

# A Path Forward on School Reopening

August 9, 2020 - Weston Education Association

## INTRODUCTION

The Weston School Committee is scheduled to vote on a plan to reopen schools at their meeting on Monday, August 10th at 7 PM. Based on numerous meetings and discussions so far, the Committee seems ready to approve the modified hybrid model put forth by the administration on [Friday, August 7th](#). We urge them to reconsider.

School opening is 5 weeks away. With the evolving nature of the pandemic, conditions at opening will likely be different than they are now. Any group - School Committee, faculty, administration, parents, students - taking a firm position on one of the three models (all-in, hybrid, or remote) at this point in time seems unrealistic.

Of course, we need to plan for the school year. However, planning and voting are two different matters. Our path forward, outlined below, takes the pressure off of a vote Monday evening. Our path allows us all to move forward while continuing to consider different options for this school year, while at the same time, prioritizing the work we need to do in the next month.

As we continue to develop solutions, we are assuming the best-intent of all parties involved. We encourage you to do the same. Finally, we are hosting a community forum via Zoom on Monday, August 10th at 5 PM to elaborate on our vision of the path forward and answer questions. Details for the Zoom are at the end of this document.

## A PATH FORWARD

We urge the committee to adopt this plan of action:

1. Pause all work on a hybrid model for the next two weeks.
2. For the next two weeks, we all shift our focus, energy, and efforts to developing all the necessary implementation details of the all-remote model. Hopefully, we can get this done sooner.
3. When complete, the School Committee and WEA Bargaining Team, and the recently formed Administration/Faculty Implementation Teams will bring forth a fully supported, detailed, and robust plan for all-remote learning. Parties will vote on this agreement.
4. Then, once the all-remote model is approved, we all shift our time, energy, and efforts back to developing all the necessary implementation details for the hybrid plan.
5. When appropriate, we implement the hybrid plan.

## RATIONALE

### Why should the focus first be on the remote model?

It is very likely that at some point this school year we will have to shift to all remote schooling. Such is the reality of the unfolding pandemic. Collectively, everyone is deeply disheartened by

this. We all want teaching and learning to happen in person.

Since the general plan was released on July 20, the administrative team and the School Committee have put forth an incredible amount of time and energy on the first version of the hybrid model. Last week, their time was consumed with a new hybrid plan.

Through no one's fault, not enough time has been spent to develop the all-remote model. Items such as student schedules, length of the day, class lists, technology needs, options for in-person schooling for high-needs students, and appropriate amounts of screen time for students have not been adequately addressed. We need to figure out these key details to make a remote model work.

Again, we emphasize that this is not for lack of hard work or commitment on anyone's part. We see that the administrative team has been doing some of this initial planning. A few pages of their most recent document outline some ideas of the all-remote model. However, up until now, neither the WEA nor the faculty at large has been a part of this planning.

Planning for remote learning needs to be our main priority. We need to figure this out and reach an agreement. We can get this done. We need to start making progress and checking off items on the list. We need some forward momentum.

### **Why will it take 2 weeks to reach an agreement on the all-remote plan? Can't it happen sooner?**

Yes. We hope to have it done sooner. However, there are important steps along the way that cannot be ignored. It will take 2-3 days for implementation teams and the School Committee/WEA Bargaining teams to work through details and draft an agreement. It will take 2-3 days to share the detailed draft with faculty, administration, and School Committee members and to make edits and changes based on feedback. Finally, the parties need to vote and approve the plan, which will take a few days. Our goal is to get it done as soon as possible. We are just trying to present realistic timelines.

### **Are you saying we need to start all-remote? Is this a "line in the sand" from the faculty that you'll only support an all-remote start?**

No. We are saying we first need to spend the next two weeks working together on the all-remote plan. Then, we take up the hybrid plan.

### **Can you envision a scenario in which we start with the hybrid model?**

We want nothing more than to start the year safely teaching students in person. In two weeks, we may have some of the [HVAC data we've requested](#). In two weeks, we'll know more about testing capabilities. The School Committee is working hard on this. In two weeks, we'll know more about COVID-19 in Weston, Middlesex County, and in Massachusetts.

