



-NEWS RELEASE-

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Owatonna Public Schools Shift to Distance Learning - Activities Delayed

[11/13/2020], Owatonna, MN -- Due to deteriorating public health conditions, the school board of Owatonna Public Schools voted unanimously at a special meeting held on November 13 to transition all grades, E-12, to distance learning. Distance learning will last through Friday, December 4, unless current COVID conditions demand a longer period of distance learning. The last day in person for grades 6-12 will be Friday, November 13, 2020. Teachers will use Monday, November 16 to plan for the transition. Early childhood and all elementary school students' last day in person will be Thursday, November 19.

After consultation with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), Steele County Public Health, and our local community incident command team, this decision is based on key data points:

- In the past week, we have seen a dramatic increase in laboratory-positive cases in Steele County, Owatonna, and at Owatonna Public Schools.
- Recent changes in our school district:
 - Since November 5th, we have seen 21 new cases in our district.
 - There are currently 40 staff members in quarantine or isolated. This has caused major staffing shortages.
- This abrupt increase mirrors the dramatic increase in Steele County and the state.
 - There were 143 new cases in Steele County from November 2 through November 8.
 - The latest preliminary Steele County two-week case rate per 10,000 residents is 41.99 and is projected to be at 67.66 next week.
 - Additionally, our Steele County positivity rate is 15.2% changing from 4.7% at last report.
- With the Thanksgiving holiday approaching, the MDH is projecting continued increases in positive COVID-19 cases in Minnesota and Steele County.

Along with the shift to distance learning, there will also be some adjustments to school activities. High school fall activities are planned to continue at least through next week (11/16-11/21). This is subject to change and will be evaluated on a daily basis. However, the start of winter high school activities will be delayed until a later date when it is deemed safe for our students, coaches and advisors to return. All middle school activities will be suspended starting Monday, November 16 until further notice. The date of return to winter activities will be based on COVID-19 data shared by the Minnesota Department of Health, Steele County Public Health, and/or other state agencies.

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