



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email]

1 message

Patricia Smith <tricia3721@yahoo.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 2:54 PM

To: Bob Gilbert <rgilbert@woodbridgeps.org>, "mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org" <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>, "asherman@woodbridgeps.org" <asherman@woodbridgeps.org>

Good afternoon,

Please include the attached letter in the open comments for tonight's meeting. Also-I am unable to attend the meeting. Will I be able to see a recorded version of it after the fact?

Thank you,
Patricia Alonso

 **Untitled document.pdf**
23K

Hello,

I am a mom to two children in Beecher. Prior to deciding whether or not to send my children to school, I would like the following addressed:

- What will a typical day look like for students?
- I understand that specialists will be coming into each of the classrooms
 - How are children cohorted when specialists, substitutes, special ed, etc are servicing multiple cohorts? Additionally, how will staff meetings affect these cohorts? It doesn't seem to me that cohorting will actually occur as it was stated in the reopening document.
 - If the children are not leaving their classrooms, how will movements for these young kids be factored in? What kind of movement breaks will the kids get? How can they safely distance themselves in a classroom of 20 kids during a movement break? Along the same lines-how will mask breaks work?
 - Will PE be mask-free? If so, how will children safely distance in their classroom during the movements of PE class?

- The absence of masks increases the need for distance, how will children eat in their classroom with their mask off at a safe distance from each other?
- How will the desks be arranged? Will children be able to work in small groups together?
- If an educator who services multiple cohorts tests positive, will the entire school close?
- Will parents be notified if a household member of staff or students tests positive?

The more parents who choose to keep their children home, the easier it will be to provide distance between children attending school. Will parents receive an updated distance learning plan before deciding whether to send their kids to school? In last week's meeting a parent suggested that the school offer some form of in-person (socially-distant) meetings for the children who are remote learning to meet their social needs from their teachers and peers. Has this been considered and will parents receive this plan prior to making the decision?

I appreciate the work you are all putting into this. I hope the voices of your teachers are regarded as they will be the ones facilitating these plans.

Regards,
Patricia Alonso
5 Burma Road



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgesps.org>

[External Email] Public Comment for BOE meeting 7/20/20

1 message

Chris A <afamily1160@gmail.com>

Sun, Jul 19, 2020 at 9:56 PM

To: Marsha Degennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgesps.org>

Dear Members of the Woodbridge Board of Education,

It is clear that, after attending Wednesday's meeting, reading the draft plan and the letters and thinking about all that transpired, there are still many questions to be answered. It is hard to say what the plan is for the fall because it will depend on the number of children who attend, yet parents cannot say if they are sending their kids without knowing the plan. It is a difficult position for everyone, and not everyone will be happy with whatever the plan turns out to be. The governor's plan states that the second of the six guiding principles is: "Allowing *all* students the opportunity to return to school *full time* starting in the fall" (emphasis placed by the document). I would like to focus on the word "opportunity", and believe that as long as Beecher allows parents the option of attending school in person, then the principle is fulfilled.

My idea is that all grade-level teachers teach the **SAME** grade-level curriculum. They give the same assignments, same homework, same projects, etc for all students in the same grade. They use the same videos, books, teaching tools etc and work together to create their content for the school year. All students of the same grade learn the same content. Some teachers will teach in person and some will teach distance learners. The order of those lessons may differ over the course of the day (ie, the distance teacher may choose to "bunch" live content rather than having multiple, shorter live sessions). Parents will be asked to choose in-person or distance learning. An important part of this plan is that parents who choose distance learning have the ability to know who else is choosing distance learning (they can opt-in to share their email addresses and names) so they are able to form their own small cohorts, similar to homeschool co-ops, so their children are still able to have social connections and work on group projects. This part does not have to, and likely should not, be school sanctioned- parents will need to be comfortable with each other and set their own ground rules around these groups, but many likely have a family or two they are comfortable meeting in-person with, even if they are not comfortable having their kids in a larger classroom.

Benefits of this plan include:

- Students and teachers are easily able to move from in person to distance learning, and back again, without missing a single day of instruction. This will be a key aspect, as even those who choose to be in person will have to remain at home with cough and cold symptoms this year. It is also probable that school will be required to move to a hybrid model or shut down completely.
- This will help address parents' fears that distance learning is not equivalent to in person learning or that they will not have enough support. Allowing the distance learning families to know each other also ensures they have some social-emotional learning taking place, even if not in school. As this is a huge driver for in-person classes (per the governor and American Academy of Pediatrics), knowing who else is at home and being able to get the kids together will meet this need. Once parents know this, it is likely that more parents will choose to keep their kids home.
- With fewer students in school, fewer teachers would be needed in school as well. Students are able to fit into classrooms, as any extraneous furniture, book shelves (assuming students are not sharing materials this year), etc, have been moved into the "empty" classrooms. Or, the fewer number of students are equally distributed into all of the grade level rooms that are available for use, with additional support staff supervising the students and the teachers move between the classrooms (this would not be different from specials teachers, as specials teachers would be moving throughout the school, but these teachers would only be moving in 2 classrooms). Also alleviates pressure on the cafeteria, bathrooms, drop-off/pickup, playgrounds, etc.
- When a significant number of in school students are sick and have to be absent (requiring distance learning), then a teacher is also able to move to distance learning. This (and the above point) means students are not necessarily assigned a specific teacher for the year, but the lesson plans are all the same. Possibly, if a distance learning teacher is comfortable, he/she could switch to in person if the in-person teacher is sick. If all teachers are sick, Beecher will have to call for a sub, as per usual, but the content will already be set. Another possibility is that if all teachers are sick, students could continue to come to school, but the teacher delivers content from home. There will have to be support staff in the room to supervise, but it would be just like the distance learning kids, just that the students will physically be in school and not at home. This could also potentially be a solution if there are not enough teachers available for in person learning.
- This plan eliminates the need for each teacher to be teaching in person and distance learning at the same time. This plan also eliminates the need for a "parallel" curriculum, as the entire grade is learning the same content at the same exact time.

I have not addressed MAG- honestly, that one is a bit of a stumbling block for me (and, in full disclosure, I have a child in MAG). I don't know what the MAG teachers are thinking of for this year, but perhaps this plan can be somewhat modified for it. I am happy to help brainstorm with the MAG teachers.

I know this plan isn't perfect. In person and distance learning are different, but with requiring a 6 foot distance between people, in person school will not be like it was before. Nothing about this school year will be normal and families and teachers will need to be more flexible. Since families and teachers can choose what is best for them, it might be able to make the best of a bad situation.

Thank you for your time,
Chrissy Anton



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] BRS Reopening Plan

1 message

Kathleen Jo E. Corbin <kelayda@gmail.com>
To: mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org

Sun, Jul 19, 2020 at 11:54 PM

Hello,

Thank you very much to the Board of Education and reopening committee members for all of your work on this very difficult issue.

I am a parent to a rising 1st grader and a pediatric specialist at Yale.

I was surprised not to see any plans for staggering start/end times to the school day. I believe this would decrease exposures among students who are not in the same cohort, as well as help manage traffic given the likely increase in families dropping off and picking up from school. I hope the BOE will consider this.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Jo Corbin
248 Peck Hill Road



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Board of Ed Meeting- Parent Comment

1 message

Federico, Melissa <Melissa.Federico@hearstmediact.com>
To: "mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org" <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 3:03 PM

Good Afternoon Board of Education Members:

I am writing to you today in regards to my concerns for our Special Education students. My daughter will be entering Kindergarten in the fall and she attends Speech 2x per week as well as resource time during her week.

