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Thursday, November 12, 2020

Dear Rock Ridge Staff & Families,

Straight-to-the-point: We are switching to all distance learning in the high schools beginning on Monday, November 23 and switching to hybrid learning in the elementary schools on Wednesday, November 25.

The data continues heading in the wrong direction. Even though we have little COVID-19 transmission in the schools, the COVID-19 infection rates in the greater community are increasing so rapidly that it is making it almost impossible to offer school to students on an everyday basis. Currently, nearly 1 in 12 students is in quarantine, unable to attend school. This number continues to get significantly worse.

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 have 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, November 12, 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 increased. The data increased from 42.72 per 10,000, to 60.07 per 10,000, which continues to meet the Minnesota Department of Education guidelines to move to distance learning for secondary students and hybrid for elementary students. I believe these rates will continue to increase or, best case scenario, stop increasing for the next several weeks. More importantly, last week we had two staff members and three students who had verified cases of COVID-19. Now we have two staff members and ten students who have verified cases of COVID-19. We also have a number of individuals who have COVID-19 symptoms that we are awaiting test results on.

This is disappointing because, as far as we know, the vast majority of COVID-19 cases continue to come from outside the school. 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

For high school students, all distance learning begins on Monday, November 23.

All distance learning in the high school will continue until further notice. I see few immediate scenarios in the near-term future where the high school students drop back to hybrid learning. We may be in distance learning for months.

High School students will be distance learning (or have assignments) five days of the week--on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

Students in grades 7-12 will log on to each class at their regularly scheduled times on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. On Wednesdays, students will log into Schoology to gain access to their daily work.

Some students in grades 7-12 may receive specific learning invitations from their teachers for extra help. Please reach out to teachers if you feel your child needs individualized support.

For elementary students, hybrid learning starts on Wednesday, November 25.

To help elementary teachers prepare for hybrid learning, there will be no elementary school classes on Monday, November 23 and Tuesday, November 24. Some elementary students will receive specific learning invitations from teachers for extra help on Wednesday, November 25. But most students will not attend school on Wednesday, November 25.

This means hybrid classes for most students will begin on either Monday, November 30 or Tuesday, December 1. Elementary students will be grouped into either Group A or Group B. **Wait for details from your classroom teacher as to which group the elementary students or your child are assigned.** Group A will begin on Monday, November 30 and have school on Mondays and Thursdays. Group B will begin on Tuesday, December 1 and have school on Tuesdays and Fridays. This weekly rotation, group A and group B, will continue until further notice.

Some elementary students will receive specific learning invitations from teachers for extra help on Wednesday.

This means the elementary student schedule for the week of November 23 and November 30 will look like this (see below):

Monday, November 23: No school as teachers prepare for hybrid learning.

Tuesday, November 24: No school as teachers prepare for hybrid learning.

Wednesday, November 25: Specific invitation from teachers (some students will be invited by their teachers) for extra help, but all other students are expected to do any assignments at home.

Thursday, November 26: No School. Holiday break.

Friday, November 27: No School. Holiday break.

Monday, November 30: Group A attends school. Group B is at home.

Tuesday, December 1: Group B attends school. Group A is at home.

Wednesday, December 2: Specific invitation from teachers (some students will be invited by their teachers) for extra help but all other students are expected to do any assignments at home.

Thursday, December 3: Group A attends school. Group B is at home.

Friday, December 4: Group B attends school. Group A is at home.

This rotation then continues until the elementary schools move out of hybrid learning. Students who currently are on 100% distance learning will continue 100% distance learning.

Elementary students who selected distance learning [also known as remote or online learning] will continue to be 100% distance learning students. **They cannot switch to hybrid at this time.**

Students cannot switch the days they are assigned at this time. If there is a family living in the same home with multiple last names, please contact your building principal. All other requests cannot be granted at this time and we thank you for understanding.

I do not foresee any short-term conditions which will cause us to switch out of the elementary hybrid back into all day schooling. Elementary school students could be in hybrid learning mode for months or we may be forced into distance learning for the elementary school students if the community COVID-19 rates do not stop rising. If they continue to rise, it will cause even more infections and consequently more and more students and staff will be forced into quarantine. This is the reality of our current situation. When in public or with other parents and kids, wear the mask and observe social distancing to keep our elementary students in school.

Additional Information

Sports

All sporting events (varsity, junior varsity, and junior high) and practices will continue as scheduled, even though the high school students are in distance learning. However, high school students will need to figure out their own transportation to the practice field or the official team bus that is going to an away game. Parents may transport their child to away games, providing they have filled out the transportation form which is available in the athletic office or online. Students cannot drive themselves to away games.

Buses

For elementary students who are on hybrid learning, and high school students who have been specifically invited by their classroom teachers, daily school bus routes will continue to operate at their normal times and stops.

Child Care for Tier I Critical Workers

If you have a school-age child with day care needs, up to the age of 12, and you are classified as a Tier I Critical Worker, we will have day care available for you. Wait for additional details from your elementary school. Note: The school-age care for children of critical workers is intended for extreme circumstances in which no parent or guardian is at home, as all of the parents or legal guardians in the child's household are Tier I critical workers. Tier I workers include: Healthcare, law enforcement, public safety and first responders, judicial branch, national guard, educators, school staff providing instruction, and child care and school-age care providers

Lunches

If your child is on distance learning for the day and on free or reduced lunches, we will have lunches available to be picked up at two locations: Virginia High School or Franklin Elementary School. Look for additional details on specifics of the program.

Wear the mask and practice social distancing

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 a 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.

Important info from the Minnesota Department of Health

- 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>

Track local Rock Ridge data

For those who are interested, here is a new link, which will be updated on a weekly basis, for you to follow the COVID-19 cases, as far as location, and the numbers of individuals who are quarantined. Expect the number of individuals quarantined to always be significantly higher than the number of individuals who actually have COVID-19. Immediately quarantining individuals is an effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19. <https://rrps.org/rrps-covid19-dashboard/>

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