

We are very excited to welcome our students back to full time, in-person learning as it has been nearly one year since students have been all “in person” with their middle school and high school classmates. Students in grades 5-6 and grades 9 and 12 will return to this model on Monday, February 22nd. Students in grades 7-8 and grades 10-11 will return on Monday, March 8th.

We are very optimistic about the decline in our Carver County COVID case rate data, community data, and our student and staff data. While the initial COVID-19 vaccination rollout process from the State of MN did not go as smoothly as we had hoped, the state has now taken over the communication process to alert staff when there are slots available for vaccination. On a positive note, we have appreciated the additional vaccines and support that Carver County Public Health has provided for our staff.

### **Updated Safe Learning Plan on February 17th**

This past Wednesday, the Minnesota Department of Education released updated guidelines in the Safe Learning Plan document. New guidance allows school districts to not require a rolling start to transition grade levels back into in-person instruction. We will continue to move forward with our original [Safe Return to School Transition Plan for Grades 5-12](#)

### **Recommendations for Testing**

MDH advises that students age 12 and older who are returning to school, sports, or other extracurricular activities be tested whether or not they have symptoms. This is in addition to the already established recommendations that anyone with symptoms, anyone exposed to someone who has tested positive, or anyone who regularly interacts with people outside their household, be tested as well.

Watertown-Mayer Public Schools has implemented a twice-per-month testing program that school staff members can participate in on a voluntary basis. According to MDH, increased testing focused on those in educational settings will help protect progress made in mitigating the spread of the virus and allowing students to return to school. The goal is to limit potential transmission from asymptomatic individuals and to minimize the impact of the virus on in-person schooling.

Please note, testing is not required, and no student COVID testing will be done at our schools. Free testing is available at multiple sites around the area and the [COVID-19 Testing - Minnesota Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](#) website has provided information regarding testing locations as well as an option to do testing at home.

In closing, I would like to personally thank you again for your patience and partnership throughout this challenging school year. I cannot be more proud of the way our staff, students, and parents have worked together to meet the challenges with compassion, empathy, and resilience. I look forward to March 8th when we can see all our Watertown-Mayer Royals back in-person!

Together in education,

Darren Schuler