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This past week marked an important milestone. One year ago we were just beginning to understand the severity of what was in front of us as the Governor announced the closing of public schools due to the COVID-19 virus. Since then, PLSAS staff have time and time again risen to the challenges of the pandemic and transformed how they educate and support students and families. Thankfully, we are now finally able to bring more students back into our buildings full time.

Students in grades K-2 have been in-person learning since January 19 and grades 3-5 have been in-person learning since February 1. Grades 6-12 will be in-person beginning April 15. PLSAS will continue to offer distance learning as an option for families.

Another sign that we are entering a positive new phase of navigating the pandemic is the updated Executive Order that eases some COVID-19 related restrictions on indoor and outdoor venues. This is providing us guidance as we plan for several spring events.

While all of this is great news, we know the pandemic is not yet over and it is important that we remain vigilant about safety. We urge everyone to continue to follow safety protocols by wearing a face mask properly in public, practicing social distancing and washing hands frequently. We also ask that all families continue to monitor the health of their children and keep them home if they are not feeling well or are awaiting results of a COVID-19 test.

Our top priority remains the health and safety of students and staff, while continuing to provide as much in-person learning as possible. That's why we are implementing several new safety protocols such as ensuring two mitigation strategies (mask, face shield, social distance, plexiglass barrier, etc.) are used by adults when working with students, maintaining a minimum of three feet of physical distancing, creating bus seating charts, daily documentation of lunchroom seating and continuing to ensure individuals isolate when exposed to someone who has COVID-19.

With Spring Break just two weeks away, we are also encouraging families to follow the Centers for Disease Control's guidelines for travel. Additionally, The Minnesota Department of Health is providing opportunities for students and families to get tested for COVID-19 every two weeks, through the end of the school year. You can visit a community testing site, order an at-home test kit, or get tested through your healthcare provider. All options are quick and free to you.

Teachers and school staff are already getting tested regularly and all PLSAS staff have been given the opportunity to receive the first dose of the vaccination. Now the State of Minnesota has launched the Minnesota COVID-19 Vaccine Connector, which is a tool that helps Minnesotans find out when, where and how to get their COVID-19 vaccine.

This system is a proactive way for all Minnesotans to indicate their interest in receiving a vaccine, so that when they become eligible, they can be alerted and connected to resources to schedule a vaccine appointment. Go to [mn.gov/vaccineconnector](https://mn.gov/vaccineconnector) to sign up.

In the meantime, we will continue to monitor school-level COVID-19 transmission data and staffing capacities. If the number of students and school staff who are absent or who are sent home with influenza or COVID-19-like symptoms reaches approximately 5% of the total number of students and staff in a school within a single week, we may need to move to a more restrictive learning model.

All of these safety measures, along with our community working together, will help limit the spread of COVID-19 and keep our schools and activities open. We are facing the rest of the school year with great optimism and are looking forward to seeing more of our students in our buildings very soon.

In closing, I want to extend my gratitude to the Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools community. As we recognize the one year milestone of the closing of schools and the ongoing planning and implementation of multiple learning models over the past twelve months, I want to acknowledge the amazing work of our PLSAS staff, the flexibility and resilience of our students, the incredible partnerships with our families and the unwavering support of our community. This has been a challenging year in many regards and together we have made the best of living, learning and working through a pandemic. Thank you! #WeArePLSAS