

Dear Board of Education,

As transmission rates within the Hamden Public schools remains next to nothing even with the recent spikes in positive COVID 19 tests within the town, please consider keeping schools open after the thanksgiving holiday break. Having school in session has not only improved my children's mental health and well-being but has also given my family better ability to perform our work duties. My husband is an essential worker and has been in work in person since school began and I am a full time work from home mother. This hybrid in school learning has been the best we could have asked for in regards to our entire family and we would be very negatively impacted if we were told they would not be going back until after the new year. I urge you to keep schools open as long as we can and take note to the next to nothing transmission rates within our schools. Our schools have done a phenomenal job and we owe it to our children to allow them continue attending as long as possible.

Thank you for your time!

Alicia Liso

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Please do not switch back to remote learning for Hamden elementary schools from nov 23-jan 19.

I have 2 children at Spring Glen and in weighing risk/benefit and i would like them to stay in the hybrid model, attending school in person. the current system with selective cohorts and selective schools closing is working for Hamden at this time.

thank you.

Molly Persinger
74 Bedford Ave 06517

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To Whom It May Concern,

Please DO NOT switch back to remote learning for Hamden elementary schools from Nov. 23 - Jan. 19.

I have two children at Spring Glen (their primary residence is their mother's) and in weighing the risk/benefit and I would like them to stay in the hybrid model, attending school in person. They are thriving intellectually in the on-ground environment but they flounder online. The current system with SELECTIVE cohorts and SELECTIVE schools closings is working for Hamden at this time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Shawn Persinger
18 Eleanor St.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to request that the BOE reconsider approval of moving to full remote learning from 11/23/20-1/19/21. While cases across CT are increasing, our Governor has stated that school is one of the safest places to be and that cases are not coming from within the schools, but from the community and behavior outside of school. As a parent who was initially reluctant about Hamden's hybrid plan, it has been largely successful and my children as well as others are benefitting from their in person instruction time, even though it is limited. I am sure at some point a closure may be necessary, but I question whether a full 10 weeks of closure is required at this time. While safety is a priority for all right now, is there consideration for the strain that this will place on households with two working parents? I wonder if the closure is premature and will make it more difficult to reopen come January 19th. Can decisions be made in 2 week increments based on the current numbers, vs. a premature 10 week closure. Students and families that have chosen the hybrid model are thriving. What a setback to transition to full remote learning at this time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ali Gilbey
Employed full time, mother of 3 Hamden students

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Superintendent Goeler and board of education members,

I understand there will be a vote to approve moving to all distance learning starting before Thanksgiving and lasting until mid-January. I also understand this is being pushed by the teacher's union. How are you letting one group of people so highly influence your decision? Has any thought been given to how detrimental this will be to the children in our schools? Have you looked at the numbers? My understanding is there have been limited cases vs. the number of students and staff we have in the district. What is the basis for this approval aside from receiving pressure from one group? This mob mentality cannot be tolerated nor should you succumb to it. There is still a high percentage of families who want to partake in in-person learning. I have a son who has some special needs and he isn't getting the support he needs due to the pandemic and the hybrid learning model so he's sure to not receive the necessary services during full remote learning (this is based on our experiences with last year's remote learning debacle). This seems to be another instance where leaders in this town are incapable of having backbone and making a tough decision. By approving this request you are also infringing the parents free will to choose for their children to attend school in person. Teachers are very important people as they help shape today's youth for the future...they are essential workers. They have the free will to decide not to teach as parents do to keep their children out of school. But the parents who choose to send their children to school shouldn't have to suffer. Let those teachers who would like to opt out do so. There are others who would relish the opportunity to jump in (who are passionate and qualified). Approving this vote is a big mistake and will cause damage to these children that will take far longer to overcome. It doesn't help having a hypocrite for a mayor who favors this yet sends his son to a private

school with an in person option. This town is and has been full of hypocrisy for many years and is now going over the top. Your decision to approve this request is not only meritless but spineless.

Sincerely,

Anthony Inzero

Hamden resident for 38 years

Please do not shut down all Hamden schools. The agenda does defat why the proposal is in the agenda, but if at all possible PLEASE continue the current approach of contact tracing and quarantining selected members of the school community. We've done a great job so far! Kids need in person learning, and parents need to be able to work.

Thank you,
Sharon Brune
123 Wakefield

Dear Board of Education Members,

I am writing regarding Superintendent Goehler's anticipated recommendation to the Hamden BOE to move students to remote learning from November 23-January 19, 2021.

I understand the likely motivation behind moving to a district-wide remote learning platform as we head into the holidays. I am sure that the risk of potential exposures from families gathering was high on the list in determining that remote learning was a better option during these times. However, I do think that Hamden has done an amazing job of keeping the schools open and running the last two months. Our kids are so happy. It is hard to put into words the change we saw in our son after only his first few days back at school in September. He's thriving. Cases are few, and have been contained – and I think that Hamden has what it takes to keep them contained, even during these upcoming months.

Moving back to a district-wide fully-remote model – even if it's just limited to two months – will have enormous detrimental effects, disproportionately on families with younger children. That is why, if you are thinking about voting to approve Superintendent Goehler's recommendation, I urge you to consider this other option: keeping just the elementary schools open. There are several reasons that I think that this would be a worthwhile option to consider.

First, from a practical standpoint, studies have shown that younger children are far less likely to spread COVID than young adults and adults.

Second, unlike their older peers, younger children cannot sit at home unsupervised. Moving to a remote learning model requires an adult to be home with the child(ren) in the household. In families with working parents, that adult will either be forced to be home from work, or will need to hire someone

from outside the family to watch the child, putting the family at a higher risk of exposure. There are also likely to be families unable to afford either of those options, and the children will be left alone.

Third, it is much harder for younger children to adapt to remote learning, and they are far less self-sufficient than their older peers. They also benefit less from that format than they do from in-person learning.

Finally, the loss of socialization for younger children takes a huge toll.

To the extent that staff shortage is the prime motivating factor in the Superintendent's proposal to close the schools, consider that closing the middle and high school would free up staff to rotate in to the elementary schools, to the extent that quarantines or family obligations require elementary-school staff to stay home.

I think that keeping the younger kids in school in November, December, and January would have incalculable benefits for our kids, with far less risk than keeping the older kids in school. Although I would first ask you to keep the schools the way they are, I think that keeping the elementary schools open is a worthwhile option to consider.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Sara Gross Kaczmarek

123 Santa Fe Avenue

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Good afternoon,

As a working parent of two students who attend Bear Path school the idea of moving to remote learning for almost two months is extremely upsetting and frustrating. Our school has done a fabulous job keeping our students safe and they have been following all of the rules and guidelines that the principal and teacher have set. There have been zero positive cases at this point. These kids need to be in school. When they are home for their remote learning day they are given busy work and typically finish within an hour. This can not be something that happens for two months when there is no direct reason for this change. If our school has a number of positive cases, then I could see the reason behind that. But to simply make the decision ahead of any cases seems unfair.