During the [HVAC forum](#) on Thursday, August 6th, many questions were answered with a response of "we'll know more in 1.5 - 2 weeks." We appreciate the hard work being done by facilities, but this leaves us with unanswered questions.

Of course, many of the factors impacting a safe return to in-person schooling are beyond our control. Currently, state COVID numbers are trending in the wrong direction. We will do everything within our control to continue to problem-solve on the hybrid model, but there is simply too much unknown right now to have a definitive answer one way or another.

To be clear, we remain steadfast in our position that a room-by-room building analysis is key to returning to in-person schooling. Families and staff should know the specifics of the room in which they will be spending up to 4 hours a day. We don't think this is an unreasonable request.

Additionally, it's crucial to establish criteria for acceptable COVID -19 numbers in order to return to in-person schooling. At the School Committee meeting on Friday, August 7<sup>th</sup>, John Henry accepted our request to have faculty members join administrators and School Committee members in meeting with local health experts to begin to determine these guidelines. We appreciate being included in these essential conversations with the medical experts who can guide us appropriately. We look forward to this work.

### **Will remote learning look different than it did in the Spring?**

Absolutely. We agree with the administration that remote learning needs to be full school days with synchronous classes, rich content, and full lessons. Please don't use last Spring as a basis for how you envision remote learning this year. However, we need to spend time figuring out and improving remote teaching.

### **Even if we start all-remote, will the students be able to meet teachers in person?**

Yes. We want to meet our students in person, even if we start remotely. Part of our vision for a remote start includes cohorts of students meeting teachers at scheduled outdoor spaces on school grounds via tents, on the fields, etc. Every teacher knows the importance of in-person connections with students, and we are actively looking for safe ways to enable this.

### **What about families who need to plan child care?**

Childcare is an issue so many of us are all struggling to figure out. In the new hybrid model proposed by the administration, students will be in school 4 hours a day, 2 days a week. This presents a significant childcare burden for working parents.

An all remote model presents a similar burden, though it requires an additional 8 hours per week for childcare. Sadly, the fluidity of the pandemic will likely require shifting between the various models throughout the year. The childcare challenges are apparent in either model.

### **What about all the work that has gone into the hybrid planning?**

A great deal of effort has been expended on developing a hybrid plan. This work will be essential when we return to working on the hybrid plan.

### **Doesn't the School Committee need to vote on and submit a plan to DESE by August 14th?**

Yes. We see a few options.

- The committee could incorporate this path into the plan being submitted to DESE and vote to approve this tonight. It will likely take DESE weeks to review all the plans coming in from around the state. So, we can continue our work in the meantime.
- The committee could delay the vote until the end of the week and take more time to consider this plan.
- The committee could vote on an all-remote start knowing we may be able to implement the hybrid plan at the start of the year.

These are realistic options that all seem to conform with DESE expectations and gives us the needed flexibility to continue to plan collaboratively.

### **How will parents make enrollment decisions if we don't know the plan for the opening of school?**

We don't see much of a difference in the path we are outlining. Parents either enroll students in the Remote Learning Academy or not. If not, parents understand that students could be moving back and forth between all-remote, hybrid, and all-in. So, parents opting to not enroll in the Remote Learning Academy do so with the understanding that how school will begin in September may look different than what they think it may look like as of early August.

### **You mentioned "all-in" above. Could you envision an all-in model at some point?**

Yes. However, we need to spend the limited time we have in August on the all-remote model and the hybrid model. Once we are settled into the school year, we can begin working on the all-in option.

### **Does the full faculty support this path?**

Faculty voted on this document at a meeting on Sunday, August 9th at 8 AM. 213 of about 250 faculty members voted on the path. 197 voted to support this path and 15 voted against it. 93% percent of faculty support this path.

### **Has this idea been shared with School Committee members prior to releasing this document?**

Yes. On Friday, August 7th at 9 AM, Dave Poras met with Dr. Midge Connolly and School Committee members John Henry and Danielle Black via Zoom to put forth this path. Our hope was they would have enough time prior to the 1:30 PM School Committee meeting on Friday to change directions and support this path.

