to have all students

attend in-person even though they are in the Hybrid Learning model. I am on a weekly call with the Waseca County school superintendents as well as the Steele County school superintendents so I am aware of what is happening in those school districts.

Principal Anderson would be able to visit further with you about the space limitations at the Elementary School and any other questions you may have regarding the Elementary School learning model(s).

You may already be aware of MDE's *Safe Learning Model Look-Up* on its website that you can view the learning model in place for any school district and school in the state at [Enter the Safe Learning Model Look-Up system](#) or <https://education.mn.gov/Maps/covidlookup/search.html>.

Please know that all board members, myself, Mr. Anderson, and the Elementary staff want our Elementary students back in-person every day. We know the importance of having students physically present in their school and in their classroom with their teacher. We continue to work closely with county and state public health officials in monitoring case rates at the county level and also examining what is happening within our school buildings, so that we can bring our students back as soon as we can and do it safely.

Thank you again for your willingness to share your concerns. Do not hesitate to contact Mr. Anderson or me with further questions.

- 3. Potential *In-Person* Learning Transition Plans and MDE Response** – As we explore potential revisions in our learning models including a future transition to all *in-person learning* beginning with the Elementary School, one possible plan being examined would bring all students back to *in-person* on four days of the week and continue with the Wednesday focus on *distance-learning* for all students. There is concern for a lack of time for teachers to dedicate to our full time *distance learning* students if students were to return to *in-person* for all day, every day of the week. I have communicated with MDE to make sure this is a plan we could implement. There was some speculation that if we maintained even one day each week of *distance-learning*, then we would need to meet the *hybrid learning* protocol of 6' distancing and 50% capacity for those days all students come *in-person*. The response from MDE would permit us to have all students attend *in-person* with one day of *distance-learning* with the support of the data and our Regional Support Team. The response below is from MDE.

I hope you are well. I am happy to respond to your email. If your data allows for in-person, your RST supports in-person, and you have the staff available to do in-person, then you only need to meet the criteria of in-person and not hybrid. Even though you would have a Wednesday DL day, that would not require the other days to be considered hybrid for health reasons. Does this make sense and answer your question?

- 4. Clarifying Guidance for Shifting Learning Models and Implications for Activities and Athletics** – Below is a message from the MDE Deputy Commissioner sent to Superintendents this week attempting to clarify guidance for addressing the continuation of activities depending on the learning model a school district implements.

*Dear School Leaders,
We have been working with a number of you across the state to clarify questions about shifting learning models and the implications it has on activities and athletics. As a result, we want to ensure that we are providing clear, cohesive information to support you and your teams as you have conversations with your school community.*

The goal of the [Safe Learning Plan](#) is to protect the health and wellness of our students, staff and families, and to prioritize safe in-person learning for students.

The Safe Learning Plan guidance that was shared at the end of July articulated a five-step process that school district and charter school leaders must use in determining learning models. The county-level data was the first point of data that needed to be used to determine your learning model to start the school year. The county data gave you a starting point to consider the status of the virus within your area. In addition to the case rates within your county, you considered a variety of factors, including your ability to meet health requirements and best practices for each learning model. As a result, we had all three learning models implemented across the state. Based on county numbers solely, some districts and charters chose to be more restrictive than the data indicated, some chose to be exactly where the data indicated, and some worked with the Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Department of Education to be less restrictive than the data indicated.

*Now that we are two months into the school year, school districts and charter schools are working through step five of the Safe Learning Plan – and this has always been part of the guidance process. On page eight of the Safe Learning Plan, step five states: “**After the initial selection of a learning model for school opening, the decision to shift to an alternative learning model should center on the impact of COVID-19 at the school level, while maintaining awareness of changes in viral activity in the community through continued review of the biweekly county-level case data.**” This means that school districts and charter schools will need to take into account not only the county-level case data when determining learning models, but also the number of confirmed cases, quarantines, and close contacts in your school community, each school building within your district, and other data such as individuals with influenza-like illness.*

This is what we are calling the “scalpel approach.” This approach allows school districts and charter schools within the same county to have different learning models. For example: a county may have four school districts within its boundaries which would give them all the same county base data; however, when each of the school districts review their community data and school data, their viral spread might be vastly different. As a result, some of the districts in that county may need to move to distance learning while others can remain in hybrid. Beyond this, some districts may have local factors or mitigation strategies that allow or prohibit students from accessing learning in person. This scalpel approach is why some school districts that have high county-level case data are still operating in an in-person or hybrid learning model.

Activities and athletics have always been part of the conversation when considering learning models. When this plan was introduced, MDE articulated that if a school district or charter school had county data that would put them in an in-person or hybrid learning model and they chose to be more restrictive in a distance learning model then they could have activities and athletics. On page 10 of the Safe Learning Plan it states that if a school district is required to be in distance learning, then extracurricular activities must be discontinued and that “in general, implementation of a distance learning model should occur for a minimum of one incubation period (two weeks) when there is evidence of substantial, uncontrolled community transmission or significant levels of illness in the school setting.”

