



Elko County School District

Superintendent's Office

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July 17, 2020

Dear ECSD Community,

It is my pleasure to introduce myself to the Elko County community. I consider it a privilege to have been appointed as the Superintendent of Schools for the Elko County School District. I have only been here two weeks, but already I can see the great passion the professionals have for the work they do on behalf of the children that they serve.

We are well into a time of great challenge and uncertainty. I am confident that the strength of the community will bring us through these challenges and we will be stronger and more resilient than before we began.

My message to you today is long, but there is much on which to catch you up.

On April 30 Governor Sisolak released, *Nevada United Roadmap to Recovery*. In this plan he outlined the steps taken in Nevada to combat the spread of COVID-19. He described the criteria necessary to transition through Phases 1 - 4 of reopening of the state. We are currently in Phase 2 of his reopening plan. You may access the Governor's plan here: [Nevada United Roadmap to Recovery](#)

On May 28, the Governor signed Emergency Directive - 021 that identified the restrictions adherent to Phase 2. These restrictions, along with added restrictions identified in Directive 024 which mandates the use of face coverings for ages 10 and up, are still in effect and have acted as the guide for planning the opening of school for the 2020-2021 school year across the state. On June 9, 2020, Governor Sisolak issued Emergency Directive 022 requiring that school districts and charter schools develop plans for reopening school buildings, providing instruction, and related activities. Directive 022 introduced *Nevada's Path Forward: A Framework for a Safe, Efficient, and Equitable Return to School Buildings*. This document and several subsequent guidance memos were issued by the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) to provide districts with support in drafting their reopening plans. You can access NDE's framework on our website or here: [Nevada Path Forward: A Framework for a Safe, Efficient, and Equitable Return to School Buildings](#).

At that point in June, ECSD invited parents, students, and staff to take part in a survey to aid in the planning for the return to school. To develop the required specialized educational plans, a committee organized by district staff and composed of staff, parents, one board trustee, community members, and partners was organized to study the restrictions identified in Phase 2 by the Governor, survey responses, and district resources. The committee set to work on the development of the three required plans for returning to school. The results indicated that the majority of families and staff want to return to school as normal. We all want children back in school. The reopening committee utilized the survey data to develop plans that came as close as possible to the desire of the community to open schools while also following directives outlined by the State. You may access survey results here: [Survey Results](#).

The work before the committee was to develop three individual plans that would address a return to school as it would relate to the phases of reopening outlined by the Governor and include the strict restrictions identified. The committee was charged with creating plans to fit the following required models:

- Distance Learning Model
- Hybrid Learning Model
- In-Person Learning with Restrictions Model

Distance Learning Model

The plan that reflects a distance learning model is one in which students receive all of their learning via distance education. Survey results indicated that the last-minute switch to distance learning for ECSD was challenging and fraught with frustration. The current plan developed for Distance Learning addresses those challenges and meets the new rigorous requirements identified by the NDE. These include, but are not limited to, the following items:

- Instruction must be supported daily by teachers
- Students must receive high-quality, standards-based instruction
- Students must have access to devices and the Internet or clear and efficient arrangements made for paper/pencil assignments
- Teachers must receive ongoing, high-quality professional development
- Requirements for specialized learning (e.g. IEP compliance, etc.) must be met
- Students eligible for Free/Reduced lunch must have access to food

The ECSD Distance Learning Model Plan could be enacted if the Governor issues an Executive Order closing schools again due to health concerns. The model will also be made available to families in all phases of the State's reopening plan and under several scenarios:

- The State requires school districts to utilize a full distance learning model
- Students are attending school in either a hybrid or in-person model, but a family chooses to participate in a full distance learning model.
- In the event a student, group of students, school, or district is temporarily shut down due to an outbreak

The Elko County School District must be ready to pivot to a remote learning model in the event of a change in the Governor's orders or localized outbreaks. Given the expansive and diverse geographic area that the district serves, many families expressed concerns regarding future remote learning due to the lack of high-quality Internet and/or access to appropriate technology such as laptops or other devices.