The idea that parents could ask for two months off from work is an incredible task to ask them. While I understand the magnitude of this pandemic I do not believe they should be moved to remote learning with zero positive cases. What I have appreciated most about the system that Hamden has in place is that when one school closes, the rest carry on. It should be the same in this situation. It is not fair to these kids who have been doing so well at school and who have followed ALL of the rules.

The plan makes sense for a college community, not for an elementary one.

These kids deserve better. They have earned it. Please consider as you have to this point, closing school by school, contact tracing and shutting down certain grades as necessary.

Thank you.

Anna Patel

Dear Board Members,

I write to ask you to deny the Superintendent's recommendation to move schools to full distance learning through January. To some, remote learning is an inconvenience but to others it is an insurmountable obstacle that impacts the social, emotional, physical, and financial wellbeing of the families in the community.

With the holidays approaching it can be assumed that part of the impetus behind this shift is the safety and security of the staff and students. Is it possible that instead of closing, we require negative COVID tests prior to returning? The teachers and staff of our schools have been amazing and the last thing I want is someone to get COVID. Transmission rates have been low in the schools and I hope that is because the families, administrators, teachers, staff, and students have been conscientious and thorough in our endeavours to keep each other safe.

As a working parent, a person who has had COVID, and a member of the community I am asking you to please allow the schools to stay open for 2 reasons- 1) to allow the students to safely socialize during the dreary winter months and 2) to continue the continuity of their educational experience.

Thank you,

Jordan Jefferson

Dear Board of Education Members and Hamden Central Office Personnel,

I hope this letter finds you in great health and spirits. I was very surprised to hear (second-hand) that there is a recommendation from the superintendent of schools to move to a remote learning model from 11/23/2020 - 1/17/2021. If not for a colleague sharing this information with me, I would have never known, and I imagine there are a great many families in the same situation. Was this recommendation communicated to families for feedback?

While I realize the reason for this recommendation likely has more to do with staffing issues than student health, may I please urge the board to consider this only for the secondary schools and not the elementary level students. I say this as a parent of three Hamden students, including two at the high

school, so I am not suggesting something that would only serve my best interests. Many elementary level students, including my first-grader, did not do well with remote learning in the Spring, and like many other parents, I have seen a decline in his academic growth and progress as a result. This is not to take away from the work the school staff did in March, but simply stating that emergency teaching does not replace live, in-person instruction. To recommend going remote from 11/23 - 1/17 is putting the needs of the district ahead of the needs of the students that the district is entrusted to serve. Also, and this is a real consideration, how are working families supposed to supervise elementary aged students while they are remote learning? We are already paying significant fees to programs like Right at School to cover morning costs, afternoon costs, and one day of distance learning. How much more of a burden is the district prepared to put on the backs of Hamden families?

Things to carefully consider:

- 1.) Is the prospect of further regression of elementary aged students something the district will accept?
- 2.) What interventions does the district have in place to support students who have fallen behind, and what additional interventions will there be to support students who may fall even further behind if K-6 students go remote for over a month?
- 3.) Where is the guarantee that going remote will address the staffing issue the district is facing when we return to school in January?
- 4.) What support does the district have to offer families who are working and can not stay home to supervise younger students while they learn remotely?
- 5.) What will the remote learning look and sound like? Will it be live synchronous teaching or Google Classroom postings? The latter is and continues to be highly ineffective for younger students who need support with the technology, including accessing and submitting assignments.

I kindly ask the board to carefully consider the impact a remote learning model will have on our younger students. The older students, who are better independent learners, may be able to weather the decision, but I am very concerned about the academic, social, and emotional impact this will have on 5-12 year olds who have already had to endure a significant interruption to their learning since March 2020.

Sincerely,

Mario Ciccarini

1243 W Woods Rd.

Hamden, CT 06518

To whom it may concern at the BoE,

As a parent of a 9 year old child that is currently thriving with the way school is working in hybrid, and my child also has an IEP, I would like to say that children of different educational needs in our special education program should have the ability to remain in person for as long as possible. I'm not sure what this would look like for the higher functioning students (such as my own), or for students with greater needs than ours. Since March, there have been very few benefits for me as a parent and him as a child with little to no live instruction. I've had to, like many many other adults with kids living through this, have had to change my entire work schedule, and re-learn a lot of elementary school information to be my child's teacher, too. All of our teachers are working SO hard, harder than ever, and I still don't feel that remote is actually furthering anything educational for us. At home, we're also working harder than ever to stay on task and maintain education. While we do have all of the infrastructure in place to remain remote in Hamden, most children do not have a special place in their homes to be set up and ready for learning in a remote educational situation. That brings me back to children in our schools that have IEPs and need the in person instruction to continue to maintain their specific needs within the guidelines of their plans.

Please take the time to consider allowing these amazing students to remain in person for as long as possible to help them achieve their goals in their plans.

Thank you,

Myla Wilson

Mom of 4th grader at Dunbar, and sophomore at HCLC

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I would like to provide a public comment for the Board of Education meeting tomorrow night, in response to the proposal to move to distance learning from November 23, 2020 to January 19, 2021.

I have a child in elementary school and a toddler at home. My 1st grader has been doing much better academically and mentally since she has started going back to school She loves it and looks forward to it every day. I'm not surprised. As a psychologist who specializes in childhood trauma, this pandemic has been traumatic for everyone, even if they have been safe, and we know that a sense of normalcy and control can alleviate many post-traumatic symptoms. Although the teachers are amazing and have pulled off Herculean efforts doing both distance and hybrid teaching, the distance learning model often has a negative impact both academically and in terms of mental health. It also exacerbates the inequities already present for many, many students.

I fully understand the concerns and wanting to be proactive, and the teachers and administrators have been amazing. We have done such an amazing job so far!! Two months is a LONG time for a young child, and as the weather gets colder and the days get shorter, they will have even more restrictions on being able to get out of the house and do anything. This will be detrimental for them, there is no question. Since there has been no transmission in schools, perhaps shortening this remote learning

period would make it easier on children (and parents), such that it doesn't start until mid-December leading into the December break, and then goes until January 19th. Many of us have not make any Thanksgiving plans with family b/c school is our priority, and we will be left with no Thanksgiving plans and then no school as well. Moreover, this is short notice for those of us who need to find childcare to work. Providing us with more time to find those resources would help families immensely.

Thank you,

Melissa L. Whitson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Psychology

Licensed Psychologist

135 Ardmore St.

Hamden, CT 06517

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Dear members of the Hamden Board of Education,

I am writing in regards to agenda item 7(c), the Superintendent's recommendation to move to a distance learning model.

As a parent and a fellow educator, I ask that you do everything in your power to maintain some in-person learning time for students who want that. Full distance learning creates harm and hardship for too many children and families.

The safety measures you have in place have worked exceedingly well (bravo and thank you!). Although COVID rates are on the rise, and although the holidays may increase the spread, school could very well still be the safest place for Hamden's young people.

If staffing is the big hurdle, I urge you to think creatively about how to solve that problem. One idea would be to engage Hamden High School graduates who are home from college. This diverse group of young people might be eager to fill their idle time as classroom monitors (where the teacher joins via video), activity leaders, or even substitute teachers. They have spent this fall learning how to safely live and learn during the pandemic, and they will provide comfort and inspiration to the younger students in the schools they once attended.

