

Bluffton Exempted Village Schools

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Dr. Gregory J. Denecker, Superintendent

Mrs. Paula M. Parish, Treasurer

August 18, 2020

Dear Parents and Students-

Thank you for your patience as we continue to work toward the opening of our schools on August 31, 2020! As you know, we are offering both in-person and remote learning platforms for our students this year and will strive to maintain continuity across these two modes of delivery. Our goal is always to provide high quality education; this is a point of pride in our district and in our community. To that end, we will be adjusting the school week to accommodate the dual platform approach: students will attend school four days per week (Monday through Thursday), and on Fridays, all students will learn remotely. Our teachers will continue to be physically at the school Monday through Friday. However, designating Friday as an asynchronous remote learning day will allow teachers the opportunity to provide more targeted instruction to those who may need additional help. Additionally, teachers will be working on recordings, lesson plans, Zooming with students who have questions or require additional assistance, and posting assignments for the week to come. We realize this schedule will put a burden on some families, and we apologize for that. However, we believe this is the best way for us to provide instruction at a high level in both platforms. We will evaluate this arrangement at the end of the first nine weeks (October 30) and decide if we will continue with this weekly schedule for the rest of the semester. The four-day in-person week will begin with the first week of classes on August 31, which means that Friday, September 4 will be the first remote learning day, followed by each Friday as a remote learning day until October 30.

Please know our goal is to be as flexible as possible when it comes to whether your child will be taught in person or in a remote learning setting. However, we ask that your requests are kept within reason; it is not possible to accommodate requests for a student to move back and forth between modes of delivery on a regular basis. Please contact the appropriate office if you need to make a change in the mode of instruction.

The rest of this letter includes several updates, along with information from previous letters.

The biggest change (seen below) is that per orders from Governor DeWine and the Ohio Department of Health, all schools, K-12, must require masks for all students. We will be passing

out masks and gaiters to all students on the first day of school. Please make sure your child wears a mask to school each day. We will have disposable masks if a student forgets, but we really want students to bring reusable masks with them from home. Teachers will incorporate some mask breaks for students for short periods of time when they can walk outside or be socially distant in an inside area. I know many of our students are eager to get back to school, and while masks may be a bit awkward, they will provide a needed measure of safety.

Food Service

- We are finalizing lunch schedules for each building.
- Students will be physically distanced as much as possible when eating in the cafeteria.
- We will use a combination of classrooms and the cafeteria for lunch by grade level.
- As always, we will be cleaning surfaces in the cafeteria after each lunch.
- Students who choose to eat breakfast at school will eat in the cafeteria (before the school day begins).
- Students who do not eat breakfast at school are required to report directly to their first period classroom upon arrival to school.
- Remote learners can obtain the same lunch being served in the cafeteria each day from the MS in a take-out container. Time for pick up will be between 12:00-12:30 PM each day.
- On Fridays, lunch pick up will be from 11:30 AM-12:30 PM at the MS for anyone who would like to receive a lunch. Lunches are for everyone—those who purchase and those who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Classroom

- Seating charts for students will be required; students will sit next to the same students each day (as much as possible) in order to limit contact with other students.
- Masks are required K-12 throughout the day, with the exceptions of mask breaks.
- K-5 students will be kept in classroom cohorts as much as possible to limit contact with other students.
- Sharing of crayons, pens, etc. will be discouraged.
- Clear Plexiglass tri-folds will be attached to all tables that students share.
- Student temperatures will be taken at the start of each day by the classroom teacher with infrared forehead thermometers. Parents please take your child's temperature at home before they come to school.
- Desks will be cleaned with disinfectant each time students change classes.
- Chromebooks will be issued to students in grade 6-12; students will be responsible for their Chromebook for the entire year. Chromebooks can be taken home; however, students learning in-person should charge the Chromebook each night before bringing it back to school.
- Chromebooks will be used in grades K-5, and each student will receive the same Chromebook each day. In the case that one student must use another student's Chromebook, the Chromebook will be disinfected prior to use.

- All students who need a Chromebook will be able to take one home for the weekly remote learning day.

Remote Learning

- Google Classroom will be used as the remote learning platform for all classes.
- Training has been and will continue to be provided for staff to teach remotely. Topics include the use of Google Classroom; Screencastify, Zoom; Edpuzzle; and others as deemed relevant by teachers per grade level and discipline.
- Jefferson County Virtual School online lessons, which are linked to state standards, will be available for use by students learning remotely and those learning in-person. These lessons can be assigned through a Google Classroom link and tied into Progressbook. Teachers will be trained to use this resource; it is seen as a solid supplement to our current educational options.
- Our goal is to transfer what we are doing in the classroom on a daily basis (in person) to the online setting for our remote learners.
- Remote learning will be made as user-friendly as possible for our students. Clear, realistic expectations aligned with in-person learning will be set.
- Every Monday morning at 8A.M., the lessons and assignments for the week will be outlined for all of our remote learning students.
- When possible, and at the teacher's discretion, we will work to integrate those students learning remotely with their in-person counterparts through systems such as Zoom. However, these types of integration will depend on a variety of factors including student grade level, subject matter, and technology availability.
- Any remote learner in need of a Chromebook will be provided one for use at home.

Visitors/Volunteers/Parties/Field Trips

- All visitors must be approved to enter the building; please contact the respective office if you plan to visit the school. Visits will be kept to a bare minimum.
- All volunteers/visitors are required to wear a mask and to have their temperature taken at the respective office upon entering the school.
- No visitors will be allowed to dine in the cafeteria.

Transportation/Entering and Exiting the Building(s)

- Masks are required by all those riding the school bus. If a student loses/forgets their mask, a mask will be issued.
- Masks are required K-12 throughout the day, with the exceptions of mask breaks.
- Students will enter the buildings at multiple designated points. For example, KG/1st grade students being dropped off should enter the doors off Lawn Ave. and then proceed directly to the cafeteria (if eating breakfast) or directly to their respective classrooms. 4th/5th grade students should enter the 5th grade entry doors on Jackson St.

Recess

- The playground will be divided into sections to promote cohort play among students. In other words, each class will have a section of the playground so that students have minimal contact with those outside their cohort.

Miscellaneous

- If a positive COVID-19 case occurs among students or staff at Bluffton Schools, the Allen County Health Department will conduct contact tracing.
- Perfect attendance for students will not be awarded this year. We do not want students coming to school when feeling ill in order to obtain a certificate/award.
- Meet the Teacher and Open House will not be in-person events this year due to fact that the events draw crowds. We are investigating alternative ways to welcome students and parents. Teachers will be in contact with their students/parents to welcome them back at each building.
- Drinking fountain use will be discontinued. Water-fill stations have been installed in each building, and we ask that students bring their own reusable water bottles to school.
- Hand sanitizer stations are being installed in high traffic areas throughout each building.
- Restrooms will be disinfected periodically throughout the day.
- Disinfecting machines will be used at night to clean each classroom and building.
- An HVAC company has been employed to routinely monitor and disinfect the air filtration system in each building.
- Other building level information for the start of school will be communicated by your teacher and/or principal of each building.

In one of Governor DeWine's press conferences last week, Dr. Manning from Cincinnati Children's hospital stressed these four guidelines for schools, in this order:

1. Masking
2. Distancing
3. Hand Hygiene
4. Cleaning surfaces

We will complete the items above to the best of our ability. In the meantime, we look forward to a different but great school year!!

It will take all of us working together to navigate through this pandemic. Please contact me if you have specific questions or need more clarification on Bluffton Schools' plan for re-opening.

Sincerely,

Greg Denecker