



November 24, 2020

Prairie Families and Staff:

As we continue to navigate the uncharted waters of life and school in a pandemic surge, we continue to examine current data. In a communication dated November 19, we announced the following:

If the community rate of infection on November 25, 2020, remains at or above 20% for Linn County, regardless of trend in the weeks preceding, the District will file a waiver to extend online learning for the period of November 30 through as late as December 14. We will also continue to examine rates of isolation and quarantine as well as other public factors in this decision.

The decision to remain online (at home) or return on November 30th in Hybrid will be announced November 25, 2020, as will the length of any intended change.

Based on current conditions and district data, we are making this announcement a day early. While today's Linn County rate is below 20% and all counties our district serves are trending down (CURRENT - Linn County - 19.1%; Benton County - 20.9%; Johnson County 13.5%), other data is suggesting that our district is still being greatly impacted by the recent surge.

The state requires waivers be submitted in 2-week increments. For positive individuals, isolation is 10 days and the quarantine period for close contact is 14 days. Therefore, the numbers represent a mostly new group of individuals that are being affected by the illness. Unfortunately, our local District data remain at very similar levels that they were on the date of our initial waiver, meaning more people are being impacted by isolation and quarantine. A high rate of staff absence compromises the ability for us to run day-to-day operations such as transportation and academic instruction. Staff absences impact our ability to consistently implement the necessary mitigation strategies to prevent further spread of COVID-19. Mitigation strategies are important always, but **correct** and **consistent** mitigation is especially important during a community surge with such a high likelihood of exposure. Additionally, high rates of students who are ill and in quarantine impact the learning environment and student support structures.

Taking all of this data into consideration, we are making the unfortunate, but necessary, decision to remain in online (at home) learning until at least December 11 with a plan to return to the every-other-day hybrid on December 14. (See schedule below). This decision is pending approval of the waiver submitted to the Iowa Department of Education. Regardless of waiver status, we will be online Monday, November 30 and Tuesday, December 1. We will only communicate if the waiver is denied.

Any changes or modifications to the plan after the 14th will be announced in a timely manner as feasible given the pace of change during this pandemic.

While choices that our students and families make related to gatherings and travel during the upcoming holiday season are on our minds, this decision was not made based on these concerns. We cannot predict the future and are hopeful that our community will make safe choices over the holiday break. We are committed to making decisions based on current data and current conditions. The decision to apply for the waiver was made based on the following factors:

- 1) No significant change in infection rate for students since November 19
- 2) Increased percentage of student quarantines since November 19
- 3) Increased percentage of staff reporting illness since November 19
- 4) Staffing impacts to areas with already critical staff shortages (transportation)
- 5) Availability of substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, and drivers
- 6) Linn County hospitals reporting critical status due to staffing and numbers

Please know that we understand the impacts these decisions have on families as well as how much students need to be at school. Our goal has always been to return to onsite instruction and our students have received, and will continue to receive, our commitment to maximizing full onsite instruction to the greatest extent possible given the pandemic. Our families and students continue to abide by our mitigation practices and we remain confident in our ability to provide safe instruction onsite with our current mitigation strategies once the above factors improve.

Please also know that our staffing challenges are not an issue of staff not wanting to come to work. 10-day isolations and 14-day quarantines have a compounding effect on our ability to be fully staffed and we have not previously experienced these types of required extended absences. The common cold and even the flu do not generate the length of absence required to mitigate the spread of illness during a pandemic. Reporting infection or suspected infection and abiding by CDC isolation and quarantine guidelines to the extent possible is a key mitigation strategy.

Thank you for supporting your student and our district in these difficult times. I wish you a safe and happy holiday.

In Service,
Doug Wheeler

Doug Wheeler, Ph.D.
 Superintendent of Schools

Week 16	Monday December 14	Tuesday December 15	Wednesday December 16	Thursday December 17	Friday December 18
	Hybrid Cohort A	Hybrid Cohort B	Hybrid Cohort A	Hybrid Cohort B	Hybrid Cohort A
Week 17	Monday December 21	Tuesday December 22	Wednesday December 23	Thursday December 24	Friday December 25
	Hybrid Cohort B	Hybrid Cohort A	NO SCHOOL Winter Break	NO SCHOOL Winter Break	NO SCHOOL Winter Break