



Board Meeting Recap

For Evanston Twp. High School District 202

ETHS Board of Education

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Regular School Board Meeting

March 8, 2021

ETHS to open to hybrid learning April 14*

Due to the Covid pandemic, March 13, 2020, was the last day ETHS was open to in-person learning. On Tuesday the 17th, the school switched to remote e-(electronic) learning for students from home. Now, a year later, on April 14, ETHS will open with a hybrid model—part remote, part in-person—for the remainder of the school year. May 28 is the last day of classes for grades 9-11. **These updates were made after the March 8 board meeting.*

At the March 8 school board meeting, Supt. Eric Witherspoon explained the rationale and plans for the hybrid opening. Of the 95 Illinois high school districts, ETHS is one of the last to make the switch from remote to hybrid learning. But, he said, ETHS has been following the Covid science, and the metrics for Region 10 had not declined enough to allow for in-person schooling. However, the metrics have improved and schools can now open to hybrid learning—but they must follow guidelines issued by the CDC and state health department.

Each school is different.

ETHS is arguably the largest high school under one roof in the nation. Its student population and staff run around 4,000 people. While the school itself is large, not all class-

rooms are, and the health guidelines require desks to remain six-feet apart, thereby reducing the amount of useable desks. Witherspoon said the administration realized “we can’t bring everyone back and still meet the CDC guidelines.” Given the space issues, only 25% of the students can return at one time.

Moreover, having vaccinations available for staff is the superintendent’s priority, but shots in the Chicago area for younger teachers and staff have not been readily available until now. So the date for hybrid opening was pushed beyond spring break and mandated state testing for juniors to allow the adults the chance to get vaccinated.

Witherspoon had promised he would give everyone a 30-day alert for any changes from remote learning. Because of the vast amount of planning needed to open to in-person learning, families had from March 2-5 to let the school know if their students would attend school in person or if they wanted to remain on remote learning for the fourth quarter.

About 46% of the students said they wanted to try the hybrid model; everyone else will stay on remote. More students of color than white students chose to stay with remote

learning. Everyone will get the same instruction, but not all of the students want to do it in the same way. Witherspoon stressed there will be no unfair academic benefit to in-person learning, and the academic expectations will be the same for all.

Administrators stressed that hybrid learning will feel and look different than coming back to regular school. A video laid out the new rules students must follow including mask wearing, social distancing, arriving and leaving school on time, and charging all electronics in advance, among other mandates.

Four cohorts, each one-quarter of those who signed up, will rotate in attendance over a two-week period. Class schedules will differ greatly from the norm. Students will come in four days a week every other week, either for morning or afternoon classes of 65 minutes each. If they are not in school, they will be learning remotely at home. Mondays are still asynchronous learning days.

The Instructional/Informational Technology staff has worked overtime to set up each classroom. For example, since teachers will be teaching to students in person as well as remotely simultaneously, large computer screens will allow teachers to see students at home via

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

Hybrid learning, continued from page 1

Zoom. IIT has made training videos to show teachers how to use the new electronics in their classrooms.

Operations staff have set desks six-feet apart in classrooms, will regularly clean desks, etc., have installed hand sanitizers and new air filters throughout the building, as well as new signage noting social distancing and one-way stairways.

Board comments focused on the need to lessen teachers' anxiety and stress over the transition to hybrid learning; making sure that people understand that delaying the decision to go hybrid was to protect students from Covid, not driven by any outside groups' complaints; and about the disparity of vaccination distribution for ETHS staff members when other North Shore teachers have received shots.

"We can't stay closed forever," said Witherspoon. He added: "We don't know what the conditions will be in the fall. It's going to take a period of transition to go from remote to fully in-person [learning] and do it as safely as possible...If the science and [Covid] variants worsen, we may have to go back to remote learning."

Update on Wellness and Mental Health

At the March 8 school board meeting, Taya Kinzie, Assoc. Principal/Student Services, and Dr. Marcus Campbell, Asst. Supt./Principal presented a comprehensive report on the school-wide and Student Service Department efforts to "connect each student with supports that ensure each student will experience social-emotional development and enhanced academic growth." (ETHS Student Wellbeing Goal 2)

The report focused primarily on 2019-20 outcomes that bridged the fall pre-pandemic period and spring outbreak of Covid that closed the school and relegated the students to remote learning from home. Information from the 2021 year was referenced when relevant.

