



Board Meeting Recap

For Evanston Twp. High School District 202

ETHS Board of Education

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Regular School Board Meeting

February 8, 2021

“In-person experiences” bring students back to campus

While ETHS continues to teach classes remotely to students at home due to the Covid pandemic, the administration and teachers fully realize this is negatively affecting many students. Beginning February 17, in light of improving local health metrics, ETHS will begin offering students in-school activities throughout the week.

At the Feb. 8 school board meeting, Supt. Eric Witherspoon said these would not be classes per se, but experiences “that will lift students’ feelings of isolation, as they will have the ability to reconnect with ETHS and their peers.” No one is required to participate in these in-person experiences. Food will be provided, and administrators, department chairs, and volunteer teachers will staff the activities.

Teachers, administrators, and students collectively developed the program. According to Nichole Boyd, Student Activities Director, a broad array of in-person experiences will include non-graded, interesting and fun student activities (e.g., yoga, tie-dying), fine arts opportunities, hands-on enrichment, athletic experiences, outdoor activities on campus, mindfulness resources, and

freshman introduction to ETHS, and capstone experiences for seniors, among many other chances to enrich students, get them into the school, and get them off the computer screen.

A Safe Center for Online Learning will open for students who want to continue remote learning but be on campus at ETHS. The Safe Center will be a supervised, quiet space with reliable internet for them to virtually engage in e- (electronic) learning... not in-person academic support or tutoring, “just a place to be that’s open to all students who want to experience e-learning in person,” said Marcus Campbell, Asst. Supt./Principal.

The on-campus schedule will be built around the school’s remote-learning schedule. Experiences will primarily be available on Mondays and during after-school hours Tuesday through Friday. Teacher office hours on Wednesdays and Fridays and certain programs like academic-support program Wildkit Academy on Saturdays may also offer some in-person contact.

The program structure will be different and won’t create the same

safety issues that hybrid learning would. Hybrid schooling would involve up to 1,500 people coming in at one time per day (about 25% of the school population and staff) on a rotating basis, socially distanced classes/areas, and simultaneous passing period movement from class to class.

All experiences will be subject to guidance from the state education office, state and local public health departments, and the Centers for Disease Control.

According to Witherspoon: “Here students will sign up, come in, go to their pod [activity], and then leave the building; then the next group comes in, does their thing, then leaves. We have to register kids according to available space with no more than 50 kids per space by state Phase 4 rules.”

School board concerns focused on teacher opinions about the program, GPA trends this school year compared to previous years, and teacher vaccinations.

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Extracurricular activity high during 2019-20 school year before Covid

Last school year (2019-20), despite the pandemic, student participation in extracurricular activities was high and successful—76% of the students joined at least one activity.

At the Feb. 8 school board meeting, four activities directors described the highlights that took place under their watch. Each noted that students who joined in activities outside of class academically outperformed their peers (earned an average GPA over 3.65), had higher attendance rates (95.1%, 1st semester; 89.5%, 2nd semester), and 86% had no behavior referrals compared to students not involved in extracurricular activities.

Chris Livatino, Athletic Director, said the total number of students in ETHS athletics reached an all-time high (44%), increasing almost 12% since the previous year and 28.1% over the past four years, particularly for Hispanic females (26.9% in one year and by 61% over the past three years).

Ninety-two percent of the varsity teams earned a team GPA over 3.5. In particular, both boys' and girls' basketball teams had winning

seasons and ranked highly (boys, 5th in state; girls, 8th in Chicago area) before Covid took over.

In Fine Arts, department chair Nick Gehl noted the Artist-in-Residence that collaborations that took place, the \$1.8 million in scholarships given to ETHS art students at a state art exhibition, the 13 sold-out theater performances and a music concert—all performed virtually—among other achievements earned by students active in fine arts.

Students were also active in community service raising \$22,000 through a variety of events for and with local non-profits. Several clubs placed well in local and state competitions (Math Team, Chess Team, DECA, Mock Trial, and HOSA/Future Health Professionals).

While overall student participation was high last year, directors are concerned that Hispanic (54%) and Black (64%) participation lags behind that for White (85%), Asian (82%), and Multi-Racial (81%) students.

It is possible that many of these students participate in commu-

nity-based activities (e.g., church, scouting) and don't record those hours with the school. Also, students from low-income families may not join fee-based activities (e.g. sports) in grade school, so they don't come ready to continue or even try these activities when they get to ETHS.

Looking ahead, in an effort to increase student participation in extracurriculars, the directors plan to work with more students of color, identify and remove barriers to participation, increase exposure to activities before the students come to ETHS, and work through the FASH program to expand opportunities for freshmen.

Board members requested trend data for them to better understand the problems. They also suggested sharing strategies with District 65 sponsors, coaches, and academic advisors to expand our outreach to under-represented students; deploying ETHS student ambassadors to promote activities to D65 kids; and allowing students to experiment in various fine arts and athletic activities without any prior experience—just come out and try.

Mid-Year Budget Review

Mary Rodino, CFO, and Kendra Williams, Asst. CFO, gave a mid-year budget review at the Feb. 8 school board meeting. Generally, "revenues and expenses are pretty much where we thought they'd be," said Rodino.

While property tax collections are slightly behind last year's rate, and some state and federal revenue accounts are receiving slow payments, the Evidence Based Funding (aka state aid) payments are on pace. In addition, some lower funding comes

from decreased revenue intake due to Covid (e.g., no vending or food service revenue, and no rentals).

Overall expenditures are low based on budgeted projections at 44.22%, down from 48.09% that was recorded at the mid-point last year.

Rodino noted some budget concerns. The Consumer Price Index at 1.4% is down from 2.3% last year. Since schools are under tax caps of 5% or the CPI, whichever is lower, this will impact revenue for the

upcoming school year. Also, while the threat of a property tax freeze still exists, it may be lessened since the graduated income tax constitutional amendment did not pass. However, the threat of shifting the state-paid teacher pension system to local districts is still looming in the background.

School board members praised Rodino and Williams for anticipating and planning for any future financial contingencies.