

Senate Education Committee chair says he prefers districts have final say in K-12 reopening plans

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State Sen. Luther Olsen tells WisPolitics.com he hopes the Department of Public Instruction's COVID-19 safety guidelines remain recommendations and the department leaves the final say up to local districts.

"Every community is different; size is different and circumstances are different," said Olsen, R-Ripon and chair of the Senate Education Committee. "I think schools are going to take this serious. And parents are taking this serious. Honestly, I think they will err on the side of caution."

DPI's "Education Forward" provides health information to school boards, warning short-term closures for schools are still possible, and children and teachers with health conditions will continue to be at risk.

Some of the suggestions include:

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*Implementing a four-day school week, with one day per week reserved for cleaning and teacher training.

*Bringing elementary students back to school ahead of other grade levels.

*Keeping a 10-to-1 student/teacher ratio in special education classrooms.

*Alternating school days for groups of students.

Olsen called the 87-page document a "smorgasbord to a point" with its lists of

information and suggestions. He said he'd bet the upcoming school year won't be "like it used to be," and that all schools should especially look into creating social distancing and rigorous cleaning standards.

"I think it's not a surprise by what I've been hearing talking with people around the country," Olsen said. "Schools were asking for some type of guidance with somebody saying: 'Here's what our guidance is, now you decide how you want to work that out with your teachers, your students and, most important, your parents.'"

An Evers administration spokeswoman didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Assembly Committee on Education holds an informational hearing Wednesday where invited spokespersons from DPI and other organizations will discuss K-12 reopening strategies.

See the plan:

https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Education_Forward_web.pdf

See the release:

<https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2020/dpi-education-forward>