

December 21, 2020

Mount Vernon Community School District Families and Staff:

As we move toward the winter break, I wanted to provide you the latest COVID-19 update along with some information on what we are considering moving forward. Here is the most current data for the District with regard to COVID-19:

Current 14-day average positivity rate for Linn County: 8.1%
Current number of students testing positive for COVID-19: 3
Current number of staff members testing positive for COVID-19: 0
Current number of students currently in quarantine due to COVID-19: 15
Current number of staff members currently in quarantine due to COVID-19: 1

Just as was the case last week, the overall COVID-19 trends in our area remain encouraging. We continue to watch these numbers in context of the overall numbers across the country, and hopefully our positive trend continues. It is obvious that many people in Mount Vernon were cautious over the Thanksgiving break with travel and gatherings, and I am hopeful the same will be true during the winter break. As always, please continue to practice virus mitigation strategies including staying home if you are ill, and keeping your children home if they are ill.

As I shared last week, when we return from winter break on January 4, 2021, we will remain in the hybrid model of learning for the final two weeks of the first semester. With the start of the second semester on January 19, 2021, we will return to a traditional model of learning with all students in school five days a week. The third party remote learning options currently available will remain available for the remainder of the school year to any students interested in these options. We will not be able to support the remote learning of families who choose to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19. We will have the first two weeks of January 2021 to assess the current reality with regard to COVID-19, and if the data is such that it is best to remain in the hybrid model, we will consider that option. Here are a few important items with regard to the transition to the traditional learning model:

1. The three schools will work with the students during the first two weeks of January to teach students the expectations that will be in place for a return to a traditional model of learning.
2. Maintaining social distancing will be a greater challenge with a return to a traditional model of learning. The American Association of Pediatrics recommends maintaining three to six feet of distance when possible, and we'll do what we can to maintain social distancing as much as possible. Diligence in the wearing of masks will become even more important with the transition to a traditional model of learning.
3. The third party remote learning programs including Edmentum and Apex will remain available for any students who wish to learn remotely for the second semester. If your child is wanting to change from 1st semester remote learning to face-to-face learning or visa versa, please communicate that with the building principals by Jan. 8, 2021.

4. Edmentum will continue to be offered to students in grades K-5. Ms. Martin will return to the regular classroom setting with the start of the second semester, but will continue to offer Edmentum support.
5. Apex will continue to be offered to students in grades 6-12 with the same support as first semester.
6. Students in grades K-8 may move in and out of remote learning at any point during the second semester. While we do not advise making multiple changes from one model of learning to another, such requests will be honored.
7. Students engaged in the Apex program in grades 9-12 need to decide by February 5, 2021, if they wish to remain in the Apex program or wish to move to the traditional model of learning. Students currently engaged in the Apex remote learning plan may continue to do so, and new students wishing to transition from the current hybrid model to remote learning may do so at the beginning of the second semester. Because high school learning is tied to the earning of credits toward graduation, the February 5, 2021, deadline is important in determining if a student wishes to make a move in or out of the remote learning model.
8. You will be receiving important information in the next few weeks from all three schools as they prepare for the transition to a return to a traditional learning model.
9. It is unclear as to when staff members may be able to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and students will not likely be in line to receive the vaccine until the summer of 2021. Until then, mitigating measures will remain in place for the safety of everyone in the schools.

The proposed transition to a traditional learning model will be supported by those of you who have been frustrated by the hybrid model, and will be met with consternation by those of you who have felt the hybrid model has been successful. I believe the hybrid decision was the prudent decision at the time; and believe with where things stand with COVID-19 and what we know about the low incidences of virus spread in school communities, that the best decision with regard to student learning is to move back to a traditional model of learning. Even when there has been disagreement with the best approaches to take during the pandemic, we ultimately have remained united as a community in support of our students. I am confident we will do the same moving forward, and am thankful to live and work in a community that is so supportive of its schools. Have a wonderful winter break!

Dr. B.