Thank you for your time and service, especially during these extraordinary times.

Sincerely,

Makaela Kingsley

64 Harmon Street, Hamden

Dear Hamden BOE members and community,

We understand that the district is considering whether it should move school to a full-virtual mode once more, mostly due to staff restrictions. We know this is a challenge and a difficult decision, but consideration of the costs and benefits for Hamden's elementary school children and their families clearly favors continuing to provide in-person learning. We propose that even if it is necessary to move the middle and/or high schools to full distance learning, the elementary schools should still have an in-person option.

Considering all of the current evidence, The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Research recommends that school districts **“make every effort to prioritize reopening with an emphasis on providing in-person instruction for students in kindergarten-grade 5 as well as those students with special needs who might be best served by in-person instruction”**¹. The World Health Organization (WHO) also notes that **“closures disrupt school-based services such as immunization, school meals, mental health and psychosocial support, and can cause anxiety due to loss of peer interaction and disrupted routines”** and suggests that **“closure of schools should be considered only if there is no other alternative”**. **More caution is necessary regarding COVID-19 transmission in secondary/high schools and older students compared to primary/elementary schools”**². Research has shown that there is very little transmission of COVID-19 in pre-schools and elementary schools, as long as behavioral practices such as those implemented in Hamden are followed^{3, 4, 5}. So, the costs of keeping in-person learning in the elementary schools, in terms of risk of infection, is low. On the other side of the ledger, there are overwhelming benefits, especially for low income and minority families:

1. **Childcare:** If schools move to full remote learning, more parents in the community will have to leave their jobs and stay at home to care for the children. This is especially true for parents of young children. Some parents do not have the option of working from home and will have to decide whether to keep their job and the income it brings in or help their children with school. It has been shown that this problem carries a larger burden to low income families, minorities, and women^{6, 7} and thus will tend to increase the already unacceptable gender, racial, and income gaps in our community.
2. **Focused learning:** As parents of a kindergarten student at Church Street School, we know that despite our best efforts to engage her in learning from home, remote learning is nowhere near as productive as in-person instruction. The effectiveness of remote learning is affected by many factors, such as the parents' need to juggle working from home (if that is even an option) with remote-learning, other childcare responsibilities, and the availability of distractions at home. Also, the remote lessons offer less content and cannot be adequately tailored to each student's needs. Hamden's young students' progress will be stunted by full remote learning.
3. **Child development and health:** Children need structured activities and routines, which are part of a regular school day. Children also benefit from social interactions beyond their close family. These interactions with teachers and classmates are needed for emotional and social development. In-person school also models healthy behaviors that families can continue to enforce at home. This includes healthy eating habits, social distancing, hand washing, and mask wearing. When schools are open,

students have access to nutritional programs and school-based clinics, which greatly benefit low income families who otherwise lack access to health care. Research shows that children participating in prolonged remote learning have increased levels of obesity due to the lack of a healthy meals and because children tend to do more sedentary activities when they are confined to the home (e.g. screen time). This again affects disproportionately low-income families and minorities ^{1,2,8,9,10}. Furthermore, in-person classes can also alleviate parental burnout, a chronic condition resulting from high levels of parenting-related stress due to a mismatch between the demands of parenting and the resources available for parents to meet those demands, which could lead to child abuse and neglect¹¹.

Current scientific evidence indicates that elementary school children are at low risk to contract COVID-19 in school settings^{4,12-14}. Thus, based on the items listed above, and the low infection risk of keeping the elementary school children at school, we believe that the benefits greatly outweigh the risks at this moment. If the infection rates continue to skyrocket and tilt the balance in the other direction, a new assessment would have to be made.

Sincerely,

Andrea Gloria-Soria and Nathan Havill, Church St., Hamden

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing in response to hearing that Hamden Public Schools is requesting to be approved for full distance learning starting as early as November 23, 2020. This is concerning to me for a number of reasons.

First, my three young children are at Spring Glen School where there has not been a Covid case (staff or student) as of yet. As the Superintendent has mentioned often, the other school cases were community based and not transferred in schools. Schools have not been proven to be a spreading atmosphere of this virus as long as we maintain social distancing and masks (which Hamden does so well). I am concerned about the rash decision to go full remote when the metrics do not support this decision. If staffing is the issue, then decisions can be made by school, by grade, etc. This is not a systemic problem with a one-size fits all solution.

I currently work as a Grade 5 teacher in a district that is back FULL TIME, FULL CAPACITY with strict rules of cohorting, mask wearing, and social distancing. We are prepared to go full remote if the time calls for it, but we would never make that call when the metrics do not support the decision. As an educator, I know students learn best in school. There is no doubt that elementary students should stay in school as they need structure, routine, social interaction with peers and live learning to thrive.

Another consideration is the working family. Hamden is a town with two working family members for the most part. How can families support their livelihood? As an educator, how can I meet the needs of my students when I am forced to take off three days a week to care for my children at home? Again, if the numbers supported this decision, then the state would mandate a shut down.

I urge you, from one educator to another...reconsider this decision. I will fully support remote learning if the metrics in our schools support that. But going to remote learning in two weeks is not in the best interest of the children. We can do better. We must do better.

Thanks

Kelly Sobocinski

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing with comments and concerns regarding the Superintendent's proposal to move all Hamden schools to fully remote from the period of 11/23/20 until 1/19/21.

I have worked as a clinical social worker in the school setting for over 15 years, and it is in my professional capacity that I note that socially and emotionally, it is best for children to be in school. Prolonged periods of distance learning is particularly harmful to the most vulnerable children: the youngest, the exceptional learners (ELL, special services, etc) who need support, the children whose parents struggle to provide supervision during working hours. It is right and appropriate to close schools due to infection rates, but to close when health indicators aren't there yet is harmful and burdensome.

I understand that there may be challenges in maintaining appropriate staffing levels. The teaching community has been doing a wonderful job, and I'm 100% behind them! I am curious about what thoughtful and creative possible solutions have been kicked around to address this particular problem.

Other members of the community have made a number of important points about this issue, including the following:

- Utilize the young adults home from college as a backup workforce,
- Keep elementary and middle schools open and reallocating staff from the high school to work at the open schools,
- Support teachers with backup childcare in the event that their children's schools close,
- Plan on a shorter period of closer that allows for more preparation time: for example mid-December to mid-January,

Note: if the public schools close, then the private and parochial schools should close too. The Mayor should only back suggestions that he is willing to implement for his own child as well.

Thank you for your time! Laura Davidson, 53 Santa Fe Ave, Hamden, CT 06517

To whom it may concern,

I write to in regards the upcoming BOE meeting, where will apparently be discussed the proposal to return Hamden public schools to full remote learning until late January. As the parent of two children in the Hamden public schools (Spring Glen Elementary, and Hamden Middle), I write to implore you not to take this step. I fully understand that staffing issues have created a difficult situation for the schools, but for working parents of young children full remote learning is an unmitigated personal, education, financial, and emotional disaster. It will lead to disproportionate harm to the most vulnerable children in our community and will similarly disproportionately harm working women who, we know, are dropping out of the work force at unequal rates to manage remote learning for their younger children.

