7th, 8th grades are in-person four days a week

Seventh and eighth graders registered for hybrid instruction began attending classes in-person four days a week in March.

Principal Matt Pascale said the district ran through several scenarios to get the rest of the Eugene Brooks Intermediate School students back into class as often as possible while still observing necessary safety measures.

“The main motivation is having the kids come back. The hope is that it can reinvigorate students who are struggling with absenteeism or academics and they’ll be able to put in a strong second half performance,” Pascale said. "I really think it will help make things feel less like a pandemic.”

The district’s K-6 students registered for hybrid instruction were already attending in-person classes four days a week. This serves to level the playing field. And, the district was able to add a few other students whose families expressed interest in having them attend hybrid sessions, too, Pascale said.

Two additional seats were added in each classroom and the library and computer lab at the high school will be used as overflow rooms. If a class has more students than

High school acknowledges positive student behavior

Students have not had it easy during the pandemic. They’ve had to adjust to learning remotely - often working more independently, change their schedules and endure the loss of many social activities.

Webutuck High School staff recognize this and wanted to acknowledge that through it all, students were working hard. And, while the positive behavior recognition program was interrupted because of the pandemic, it’s back as of February.

“There are so many different things about the year. We wanted students to know that we recognize their efforts,” Sarah Martin, the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports lead teacher at the high school, said.

The PBIS committee selected five students in each of two categories, standout and great effort.

Standout students are those who have exhibited consistency in their work. They work hard, participate and complete assignments, Martin said.

In the great effort category, Martin said the committee was looking for students who, “we know are learning at home and it isn’t easy, but they aren’t giving up. They are persevering through it all.”

Each student receives a certificate, a handwritten note
EBIS starts Teacher of the Month recognition

Teachers are working hard during the pandemic, often more so than during a normal school year. Eugene Brooks Intermediate School Principal Matt Pascale realized that and wanted to do something to show them how much he appreciates it. So, starting in January, he began choosing a teacher to recognize as the EBIS Teacher of the Month.

“The way teachers are working and handling obstacles, I wanted to make sure I started honoring those teachers,” he said, adding that every one of the teachers at the school could be a Teacher of the Month.

The award recognizes those who go a-above and beyond.

“Things have been so chaotic and disruptive and, at times, gloomy - I wanted to brighten it up for the staff and students in the second half,” he said.

The first two honorees, Mary Murphy and Tammy Nethercott, are both long-time teachers in the district.

“They are examples of what teachers should be like,” Pascale said. “They are involved in activities outside the school day, they always look to improve things and don’t say, ‘No,’” he said.

Mary Murphy

Pascale said Murphy was selected because of her efforts after he asked her to teach other core subjects besides math this year.

Murphy has been with the school district since 1987.

“I haven’t taught these subjects (sixth grade science and social studies) this century, but that is what he asked me to do so that’s what I did,” she said.

“I review all the materials before I teach it, so this year is a more intensive period of home studying to get ready for school.”

In addition to learning the courses herself, Murphy spends time at night and on weekends coming up with ways to make the lessons interesting for the students and preparing to answer their questions.

“This is the first time we’ve had any recognition like this. It’s nice to be recognized by your boss and the school district,” she said.

Tammy Nethercott

With the pandemic, there were many children who were absent from school and having difficulty with classwork. Nethercott, a special education teacher, took it upon herself to go out of her way and help students who were not on her roster to “get an understanding of their situation and help,” Pascale said.

As the district was looking at scheduling, “she presented ideas on how to make a positive impact on special education students … she put time and research into it to help make things better,” he said, adding that she also is president of the teachers’ union and serves on many district committees.

“It’s always nice to be recognized for a job well-done,” Nethercott said, adding that she doesn’t do it for the recognition.

Nethercott has been at Webutuck for 25 years and teaching for 30. She does it to help the kids.

Mary Murphy is EBIS’ January Teacher of the month.

BEHAVIOR

and a $10 Cumberland Farms gift card.

WHS faculty were sent a list of students and asked to nominate students. The PBIS committee then tallied the results.