What are our plans for these children? I am not only concerned about my child, but all special ed children, as well as all children who come into contact with the special ed children. How would cohorting work in these situations?

As the letter from the special ed teachers said 1 special ed student can be exposed to 5 different cohorts during their day. The child they described, could/would be my daughter. We need to work together to ensure ALL children and ALL staff are safe.

I urge the Board of Education and Administrators to spend more time focusing on a Synchronous Distance Learning Program, as well as more time be spent on plans for special education students.

Reading the letters from the entire teaching staff at Beecher Road School, brought me to tears. All I hear is fear for our children, fear for themselves, their colleagues and their families. If our teachers are all standing together that is enough for me to know this move, of 100% return to school is not the smart or right thing to do.

Please work together to build a better distance learning plan for our children, our staff and our community.

Melissa Federico

HEARST | Strategic Account Manager

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Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] BOE Meeting Public Comment

1 message

Michelle G <MGoglia@msn.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 12:37 PM

To: Robert Gilbert <rgilbert@woodbridgeps.org>, Analisa Sherman <asherman@woodbridgeps.org>, Marsha Degennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Dear Superintendent Gilbert, Principal Sherman and members of the Woodbridge Board of Education,

After attending last week's Special Meeting, I feel compelled to write to share my views. Without question, we are all trying to navigate this storm with our full community's best interests in mind and, clearly, there are no easy solutions.

I am not a scientist. I am not a physician. I am a parent. I have no desire to put my child's or anyone else's health or safety at risk. That being said, I'm writing in support of the draft re-opening plan. The plan acknowledges that, with proper precautions (and perhaps with some creative thinking!), the current low levels of COVID spread here in Connecticut and, particularly, in Woodbridge, allow for safe in person learning. Of course, families with medical and other concerns have the ability to keep their children home if they so choose. The plan also includes the important contingencies for the very real likelihood that community spread may increase over time and alternative learning options will need to be imposed. Whether full-time or on a hybrid basis, in school learning should be the priority, and the State-required safety measures should be the minimum standard, with the goal of exceeding these standards (for example, 6 feet social distancing should be required, strict cohorting should be enforced, etc.). Many daycare facilities remained open throughout the height of the crisis here in Connecticut and have done so safely. There must be lessons learned that can help inform how we reopen our school.

Please know that while I support a return to school, I fully appreciate the fear and apprehension the teachers are feeling. Depending on the day, I have those same feelings. But even if we ignore the fact that our children are suffering from social isolation, can anyone argue that distance learning was at all effective during the Spring? From my point of view, it simply was not. The lack of live teaching and substantive feedback made it very clear very quickly to my then third grader that it did not matter whether he did the work or how much effort he dedicated to it. It was "crisis learning" (how many times did we hear that term?), not true learning. I know the teachers did their best and I commend their efforts – it certainly was not easy for anyone. With no time to prepare and with a world of worry for their own families, the situation was untenable. But what proposals have the faculty or others made to ensure distance learning is effective this school year so that our children achieve appropriate grade level learning and meet all standards by June? And if we are expecting less from this academic year, how much less? What does that mean for 2021-2022? At what point do our children catch up?

Our children need live, in-person instruction. They need live, in-person accountability. And, quite frankly, they need live, in-person social interaction. While most certainly there are ways to improve distance learning, it should not be the first option – it should be the last resort. And though improvements are possible, the difficulties and challenges of distance learning that existed in the Spring continue: Families have different levels of access to technology. Allocating devices and resources to multiple children in the home is difficult. Family responsibilities, including work both in and out of the home, make it difficult and sometimes, nearly impossible, for parents to provide the support many of our children need (and deserve) to complete their assignments. And, personally, as a solo parent with a more than full-time job, I quite simply do not have the ability to be my son's primary teacher. I am his mother. I will support him, review his work and supplement the work of his teachers. But I cannot replace his teachers. I cannot implement a 10-page syllabus on a weekly basis. Our Spring was full of arguments over getting assignments done and frustrations over the various tools that turned very simple (too simple) assignments into long, drawn out affairs. Stress levels were unhealthy and not sustainable.

I haven't spoken to a single person who believes this virus won't be back with a vengeance. With the prospect of a very long winter, we need to take advantage of the time we have while this crisis is manageable and return the kids to school, even on a hybrid basis, until the science and the data tell us it's no longer safe to do so.

My fourth grader tells me every day – he'll wear a mask, he'll sit in rows, he'll work independently, but he wants to go back to school. He knows it will be different and he knows he'll likely end up distance learning

again, but he desperately wants to be with his friends, he wants to be with teachers. He needs this, and I know he's not alone. And for so long as it can be done safely, we owe it to our children to give it to them. We have to get past "the way it used to be" and accept "the way it is." We can't let our fears paralyze us, but instead our decisions should be guided by the advice of scientists and physicians in the know. We have to do what's right by our children. For so long as it is safe, and even on a hybrid basis, the kids should have access to in school learning.

Respectfully,

Michelle Goglia



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgesps.org>

[External Email] Re-Opening Comments

1 message

Nicole Graas <ongraas@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 16, 2020 at 2:16 PM

To: rgilbert@woodbridgesps.org, Beecher Road School <asherman@woodbridgesps.org>, mdegennaro@woodbridgesps.org

Dear Superintendent Gilbert, Woodbridge Board of Education, and Beecher Road School Administration,

Thank you for sharing the draft reopening plan in a transparent manner and allowing time for further comment.

There is much in the draft that is fantastic and the committee is clearly thinking through the inevitable possibilities of what happens when a child or teacher becomes ill. There are a few points that I would like to emphasize as being essential to a safe re-opening and may find more common ground between the needs of the students, teachers and parents.

- 1) It is essential to start the school year at the hybrid model/Plan 2 and to make the choice of A/B weeks or A/B days sooner rather than later so that the specific logistics for those accommodations can be thoroughly determined. From a logistical standpoint, the re-opening plan leaves far too much in stage 2/hybrid model up to the principal to decide and should be hammered out and determined what is best NOW instead of it being thrust upon the school to REACT. It is wishful thinking that Connecticut's COVID rate will remain below 1% for much longer into August - not to mention into fall and winter. If the school year starts with this model, there will be time for the students and teachers to become comfortable with these "new normal changes" and would have less thrash and disruption throughout the school year. Consistency leads to enhanced learning, right? Also, the model helps accomplish in-person learning, improved ability to strictly cohort the kids, and works as a measure to keep socially distancing. For those families and teachers that require virtual learning, the lessons/platform to provide that will already be developed, as well.
- 2) Adhering to a strict cohort protocol will be essential, including busing/transportation and lunch. Nothing can be replicated from last year in how these two areas function. Either no busing this year (could save the money and use it for other enhancements to accomplish the plan) or the same cohorts that may interact with each other at school should arrive together. This means bus routes aren't designed by geography, which could result in a longer route, but again, nothing about this is normal and we've all been very spoiled in our busing. Lunch interactions must also remain in the cohort (perhaps in the classroom is the only way to function).
- 3) Because this school year will not be normal, we must focus the curriculum on what is essential to accomplish in-school to capture lost educational growth from the spring 2020 and to attempt to get the children on grade level in essential subjects for 2020-2021. It saddens me that I didn't receive a single piece of artwork from my kids last year (assume they are still hanging in the art room or something) and I love the ability for music, art, theatre to advance people's opinions and it clearly benefits overall learning. BUT, because of the challenges to truly cohorting the specials (for the safety of the teacher's) they will need to be held virtually (if A/B schedule, perhaps that is Wednesday!) or perhaps deemed non-essential for this year. Technology is especially non-essential; the kids will get enough growth in their use of technology as a matter of function during the hybrid model alone. IT support, yes, but instructional time, no.
- 4) The importance of fresh air can't be understated. There should be specific policies about when inside the classroom a certain percentage of windows must be open and enhanced HVAC treatments such as UV light treatment could be explored. Where at all possible, class should be held outside (especially for the rooms that may be harder to get 6-foot distance). Also, the PTO and other parents may like to volunteer to construct outdoor classrooms. They would be a welcome asset to the school beyond COVID.

