

October 20, 2020

Superintendent Gothard and Members of the School Board,

We, the educators of Highland Park Elementary, are writing to you about our concerns regarding entering into the Hybrid learning model for our students in November. We all agree that Distance Learning is not the ideal solution for conducting school. As we continue to live through this pandemic, it **IS** the safest option for our students and their families as well as our educators and their families.

Over the weekend, there were numerous news reports of how numbers of Covid-19 cases are continuing to rise. We currently have a positivity rate hovering around 5%, which experts say indicates community spread. Dr. Michael Osterholm has been quoted in news stories this weekend to say that now is not the time to let up when we look at combating this virus. He recommends that people continue to practice diligence in maintaining social distancing and staying safe. He says that the next six to twelve weeks will be the **WORST** that we have seen since the start of the pandemic. He was also quoted to say that “the dark days of the pandemic are about to descend on us.”

At the beginning of October, the Minnesota Department of Health started adding a new chart in their weekly Covid-19 report. This chart shows how many positive cases of Covid-19 have been reported in schools to the state since the beginning of August. In the three weeks that have been reported so far, the numbers have continued to climb significantly each week from 864 to 1315 to 1803. The report also shows that staff and students are contracting the virus at virtually equal rates.

Of course, we should not even have to mention the fact that throughout the pandemic the most significantly hit population is people of color. There continue to be report after report that this community continues to be harder hit. This is due to the fact that they potentially lack insurance and quality health care available to them.

We have spent the last five weeks working hard to build our Distance Learning communities. We feel that we have finally reached a point where we have made it past the majority of the tech issues and newness. We are now able to see our students learning and thriving in the online community that we have built. We do not believe that it would be beneficial to anyone to upset our learning community when we finally feel like we have a bit of control and success. As we take into account the accumulated data of Covid-19 cases in school environments, the concerning positivity rate and medical experts warning of surges in the next six to twelve weeks; why is the district considering putting students, staff, and their families at the risk of exposure. Especially as we see other districts in the area start to shift some of their students back into Distance Learning because of the high Covid-19 case numbers.

The District has just opened its Academic Support Center and will be providing in-person EDL services to students and families. The District also continues to provide Essential Kid Care to

families that require care while we are in Distance Learning. We would ask that you continue to offer and expand these programs first for families that request in-person services for their students.

We respectfully request that you take into consideration the concerns of your educators as well as the overwhelming amount of data that shows this is not the time to re-open to our youngest and most vulnerable students. Instead, it is time to prove that we DO have the best interests of our students, educators, and families at heart. By continuing to provide quality education through our Distance Learning 2.0 platform, we will show that we are taking this virus seriously and with continued diligence to slow the spread.

With respect,
The Educators of Highland Park Elementary

Rachel Stohlmann, ECSE
Shannon Erickson, ECSE
Laurie Weestrand, Pre-K Teacher
Teresa Vogelgesang, Pre-K Teacher
Steve Abenth, Kindergarten Teacher
Melissa Rust, Kindergarten Teacher
Jenni Blat, 2nd Grade Teacher
James Knowland, 2nd Grade Teacher
Colleen Kelley, 3rd grade teacher
Ellen Tronnes, 4th Grade Teacher
Latasha Chandler, EA
Deidra Holland, OT
Kim Smith, Speech and Language Pathologist
Matt Bogenschultz, English Language Learner teacher
Seth Stratton, Art Teacher
Kristi Papenfuss, Spanish Teacher
Annie Schoeben, Physical Education Teacher
Kam Wai Tsui, Teaching Assistant

Data collected from the following sources:

<http://strib.mn/3m9FtaX>

<https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2020/10/17/with-recent-local-covid-surge-experts-say-its-time-to-recommit-to-life-saving-precautions/>

