ELMIRA EXPRESS CHAMPIONING ‘AN ATTITUDE OF FORTITUDE’

ALSO INSIDE

PANDEMIC PODS
READERS ARE LEADERS
FROM IN-PERSON TO ONLINE
A Letter from our Superintendent

FALL/WINTER 2020

Dear Friends,

Who could have predicted a year ago that we would now be writing about education during a global pandemic? With regular conversations about health protocols, masks, testing, social distancing and more, it seems surreal that education has changed so much in such a short period of time. In the last nine months, we have adapted, persevered and gone on with the most important job we have - to educate students in an engaging, safe and healthy way. I couldn't be prouder of the things we have been able to accomplish despite the complications of a global pandemic.

As we anticipate the remainder of this fall semester and school year, it is important for the District to share the things we are doing to continue the delivery of high quality education. We are grateful to our students, parents and community agencies for helping to guide and encourage us during this challenging time. It has been a true privilege to see first-hand what our community is capable of conquering.

Throughout this newsletter, you’ll read about things like ‘pandemic pods,’ virtual parent academies, technology advances across the entire district, and more. When the pandemic began in March, we reinvented education in a short 10 weeks that would have taken 10 years under normal circumstances.

This year continues to be the furthest thing from a typical year, yet we continue on with humility and grace. Our Elmira reputation is built upon an attitude of fortitude. For years, our faculty, staff and students have been honing a culture of courage in the face of adversity. Indeed, it is that culture that has allowed us to move through this pandemic unwavering and sure.

Like you, we want our students in our buildings. However, the health and safety of our students, staff, families, and the entire community are the driving factors behind decisions to transition from in-person to virtual. We ask that everyone follow best practices and wear masks, maintain safe distancing, and wash hands well and often.

As a strong and proud Elmira community, we encourage you to join us in championing “An Attitude of Fortitude” through the days and weeks to come. Empowering our students with positivity, especially during these challenging times, is one of the best things we can provide for our youth. In the Elmira City School District, we believe in the power of fortitude -- inspired by the strength we gain when showing courage in the face of adversity.

Go Express!

Hillary J. Austin
Superintendent of Schools
Elmira City School District

FROM THE COVER IMAGE

Students Emily Klotz (9th grade) and Jonny Klotz (5th grade) are working alongside one another, logged-in for virtual school on Schoology. In particular, our 9th grade students are adjusting well to the new grade configuration at Broadway Academy. Under Mrs. Rollin’s leadership (Principal), 9th Grade…Is A Great Start to the High School Journey…#ExpressStrong
Pandemic Pods

Our partners at the Chemung County Childcare Council, in partnership with the Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes, have worked tirelessly to build an infrastructure of child-aged learning pod solutions for virtual students in our region. This was in response to a growing need for week-day childcare for working parents to support their students during remote school days.

With anticipation of virtual learning this school year, a number of community agencies stretched their visions, thinking outside of the box, to create opportunities for students and working parents. With an increased need for school-aged childcare solutions, optimized to accommodate virtual students and their various tech needs, our region successfully established more than a dozen opportunities to offer working parents and their students.

What is a Pandemic Pod?

Pandemic pods — also called learning pods, micro-schools or nano-schools — are small groups of students (typically three to 10 children) who learn together outside the classroom but still in person. Some pods are hiring tutors to teach a child’s school curriculum; some pods are sharing teaching duties among parents.

The photos featured are of Elmira City School District students attending their learning pod at Tanglewood Nature Center. Like many organizations in our region, Tanglewood rose to the occasion and is offering an exceptional environment for learning exclusively for our Elmira City School District families.
An impressive three-monitor set-up keeps the teaching and learning moving in Mrs. Eden’s home. Mrs. Eden, an Elmira virtual teacher of Broadway Elementary School, teaches a class of third graders while making sure her own children at home are logged-in and ready to learn.

Mrs. Eden is one of several teachers who have been assigned to the role of Virtual Teacher for our 100% virtual students. This plan to assign teachers the specific role of the virtual classroom has proven to be strategic and successful in the face of swift transitions from in-person to virtual learning for many.

As we prepared for this fall, we strategically placed teachers who soared in the online environment this spring so that our online students would have the best virtual experience possible.
As the coronavirus pandemic surges into fall and winter, Elmira students, teachers and families are embarking on an extraordinary school year. Most of the usual back-to-school traditions have been postponed or modified to a virtual experience. At the beginning of the school year, our students began to get to know each other and their new teachers in person. Then, they began learning new skills and meeting new friends virtually, in a high-tech experience. We have been so impressed with the resiliency of our Express community. We anticipate that throughout this academic year, toggling between in-person and virtual learning will become a new normal as the pandemic continues to affect our school experience and swiftly change our educational delivery.

