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Possible swine flu cases close Grafton High School

October 23, 2009 12:00 PM

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By Michaela Stanelun and Matt Rocheleau, Globe Correspondents

Grafton High School will be let out early today and remain closed on Monday and Tuesday because after a high number of students and faculty came down with possible cases of swine flu.

Superintendent Dr. Joseph F. Connors said that this week brought "five days of escalating absenteeism for staff, faculty, and students."

"We wanted to keep the building open as long as we could run a productive and safe school," Connors said

Grafton High appears to be the first school in the state to close this school year because of students experiencing flu-related symptoms, said J.C. Considine, spokesman for the state education department.

On Thursday, 236 students, or about 36 percent of the school's enrollment, and 15 out of 54 faculty members were out sick with flu-like symptoms. It is not confirmed if all those sickened have the H1N1 strain, but Connors said there are two confirmed cases in the school.

However, Lois Luniewicz, health agent at Grafton's Board of Health, said the board not received any positive test results for H1N1 swine flue cases. The discrepancy could not immediately be explained.

Connors said that in addition to the sick students, "we had 23 teachers ill, along with four custodians and several administrative staff members.

"Since 43 percent of our teachers were out, we turned to Plan B," Connors said. "We wanted to close school for four consecutive days, and we will re-evaluate on Wednesday."

Connors wanted to stress to parents of students attending Grafton High that it is a "pivotal point" that students not commingle with one another during the four days off.

"We want to see some level of isolation in place for these four days," Connors said.

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