



**THE PROMISE OF RUSH CITY SCHOOLS IS TO CREATE
GLOBAL CITIZENS WHO ARE LIFELONG LEARNERS**

October 30, 2020

Dear Rush City Families,

Parents, school district employees, and the Rush City community have a common goal: we want our children to safely attend school in person and participate in extracurricular activities. We know and appreciate the vast benefits that school and sports bring to students that include academic growth, mental health, physical health, and all the advantages that are just too difficult to quantify. The reality of our current situation is that we are living in the middle of a global pandemic and our primary responsibility to our children, staff, and community is safety. Before we can bring students back to a less restrictive learning scenario or reinstate activities, we need to ensure it is safe to do so.

There are many people who work together to make various school decisions related to the COVID-19 situation. The School Board Advisory Committee, composed of parents, staff, board members, and students, meets monthly to discuss concerns, feedback, and ideas related to our daily functioning as a school. The School Board plays a large role in reviewing and approving school policies, plans, and procedures related to COVID-19. Our district has also established a COVID-19 Incident Command Team, which includes school administrators and the school nurse. This group meets as needed to manage the tasks associated with active COVID-19 cases in the building and to discuss immediate next steps for our schools. Members of the Incident Command Team work closely with local and state public health members, as well as our state-assigned Regional Support Team, as needed for their input related to evolving local situations.

There are many factors we consider when making decisions about our learning model status. A partial list includes the following:

- The number of active COVID-19 cases we have in our school among students and staff
- The number of students and staff we have absent because they are under quarantine
- The number of students and staff we have absent because they are sick with COVID-like symptoms
- The rate and trends of COVID-19 cases in our local community
- The rate and trends of COVID-19 cases in our county
- Our ability to safely staff our classrooms and buildings, and to transport students

We obtain the information needed to make safe decisions in many ways. We track student and staff data, including symptoms, every day. We are in regular conversation with Chisago County Public Health, who often brings us data from neighboring counties that affect our schools. We are also in frequent contact with our Regional Support Team established by the state. Various staff members attend regular meetings with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), and the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL). Area superintendents meet multiple times a week with each other and local public health staff to assess the current situation in our area, and to determine if one part of the county is affected more than another.

As you know, guidance for best practices changes as we learn more about COVID-19. You also know that some situations necessitate very swift changes to our learning scenarios. For example, while the state's published data yesterday put our county case rate at 51, we know that as of today, our number is actually 71. Next week, our Incident Command Team will meet with local public health and our Regional Support Team to determine an appropriate learning scenario for our district in light of local case data. We will of course communicate with district families if we need to shift learning scenarios. Remember, families always have the option to choose distance learning at any time they feel it is necessary for the sake of safety or consistency.

The ability of our children to return or stay in less restrictive learning models, and to safely participate in extracurricular activities, depends on our school, district, county, regional, and state data. As previously stated, many types of data influence the tough decisions we must make. With extracurricular activities, we must even consider the behavior of the spectators. If people in attendance or in participation do not follow health guidelines, they jeopardize the ability to continue the activity. The actions of our community at large are an immense factor in determining what opportunities are available for our students. When we have multiple cases of COVID-19 in our building, high rates of students and staff with symptoms, staffing shortages, or our county metric is above the established threshold, we likely will need to shift to a

more restrictive scenario. The Minnesota Department of Education has the authority to force us to go to distance learning and suspend activities if necessary.

Here are things we can ALL do to help our situation:

- Wear masks when we are not in our home or car
- Stay home, and keep our children home, when we have even minor symptoms
- Avoid gathering in groups or attending high-risk events where people are not wearing masks or distancing
- Practice good hand hygiene

COVID-19 is in our community. We know it is here from school data, and from the local data we get from Chisago County. We are bound as a school district to protect our kids and our community, and because our local incidence of COVID-19 has steadily and relentlessly increased, we have had to further restrict our learning models. If we work together, we can reverse the trend and get our kids back in the building and back playing sports. If we dismiss the actions that we know help the spread of this virus, the school must remain in more restrictive learning models to avoid contributing to local case rates.

We are truly all in this together. We are doing what we can to make school as safe as possible, so make a commitment to do your part in stopping the spread of COVID-19 at a local level. We all can work together to help our students return to the building and return to their sports and activities.

We know this is a very complex and ever changing issue, and that you may have further questions. In an effort to ensure the district is as transparent as possible, and that community members can stay informed, **I will host a question and answer Zoom meeting on Thursday, November 5th, 2020 at 5:00 pm**. School leaders will be available to answer questions. Simply click on this [LINK](#) to attend. We are looking forward to offering more in-depth information and to answering your questions.

General Updates/Communications:

- We will be creating a virtual **Veterans Day celebration** this year. If your family includes a veteran you would like to recognize, please send a photo of your student(s) holding a photo of the veteran(s) they are proud of to Nbasta@rushcity.k12.mn.us so we can include it in our virtual program. Include the veteran's name and the branch of the military in they served. We must receive your photos by the end of next week, November 6th, for them to be included. Help make this year's Veterans Day a special one by participating!
- **Homecoming** is still coming. Staff will be planning activities next week. Watch for an announcement soon!
- Academic and technical support is available for your student(s). If you are having problems and need assistance please contact your student's school.
- **Mental health resources** are available for families and students who are struggling during these challenging times. Please reach out to your school counselor or for assistance if needed.
- You can also find resources for families and students on page 35 of the 2002-21 Planning Guidance for Minnesota Public Schools document found on the [Minnesota Department of Education COVID-19 Updates](#) webpage.
- Unless we are operating in Scenario 1, full in-person learning for all, any **snow days** will become district-wide distance learning days. In the event we are back to full in-person learning, school would be canceled as in past years. In either situation, we will communicate plans via Schoolmessenger.
- We are doing our best to keep **bussing times** as constant as possible, however, we realize that during the hybrid scenario some busses are running a bit early in the afternoon. Please be flexible if possible and plan accordingly.

Have a safe and healthy Halloween weekend,

Brent Stavig
Interim Superintendent
Rush City Schools