Our Elmira staff and administration have prepared for these fluid transitions in numerous ways in order to best serve our families. We have established strong supports around our virtual learning platform (Schoology). From re-assigning classroom teachers to virtual-only teachers, to Parent Academy sessions to learn the nuances of Schoology, our District is best optimized to make these (often quick and immediate) shifts smoothly. We are committed to a high standard of education and delivery as well as understanding and patience.

In order to best support our families, the District has prepared the following supports:

• Assigned experienced classroom teachers to the dedicated role of “Virtual Teacher”

• Virtual Parent Academy sessions to best support our families have been scheduled and posted to the District website.

• Our Food Services Department is providing meal assistance for families who would like to participate throughout the school year. These well-balanced, cost-free meals are available for all students.

• Social and emotional support is available for our students during these difficult transitional times.

DID YOU MISS A PARENT ACADEMY?
ALL SESSIONS HAVE BEEN RECORDED
AND CAN BE FOUND AT ELMIRACITYSCHOOLS.COM
Work Underway for **New Express Athletic Stadium**

This spring, Elmira City School District residents voted yes to a $68 million 2020 Capital Improvement Project and $8.75 million Energy Performance Contract Project. As we keep moving forward, this project represents the District’s continued investment in our facilities and the opportunity to experience savings to the District through future energy efficiencies.

To promote our physical education and athletic programs, the District is building a new athletic complex at Elmira High School, including a new turf field, track replacement, new bleachers, scoreboards, bathrooms and sound system.

The concern of soil contamination at Elmira High School (and specifically the football field) will be addressed with state-regulated site remediation. After several studies conducted by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) the NYS Department of Health, Elmira CSD has reached a $7.5 million settlement with the site’s previous owner Unisys Corporation to fund the restoration of the High School stadium after the site remediation. Following the cleanup, the District will be left with a clean-slate to build the new athletic complex.

The architectural renderings featured on this page, created by HUNT Engineers, Architects & Surveyors, are visions of what the complex will look like upon completion. The targeted completion for this project is 2022.

#GOEXPRESS
THANK YOU!

Maintenance and Facility Staff

The true heroes of today’s pandemic are those who are working diligently to keep our learning and working environments safe and clean. With a multitude of new regulations, processes and more, our Elmira maintenance and custodial staff are working harder than ever. From hand sanitizer stations, to health checkpoints, disinfecting routines, and more, our dedicated team works hard every day to make sure our buildings are meeting all the necessary requirements to remain a safe environment for our Elmira Express community. THANK YOU for your work, team!

New! Handwashing has always been part of an elementary school routine, but it’s more important than ever to have access to soap and water routinely throughout the day. Thank you to our building custodians for installing these Express soap stations for our students and staff!

Each morning, our staff and students complete an online health attestation to report wellness and sickness to the school for a timely and effective monitoring system of the virus.

Floor decals, with 6’ social distance markers, are now installed throughout school buildings as friendly reminders to adhere to the CDC recommended 6’ social distance guideline.

Our Elmira High School Hall Monitor team came together to show Express Strong support at Washington School during the days of COVID-19 testing (administered by the Chemung County Health Department). We are grateful for their unwavering dedication!
Virtual Fire Safety and Prevention Week

Each year, the Elmira City School District joins schools across the nation in participating in Fire Prevention Week. In a typical year, students would gather in a large auditorium room for a Fire Prevention Assembly and might even have the chance to climb aboard a real fire truck with volunteers who visit the school.

As most things this year, Fire Prevention Week went virtual thanks to the hardwork of Mr. Patrick Allison and other volunteers from the Pine City Fire Station. Mr. Allison, second grade teacher of Pine City Elementary, is also a volunteer firefighter in our Elmira community. Knowing the importance of fire prevention education, Mr. Allison worked with his fellow firefighter friends and teachers to teach students how to stay safe in case of a fire. Firefighters like Mr. Allison provide lifesaving public education in an effort to drastically decrease casualties caused by fires.
Like many of our Express staff and families, Mr. Allison of Pine City Elementary School is a volunteer firefighter in our community. We are always so honored to highlight the great work of our educators, especially as civic leaders in the classroom and in our community.

Thank you to all of our first responders and their dedication to keeping our communities safe.

Pine City student artwork (second grader) submitted during Fire Prevention and Safety Week!
Each year, Principal Mrs. Donovan of Riverside Elementary School encourages reading at home with an online social experiment using the hashtag #RiversideReads.

Every week, Mrs. Donovan encourages her Riverside Dragons to read at home and snap a photo to post online. She and her staff are always so excited to see the learning continue, especially during school closure.

As a way to stay connected, Mrs. Donovan hand-delivers (in a pandemic-friendly way) a prize to the reader-leader of the week!

