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# Niagara Wheatfield Central School District outlines reopening plan

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO

Interim Tribune Editor

The Niagara Wheatfield Central School District is moving forward with a two-program model as it submits its reopening plans to New York state.

If the state allows for schools to reopen in the fall, parents will be able to choose between a so-called regular program and a virtual program. The plan includes an every-other-day schedule where the student population will be split into two groups, alphabetically.

The district's plans include an "orientation period" from Sept. 8-22, giving students, parents and teachers time to monitor and adjust to the new changes. During this period, students in both elementary and secondary schools will only attend every other day. Half will attend school on Sept. 8, 10, 14, 16, and 18. The other half will attend school on Sept. 9, 11, 15, 17 and 21. Children of households will be kept together.

Along with guidelines from New York state and the Niagara County Department of Health, the district says its plans were informed by survey data collected by parents. Based on these surveys, 33% of parents say their children will be partaking in virtual-only education at the start of the school year. This means that in-person student population will be at 67% at the beginning of the school year. Additionally, 50% of parents indicated they would drive their children to school, versus busing, meaning a smaller population there, as well.

The board's July 28 plan presentation is available in full on YouTube. The full plan itself can also be found in written form on the district's website's home page, <https://www.nw-csd.org/>.

## Virtual Program

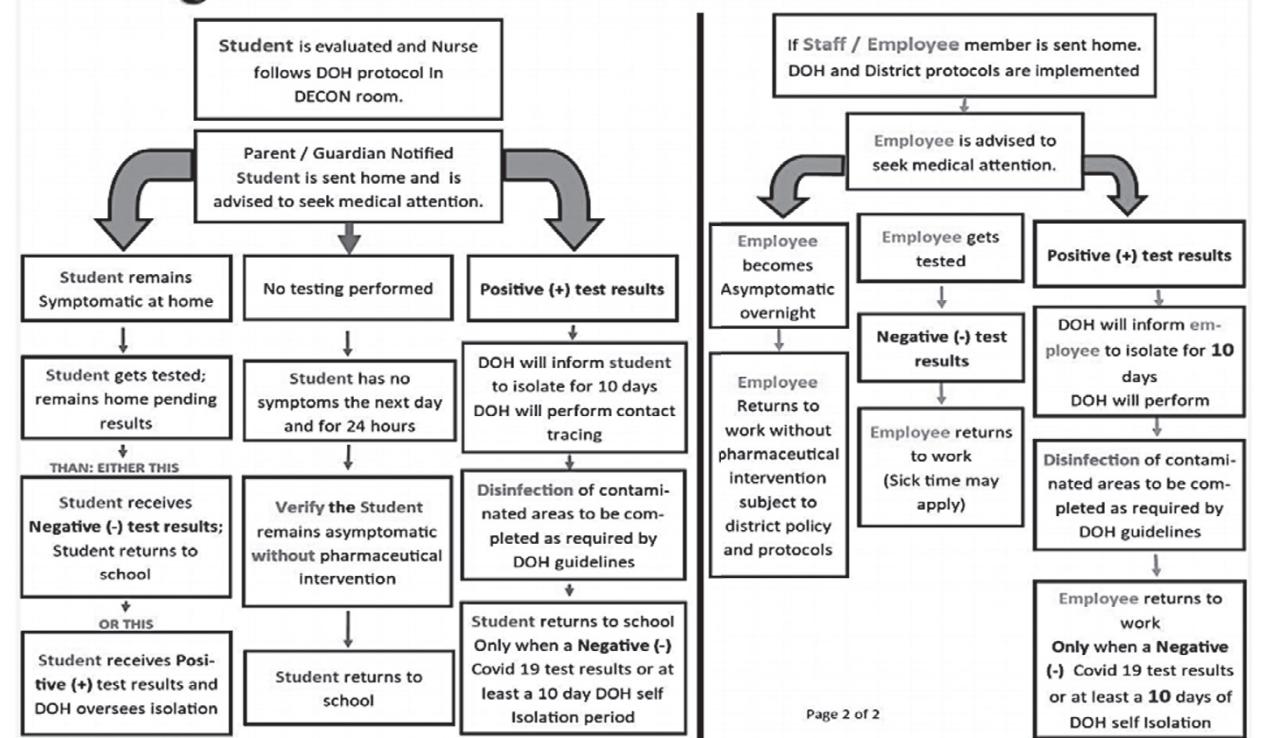
The virtual program is fairly straightforward and will have only one model in which all participating students will take part in learning activities from home. The district says the virtual program was designed for students "whose family does not wish them to physically attend school at all, even if a return to school is permitted by state and local government."

