



Board Meeting Recap

For Evanston Twp. High School District 202

ETHS Board of Education
Pat Savage-Williams, President
Monique Parsons, Vice President
Members: Gretchen Livingston, Pat Maunsell, Liz Rolewicz, Stephanie Teterycz
Student Member: Barbara Tomaradzke

Regular School Board Meeting
June 14, 2021

ETHS transitions back to full-time reopening in the fall

On Monday, June 14, the ETHS school board received a comprehensive update on how ETHS plans to transition students back to learning, full-time and in person, to school in August.

In March 2020, due to the pandemic, all Illinois schools by state mandate had to switch to remote learning from home. Following the Covid science, ETHS administrators chose to continue with remote learning until spring of 2021. As Covid ranking metrics declined and vaccinations increased, on April 14, ETHS went to a hybrid-learning model—part remote, part in-person—for the rest of the school year.

According to Dr. Peter Bavis, Asst. Supt./Curriculum & Instruction, “Hybrid is a good transition from remote to full 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.”

That process has already begun on a smaller scale with the opening of summer school. Bill Farmer, Summer School Director, reported that over 800 students are taking

classes—wearing masks and sitting in desks that are three-feet apart. Eventually, 1,200 students will attend with 600 incoming freshmen who are taking orientation classes. Remote-learning options have been offered to summer school students, mostly for those with medical issues. Farmer said that building community in all classes is an important focus to acclimate students and get them comfortable with attending school and with each other.

But, the New Normal this fall will be much different from business as usual for ETHS. The administration has actively developed a framework for how to reopen the school. Given the difficult year experienced by the entire ETHS family—Covid itself, economic loss, racial trauma, enforced isolation, and loss of life—much thought has gone into meeting the needs of the individuals who have been affected: the students, their families, teachers, and staff. And having everyone return to a space that is humane, built on a “foundation of love, empathy, and support,” will be the New Normal, said Dr. Marcus Campbell, Asst. Supt./Principal.

The most dramatic changes include using a block schedule to provide

larger amounts of instructional time and fewer disruptions and transitions each day; eliminating semester exams to allow more teaching time and less stress for learning; clearing any detentions and tardies from students’ records to give them a clean start when they return; and focusing on restorative vs. punitive practices regarding discipline that help students take responsibility for their own learning.

But, the humanizing efforts, rooted in equity, will be equally important and long lasting. Students will return to school with varying degrees of emotional disconnection, so a primary focus will be on their care and wellbeing, building relationships and a sense of belonging, and creating community in the classroom even before teaching content begins—efforts that will be embedded in the curriculum. In addition, teachers must be supported throughout the school year as they help students reintegrate into school and thrive during the year. As Bavis said: “The goal is to increase student engagement.”

Outreach to students and families of color and acknowledging their feelings of trauma are particularly

Continued on next page

FY22 tentative budget balanced but that could change

Reporting on the district's Tentative Budget for FY 2022, Mary Rodino, ETHS CFO, said the proposed ETHS budget is balanced, for the 15th consecutive year. However, things could very likely change because of the effects of the COVID pandemic at the state and local school level.

Evidenced-Based Funding (EBF—formerly state aid) payments are coming in on time, for now, and will remain flat for the foreseeable future. Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax payments also are stable at the moment.

Items on the legislative table that can impact ETHS's budget include a possible property tax freeze to help taxpayers hit by expenses due to COVID and pension reform that could cost ETHS \$2 million annually in new expenses if the state shifts teacher pension payments to the local school districts. While the EBF funding is flat for now, the amount

could decrease if the state is unable to make its minimum required funding contribution.

Given the cautions looming on the horizon, and using conservative budgeting and deliberate containment of personnel costs, most of which are contract based, this year's tentative total budget is \$95.9 million, 4.8% higher than FY2021, and \$85.6 million for the operating budget, 7.4% more than last year (typically the budget is 2-3% more than the previous year).

This budget includes \$2.3 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Grant Funds (one-time federal pandemic relief money that will total \$3.7 million for ETHS and will be spent over two years). ETHS has earmarked these funds in student-centered areas: academic acceleration, health and safety, mental health services, and technology. Aligning the fund distribution with

the school's ongoing equity work, ETHS staff is working to ensure continuity of services for low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, refugees, and homeless students.

The budget also includes a \$900,000 planned transfer to Capital Improvements for infrastructure upgrades, which can be kept in the Education Fund if financial conditions warrant.

The school board unanimously adopted the FY2021 Tentative Budget as presented.

Rodino will carefully review and revise the budget over the summer. The school board will hold a budget hearing in September, where any proposed changes will be presented. Final approval of the FY 2022 budget will be at the September 13, 2021, board meeting.

Transition to reopening, Continued from page 1

important. Efforts will continue to help these students and their families reconnect with school through home visits and personal phone calls. Campbell has also convened a group of partner organizations, including District 65 and Northwestern University, to develop a mentoring model that supports Black male students in both D65 and 202.

ETHS learned the value of current structures and practices during remote learning—academic support programs, use of backchannels for students and teachers to share feedback, democratic classroom training that honors student voice,

and retention of the full complement of course offerings.

Opportunities for students and staff to reconnect socially are in the works including “welcome back” picnics for all four grade levels all over the campus and a workshop series held in small spaces at the beginning of the year to give students a chance to connect again with each other.

To assess the success of block scheduling and its effect on students, the administration has developed a new research focus that will follow student cohorts (not including this

or last year's classes) over three years. Research staff will observe in classrooms and will listen to students' interactions. This will be for program evaluation, not teacher evaluation.

Board members praised the administration for reimagining how ETHS can reopen and for learning from experience gained during remote learning. Their concerns included the need for continual updates about the reopening plan that can also be shared with parents and the community.