ETHS addresses student outcomes in several ways including results from the 5Essentials Survey, Senior Graduation Survey, Freshman Advisory Study Hall Survey, and the Wellbeing Survey for Students. These measure students' connectedness to school, wellbeing, school supports, attendance, extracurricular activities, behavior, academic growth, substance use, and more.

Highlights presented in the report include:

Connectedness at ETHS

- 94% of the students feel safe and comfortable with their teachers.
- 92% said their teachers treat them with respect.
- For two consecutive years, 89-90% of the seniors (Classes of 2019 and 2020) felt prepared for post-high school plans.
- 93% of the seniors felt their counselors were helpful, and 92% of the freshmen felt their counselor was supportive.
- Four-year graduation rate is 93%, five-year graduation rate is 94% (state is 88%); dropout rate is 2%.
- 85% of the seniors planned to attend a 2- or 4-year college.

During 2020-21, over 55% of the students reported their teachers check in with them, ask how they are doing emotionally, talk about life outside of school or doing related activities; these same students reported much lower depression levels.

Wellbeing for 2019-20 students, given the pandemic

- Over half reported feeling anxiety or stress that impacted their ability to deal with daily activities, and nearly one-quarter sought out support regarding stress and mental health in the last 12 months.

- 86% said they "belong" at ETHS, and 73.28% feel connected to adults at ETHS.

Students seek support for personal safety within/outside ETHS from parents/guardians, ETHS and community mental health providers, ETHS staff members, and police/Student Resource Officers.

There was an 11% increase in social work referrals from 2019 to 2020.

Attendance outcomes

- 93% average daily attendance, 95.2% attendance for semester 1 for 2019-20 (pre-pandemic), 96.8% for semester 1 for 2020-21 (pandemic).

89% of the students say that teachers work hard to make sure students stay in school. This school year, interventions to help ensure that takes place have included: 100+ home visits, over 8,000 phone calls by Outreach Callers to date, over 1,000 phone calls by leaders and support staff before school started in August 2020 and during 2nd quarter to identify needs.

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Wellness/Mental Health, continued from page 2

Extracurricular activities

- 75% of the students participated in one or more extracurricular activities last year, not including ETHS student summits and outside activities such as church or scouts.
- 81% of the Class of 2020 participated in one or more activities in their last two years at ETHS.

Behavior referrals

- 80% of all students did not earn a behavioral referral; 3.2% (113 students) earned 50% of all the referrals.

Academic measures

- 94% of all students maintained or increased their GPA in 2019-20.
- 95-96% of the students report that teachers expect them to do their best all the time and expect everyone to work hard.

Substance use

- 72% of the students say they had not used any tobacco, alcohol, or drugs not prescribed to them in the last 12 months.
- 75% of students reported that their family has clear rules that do not allow alcohol and drug use.

Both Kinzie and Campbell noted that within each of these school-wide practices, social-emotional learning and equity must be embedded in classroom curriculum and teaching, even when school returns to normal. "Wellbeing belongs to all of us at ETHS through graduation and beyond," said Kinzie. "As members of our school family, we have redoubled our message that every single one of us is responsible for the wellbeing of our students and each other," she added.

Board members asked what practices should continue once school returns to regular in-person learning. Kinzie said maintain the calls to students that teachers are worried about, starting before school begins. Campbell said a more comprehensive approach to discipline and behavior referrals is needed and that he and Witherspoon have already begun working with the deans. One board member said that better parent participation in the school surveys, especially the 5Essentials survey, is needed.

Vaccinations for all school staff

ETHS has now confirmed that all ETHS staff members still requesting the Covid vaccine will be vaccinated on Sunday, March 21, at Maine South High School in Park Ridge. This clinic is thanks to a partnership with Walgreen's, Walgreen Health Solutions, and the Regional Office of Education.