In closing, if most universities are operating in a hybrid model this year, it seems to be the smart decision for Beecher, as well. The kids are acutely aware that the current pandemic isn't normal. To try and fit a square in a round hole by starting the school year 100% in person but then quickly shift to Phase 2 will be a disastrous transition and potentially unravel any benefit of starting in-person learning in the first place. Kids, especially those receiving special services, with an IEP, or on a 504 plan, need time to adjust to the new situation. Swift transitions are what can initiate or activate the PTSD that may have occurred from the spring in some children. Having there be ANY intermediate step between 100% virtual learning isn't taking their development into consideration.

They need the in-person interactions with teachers and students. Yes, those interactions will be different and will take enhanced creativity to operate in a safe manner, but the interaction and learning will be better than what virtual/distance learning provided – virtually nothing. This is one of the best school districts in the state (a big reason we moved here recently), the creativity to do things differently exists in each student and faculty member.

Best wishes,
Nicole & Jon Graas
Parents at Beecher

PS. An account of various reopening ideas from around the world - <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/07/school-openings-across-globe-suggest-ways-keep-coronavirus-bay-despite-outbreaks>



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Reopening Plan

1 message

Aryeh Herman <aryehih@gmail.com>
To: mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org

Sun, Jul 19, 2020 at 9:27 PM

Dear Administrators of Beecher Road School,

I am writing to you as a parent, to express my concerns about the draft of the reopening plan that was shared last week. We understand that there are some significant mandates coming from the state, and the expectation from the state-wide leaders is to reopen to reopening with as many students as possible. However, with the current plan in place, we feel uncomfortable sending our children into the building, and are also worried for the safety and well being of the teachers and staff.

Based on the information shared in last week's special meeting, there is no actual way to enforce the CDC guidelines, and the stress on the teachers is extremely high. We are also concerned about the attempt to have full classrooms with minimal social distancing, and the lack of specific guidelines and procedures about what will happen if a child displays symptoms or there is concern (without verification) about infection. There is a significant lag between once a child is tested and when the results are received. There are too many elements that are currently unclear what will happen if/when COVID numbers start to rise.

It is important for the district to survey the parents once more, to get a sense of what people truly feel now that the plan has been shared. It is important to get a read of where the community stands, a month before school starts, with the given information and the teachers' outcry. It is also very important for us to get a sense of the distance learning option for the many families who are not comfortable with the plan, as this has not yet been discussed at length.

I appreciate you taking the time to read our thoughts. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,
Aryeh Herman
Parent of two students, entering Mag2 and Grade 5



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Public comment: fall re-opening 2020-21 academic period

1 message

Monika Kaczmarczyk <kacz_monika@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 3:55 PM

To: "mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org" <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Dear Members of the Woodbridge Board of Education,

First, I would like to thank the Board for their commitment to trying to put together a re-opening plan that would appease all constituents while meeting State mandates. I am confident that with a concerted effort and innovative thinking this goal can be accomplished even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. However, neither science nor current events support the state mandate, and I request that you invest resources in planning for distance learning.

By now, you have extensive feedback from teachers, administrators, parents, and various health care professionals, who all play a key role in your decision making. In addition, we have many months of experience with the novel virus, which provides us with valuable information about the nature of COVID-19. Taking it all into account, I am writing in full support of teachers, administrators, parents, and those who have expressed their concern about the viability of full-time in-person instructions in the fall of the 2020-2021 school year. In the absence of prophylaxis, COVID-19 will continue to cripple communities, regions, states, and the country as a whole. And this is the one and only quantitative research that is applicable to your strategy! Most research data cited under 'Implications from Medial Literature' in your preliminary draft are either already obsolete or lack validity due to insufficient sample size. This coupled with significant errors in survey design also renders the initial parent survey of the Beecher Road School community void of meaningful data that would provide guidance in the direction of full-time in-person return to school.

I urge the Board to reconsider its approach and spend the remainder of the summer moving towards distance learning with possible alternative option(s) for only those students/families, who are in the greatest need for in-person instruction.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Monika Kaczmarczyk



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Letter about BRS Reopening

1 message

Marie McDaniel <mcdanielm4@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 16, 2020 at 5:50 PM

To: asherman@woodbridgeps.org, mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org

Dear Principal Sherman, and Superintendent Gilbert,

Thank you for all that you've done and are doing to serve the students and families and teachers in our community. I know that you are doing your very best, and I am very grateful to all the people in the Beecher Road School community for being so thoughtful all the time, and especially since March.

As I read the WBOE's draft re-opening plan, I was struck again by the idea that we are doing what we can to serve the students and community, but there are no good answers. So, I would like to offer some suggestions that may (I hope) prove useful.

- 1) I would like to suggest a very slow phase-in of the school year. This would mean that students could meet their teachers, masked, and outdoors in small groups (maybe one teacher and five students) for a very short time (1 to 2 hours). This would help create a bond between a student and a teacher that they do not know, and may never have seen before (also with other students!). These meetings could take place over several days, or for the first couple weeks, or longer! Then, school could slowly increase the time spent at school until it meets the hybrid model. And if that goes well, and the community and state still have low infection rates, then BRS might be able to go to full time.
- 2) I would like to suggest getting the teachers at Beecher Road School entirely comfortable with whatever safeguards are put in place. I don't want any teacher to be afraid of my children, as I believe that will create a poor learning environment. When I read the letters from the faculty, I read a lot of love, but also fear and concern. I know I couldn't teach as well if I was scared of a student (I'm a college professor), and I can't imagine they can either. So, are there any scenarios in which they would be comfortable teaching in person? Some things I think may help include: covid-disinfecting lamps in each classroom; an all-outdoor classroom day; no more than 10 kids in each cohort (or pod); and clear protocols for cleaning and money for supplies. I know the weather in Connecticut is variable, but there are other completely outdoor schools in Connecticut, and it can be done.
- 3) Since the covid-related needs of the students at Beecher Road School are so variable, I am wondering if we could (to a certain extent) pod according to need. For instance, the kids who need in-person full-day schooling because of family circumstances. The kids who need bussing in another pod. And students who were able could have much shorter in-person days (or alternating days) and those would be almost entirely outside. This would entail moving to more of a MAG model for more of the school, but could solve some logistical issues.
- 4) Under such a model above, the in-person school would focus on social emotional connection. This would need to be emphasized much more than in previous years. This cannot be met by group zoom meetings. More of the academics would therefore move to a digital platform. All students should also get access to needed digital materials.

Again, I appreciate everything you are doing, and I empathize with the difficult path we are all facing. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Marie McDaniel

Mother to a rising 3rd grader and a rising kindergartener



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Letter for Public Comment

1 message

Aimee Meacham <ameacham@woodbridgeps.org>
To: Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Sun, Jul 19, 2020 at 12:06 PM

Hi Marsha,

I hope you are having a chance to enjoy the summer as much as possible during these crazy times.

