

Return to Learn Plan-Westwood Heights Schools

As we prepare for a new school year under a cloud of uncertainty, we want you to know that our school district will accommodate whichever form of learning your family chooses. While the risk of serious illness from Covid-19 is low among our student population, we recognize that you must consider many factors in your decision. Are there vulnerable family members in the home? How will my student tolerate wearing a mask most of the day? How do we keep our student from falling behind in their education?

Regardless of your decision, be assured that we will do everything in our power to keep your student safe and on track with their education. This letter is an attempt to explain the steps we are taking to reopen safely and the rationale behind them. Events may force us to change course in the coming months, and we appreciate your patience as we work through these difficult times.

Q: What will school look like in the fall?

Based upon our phone surveys, the majority of parents prefer an online or a blended approach to learning when school resumes September 8. We are going to assume that every student is a blended student, getting the same instruction whether they are in the classroom, or learning remotely. Students are able to attend full-time, part-time, or remain a virtual student full-time.

As we expect 50% or less of our students to return to full face-to-face learning in September, we need a method to keep the students at home on track. Our hope is that eventually most parents will be confident enough to send their student back to school full time. Until that time, we will incorporate google classroom technology combined with packets and either live streaming or taped instruction that can be viewed at home.

This model accommodates many scenarios: If we go back to phase three, requiring school buildings to close, we are ready to teach all students remotely. Conversely, if more students begin to return, they

will not be behind their peers. Teachers will have a full class assigned to them, and we will adjust class rosters based upon the number of students that show up the first week. If we get a much higher percentage of returning students than we anticipate, we will have overflow rooms prepared, and may have to resort to a split schedule. We are trying to avoid that at this point.

An online survey will be sent later this month to determine the learning plan that you prefer for your student. We need your input to help us plan for our opening in September.

Q. What about band and choir classes?

We are working on a safe way to allow band and choir classes to be held face-to-face. Initially we will focus on percussion instruments, with wind instruments practiced remotely.

Q: If a student chooses remote learning, will the teacher be available to interact or answer questions they have during school hours?

Teachers may interact with students virtually through Zoom, Google Hangout Meets, or another platform; how frequently will depend on the course. In an online setting, the responses to questions are not as immediate as they would be in a face-to-face setting and teachers will also be teaching during the school day. Students or parents should receive a response within 24 hours except on the weekends.

Q: If a student does not complete the work on the day it is given, can they complete it the next day?

Students who choose the online option will be expected to follow the same guidelines as those students who attend in person instruction. If an assignment is due on a certain day, it will be due, unless the teacher has made an accommodation for that student. This school year the remote learners will be held accountable to complete their classroom assignments, unlike last spring when grades were frozen.

Q: Would an online student be marked as absent if they did not check in for the day?

Some form of two-way communication between the student and instructor must occur. The frequency of that two-way communication will vary depending on the student's grade level. Elementary students should have daily communication while secondary students, at a minimum, must have at least weekly two-way communication. The most important factor in online learning is student engagement, so our staff will be following up frequently with the students to keep them on track.

Q: Will my child be required to wear a mask while in the school buildings?

If we are in Phase four (4) of the Governor's "Safe Start" plan, all students and staff will be required to wear a face covering. The only exception to that rule in the State's Return to Learn Roadmap is for kindergarten through fifth grade students in a self-contained classroom. Masks will also not be required during recess, gym class, and meal times, assuming proper distancing can be achieved.

Kindergarten - 5th grade students will be required to wear a mask on the bus and in common areas and shared spaces of the school such as hallways.

If we are in phase five (5) of the Governor's "Safe Start" plan, face coverings will be strongly recommended but not required except in common areas.

Q. What kind of mask or facial covering will my student have to wear? Is a scarf or face shield okay to wear instead of an actual mask?

According to the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services, a face covering can be a scarf, bandana or other cloth material that fully covers your nose and mouth. A face shield cannot be used in lieu of a mask.

Q. My student has a medical reason as to why he cannot wear a mask. What do I need to do?

According to the Governor's Executive Order, the requirement to wear a face covering does not apply to people who cannot medically tolerate a face covering, such as people who have trouble breathing, are unconscious, incapacitated or unable to remove the covering without assistance.

