Eastern Lebanon County School District
Learning Options for 2020-2021 School Year

Overview

The ELCO School District developed a Health and Safety plan that prioritizes the health and safety of all students and staff. Our intention is to have as much in person instruction as is possible while maintaining the health and safety of our school community. Plans continue to be developed to outline which schedules and modes of instruction will be in place when we return. If we determine that instruction will occur either partially or fully online, the instruction will not be a repeat of the Emergency Remote Learning from the spring and will include more real-time, synchronous instruction. This year, families have additional choices about the types of learning environments that are best for their children. A survey will be shared with families to commit to one of the options below. There is a two-week drop/add period where the family may select a different option for the student. After the first two weeks, no changes will be made until the next enrollment period.

ELCO In Person or Hybrid Learning

The goal is to bring all students back into regular classroom settings for as much time as is possible according to the Health and Safety Plan. The most current guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, CDC and Department of Health will be used to determine the amount of time students can be present in our school buildings. This may require a hybrid mix of in-person and online instruction. Hybrid learning requires students to be part of the synchronous instruction occurring in the regular classrooms. A schedule will be developed for students to attend in person and may also include days where the students receive instruction and activities to complete at home through Online Synchronous Learning as described below. Attendance guidelines will be established that will include mandatory participation in the streaming lessons.

ELCO Online Synchronous Learning

We understand that there are some families who may wish to look for full time online learning opportunities for their students this year. To accommodate this flexibility in learning, we will offer a synchronous learning environment online. This real-time environment permits students to work from home full time. The students will remain part of the regular classroom instruction and will receive the same curriculum as students who are physically present in the school buildings. Students will also receive a district-issued iPad to use at home. Students will be expected to connect for live lessons on a schedule that aligns with the instruction occurring in the buildings. It is not expected that students are present in streamed lessons all day, but schedules will be developed and expectations established for students to attend portions of the class periods. Attendance guidelines will be established that will include mandatory participation in the streaming lessons. Activities and other work will be provided for students to complete offline. The Online Synchronous Learning will be used for students who choose to learn from home full time and for any students working from home on the hybrid model. If a student enrolls in full time Online Synchronous Learning, we ask that this commitment be made for the entire quarter. At the end of the quarter, a student can decide to return to regular, in-person classes or continue in the hybrid model. Some hands-on courses may not be possible through Online Synchronous Learning. Because this model uses the same curriculum and pacing as in-class instruction, it is much easier for a student to transition back into the hybrid model than the remaining options below.

ELCO Virtual Academy

ELCO has its own K-12 Virtual Academy that is an alternative to a cyber charter school, but with added benefits of remaining part of the ELCO community. The District uses Lancaster-Lebanon Virtual Solutions to provide quality

instructional programs through the Virtual Academy. The cost for ELCO to educate a student in the Virtual Academy is much less than a cyber charter school and there are added benefits of remaining part of the ELCO community. Our Virtual Academy provides opportunities for students to graduate with an ELCO diploma, receive ELCO transcripts, participate in ELCO extracurricular activities, and receive a quality instructional program (taught mainly by ELCO teachers) that mirrors the cyber charter schools. We even use the same online curriculum as some of the cyber charter schools. If you select the Virtual Academy as the learning option that is best for your family this year, we ask that you make this commitment for at least one semester. <u>If your students enroll in the ELCO Virtual Academy, the students will remain in this mode of learning through the end of the first semester (January, 2021)</u>. At that time, the students may return to the regular classroom or may choose to continue in the ELCO Virtual Academy for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. The curriculum and pacing of the ELCO Virtual Academy is not aligned with courses taught in the models above so students may experience gaps and/or overlaps in learning if they intend to transition back into the regular classrooms this year. More information about ELCO Virtual Academy can be found on the district's website (under Departments). Registration for the ELCO Virtual Academy will begin in August.

Cyber Charter Schools
Cyber Charter Schools do not provide the same curriculum as can be found in our regular classrooms. Families who select these cyber options are often looking for online instruction that can be done asynchronously according to a flexible schedule. Although the cyber options are aligned with the PA Core Standards, the curriculum, pacing, and resources that are used are different from what is used in ELCO classrooms. There are distinct differences between virtual and cyber options. Enrolling your child in a Cyber Charter School comes with a price to the School District and taxpayers. While Cyber Charter Schools advertise that they are free, the sending School District actually pays for the tuition cost which can range anywhere between, $8,000 and $20,000 (and this impacts the local tax rate). Furthermore, when a child is enrolled in a Cyber Charter School, they must withdraw from ELCO School District and will not be eligible for an ELCO diploma.