I have attached a PDF of a letter for public comment at Monday's meeting.

Take care,
Aimee

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This email transmission (and/or attachments accompanying it) may contain privileged and/or confidential information, and is intended only for the use of the individual or entity named above. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any dissemination, disclosure, distribution or copying of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please promptly notify the sender by reply email and destroy the original message.

 **For Those Wanting to Speak Out .pdf**
88K

July 17, 2020

Hello Parents,

After speaking at the Board of Education meeting on Wednesday night, I had several parents reach out to ask how they could help advocate for making a return to school safer for both students and staff.

I start by saying this: none of this is easy. There are no winners in any scenario. As well as being a teacher at Beecher, I am a parent here as well. I hear from so many of my parent friends that they need school to be back in session so they can work. This is an entirely valid point. I also hear that distance learning didn't work well for some students. I hear that, too. Improvements would need to be made to make distance learning more effective. But I hope you hear me when I say that under the current in-school learning plan mandated by the state, I truly worry about my own health, my family's health, the health of my students, and the health of my students' families.

There is still so much unknown about Covid. For every report you hear that children don't spread it very easily, you also see data saying that in fact they are silent spreaders. (At the governor's press conference on Thursday, Dr. Gottleib admitted this conflicting information, declaring "the data is mixed.") For every article about how European schools have for the most part found success at reopening (often with stricter standards than what the state is suggesting), we are bombarded with the reality that in our country right now, cases are surging and there is no end in sight. Even Connecticut has seen a recent uptick in numbers.

For me, here's what it boils down to: in this nightmarish situation we are living in now, we need to make some difficult decisions. We need to prioritize. And to me, **the priority always must be the health and safety of the staff and students at Beecher Road School**. That trumps everything else. As a community, we cannot send our Beecher staff and students back into an unsafe situation.

So to those asking how to help, I think one way is to bring this fight to the state level. Superintendent Gilbert made it clear that the state is mandating districts must create a plan to have **all** students in school at **all** times. He stated that he has tried to ask the state if there will be wiggle room on this, and that he is being told no. I truly believe our administrators care about Beecher teachers and students. I believe they will do everything in their power to keep us as safe as possible. But there is only so much they can do with what the state has mandated. That is why I would suggest focusing some efforts at the state level right now.

If you share teacher concerns about how to keep staff and students—and truly every single person those people will interact with on a daily basis—safe, given the mandates outlined by the state, I ask you to write to those at the state level who are mandating full, in-person schooling.

I don't want to speak for you, but if you are looking for some talking points I've put some below:

- **Demand** that the state plan be revised to follow CDC guidelines to have all people at least six feet apart and don't let them loosen those guidelines as they are doing with the current plan. And when

they say that's not possible in a classroom of 20+ students, **demand** that they rethink insisting on having all students in at all times.

- **Demand** that they reexamine their claim that they can keep students and staff safe with cohorting. Ask how they can possibly promise to keep students in cohorts when we know that students will need to mingle on buses and in Extended Day. Ask how students and staff can feasibly be in cohorts in a system where specialists, special education teachers, and resource teachers will be interacting with many students in many grade levels on a daily basis.
- **Demand** that they give specifics on how they can provide enough qualified long-term substitutes to cover all the teachers who won't be able to teach in person. There is already a shortage of substitute teachers but this year the lack of subs may prove crippling.

And in these communications with the state, I hope you can think beyond just Beecher. I am acutely aware that we are lucky here at Beecher to have an administrative team that listens to us and is very accessible. We have parents who support us vocally and will go to the mat for us. We have a Board of Education that is willing to think outside the box to best meet the needs of all its constituents. But think of those towns in Connecticut that don't have that. I know there are teachers all over the state who are terrified to go back and whose voices are not being heard. I know teachers in other towns whose classrooms are smaller than ours, with much larger class sizes. There are schools all over the state, including our neighbors in New Haven, with no HVAC systems and classroom windows that don't even open. Imagine being a teacher in that room. At our last meeting, Dr. Shari Storeygard offered some outside the box thinking about how we at Beecher could utilize our outdoor space to keep staff and students more safe. But not every school in Connecticut has that option. In fact, many don't have any nearby open spaces. **We need to speak up for those voices that are often ignored or diminished.**

I'm attaching to this letter some contact information for state legislators.

I don't have all the answers. I don't think anyone does in this pandemic. But I believe that we need parents and teachers working together to demand we make these decisions guided by the main goal of keeping everyone safe.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Aimee Meacham

Name	Title	Email	Mailing Address	Phone Number
Ned Lamont	Governor	governor.lamont@ct.gov	Office of Governor Ned Lamont State Capitol 210 Capitol Avenue Hartford, CT 06106	Local phone number (Hartford area): 860-566-4840 Toll-free: 800-406-1527 TDD: 860-524-7397
Susan Bysiewicz	Lieutenant Governor	ltgovernor.bysiewicz@ct.gov	Rm. 304 State Capitol Hartford, CT 06106	Tel: (860) 524-7384
Denise Merrill	Secretary of State	denise.merrill@ct.gov	210 Capitol Ave. Hartford, CT 06106	Tel: (860) 509-6200 TDD: (860) 509-619
Miguel Cardona	Education Commissioner	miguel.cardona@ct.gov	450 Columbus Boulevard Hartford, CT 06103-1841	860-713-6543
Richard Blumenthal	U.S. Senator	senator@blumenthal.senate.gov	G55 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg. Washington, D.C. 20510	(202) 224-2823 or Wethersfield: (860) 258-6940
Chris Murphy	U.S. Senator	Email Link	303 Hart Senate Office Bldg. Washington, D.C. 20510	(202) 224-4041 or Hartford: (860) 549-8463
Joe Courtney	U.S. House (2nd District)	Email Link		860-278-8888 (CT) 202-225-2265 (DC)
John B. Larson	U.S. House (1st District)	Email Link	221 Main St., Hartford, CT 06106	(202) 225-2265 (DC) (860) 278-8888 (CT)
Rosa DeLauro	U.S. House (3rd District)	Email Link or try imact03@mail.house.gov	59 Elm Street New Haven, CT 06510	203.562.3718 (New Haven) 202.225.3661 (DC)
Jim Himes	U.S. House (4th District)	Email Link	211 State Street, 2nd Floor Bridgeport, CT 06604	203.333.6600 (Bridgeport) 203.353.9400 (Stamford) 202.225.5541 (DC)
Jahana Hayes	U.S. House (5th District)	Email Link	108 Bank St, 2nd Floor Waterbury, CT 06702	860.223.8412 (Waterbury) 202.225.4476 (DC)

Other contacts:

- **CEA Leadership**
- **The CT General Assembly (find your legislators [here](#))**
- **The Education Committee of the CT General Assembly (find their contacts [here](#))**



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Our thoughts on school reopening

1 message

Erin A S Oleskey LCSW <easoleskey@gmail.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 12:40 PM

To: "mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org" <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Cc: "Oleskey, Christopher" <christopher.oleskey@yale.edu>

Dear Superintendent Gilbert and Members of the Woodbridge Board of Education,

Our names are Erin and Christopher Oleskey, and our son is a rising second year student in the Multiage Classroom at Beecher Road School. We are writing to share some thoughts about the start of the school year. Reopening schools during a pandemic presents a labyrinth of choices with medical, financial, ethical, and developmental implications, so we submit this letter with respect and appreciation for your effort and responsibilities.

