

Re: The need to improve the Covid safety plan

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

Things are looking pretty bad in the SDMA right now. After a few weeks of very high exclusions in our classrooms, school has now been canceled for two days due to lack of staff and employee burnout.

Given the severity of the situation, I was disappointed to see that the issue isn't on the agenda either as a possible action item or even a discussion item. As stewards of our children's education, the Board has an obligation to work together with each other and the community to find ways to keep our schools open and students in the physical classroom.

I've been saving some of the historical data from the SDMA Covid dashboard since September, and the data show a compelling story about the effectiveness of widespread masking in keeping exclusions down when compared to the previous policy of masks-optional/quarantine optional from mid-September.

Exclusions are high right now, yes, but please remember that they were also this bad in September prior to the K-6 mask mandate being put in place, even though coronavirus activity was much lower within our community. For example, on 9-17 River Heights had an exclusion rate of 27.74%, the overall exclusion rate across the district was 9.46% and there were .92% active Covid cases. Compare that to 11-20, when 9.12% of students were excluded district wide with 2.00% active cases. Even though there were more than double the number of cases in November, there were fewer exclusions overall.

It took some time for the exclusion rates to come down in October after the K-6 mask requirement was implemented, which was expected for a number of reasons. Once it came down, though, exclusions across the district were by and large unremarkable until Covid cases started to surge again in Dunn Co in November.

Now, coronavirus activity is too high in our region even for the current Covid safety plan to be effective at keeping exclusions down and schools open. There's good reason to believe it would have been even worse without the mask requirement in place. The current safety plan isn't good enough, yet in mid-December when the mask requirement expires the plan is going to become even weaker.

I hate to see what might happen if no changes are made to strengthen the plan. The board needs to work together to find a way to improve it so that our schools can stay open and our kids can stay in the classroom.

Thank you,  
Monica Berrier from Menomonie