I understand that the issue of staffing creates difficulties that cannot be fully controlled. Be this as it may, even in a worst-case scenario there are at least some other options. If all Hamden public schools cannot be kept open for in person learning, then at the very lease please find a way to ensure that the elementary schools remain open. Unsupervised remote learning for elementary school children is - and everyone knows this - not really remove school. It amounts to assisted home schooling and requires nearly full-time supervision from a parent if it there is to be any real education at all. It should be possible to reallocate staff to preserve in-person elementary school operations even if middle- and high-school must go remote. You have a duty and obligation to Hamden families to consider this option as well.

Thank you for your consideration and your hard work,

Eric Greene, 109 Santa Fe Avenue, Hamden

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If the schools go to full remote learning as an essential worker where will I bring my child? I have no vacation or sick time left due to the remote learning last school year. Will the town be reimbursing parents the cost of childcare? As a single parent, I have already had to reduce my hours due to the shortened school day. I understand that you are having staffing issues, but why should our children suffer due to a human resources issue. I am as always grateful to the teachers and everyone that works in the schools, they are all essential workers. That being said, we are all paid to do a job no matter the circumstances. I cannot call out of work or work from home because there is a risk, I will contract COVID19. We all take that risk walking out our front door every day.

Also, the current remote learning curriculum is abysmal. My child tested positive before school began and did remote learning for the first two weeks of school. The internet in the school rarely worked, which was supposedly fixed but there are still major issues and 35 – 45 minutes total online with the teacher daily is insufficient time for an elementary school student. The expectation that parents will again be responsible for teaching our children the full curriculum is unacceptable. I will of course support my child and help him in any way I can, but I am not an elementary school teacher. Our children need to stay in school and will suffer if you go to full remote learning for the proposed two months.

Regards, Kathleen Kaliscak

Hello PTA,

I think it would be great to move all students to distance learning for several reasons.

First is for the teachers. It is an incredible tax on teachers to risk their health and safety to be in the classroom is an issue of dignity and respect for them, and moving to distance learning would reflect our value of their work. Another is that they have a harrowing balancing act between the in-person students and distance learning students is very hard for them, and any way we can help by streamlining would be a gift of respect to their work.

Second, it is for the students. It is very hard for the distance learning and in-person students to balance between each other their schedules and accomplishing tasks. Because of the burden on teachers, both groups of students struggle, and to streamline so that teachers can focus on the students and the feedback between these two high-demand tasks would benefit the students.

Third, it would benefit families, particularly working parents, to have a streamlined, student-focused school situation so that parents can have reduction in complication to help their students participate and engage in school and education as much as possible.

Warm regards, Sarah Dunn

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To Whom It May Concern,

I wanted to make sure our voice was heard prior to tonight's BOE meeting specifically regarding the decision related to transitioning from Hybrid to Remote for the balance of the year following the Thanksgiving holiday. While I understand the resourcing issues that are challenging for the district during this unprecedented time, I would ask that extra consideration be given to solutions for our youngest students. I have a first grader at SPG and we just transitioned from full remote to in person/hybrid in early October. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to the SPG community, staff and teachers for all that they do. My son is a different and happier person since returning back to school. He skips home every day!!! I have always said a skipping child is the sign of a happy child. That said, I cannot stress enough how important it is for the youngest children to have the opportunity for socialization and live interaction with their teacher. Virtual is fine and manageable 1-2 days a week (and the teachers are amazing btw), however there is no real substitute for live interaction especially during this crucial developmental stage.

If pushed to move to a remote model again, can the BOE at least consider an option to keep K-2 or up to 3 in a hybrid model? There has to be some creative options that can be considered.

Does it have to be all grades or can't a solution be developed for our youngest students. Further if a remote model must be considered why for so long? Can't other time frames or on/off weeks be considered? I really really hope the BOE does not move in a remote model direction it really will be devastating to our sons learning and will potentially force us to consider other options outside of The

Hamden public school district.
Thank you for hearing our concerns.
Sincerely,
Elizabeth Ranfone

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On going to distance learning from Thanksgiving to mid January.

I think we should wait assuming we have the staffing to wait.

This is a hard time of year and going virtual will just make it harder. It will be rougher on the kids as they get a little crazy this time of year when they can't play outside as much and as it gets closer to holidays.

It will make it easier to travel which I don't think is encouraged this year. But some will travel so maybe the 2 weeks after break is a good idea.

I'm working home so it is less of a hardship for our family than others, and I think we all expect it to happen for a short time. But thanksgiving to mid January is so long, I worry the process my kids have made since they went back will diminish. I don't know if you have any elementary kids, but someone has to be on top of them the whole time. They just don't know what to do if they don't know what to do. Meaning someone can't work to make virtual school happen. There is only so much the teachers can do.

Misha, Spring Glen Hamden

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Hello-First of all, I want to thank the teachers, principals, and BOE for making in-person learning possible so far this school year. It was vital for my children, both to reignite their love of learning and their mental health. So, thank you!

I am adding my voice to those who may be writing in to see if the schools might not plan for a two month closure. Would one month be enough? I realize that the primary issue is staffing and not transmission, so maybe there are concerns driving the two month closure that aren't clear to me. If we must go to distance learning, I hope teachers will be supported to do all they can to keep kids feeling engaged and connected--via synchronous learning when possible and community building efforts. My kids suffered in the spring, especially my 2nd grader, who cried herself to sleep every night for weeks because she missed her teacher and her friends.

I also hope that we--as a region--are studying where transmission is actually occurring (which doesn't appear to be in classrooms), and focusing on stopping or drastically altering those activities.

Thank you--Kaari Pitkin (parent of two Spring Glen students)

Dear Board of Education,

Thank you for guiding our children through these early months of school with such consummate care and skill. It has meant the world to them to be there in the building, in the presence of their teachers and classmates. If Covid has taught us anything about schooling, it's that we were beginning to undervalue what a difference in-person learning among a group of others makes to a child. Last spring, it was alarming how little our children learned after they'd both been learning so well before March, and how alienating distanced learning was for them. They both regressed in all sorts of ways—missed their teachers and friends, seemed somehow to absorb information differently, without the thrilled verve of truly engaged students. I understand that none of this is probably any news to you, that your hopes are to keep schools as open as possible during this completely unusual time. Still, two months of closure when transmission within the schools isn't high does seem extreme. I hope you'll find ways to make the time away much less. Best wishes Nicholas Dawidoff

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To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing in regards to the news that the Superintendent has proposed that all Hamden schools go remote for two months during the holidays.

I object that this was brought to the public's attention only two days before the BOE meeting. I also object to the fact that we have not yet been provided the Superintendent and BOE's RATIONALE for this decision, which would help the public be better informed as we react to this news.

Two months is a long time to close schools. My kindergartener does not do well with remote schooling and my husband and I, both working parents, do not really have time to spend the day doing school work with him. His participation in school for those two months will likely only be pro-forma, given the other constraints in our lives. I imagine other children will likely not receive a good remote education over these two months, not because of what is being delivered by the schools, but because of the many challenges of remote schooling for families and children of certain age groups.

