

September 20, 2020

Dear Administration and BOE,

Unfortunately, it has been two weeks since we submitted our first of many letters to Superintendent Syriac, Principal Sherman and the Board of Education and still have not received any action to date concerning the sub-par education our distance learners are experiencing at Beecher Road School. The administration's engagement (or lack thereof), abysmal planning and poor execution clearly exhibits the lack of concern for our children's needs while putting their academic needs last.

Syriac has stated that the administration "wants all our students to be successful, we want both programs to be rewarding for our teachers, students and families". Yet, it is ironic that the distance learners are being isolated and receiving a sub-par education with limited teacher engagement. Our many attempts to discuss these issues with the administration have been met with dismissal, disrespect and an ask for "time and patience". The administration has been given enough time to plan strategies, now it is time for swift actions to be taken on ALL concerns raised by key stakeholders. It is clear that the administration does not value parent's feedback as all plans are absent of parent's guidance and advice while the plan that administration and the BOE has put in place is failing.

It appears the administration's only strategy to date is to make the distance learning experience so terrible that it forces parents to send students to school – this week alone Mr. Halsey's second grade lost a number of children due to the dire distance learning situation. What is not being taken into consideration is the fact that people are keeping their children home for a reason, as in our case due to medical conditions. The administration's actions to date indicate that distance learning is seen as a nuisance and an annoyance that will go away. We are here to share that we cannot send our children to school and they are entitled to the same education as their peers in school – meaning the administration must fix these issues. The administration and the BOE has failed our children prior to the school year and continues to do so as the school year continues.

Outlined below are the major concerns that must be addressed immediately:

Oversized Classrooms:

Classroom size is more than double the traditional Beecher Road classroom. As of 9/15/20, there are **211** overall distance learners, representing **26%** of Beecher's student body, with only **7** designated teachers - averaging a **30:1** student teacher ratio. On the other end of the spectrum, **607** students are in school with **43** designated teachers - representing a **14:1** student teacher ratio. Also, keep in mind that the in-school students and teachers have the support of teacher's assistants, while remote learners and their teachers have been left with zero support to date.

Specifically, **41%** of the second grade has chosen remote learning, leaving a **39:1** student teacher ratio, far above the school average. While the second graders in school have the current luxury of an average of **11** students per class.

The remote classroom sizes are impractical and unmanageable for elementary school education and are more than **double the national average for elementary public schools**, while far exceeding Beecher's class size guidelines from October 15, 2018. These guidelines also state that administration can exercise exceptions to safeguard the educational continuity of students.

We are demanding you to reallocate resources immediately as our children are falling behind based on the current structure. For second grade, the solve seems mathematically simple. Reduce second grade in-school classrooms from **5 to 4** and dedicate two teachers to second grade remote learning. This one change alone will only increases the in-school classrooms from **11.2 to 14** students, is still under Beecher's class size guidelines, all while reducing the remote learner's classroom ratio from **39 to 19.5** per teacher. Although 19.5 is still high, it is much better than the current state and with teacher assistant support, this structure is manageable while equalizing in-school and remote learning environments.

Curriculum:

Adequate Specials are still missing from the distance learning curriculum. Over the last two weeks, administration has designated 8 hours to Specials, yet have only provided two art lessons to fill this time – one to draw a bird, the other to draw an ice cream cone. We are lucky if these assignments took a total of 30 minutes each, leaving over four hours this week with no curriculum and a sub-par education compared to their peers in school who are receiving specials daily including music, health, language, technology and PE. This is not our past Beecher experience or the educational experience we expect for our children. For second graders, we believe that Specials are so important for their overall education and must be part of the curriculum with appropriate live teacher support.

Hours of Learning

Although we commend the administration for the attempt to mirror the in-school day for remote learners, it isn't working. The time dedicated for each learning interval is bloated, including multiple breaks. The schedule most days leaves over a 2+ hour continuous gap in learning (i.e. 10:20am- 12:40pm). This gap represents a child not being chosen for small group math, recess, no Specials and lunch.

Over the last two weeks our children have averaged, at most, a maximum 3 full hours of learning a day, which is well below the state guidelines of 4.5 hours a day. Also, keep in mind, the schedule itself is bloated, meaning that the time dedicated to each interval is overstated. For example, math is slated for 45 minutes daily, but the majority of the students only get 20 minutes of math daily before they break into small groups. Based on the number of students divided by four school days, each student can only be chosen once a week to receive the full 45 minutes of scheduled math (39 students /4 days = 9-10 students daily).

Student/Teacher 1-1 Engagement:

Flex Fridays are back, meaning our children only have four days of learning vs. five and have not been provided any education options to fill these days to date. And due to administration planning, no students have received any 1-1 time with Mr. Halsey. Classroom size and poor administration planning has diminished what is supposed be a positive experience for our children. Administration sold Flex Fridays to distance learners and parents as time for 1-1 student/teacher engagement that is needed for their emotional well-being and education. Based on the number of students in the class, each child will only get 1-1 time with Mr. Halsey every fourth week. Our distance learners are being given a lesser education simply based on numbers and limited teacher interaction. In this instance, our children will not be given the

opportunity or time to build a relationship or trust with Mr. Halsey that is needed for their second-grade learning experience.

Technology Support:

The appearance is that Beecher is up to speed on technology, yet this is farthest from the truth. Second grade distance learners have not been provided the adequate access to technology needed (Google Classroom) to make learning and interaction better for students, parents and teachers, even though grades 3-6 have been up and running.

We chose to live in Woodbridge because of the educational experience for our children. Poor planning and lack of swift action proves BOE leadership is misusing our tax dollars. It feels as if our children are being punished for our choice to keep them at home for this school year. There has been enough time for planning, we expect and our children deserve more. When we chose distance learning for our kids, we did so with the knowledge and acceptance that some things would be different - but not that their education would be diminished or they be treated less than their peers. In a time of global inclusion for all, the fact that Beecher's administration and the BOE has devised plans to treat distance learners differently and less than is unethical, shocking and appalling to say the least.

We expect more for our children's educational experience and are dedicated to do whatever is necessary to make this a better and an equal learning experience for all involved.

Sheri and Michael Fitzgerald

Parents of two second grade remote learners