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In the early stages of our Return to Learn Planning we identified four main objectives that we wanted to achieve:

- 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

Based on all the information we have gathered since developing our plan, I feel confident in recommending that we begin our school year in the Hybrid Model outlined in our Return to Learn Plan for the following reasons:

Empowering Families:

- The families we serve have a wide range of needs, circumstances, and beliefs. During these unprecedented times I believe it is in the best interest of our students, their families, and our school district to support and empower families to make decisions that are best for their family.
- Our hybrid plan offers every family a high quality educational option regardless of their health conditions, childcare needs, or any other unique circumstance that contributes to their preference to send their child to school in person or enroll them in an online program

Health & Safety:

- By implementing our hybrid model, we are not only responding to the requests of approximately 15% of our families, but we are also increasing the safety for the other 85% who have expressed their intent to send their child(ren) to school for in-person learning. The more families that opt for online learning, the more successful we will be implementing social distancing practices in our schools. If we move 15% of our students into an online program to start the year we would have three fewer students in a class that might normally consist of twenty students. This may not sound like a lot, but it makes a big difference when we are trying to space out a large group of students in a confined space. This benefit is compounded even further when we consider how it affects the number of students on a school bus or in the cafeteria.
- Certain precautionary measures, such as requiring students to wear a mask, has

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proved to be somewhat controversial among many members of our school community. Offering both an in-person option and an online option will help us to implement and enforce practices that we know will help keep staff and students safe. In the instance that an individual is unwilling to follow our safety requirements we will have an alternative educational option ready and in place to best meet their needs online.

Flexibility/Preparing for the Unknown:

- While much is unknown about how the upcoming school year will play out, one thing that is certain is that the rise of confirmed Covid-19 cases is on the rise in our community. Regardless of how anyone feels about the impact of the virus, I think we can all agree that this pandemic has the potential to substantially disrupt our academic year. Over the past 14 days Jackson County (7% positive case analysis) ranks as having the 43rd highest rate in the state. Clinton County (11% positive case analysis) ranks as the 11th highest rate in the state. This shows that the trajectory of cases is on the rise, which means the likelihood of us being impacted in our school is high. We must be prepared to quarantine groups of staff or students or even close schools if needed.
- We know that approximately 15% of our families are requesting online learning at this time. I would expect that if we begin having confirmed cases of Covid-19 in our schools we will have many more families pulling their children out of in-person learning. By beginning our year in the hybrid model we will have a system in place that we can transition into quickly. Whether it is one student, one grade, or one school, we will be prepared to move any size of group into the online learning platform that we begin implementing from day one.

Quality of Learning:

- Considering a third-party educational provider to educate our online students may seem like an easy, yet expensive option. However, I am opposed to this option because I strongly believe that our teachers are the best instructors for our students. Education is more than the delivery of academic content. In Easton Valley we invest heavily in the development of a healthy and trusting relationship between our staff and students. We believe in the importance of developing social and emotional intelligence in every one of our students. The connection between our staff and students goes beyond what can be conveyed through a computer screen. Even when our students are learning with our teachers on an online platform, our teachers are more effective because of the relationships they have already developed and will continue to develop well beyond this pandemic.

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- Just because we are restructuring our school day in the hybrid model does not mean we are significantly reducing the quality of learning experiences for our students.

For elementary students who chose to stay with us the entire school day they will still engage in a variety of the learning experiences that they would normally encounter during a traditional school day. We plan on rotating students through stations every afternoon so that students still get to experience important components of a well-rounded education such as music, art, and physical education. The main difference in the elementary is that we will be condensing core academic subjects into the morning in order to free those teachers up to deliver the same quality of learning online in the afternoon.

In the junior high and high school, all students who attend school in person will still participate in the same classes they would be enrolled in during a traditional school day. The main difference will be that each class will be shortened to approximately 55 minutes, which is more than enough time in most cases to deliver the necessary content and experiences. Due to the shortened class times there is a good possibility that many students will have additional responsibilities to complete work outside of class. For that reason, we will offer support for students who would like to remain and work at school throughout the afternoon.

- We recognize that implementing the hybrid model will result in a steep learning curve for staff, students, and families due to the significant shift to web-based learning. While this will require a significant effort to successfully make the shift, I believe that it will benefit everyone in a variety of ways long term. My hope is that we will look back when all of this pandemic has passed and our teachers and students will be equipped with new skills and be even better prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Cost:

- While cost is not the driving factor when it comes to preparing for a safe school year, it does have many short and long term implications on the quality of learning we can offer our students. The cost of enrolling one student in an online program, such as Edgenuity, for one year is approximately \$3,000. Considering that families of approximately 75 students expressed interest in an online program at this time, our district would be looking at a potential price tag of \$225,000 to pay the teachers of a third-party educational provider to educate our students.
- Beyond the initial price tag, we also must consider that there may be many more families that would choose or be forced to pull their children from school for a short

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or long term period during the year. If our school were to remain in a traditional school day model we would have no other choice than to enroll these students in an online program at an additional cost in the middle of the year.

Short Term Investment, Long Term Benefits:

- A critic of our decision to implement our hybrid model to start off the year could look at our plan and say, “Why are we implementing the hybrid model when 85% of our families plan to send their children to school?” It is a logical argument. However, in addition to many of the points above, I would make the case that the 85% of students who initially come to school will be better off in the long term because of our decision to implement this plan from the beginning. In the event that we begin in the hybrid model we plan to require all teachers to develop lessons daily within the Canvas Learner Management System. We will also require teachers to begin exposing students to Canvas every day by guiding them through the platform during in-person learning time. Not only will this help our teachers develop their ability to use the system effectively, but it will prepare all of our students to effectively learn online. In the event that a student that begins the year learning in person needs to transition to online learning due to the need to quarantine or a school closure, that student will already be familiar with how to learn in the Canvas system.
- Perhaps the best reason to implement our hybrid model to begin the year is that I believe it will offer us ONE PLAN, ONE SOLUTION to guide us through the year. I cannot overstate the benefit to our staff, students, and families to be able to approach the school year knowing that we are prepared for whatever comes our way. With so much uncertainty surrounding us we need to know what we can expect whenever possible. As described in detail in each bullet above, our hybrid plan is intended to:
 - 1) Help us know what to prepare for from the beginning
 - 2) Provide flexibility to respond to a variety of changing conditions and situations
 - 3) Ensure as much consistency as possible for students, staff, and families
 - 4) Meet all four objectives that we aspired to reach when we began designing our plan

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Long Term Plans & Timeline:

- Of course, our long term goal is to return to our traditional model as soon as it is safe and in everyone's best interest to do so. At this time, there is no telling when that might be. In order to be mindful of the benefits of having a consistent plan while we monitor the conditions and gather information, I propose we consider the following timeline:
 - Commit to implementing our hybrid model for the first quarter of the school year, which ends on October 23, 2020.
 - Continually review strengths and areas of improvement throughout the first quarter and informally review the effectiveness of our plan at each school board meeting
 - In our regularly scheduled school board meeting on October 19, 2020 we formally review our plan and determine the model that we plan to implement for the second quarter

Conclusion:

Thank you for taking time to understand the rationale of the recommendation to begin the school year by implementing our hybrid model. As you can see, there are many complexities that make this a very difficult decision. Please know we are open to feedback now and throughout the implementation of our plan. We are eager to work together to overcome the challenges we are all facing in order to do what is best for the Easton Valley students, staff, and families that we all have the pleasure to serve.

Sincerely,

Chris Fee, Superintendent

Easton Valley Community School District

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