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Letter to Wilton families and community

Wilton Public School Reopening Plans: Challenging, but we got this!

From Wilton Board of Education, July 12, 2020

By now you are probably aware of Connecticut's expectations and guidance for reopening schools contained in the Connecticut State Department of Education's "Advance, Adapt, Achieve" document posted online [https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Press-Room/Press-Releases/2020/Adapt-Advance-Achieve#:~:text=\(HARTFORD\)%20%2D%20The%20Connecticut%20State,the%202020%2D21%20academic%20year.](https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Press-Room/Press-Releases/2020/Adapt-Advance-Achieve#:~:text=(HARTFORD)%20%2D%20The%20Connecticut%20State,the%202020%2D21%20academic%20year.)

What will this look like in Wilton? Superintendent Smith and the district leadership team are well underway planning to reopen our schools safely for students and staff. The district, as required by the state, is planning three scenarios described in broad terms as follows:

- a. A "full open" - all students on site every day for a full day of instruction with multiple mitigation strategies to protect everyone's health and safety. These will include strategies such as wearing masks, frequent handwashing/sanitizing, cohort groups (assigning students to small groups – such as a grade-level class - who spend most of the day together), social distancing to the extent practical, limiting class size where necessary, establishing routines for lunch and recess, determining practices for riding the bus, ensuring proper air filtration and circulation measures, enhanced cleaning practices, and numerous other measures.
- b. A hybrid model – students spend time learning both onsite and online, the exact schedule to be determined. This might include different alternating groups of students attending onsite certain days and other days learning online from home.
- c. Schools closed – all learning online. This scenario was used last spring and the online learning was done under emergency conditions with little time to plan and no models to follow. If we are closed for a portion of 2020-21, we have had time to plan and determine best practices, so online learning will be more rigorous, consistent, and well-defined.

The three basic scenarios allow for adaptability. Because health and safety for staff and students are our top priority, the health data will determine which scenario to use when. The state is expected to come out with health benchmarks and of course we will consult with our local officials and health director. Plus, at least for the early part of the year, parents have the option to choose online only.

Our hope is that we are able to do the “full open.” Whether this can be achieved will depend upon what happens with the COVID-19 virus and its spread in the next few weeks. As we know, the data for Connecticut and Wilton generally have been very good. But, like we have heard a million times before, we must stay vigilant by wearing masks and practicing social distancing at all times in public.

All the scenarios require strong partnerships between staff, students, and families. We need your input. If you haven’t done so already, please complete the short survey sent out to parents by Dr. Smith on July 10. We also invite everyone to email your questions and comments anytime to boe@wiltonps.org. Please watch our upcoming virtual Board meetings - July 16 (will hear updates and draft plans so far) and July 23 (Board will vote to approve plans to submit to the state) – meeting links posted on our website with public comment via email. In addition, there is a virtual Reopening Goal One Committee on July 15 from 2 – 3:15 PM focusing on logistics and open to the public – link on website. Please also know that virtual parent forums will be scheduled in the upcoming weeks.

We commend Superintendent Smith, the leadership team, and our faculty for their work and leadership. Their deep commitment, concern, and passion to get these plans “right” comes through in every conversation and in every meeting. Their talents, professional skills, positive attitudes, and creative approaches to all the challenges and details of the situation are awe-inspiring. While there is much work left, the Board is heartened that our students are in such good hands and we are confident that the resulting plans will meet our standards for Wilton excellence.

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