

Chippewa Valley considers return to class at middle, high schools

- By Nicole Tuttle For **The Macomb Daily**

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Dakota High School in Macomb Township has the highest enrollment of any secondary building in Michigan.

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Oct. 19 could be a red-letter date for middle and high school students in the Chippewa Valley Schools district as officials could vote that day to return middle and high school students to their buildings.

During a virtual Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education meeting on Oct. 5, the educational services team provided information regarding a transition from remote learning to a hybrid instruction model for middle and high school students. The board could vote on the plan on Oct. 19, with implementation beginning Nov. 9.

The board voted in August for a remote instruction model to start the school year. Officials have since voted to return K-5 students in person as well as early childhood special education and K-12 creating learning plan students that will launch Oct. 12. One school, Clinton Valley Elementary in Mount Clemens, will not go back until Oct. 19.



Executive Director of Secondary Education Paul Sibley presented the 6-12 grades hybrid in-person model, part of the district's process of phasing in students who are not part of the virtual academy, which will be available throughout the school year. He discussed challenges involved at each particular building, and the need for students and staff to wear face coverings.

“So at the secondary level we would be assigning students in Group A and Group B just as we did at the elementary level. That again would be done by utilizing or by using students addresses, looking at our class schedules, what transportation would look like in certain areas. And you identify Groups A and B, phase in all of those factors, while also making sure that we can balance our current classes,” Sibley said.

He showed pictures to illustrate cafeterias in which seats and tables are organized for social distancing, stating in some cases students will also utilize additional rooms or the outdoors when possible at lunch. Classrooms will be set up with desks facing the same way and in ways that maximize social distancing, as well as utilizing assigned seating to assist in any necessary contact tracing. Dakota High School, which has the largest enrollment in the state, was of particular interest.

“The reason I am using a lot of the pictures from Dakota is because it is going to be our most crowded school, even in a hybrid model. So I feel it is important to show that this can be done at any school,” Sibley said.

He also illustrated halls marked for traffic flow and explained students will use book bags rather than lockers to discourage congregation. Classes would be released in short, staggered increments to reduce hallway traffic. With some students on the hybrid A or B schedule and others in the virtual

academy, fewer students will be in buildings making for less crowded hallways and smaller class sizes, Sibley added.

“In talking to our nurse, who talks daily to the health department, the impression that they have, and that they give is that passing time, believe it or not, is not one of their biggest concern areas. Because students are actually moving in the same direction, they are wearing masks and they are also not together for a long period of time,” Sibley said. “So at our high schools, a normal day, you have six minutes of passing. So the way the health department and CDC is looking at contact tracing they are talking about up to 15 minutes in what would qualify as a close contact. And so our students would not have anywhere near that.”

Arrival would also be staggered, with busses, driving students and walking students entering at slightly different times through different entrances, according to Sibley.

The district’s website at chippewavalleyschools.org/ has an in-depth description of the hybrid plan posted. This includes information regarding PPE, masks, health screening, health department information and how sick students or staff are handled. The guidelines also outline school office procedures, arrival and dismissal procedures, hygiene, protocols for suspected COVID-19 cases, visitors, and arrangements for classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, lockers and cubbies at all levels.

Superintendent Ron Roberts added although there has been some confusion in the wake of the Michigan Supreme Court invalidating mask orders issued by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer after April 30, he added wearing face coverings in schools is a part of the Michigan School Aid Act put in place by the Legislature.

“Now furthermore although the executive orders have been ruled to be invalid, Chippewa Valley does have the right and obligation pursuant to the revised School Code to implement reasonable rules and regulations to promote the health and safety and welfare of students in our district. So as a result the district will continue to enforce the face covering requirements that are included in the districts extended COVID-19 learning plan and the district’s return to school guidelines,” he said.

Roberts added the district will continue to review its legal obligations as details of the effects of the state Supreme Court decisions are vetted by legal counsel. He also said that unless something is ordered or enacted that indicates safety provisions put in place by the district are not permitted under the revised School Code or other applicable laws, the district will continue to implement safety

protocols. Parents who think their children may meet requirements for medical exemptions to masks should contact the district, according to Roberts.