

Concerning School Re-opening Plans

Inbox



Whitney

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to me

To the Woodbridge Board of Education:

I am the parent of a rising MAG 1 student, and am writing to express my concerns regarding the current plans for school re-opening. I hope that you will please accept and distribute this statement in advance of, or during, your BOE meeting on Tuesday, August 4, 2020. It is my understanding that the BOE has planned to open Beecher Road School for in-person learning with an option for students to stay home and learn remotely. This is despite that the State has given full power for this decision to be made by our district. This letter is to **propose for BRS to start the school year with a hybrid model of learning.**

Connecticut's infection rates are currently low, but have been trending upward over the past week, according to YNH's COVID-19 tracking records. It is clearly not guaranteed that lower rates will continue in our area, especially with the arrival of college students in mid- to late-August. **We need to be prepared to start the year as a phased reopening.** It is imperative for schools to be proactive in helping to keep the virus contained, and our children and teachers safe. We have been able to maintain lower numbers in Woodbridge by acting even more cautiously than other parts of the state, and by re-opening business and shared spaces very slowly. A phased re-opening of the school, by starting at the hybrid level of learning, and then moving to full in-person instruction if indicated, would follow a similar model. Conversely, fully re-opening the schools violates many of the Phase 2 guidelines that are currently recommended by the State, and will prematurely accelerate our risk of exposure. **This is contradictory to the approach that has been advocated** by so many Woodbridge residents, including First Selectman Heller. Teachers have been extremely vocal in their concerns and fears, and I imagine a hybrid model would allow for the flexibility of instruction to meet the needs of both teachers and children.

We have a number of people returning to the greater New Haven area just before PreK-12 starts, due to the return of college students and residents who have been away for summer holidays. Traditional-aged college students are not likely to consistently adhere to public health guidelines due to their stage of development. Studies show that this age group is more likely to push limits and disregard authority. They are also more likely to engage in risk-taking behavior. We are therefore **likely to experience a surge in early to mid-September in the context of college students returning to the area**, especially those coming from states where there are currently severe outbreaks. Historical accounts of pandemic spread, and current examples of failed attempts to reopen, illustrate how remaining conservative and proactive will yield better outcomes than responding reactively to a surge. I will save you the details of this statement, noting only to look toward the action of San Francisco during the 1918 Spanish flu, the current experience of Hong Kong facing a 3rd and more overwhelming wave, and the multiple accounts of Southern US states experiencing surges of cases in their daycares and schools. Historically, second waves have tended to be more deadly, and **if we wait until a second surge occurs in Woodbridge, we are 2 weeks too late in fully protecting our children and teachers** due to the (up to) 14 day incubation period of this virus. In Woodbridge, we have many children, teachers, and caretakers who have pre-existing medical conditions and/or are BIPOC, and therefore have a higher risk of developing extreme symptoms and/or death. Some studies have even shown that there may be long term physical damage in children who never exhibit

symptoms. ***We must therefore avoid infection as much as possible, until either more is known about the effects of the virus, or until a vaccine has been widely distributed.***

The hybrid model is clearly the most reasonable option to implement at the start of the school year, while we are adapting to this strange reality, and awaiting more reliable information about the virus or for a vaccine to be distributed. It should be the preferred level for reopening, even if our infection rates remain stable. Forcing parents from the start of the year to make a binary decision for their children to fully return in-person or to only learn remotely is a gross mistake, and an oversimplification of the matter at hand. ***Further, it puts the most vulnerable children, and those who have no other options but to go in-person, into what will likely become a dangerous situation.***

I am saddened by the decision I will need to make if this plan to start the semester in-person materializes; I want my son to have the opportunity to form connections with his new classmates and the MAG teachers who will be mentoring him, but fear the higher risk that will be present with the full class of children present. I implore you to seriously consider scaling back the reopening plan by using the hybrid model for initial return to school, so that the school may then adjust as indicated.

Thank you for your consideration,

Whitney Randall, Psy.D.
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