During the statewide closure, the district increased its procurement of Chromebooks for students. In the fall, students without devices will be issued a Chromebook. We are also preparing for the provision for Internet access for students who do not currently have adequate access. Should we need to reenter a remote learning environment during the next school year, we will work to ensure families who need Chromebooks and other learning tools will have them.

Hybrid Learning Model

The plan that reflects a hybrid learning model is one in which schools engage in a combination of distance learning and in-person models. In the ECSD Hybrid Plan, we are referring to a learning model in which students are receiving in-person instruction for part of the week and distance learning for the other part of the week. This plan takes into account the current restrictions outlined in the Governor's Phase 2 of the reopening plan for Nevada:

- Social distancing requirements
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements
- Groupings of individuals that reflect 50% of a classroom/space capacity or 50 people, whichever number is smaller

This model/plan also allows ECSD to adhere to social distancing requirements, with restrictions, while transporting students on school buses. The Hybrid Learning Model Plan supports students attending school in an A/B rotation schedule format with approximately half of their instruction to be in-person and half with distance learning. Students attending schools in a five day school week will be on a two week rotating schedule. For example, students in A Group will participate in Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in-person learning, and Tuesday/Thursday distance learning for week one. During week two, A Group students will participate on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in distance learning and on Tuesday and Thursday students would attend school for in-person learning. Students attending schools with a four day school week will be on a Monday, Wednesday, Tuesday, Thursday rotation. Families throughout the district will be assigned the same A or B grouping. Certain vulnerable student groups will receive in-person instruction throughout the week.

Please note - Schools must operate within the requirements identified by the state. The restrictions that mandate that classrooms may only accommodate 50% of their capacity is key in determining which model will be utilized for school reopening. Given the requirements of reopening under **Phase 2 that is in effect today**, the hybrid model is the one that meets the current restrictions and comes the closest to getting our children back in school. While it is the goal of the Elko County School District to return to robust face-to-face instruction for all students, it will, **given the current restrictions**, be likely necessary for the school model to be a hybrid of in-person learning and distance learning.

In-Person Learning Model

In the in-person learning model plan, students would attend school in-person every day with strict restrictions and guidelines. This model would be in effect once the state moves into Phase 3 or 4 of reopening or in the event the Governor eases restrictions in Phase 2. This plan must also adhere to the restrictions regarding social distancing, PPE, and cleaning that would be in effect in Phases 3 and 4 or Phase 2 at the time of reopening of school. Given their sizes, Independence Valley, Mound Valley, Ruby Valley, and Jackpot Combined School will be able to utilize the In-Person Learning Model Plan and still meet the 50% occupancy limit. **Under the current restrictions regarding social distancing and requirement to meet the 50% capacity limit, we can not meet the criteria that will allow for this plan in all other schools not listed above.**

Survey results indicate that the preference for families is to return to school in the fall without restrictions. We fully understand your varied concerns about health and safety, distance learning, the importance of face-to-face instruction, parents needing to work, the economy, and all of the other unexpected consequences of not being in school or being in school in a traditional method. Our goal is to find the best way to have our students safely in our buildings as frequently as possible to ensure the health and well-being of all.

I am sure that after reading through this letter, you likely have many questions/concerns. We do as well. The NDE requires that districts present their plans to the community 20 days prior to the opening of school. **Please be advised that the starting date of school in the Fall may be delayed by a few days.** Please watch for updates from me as well as information which will be posted on the district website. We will be presenting the three model plans to the community and the Elko County School District Board of Trustees at the July 28, 2020 Board meeting. Please submit your questions ahead of time or during the meeting by accessing the question form that will be posted on our website. The form will be available starting **Thursday, July 23** on our website and social media outlets.

This is an extremely difficult situation to navigate, one for which there is no “right” answer. We see how challenging it is for the state to manage. We see our families and staff struggling with the situation. We see other districts unsure about how to move forward. For everyone that is happy with one approach, there is someone that is not. This difficult reality applies to students, staff, family members, and community partners.

The overall success of this school year will require each of us working closely together, listening to one another's concerns, and doing our part to contribute to a positive, healthy, and safe school experience. Ultimately, we will get through this. Once we find our way through the storm, we will be better prepared as a district to face future challenges.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michele Robinson
Superintendent of Schools
Elko County School District