Here are the February and March students:

Stand Out students

• Rafael Esquivel
• Devynne Gallagher
• Cadance Shufelt
• Luis Choc Iche
• Paris Perkins
• Hunter Breyette

Students with Great Effort

• Edwin Espinosa Lopez
• Morgan Lobert
• Elijah Pfersick

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Matthew Melin-Alfonso
• Tiffany Slater
• Tyson Eismeier
• Mitchell Peterson
• Sabrina Crum
• Josselin Cac-Lima
• Cole Cookingham

“Now, any communication home or to the students is appreciated, especially when it is positive,” Martin said. “I think it helps with building up parent support and communications to the community.”

Future awards will be presented at the end of each month.
After Regina McCoy’s class read a book about a boy who raised money to help out a penguin, she hit on an idea to help them learn and do good.

McCoy teaches 15 remote third graders and sometimes found motivating them to complete the weekly iReady independent lessons each afternoon was a challenge. So, she used the book’s story as a motivator. Would the class want to do something similar?

She did some research and found Lancaster Farm Sanctuary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, that would be willing to communicate with her and then she pitched an idea to the class. They could vote on which animal they wanted to help and then, for each iReady lesson they completed in English and Math, she would donate 50 cents toward helping that animal.

The farm shared photos of several animals with McCoy and the class voted to help Jude, a cow with a cleft palate who needed surgery.

The class set a goal of $100 in a month.

“I emphasized to them how completing their lessons helped Jude and them,” McCoy said.

Each day they added up the money and by the end of the month (Feb. 14), they had reached their goal.

“Kelly Pacay Cuc went above and beyond and did 34 reading lessons and 20 math lessons, raising a quarter of the money on her own,” McCoy said.

“I wanted to do so many lessons because I wanted to help Jude so he could feel better,” Pacacy Cuc said on a Zoom call. During the call, McCoy surprised her with the announcement that she would get a shirt from the sanctuary for being the top fundraiser.

Andrea Caal said she enjoyed doing the math lessons most.

“I get to divide and group and I get to sometimes draw circles if I’m stuck on a problem,” she said.

Another student, Payton, said he liked the reading lessons. Specifically, he liked reading about animals and camouflage.

“I was real happy to see Jude after surgery,” he said.

The sanctuary followed up with McCoy, sending photos of Jude after the first surgery.

WES Principal Jennifer Hengen loved what the class did.

“I think it is terrific. It is like incorporating the character trait of kindness for the month and it motivates the students,” she said.

McCoy decided she would try to do some sort of activity around each book the class read.

Up next was a book about a talent contest, McCoy said.

Seuss Week challenges students to read

March 1-5 was a special week for Webutuck Elementary School as students at home and in person celebrated Read Across America Day and Dr. Seuss. It was Theodor Geisel’s birthday, but they received the gifts.

Second grade teacher Stephanie Langdon organized this year’s event, adding new elements: a raffle and clothing changes throughout the week tied to different Seuss books.

“I wanted to have a couple ways to get students involved in reading and to get them to read at home,” Langdon said.

Clothing challenges, including “My Many Colored Monday,” were based on book titles. In this case, “My Many Colored Days.” Students were encouraged to wear as many colors as they could.

Students were eligible to submit a raffle ticket for each Dr. Seuss book they read at home with their family – whether it was their own, a book they borrowed from a friend or library or one they watched being read aloud on YouTube.

Prizes were all Seuss-related and provided by donations from Langdon and her family. They included art kits, a fishing game, travel mug and stuffed animals. One prize was awarded each day.

Students in Langdon’s class were eligible for additional prizes based on extra books they read.

“I believe it worked,” Langdon said, based on the tickets submitted.

Perhaps the most valuable prize, however, was the gift of reading itself.

“I’m really proud of our school and the way we came together,” said Langdon, of her first time coordinating the school-wide event.
Fifth graders turn lessons into love for veterans

Students in Heather Farr’s fifth grade social studies class helped brighten some veterans’ day through a class project, “V for Veterans.”

Farr had discussed veterans several times throughout the school year with students. As a result, the class began writing letters to veterans near Veteran’s Day, but with the school closures forced by the pandemic and so many students working remotely, Farr decided to turn them into cards and send them out in February.

“Veterans have a special place in my heart. I wanted my students to have the opportunity to reach out and feel good about something, especially in this new educational (and world) climate!”

