



# Board Meeting Recap

## For Evanston Twp. High School District 202

ETHS Board of Education

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Regular School Board Meeting

April 12, 2021

## Steps taken leading to full in-person school at ETHS

On Monday, April 12, the ETHS school board received a comprehensive update on how ETHS has been coping with student learning during the Covid pandemic—and the multi-stage plan that will open ETHS to full in-person learning beginning in August for the 2021-22 school year.

In March 2020, due to the pandemic, all Illinois schools had to switch to remote (e-: electronic) learning from home. With COVID surging in Illinois, particularly in Cook County, in fall 2020, ETHS administrators determined to follow the science and chose to continue with e-learning throughout first semester and into spring 2021.

ETHS learned a great deal about teaching and student learning during the initial experience with remote learning. In fall 2020, ETHS adopted the 70-minute block schedule, but academics were strengthened, grading went back to letter grades, expectations for attendance and participation were tightened, daily/weekly routines were firmed up, and semester exams were replaced with multi-media or individualized projects that pulled together what students learned in class. Social-emotional connections between teachers and students were a particular focus.

Now, a year later from going remote, the Covid metrics have improved and the CDC and state health department encourage schools to offer in-person learning. So, on April 14, ETHS will open with a hybrid model—part remote, part in-person—for the rest of the school year. Most important, all teachers and staff have all had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Students picked if they would attend school in person or remain on remote learning for the fourth quarter. About 46% of the students said they wanted to go hybrid; everyone else wanted to stay on remote. All will get the same instruction. Supt. Eric Witherspoon stressed there is no academic extra credit to in-person learning, and the academic expectations will be the same for all.

Four cohorts, each one-quarter of those who signed up, will rotate in attendance over a two-week period. When they are not in school on alternating weeks, they will be learning remotely. Mondays are all asynchronous remote learning. Students and staff must complete a Covid self-certification before entering the building including a temperature check. Masks and social distancing rules must be followed at all times.

The Instructional/Informational Technology staff has worked overtime to set up each classroom. For example, since teachers will teach simultaneously to students in person as well as remotely, large computer screens will allow them to see students at home via Zoom. Desks are set in rows, six-feet apart in classrooms, and face forward, and staff will disinfect rooms each evening. Hand sanitizers and new MERV 13 air filters have been installed throughout the building. New signage points out social distancing, one-way stairways, and right-left-way hallways.

Before opening up to hybrid, and in light of improving local health metrics, ETHS developed “in-person experiences” to lift students’ feelings of isolation, get them into school, and get them off the computer screen.

From February 17 to late-March, students chose to enroll in a broad array of small-group, non-graded, interesting, fun 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

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## Steps taken...in-person, Continued on from page 1

capstone experiences for seniors, among many other activities. Staffed by teacher volunteers, all experiences were held on off-hours before and after remote-learning classes and on asynchronous Mondays.

Students will be able to continue their education this summer. From June 3 to July 14, courses will either be in-person OR fully remote; no hybrid classes will be held. As with everything else, in-person instruction may be adjusted depending on public health requirements this summer. According to Bill Farmer, ETHS Director of Summer School, course offerings will include academic recovery courses, enrichment courses, and academic advancement (elective) courses for students in grades 9-12.

The next and last step is fully opening school in August. According to Peter Bavis, Asst. Supt., Curriculum/Instruction: "Hybrid is a good transition from remote to fully in-person learning within classrooms and within the school itself. This fall will be a chance for a fresh start, a New Normal with everything we've learned from the pandemic."

Marcus Campbell, Asst. Supt./Principal explained the pending changes to the 2021-22 school year. "We will not return to 'business as usual,'" he said. "We want to make sure we seized the opportunity to address some of the challenges ETHS and our students have faced even before the pandemic. We want to be thoughtful, compassionate, and student-centered as we think about how to reintegrate our students back into ETHS after surviving a global pandemic."

Major differences will include:

- **Clearing detentions, tardies, and social probation from students' records.**

"This will give students a clean slate to support their well-being," said Campbell. In addition, teachers, not Safety Staff, will mark students tardy to class.

- **Eliminating semester exams.**

According to Witherspoon, "If students do not have the stress of semester exams in their classes, they will be able to better focus on the courses taught by ETHS teachers already skilled at preparing students for college and career and benefit from authentic assessments."

- **Adopting a block schedule.**

According to Campbell, this will provide larger chunks of instructional time for more experiential, hands-on learning in all classes, and provide a break in the pace of the school day with 10-minute passing periods between classes and fewer disruptions and transitions each day.

Other changes will affect lunch schedules, study hall and Student Services, science course schedules, Special Education services, and Day School.

Board member questions included the Prep for ETHS summer school class for freshmen, any push for getting students vaccinated like the staff vaccination event in March, credit recovery, how expected federal funding will be used to address issues that have come up during the pandemic, professional development to help teachers adjust to full in-person block scheduling, and how to advise families of color who may have concerns about in-person learning.

## Newly tenured teachers approved

Twenty-six teachers were granted tenure by the ETHS school board on Monday, April 12, 2021. Supt. Eric Witherspoon said these are teachers who highly skilled. "We want you to stay and make your career at ETHS, one of the premier high schools in the nation," he said.

The newly tenured teachers are in Math (3), Special Education (5), History/Social Sciences (4), Science (3), Student Services (3), Career/Technical Education (1), World Languages (2), Fine Arts (2), Physical Education (2), and English (1).

**The board approved the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school calendars on April 12. They will be available on the ETHS website ([eths.k12.il.us](https://eths.k12.il.us)).**