### **What do you think of the district's plan titled "Weston School Reopening Plan: A Second Draft"?**

We just received the plan late Saturday evening. We appreciate the advance preview and the time and energy that the administrative team spent in preparing the lengthy document. We need time to review the document and generate questions and possible solutions.

We do want to point out that notably absent in the section on “Reopening Risk Reduction Plan” is a section on ventilation of learning spaces.

**I’m getting lost in the details. What are you proposing again?**

Yes - sorry. We answered a bunch of questions there. We want to pause work on the hybrid model while we figure out all the necessary details of the all-remote model. Then, we return to working on the hybrid model. Forcing a vote on the hybrid model on Monday runs the risk of parties becoming entrenched in positions or backed into corners.

We also don’t have time for a public debate on issues removed from the crucial work of opening schools. Rather, we need to continue to problem-solve, collaborate, and assume the best of intentions. Our path forward achieves this.

**I see. That makes sense to me. How can I support making this happen?**

Please contact Weston School Committee members and administrators to urge them to support this path forward. Below is their contact information listed on the [school website](#). Please attend the School Committee meeting Monday evening at 7. Ask to speak and share your support of this path. Share this document with other people in Weston and encourage them to do the same.

John Henry, Chair	<a href="mailto:henryj@weston.org">henryj@weston.org</a>	(781) 893-1737
Danielle Black, Vice Chair	<a href="mailto:blackd@weston.org">blackd@weston.org</a>	(781) 647-1239
Alex Cobb	<a href="mailto:cobba@weston.org">cobba@weston.org</a>	(781) 734-2678
Anita Raman	<a href="mailto:ramana@weston.org">ramana@weston.org</a>	(917) 334-1641
Rachel Stewart	<a href="mailto:stewartr@weston.org">stewartr@weston.org</a>	(919) 455-4050

Dr. Midge Connolly, Superintendent	<a href="mailto:connollym@weston.org">connollym@weston.org</a>
Dr. Kimo Carter, Assistant Superintendent	<a href="mailto:carterk@weston.org">carterk@weston.org</a>

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. The WEA Reopening Team, with the support of the full faculty, is committed to collaboration and transparency as we all navigate this difficult work.

The WEA Reopening Team

Mandy Baker, Field School  
Susan Bairstow, High School  
Katie Brown, Field School  
Michael Brown, Middle School  
Heather Burns, Field School  
Jon Eldridge, Middle School and High School  
Trevor Glode, Country School  
Leah Gordon, High School  
Corey Guerra, High School

Dana LaCava, Woodland School  
Jill Looney, Woodland School  
Janet McGrath, Middle School  
Ed McLoughlin, Middle School  
John Monz, High School  
David Poras, Middle School  
Carrie Rainville-Collins, Middle School  
Steve Ribisi, High School  
Jody Salisbury, Middle School  
Erika Sava, Woodland School  
Chris Shanahan, High School

You may contact the WEA Co-Presidents Sue Bairstow and David Poras at [wea02493@gmail.com](mailto:wea02493@gmail.com).

**Information for Community Zoom Monday at 5 PM:**

The meeting will be an open Zoom meeting. We appreciate the administration allowing us to use the school's Zoom platform for this meeting. Our understanding is that the Zoom is limited to 500 participants. Apologies in advance if we surpass that. We will record the meeting and post it as soon as possible.

After a brief introduction from Sue and Dave, we will open it up for questions. To request to ask a question, starting at 5 PM on Monday, email just your name to [wea02493@gmail.com](mailto:wea02493@gmail.com). We will call on people in the order the questions come in. We prefer to hear people ask their questions rather than us reading the questions. When we call on you, unmute yourself and ask your question. We are happy to allow for follow-up questions as needed.

**Zoom Meeting Information:**

<https://westonorg.zoom.us/j/84932128690?pwd=bTNQU0RkRC82ZmhocU5xaUk1azg4UT09>

Meeting ID: 849 3212 8690

Passcode: 6Pdi41

Phone Dial-in: 646-558-8656

If the Zoom is full, visit [weston.massteacher.org](http://weston.massteacher.org) for a link to a live stream.