In any given period, Pascale said, there are from two to 10 students in an overflow room. Seats, the extra students will be sent to an overflow room (the library for periods 1-5 and the computer lab for periods 7-9). Students selected for the overflow room will vary so that all students have an opportunity to be in class. Students in the overflow rooms will participate in classes virtually, with the added benefit of having instant access to their teacher each day, Pascale said.

Students pleased

“It’s a good thing because many students, like myself, have an easier experience focusing and having interactions,” seventh grader Violet Aufdenberg said.

Aufdenberg said she was most excited about attending her ELA class four days a week in person. “Perhaps it is because we started a new unit, but that class has had so many open discussions that I’ve been really inspired.”

Classmate Jonathan Chiarenza said he prefers being in school.

“It is interactive. It’s more fun - I can see my friends and talk to my teachers.”

The two classes he’s most looking forward to attending in-person are math and physical education. “PE at home they would have us do an EdPuzzle and keep a fitness log when we were outside doing something on our own. Now, we’re doing badminton and it is one of my favorites and I can play with friends.”

He’s also looking forward to getting back to work on the Eugene Brooks News Network and National Junior Honor Society.

The only thing he - and several other students identified as a drawback - is having to get up earlier.

Noah St. John said that being back in person has made a marked improvement on his grades.

“On Zoom, I was dozing off,” he admitted. “I was failing science. Now, I’m at 91.”

Just then, his science teacher, Christine Gillette walked by after overhearing part of the conversation. “He is a perfect example of in-person helping. His grade is up like 40 points,” she said.

Being back in school has also helped eighth grader Alexia Benturino.

“It’s helped me get better grades. I’m more focused and I like it,” she said, adding that she thinks it will help her mostly in math.”

Teacher’s agree

“I can already see the benefits of having the children back in school,” Gillette said, explaining that she is better able to see and help students who may be falling behind.

Plus, it’s easier to teach labs this year. Everyone will have their own microscope and will be able to do the experiments themselves instead of just watching a demonstration. She is even exploring the idea of sending microscopes home to the students who are still learning remotely.

Social studies teacher Bill Braislin, who has been with the district for 20 years, said he is, “thrilled to have them back.”

“In-person learning is definitely more effective than going through Zoom. There is more of a group dynamic. I couldn’t be happier,” he said.

Pascale said that as with anything new, there may be some stumbling blocks, but “we’ll work through them.”

With the change, 55 percent of our students are attending in-person instruction and 45 percent of our students have chosen to stay in a remote-instruction model, Superintendent Ray Castellani said.
Twenty-three students committed to extra work and overcoming challenges to enter the district’s STEAM Fair, which was held virtually this year because of the pandemic.

A total of 20 projects were submitted, as some students worked in teams, co-organizer Christine Gillette said. Projects in grades 6-12 were judged for first through third place awards, while the others, including 10 K-4 projects were eligible for comments and some new awards.

Gillette and fellow science teacher Danielle Fridstrom found a way to create an experience that included much of what the traditional fair offers and some extras.

“Our goal is to really spark interest in STEM fields and get them excited about science, technology, engineering and math and show that it can be fun while learning,” Gillette said.

Instead of students presenting their projects live to the judges over a weekend, students had to develop slideshows, videos or other presentations that could be posted to a website Fridstrom created.

“Over the summer I attended a professional development program on a group that had to pivot and move from a live coding fair to an online version so I decided to take cues from that and created a website, registration and way to judge.

The co-organizers said there were fewer projects this year.

“Even though it was down, the enthusiasm was heightened,” Gillette said. And, more people viewed the projects because they could do it from the comfort of their own home, she said.

Fridstrom and Gillette both said that parent involvement was increased, too, as parents often had to provide some tech support (with assistance).

While the face-to-face interaction didn’t exist this year, Fridstrom built in a comments section where five designated commenters could leave feedback for students.

Students came up with their own project ideas, though the website did provide some ideas.

Samantha Meehan chose her project, “Short Term Memory and its Effects on Eyewitness Testimonies,” after a class lesson.

“We learned about some of the topic in forensics class and the topic really stuck with me so I wanted to do further research,” she said. In the end, Meehan said she learned more about memory, the legal system and how to take action through her work.

There was something for everyone in the fair.

