

Madison-Grant gives additional re-entry, virtual learning guidance

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The Madison-Grant United School Corporation is putting the finishing touches in place for preparation of the start of school next Friday, Aug. 7.

Superintendent Scott Deetz gave the school board an overview of the plan and recent updates at the regular meeting Monday.

The board approved an update revising the use of mask expectations in the plans to adhere to Gov. Eric Holcomb's recent executive order. Masks will be required for all adults and students grades three through 12, and teachers and other employees in preschool through second grade will have the authority to require the younger students to wear masks in certain situations like while on the bus.

Deetz said the most recent guidance from the state advises that if desks are all facing the same direction and at least three to six feet apart, students will be permitted to remove their masks during instructional time but will be expected to put the masks back on if getting up and passing other students for any reason.

"I don't think we would wish that upon our worst enemy, let alone our kiddos," Deetz said of being forced to wear a mask for 7 hours straight. "We're trying to create an environment that's still encouraging to learn in, let alone teach in. That is very very clear in the executive order and I was thankful for that when it was finally published."

The district has thousands of disposable masks ready and is also awaiting a shipment of reusable cloth masks from the state, Deetz said.

"Just like honestly with a device, if a kid breaks theirs three times in a week we may not be able to keep up with that demand," he said. "There is still a responsibility of the family and student to bring one or supply a mask."

Disciplinary actions for students not complying with mask rules will follow the typical discipline for any school conduct rule and be tailored based on the age of the student, according to Deetz.

Deetz said Madison-Grant has been constantly collaborating with both Madison and Grant counties' health departments and other school districts to ensure best practices are being followed when reopening school.

"I want to state very clearly that as late as last week and in an email (Monday), both county's health departments are in full support of schools reopening on time and are doing everything that they can to make sure that we have those supports in place, especially in the areas of contact tracing," Deetz said. "And so I feel really really good about the situation that we are in so that we can be here for our families."

While many teachers already returned to campus once buildings opened in early July, Deetz said teachers officially report Aug. 5 and will receive trainings from the district's nurse on COVID-19 identification, care, screening and how to recognize and what to do if someone is symptomatic.

Deetz gave board members an overview of the junior/senior high, Park Elementary and Summitville Elementary reentry plans.

All buildings will have increased hand sanitizer stations, but Deetz said frequent hand washing will be preferred. There will be signs throughout the buildings going over screening questions and reminding of social distancing and hand washing.

Visitors will be allowed in classrooms only when they are there for a specific academic purpose, such as a college student teacher, and will be required to follow the same screening and other procedures in place for staff.

Water fountains will not be available for use, but there will be water bottle filling stations available and all students are encouraged to bring a water bottle. There will be no field trips allowed this year, with the exception of a plan for eighth- and ninth-graders to travel to Washington, D.C. in May or June of 2021 if travel is permitted at that time.

The junior/senior high will be on a traditional seven period schedule with classrooms adjusted for social distancing. There will be shorter passing periods with students required to wear masks while changing classes.

Band and choir classes will be held in the auditorium and/or cafeteria to give enough room for social distancing, and lunch at the junior/senior high will take place in the cafeteria, library and other areas if needed so that students can socially distance while eating.

In the elementary schools, recess periods will be staggered with one grade level at a time, and all students must immediately wash their hands upon coming in from the playground.

Deetz said as of Friday, July 24, about 6 percent of all students have signed up for Madison-Grant's virtual learning option. Full-time virtual learning is a commitment made by each family, Deetz noted, and will be more structured than what was in place when schools were closed in the spring.

"This document wants to make it clear you should anticipate five or more hours of classroom work a day in our virtual option," he said. "This is different than your snow day, eLearning day or what we kind of transitioned into in 24 hours on Friday, March 13. This is not your normal eLearning day. This is a virtual school option with regular amounts of work."

Assignments will generally be given to students learning virtually in two-week intervals, with some high school classes having more rigorous schedules. While most of the virtual learning will not be tied to a timeframe and students can choose to get their five hours of work done at any point in a given day, Deetz said students will be expected to attend one scheduled meeting live with a teacher per scheduled class a week as well as one "homerom" type check-in with a supervising teacher to review the student's progress.

If a student attends all meetings and completes all work, they will be credited with five or 10 days of attendance depending on if they are on a weekly or biweekly cycle.

Failure to attend a scheduled instructional time or check-in with a supervising teacher will result in one absence per missed session. Failure to complete all assignments in a two-week period will result in one absence per 10 percent of missed assignments, and state laws regarding attendance will be enforced if necessary.

Parents or guardians are expected to serve as “learning coaches” and be the primary instructor/monitor during students’ virtual school days.

“This is a key difference between eLearning and our virtual school. There is skin in the game for the folks at home that choose to go to virtual learning. The key to success is they have to have an engaged adult monitoring, going over work and helping with that communication process,” Deetz said. “Now you can imagine that role is a bit more engaging as a second grade student the role of the learning coach as opposed to an 11th grader taking AP classes, but still there are some things in here that the learning coach is responsible for.”

Typical grading will be used for grades three through 12, while grades kindergarten through two will be monitored with a “competency based system that is watching for mastery of grade level standards,” according to the virtual learning plan.

If a parent wishes to transition their student from virtual learning to in-person or vice versa, they will have to wait for set transition points. Students kindergarten through eight can transition back and forth at the end of each quarter, while students grades nine through 12 will have to wait till the end of a semester to transition.

Students receiving instruction in-person who need to stay home for extended time due to quarantines or other reasons will be given eLearning work more similar to what is expected during a snow day and will not be fully transitioned into the virtual learning model, Deetz said.

For more information, all three schools’ reentry plans and the virtual learning plan can be found at www.mgusc.k12.in.us.