Following the orientation period (which ends Sept. 21,) elementary school students "will receive daily instruction and learning activities that are both synchronous (live) and asynchronous (can be done at any time)." Meanwhile, middle and high school students in the virtual program, in addition to synchronous instruction, will begin participating in asynchronous assignments provided by their teachers, on their alternate day.

## Regular Program

Students enrolled in the regular

## Management of ILL PERSONS and COVID 19



These flowcharts from the proposed Niagara Wheatfield plan outlines how the district will handle positive and suspected cases of COVID-19.

program are expected to transition between three instructional models, depending on directives by state and local governments. The three models include:

► **In-Person Model:** All students attend every day following a regular schedule with safety measures in place, including wearing masks at all times, with the allowance for teacher directed mask breaks.

► **Hybrid Model:** Students are assigned to one of two attendance groups. The groups of students alternate, in an A-day, B-day-type schedule.

► **Regular-Remote Model:** All students participate in learning activities from home.

Beginning on Sept. 22, middle and high school students will continue to attend school every other day, according to their grouping. On a student's alternate day at home, they will participate in asynchronous instructional assignments provided by their teachers.

District Superintendent Daniel Ljiljanich clarified the regular program by saying that, even if the governor gives the go-ahead to fully reopen schools, NWCS D will take its own measured approach, beginning first with a hybrid model. From there, the school will determine, every 10 weeks, whether it wants to move toward a fully, in-person model, a goal which Ljiljanich says the district is striving for.

"We know that in-person education is where we all want to be. We want all of our students back here all of the time. As a district, we're not going to start that way with our

plan; with all of our students here on Sept. 8. However, we are going to, hopefully, be able to move into that before the course of this year ends," Ljiljanich said.

The district says once a parent selects a program, the student is effectively locked in for 10 weeks. However, after that 10-week period, parents will be given the option to switch to the other program for the next 10-week period, if they choose.

The district also says it is working to ensure all students from the same household attend school in-person on the same days.

Families are asked to select one of these options using the "Family Program Commitment Form" available on the district's website. Students will be scheduled in the regular program by default.

## Health and Safety Measures

One of the topics that was heavily discussed was health and safety measures. Broadly, the district is instituting the types of precautions one would expect. Students and faculty must practice social distancing except when safety or "core activity" (ex: moving equipment, using an elevator, traveling in common areas, teaching a class) requires a shorter distance (or individuals are of the same household) dictates otherwise. They are also expected to follow proper prevention hygiene, such as washing hands frequently and using alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Students must also wear facial coverings at all times, except during teacher-instructed mask-breaks. Noncompliance will result in a stu-

dent being sent home. Ljiljanich said students will be provided with two rewashable masks at the beginning of the term. Additionally, paper masks will be available at entry points and on school buses if students arrive without one.

Additionally, all persons on school grounds will be subjected to daily temperature checks (parents are advised to do so before the school day), as well as mandatory weekly questionnaires, which will be available online.

The district also noted ventilation will be increased in buildings, and ventilation systems are being outfitted with state-recommended filters, where applicable.

## Testing and Positive Cases

One lingering issue that was discussed, is one that districts across the state are facing: What happens if an individual is suspected, or confirmed, to have COVID-19?

Unfortunately, there are few reassuring answers.

The district says that, while it will work to identify individuals who show symptoms and sanitize areas which may have been compromised, there is very little it can do beyond that. Per Department of Health guidelines, students and parents are not required to notify school officials about positive cases, a fact that didn't sit well with members of the School Board including President Steven Sabo.

"A parent doesn't need to take that kid to get tested or let us know if there's a result there," Sabo said.

"When I first started, you used to SEE NIAGARA, continued on Page 5

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Halie Hernandez  
**CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS/REPORTERS**  
Kevin and Dawn Cobello, Mark Daul, Autumn Hall, Wayne Peters, Mark Williams Jr., David Yarger

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**1859 Whitehaven Road**  
**Grand Island, N.Y. 14072**  
**Phone (716) 773-7676**  
**Fax (716) 773-7190**  
**Editorial:**  
**Tribune@wnypapers.com**  
**Dispatch@wnypapers.com**  
**Sentinel@wnypapers.com**  
**Advertising:**  
**NFPDesign@wnypapers.com**  
**Classifieds:**  
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