We want to begin by saying that we believe one of our roles as parents is to support our son's teachers. During the June 14 Board meeting we were moved by the report on the WEA survey as well as by the heartfelt comments shared by some BRS teachers. It is our understanding that a significant number of BRS educators are concerned about the danger associated with returning to work on-site. We hope the Board prioritizes the findings of that survey and supports teachers' safety and well being. Physical and psychological safety are of utmost importance. That is a message children need to hear unambiguously in adults' words and see clearly in our actions.

Just as in March when hospitals and other health care facilities reduced on-site services to only the most critical, we think school should resume on-site learning in a comparably limited manner. In so doing our community would balance the developmental needs of some with the need to limit coronavirus exposure of all. To that end, we want to express support for an idea that was floated during the June 14 Board meeting, the possibility of surveying BRS families to determine the need for children to attend school on-site. We think the survey should define "need" as a child's dependence upon special education services or nutritional services or in terms of parental/caretaker circumstances that obviate a good enough distance learning environment. The data collected by such a survey could be used to determine on-site staffing for the outset of the school year. We would hope that the survey would be written as an appeal to the common good, one that asks families to consider how our households can collectively protect the needs of our most vulnerable children with public health and safe labor conditions. Over time, as coronavirus testing and contact tracing improves and the prevalence of the virus is established with greater confidence, a phased-in return to on-site schooling for all could begin. Additionally, perhaps the survey could solicit suggestions to complement distance learning. We would be in favor of occasional, socially distanced outdoor school days, for example.

Regarding the risk of exposure to coronavirus, we understand Alison Galvani, PhD and Shannon Martinello, MD will be presenting at tonight's Board meeting. In addition to the epidemiological and medical expertise they will offer, we respectfully ask you to consider a New York Times article by Apoorva Mandavilli dated July 18, 2020 titled, "Older Children Spread the Coronavirus Just as

Much as Adults, Large Study Finds.” The author reports on the findings of a large-scale, systematic study that challenges the notion that children are not involved in virus transmission: “Children under 10 were roughly half as likely as adults to spread the virus to others,” and children age 10 and over were “even more likely to infect others than adults were.” Dr Ashish Jha of the Harvard Global Health Institute says the study is “one of the best studies we’ve had to date on the issue.” We understand that the study followed symptomatic individuals and traced their contacts, and it does not tell us anything about asymptomatic transmission of the novel coronavirus, but we would ask you to consider the lack of data on symptomatic children in Connecticut. As recently as July 8, 2020 the COVKID Project, a quality report card of data reported on by state health departments, gave a “C” grade to the State of Connecticut. We simply don’t know enough about how many children are infected, asymptomatic or symptomatic.

Finally, we ask you to consider the inconsistency we see in the Governor’s mandate to reopen schools. We value the State’s immunization laws and regulations for school-aged children, which are of crucial importance in protecting our children and our community from many severe and debilitating infectious illnesses. There is an inconsistency in the State’s willingness, however, to bring students and adults back en masse to on-site schooling during a pandemic of an infectious disease for which there is no vaccine yet available, insufficient testing/tracing capacity, negligible community immunity, and a still rapidly-evolving scientific understanding of the transmission and pathogenesis of the virus.

This Spring on short notice our teachers deftly developed distance learning skills and earnestly tried to nurture their relationships with our children. To ask them now to pivot again, orient to and maintain CDC compliant conditions, all while educating and nurturing our children is an almost absurdly complex ask. They and our children can be at their best in these least desirable of circumstances only if everyone feels safe and at ease. Some children will need on-site schooling to experience a good enough environment during the pandemic; most will not. So, we hope to see the school year begin largely in a distance learning format. It would be the data-driven, parsimonious, community-centered, and ethical thing to do.

Thank you for your consideration,
Erin A. S. Oleskey, LCSW
Christopher J. S. Oleskey, MD MPH
118 Seymour Road
Woodbridge, CT 06525

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Erin A. S. Oleskey, LCSW (203) 314-1887



**[External Email] Public Comment for Woodbridge Board of Education Meeting
7/20/20**

donna schuster <donnark@hotmail.com>
To: Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>
Cc: donna Schuster <donnark@hotmail.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 3:04 PM

Marsha,

Can you please confirm receipt for tonight's meeting as a public comment?

Best,
Donna Schuster



Woodbridge Board of Education Public Comment School Reopening Draft Plan.docx
22K

July 20, 2020

Dear members of the Woodbridge Board of Education

I appreciate the time and careful consideration that has been given to the Reopening Plan in its draft stage. In reading the CT State School Reopening Plan Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to learn and Grow Together the Beecher Road School Reopening Draft does not meet the requirements set by the state as stated by the teachers letters that were submitted for the July 15, 2020 meeting.

Clearly this is a polarizing topic. There are families who are not in a position to support an on-line distance learning platform and those who are. The teachers are clearly not comfortable or support the drafted plan, nor do I. I have read the letters from the teachers and agree 100% with the concerns that a forced reopening puts our teachers, children and community at risk. Connecticut was the last state to open and we should learn from other parts of the country taking note of the spikes in infection rates and deaths. I believe that it is short sighted to believe that Connecticut will continue to have a low infection rate with the ever-evolving learnings about COVID19. We need to consider the lack of 100% immunizations in our school in addition to the inevitable flu season approaching in the Fall.

I understand that our world will be forever changed and we cannot continue as if this is a temporary situation. We need to adapt. I support a distance learning platform that will allow for interactive real time teaching where our teachers feel comfortable and can provide our children with education while keeping everyone safe. There are so many unknowns and my children are not a statistics or guinea pigs.

Until we can create a safe environment by meeting the reopening priorities set by the state of Connecticut, we should not even consider reopening. We need to be able to social distancing at 6 feet and require everyone to wear masks on buses and in school. The requirements are that children and adults are 6 feet apart while wearing masks and maybe even face shields, all doors need to be open, one way traffic, teachers move from room to room, ventilation needs to be addressed, the implementation of non-touch surfaces (including bathroom faucets), feeding children in school, no sharing of materials, no assemblies or large gatherings, 12 feet distance when engaging in music, physical education with social distancing, no physical contact, supporting the emotional and mental wellbeing of our community, only to mention some of the requirements. This is a logistical issue trying to keep children and adults 6 feet apart in school and on the bus, providing PPEs to everyone, testing, temperature taking, closing the school protocols when someone tests positive, deep cleaning all the time.

My children have not been sick one day since they have been home distance learning which tells me that the cleaning protocol is inadequate. The amount of stress reopening will cause in the community as the Woodbridge town buildings are not open, parks are still closed, and you need to wear a mask outside your home. I understand that children need to be social and school provides more than academic learning but when there is added stress from the risk of my children being in school, I will be constantly concerned about the

teachers and children. I question the idea that we are trying to ignore our new world and a public health emergency to move to open schools when we don't have a viable safe plan.

The school budget will be an issue as we try to clean, provide PPEs, and updating our buildings and protocol while constantly easing the minds of stressed out parents and children when someone tests positive, or makes the mistake of touching something that may have been overlooked while cleaning, implementing non-touch surfaces, and pay for increased transportation bus runs in order to social distance. I can't go to a doctor appointment without getting my temperature read, social distance on my piece of tape on the floor while wearing a required facemask.

