

Back to School in Northville Amid COVID-19

Posted At : November 22, 2020 1:59 PM | Posted By : SHSJC

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By Sierra Steele (JAC 210 assignment for Prof. Waltz)

As most kids are opening their laptops and preparing for zoom lectures, some middle schoolers and high schoolers at Northville Public Schools (NPS) are dusting off their backpacks for in-person classes starting Oct. 2.

"I never thought I would be this excited to go back to school," said Northville High School (NHS) Sophomore Victoria Winfield. Northville Schools have been operating remotely online since Sept. 8 due to safety concerns over COVID-19.

Now, high school and middle school students will get to choose whether they want to attend in-person classes every other day, continue learning virtually or put together a hybrid of the two.

"I'm honestly impressed with NPS for giving families the option to choose what works best for them," NHS alumni Sophie Kenward said. "There is no one size fits all and I can't imagine being a child experiencing all of this."

Students and parents say they are torn between excitement for the new year and concern over the virus.

Still, it's not a simple choice.

Many parents are putting aside their fears about the virus and focusing on the impact of virtual learning on the mental and social wellbeing of their children.

"My daughter needs socialization," said school board candidate and parent Sherrie Winfield. "I understand people's concerns, I have my own too, but I have to think about what is best for my child right now."

Some students need in-person instruction more than others, according to the education specialists of McKinsey & Company. Students entering a new phase of education such as kindergarteners, 9th graders, and students transitioning out of high school need in-person training more than the general student population.

"My son is very introverted," said parent Ceresa Hayes. "It's his freshman year, and I want him to experience some in-person instruction so that he can have a smooth transition into high school."

Children who require childcare, special education students, homeless students, English as a second language students, students in abusive environments and those without access to the internet are high priority for in-person learning.

As a result, NPS opted for a full in-person return for special education students and elementary school students.

Fewer than half (43.6%) of parents wanted a full-time in-person start,

according to a district wide survey, while about three in ten (29.6%) wanted a hybrid start and 26.8% wanted full-time virtual learning.

"I think it's a bad idea for students to go back in person full time because there are still so many cases and so many at risk people. I think right now hybrid classes are a good compromise," said NHS alumnus Audrey Schikora .

As of August, nearly all Michigan counties meet school reopening standards, including maintaining a 14-day average daily infection rate below 5%.

Teachers are nervous either way.

"I can see both sides of the argument. As a future teacher, I would definitely be worried about my health and the health of my students during this time, so I'd definitely be nervous to be in a classroom right now," said Special Education and Elementary Education major and NHS alumni Riley Huggins. "On the other hand, I know that many parents have to work and don't have someone to watch their kids."

According to McKinsey Global Institute, the increased burden of unpaid childcare inflicted by the pandemic is a significant factor in women's rising level of unemployment.

There are also concerns about mental health issues as students are isolated.

"I've gone through a real depression since quarantine, and it sucks being stuck in my room trying to participate through a screen. It's probably way worse for kids," said NHS alumni and Michigan State University student Jayson James.

Based upon the state's current rates of COVID-19 cases and testing, school districts in most Michigan counties can safely reopen for class instruction.

The city of Northville is at Phase 4 of the MI State Start Plan: Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's plan to re-engage Michigan's economy.

Phase 4 is considered to be in the "improving phase" where cases, hospitalizations and deaths due to the virus are clearly declining.

The state requires students sixth grade and up to wear face coverings in classrooms and other common areas during the school day. A new executive order taking effect on Oct. 5 will require the use of masks for elementary school children in classrooms in all regions at Phase 4.

The district will also be following its 'NPS COVID-19 Preparedness and Reentry Plan' and the 'NPS Extended Continuity of Learning Plan' outlining current operational and instructional plans, both approved by the Board of Education.

"I guess I am kind of excited to go back to school in person. I'm just really curious how things would work," said high school freshman Samir Steele. "But at the same time, I don't want to be around people because of Corona."