School transmissions do NOT seem to be occurring in Hamden, nor do schools appear to be driving rising rates anywhere in the world. Obviously, rates ARE going up. But closing schools instead of restaurants and nail salons in order to mitigate or prevent a second wave of COVID seems deeply unfair, and not based in science.

I have heard that this may be a staffing issue-- that teachers traveling out of state for the holidays will need to quarantine for two weeks, which leads straight into the next holiday, then the next. This seems like a very real obstacle. But I wonder if this rationale maybe means that the decision should be made school by school, after asking the teachers there what their holiday plans are?

We need more information. This is a huge step to take without having provided the public more information, well in advance of the vote. Best, Raquel Otheguy

Hello,

I'm the parent of a 7th grader at HMS and a 4th grader at Ridge Hill. The reason for writing is to share one aspect of our positive experience at HMS. My son is very lucky I've learned to be in the resource room. He is a hybrid student. In the beginning, I was in communication with him several times a day as he settled in. I think that was key. We talk if there are problems or concerns and she is the one who investigates and speaks to his teachers. There are lots of "heads up" in both directions. We are also lucky because the resource room is his last period of the day, so he goes over the day's classwork with her and she makes sure everything is complete. She let's me know if he isn't. Today he's doing his work from home and there are no zooms. He's currently trying to improve his social studies and math grades, so she wrote to me to make sure he completes certain worksheets. I work for her. She works for me. We're working together. It's an excellent system.

I'm writing to ask that when we go full distance (and I believe we should soon) every family has at least the opportunity to have help akin to having a resource room teacher. I've noticed that he is having an easier time than many of his peers and a more positive experience. He may disagree because he gets away with less, but that's the idea. His work is more likely to be done. He's doing well academically. He's less stressed and so am I. I think while kids are learning from home all of them need a person dedicated to their experience and a point person for their families. Some will need more than others, but I believe all should be personally offered.

It's my opinion that the schools need to be closed and we may decide to pull them out before Thanksgiving. Don't make me be the bad guy, close the schools. However, when you do close them, please give every parent a partner in the school.

Thank you, Sarah Bolitzer

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Good Evening Hamden Board of Education,

I am writing this e-mail to express my deep concern about the potential decision to move to a remote learning format effective Nov 23, 2020.

I am the parent of a fourth-grade student who receives special education services. He has been placed on remote learning for a total of 20 days thus far this year, despite my family's decision to have him attend school for in person learning 4 days a week. Families were given a choice to select remote learning or in person learning based on their level of comfort given the circumstances. Unilaterally moving to a remote format removes that option for a family to choose what is best for their child. Why is it necessary to make this decision based on information that is not yet known? Several districts have dealt with Covid cases and have not resulted to placing entire schools or their districts on remote learning. In addition, this decision places an extreme hardship on working families to arrange for a remote learning setting for an extended period of time.

I respectfully ask the Board to consider the educational, social, and financial implications this decision would have on students and families of school age children. There are many scheduling options available other than placing the entire district on remote learning.

Respectfully,

Brian Gordon

80 Robinwood Road

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Hello,

I'm the parent of a 7th grader at HMS and a 4th grader at Ridge Hill. The reason for writing is to share one aspect of our positive experience at HMS. My son is very lucky I've learned to be in the resource room. He is a hybrid student. In the beginning, I was in communication with him several times a day as he settled in. I think that was key. We talk if there are problems or concerns and she is the one who investigates and speaks to his teachers. There are lots of "heads up" in both directions. We are also lucky because the resource room is his last period of the day, so he goes over the day's classwork with her and she makes sure everything is complete. She let's me know if he isn't. Today he's doing his work from home and there are no zooms. He's currently trying to improve his social studies and math grades, so she wrote to me to make sure he completes certain worksheets. I work for her. She works for me. We're working together. It's an excellent system.

I'm writing to ask that when we go full distance (and I believe we should soon) every family has at least the opportunity to have help akin to having a resource room teacher. I've noticed that he is having an easier time than many of his peers and a more positive experience. He may disagree because he gets away with less, but that's the idea. His work is more likely to be done. He's doing well academically. He's less stressed and so am I. I think while kids are learning from home all of them need a person dedicated to their experience and a point person for their families. Some will need more than others, but I believe all should be personally offered.

It's my opinion that the schools need to be closed and we may decide to pull them out before Thanksgiving. Don't make me be the bad guy, close the schools. However, when you do close them, please give every parent a partner in the school.

Thank you, Sarah Bolitzer

Good Evening,

My name is Justin Boucher. I live at 167 Dessa Drive, and I have two sons at Spring Glen School, where (as I write this) I am aware of no cases of Covid-19 since the start of the school year. I wish to comment regarding tonight's action item " Approval of Superintendent's recommendation to move students to a remote learning platform starting on November 23rd and returning on January 19, 2021."

I would like to begin by saying that though I was skeptical about the ways in which Hamden crafted its hybrid plan, I have been pleased with its implementation. My sons are happy at school. They are learning at school. And given that to my knowledge there has been no in school transmission, I feel they are safe at school. It has been an adjustment to be sure, but it is a testament to the hard work of teachers and administrators that this model feels like school to my kids. I am invested in keeping it going for as many students as possible, as long as it is safe to do so.

Tonight I hope to raise some questions about the necessity of making this choice at this time, the equity concerns inherent in the district's implementation of the hybrid/distance model and the communications mechanisms that the district uses.

I have read through the website, drafts of the reopening plan, and the frequently asked questions. I have found little there to explain the necessity of this choice at this time. The CDC guidance listed on the schools' website merely states that between 25 and 50 cases/ 100,000 we should intervene in the ways in which we have already intervened (masks, cleaning, social distancing). What are the numbers that are driving this decision? Why 2 weeks from now? What do we imagine will be different on January 19th? And what will the metrics be for returning to school?

This raises a related series of questions that concern the district's commitment to equity. I understand that some schools in the district have been forced to close due to staffing concerns in quarantine. Is there no way to reconsider the staffing distribution around town to account for this? Should Spring Glen Or West Woods pick up another cohort if Ridge Hill is forced to close? I understand that cohorting may prevent any kind of short term staff reallocation but does that really leave us with only the option of reverting to distance learning? To that end, what changes have been made to distance learning to ensure equitable outcomes for students across the district? Is there a series of academic metrics the administration will be using to assess the success of distance learning? What is the cycle of review for those metrics?

This brings me to my final concern about communication. Parents are left with so many questions in these moments, and base levels of trust are lower than they could be. I have become accustomed to receiving daily calls from the district. It frustrates me that a change of this magnitude could come before the board with only the minimum legally required notification (Three tabs into the website, on the second page of a pdf). I deeply appreciated one of the board members drawing the community's attention to the agenda item. But the district's chosen method of communication breeds mistrust. Unlike discussions of redistricting, which were heralded by months of public discussion, changes to schools in Covid have been largely decided behind closed doors. The board has gone on to

approve those changes with little amendment, leaving us to believe that each change was already a forgone conclusion, and to fear that our voice is not welcome.

