



New Richland-Hartland-Ellendale-Geneva Public Schools

Independent School District No. 2168

District Office

306 Ash Avenue South
New Richland, MN 56072
(507)465-3206
Fax (507)465-8633
Dale Carlson, Superintendent

Secondary School

306 Ash Avenue South
New Richland, MN 56072
(507)465-3205
Fax (507)465-8633
David Bunn, Principal

Elementary School

600 School Street
Ellendale, MN 56026
(507)684-3181
Fax (507)684-2108
Douglas Anderson, Principal

Empowering students with knowledge and skills to succeed.

2020-2021 School Year Learning Model Family Update

October 22, 2020

Hybrid Learning Continues

Dear Families:

Based on the most recent consultation with public health officials today that included a review of projected county-wide case rates from the past two weeks, our low student and staff isolation and quarantine numbers including no positive cases as of today, and a review of today's 14-day county case rates published by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), NRHEG Public Schools will continue in *Hybrid Learning* for both buildings.

As referenced in my October 1 Family Update, we anticipated that the 14-day MDH published rate for Waseca County would likely continue to be high for several weeks. The high case rate was due in large part to the number of cases isolated to the correctional facility in Waseca. Following the October 1 published rate of 92.51 (per 10,000 people in the County), the published rates for October 8 and 16 were 164.28 and 159.50. However, when separating out the correctional facility positive cases for those published rates, public health officials indicated case rates in the 30s and trending downward. Today, the published 14-day rate was 69.65 for the period between September 27 and October 10. When separating the correctional facility cases from the other sources, the Waseca County case rate was projected in the lower 20s. Looking ahead, projections by public health officials have the overall case rate for Waseca county continuing to trend downward with the "non-correctional facility cases" remaining in the 20s.

Even though I report the separation of the correctional facility cases from the non-correctional facility cases, I would caution those who believe the correctional facility case numbers should be totally dismissed and not considered when determining the learning model. At the same time, I acknowledge there is consideration by public health officials to weigh the correctional facility case numbers less than the general community spread cases in the decision-making given the large percentage of cases isolated to facility residents. This could change in the future if the case rate of employees working at the correctional facility increases.

We are closely monitoring both Steele County and Freeborn County as there are indicators of cases trending upward. Today's MDH published 14-day case rate for Steele County was 29.72 up from 19.90 a week ago. Today's Freeborn County case rate was 16.05 up from 13.43 a week ago. A reminder that these rates are for the period September 27 through October 10 so it is lagging data reflecting cases from almost two to four weeks ago. We can anticipate the published case rates next week to increase for both counties.

As I previously shared in earlier updates, the weekly 14-day county-wide case rate published by MDH is not the only metric to be considered when examining the current learning model to determine if an adjustment in learning models is warranted. From the [Safe Learning Plan for the 2020-21 School Year](#), beginning on page 8, there is guidance to consider when determining adjustments and potential moves between models. This has not changed since the start of the school year with the last update being September 3. A few highlights from pages 8-11 include:

- *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 bi-weekly county-level case data.*
- *As viral activity increases within a community or school (e.g., when there are increasing numbers of cases over a short period of time or clusters of cases are identified), the need to adjust to a learning model that reduces the number of people in a school building and requires more stringent mitigation strategies also increases. By contrast, schools using a distance or hybrid learning model that experience a declining level of viral activity in the school and/or surrounding community, as indicated by county-level case data, may consider cautiously shifting their learning models to increase the number of students learning in-person.*
- *If a school district or charter school is considering dialing forward to a less restrictive learning model than what is required under the Safe Learning Model Guidance, it must work with its Regional Support Team to consult with local public health officials, MDH or MDE as needed. -- This is the process we have used since the weekly MDH 14-day case rate has exceeded 50 for Waseca County.*
- Beginning on page 9, there are *Planning Scenarios for Moving Between Learning Models* that continue to be referenced as we monitor our current learning models and the possibility of making a move to another model. We have focused on Scenario 2 and Scenario 3 for help in navigating between *Hybrid* and *Distance Learning*.

The growing trend in cases throughout the state is not encouraging. We must be prepared to move to a more restrictive model (*distance learning*) should we experience a surge in "community-spread" cases in any of our three counties (Waseca, Steele, Freeborn). However, the more likely reason why we would make a sudden move to *distance learning* for part or all of a school building would be due to an increase in the number of quarantines and/or positive cases within our two school buildings which could happen literally overnight.

There are those who have asked: "Why not move Elementary to *in-person* if we are not experiencing any positive cases?" My response has been that the school district will follow the guidance and direction from county and state public health officials in considering a move to *all in-person* as our goal is to minimize the spread of the virus with the hope of having zero or very few positive cases within our schools. Most important to our efforts of maintaining our *Hybrid Learning* model as well as being able to eventually move to an *All In-Person* model beginning at the Elementary School is to make sure students, families and staff members are screening daily, staying home if ill, wearing masks, socially distancing, washing/sanitizing hands often, meeting in small groups, refraining from sharing objects, no carpooling, etc. Thank you parents for screening your child every morning before leaving for school. When one comes to school having symptoms, it significantly increases the chances that a part or all of the school will have to be closed to *in-person learning* for a period of time in the event that individual tests positive.

I do not have easy answers or solutions right now that will change our current reality of *Hybrid Learning* and the many safety measures that must continue to be in place. We know that the most effective learning model for most students is being physically present in their school. It is my hope that we are not far from that time when we can safely welcome our students back to school every day beginning with the Elementary School.

Please know our staff is working extremely hard to provide meaningful learning opportunities for all students. We continue to examine areas in need of attention and how we can continually improve in servicing students and families. Please do not hesitate to contact your child(ren)'s teacher(s), principal, or me with questions, concerns and suggestions.

Thank you for all you are doing to keep yourself, your family and all those around you safe and healthy.

Dale Carlson
Superintendent