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Subject: [External Email] Beecher Road School reopening Fall 2020

To: csyriac@woodbridgeps.org <csyriac@woodbridgeps.org>, mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org <mdegennaro@woodbridgeps.org>, piascyk.boe@gmail.com <piascyk.boe@gmail.com>

To Superintendent Syriac and the Beecher Road School Board of Education,

We would like to use this letter to welcome Ms. Syriac to Beecher and share our thoughts about what we have observed over the course of the extensive Board of Ed meetings relating to the opening of school.

We are sending this note in advance of the 8/26/20 board meeting, which is taking place on the day our students were supposed to resume the education that was cut far too short at the end of last school year. The reason we are sending this note is that despite all of the communication and reassurance pointing to a full time in-person opening, and a clear majority of our community standing in favor of such action based on their enrollment selections, the tenor of the last few Board of Ed meetings and the current agenda leaves us concerned that today's meeting will include a renewed effort to push distance or hybrid learning.

We have a sixth grader and a kindergartner attending Beecher this year. Like many families in town, both of us work full time and are not in a position to homeschool. However, the most fundamental reason we have selected the in-person school option (vs hiring a sitter to support distance learning) is the health and well-being of our children. Both of our girls exhibited significant distress in the spring without the educational and social benefits of an in-person school experience. Since resuming in-person activities in June, both have been happier and more energetic. Our kindergartner returned to her preschool, which remained open to essential workers' families throughout the spring and still has rugs, toys, and tables without shields. She recently transitioned to wearing a mask without issue, as did her friends. The entire preschool community - including families - has risen to the occasion to keep serving the children holistically while protecting staff.

We fully recognize that these are exceptional times, and accordingly there are decisions to be made regarding the reopening that will not be 100% satisfactory to all. Reopening as currently planned meets the needs of more than 70% of our Woodbridge families, but is clearly against the wishes of the majority of our teachers, and may cost us some longtime staff. It will also be a very different in-school experience for our children and teachers, and we understand that comes with another level of change and uncertainty. However, we strongly feel that if we reopen in a hybrid model as some have suggested, we may put everyone at greater risk than a full opening (<https://www.wired.com/story/hybrid-schooling-is-the-most-dangerous-option-of-all/>).

We also strongly believe that if we reopen in a distance learning model, our teachers will feel safer, but our children's education will suffer dramatically. While Beecher Road's teachers responded bravely to a terrible situation in the spring, the education that our children received was neither complete nor adequate, as evidenced by the fact that report cards could not be completed for the final marking period, and that 20% of the days (flex Fridays) lacked new content or engagement.

Our then fifth grader was immensely frustrated during the spring. She was consistently eager to move through more instructional material, but stuck in a one size fits all approach that lacked the push she was seeking and the stimulation she needs. As such, we have no confidence that her needs can be met by a 100% online education. And by the admission of Beecher's own kindergarten staff in their July 20, 2020 letter to the Board, kindergarteners need "hand-over hand guidance". This is not something that can be accomplished via distance learning without an actively engaged adult at home and a child who is willing to accept that specific adult's instruction. Again, the adults in our household and many others work full time and are unable to provide such engagement without a significant impact on our jobs and health.

We hesitated to send this note as it has become clear that the topic of reopening is a truly polarizing one, perhaps more than any other issue ever faced by our community, and we recognize that everyone has their own level of comfort with this pandemic and they are right to express their concerns without fear of reprisal or condemnation.

However, Amity will be opening its doors to students this coming Monday, and the other elementary schools in our tri-town school district will be open for full in-person next week as well. There are never guarantees of anything in life, and there are no zero-risk solutions either. Yet we must recognize that we currently have favorably low community spread statistics. As such, we believe there is no better time to get our children back in school to develop relationships with their teachers and peers. More than ever before, it has been made clear to us that it truly takes a village to have happy, healthy and engaged children, and we are confident in the steps the administration has taken to ensure the safety of the students and staff at Beecher. We thank everyone for all of the hard work in getting to this point and look forward to dropping off our children at Beecher on their first day.

Best,
Kristen and Paolo Campos
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