Therefore, in order for a student to be exempt from wearing a mask, he/she would have to have a doctor's excuse stating they are "medically intolerable" of wearing a mask.

Q: If my child does not wear a mask and is required to do so, what will happen?

If we are in Phase four (4) of the Governor's "Safe Start" plan, your child will not be permitted to attend school without a face covering.

Q: Will the district be providing masks, gloves, etc.?

The District recommends the students wear their own facial covering, however, we will have masks and other PPE available if a student needs one.

Q. If a parent chooses face-to-face instruction but their student or someone in the household has a positive COVID test result, will they have to go to online instruction?

Yes. Any student or staff that tests positive for COVID 19, or lives in close proximity to someone testing positive, will be expected to quarantine and will not be allowed to return to school until they have had a negative COVID 19 test, or are cleared to return by the board of health.

We will quickly switch these students to the online option until it is safe for them to return.

Q: What is the protocol if a student or teacher or household member tests positive for COVID-19?

As stated above, the employee or student would be quarantined for 14 days and would also need a negative test or clearance from the board of health before they would be allowed to return to school.

Q: Will parents be notified if a student or staff member tests positive for COVID-19?

Families will be notified of the presence of any laboratory positive or clinically diagnosed cases of COVID-19 in the classroom and/or school to encourage closer observation for any symptoms at home. In the event of a lab or clinically diagnosed case of COVID-19, immediate efforts will be made to determine any close contacts (those who spent more than 15 minutes less than six feet in close proximity to the student or staff member) so that they can be quarantined for 14 days at home. Students and staff should be closely monitored for any symptoms of COVID-19. At this time, testing of all students or staff members in the class is not recommended. Only those who develop symptoms will require testing for COVID-19.

It is important to note that we will observe all privacy requirements and will work with the county board of health on the contact tracing.

Q: Will there be temperature checks before entering the bus and school?

The guidance from the Governor's Roadmap is that parents should be expected to take their child's temperature daily before they send or take their child to school. Temperature checks are not required, nor strongly recommended in the State's Road Map. As an extra precaution, our students will be given a temperature check before getting on the bus or entering the school building.

If a student temperature check reveals a fever over 100.4 degrees, that student will be returned home if possible before getting on the bus or entering school. If a student exhibits symptoms during the school day they will be placed in a designated location staffed by a trained employee until the family can arrive to take the student home.

Foodservice

Q: What will meal times look like?

Our plan is to offer free breakfast and lunch to ALL students, and after school meals for students staying late. Elementary students will eat breakfast in their classrooms and lunch in the lunchroom and part of the gym. Grades 7-12 will eat in the commons area and adjoining hallways to allow for proper distancing. We will also stagger release times for lunch to reduce the number of students standing in line.

We are developing a plan to allow the families of remote learners to pick up meals at designated times and locations.

Transportation

Q: How will bus transportation work?

Our bus service is provided by First Student, which will be sanitizing our buses frequently. In addition, our bus monitors will checking temperatures before students board the bus and distributing hand sanitizer. Monitors will disinfect the buses between runs to provide more protection for the students. We will distance the students as much as possible, and all riders must wear masks.

TECHNOLOGY/PROGRAMMING/OTHER

Q. Will the district be able to provide WiFi/hotspot assistance for families?

Yes. We will supply hotspots or other devices to families who need internet access.

Q: Are chromebooks being offered to students who opt for online learning and need access to a learning device?

Yes. The district will be providing EVERY student grades 2-12 a device of their own for online or in-person classes. This will help avoid sharing devices with other students.

Q: Why is the District not offering an every other day/week option?

What is now commonly referred to as the “hybrid” system where students attend school part time and do online learning part time, often in a day on/day off or week on/week off pattern, was considered.

In our parent survey in July 40% of our parents indicated they wanted to send their students back for full time face to face instruction. We knew we had to offer an on-line option for those parents who did not feel comfortable returning their students to school. Approximately 85% of our families qualify for free or reduced lunch and many families simply can’t afford childcare on the days when their students would not be in school.

Numerous parents let us know that part time school just didn’t work for them. We also recognize that kids need to be in school. We all know that on-line learning is not as effective as face-to-face instruction, especially for elementary students. Children need the social and emotional benefits of school and a lot of our students receive important services at school. For all these reasons our goal was to give all of our students the opportunity to return five days a week.

