

What's It Take to Keep the School Doors Open

According to Webster's Dictionary, a hero is defined as a person admired for great deeds or fine qualities, and a hero is defined as a person who shows great courage. Dictionary.com adds that a hero is a person noted for courageous acts or nobility of character. Both definitions eloquently capture the worthiness of such a title for our Edgerton School District staff--true American heroes. Every day our staff demonstrate incredible courage in their relentless efforts to provide a safe learning environment for students.

This past summer, the Edgerton School District administrative team spent countless hours planning and preparing the reopening of schools for the fall. We discussed many different ideas and aligned each of them to the latest recommendation of the CDC and local health department. The final plan, which provided options for families to return in-person or attend virtually, ensured a safe learning environment for students to learn and Teachers/Education Support Professionals to teach. During the summer, our team discussed a myriad of plans which were based on a series of assumptions, unknowns, and facts at the time. It felt like we were sailing a seventeenth century cutty in uncharted waters without a compass or map to follow. There simply were no navigable examples or game plans for reopening schools during a world-wide pandemic.

Our Roadmap to Reopening plan emphasized the mitigation of in-person risk by requiring students and staff to wear masks, monitoring social distancing, stringent cleaning protocols and procedures, structuring the school day in a manner that minimized movement to reduce the challenges of contact tracing, and organizing students into cohort classrooms. In addition, assigned seats on the bus were mandatory, temperature checks in the morning routine, lunches brought to classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels, and continuous cleaning throughout the school day in all buildings. Along with these and many other measures, staff worked with their building principals to address the day to day logistics of reopening schools safely.

As we enter the month of November, I am pleased to share that our school doors are still open for in person instruction. This is not because of luck or by accident. It's a direct result of the relentless pursuit of our staff to provide all students a comprehensive learning experience whether they attend in-person or virtually. To do so requires addressing several challenges that couldn't all be predicted in our planning efforts. For example: 1). anxiety from positive cases being reported, 2). stress caused by immediately having to shift from in-person instruction to virtual if a cohort or school pivots, 3). addressing a variety of technology needs including internet access from homes that have limited service, and 4). staff that have tested positive yet teach virtually from home if they choose to do so. These are only a few examples of the significant challenges our staff have had to overcome in order to provide students and families the quality of education they have come to know and expect in Edgerton.

Even with all the mitigation protocols and procedures, we haven't eliminated all positive cases of COVID-19 among students and staff. Since the opening of school on September 1, we have had positive cases which required us to switch thirteen cohorts from in-person to virtual for two week periods. This plan of cohorting was designed so that we would not have to switch the entire school to virtual instruction. In September, we had one entire school switch to virtual for two weeks because of the number of positive cases we experienced in one week. Since then, we've been able to keep the doors open in all schools and manage positive cases by switching cohorts from in-person to virtual if a positive case arises.

Our success to date is not a result of luck or random coincidence. Our success is a testimony to the tireless commitment of our staff, students, and families to implement safety protocols and procedures consistently ensuring risk to students and staff is minimized.

Each day requires a herculean effort on the part of our staff to keep the school doors open and provide students a world-class education both in-person and virtually. We are operating under conditions never experienced before and yet our staff remains positive and relentless in their pursuit of excellence. The seas are uncertain and cause us to adjust our sails quickly and often. The internal waves can be challenging and the waters rough, yet through the incredible commitment and efforts of our staff the external waters are calm and inviting. Words cannot express my admiration for the efforts of our Edgerton School District staff, they are truly American Heros!

It is a privilege to serve as the District Administrator in the Edgerton School District.

Dr. Dennis Pauli