

Press Clippings 09-25-20

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U-46 leaders discuss evolving plan for return to classrooms

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Elgin Unit District U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders said district families can choose between an online distance learning format and a mix of in-person and online instruction

Elgin Area School District U-46's plan for resuming in-person classes calls for students receiving specialized services and prekindergarten through second-graders to be the first groups returning to classrooms next month.

All students in kindergarten through 12th grade started the school year in distance learning, which will continue through Oct. 22 for most students.

The sheer size of the state's second-largest school district makes it challenging to bring more than 38,000 students back to school for in-person instruction at the same time, Superintendent Tony Sanders told the school board Monday.

Families can choose between an online distance learning format for the remainder of this year or semester and a mix of in-person and online instruction. They have until 5 p.m. Wednesday to confirm their preference for the distance learning or hybrid instructional models for each child.

Parents who select the distance learning option for the remainder of the 2021 year will not be able to change their selection. However, the district could accommodate parents who select hybrid learning and later decide to switch their students back to the full-time distance learning.

In distance learning, students receive on average five hours of instruction daily, with about half in real time. Should students elect to continue with distance learning their school day will be similar to what they are experiencing now, said Suzanne Johnson, deputy superintendent of instruction.

"For our elementary students, it has been identified that we can meet the safety guidelines established within the moderate community transmission range for COVID-19," Johnson said. "However, with the increased complexities at the middle school and the high school level, we need to reach the minimal community transmission range prior to returning to in-person instruction."

Transmission guidelines are established by the county health departments — for U-46 that includes Cook, DuPage and Kane — aligned with the Illinois Department of Public Health.

"We will follow the most stringent guidelines as our schools serve students from across 90 square miles and all of those counties," said Johnson adding, families can access updates on those guidelines on the district's COVID-19 page.

The first students to return to hybrid instruction will be those in self-contained special education and transition programs, prekindergarten, and kindergarten through second-grade students. Grades three through six will be the next priority group.

“We have crafted and continue to finalize a plan to accommodate the return of smaller groups of students, as opposed to welcoming all students back at one time to best allow us to align to the safety guidelines and measures,” Johnson said. “Bringing back our students in grades K-2 and then grades three through six will allow us to have adequate personnel, resources and responsiveness to issues that could arise.”

Middle and high school students likely won't return to in-person classes under the hybrid model until the start of second semester in mid-January, she added.

Sanders stressed parents need to talk to their children about what school will look like when they return and model the behavior of proper mask wearing, washing hands and maintaining six feet of social distancing.

To view the district's tentative back-to-school plan, visit u-46.org. For answers to frequently asked questions, visit u-46.org/domain/11258.

---WBBM NEWSRADIO--- 09/25/2020

Elgin District U-46 parents have until Wednesday to decide on possible hybrid learning model

By: Bernie Tafoya



CHICAGO (WBBM NEWSRADIO) -- The state's second largest school district is talking about possibly resuming some form of in-person learning later next month, but parents have to make a decision on that very soon.

The earliest Elgin District U-46 would resume in-person instruction with a hybrid model is Oct. 22, but parents have to let the district know by Wednesday whether their children will continue remote learning for the rest of the year, or choose the hybrid model with students in school some days and learning remotely on others.

Deputy Superintendent for Instruction Dr. Suzanne Johnson told the school board Monday, "the distance learning model will continue to look very similar to what students and families have already become familiar with and come to know. There might be some variation, but overall, it will look very similar."

Supt. Tony Sanders said "our students who choose to to be in an online distance learning format for the remainder of the year or semester, really will have that teacher that is devoted to them in a distance learning classroom. And, students and families that choose this hybrid mix of in-person and online will also have a teacher assigned to that group of students."

When hybrid learning begins, it would start with pre-kindergarten through second graders. Middle and high school students likely won't return to in-person classes under the hybrid model until the start of second semester in mid-January.