



October 27, 2020

MAS Parents, Students and Staff:

As can be expected during these times of COVID-19, several MAS families and community members have asked “What kind of information does the MAS Command Team review at its regular weekly meeting to determine which Learning Scenario MAS children will be in?” The focus of this letter is to provide some insight for your reflection.

There are four Learning Scenarios that are permissible based on Gov. Walz Executive Order 80-22. They are (1) In-person Learning, (2) Hybrid Learning, (3) Distance Learning and (4) Distance Learning by Family Choice. Currently, MAS is in the “in person scenario” for grades K-6 (which means K-6 graders are in person attending every day of the week). MAS 7-12th graders are in the “Hybrid Learning Scenario” meaning they are “in person” every other day and are “distance learning” on the days they are not in person (this is referred to as our ABABA schedule). Some families have chosen the Distance Learning Choice model.

At the beginning of this school year the Minnewaska Area School Board approved a 13 member COVID Command Team. That team includes MAS educators, school board members and representatives of Horizon Public Health and Glacial Ridge Health System. The team was charged with the responsibility to meet together weekly to determine the appropriate “Learning Scenarios” our students will be in at any given time throughout the 2020-2021 school year.

Since the beginning of the year the information we review has evolved from one piece of information--the [Minnesota Department of Health COVID County](#) data (*available to everyone but two weeks old*)-- to several additional data reports giving us a more comprehensive and specific look at our own school situation. For example, we can now:

- Review more immediate Pope County COVID data giving us a [MAS up-to-date information table](#).
- Drill down into our data (with the help of Horizon Public Health) to understand where the [Pope County Active Cases](#) actually are (*For example; Are active cases in schools? Are active cases in long-term care facilities? Are active cases in other geographic areas? What age groups or workplaces are experiencing active cases?*) In other words, we can now be much more specific in interpreting the data than we were when we began the school year.)
- Review our own MAS data to review the number/percentage of [MAS school children active cases](#)
- Review our own MAS data to review the number/percentage of [MAS staff active cases](#)
- Discuss MAS weekly rate of student and staff absenteeism

After reviewing and discussing the data identified above, the Command Team applies its own **common sense** to this more sophisticated information and makes decisions about which Learning Scenario is appropriate for our schools to be in. We are no longer dependent on one report to make decisions. Every Monday afternoon, we update on our [MAS COVID-19 Website](#) some of the information the Command Team reviews. You are encouraged to review it periodically.

Our Command Team members have also been asked “Why don’t all school districts in our geographic area use the same model?” The answer is each school district throughout Minnesota is unique! Each individual school district has its own specific demographics and characteristics to consider! Some districts have small enrollments with larger educational facilities. Some districts have larger enrollments with smaller facilities. Some have very low student-to-teacher ratios so social distancing is easier. Some districts have higher student-to-teacher ratios so social distancing is more difficult. Consequently, some schools are “In Person” learning, some are in “Hybrid” learning while still others are in “Distance Learning”. No two school districts are the same so the decisions one district makes has no bearing on the other districts. Our Command Team tries to be aware of what other school districts are doing, but it pays attention to our own specific demographics and then each week makes a decision based on that information.

I hope this letter is informative and provides insight into the MAS Command Team decision-making process. Thank you for hanging in there with us as we navigate the 2020-2021 school year. Rest assured, student and staff safety remain our highest priority.

Respectfully,

  
Rick Ellingworth

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