

Wilton Board of Education
Message to families and community
March 23, 2020

The Board of Education appreciates and is grateful to Superintendent Smith and all Wilton Public Schools faculty and staff for their leadership, skills, and time in implementing online learning. We also thank our students and families for their support, engagement, patience, and perseverance as online learning is introduced. A special thank-you to our custodial staff and bus drivers for delivering computers and lunches where needed. The crisis efforts take coordination with the whole Town and we thank First Selectwoman Lynne Vanderslice and Director of Health Barry Bogle for their communication and consistency in coronavirus protection practices across Wilton. We thank the local press for the numerous articles, alerts, and interviews that keep us informed and up-to-date.

We went from on-site learning to on-line learning in four days, counting a weekend. Like many other districts, we are “ramping up” in phases. Last week was Phase 1 as teachers designed initial activities and lessons so that students were engaged with learning. As we begin this week (March 23 – 27), we enter Phase 2 with the goal of advancing the learning and moving forward in the curriculum.

As we heard from staff at last week’s video-conference BOE meeting, this is a complex endeavor. We are a district of 3,891 students ranging from pre-school students to students in our 18–21 year old program. Teachers’ planning involves a myriad of decisions in order to match the developmental needs of students with the demands of the curriculum content in a virtual environment. Teachers have to consider the best balance of asynchronous (students access and complete materials at their own schedule within teacher determined deadlines) and synchronous learning (students meet in real-time to engage with the teacher and material). Teachers need to assess and choose specific digital resources and tools that match their instructional goals and course content. Teachers need to design activities and assignments that are realistic and possible in a virtual environment. Teachers must decide how best to interact with students and how students can interact with each other in a secure and productive manner. Teachers must determine reasonable schedules and deadlines for the work. Special services teachers must determine appropriate resources, tools, and schedules to support, accommodate, and individualize services in a virtual world to best meet student needs as defined in approximately 600 IEPs.

In many respects, teachers and students are navigating the virtual environment together. We know it takes flexibility, creativity, and patience. We understand the increased partnership it takes with families to support and monitor students. We also emphasize the need to attend to students’ social and emotional well-being during this time. To that end, our school counseling and support staff are planning outreach and availability. On a related note, we encourage you to participate in @wpswestillcan for some smiles.

As part of the increased partnership, we need your feedback. We appreciate those who have provided feedback regarding spring break and we are working with the administration to make a decision. Moving forward, please email the Board at boe@wiltonps.org with general comments and feedback regarding online learning. To address student-specific questions or comments, please email school principals and/or teachers.

As Board members, we want to ensure good communication. Superintendent Smith and his team will continue daily updates to families and there will be regular communication with school principals. Principals and PTAs are planning virtual meetings for parents in the upcoming days.

The BOE will hold our next regularly scheduled meeting March 26 using the Zoom platform. Details will be available when the agenda is posted. We hopefully will find a way to hear public comment. However, as with regular meetings, we will not respond to individuals but instead listen and follow-up as appropriate. Also, public comment time will be limited because we want to get through the agenda in a timely manner.

As you may already know, this year's budget process will be completely different. Please know the BOE will be communicating with First Selectwoman Lynne Vanderslice, the BOS, and the BOF about the budget process during this state of emergency. The BOE will review and revise the BOE budget proposal as appropriate. We will work collaboratively with the BOS and BOF in the best interests of students and the Town. More information will be forthcoming when we know it.

As Board members, we know Wilton is fortunate to have the resources it takes to make online learning successful. Most of all, we are honored to work with outstanding staff, engaged students and supportive families through this challenging time. We appreciate everyone's collaboration and patience. We will get through this together.

Thank you.

Wilton Board of Education

Deborah Low, Chair

Glenn Hemmerle, Gretchen Jeanes, Mandi Schmauch, Jennifer Lalor, Ruth DeLuca