

It's with deep regret that we inform our families and staff of the need to shift to distance learning for all grade levels within Cloquet Public Schools. We have been working hard to keep our students in school this year and have done excellent work implementing precautions to minimize the spread of COVID-19 within our schools. Despite our efforts, COVID rates have increased throughout the county and are in the midst of a rapid spike. This spike has led to large scale quarantine of students and staff and is crippling our ability to provide in-person schooling, along with meeting the other requirements placed upon schools. We had sincerely hoped to keep our students learning in-person for as long as possible. We understand the importance of in-person instruction for student learning and understand the reliance of many families on schools for childcare in order to maintain employment. Please know that we will monitor the situation closely and will consider a shift back to in-person models as soon as we are reasonably able.

Grades 7-12 will shift to full distance learning beginning on Tuesday, November 10<sup>th</sup>. As a reminder to families, there is no school scheduled on Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, due to a staff development day. Grades K-6 will continue with in-person instruction through Wednesday, November 11<sup>th</sup>. There will be no school for grades K-6 on November 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> to allow staff to prepare for the transition to distance learning. The first day of instruction via distance learning for grades K-6 will begin on Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup>. Distance learning will look significantly different than last spring. Please keep an eye on future communication from the schools regarding distance learning format, food service, extracurricular activities and emergency childcare guidelines for qualifying families. For more information on the need to shift to distance learning, please review the section below.

#### Shift to Distance Learning

School districts across Minnesota have been provided guidance by the Minnesota Department of Education and Minnesota Department of Health under what's called the *Minnesota Safe Learning Plan*. These guidelines are meant to guide districts in maintaining a model of instruction that prioritizes in-person instruction while also protecting community health. One portion of the guidelines directs schools to put a number of safety precautions in place to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in schools. These guidelines include monitoring for signs/symptoms of COVID, ordering individuals to quarantine based on various factors, increased cleaning of school buildings, providing increased spacing between students and requiring masking. Our current evidence across the county suggests that these measures have been very effective in combating spread of COVID within our schools.

The guidelines also provide a system which directs schools to monitor local COVID-19 case rates within the county and COVID rates within school buildings when determining appropriate model. Recently, the 14-day county case rates in Carlton County have hovered near 20 cases per 10,000 residents. According to the guidelines, this case rate should trigger a review of current model. Cloquet Public Schools has closely monitored the number of COVID cases in our buildings as well as any evidence of spread between students and/or staff. Our evidence indicates that our prevention measures have been effective in stopping spread of COVID in our schools and we have been staying in a model that prioritizes in-person instruction. We were hopeful we could maintain this model for quite some time. Unfortunately, over the past seven days we're seeing a rapid spike in COVID rates in Carlton County. In the county, we went from seeing an average of 5 new COVID cases per day to an average closer to 25-30 new cases per day. We are anticipating county case rate data in the coming weeks to be well in excess of 50 cases per 10,000. It's important to note that county health officials are seeing the spread happen outside of schools, but those cases then come into the schools as a result. The 50 per 10,000 resident case rate triggers the review of a full distance learning model for all students. That said, it is not the case rate alone that is pushing us to distance learning. The rapid spike in cases, along with quarantine

requirements for close contacts, has left our district with severe staff shortages. We have seen districts in northeastern Minnesota close down grade levels or buildings due to staff shortage. Unfortunately, we are now in a similar circumstance. Our ability to safely staff our classrooms is very near a breaking point and is trending in the wrong direction. This complication is also strongly contributing to the need to move to distance learning.

Out of interest for public safety and considering our ability to provide sufficient staffing for our schools, we will enter into distance learning for the time being. We will continue to monitor county case rates and our ability to staff our buildings effectively. We will move back to a less restrictive model as soon as we are reasonably able to do so. At present, we do not have any advance idea of when a shift back to in-person instruction will be possible.

Dr. Michael Cary, Superintendent  
Cloquet Public Schools