



Canton

Union School District #66

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Parents, Friends, Guardians, and Community and School Board Members:

At the outset I would like to apologize for the length of time it has taken our school district to develop the re-entry plan you are going to learn about tonight. I know the delay has created a lot of anxiety within the community and with parents as they anticipate the opening of our schools. During the development of this plan the priority has consistently been the safety of the students and staff, while, at the same time, maintaining the highest level of quality education. To say the least it has been difficult and time consuming to develop a consequential plan as the rules and mandates provided by the state have been challenging. Nonetheless, we understand the cautiousness of the state and support their mandates and recommendations. Thankfully, due to the hard work of our staff and administrators, we feel we have developed a plan that will provide the safest possible environment and still maintain the highest expectations and quality of education.

In my 35 years of education I never dreamed I would be making a presentation of this magnitude. This is by far the most difficult recommendation I have made in my career. Nonetheless, it is a decision that none of us have taken lightly as it affects the entire Canton Community.

After much thought and careful consideration, I have determined that any form of in-person learning in August will:

- Potentially compromise the health and safety of our students, faculty, staff and their families
- Significantly compromise our high expectations for teaching and learning.

As a result, I am recommending that all Canton #66 students start the school year on a remote learning schedule. That schedule will encompass:

- Classes for all students will begin on Monday, August 19.
- Teachers will report on 8/12, 8/13, 8/14, 8/17, & 8/18 for training.

- Students will receive instruction synchronously 2.5 hours a day (live on-line) and asynchronously (projects, essays, tests, quizzes, etc.) through our Google Classroom Platform.
- Students will follow a carefully designed daily schedule.
- The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) removed restrictions on assessments and grades for students for the 2020 - 2021 school year. As a result, we will resume our assessment and grading practices.
- We will provide meal service for students in need.
- We will provide virtual student services and support for students.
- We will periodically re-evaluate our plan using regional and local metrics and review ISBE guidelines to determine if health and safety conditions allow us to gradually bring additional students, faculty, and staff back to campus in a blended learning model.

This was a very difficult decision knowing the effect it will have on families, students, faculty, and staff will be serious. Because this decision is important we felt that it is important to share with you our reasoning and why we believe starting the year in a remote learning model is best for our students, faculty, and staff.

Part-time Attendance VS Remote Learning

The most important priority in our planning has been to provide a safe and healthy environment for students, staff, and their families. At the same time we also placed a very high emphasis on providing the highest quality education for our students.

During our planning period staff studied the ISBE and CDC guidance thoroughly. We have also consulted with our legal counsel and insurance providers to ascertain if shortcuts or adjustments to the official school reopening guidelines were possible. Unfortunately both our legal counsel and insurance providers have advised us that the guidance should be followed closely. To not do so would place our district at risk. In addition to requiring face masks and limiting gatherings to 50 people or fewer, ISBE guidance makes it clear that schools should implement social distancing (6 feet or greater) to protect students and adults from viral transmission. In a school district with buildings containing populations of 240 to 750 students and staff, the only way we could come close to adhering to these social distancing guidelines is to reduce the number of students on campus in half.

As our planning progressed it quickly became clear that the most effective way to comply with social distancing requirements was to create a learning model in which the students only attended on a part-time basis. Consequently we developed a learning model in which students would be on campus two days per week, learning remotely one day per week, and doing

independent work the other two days per week. This would mean that the students would be in a Canton CUSD #66 classroom eight days a month.

Although the learning model we developed would have provided students with 2 days of in-person instruction, this model has significant limitations:

- A Part-time learning model would only enable students to be at school 2 days per week given the ISBE social distancing guidelines.
- Students would be doing asynchronous work (projects, essays, tests, quizzes, etc.) two days per week at home without any contact with their classmates or classroom teachers.
- In a part-time learning schedule, we would only be able to cover 50 - 60% of the course curriculum, that would put students at an educational disadvantage.

There is no doubt that a remote learning model is not ideal, but it does provide several benefits:

- Students will connect every day with their classroom teacher and classmates.
- Student schedules will more closely resemble our current daily instructional schedule format.
- Remote learning classes will meet every day and will cover all Canton Course Curriculum. Daily instruction will provide us with a stronger opportunity to prepare students for future studies.

Obviously, we would all prefer a regular Canton School District in-person learning environment. Unfortunately, this is not possible at this time. Of the remaining options, we strongly believe that our Remote Learning model is the best option for keeping students on track academically.

Health and Safety

The most important priority in making our decision regarding the commencement of the 20-21 academic year has been the health and safety of all members of our learning family.

Unlike our elementary buildings, it will be impossible to introduce guidelines imposed by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) that recommends the isolation of students into self-contained classrooms throughout the school day. For example, Middle and high school students change classes to move from one curriculum specific room to another. This would also create challenges for those students that are enrolled in vocational and advanced courses.

Another significant challenge that IDPH and ISBE guidelines present are the mandated quarantine and contact tracing procedures. The quarantine and contact tracing procedures we have received from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Illinois State Board of Education make it very clear that we could potentially have dozens of students, faculty, and staff members quarantined for up to 14 days at various points throughout the fall. For Example, the most current guidance (June 2020) from the IDPH states that: “Those who had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 or is suspected of having COVID-19 infection should isolate at home and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. Close contact means the individual was within 6 feet of the individual with symptoms for more than 15 minutes.” As some schools have tried to open up sports camps, we have already seen the significant effects that contact tracing and quarantining may have. There will be interruption and shutdowns with potentially dozens of students, faculty, and staff members being quarantined at various points throughout the first semester. This constant and continual interruption will have a serious and negative impact on our ability to provide students with a consistent high-quality learning experience, cause panic amongst parents, and create chaos throughout the community. Whatever benefit there may have been to having students in school for two days a week will be quickly invalidated when they and their teachers will need to be quarantined for 10-14 days at home one or more times as we start the year and when flu season starts in the fall.

In closing, I want to reiterate that this decision has been very difficult. We all want our children back in school in person – including my own. However, under the circumstances we don’t feel we can conduct a normal in person format and still maintain a safe school learning environment.

Sincerely,
Rolf Sivertsen
Superintendent
Canton Schools