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EASTON VALLEY CSD: RETURN TO LEARN PLAN OVERVIEW - DRAFT: 6-30-20

INTRODUCTION

The Easton Valley Community School District believes that the health of our students and staff is our top priority. We also believe that the education and care we provide our students is critically important. With these two priorities in mind, we are eager to share with you an overview of our Return to Learn Plan for the 2020-2021 school year.

Developing a plan amidst an abundance of uncertainty has been a daunting task. The vast perspectives held by health experts and the families we serve has further complicated our efforts to deliver a plan that will respond to the wishes of all our stakeholders. Despite the nearly insurmountable hurdles that may lie ahead, we are confident that we have developed the foundation of a plan that will allow us to overcome any challenges we may face together.

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

It is the position of the Easton Valley Community School District that we are responsible for providing education and care to all the students we are so fortunate to serve. We believe that this education and care is essential to our vision of “Empowering today’s leaders to excel in tomorrow’s endeavors.” We also know that many of our families rely on us to provide quality care for their children while they serve other critical roles within the economy that we all mutually benefit from and depend upon. We all know that we may be tested at times during the 2020-2021 school year, but we want you to know that we are up to the challenge.

The foundation of our Return to Learn Plan has been developed based upon the following guiding principles:

- 1) The most rigorous and robust teaching and learning occurs in a classroom with a highly-qualified teacher and among other peers to collaborate with and learn from
- 2) Beyond the core academic subjects taught, school provides a safe learning environment where our students develop critical social and emotional intelligences necessary to succeed in the 21st century
- 3) When face to face learning cannot occur for any reason, our students need consistent, quality, student-driven learning opportunities guided by their teachers
- 4) Last, and perhaps most important, we must empower our families to make decisions that are in the best interest of their child(ren) and family

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In our Return to Learn Plan we focused on the following objectives:

- 1) Maximize time in school for ALL students
- 2) Deliver quality, rigorous learning to ALL students
- 3) Develop consistent, fluid solutions to respond to any challenges
- 4) Design distance learning experiences that are teacher & student driven

As we approach the 2020 - 2021 school year we are 100% committed to doing everything in our power to open our school for full days and at full capacity. In order to do so, it will be essential that we follow the guidelines put in place by the State of Iowa, the Department of Education, and the Health Department. We will continue to follow their guidance, which could include the recommendation to wear a mask or face shield, temperature screen, social distancing, or other measures that may mitigate the spread of Covid-19. Currently, the Center for Disease Control is not recommending these practices. However, we will be prepared to implement the necessary procedures if the recommendations change at any time. We know that these practices may not be ideal, but we are willing to do whatever is necessary to be able to deliver the essential services our students and families depend on.

Based on survey data that we have collected, we have learned that many of our families are questioning the decision to send their child(ren) back to school during this pandemic. We know that every family has unique circumstances that will contribute to their decision and we respect the right of each family to determine what is best for them.

RETURN TO LEARN PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

In order to respond to the vastly different needs and perspectives of our families, we have developed a continuum of options that we are asking each family to carefully consider.

Option #1 (Recommended Option): On August 24, 2020, we plan to open our school to all Easton Valley CSD students whose families are inclined to send their child(ren) to resume their education in-person. We will do everything we can to comply with safety guidelines so that we are able to provide high-quality instruction to every student, all day, every day. While this is our

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ultimate goal, we recognize that there are a number of factors that could interfere with this plan. These factors include:

- Governor's order to close schools
- Health departments requirement to limit capacity
- Local health conditions
- Inability to properly staff programs or other school operations
- Significant student absenteeism

In the event that we are unable to deliver in-person learning experiences we will transition into our hybrid model, which is described below in Option #2.

Option #2: The decision to implement this option will most likely be driven by our families willingness and ability to send their child(ren) to school. In the event that our attendance rate drops below 85% for three consecutive days we will consider shifting to our hybrid model. In the event that our attendance supasses this threshold, the superintendent will review the situation and make a recommendation on how to proceed to the school board. Our hybrid model is designed to meet the learning needs of ALL students who are able to attend school in-person and those students who are needing access to high-quality learning through an online, distance learning approach.

