



July 24, 2020

Dear Woodland Families,

At the July 23 Board of Education meeting, I presented preliminary plans for the 2020-2021 school year along with other district and school administrators. As I have explained in previous messages, we have been actively planning for next school year since May. From the beginning, our priority has been the health and wellness of staff and students.

One thing we learned early on in our response to COVID-19 is that this is a very fluid and rapidly changing situation. I sent out an update last week with the full intention of presenting a Blended Learning Model to the Board of Education to start the school year. Yet, as we worked on solidifying final pieces of that plan, I realized that we simply are not able to say the plan is safe for everyone. Because the ability to keep everyone safe remains my top priority, I have made the recommendation to the Board that we start the school year in a fully Remote Learning model.

I know this will be a difficult change of course for some, a welcome relief for others, and this decision will impact our learning community in numerous ways. Coming to this decision was not easy, but as we tried to make all the puzzle pieces fit together there were safety considerations for which we could not find a solution. When the majority of our discussions were centered around how to respond when we have cases, when various groups will be required to quarantine, and when we will transition to full remote for all, it was a wakeup call that we were trying to reopen knowing full well we would have cases of COVID-19 among our staff and students. It was time to change course, even when that seemed like the hard thing to do.

Remote Learning in August will look much different than it did in the spring. Thanks to the tireless work of our three ReEntry Committees and administrators, along with feedback from teachers and families, many components of the Remote Learning plan have already been developed. Here is a high level summary of what the new Woodland Remote Learning 2.0 will look like:

Woodland Remote Learning 2.0

We are starting the school year in a full REVISED Remote Learning Model. The program will be called Woodland Remote Learning 2.0.

- The current plan is to stay in remote learning through the first quarter and continue to evaluate the situation over the coming weeks/months. The plan will be to eventually move into a Blended Learning Model, and to one day fully reopen when it is safe to do so.
- We heard loud and clear from teachers and families that the remote program offered in the spring was not sufficient. Woodland Remote Learning 2.0 will be a different experience with clear expectations, more live instruction and meaningful interaction among teachers and students.
- The first day of remote instruction will be Aug. 31. The week before will be used for Remote Learning Planning days, supply and material pickup, and virtual teacher meet and greets.
- The school day for students in first through eighth grade will be from 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
- Early Childhood and Kindergarten will be a half-day model with AM and PM sessions.
- Students will be expected to attend classes, complete all assignments, and normal grading and attendance practices will resume as if we were in a traditional classroom.
- We will be providing Special Education services, Dual Language, Advanced and Challenge classes, Specials and more. Additional details will be available as we continue to finalize the plan.
- We will provide Grab and Go breakfast and lunch meal options for pick-up

I acknowledge that after my message last week, many families were starting to consider how the Blended Model would work, and formulating potential plans based on the two-day, and half-day concepts. While it's hard to explain everything that went into such a multi-faceted and difficult decision, let me address some of the driving factors. The biggest concern



was explained above as we realized we were spending more time planning for people getting sick than we were for a high-quality educational experience. We could not check the safety boxes that needed to be checked and that realization stopped us in our tracks. In addition to the health and safety concerns, this decision also considers several other important factors:

- **Quarantine and Contact Tracing** - Even in a Blended Model with only 50% of the students in school at a time, there would still be more than 5500 students and 850 staff members moving through four school buildings each day. Limiting student movement to attempt to isolate students into smaller groups is negated with students riding buses with different students, having siblings in other classes and school buildings, and rotating teachers to provide core subjects and special classes. These logistics make managing the quarantine and contact tracing procedures we have received from public health officials impossible, knowing that we could potentially have hundreds of students, teachers and staff members quarantined for up to 14 days at various points throughout any given month. This constant and continual interruption would have a serious and negative impact on our ability to provide students with a consistent high-quality learning experience.
- **Sense of Normalcy** - One thing we hear as part of this discussion is that kids need some form of in-person learning to regain a sense of normalcy and have positive social experiences during this uncertain time. We understand that schools provide students with important social interactions and experiences during a *normal* school day. However, given the extensive health and safety guidelines we must follow, there will be nothing normal about the daily experience for students if we try to bring them back at this time. In fact, we will be required to do everything we can to limit social interactions with other students and adults, which will take away any sense of normalcy.
- **Childcare Arrangements** - Any option outside of a traditional school day presents childcare concerns for families. Whether we return to school for half day sessions split in AM and PM blocks, or full remote learning, we know that some families will need to find childcare for our younger students. We are working with local childcare providers such as Champions and Gurnee Park District to determine what type of programming they can offer in the fall to assist with this community need.

I know that this letter does not address every question or concern you have. After the discussion at the Board meeting ([view presentation here](#)), we need to make several revisions to our written plan and Frequently Asked Questions before we can provide a complete and final version of the plan to our community. We will be coming out with additional details in the next few days/weeks as it becomes available. In the meantime, please use this [Feedback Form](#) to submit any questions, comments or statements of support through this form so that all feedback can be collected in one location.

Thank you for your continued support and patience as we work through this very difficult time. Please know that we are dedicated to providing the best possible learning experience for your students and keeping our Woodland learning community safe.

Your Partner in Education,

Dr. Lori Casey, Superintendent
Woodland District 50