The Connecticut state plan has an operational model listing the priorities on page 4:

Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together
The School Reopening Priorities (Referenced from Page 4 of CT State Reopening Guidelines)

"Operational Model:

- Prepare to initiate in-school instruction accessible to the full student population.
- Plan for educational opportunities to be primarily in-person, but allow for students and parents to choose not to participate based upon individual considerations.
- Establish a continuum of strategies for implementation of in-person schooling that anticipates potential alternative programs and robust blended learning if future public health data requires class cancellations. This will require engagement of contingent plans for blended learning, including but not limited to a mix of remote blended learning, synchronous and asynchronous class meetings, and other educator and staff outreach to students. Remote learning is defined as situations where students and educators are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment, and where instruction is relayed through technology, e.g., learning management systems.

Equity:

- Identify gaps and develop action plans for reopening that specifically address inclusion, equity, and access for all learners with strategies and clearly defined action steps.

Cohorts:

- Emphasize grouping students by the same class/group of students and teacher (into a cohort) so each team functions independently as much as possible.
- Consider this methodology by grade levels. Placing students in cohorts is strongly encouraged for grades K-8, and encouraged when possible for grades 9-12."

Facilities:

- Prioritize collection of data from families to confirm the intent to participate, as that may affect facilities and operations planning.

- Review building space and reconfigure available classroom space, such as gymnasiums and auditoriums, to maximize social distancing, consistent with public health guidelines in place at that time.
- Review community and municipal spaces with local stakeholders to determine additional capacity and availability if school building space is inadequate. Technical support will be available as needed.

Transportation:

- Plan for buses to operate close to capacity with heightened health and safety protocols, including requiring all students and operators wearing face coverings. Plans must be developed to activate increased social distancing protocols based upon community spread.

Health and Safety Policies and Protocols:

- Expect all students and staff to wear a protective face covering or face mask that completely covers the nose and mouth when inside the school building, allowing for certain exceptions.

Monitoring, Containment, and Class Cancellations Plan

- Develop robust monitoring and containment protocols, and class cancellation plans, in the event there are public health indicators that may require temporary closure of the building, such as evidence of community transmission in the school.
- If public health data requires partial reopening, or if schools' containment efforts require partial closure, prioritize the return of vulnerable learner groups, with specific protocols to increase the in-school population over time until full in person instruction is achieved.

The Beecher Road Draft does not meet these priorities as the ability to distance learn is not explored.

In order to safely open the School Decision Tree (page 27) offers assistance and currently our plan does not allow for us to safely reopen as the requirements have not been met that have been set by the state. Something as simple as the ability to screen student and employees upon arrival to school for symptoms are not mentioned in the draft. The onus is on the parent not the school. This is the responsibility of the school to protect everyone who is entering the school.

The decision tree states that we should not open if the three basic requirements are not met:

- Will reopening be consistent with applicable state and local orders?
- Is the school ready to protect children and employees at higher risk for severe illness?
- Are you able to screen students and employees upon arrival for symptoms and history of exposure?

If the answer to any of these questions is no then the school does not open. The Beecher Road Draft does not meet these requirements as there is no screening plan set-up.

In addition, the school reopening plan supports distance learning and parents in teaching their children at home but this is addressed in the draft.

Page 6:

“Temporarily Choosing Not to Participate Requirements

- Plan for parents and students who may temporarily choose not to participate in the return to school. There are defined requirements when participation of a student in the schoolhouse is limited due to a verified medical reason. However, parents and guardians may also voluntarily choose for students to temporarily engage in learning from home for a variety of other reasons. LEAs should develop temporary support options for students who continue remote learning from home, including but not limited to offering families the robust educational support options outlined in Academics on page 28. In developing these plans, options include but are not limited to:

- Consider how retired teachers and/or teachers who voluntarily identify as “high risk” or otherwise need to be accommodated outside of the school house may support operational needs via remote learning, including but not limited to the following:

- Working with students (virtually) who are unable to attend school;
 - Developing and implementing district professional development (PD) (virtual or in person);
 - Assisting with continued PD to train teachers who need assistance with best practices for virtual teaching and learning. See also Staffing and Personnel, page 44.
 - Serving as online tutors for those who need additional assistance.

- CSDE, in consultation with stakeholders, will continue to support LEAs in developing options for students and families choosing not to participate, including by issuing future guidance.

A school liaison and communications program must be established, right now we are not getting a unified message and are clearly polarized. Our classroom layout needs to maximize social distancing, every protocol down to using the bathroom needs to be outlined. I can go through the Connecticut State plan page by page but I believe that we need to acknowledge that in order to implement a safe plan where everyone feels comfortable will take a large budget and it is highly likely that we will all be distance learning before winter, if not before school begins.

The state is requiring a re-opening plan but supports distance learning for those who are not comfortable reopening school in full capacity. We could develop a plan for real-time distance learning that would allow for a decrease of the student body and safety of the teachers. This could decrease the health risk for teachers and students with fewer people in the building and supply N95 masks, face shields and masks for teachers and masks for

students and testing before entering the building. Parents who need their children back in school could feel more comfortable with increased social distancing, true cohorts, testing, masks for all children, decrease in transportation costs while social distancing on the bus. This is a huge expense to reopen safety especially with over 800 students.

The teachers, parents and children need to feel safe and the current plan that was proposed is not a plan that I feel provides safety to anyone. Let's try to support our outstanding teachers and keep everyone safe.

Our plan needs to consider the health, safety and wellbeing of our teachers, children, and community.

Best,
Donna Schuster



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Public Comment to be read by Shari Storeygard 7/20

1 message

Shari Storeygard <sstoreygard@yahoo.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 7:57 AM

To: Woodbridge School District <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

Hello Marsha,
Thank you so much.
Shari

Good evening, Board. Thank you, again for your time and effort during this very difficult period. My name is Shari Storeygard and I spoke last week about my ideas regarding outdoor learning. I am a parent of children at your school, pediatrician in the community, and I have been involved in non-stop conversations with people who have been problem-solving safety and logistics for schools, camps, and medical practices for the past months ... places that have successfully opened in creative ways during the spring and summer, and are planning for the fall. I am speaking more today as a problem-solver *informed* by medical practice. It is clear that public health officials informing government mandates will determine to what degree our children have in-school learning or have home-schooling. Many are waiting and advocating for the call to be made that the next year will be one for home-schooling. That may happen. Given that we have a mandate and that there may be an opportunity to have at least some in-school learning happen, we should be thinking creatively about how to do this in a way that maximizes safety and minimizes risk. To the extent that *any* in-school learning *is* able to happen in 6 weeks/2 months/3 months/ or 6 months safely based on COVID numbers in our state, I aim to mobilize a will for outside learning at school. I believe that it is the way for teachers and students to have the lowest risk of COVID transmission at school while fulfilling our goals to have our children engaged meaningfully in their education.