In our hybrid model school will remain open to any students who are able to join us for in-person instruction. The academic instructional day will end midday around 12:30 pm. The outcome will look a little different in our elementary compared to our junior high & high school.

Elementary Hybrid:

In this half day model our elementary educators will condense their instructional offerings to focus on core academic subjects such as reading, writing, and mathematics. Other subjects and content will be integrated into the half day schedule as much as possible.

Families who depend on the quality care provided by our school will have the option for their children to remain in school for the remainder of the traditional school day. During this time we will leverage the support of paraeducators and non-classroom teachers to engage students in

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age appropriate, non-academic learning opportunities. These opportunities may include academic enrichment, games, and other activities that encourage social and emotional growth.

Junior High & High School Hybrid:

In our junior high and high school hybrid model, all students will still follow their traditional schedule. The main difference will be that in the morning session held in person, all class meeting times will be reduced. Essentially, our daily schedule would look very similar to a traditional early out school day. Even though class times will be shortened, our teachers goal will be to still teach the same amount of learning objectives as they normally would. In this model students may be responsible for completing some of their work outside of class time.

Option #2 Continued: The primary purpose of implementing a half day, hybrid model will be to free up our teachers who will take on the responsibility of preparing high quality online instruction in the afternoons. Students and families will be able to connect with teachers online in the afternoon or access the content online at their convenience. Easton Valley CSD acknowledges the responsibility we have to educate every one of our students and collectively move our student cohorts forward so that all students acquire and develop the cognitive skills appropriate for their age level. For this reason, we are investing heavily in the technology, resources, and training required to prepare for the need to deliver rigorous learning experiences to our students in an online environment.

While we commend our educators for their efforts to quickly develop a distance learning plan last spring, we know that we must do more to meet the needs of our students and families in a required distance learning environment. Here are a few highlights that you can expect if your child(ren) engage in a distance learning approach during the 2020 - 2021 school year:

- Required participation and evidence of learning (submitting work)
- A consistent and structured learning platform that allows students of all ages to drive their learning with the support and guidance of parents and teachers
- Flexibility to access the instruction and complete the related tasks at a time that works for each family
- Easton Valley CSD educators will dedicate their time in the afternoon to developing online lessons that align with what is being taught in the classroom.

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- Every day, your child's teacher will push out required instructional content, monitor student progress, assess your child's learning, and make time to engage with parents and/or students via an online video platform to check-in, answer questions, and guide the learning being done online

Being able to offer a rigorous and robust online learning experience for our students is a critical component of our Return to Learn Plan. In order to achieve this we are expanding our efforts to enhance the following areas:

- **Technology:** We are currently exploring a partnership with other school districts in the Mississippi Bend AEA to work with a private online education provider to help meet the needs of elementary age students. This resource will be able to provide our teachers with the tools they need to teach the academic standards in an online environment. These tools include curricular resources, online learning tasks for students to complete, assessment tools, and more. This online platform will also provide families with a one-stop shop to access all the learning their child(ren) will be required to engage in. It will also allow families the flexibility to access the required learning resources at a time that will work best for their family. One of our primary goals is to take the burden off of parents, who in the past, have been asked to essentially be their child's primary teacher in a distance learning environment. We believe that it is absolutely essential to put the teacher and student in the driver's seat when it comes to navigating the educational journey. We believe the new learning platform we adopt will help us accomplish this mission. Please keep in mind that the parents are always a critical component of any educational experience. The amount of time required to support your child(ren) will vary greatly depending on the age and needs of each student.

In the junior high and high school we will be investing further in our ability to deliver quality and rigorous learning via zoom and google classroom. We are currently exploring the possibility of purchasing portable classroom cameras and other tools that will allow our teachers to deliver a similarly rigorous learning experience to students accessing instruction online.