We all recognize that we are in an emergency situation, and that change can come at a moment's notice. In the spring there were clear and compelling reasons to shut down the entire district. It has been clear for some time that going remote might be a necessity again. As a teacher and a parent I simply don't see that need at this time. Making this choice, out of anything less than the greatest necessity, has such momentous consequences for the learning community, it deserves a robust public discussion based in available data (i.e. infection rates, in school transmission rates, teacher absence, and fiscal cost). And I fear that when decisions of this magnitude are brought to the board in this way, discussion will be less robust, less public and garner less support than it should.

Thank you for your time, and for all your hard work.

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To: Board of Education, Superintendent Goeler, Assistant Superintendent Melillo, HR Director Gary Highsmith

From: Diane Marinaro, HEA President

I am well aware of the Board of Education's right to make decisions regarding the school schedule and instructional modality. It goes without saying, that this unprecedented time has changed public education as we know it. With those changes come uncertainty and concerns for teachers, students and all staff as to the direction we are going in, knowing there are no definitive answers as to what the future will bring.

The CT positivity rate has continued to be troubling to all. Schools across the state, and in Hamden have documented cases and have had to quarantine individuals, groups or an entire school building in order to keep others safe and healthy. Other situations are impacting us that we cannot control such as school/daycare closures and then teachers having no one to care for their own child when it happens; other districts are changing their school schedules and teachers once again do not have someone to care for their own children. No matter what is done, cases continue to occur and the absenteeism of staff and students is growing. On many days there are not enough teachers available in a building to cover classes. Students then report to another teacher's classroom or to a large room to do work. Students are being exposed to others they would not normally be in contact with as are the teachers. The cost for covering classes is adding to the Board's budget and it is no one's fault, but it is a reality. There is a lack of instructional continuity due to the unique circumstances in which we are living and teaching. I applaud the district's handling of COVID cases and quarantining those who need to be, but taking precautions is not enough. We need more assurances.

I understand and appreciate the concerns of closing down the entire district. Doing so would impact families and work responsibilities for many. However, when I weigh in the risks and costs both academically, monetarily, and especially physically and mentally, I believe the Board needs to discuss

and examine the possibility of closing in-person instruction beginning with the Thanksgiving holiday and participate in full distance learning until January. This would be for 17.5 school days, of which one day is a scheduled early dismissal day for all teachers for professional development and two days which are early dismissal days for elementary for parent conferences. Flu season is fast approaching, on top of the spread of COVID-19 and the reality that people will gather in large groups for the holidays. I am sure many people have not seen family and friends in many months and what better time to reconnect than the holidays? Is it worth the risk? We cannot control what is going on outside of the schools and the contacts people have, but we will be on the receiving end of being at further risk of exposure as the uncertainty and controls are out of our purview.

On a personal note, I know several friends and family who have been struck by the COVID virus. They tell me they would not wish it on anyone. According to the experts, the growing positivity numbers and hospitalizations will continue to rise. Why should we add to those numbers, when everyone can be kept safer at home? If a plan is put in place now, the transition would be smooth and the community would be made aware of the direction the Board has chosen to take and families will have time to make changes to their schedules. Most universities are choosing this course of action to protect their communities and to hopefully lessen the spread. Isn't it better to be proactive then have to react when we are suddenly forced to close down the district as we did in March, giving no time for anyone to prepare. I know this is an incredibly difficult decision to make but am hopeful that you will at least take this proposal into consideration.

I would be happy to speak to you at any time. I wish you all well.

Stay safe-

Diane

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I am sure the BOE is aware of the substantive concerns that come with the distance-learning platform (e.g. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/10/6/21504195/covid-schools-learning-loss-projections-nwea-credo>).

While there is debate around the extent of learning loss, newer data are emerging that the degree of learning loss is related to the home environment that parents and other guardians can provide, especially at elementary school levels. If there is a parent/ guardian available to work directly with the child in a sustained manner, there can actually be learning improvements. However, in the majority of cases parents/ guardians have jobs and/or other care responsibilities, or they lack the teaching skills to guide a child.

Overall then, there are well-founded and now demonstrated repercussions on educational attainment for elementary school children in particular of adopting a distance learning model. What is recommended are closures of other entities (e.g. in-restaurant dining) that are admittedly out of the control of the BOE. Yet the BOE has the capacity to advocate and decide to keep in-person learning open

for as much time as possible, even if the hours are reduced further from those currently offered in Hamden.

If you do decide to go to a distance-learning platform, then other measures - such as intensive 1-on-1 tutoring - should be made available to all students because such interventions are being shown to combat some of the most egregious learning loss. But, if the decision is made to have extended distance learning without interventions, then you make the decision in full knowledge of pronounced learning loss for children in the Hamden Public School system.

I appreciate that you are in a strongly sub-optimal position. But you have the power to make decisions that have significant consequences for children in Hamden. Additional interventions such as tutoring, some in-person learning, and testing to gauge where interventions are needed, are responsible, informed actions to take if you find yourself in a position to go to distance learning. I sincerely hope that you implement such interventions to help ensure positive futures for Hamden children.

Mark Bradford (parent of children in the HPS system)

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Greetings to you all,

I understand that there is a desire by HPS to have all the students move to fully virtual schooling starting the Monday before Thanksgiving. My initial response to this news was anger, annoyance, and distress.

I was angry because I only found out this was being considered due to my mom hearing it on the news. Why is it that the superintendent's office can be so on top of communicating to all HPS families that there are new positive Covid cases in the schools but not give those same families a heads up to a potential drastic change for school arrangements? The annoyance and distress go hand in hand because now I very likely need to find alternate child care arrangements as I cannot leave my 3rd grader home alone. If this was a short term isolation for a possible Covid exposure my boss would be willing to work with me to stay home but to do so for almost two months is out of the question. I am lucky that I have family who can help watch my son. But this also means he will be living with them part time due to distance.

And ours is not the only family that is going to struggle to make this work. There are a lot of working families that will find this change to be very difficult to manage. Especially since many are not being told to stay home from work the way we were in the spring.

At the end of the day though my anger, annoyance and distress are not the important part. What is important is what is best for the students AND staff who are in our school buildings. I will trust that the superintendent and BoE would have done the smart thing and consulted not just the medical professionals but also the staff who work in our schools before they vote to move forward with this decision. I will also trust that any decision made is going to be the best interest of the staff and students. Because no matter what I may want to happen I will always support our teachers, staff, and students.

Best, Betsy Kearney D'Amico Church Street parent 33 Plains Rd

My name is Rob Lawton. I live at 161 Dessa Drive and have two children at Spring Glen School. I was frustrated to learn about potentially moving to full distance learning on short notice from informal sources like Facebook and neighbors. Please do a better job of providing all parents with meaningful opportunities to provide input on huge changes like this. The superintendent's email that arrived today, on the date of the board meeting, is better than silence and legal notice via board agenda only, but even this email does not bother to explain how everyone receiving it can submit public comments. And it only came out after comments started coming in expressing bewilderment that you would consider something like this with no outreach to parents. This sure seems like a last minute email slipped in as a talking point to help fend off reasonable criticism about lack of transparency, and lack of opportunity for meaningful input by parents. Please show parents more respect, and consider costs and benefits parents face as part of your decision making. You are just not doing that right now, and you need to do that to do your job competently. If you can't handle the job, please step aside and let others who are competent take over.