We know that outdoor open air is the safest place for thoughtfully planned small groups to be during this pandemic. Again - thoughtfully planned small groups in outdoor open air. This can be possible at our school where I am told every classroom has a door leading to the outside and there are large fields, shaded areas, and open paved areas. Every class could have a sturdy pavilion close to its classroom door. I have researched costs. Tables, benches and fans, yoga mats and lap desks could be donated by parents from their homes. Many types of instruction or teaching could happen in and around these pavilions. In choosing to be appropriately conservative, masks should be worn while together outside under the pavilion and could be taken off when children are more spread apart when out of the pavilion. I suggest that children walk directly to these outdoor classrooms wearing masks upon getting dropped off at school and also be dismissed from the outdoor gathering spot, minimizing travel through hallways and crowded entry-ways. If in-school class sizes are smaller, all can be done more safely - trouble-shooting weather hardships, teachers getting their bearings with everything that is new, and decisions about illness. Whether these small groups happen via the hybrid model or via families who opt out or via creative grouping outside with more staff will be the question for your Board or Committee who gather information about staff and student numbers. Asking parents about opting out of bussing and applying these same guidelines to the Extended Day Program could help make this goal attainable. Again, I will state this vision should COVID numbers in our community stay low and in-school learning be mandated to happen: thoughtfully planned small groups cohorted outdoors in open air, wearing masks when closer together.

You need the community to help to achieve this goal. There is a finite amount of energy, band-width, and time for every group and individual. The extensive moving parts and layers of this problem will quickly

hinder progress if we don't call on more people locally now to help and if we don't have a plan that is inherently flexible. If a subcommittee for outdoor learning can be made, I offer to lead other parents and engage teachers to problem-solve *this part* and will reach out to builders, architects, engineers, and logistics experts.

Parts of our community hunger to be an active part of our local solution. I have been getting many emails from parents since I spoke last week in support of this vision. Picture this.... Teams of teachers coming together to figure out how to craft their plans for different types of learning - sitting together outside in wide circles. Within view of them, organized parents wearing masks putting together pavilions for their child's classroom outside and washing tables that they've unloaded from their vans and trucks. Imagine how good it could feel for parents to put their sweat into building outdoor spaces for this school. Imagine how good it could feel for teachers to see them doing this. Imagine how good it could feel for our children to see this teamwork. Imagine how good it could feel for the community to be helping with their hands ... for a plan that makes sense simultaneously for education and health.

We all agree that the safety of our teachers, staff, students, and their families is of primary importance. We know that the virus is transmissible by all and that there are concrete measures that we can take to lower risk. We know that education is at its best when students are with their teachers and peers. We also know that there are many families that do not have the capacity to home-school their children indefinitely without facing job loss or significant dysfunction. School cannot happen safely at full capacity inside. I am concerned that if we aren't creative in lowering risk at school and in thinking broadly about risk, school will be unable to happen for well over a year. I believe that by embracing the outdoors as the primary location for convening and learning, while also focusing on mask-wearing and small group cohorting, we can move closer to our goals for safety, education, and wellness.

If asked, I will help.

Thank you very much.



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Public Comment for 7/20 BOE Meeting

1 message

Music with Mrs. Turkosz <kturkosz@gmail.com>

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 12:47 AM

To: sjfleischman@gmail.com, plascyk.boe@gmail.com, Maegan.genovese@yale.edu, Daniel Cowan <danielcowanwbe@gmail.com>, jeffrhughes@netscape.net, david.a.ross@yale.edu, joyceshavers@gmail.com, michael.strambler@yale.edu, jeffrey.p.townsend@gmail.com, mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org, Analisa Sherman <asherman@woodbridgeps.org>, rgilbert@woodbridgeps.org

Cc: George.Logan@cga.ct.gov, jamie.iannotti@cga.ct.gov

Dear Board of Education Members, Superintendent Gilbert, and Principal Sherman,

It was very concerning to us to receive an email from the Beecher Road School PTO urging us to take action *against* schools opening in-person in the fall. While we know many community members take this position, it does not accurately reflect the beliefs of the entire Parent Teacher Organization. We are disappointed that such one-sided information was spread throughout our community without any regard to opposing schools of thought. Attached please find our public comment for your consideration. Thank you for all of the hard work you are putting into ensuring our schools can re-open safely.

Best,
James and Kristen Turkosz
[14 Bear Hill Rd, Woodbridge](#)

 **PublicComment_Turkosz_07-20-2020.pdf**
126K

We are parents of two Beecher students, one entering 3rd grade, and one entering kindergarten. We were disappointed to see a note from a teacher sent out on blast to everyone on the Beecher PTO email list, without any screen real estate given to any alternative viewpoints. This is a complex situation without a doubt, but while this letter made some valid points and was definitely sincere, it also lacks context and completely skirts many other issues and considerations around this situation.

It's not technically incorrect to say the evidence on children as spreaders is "mixed", however the overwhelming majority of countries that have reopened schools did not have to close back down, and many of them even did so without masks (or have since ditched the masks) while reporting that they did not find schools reopening (or never closing down at all) as having been a significant factor in the spread of the virus.¹

It's arguable at best that students and staff are actually at any significant risk from COVID in this state and in this town. Per the CT DPH data, the cumulative total of cases in Woodbridge has actually ticked down from 148 to 145 during the month of July.ⁱⁱ This means that if any new cases were in fact reported, a greater number (by three) were actually removed from the tally during that time. As we know, other parts of the country are having issues, and the situation can always change, and the district can always change course. But risk can never be reduced to zero (and never was zero even before COVID as evidenced by far more children having died of flu this past seasonⁱⁱⁱ [and every flu season] than have died from COVID^{iv}), and there is no such thing as a germ-free environment, nor is it realistic for anyone to expect one, or feel entitled to one.

Connecticut has been seeing extremely low numbers for over a month now. No, they have not yet gone to zero (and probably won't for some time no matter how well things go), but there has not in fact been a recent meaningful uptick in cases or deaths. Things have been pretty flat for a few weeks now. This is not to downplay the reality of the havoc the virus can wreak in some people, however the collateral damage that will be caused by failing to bring back any sense of normalcy for our children is clearly not being considered.

While everyone is laser focused on keeping the children safe from COVID, we are apparently not talking about keeping them safe and healthy in general. The social and emotional well-being of the children needs to be a much larger focus in any discussion around this issue. We have unwittingly trained many of them to fear their cousins, friends, teachers, and even the very air they breathe. As if that's not enough, their routines have been completely destroyed in every sense, and some of them are likely still in near-isolation. We fully appreciate and understand how difficult these decisions are for all families, and at the end of the day we all want what is best for our children. But how long is it reasonable or prudent to keep them from being children?

The answer to that question will undoubtedly be, "When it's safe." The problem is how do we quantify that? Nobody ever seems to have an answer for this, up to and including the foremost experts in the field. Everything is a moving target. "Three weeks to flatten the curve" is a distant memory. Almost everyone was on board with that, and it at least made some degree of logical sense. But apparently, now we can't tolerate hardly any cases at all, judging by the amount of consternation despite CT's extremely low numbers. There needs to be an exit strategy. How many months (years?) do we plan on stringing our children along?

The longer this continues, the more our children will suffer. It's easy to have tunnel vision right now during a pandemic, but unintended consequences resulting from our response, while hard to quantify right now, are guaranteed. The impacts of school closure have likely been most drastic for students with special needs who have lost access to services such as speech or physical therapy, mental health counseling, etc. Many students may be in need of support as a result of stress from the pandemic and related hardships. This stress can often be overlooked

in the home, with working parents, single parents, abusive family situations, etc. Students need in person access to counseling and caring adults in order to prevent abusive home situations and/or mental health issues to continue.

We don't think the fact that many New Haven schools may not have state of the art HVAC equipment should have any bearing whatsoever on any discussion around how we approach reopening Beecher Road School. In reality if we're going to talk about New Haven, those children probably need to be back in school even more than ours do in Woodbridge. Inner cities generally see higher prevalence of low income or single parent households, or lack of access to technology or resources to facilitate proper child care or distance learning. These conditions would make the continued closure of schools especially harmful to families.

