

4-12-2021 Family Update - In-Person Learning Models and Variant Spread

Families:

It has been several weeks since I last communicated with families regarding an update on our learning model status in both school buildings as not much has changed. When I last communicated with you, I shared that we would be completing our transition to *in-person learning* for all students by March 2. Since then, students have had the opportunity to remain in *full-time distance learning* as well. By the end of March, both school buildings had also transitioned to *in-person learning* on Wednesday mornings. Wednesday afternoons continue to be non-instructional time reserved for distance learning planning for staff.

Health and safety mitigation strategies continue in both schools. With the uptick in virus cases in the last two weeks throughout Minnesota especially in schools and activities, it is critical that students, families and staff not let up on those strategies that have been in place all school year including staying home when ill, keeping as much distance from each other as possible, avoiding crowds, washing/sanitizing hands frequently, and wearing a mask properly. There are reports that one of the variants (B.1.1.7) is spreading more rapidly among children impacting schools. Some schools are having to make difficult decisions on whether or not to move to more restrictive learning models with only two months left in the school year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the best and most effective action we can take as a school community is to continue with the mitigation strategies mentioned above.

Several of the metrics we have followed for most of the school year including the number of positive cases and quarantines within our schools, 14-day county-wide positive cases in all three of our counties, positive cases in our school district zip codes, and the positivity rates in our three counties reflect a potential trending upward which is the wrong direction we want to be heading at this time. It is my hope that students, families, staff and those throughout our communities do everything possible so that our students can remain in their school until the end of the school year. I do not want our students to have to change to a more restrictive learning model again this year, but this option will have to be considered if we experience an increase in cases and/or experience challenges with providing adequate staffing.

I am encouraged that in the past several weeks, families now have the opportunity to test as often as needed. All adults are able to sign up for the vaccine. In fact, students 16 and older now have the opportunity to sign up for the vaccine. Regular testing and the increase in those vaccinated will also help in our efforts to minimize the spread of the virus and keep our schools open for *in-person learning*.

If you have a family member who is currently having any symptoms consistent with COVID-19 or testing for COVID-19, please make sure all other family members remain quarantined and contact the school nurse, Donna Olson, @ 507-416-2105 or lolson@nrheg.k12.mn.us.

Thank you for all you are doing to take care of yourself and those around you!

Dale Carlson, Superintendent