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Update on COVID-19 and Rock Ridge Public Schools

Thursday, October 29, 2020

Dear Rock Ridge Staff & Families,

Straight-to-the-point: For now, we are continuing with hybrid learning in the high schools and in-person learning in the elementary schools. However, the data are clearly heading in the wrong direction. Unless COVID-19 rates reverse in the near future, I can clearly see a scenario before the holidays where we will have to switch to distance learning in the high school and hybrid learning in the elementary schools.

We continue to work with the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Education, and St. Louis County Public Health to ensure your child/children have a safe and healthy 2020-2021 school year. The Minnesota Department of Health and St. Louis County Public Health has been supporting us in the implementation of our Safe Learning Plan along with providing local data, monitoring trends and providing consultation to assist in our decision-making process. They have also provided infection control recommendations and connected us to additional resources.

On Thursday, October 29, the St. Louis County Dashboard numbers were updated. We have been monitoring the case rates for schools as one of the many tools that help facilitate conversations and decisions about our Safe Learning Plan.

The Greater St. Louis County bi-weekly case rates continue to increase. They increased from 25.73 per 10,000, to 37.60 per 10,000, which continues to meet the Minnesota Department of Education guidelines to begin considering distance learning model for secondary students and the hybrid model for elementary students. I believe these rates will continue to increase for the next several weeks. The new guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health is to wait for three weeks of data before changing learning models unless there is an outbreak in the schools. We currently are nearing three weeks of data. We are getting close to the guidance level from the Minnesota Department of Health for considering the high school switch to all distance learning and for us to consider switching the elementary schools to hybrid learning.

However, the rates of COVID-19 in our schools continue to be lower than the greater St. Louis County area. Currently we have 5 known COVID-19 cases among the students and 2 known COVID-19 cases among staff. As far as we know, the vast majority of COVID-19 cases are coming from outside the school. Students and staff are not catching COVID-19 in the school setting. In general, individuals are getting COVID-19 from public birthday parties, family gatherings, meetings with individuals from out-of-town, athletic gatherings, and similar engagements where people are not wearing masks and practicing social distance.

Immediately listed below is the Minnesota Department of Health **recommended policy options based on 14-day case rate range chart:**

Policy Option	Range (14-day case rate per 10,000 people)
In-person learning for all students	0 to less than 10
Elementary in person, Middle/high school hybrid	10 to less than 20
Both hybrid	20 to less than 30
Elementary hybrid, Middle/high school distance	30 to less than 50
Both distance	50 or more



In addition, and this is important, the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Health are reminding us to continue to use local data and conditions in our decision-making process. This is from a notice which I received yesterday from MDE and MDH:

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.

We will continue to work closely with St. Louis County Public Health and Minnesota Department of Health to monitor the transmission of COVID-19 throughout the year to keep our students, their families, and communities safe. Our school board and COVID planning team will work to change learning models if at any point we feel it is in the best interest of our faculty and students.

We know these are difficult times and there is no perfect solution to the problems being caused by COVID-19. But we will get through this. And things will eventually get better.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for everything you are doing to ensure the success of the 2020-2021 school year and to remind you of the key role you play in helping slow the spread of COVID-19. Please continue to:

- Wear your face coverings and masks when in public.
- Maintain social distancing even in social settings, e.g. sporting events, family functions, birthday parties, or social gatherings.
- Avoid contact with people from other states and other distant cities, especially if individuals are not wearing masks.
- Avoid crowds, especially if individuals are not wearing masks.
- Wash your hands thoroughly.
- Stay home if not feeling well.
- Quarantine your household if you or any member of your family is home with COVID-19 test result pending.
- Clean and sanitize school items such as backpacks and lunchboxes as they return home from school.
- Wash reusable masks and throw away disposable masks.
- Inform your child’s school nurse if your child has symptoms of COVID.
- If your student is cleared from COVID Quarantine due to a negative COVID test result, you must notify your student’s school nurse before they can return to school.

In addition:

- **If you or any member of your household is being tested for COVID-19 because symptoms of the COVID-19 infection are present, each member of your family must stay home until the test results are known. This includes children of the household staying home from school and extracurricular activities.**
- **If someone in the household is being tested for COVID-19, but does not have symptoms of the COVID-19 infection, children may return to school before the test results are known. Examples of this include: healthcare workers who are being tested through their employer as a precaution given their job requirements or someone being tested for an upcoming procedure as a precaution.**

We want to again thank you all for your continued support as we work to make this unforgettable year as safe and fun as possible. <https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/schools/attendance.pdf>

We understand parents and families have questions and concerns as we have entered a school year filled with uncertainty. We want to make sure your questions are addressed. Health.covid19@state.mn.us is an email parents can use for questions they have related to COVID-19 as they arise throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

For up to date local information, you can visit the St. Louis County Dashboard at: [Story Map Series](#)

Sincerely,



Dr. Noel Schmidt