We are so proud of our Riverside readers for being exceptional role models! Congratulations to all of our families for supporting literacy at school and at home. Keep reading and keep posting using #RiversideReads! We love to boast about our rising scholars.

Morale is a key component to a successful educational experience for both students and staff.

At Ernie Davis Academy, the reconfigured 7th and 8th grade middle school, administrators and faculty have embraced a new moto inspired by the school’s namesake, Ernie Davis. With a goal to exhibit champion qualities, staff are being recognized with the Champion Chain for going above and beyond.

Each week, staff submit names of fellow peers that are exhibiting qualities of which the award represents -- caring, respect, fairness, citizenship, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

The Champion Chain was created as a way to increase morale and build team dynamics as two staffs merge in the new grade level configuration. GO EXPRESS!
Art As Expression | An Election Photography Challenge

In this Election season, Elmira High School art teacher Mrs. Newkirk, challenged her virtual photography students to capture election-inspired photos. Art is often used as a catalyst for many important topics, including politics.

Our Elmira educators are always looking for ways to help our students engage meaningful civic dialogue. This democratic lesson captured many perspectives and promoted creative expression.

Art credit: “Puppy Love”  Elizabeth Robbins, 11th grade, Elmira High School Student

Art credit: “This Flag Means Freedom to All” Aidan Bogle, 10th grade, Elmira High School

Art credit: “The Reality of the Election”  Emma Pack, 10th grade, Elmira High School Student
Humans are stressed to the max during the pandemic. That’s why we are focusing on mindfulness as a technique to combat social issues of today like ‘pandemic fatigue,’ ‘screen time stress’ and more.

Especially during these challenging times, our staff and students are creatively finding ways to combat stress. From mindfulness meditation to STAR breathes, our learners are becoming increasingly aware of how to manage their emotions.

A physical release of emotions can help reduce headaches, anxiety and exhaustion.

As part of our Community Schools approach to learning, social and emotional support is a big priority. Together, our communities are growing stronger together with a focus on improving ways to manage overwhelming emotions during this difficult time.

Supporting Students with Mindfulness Techniques
Fassett Elementary school counselor, Mrs. Jessica Reger, is joined by fellow Fassett Falcons on Fridays during “Lunch Bunch.” For an hour each week, students are welcomed into a fun and safe online environment to play games, get to know one another, chat with Mrs. Reger, and to build social skills even during these times of virtual school.

At Diven Elementary, staff created fun and active ways for the kids to play outside on the playground in a safe way, socially distanced. Who doesn’t love an obstacle course? This year has forced some pretty ingenious creativity!

Inspirational banners, designed and fabricated by Broadway Elementary students as part of an artist-in-residency project, are now display on the facade of the building. Encouragement and inspiration are keystones of the Broadway Elementary experience!

Reaching, Teaching, and Empowering Families During the Pandemic

The Elmira City School District is fortunate to have available a multitude of academic and supportive services for all students. One of the cornerstones of these services lies in the school counseling office.

The school counseling department pulls together the academic, social, and emotional needs of each student, and makes sure that they are being met by the school and district in the most appropriate manner.

The quick shift to home-based schooling during the pandemic has refocused attention on the importance of social supports for our students.

In Elmira, we are so pleased to be able to offer social and emotional supports to our students in ways that help support their academics as well as their self-esteem.
Meal Assistance Continues During Days of Virtual Learning

Our Food Services Department is providing meal assistance for families who would like to participate throughout the school year. If you would like to pick up weekly meals for those days your child is learning at home, please register at elmiracityschools.com. Pick-up will be on Wednesdays.

You need only complete the registration form once. This service is available to enrolled Elmira City School District students at no charge.

Please visit elmiracityschools.com to register.

Our meal assistance distribution will be available for pick up at four school sites – Diven, Fassett, Broadway and Elmira High School. Two pick-up times are available for families to choose from on the survey (7:00am - 8:00am or 11:30am - 12:30pm). Each meal will include entrees, fruit, vegetable, and milk.

With questions, please call the Food Services Office at 607-735-3236.

Family, School, Community: Together We Succeed
A creative expression from elementary art teacher, Ms. Macko, to remind students to ‘keep creating.’ What a wonderfully creative greeting at the entrance of the art room! And our virtual Beecher students keep on creating with encouragement from Mrs. Romeo! #GoExpress

School Taxes

Taxes can be paid in two installments. The first installment was due October 31, 2020 and the second installment is due March 31, 2021.

Pay Your Tax Bill Online at elmiracityschools.com/taxes

Pay your tax bill online using your Visa, Mastercard, American Express or Discover card. A convenience fee of 2.65% for credit card payments and a $1.50 per e-check transaction will be collected by the online payment provider, not by the Elmira City School District.

Payments can also be mailed to School Tax Collector, P.O. Box 5504, Binghamton, NY 13902-5504.
****ECRWSS**
Postal Customer