“As soon as I watched the first project "Moldy Muffins" by kindergarten student Lois Musgrove, I was hooked! She had me at "mold!,” Gillette said.

The winners

In addition to the normal 1st-3rd place awards, Fridstrom and Gillette came up with some other awards to help drive engagement and fun. The winning projects were:

1st: Samantha Meehan, 11th, Short Term Memory and its Effects on Eyewitness Testimonies (Submitted to Dutchess County Science Fair)

2nd: Carlos Franco Sub, 7th, Swift Corrosion (Submitted to Dutchess County Science Fair)

3rd: Abigail McEnroe, 7th, Do Different Types of Salt Affect the Homemade Ice Cream Process?

People’s Choice: (Anyone could vote) Landen Elliott, 8th, The Potato Launcher.

Prize: A framed, mock Popular Science magazine cover.

Fauci Award: McKenna Tanner, 10th, How COVID-19 Has Affected Society. Prize: A variety of PPE including masks and hand sanitizer.

Visual Communication Award: Hailey Brennan, 6th, Melanin & Rabbit Fur Color. Prize: Sunglasses and earbuds

MacGuyver Award: Nolan Howard, 4th, Electromagnetic Railroad. Prize: a huge roll of science-themed duct tape

Innovation Award: Garrett Yeno, 10th, Why You Should Learn Programming. Prize: Lightbulb, flashlight

Eight staff or retired staff members were judges.

Meehan said she felt, “proud and accomplished,” after winning. “I owe a big thank you to the science department and Mrs. Gillette’s advanced class.” Though she participated last year, Meehan said she was “more invested in her research” this year and would be interested in entering again next year.

The Webutuck Teachers’ Association, CSEA and PTA sponsored the event.

Though Fridstrom and Gillette hope the fair will return to in-person next year, the website will continue to be used as a resource. View all the projects at the 2021 Webutuck STEAM Fair site.
Hybrid update: Grades 9-12 set to go four days

More than 60 percent of our preK-8 students attend in-person instruction four days a week. After spring break, we hope to return our students in grades 9-12 to in-person instruction four days a week as well.

Each day, we discuss with the Dutchess County Department of Behavioral and Community Health the procedures, guidelines and mitigation strategies that must be in place to return to a “normal” school setting.

To that end, we have purchased more than 900 desk barries that we plan to utilize in the near future or in September at the start of the new school year to prepare for all our students to return to in-person instruction.

If you’d like your child to return to in-person instruction upon return from spring break, please speak to your building principal.

We will communicate with families about plans for end-of-year activities – including graduation and moving-up ceremonies – in the next three months. Have a safe, relaxing and enjoyable spring break.

Baker earns National Board Certified Teacher designation

Webutuck Elementary School’s Monica Baker is now a National Board Certified Teacher in English as a New Language/Early and Middle Childhood, earning the designation in February.

She is one of only 45 teachers in New York State to hold such a designation and the only NBCT in the district.

The certification process has four components: content knowledge; differentiation in instruction; teaching practice and learning environment; and effective and reflective practitioner. It is “designed to collect standards-based evidence of accomplished practice,” according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards website.

Baker said she had heard about the certification for years and “enjoys a personal challenge” so she researched it and jumped in.

“It was really about personal reflection, ‘How do I help students,’” she said.

Each component requires reflection. “That helped me grow as a teacher but it also has a direct impact on the students,” Baker said.

“I definitely did more one-on-ones with students than before to really get to the heart of what my students need to be successful,” she said.

Through each component, candidates are provided with questions and documents to guide them.

“There are hundreds of pages of work and work samples,” she said.

As she went through the steps and noted ways to improve, Baker implemented them in class.

“It’s a different mindset. You’re going into each lesson with the thought: How will I be successful, what was effective and what didn’t work and how do I take the next step.”

In addition to the self-reflection, candidates must take and pass an exam.

The initial cost for the four components is $1,900 and candidates have five years to complete the process. Baker achieved certification in two years.

“I thought it was fantastic,” she said. “The process is for anyone looking to improve their teaching skills. You have to be willing to commit the time as it takes a lot of effort, time and writing.”

Baker called it the “best professional development experience I’ve ever been involved in.”

If you’re interested in learning more about the process, visit National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.