Lack of in person schooling will exacerbate any existing social or racial inequalities, leaving lasting impact years down the road. Children of all ages are already falling behind, and distance learning went very poorly for many families. It went worse than poorly for some, as many students did exactly nothing for the final three months of the school year.

I (Kristen) am a teacher in another district in Connecticut and I have seen these issues first hand. Several students did not complete a single assignment the entire spring. Others completed only a handful, or did nothing up until the final week when they hastily submitted several assignments at once. Numbers we found from a Philadelphia survey indicate that only 61% of students 'attended' school on an average day during distance learning.^v Is there information regarding student engagement and participation at Beecher Road School from the spring? It is unacceptable for even a small fraction to have lost the privilege of their education or have their educational services impeded in any way due to the distance learning format.

For our family specifically, the approach from Beecher Road School came across as haphazard, and did not seem to improve much as the spring went on. There was a complete lack of interaction, feedback, differentiation, and continuity, though we understand that the program was put together hastily and under duress. We are confident that distance learning can and will be improved over what Beecher was able to accomplish this spring. Nevertheless, it is no substitute for proper in person schooling.

It is our opinion that Beecher Road School needs to open in the fall for full time in-person instruction for all students for all the reasons we have discussed. We fully understand that not everyone feels entirely (or at all) comfortable with that, but this needs to first and foremost be about what is best for the children. Yes, there is some level of risk. Some students and staff (or family members) may be vulnerable or immunocompromised. This should definitely be a consideration when formulating any reasonable reopening plan, but it cannot come at the expense of the quality of our children's education and their future.

Respectfully,

James and Kristen Turkosz
14 Bear Hill Road, Woodbridge

ⁱ <https://www.wired.com/story/its-ridiculous-to-treat-schools-like-covid-hot-zones/>

ⁱⁱ <https://portal.ct.gov/Coronavirus/COVID-19-Data-Tracker>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2020/04/10/fluupdate041020>

^{iv} <https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP%20and%20CHA%20-%20Children%20and%20COVID-19%20State%20Data%20Report%207.9.20%20FINAL.pdf>

^v <https://www.inquirer.com/news/coronavirus-school-attendance-philadelphia-district-hite-remote-learning-20200524.html>



Marsha DeGennaro <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>

[External Email] Reopening of schools: A parent letter

1 message

Amanda Tyma <abtyma@gmail.com>

Sun, Jul 19, 2020 at 2:08 PM

To: mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org

Woodbridge Board of Ed,

Hello,

My name is Amanda Tyma of 5 Cow Path Ln. Woodbridge, CT. I am the parent of two children in Beecher Road School. I am highly concerned about the upcoming reopening. Both of my children will receive special education in the fall, one currently does and the other child we are working on getting a proper diagnosis for the school.

In a matter of a few short weeks you are expecting the school to open at full capacity with full capacity busing. This meeting is being held remotely because it is unsafe to have the meeting in person, how do you expect to open our school. Our elementary school is not small, we have over 800 children. How do you plan to ensure the safety of not only those children but all of the teachers and staff at the school? How do you plan to keep the disruptions to schooling at a minimum when staff or students test positive for the virus? It is not an if but a when it will happen with a school our size. The current plan is if a child or teacher tests positive the school will close to be cleaned. How is that not disruptive to the children, staff and families? Families will need to provide distance learning during that time which means missing work or hiring child care in hopes that they will also be willing to teach their children.

The number one objective in opening the school is the Social and Emotional health of our children. Our children are accustomed to going to school and sitting at a desk with 3+ of their friends. They share their school resources. They play games together and have fun. They work on problem solving and friendship building. You are proposing that when they return to school they sit 6ft apart facing forward at individual desks and no material can be shared. What happens when a child gets hurt? How can a teacher comfort a crying child? They need to maintain a 6ft distance. What about the preschool and kindergarten children coming in for the first time and they become scared or overwhelmed? What are you going to instruct the teachers to do to ensure they are maintaining a children's social and emotional health while unable to touch them?

The plan has the buses running at full capacity. Our bus at one point had 2-3 children per seat for a 40 minute ride. How do you plan on having younger kids keep their masks on for the duration of the bus ride? How is the bus driver going to focus on driving while simultaneously focusing on children keeping masks on? And how are we going to ensure their safety while safely transporting our children to and from school? I know it is recommended that children be driven to and from school, but that is not always an option. Our family is a great example of that. My husband is legally blind and can not drive, but will often walk our children to the bus stop if I am unable to drive them. He would not be able to provide transportation any other way.

My older son is unable to wear a mask due to his medical conditions. He is at a significantly higher risk of contracting and suffering from Covid than most children his age. Also because he is unable to wear a mask he is at a significant higher risk of spreading Covid. He can also bring the virus home to his medically complex younger twin sisters. He did not do well with distance learning last year, he struggled significantly. It is not an ideal learning situation for him. But with that being said I understand my part as a parent and a member of the Beecher community to help prevent the spread of this virus. Therefore we have decided it is safest for everyone for him to do distance learning again this year. But I worry about his education. I feel we were not given sufficient special education services, and what we did get I had to ask for even though it is in his IEP. We are hiring a tutor to assist us in providing the proper education. But in order to do interviews and find the tutor that best suits our needs we need time to understand the plan the school has in place.

My second son is able to wear a mask medically but his developmental condition makes it hard for him to have a mask on his face for long periods of time. He struggled by far worse than my older son in distance learning. He did not do well with his parents being his teachers and not having any live teacher instruction. They provided videos for him, but he is unable to focus long on a video without interactions. He did not do well being on a screen for hours a day. He overall did not thrive in that environment and did not retain any thing that was taught. But like my oldest son, I know the risks associated with sending him to school. I also understand the significant adverse effect it will have on him personally having to maintain a 6ft distance from his peers and teachers. We will also be providing him a tutor to help him hopefully catch up and advance in his education.

I know that I am one of the fortunate parents who is able to stay home with my children. Companies are starting to have

employees return to work so some children will have to return to school. I feel as though the school needs to create strong learning platforms for both situations. I also feel as though special education services NEED to have a better system in place for our children. While I understand special education children are not in the majority at Beecher, they are still there. They are important and it seems as though they were forgotten. Many parents do not have the resources the school has to ensure their child is getting a proper education and more needs to be done about this. We have chosen to purchase a house and stay in Woodbridge because of the special education services our school provides.

We also need to listen to our teachers and staff. I have read the teachers letters and the overall feeling in them is fear. Not fear of extra work or unwillingness to change their routines. It is genuine fear for their health and the health of their families. They are asking for a distance learning plan be put into place. On an average school day my children's teachers are with them more awake hours than I am. How can we as a school not take what they are asking for into serious consideration? They can not control what families are doing outside of school. Many families may be strict social distancing, like myself, but others may feel comfortable being around others. The teachers will not know either way, putting them at more risk. Cohorting was the idea to minimize the potential spread of the virus. The special education teachers, therapists, and specials teachers will be going from room to room to see the students. Many special education teachers and therapists are right next to children, many whom can not wear masks. How are we going to ensure their safety?

This situation is hard no matter what way we look at it. There is no black and white answer to how this should be handled. But I feel we need to do more to ensure the safety of our children, teachers, staff, and bus drivers. I thank you all for your hard work in this tough decision. And I hope we can move forward to create a positive and safe learning experience for our children and teachers alike.

Thank you,
Amanda Tyma