



September 3, 2020

Dear Cotter students and families,

I am writing to update you on the status of our Cotter Covid-19 Learning Plan as of the first week of September. As you probably know, District 861, Winona Area Public Schools, recently made the decision to move from their original planned hybrid model for all grades to a more restrictive model of distance learning for grades 7-12 and hybrid for grades Pre-school-6 due to the increased level of community transmission of Covid-19 in our area. Over the past 14 days, the number of new cases per day has risen dramatically and it has entered the range where a more restrictive learning model is recommended. (See link to [Safe Learning Plan](#).)

At Cotter, we began the school year with a more restrictive model for our high school students by putting them in distance learning with in-person activities on Wednesdays and in the afternoons. We have had two great weeks with them in-person, and they have done a FANTASTIC job of following the safety protocols. They have enjoyed meeting their teachers, getting information about their classes, and connecting (distantly) with their friends. Some of them have also been engaged in the sports allowed by MSHSL. **Students in grades 9-12 are scheduled to move to full distance learning on Tuesday, September 8, and we will proceed with this plan.**

Our plan currently is for **students in grades 5-8 to attend in-person, in small cohort groups in their classrooms.** We feel the manner in which we have structured the classrooms and the schedule (desks spaced 6 ft. apart, less than 20 in a class, and no intermingling with other classes) allows us to continue with this model for now. Students in grades 5-8 begin in person on September 8 and will still be able to take the first-tier bus unless 861 goes to all distance learning for all grades. Should the community transmission rate for Covid-19 continue to rise, then moving to distance learning for all grade levels is recommended. Our most sincere hope is that we can have as much in-person instruction as possible with our 5th-8th grade students.

We had a wonderful “Meet Your Teacher” night with our new 5th and 6th graders in their brand-new classrooms. It was exciting to see all the new faces in our Cotter community. The classrooms are all ready to go and everyone is aware of the social distancing and mask wearing that is necessary. It will be good to get started. **On Tuesday, September 8, at 9:00am, Bishop Quinn is coming to bless our new classrooms and students.**

I know it has not been easy to begin school under such strange and unusual circumstances, but everyone is giving it their best effort. Thanks to our caring and committed faculty and staff – especially our Maintenance Team, we are learning and growing in a clean and safe environment. Our goal is to continue to do this as long as possible, but we are continually evaluating the community status of Covid and will make adjustments as necessary.

Blessings for safety and health,

Sister Judy

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