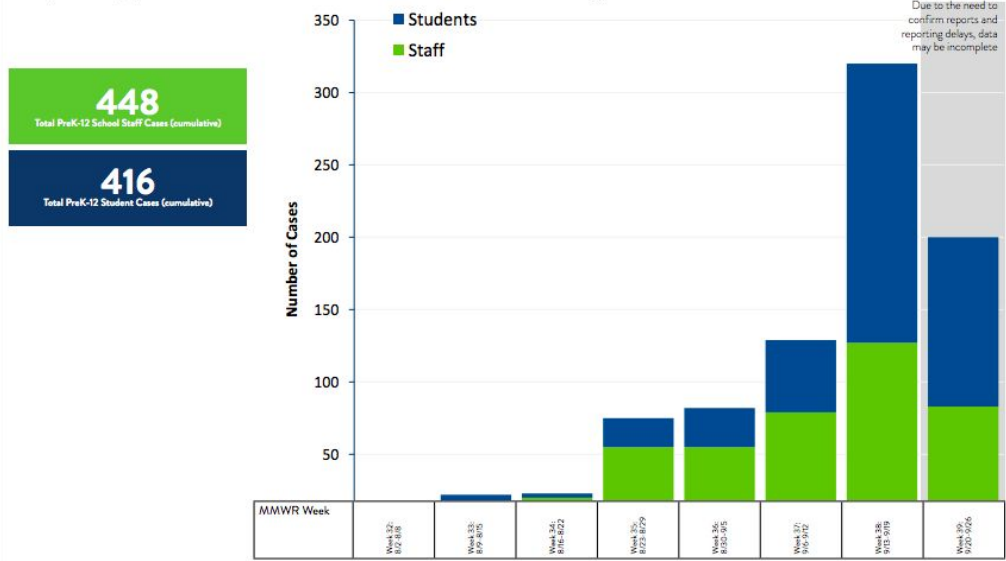
<https://www.twincities.com/2020/10/16/coronavirus-friday-update-daily-record-of-2297-new-cases-and-44504-tests/>

Cases Associated with Pre-K through Grade 12 School Buildings

864
Total PreK-12 School Building-associated Cases (cumulative)

Lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 associated with school staff and students working or attending school at a prekindergarten through grade 12 building while they were able to spread COVID-19. All Minnesota schools are represented including public, nonpublic, and tribal schools.

Cases by week are by specimen collection date. Numbers listed as cumulative total are cumulative since Aug. 1, 2020.

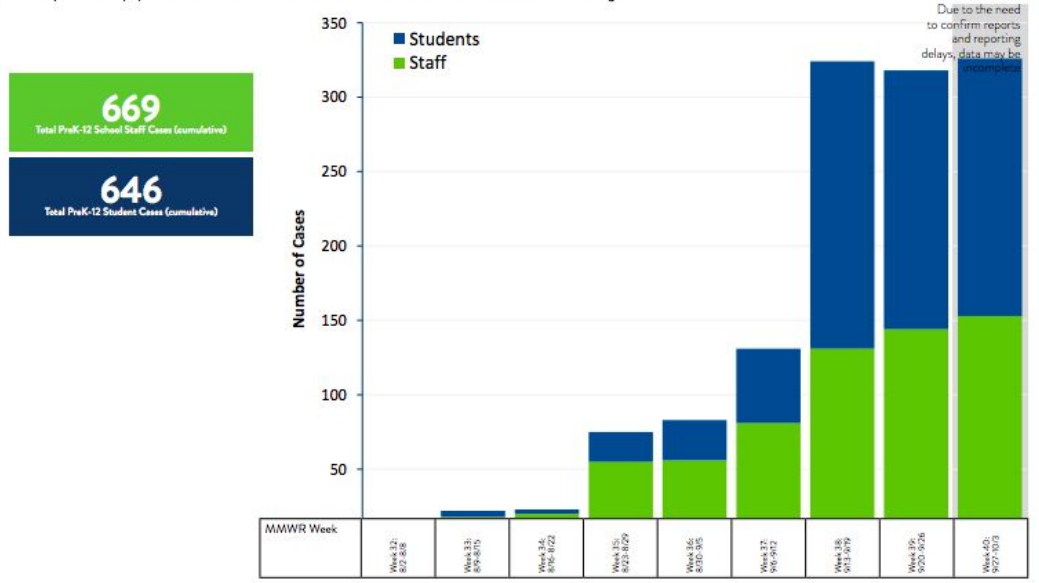


Cases Associated with Pre-K through Grade 12 School Buildings

1,315
Total PreK-12 School Building-associated Cases (cumulative)

Lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 associated with school staff and students working or attending school at a prekindergarten through grade 12 building while they were able to spread COVID-19. All Minnesota schools are represented including public, nonpublic, and tribal schools.

Cases by week are by specimen collection date. Numbers listed as cumulative total are cumulative since Aug. 1, 2020.



Cases Associated with Pre-K through Grade 12 School Buildings

1,803
Total Pre-K-12 School Building-associated Cases (cumulative)

Cases of COVID-19 associated with school staff and students working or attending school at a prekindergarten through grade 12 building while they were able to spread COVID-19. All Minnesota schools are represented including public, nonpublic, and tribal schools. Numbers include confirmed and probable cases.

Cases by week are by specimen collection date. Numbers listed as cumulative total are cumulative since Aug. 1, 2020.

877
Total Pre-K-12 School Staff Cases (cumulative)

926
Total Pre-K-12 Student Cases (cumulative)