As more districts and charter schools are considering moving to distance learning because of case counts, we are hearing more questions about activities and athletics. The good news is, the answer is the same as it has been since July. Your learning model will dictate whether or not your students can participate in activities and athletics. If you are in-person, hybrid, or more restrictive distance learning by choice then your students can participate in activities and athletics. If you are required to be in distance learning then your students cannot participate in activities and athletics. To determine your learning model, you should walk through step five in the Safe Learning plan with your Regional Support Team. You will need to take into account not only the county-level case data when considering a change to your learning model, but also the number of confirmed cases,

quarantines, and close contacts in your school community, each school building within your district, and other data such as individuals with influenza-like illness.

If your data indicates that you can be in an in-person or hybrid model, but you choose to move to distance learning, you can continue to have activities and athletics. To determine whether or not activities and athletics should be continued or discontinued, you should review the amount of spread happening with your activities participants and athletes.

*If your data indicates that substantial, uncontrolled community spread is occurring and/or there is a significant degree of impact on the school community, with multiple confirmed cases or large-scale outbreaks occurring among students and staff, then you **must** move to distance learning and discontinue activities and athletics for a minimum of two weeks.*

The language in [Executive Order 20-82](#) states that school districts and charter schools must adhere to the parameters set forth in the Safe Learning Plan for 2020-2021. As a school leader, if the data indicates that you must move to distance learning and you choose not to move, [Minnesota Statutes 2019, section 12.21, subdivision 3\(11\)](#) gives authority to the Commissioner of Education to curtail school activities for the safety, health, and wellness of our students, staff, and community. This includes in-person learning, hybrid learning, activities and athletics.

Our partnership in this work is critical. Thank you for courageously leading and walking our students and families through one of the most trying times in recent history. You are all deeply appreciated.

5. Distance Learning and Activities – Related to #4 above, a Board member asked the following question:

If we have to go into Distance Learning due to lack of staffing, how would that affect sports? I fully support Academics being our #1 priority, but at the same time these kids need to be involved in extra curricular activities as well.

My response . . . As many other districts appear to be doing now, we would work with our regional support team, county and MDH to see if activities can continue. As you probably have read in the past two weeks first with St, Cloud and now with Anoka, some districts having to move to DL due to numbers are continuing activities with the support of MDH. I would expect we would follow the same process.

6. World's Best Work Force (WBWF) Plan Review Update – We are expecting to receive from MDE a modified report template to use to document the progress of our 2019-2020 plan. At this time, we plan to present a review of our progress with the 2019-2020 WBWF plan at the November 16, 2020, School Board meeting. We may also present a draft of the 2020-2021 plan for Board consideration.

7. MSBA Call with Governor Walz – See below.

Call with Governor Walz for MSBA and MASA

What: “A Call with Governor Tim Walz for MSBA and MASA Members”

When: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Friday, November 6, 2020

Zoom Meeting Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83173001966>

Members of both the **Minnesota School Boards Association** and the **Minnesota Association of School Administrators** are encouraged to join us for “**A Call with Governor Tim Walz for MSBA and MASA Members**” at 10 a.m. Friday, November 6.

In addition to hearing from Governor Walz, members will receive important updates from **Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker** and **Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm**.

Join us next Friday morning by accessing the Zoom meeting link listed above. Additional details will be provided next week in a follow-up notice.

8. **School Learning Model Look-up** – If you want look up a specific learning model for a school district or school, you can go to the MDE website at [Enter the Safe Learning Model Look-Up system](#). Simply enter the school district you are seeking.
9. **Building and Grounds Committee Meeting to Meet** – The next Building and Grounds Committee Meeting is tentatively planned for Tuesday, January 19, 2021, beginning at 5:30 pm prior to the start of the regular School Board meeting. Agenda items may include discussion about potential land sale, construction project follow-up, and examining the Board’s goal of developing a long-term facility plan.
10. **Election Night Gathering** – The Board will not gather Tuesday night to monitor the election results due to a lack of interest.

School Board Calendar of Events

November 13, 2020	5:00 pm	Special School Board Meeting to Canvass Results – Board Room
November 16, 2020	6:30 pm	School Board Meeting – Secondary School Media Center/Remote
December 21, 2020	6:00 pm	Truth in Taxation Public Hearing – Secondary School Media Center
	6:30 pm	School Board Meeting – Secondary School Media Center/Remote
December 24, 2020 – January 1, 2021		Winter Break
January 4, 2021	5:30 pm	School Board Organizational Meeting – Board Room

Dale's Calendar for November 2 - 6 (As of 10-30-2020)

Monday		Out of District in AM
	1:00 pm	Weekly check in with Donna
	1:30 pm	Check in with Doug / Dave
	2:00 pm	Check in with Karla
	2:30 pm	Check in with Sue
	3:00 pm	Weekly Call with Steele County Public Health
Tuesday	9:00 am	New School Board Member Orientation Planning with Sue
	1:00 pm	Audit review with auditor and Karla
	3:30 pm	Secondary Staffing Plan Review with Dave
Wednesday	9:00 am	Principal Evaluation Conference #2
	1:30 pm	Principal Evaluation Conference #2
	2:30 pm	WBWF Planning with Jessica, Doug, Dave
Thursday	7:30 am	Weekly Waseca County Public Health Check in with County Schools
	8:30 am	Weekly check-in with Donna
	9:00 am	SW Metro South Superintendent Meeting
	10:00 am	Budget Review with Karla
	4:00 pm	Weekly MDE Call
Friday		Out of the District – Tentative
	8:00 am	Board Agenda Planning with Board Chair
	10:00 am	MSBA Call with Governor Walz/MDE/MDH

Thank you for all you do!