



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

December 2, 2020

Elementary School Moving to Distance Learning

Dear Families:

Unfortunately, we will be moving the Elementary School from *Hybrid Learning* to *Distance Learning* immediately beginning Monday, December 7. Thursday, December 3, and Friday, December 4, will not be instructional days for elementary students in order to allow staff to prepare for the transition. School districts are allowed a total of five (5) planning days per school building to be used when either transitioning between learning models or to make modifications within a learning model. Thursday and Friday will not have to be rescheduled for elementary students. The Secondary School will be in session on Thursday and Friday under *distance learning*.

At this time, both the Elementary School and Secondary School will remain in *distance learning* through Wednesday, December 23, with a tentative return to *hybrid learning* for some or all grade levels set for Monday, January 4.

As I reported to you last week on Wednesday (11-25-2020), the School Board determined to continue the Elementary School in *hybrid learning* at its November 23 special School Board meeting. However, the School Board gave the Superintendent and School Board Chair the authority to act on its behalf to move the Elementary School to *distance learning* if providing the adequate staff necessary was not sustainable. Today, Principal Doug Anderson and I recommended to the Board Chair an immediate move to *distance learning* for the Elementary School was necessary due to challenges in staffing.

With the increase in COVID-19 cases, and the need for ill staff to test, it has become extremely difficult to appropriately staff our classrooms and building. For the past few weeks specialists, administration and other individuals have stepped in to cover those classrooms and assignments where a substitute was not available. Our substitute pool is very limited and our ability to reassign staff to an unfilled position has dramatically declined as staff are ill or are required to quarantine. Staff absences have occurred in all areas of the Elementary School which include: classrooms, paraprofessionals, cafeteria, transportation and our custodial department.

The challenge with staffing is that we are unable to predict what staffing needs will be in a few days, a week or longer. The Elementary School has been having to address an average of more than ten (10) staff absences a day for more than a week. While the Elementary School has been able to manage the substitute needs for the short term, it simply is not sustainable to continue for an unknown period of time.

We are also aware of the continued elevated positive case rates all around our school district and within our communities. We continue to experience positive cases within our schools including the Elementary School. When looking at our [COVID-19 Dashboard](#) that was updated late last week, you will see that the 14-day County-wide case rates continue to be extremely high. The positivity rates for all three counties continue to increase and all exceed 5%. The number of positive cases within our four zip codes from the past week significantly jumped as well.

At this time, the Elementary School and Secondary School will remain in *distance learning* through Wednesday, December 23, with a tentative return to *hybrid learning* for some or all grade levels set for Monday, January 4.

However, the *distance learning* period could be extended for one or both schools depending on the number of cases within the school, school district, our communities and counties. In addition, a school will remain in *distance learning* if we are not able to adequately staff classrooms and/or the building due to staff in isolation or quarantine.

Moving either school to *distance learning* is a difficult decision as we believe most students learn best when they are physically present in school. Our behaviors as a school community and how our communities respond to stopping the virus spread will have an impact on when our students will be able to return to school *in-person*.

If you have a family member who is currently isolated due to testing positive, please make sure all other family members remain quarantined and contact your child's school even during a *distance learning* period. In the event a child tests positive, we encourage you to contact the school or the Minnesota Department of Health immediately so that contact tracing may begin. Having an accurate record of isolations and quarantines will be an important factor in determining when one or both schools will be able to return to *hybrid learning*.

It is unfortunate the need to move the Elementary School to *distance learning* must occur so quickly, but we have known of the possibility that a change in learning models due to staffing challenges could occur suddenly. Information regarding daycare and meals will be forwarded in a separate communication.

Thank you for all you are doing to take care of yourself, your family, and those around you.

Dale Carlson
Superintendent