Homeschooling
The Virtual Academy is not a homeschool program. Homeschool programs require parents/guardians to have a high school diploma and to submit an affidavit verifying their intentions for homeschooling. A homeschool evaluation is the responsibility of the parent/guardian and is required at the end of each school year. Parents are responsible for securing curriculum and teaching materials; the ELCO school district does not provide the curriculum for homeschool programs. More information about the requirements for homeschooling can be found on the district's website (under Departments and Curriculum and Instruction). Homeschooling is a commitment made by families for the entire school year.

Deciding whether a fully online virtual program is the right choice for your children is a big decision. The next page includes a few considerations as you make your decision about which learning option is best for your family. In August, the District will be asking each family to make a commitment about whether they will have their children return to in-person instruction or select one of the at-home models described above.

Which Option Is Right for My Child?

Consideration	In-Person ELCO and Hybrid Learning	ELCO Online Synchronous Learning	ELCO Virtual Academy	Cyber Charter School	Homeschool
Can my students have a flexible schedule and choose when they complete the assignments 24/7?	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
Is the instruction aligned to PA Standards?	YES	YES	YES	YES	FLEXIBLE
Will I receive an ELCO diploma?	YES	YES	YES	NO	HOMESCHOOL DIPLOMA
If my child applies and is accepted to the Lebanon County Career and Technical Center, can he/she attend the CTC?	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES (if seats are available at CTC)
My son/daughter struggles to understand what he/she reads and/or struggles to express his/her thoughts in writing. Is this a good option for my child?	YES	YES	NOT RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED	DEPENDS ON THE PROGRAM
A parent/guardian is home with my elementary aged child, but is unable to provide instructional support for the student.	YES	YES	NOT RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED
My son/daughter requires a lot of teacher instructional support. Is this a good option for my child?	YES	MAYBE	NOT RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED	DEPENDS ON THE PROGRAM
My son/daughter needs constant reminders to complete schoolwork and to submit assignments. Is this a good option for my child?	YES	YES	NOT RECOMMENDED	NOT RECOMMENDED	DEPENDS ON THE PROGRAM
Will my son/daughter still be involved in the ELCO School District?	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Can my son/daughter be involved in extracurricular activities in the ELCO School District?	YES	YES	YES	SOMETIMES	SOMETIMES
Does the program keep my tax dollars in my local district?	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES

Myths about Online Learning

Online learning is easier than going to school and attending classes in person.
- Online learning requires more attention to detail, organizational skills, reading comprehension, and clarity in writing than traditional in-person classes. There is often less interaction with a teacher and more responsibility placed on the student to read and understand the directions and to comprehend the information presented in written form.

My student will benefit from not having to adhere to a schedule.
- There is a difference between flexible schedules and no schedule. In online learning, students benefit from having the flexibility to set their own schedules, but without a schedule, it is hard for students to pace themselves to accomplish the tasks. Students who work online must have excellent time management skills and be able to self-monitor their work or have parents/guardians who are overseeing these timelines.

The cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania have high standards for achievement.
- Pennsylvania cyber charter schools do not consistently perform well on metrics used by Pennsylvania to measure school progress (School Performance Profile and Future Ready Index).

There is no difference between ELCO Virtual Academy and a Pennsylvania cyber charter school.
- The difference is in the connection to the school district. By being part of the ELCO Virtual Academy, a student remains part of the school community and can engage in extracurricular activities and receive an ELCO diploma. A PA cyber charter school takes a very large part of the ELCO School District's budget. The cyber charter schools spend millions of taxpayer dollars each year on advertising. The money taken from school district budgets does not fully go to educate the students in the cyber charter school. By choosing the ELCO Virtual Academy, you ensure that the local taxpayer's dollars remain in the district and are spent to provide a quality education for all students.

Homeschooling is the same as a cyber charter school.
- Home education and cyber charter programs are two different options under the law. Home education programs or homeschooling put all of the responsibility of designing instructional experiences for students on the parent. Cyber charter schools typically provide teachers and instruction through an online learning environment. A cyber charter school is very similar to the ELCO Virtual Academy.