



Board Meeting Recap

For Evanston Twp. High School District 202

ETHS Board of Education

Pat Savage-Williams, President

Monique Parsons, Vice President

Members: Jude Laude, Gretchen

Livingston, Pat Maunsell, Liz

Rolewicz, Stephanie Teterycz

Student Member: Carmiya Bady

Regular School Board Meeting

October 12, 2020

Board updated on school reopening progress

ETHS closed to in-person learning on March 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and switched over to remote (e-) learning from home. Later that month, Gov. Pritzker and the state education office and public health agencies said the spread of COVID in Illinois had surged and that while educators and parents nationwide were unsure about students returning to school in person, many school districts across the country—including Illinois—were closed by the government for in-person and continued with e-learning.

ETHS's remote reopening for the current school year began August 17 and will remain in place until school officials determine it is safe to move to a hybrid system that includes some in-person attendance. Further, state requirements for safety are rigid and not conducive to in-person learning for a school and student population as large as ETHS.

So for now, unless COVID conditions improve dramatically, remote learning will be in place at least through first semester, and possibly beyond. If plans for remote learning change, families will receive 30 days notice to prepare.

At the October 12 school board meeting, ETHS administrators reported on how ETHS has fared with Enhanced E-Learning during the first half of the school year.

This fall, remote learning at ETHS is different from what took place last spring when there were more state restrictions. Attendance is mandatory and monitored daily online, expectations have been increased, and a return to letter grading and daily/weekly routines are firmly in place. Students are expected to complete homework outside of class. Semester exams will be replaced by multi-media group or individual projects that synthesize what they've learned in class. Teachers offer additional academic support help as well as routine office hours.

So far, student daily attendance has averaged between 95-98%. And when recently surveyed, students said that while it's different, "It's real school and rigor is strong."

While COVID's impact on learning is still evolving, numerous challenges have emerged from Enhanced E-Learning that the administration, teachers, and staff continue to

address. For instance, everyone is experiencing technology overload from working on a computer all day long. Balancing live learning with small-group and individual learning in 70-minute blocks of time—especially remotely—is difficult to keep students' attention. Creating hands-on experiences for lab experiments, and Fine Arts and Career/Technical Education courses is hard with remote learning.

Teachers are working vigorously on collaborative planning, problem-solving, and creating instruction with each other to address these needs. Sometimes it's more relaxing and conducive for students to be in breakout rooms to just "be" during independent work time.

ETHS's Enhanced E-Learning model also takes into account the additional supports needed to establish close connections and coping strategies. Special focus is on students who may require more follow-up to stay connected and get the most out of their remote experience. Enhanced E-Learning also incorporates social and emotional supports to help keep students engaged. Mindfulness resources that help everyone, including families, focus on their own

Continued on next page

Additional information, including videos and minutes of board meetings, is available on the ETHS website (www.eths.k12.il.us) under Board of Education.

Reopening Update, continued from page 1

well-being are available in classrooms and school-wide.

In an effort to keep things as normal as possible, ETHS extracurricular activities and parent meetings are being reinvented. According to Supt. Eric Witherspoon, “We’re trying to give students full-school experiences as best we can.”

Club meetings are held remotely; National Honor Society induction and Student of the Month recognition were held via Zoom. Parents went to teacher conferences remotely. Spirit Week during October got students engaged in daily Wildkit activities from home. Orange-and-

blue masks were sent home for students to celebrate being Wildkits while staying safe. Grab-and-go breakfast and lunch meals, free for children ages 1-18, are prepared at school, and a week’s worth of meals are distributed behind ETHS every Monday—and will continue to be subsidized by the USDA through June. All freshmen received Chromebooks and 175 wifi hotspots have been distributed to students and staff.

ETHS continues to monitor city, county, and regional metrics that change daily. ETHS is in Region 10, which currently has a 5.9% positivity rate for COVID-19—and is steady-

ly rising. To even consider changing to a hybrid learning model, that rate would need to decrease to 3% or below.

Witherspoon noted, “The risks and restrictions for hybrid do not benefit student learning at this time.

School board members praised the teachers and staff for their efforts to engage students in their learning and to keep traditions alive. They also cautioned that setting the bar for reopening school, even to a hybrid model, must be very high. They pledged to be honest with the school community, and if the positivity benchmark can’t be reached, then remote learning will remain in place.