

Chippewa Valley approves limited classroom return

By: [Alex Szwarc](#) | C&G Newspapers | Published October 5, 2020



In August, Chippewa Valley Schools elected to start the school year with remote learning. On Oct. 1, the Board of Education approved a limited return to the classroom Oct. 12.

Photo by Alex Szwarc



Brittany Gonzalez, left, and Julie Pearce hold homemade signs at a protest Sept. 21 in Clinton Township. The gathering was a way to show support for in-person learning, in addition to a virtual option.

Photo by Alex Szwarc

CLINTON TOWNSHIP/MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Beginning later this month, some students in a local school district will return to a variation of in-person learning.

At the Oct. 1 Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education virtual meeting, it was decided that grades kindergarten through fifth will be in a hybrid model, while Early Childhood Special Education students, and kindergarten through 12th grade Creative Learning Program students will be in-person five days a week.

The target date for return is Oct. 12.

The vote was 6-1, with the lone “no” vote coming from Trustee Beth Pyden.

The board's Sept. 28 meeting was postponed due to technical difficulties after the district cited a system-wide issue with Microsoft Teams.

The board also approved the extended COVID-19 learning plan, which will be re-visited monthly.

The hybrid plan for students in grades sixth through 12th returning in-person is ready, but Superintendent Ron Roberts said it's a matter of determining a date to implement it.

Roberts said selecting the Oct. 12 date was based on how much time the district needed to transition from remote to a hybrid model.

"Parents need time too because in a hybrid model, kids are there three days one week and two days the other," he said. "Parents have to figure out what to do with their kids."

In September, the district operated in a complete virtual setting, meaning students remained home.

Elementary students will be divided into two groups, attending in-person school on alternating days Monday through Thursday, and in-person on alternating Fridays.

Paul Sibley, executive director of secondary education, said both groups are determined by home address, meaning that siblings will attend school on the same day, no matter what grade level.

Those not attending school in-person will be provided direction and work to continue from home.

The hybrid model does not affect the CV Virtual Academy, which provides families with a full-time option for remote learning.

With the return to the classroom, facial coverings are required for all students.

"We all agree that we're all frustrated and we must be frustrated for different reasons, and I think we can recognize that our goal has always been to return students to school when and if it's safe," Pyden said. "I think it's problematic that we've made the list of outbreaks along with Utica and the MISD and we're being asked to return students to school."

Board President Frank Bednard said he's struggled with the decision.

"We have children with special needs and the resources they were not getting," he said. "As school has been remote, I've struggled with the idea that we have English as a second language children and children who don't have the support at home, versus looking at the COVID numbers."

Jill DeMuyneck Zech, board treasurer, said she listened to a remote class and it was filled with plenty of missing instruction time.

"I would much rather have them in class two to three times a week with a teacher focused on teaching them, then what they're trying to do now," she said.

Trustee Andy Patzert said it's sad to see children going on to their second school year of losing their education.

"Sometimes in life you take risks, but I don't think it's a big risk for these children," he said.

More than a week before the board's decision, district parents, students and community members gathered for what organizers called a protest for the lack of choice for in-person learning.

The protest was held outside the Chippewa Valley Schools Administration Building on Cass Avenue in Clinton Township.

Julie Pearce, of Macomb Township, has two children in the district and attended the protest.

“The district gave us the option at the beginning of the year for face-to-face, hybrid or virtual,” she said. “Everybody voted on it and after, they decided not to do hybrid. They gave us the choice then took that away from us.”

Pearce said her children are home alone all day and there is no one there to check they’re doing their schoolwork.

She mentioned she would be fine with the hybrid option, so students are doing homework and paying attention.

In response to the protest, Roberts said he shares parents’ frustration in that COVID-19 has caused the district to put plans in place that changes how things are done.