Please note that under our plan, families can choose to send their student to school part time, and have them work from home on other days, which is identical to a hybrid system.

Q: If a parent picks the online option and there is a working vaccine offered for COVID-19 by the end of the year, will students be able to return to school or are they stuck online for the entire year?

No, students will not be locked in for the entire year but if they choose online instruction to start the year, we ask that families give us five days advanced notice that their student is returning full time to school. This will allow us to balance classrooms, arrange transportation and alert the foodservice department.

ATHLETICS/EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Q: Would there be extracurricular activities available if you choose online?

Yes, assuming we are allowed to offer them by the state authorities.

Q: If my student elects to work from home, will he/she be allowed to participate in sports?

Yes. If schools decide to go back into the classroom but also offer parents/students the option of going online out of the classroom, those students who take the online option are still eligible to play sports at that school, so long as the online courses are for active credit/diploma at the school.

Q: Will athletics be offered in the fall?

As of now, yes. Fall middle school, freshmen, JV and varsity schedules have been created. We will continue to take the guidance from the MHSAA, which recently announced that as of right now, fall sports are planned to begin as scheduled.

WHO CAN I CONTACT?

Please feel free to contact the office of the superintendent at:
ptoal@hamadyhawks.net or the building principals.

Students interested in sports should contact the Athletic Director:
cleee@hamadyhawks.net.

To the Staff and Families of Westwood Heights School District,

As a district we are overcoming the strain of this pandemic which has caused so much suffering for our students and families. We would like to thank you for your consistency and support in keeping our children safe. It is because of your efforts and diligence that our numbers, when it comes to COVID-19 positive cases in our buildings, have been much lower compared to most districts in the county. From the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year to date, our district has only had a total of 175 positive cases, which is under 8% of our staff and students. Our positive cases have been nearly eliminated, as evidenced by the data below:

As of 2/24/2022

Hamady High School Covid free for 24 days

Hamady Middle School Covid free for 34 days

Hamady Elementary School Covid free 49 days

Academy West Covid Free for 98 days

McMonagle Elementary School Covid Free 36 days

As you are aware, there have been some new changes with mask mandates in school buildings. As of 2/22/22, the Genesee County Health Department has lifted the mask mandate completely for schools. They have left the decision up to the school districts themselves on whether they will still require masking of students and staff. Studies have been published describing the difficulties that masking is causing, especially in the speech and language abilities of our youngest students.

We will be cautiously moving to a mask optional policy, allowing parents to decide if their student will continue to wear a mask in school. We respect the rights of our parents to determine what the healthiest strategy is for their children, and we will support them in whatever decision they make. In the event that a new, concerning variant is discovered, or cases trend upward, the Westwood Heights Board of Education will revisit this policy to best protect our community. The following timetable will be followed in this change of policy:

March 7-Mask optional at Hamady Elementary

March 16-Mask optional at McMonagle Elementary

March 23 –Mask optional at Academy West

April 6-Mask Optional at Hamady Middle/High School

We thank you for your patience throughout this process and want to assure you that we are doing everything in our power to keep our staff and children safe. Should conditions change, or positive cases re-emerge, we will reconsider our policy. The following steps will remain in place:

- Students are still required to wear a mask while riding on the school bus
- We will continue with increased levels of sanitizing in our facilities
- If staff or your child is sick, please stay home or keep your child home. Always be mindful of others' safety.
- Testing is still available for staff and students within our buildings
- If you feel the need to test, we strongly urge you to test as soon as you get to school
- If you do not feel well on day six of testing positive with continued symptoms stay home for the remaining five days, then return to school
- We continue to offer virtual learning options for students who cannot attend in-person school

If you have any questions, or want to provide feedback regarding this policy, please contact your school health assistant or your building principal.

Sincerely,

Moneake Bransford, District Health Assistant Hamady Middle High School

Quay Wright, Health Assistant Hamady Middle High School

Sandy Roe, Secretary Health Assistant Hamady Elementary

Latasha Rice, Health Assistant McMonagle Elementary

Tasha Bennett, Health Assistant Academy West

Michael Davis, CDC School Liaison supporting Genesee County