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To the Members of the Board:

As parents of a kindergartener at Spring Glen Elementary, we strongly oppose the Superintendent's recommendation to move all students to a remote learning platform starting on November 23rd and returning on January 19, 2021. It is vitally important that the Board continues in-person learning for our children, and we ask that the Board reject the Superintendent's recommendation and give the community more time to assess the situation and develop other alternatives before taking this drastic action.

Given the level of community commitment to preserving some semblance of in-person education, the Superintendent's abrupt proposal to move all students to remote learning is gut-wrenching. At the beginning of this school year, everyone with an interest in preserving some version of in-person learning was asked to make sacrifices to ensure that our children could attend school. And everyone--parents, teachers, staff, and especially our children--has made those sacrifices, to great effect. The risk-mitigation strategies that were put in place before school opened have so far been largely successful. The professional and community efforts to provide in-person learning despite these challenging circumstances has been commendable.

The sacrifices we made to our jobs, our family, and even our health, so that this could work were not made lightly. We are not ignorant of the risks of COVID. The pandemic impacted every part of our lives this year. We lived through the first surge in COVID cases this Spring, just as we lived through the first school shut-downs. The collective harms of both the surge and the shut-downs are well-documented. Hybrid learning, with limited remote education, may be a necessary evil. However, remote learning is no alternative to in-person instruction. It carries risks that, as parents, scare us more than COVID. See "*Are We Losing a Generation of Children to Remote Learning?*" NY Times, Nov. 6, 2020 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/06/nyregion/nyc-remote-learning.html>), PDF attached. The differences in outcomes are not abstract: we see them every week for the days our daughter gets to go

to school versus the day she is forced to stay home and learn remotely. That is why, knowing what we know, we will send our daughter to school whenever we can.

If continuing in-person learning means the Board must ask more of us, then ask. But do not make this decision now. We learned of the Superintendent's recommendation only yesterday, through word-of-mouth. The way it was added on this agenda, without notice or explanation, is completely at odds with the level of transparency and reflection that we have come to expect from working with the school system in managing our child's education through this pandemic. This is a serious decision that, before it is made, demands careful consideration of other alternatives and the impact it will have on the families in this community. Based on how it is being presented today, that has not been done. Therefore, we ask the Board to reject the Superintendent's recommendation at this time.

Sincerely, Blake Sullivan & Marsha Movshovich, 27 Spring Garden St

Dear Hamden Board of Ed,

I ask that you take into consideration that elementary schools in Hamden stay on the Hybrid Schedule for many reasons. While I know that it has been a large focus getting our children comfortable using technology incase we needed to go remote, I still see it as an overall problem. Our kids need to be in school, with their friends and teachers, learning. I'm not oblivious to what is going on in Hamden with spiking numbers and Quinnipiac students being under a 14 day quarantine but as you've repeatedly said in your calls and emails when there's an incident in school it didn't start there and there hasn't been spread because of masks and social distancing.

For the sake of our students and teachers remaining in the classroom we all need to do our part. I think that it's important for people to understand that our actions have consequences. If you do not feel well or if you become exposed to someone who tests positive, it is important to notify the school and get tested and follow quarantine. We need to know that holidays are not going to look the same this year and if we want to get back to normal sooner than later, we must do our part. It shouldn't be the school board that has to be concerned about what families are going to do over the holidays, that the only way you feel you can control the situation is to put remote learning in place for 10 weeks. You have put our students in cohorts and that is working! If there has been an issue in an elementary school, the teachers and students that have been exposed have been notified and been told the next steps to follow. Why not continue with the plan you set out?

I know the middle school and high school have been forced into remote learning some days because of staffing issues, I haven't heard this being an issue in the elementary schools. I do think in general that older kids have a better understanding of distance learning and using a computer all the time. I worry that our elementary school children will fall further behind because they need the in person guidance of their teachers. I watched my daughter doing distance learning one day last week and repeatedly saying her teachers name with her hand up. She had a question that never got answered because how can a teacher possibly hear her over 14 other students on a zoom call.

Lets not do a disservice to our children, they are already falling behind and the window to get them caught up will be closed with 10 weeks of distance learning. Why not take it week by week and if necessary, close. I don't think its fair for our children to go remote when surrounding towns aren't considering the same steps. I think we can do better, and our children deserve better. Shutting down the schools will have a ripple affect on many aspects of families lives.

Sincerely, Teresa Considine, 85 Thompson Street, Hamden CT 06518

Dear members of the Board of Education,

I hope that you are staying well. I want to thank the district and each Hamden educator for what you have been able to provide to Hamden students over the past 8 weeks of hybrid school. Having the opportunity to meet teachers in-person, to be with friends, and to be part of the larger school community has been a vital and stabilizing resource to children during these uncertain times.

Given staffing and other concerns that may limit our district's ability to remain open for in-person learning, I ask that the Board prioritize the needs of those students for whom distance learning would be most detrimental, including some special education students and our youngest learners.

Kindergarteners should not be learning through a screen. Some children, because of their special education needs, just simply cannot access their education remotely. I hope that the district will find a way to continue to afford these children with at least some opportunities for in-person learning, even in the context of broader closures. Please also consider, as I know you will, the needs of single parents, essential workers, and families who cannot afford to keep their children home during school closures.

Thank you and stay well.

Best, Megan Goslin, Haverford St

Good afternoon,

I strongly request that the board vote against any recommendation to pause in-person school between Thanksgiving and January 19. The first couple months of school have demonstrated that there is no transmission happening in the buildings and cases are only present through outside community transmission. Cancelling school in this window may only serve to encourage families to see extended family and friends for holidays, thus exacerbating the rise of COVID in Connecticut, while keeping school in session will encourage families to make smart and safe decisions that allow their child to remain at school. Furthermore, families will be unduly taxed with childcare and supervising learning, thus limiting their ability to work, have steady income, and provide for their families.

If it is safe to stay in school (which we have successfully demonstrated thus far), then students should remain in school. When, and only when, there is cause to believe students and teachers are contracting COVID from the school, should schools be closed.

Respectfully, Margo Nicolson, parent at Spring Glen Elementary, 28 Thornton St, Hamden 06517

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Good Evening,

I want to first thank the BOE, the District, and all of the Staff of Hamden Public Schools for making these last few months successful for our children.

Moving to full remote learning seems to be the inevitable outcome of the rising levels of COVID cases in our area. As we consider making this decision, I would like to urge the BOE members to consider the following:

Are we providing our educators with the adequate technology they need to be successful? Have all children been provided with the support, both emotional and physical, needed to be successful in a remote setting? Is there an opportunity to leave a central school open and staffed for children who may need more support? Will teachers, many of whom have school age children of their own, be able to make a choice about teaching remotely, or will they be required to be in their classroom?

Finally, I urge our community as a whole to make the necessary changes needed to keep our children safe. If we could put a stop to the rising COVID cases, we could ensure that our schools would be able to remain open, which has to be a priority moving forward.

