

April 27, 2020

Message from the Wilton Board of Education

Wilton schools have finished six weeks of online learning and, assuming schools remain closed, that means we are about half-way through the online learning for this school year. Online learning was implemented under a crisis situation with little warning and not much advance training and in spite of these challenges it has been successful. At the heart of the success are the efforts of the staff, students, and families. We have always known our faculty is outstanding, now we know they can pull off miracles. Our normally talented, enthusiastic, and engaged students are now also demonstrating great resilience and resourcefulness. Involved and supportive families are now living a daily home-school partnership.

A parent recently commented that we should look for what has gone well and the lessons we can learn from this crisis. There have been many successes. The Board recognizes the school leadership and staff for responding not only quickly but also thoughtfully and systematically. The implementation of online tools was done in phases after teacher training for each one. The school team has communicated well including regular family updates from Superintendent Smith, newsletters from principals, and video, email, and phone messages from faculty. The administration and faculty have reached out through parent forums resulting in great exchanges. Because attention to the social and emotional needs of students is paramount, counselors and teachers have checked in with students and families through phone calls, surveys, video chats, emails, morning meetings, and other tools. Our special services staff members have been outstanding in implementing state-of-the-art online support services for individual students. The staff has provided normalcy where possible - the online version of Miller/Driscoll TV is one example. The students are moving forward in the curriculum. The faculty has defined the most essential concepts for each subject area and designed activities, assignments, and assessments using an array of digital tools.

Implementing online learning has included challenges and frustrations. We are learning together as we go and we get stronger each week. It is equally important to recognize that online learning cannot replicate the traditional school setting. The pace of learning is different, assignments and assessments are different, the ways of interacting and communicating are different.

A recent example of change is the fourth quarter grading system for middle and high school students. Letter grades have been replaced with a "Met standards" and "Did not yet meet standards" type of system. We will have to continue to make changes, including end of the year ceremonies and celebrations. The likelihood is they will not be traditional which is a major disappointment. However, the Board believes that the staff, students, and families will develop creative alternatives to recognize our students and celebrate their accomplishments.

Moving to an online environment has demonstrated adaptability that we probably didn't think we had. We're finding that some of the routine worries and stressors are not as important as keeping connections with students and demonstrating support and compassion. We know that nothing works without patience and understanding.

We will need these attributes moving forward. The Board will discuss budget revisions this week - much more to come on the topic. The process of reopening school will be as challenging

and even more complex than moving to online learning. We don't have a timeline. When we know one, we will be coordinating with federal, state, and Wilton town departments about health and safety protocols and determining the impact of that guidance on our schools. Our faculty and staff are skilled at revising curriculum and assessments and connecting with students but adding the logistics of health and safety requirements will demand tremendous effort and planning. And we may have to develop multiple plans.

Rather than be overwhelmed, we will learn from what we've accomplished so far and, adapting as we go, continue our best efforts for the long haul. That's the Wilton Way.

Sincerely, Board of Education members

Deborah Low, Chair

Glenn Hemmerle, Vice Chair

Gretchen Jeanes, Secretary

Jen Lalor

Ruth DeLuca

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