

Elcho fall return-to-school plans

(Questions asked by WXPB; answers provided by Director of Instruction Betsy Gruszynski)

1. How will your district resume instruction in the fall? In-person, five days a week? Virtual instruction? A hybrid? Please provide a brief description.

We are developing a start-of-year plan that includes ideas for how to adjust if, and when, circumstances change. Our intent is to be in school, five days per week, following the School District of Elcho calendar. We know parents have different circumstances and conditions at home that might make them want to have their children in school or that cause them to have second thoughts about sending their child to school. Therefore, we are preparing to incorporate virtual learning resources to support students whose families choose or need to keep them at home.

2. As compared to a "normal" school year, what are the major changes you anticipate making to accommodate student and staff health and safety?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that schools take the following preventative measures: "Encourage students and staff to take everyday preventive actions to prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses. These actions include staying home when sick; appropriately covering coughs and sneezes; cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces; and washing hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol."

According to the CDC, "The use of cloth face coverings in educational settings may present challenges, particularly for younger students and students with special healthcare or educational needs." Guidance from the CDC will be used to determine in which settings/circumstances we should be encouraging the wearing of cloth face coverings for our staff and students. Through a donation from The State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the District has enough cloth face masks to provide one washable mask for each student and employee of the district. Although social distancing of at least six (6) feet is also recommended when near people who don't live in the same household, this recommendation would be impossible for a school to maintain at all times.

We are trying to prepare for modifications to all aspects of typical school day, such as food service, parent drop-off, pick-up and visitors, extracurricular activities, teaching and learning, and how we monitor and respond to ill persons. We are using guidance from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) in our planning. These Resources, recommendations and mandates may be frequently updated, so we will continue to monitor day-by-day and make decisions with the help of guidance from our school nurse and the Langlade County Health Department.

3. If you're planning on offering in-person instruction, what options do parents have if they're uncomfortable sending their child to in-person school?

We are preparing to incorporate virtual learning resources to support students whose families choose or need to keep them at home. Classrooms will be working with new technology so that we are better prepared for instances in which an entire classroom, school or building needs to stay home for health reasons. We are asking families that would prefer to work with their child at home (in lieu of in-person instruction) to call the school office so that we can talk to them about options for virtual, parent guided, at-home learning.

4. Anything else our listeners should know on the topic?

In 2019 the Elcho Board of Education identified the goal of "*Lifelong Skills: Providing opportunities to model, teach, practice and reinforce Social and Emotional Learning Competencies with all students every day.*" Over five months will have passed before we are able to have our students back in the school with us. For some, it will be a child's return to participating in anything in a public setting. We know that our focus needs to be on helping the students and staff feel comfortable being back together, practicing our new safety measures and helping students get back in the right mindset for learning. Although we are very concerned about the academic time that was lost, we first need to focus on the individual so that we can set the stage for students and staff to be academically engaged and successful this year.