



September 20, 2020

Dear Cotter students and families,

As many of you know by now, the community transmission rate for the coronavirus in Winona County is above 50 cases/10,000. Using different data and dates, the rate ranges between 50 and 67 cases/10,000. The Minnesota Department of Health weekly report on September 17, 2020 stated that Winona County was at 67 cases/10,000 as of September 5. With that rate, all schools in Winona County are recommended by MDH to go to distance learning for all grades.

After consultation with the Department of Health, other educational leaders in Winona County, Cotter's Board of Directors, and our COVID Response Team, the decision has been made that **Cotter Schools will continue its current model** of blended learning, i.e., grades 5-6 are in-person five days a week, grades 7-8 are in-person four days a week, and grades 9-12 are primarily in distance learning with in-person opportunities, until further data warrants a change.

The reasons for choosing a less restrictive mode of instruction are the following:

- To date, there have been no positive cases of COVID-19 in our student body, including faculty and staff, and we have been in session for four weeks.
- Students, faculty, staff, and families are voluntarily complying with all suggested mitigation strategies, including proactively keeping at home anyone who is ill or suspects exposure to COVID-19.
- Our faculty and staff are deeply committed to maintaining a clean, disinfected, and safe learning environment.
- We believe it is collectively safer and healthier for our students to continue our current pattern of instruction.

We will continue this mode of instruction unless additional data demonstrates the need to do differently, such as active cases within our buildings. Parents and students need to know that the situation can alter quickly and the decision to switch to distance learning may come without much notice.

Central to being able to continue our current model is the cooperation of EVERYONE! We can only stay in school and participating in sports if everyone does all they can to avoid contracting and spreading the coronavirus. Parents, we need you to continue to be vigilant in checking daily on your child's health and keeping them home at the sign of any illness. Families have done a GREAT job of proactively calling in any concerns. Students, we need you to continue to make good choices of where you go, who you relate to, and how faithful you are to our safety protocols. We know you like being together at school. Help us, help you, stay in school!!

Our staff and I make a firm commitment to you that we will not only continue our current safety practices but increase our vigilance to them. The transmission rate numbers tell us that the virus is alive and active in our community as a whole. We cannot become complacent. Working together, we can keep our school

open, and our students engaged in learning, if we all re-double our effort to be safe and to follow all the protocols.

For those who feel that it is not safe to come to school, please know that you always have the choice to do distance learning. It is important that we all make the choices that will give us the greatest sense of safety.

Let's pray for one another as we walk through this unusually complex time together. We will get through this. Be safe. Stay healthy. Live well!

Blessings,

Sister Judy

Sister Judith Schaefer, O.P., PhD
President, Cotter Schools