



October 27, 2020

Good morning

I am emailing today to provide more context on the decision to delay full time K-5.

First and foremost, the health data trend is driving the decision. On October 4, when we internally identified November 9 as the K-5 return date, the positive test rate was 1.8%*. Just a week later, by the 15th, it was 2.5%, and I was already concerned. By the 19th, it was at 3%, and by the end of the week it was up to 4.1%. Thursday, 10/22 brought a spike in cases, putting Fairfield County in the red, as well as updated guidance from the State Department of Education on decision making regarding movement between learning models.

I recognize there are a number of sources providing state, county and town level data. Initially, the state required us to use county-level data to drive decision-making. The updated guidance allows us to take into consideration town-specific data, as well as moving from a 7-day to a 14-day data window for greater stability. This has raised the question of the impact of university-related cases on our decisions. It is important to note that many university cases are not occurring among students living on campus, but among those living in the Fairfield community. We cannot cherry-pick which cases we think might or might not impact our K-5 students, staff and their families. FPS cases to date have been the result of community spread. We have been largely successful in keeping COVID out of the schools, precisely because of the mitigation measures we have put in place and the quick response to isolate, contact trace, and quarantine. With an uptick in community spread, we need to understand that changing social distancing and bringing more students into the buildings will have an impact.

This is not a decision made lightly. I firmly believe that the best learning environment for all our students is back in school full time. I have spoken with the health department, reflected on conversations other superintendents are having with their health departments and other experts, and read information from a variety of sources. At this time, moving forward with a full return on the 9th is counter to the health trends we are seeing and the caution many are urging. I am also mindful of child care issues and wanted to be sure parents had time to make arrangements.

I have had a number of questions about a new date. What must the data show for there to be a new date for the full return? It is not a specific number. As we are concerned with the increasing trend, we will need to see a decreasing trend that demonstrates spread is under control. While nothing is certain, we do not want to be jumping from one learning model to the next with the data trends. Stability in the data provides stability in instruction.

There are secondary issues at play as well. Last week's CDC guidance on close contact now being based on the cumulative 15 minutes over 24 hours has real impacts on a full day return.

Principals are working with teachers to have them track how much time they spend working one on one or in small groups with students. This is not work that can happen effectively 6 feet apart. Providing this level of instruction becomes more difficult in a full day and with the 24 hour window it raises further concerns.

The announcement of a full return has also increased the number of staff requesting leaves. It is clear we are going to be stretched more thinly than before. We do not have substitutes. We are struggling to find elementary teachers. And we are not alone in this.

Teachers have been working overtime for weeks. They are deeply concerned, particularly about the reduction in distancing. Our priority right now is supporting them through the instructional changes needed to improve the remote learning portion of the day. This is the focus for the professional development planned for November 2 and 3.

We are not stopping planning for full return at any level. We continue working on K-5 as the priority. We appreciate the strong parent response to our request for a K-5 commitment. This important information is being used to plan the full K-5 return. We are continuing to inventory and stage furniture needed for classrooms. We will be finalizing the technology needs in the next two weeks. The replacement of the air filters will be completed by November 6. Plans for the 6-12 reboot of remote learning should be out by the end of this week.

The educational and emotional health of our students continues to be a great concern.

Take care,

Mike

Mike Cummings
Superintendent of Schools
Fairfield Public Schools

[Fairfield Health Department School COVID data](#)

[CT.gov COVID-19-Data-Tracker](#)

[CT School Learning Model Indicators](#)

*[Data Source: Fairfield Positive Test Rates](#)