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- **Resources:** Last Spring we reached out to families to ensure that each family had a device that they could use to engage their child(ren) in the voluntary online program. Based on survey feedback we know that many families had a difficult time sharing a single device between multiple children. To address this concern we have invested in the purchase of additional chromebooks. In the event that any of our students engage in online learning during the upcoming school year, we will be prepared to issue a chromebook to every student that we serve.
- **Training:** We are currently having conversations with our teacher leaders and school board members to ensure that we have adequate time to train and prepare our teachers to effectively lead an online learning experience for our students. This plan involves moving multiple teacher professional development days to the start of the school year. This consists of moving days that were already built into our school calendar. Shifting these days **WILL NOT IMPACT WHEN STUDENTS BEGIN SCHOOL, NOR WILL IT CHANGE ANY STUDENT CONTACT DAYS** scheduled in our original school calendar. During these additional training days our teachers will learn how to use our new online platform. We will also utilize this time to develop plans to map out our curriculum and close any learning gaps that exist as a result of the closure of school in March.

To reiterate our previously stated belief, we strongly believe that most students learn best in a classroom with a highly-qualified teacher and among other peers to collaborate with and learn from. However, in the event that a large number of our students are not able to access this preferred method of learning, we will be prepared to meet these students' needs in an online learning environment.

Option #3: We expect that this option will only pertain to a very limited number of families. However, we recognize that there may be families that are forced to make a difficult decision about returning to school due to increased risk factors in their home. These risk factors are particularly limited to significant health conditions that a child or caretaker may have that make them more susceptible to complications from COVID-19. In the event that someone in your family meets this criteria we encourage you to reach out to the school administration to discuss your options prior to July 15, 2020. We will handle these situations on a case by case basis and

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will work with each of these families to develop a specific plan for each child in this type of situation. Please keep in mind that this option would be contingent upon the family being able to provide a doctor's written verification. This verification would need to specify the person's name, the health condition, and the relation to the child.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

We all know that there are an infinite number of hypothetical scenarios that we may need to consider. While we have engaged in more detailed conversations related to practices we might need to implement when school resumes, the purpose of this communication is to provide a broad overview of what our families can expect in the Fall. Without getting too deep in the details, there are a couple of additional pieces of information that are important for you to know.

- **Limited Capacity:** The idea of reducing class sizes in order to promote social distancing has been quite prevalent among public schools throughout the state. In most instances, schools have been developing plans to place students into two different groups that will attend school on a rotating basis. For example, half the students attend school in person on Monday and Wednesday and the other half attend school on Tuesday and Thursday. It is the belief of Easton Valley CSD that consistency and continuity are critical components of any educational program. For this reason we will only consider this type of approach as a last resort. Instead, our response would most likely be to ask families to volunteer to participate in a short term, but consistent online learning program for a predetermined number of weeks. Another option might be to transition into a fulltime distance learning model until the restriction eases. (Currently, there is no recommendation or requirement from the state of Iowa to operate with reduced capacity.)
- **Partnerships with Neighboring School Districts:** As many of you know, our school district has flourished as a result of the partnerships we have developed with our neighboring school districts. One example of these partnerships includes our class sharing with Maquoketa CSD. Throughout the Return to Learn planning process we have remained in close contact with our partners. As you might imagine, it is sometimes difficult to get on exactly the same page with all of our own stakeholders, and for good reason. Getting on exactly the same page with all the stakeholders across multiple school districts can be an even more difficult task. For this reason, each of the school

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districts we partner with have been developing their Return to Learn Plan based on the needs of their students and the perspectives of their stakeholders. We will remain in close consultation with these schools as our plans continue to develop. We all expect that new information will be released, requiring us to continue modifying and reevaluating our plans. As the start of the school gets closer we will work with these partners to figure out how to implement our Return to Learn plans in conjunction with any other schools we share programming with..

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In addition to teaching and learning, there will be many day to day decisions that will need to be made to ensure the health and safety of our students. We are not currently certain what recess will need to look like. We do not know what precautions we will need to put into place for music classes, assemblies, or the lunch room. As the school year gets closer we will update our plans for handling and responding to students who develop illness related symptoms in school. In short, there is a lot of work to be done to prepare for what could be a tumultuous school year.

Regardless of the challenges that lie ahead, we hope that you and your family are able to rest assured knowing that the Easton Valley CSD team will be prepared to provide your child(ren) a safe and meaningful learning experience during the 2020 - 2021 school year.

Sincerely,

Chris Fee, Superintendent

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