



New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Geneva Public Schools

Independent School District No. 2168

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Empowering students with knowledge and skills to succeed.

2020-2021 School Year Learning Model Family Update September 11, 2020

Dear Families:

I want to provide our families with an update after the weekly county-wide case-rate numbers were released yesterday on September 10. As I have shared with you for the past several weeks, the school district is closely monitoring the positive case rates in all three of our counties, but have been instructed to make our learning model decisions based on the case-rate data for Waseca County as it continues to report the highest number of positive cases and it is also home to the largest percentage of our students and families.

The learning models as of Monday, September 14 will have the Elementary School remaining in *Hybrid Learning* and the Secondary School beginning *Distance Learning* as I shared with you last week. The positive case-rate for Waseca County that was published by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) on September 10 was 50.51, up from 37.75 a week ago. I have attached a press release by Waseca County Public Health (WCPH) dated September 9 for your review as it speaks to the trending-up of the positive cases in Waseca County.

Minnesota's *Safe Learning Plan* outlines recommended *Learning Model Parameters* based on the number of positive cases per 10,000 over 14 days in each county. Last week, I announced that the Secondary School would be moving from *Hybrid Learning* to *Distance Learning* beginning September 14 due to the case-rate for Waseca County moving well into the 30-49 learning parameter and that WCPH was tracking cases on an upward trend in which it was projected the case-rate would continue to exceed 30 for multiple weeks.

With the September 10 published case-rate for Waseca County at 50.51, the question to be asked is . . . if and when the school district must consider moving the Elementary School to the most restrictive model of *Distance Learning*? The *Learning Model Parameters* suggest a school district consider an adjustment when the county case-rate exceeds 50 in a 14-day period. However, the guidance in the *Safe Learning Plan* offers additional factors to consider before moving to *Distance Learning*, especially for our youngest learners at the elementary level. Most important, the guidance recommends school districts work closely with their Regional Support Team (RST) that consists of public health experts, in determining when to move to the most restrictive learning model. The school district met last week with the RST as well as WCPH before announcing it would move to *Distance Learning* for the Secondary School.

After consulting with both the RST and WCPH in the past 48 hours, **the Elementary School will remain in *Hybrid Learning* at this time.** The school district will be monitoring the positive case data and will be consulting with the RST and WCPH to determine if and when there needs to be consideration to move the Elementary School to the most restrictive model of *Distance Learning*.

The *Safe Learning Plan* recognizes and states: “*The learning model determination may not be the same for all grades. The research has shown much more limited transmission of COVID-19 in younger children. This knowledge, combined with understanding that distance learning is more difficult with younger learners and creates a more significant burden on families, should lead districts and schools to always consider ways to keep elementary students in-person where it is safe and possible.*” Specific to the decision of moving to a more restrictive learning model for the Elementary School, the school district is closely monitoring the number of positive cases within our specific school community. The current low positive case number within our school buildings is another factor for determining to remain in *Hybrid Learning* at the Elementary School at this time. However, an increase in positive cases within the school would contribute to a decision to possibly change to a more restrictive learning model.

I want to respond to a question that I have received over the course of the past week regarding the correctional facility in Waseca and its impact on the county case-rate. As you read in the press release by WCPH, there is acknowledgment of the Federal Corrections Institution, but while a percentage of the county positive cases reflect cases within the Institution, WCPH reports that the community spread is much greater and projections continue to trend up even without including the correctional facility cases. As WCPH Director Sarah Berry states in the press release, WCPH takes this data in consideration when providing guidance to school districts.

Please know the health and safety of our students, families and employees is our highest priority and leads every decision that is made regarding the learning models for each school. The school district will not hesitate to move to *Distance Learning* for the Elementary School if, in consultation with the RST and WCPH, it is determined the change is necessary in order to minimize the spread of the virus throughout our schools, homes and communities.

Do not hesitate to contact your child(ren)’s teacher(s), principal, or me with questions. Thank you for all you do to support your child(ren) and the NRHEG Public Schools.

Dale Carlson