Thank you, Diana Theriault, 690 Mountain Road

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Jessica Savik
Sky View Circle

In advance of tonight's board meeting, I'd like to address the proposal to move all students to remote learning from November 23 through January 19th.

As someone who is extremely concerned about the spread of COVID-19, I can appreciate the desire to err on the side of caution and keep students and teachers remote during this time.

However, we have been quite fortunate in Hamden to have only a few cases pop-up across the district. To my understanding, all of which have originated from outside the schools. A few questions:

1. Have we considered only having the middle and high school students fully remote during this time? (Remote learning is nearly impossible for younger grades, especially Kindergarten).
2. Have we considered that keeping kids home during this time, could promote increased socialization outside of school (where recommended protocols being not as strictly adhered to)?

(I.e. it could actually make things worse).

3. Have we considered a bare bones approach that at least keeps the youngest elementary students in person? Kindergarten through at least 2nd grade will be quite challenging for most kids at this age?

4. If there is no convincing the board, as comments seem to fall on deaf ears, what will the curriculum look like for kids (especially the younger grades)? Will they move to fully zoom lead classes? Our Monday remote day for kindergarten at bear path is self-guided. One day a week, this is okay... but everyday for two months will be a major set back and a major burden to parents.

5. If the school board is coordinating with after school programs to help with daycare needs during this time, doesn't that defeat the purpose of staying remote for 2 months? And if you are going to do this, then why bother going remote - risk will remain the same.

6. Bear Path has not had a single incident of COVID, why close for schools like these who have maintained low/no incidents? Elementary schools are competed better than the middle and high schools... again I refer to questions 1 & 3.

Thank you, Jessica Savik, (Children in grades K & 7)

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This note is in regards to the possible closure of Hamden Public Schools through the holiday season.

I commend the board's handling of the virus thus far. We have felt confident and comfortable in letting our son Miles attend Spring Glen Elementary this year. This is why I strongly advocate for keeping the schools open through the holiday season.

Throughout last spring and summer, without the anchor of school, my son was lost. He needed the knowledge of teachers, friendship and play, and the diversity of peers. My husband and I tried to create a fun, learning place for him, but as I am sure you all know, nothing can replace a traditional, school environment. We were wary, yet excited to send him to school in September. He has been thrilled! He is young. It doesn't matter that school may look and feel different this year. Miles is simply happy to return, and my husband and I have been thrilled to see him grow, learn, and change, each day. Any trepidation that we may have had fell away.

We are a lucky family. I think of all of the parents who TRULY need a place for their child to go to for a few hours each day, a place where they learn, can eat a meal and are safe. The disruption and difficulties these families will experience are hard to imagine. I wonder what they will do.

I implore the board not to shut down, to think of alternatives. This is a very difficult time for us all. For the well-being of all the children, and their parents too, there has to be another way.

Thank you, Adrienne Kane, mother of Miles Kane, a kindergartener at Spring Glen Elementary

My name is Lindsay Lawton and I live at 161 Dessa Drive. I am writing to express my profound disappointment in our superintendent - and in this board if you support his attitude toward the working families of this town.

The fact that his plan to switch to fully remote learning was not made public is outrageous. If the district is able to communicate with all families about bus delays and to alert us to isolated cases of COVID-19 at district schools, there is **NO EXCUSE for the failure of communication here.** Superintendent Goeler did not even have the courtesy to explain how we might comment on his plan in his email **this afternoon!** His entire approach to this crisis has demonstrated that he has no respect for the Hamden families he is meant to serve - and who pay his salary.

Aside from the secretive way that the superintendent has pursued this, I urge you to consider two important facts before making a final decision:

- 1) [According to our own Education Commissioner](#), schools are not driving COVID cases!
- 2) Going fully remote for ALL schools when some have not had even a single case is going to **disproportionately burden the most vulnerable members of our community.**

When the schools closed last spring, the Hamden district made a lot of noise about "being in this together" and calling for us to all share the burden as a community. The superintendent's actions leading up to this meeting have shown that he certainly is NOT in it with us. Please show Hamden's families that you ARE.

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I would like to weigh in concerning the Superintendents recommendation to close HPS from Nov 23rd till Jan 19th.

This length of school closure is ridiculous and will cause more harm than benefit to the students within the Hamden School system. We have been repeatedly told that our schools are not driving the increase in COVID numbers but now we are being told that going remote for 2 months is the best option. Why not close for the week following Thanksgiving if some kind of buffer is needed, how about the town shut down all sports instead, which seems to me to be common sense as they are bigger spreaders of the illness?

My child was happy to return to school, and even with the new world of masks and cohorts she enjoys getting to be in school with her friends and hated having to participate in zoom meeting etc.

To go ahead with this plan would be a huge mistake and way more detrimental than beneficial to our children.

B Hasson
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I'm hearing many complaints from students that many times they log into their classes remotely, only to have attendance taken and assignments provided. And then they log off, and are left to complete their work on their own. The struggle and frustration is affecting all students, not just the academically challenged ones.

If the district moves to a full distance learning platform, how to you plan to keep students engaged with their teachers and fellow classmates, without making them feel as though they are on their own to “teach themselves”?

Thank you,

Julia Desroches
32 North Woods Road
203-494-4106

Dear Hamden BOE Members,

I want to thank you for the extensive planning that you all did before opening the schools. Because of your plan, we’ve had very few closures and not much disruptions. Those that have become sick, I wish you speedy recovery.

I am grateful to the staff and teachers of the schools for their dedication and their hard work. It can not be easy trying to teach both in-class and distance learners at the same time. We walk to our elementary school after school hours, which is officially 3:45pm but find our teachers, staff and principal there well beyond 5pm!

We thank you for caring for our children. Our Principal even took the time to drop off materials in our mailbox!

I wish you all good health. Stay safe.

Regards,
Mubarra Elahee
Mother of Bear Path, HMS & HHS children

Dear Members of the Board,

We are writing as a small group of concerned employees of the Hamden Board of Education. As a collective, we work in a Special Education IIC classroom. It has been brought to our attention that there is a possibility that as a condition of the District closing from 11/23-1/19 that the Special Education students and therefore Staff will continue to meet in person, not virtually.

Originally we believed that the BOE would approve the recommended closure from 11/23-1/19 due to staffing concerns, however after reading an article where administrators were

quoted saying one of the reasons for closure was due to a concern about increased COVID cases and our town being in the red alert zone has us concerned as employees.

We agree that school is the best place for children. Especially those that receive Special Education services, however it is concerning that the district would put the life of the whole Special Education team at risk. Closing from 11/23-1/19 allows for families to quarantine after potential family interactions during both Thanksgiving and the Winter Holiday Break, however by keeping open the IIC classrooms you are removing this protection to your employees and students. How, does this reflect the idea that "We are all in this together!" ?

We all have families, some with health considerations and some responsible for elderly care. We ask that you give us the same consideration as the rest of the district and know that we are committed to doing what's best for all. Working virtually will not diminish our commitment to these kids and their needs.

Thank you for considering all of us in your decision.

Casey Arenberg, Lisa Devine
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Hamden BoE,

First and foremost, I would like to commend the open communication from schools and Central Office regarding active COVID-19 cases in our school district. I have been extremely impressed with the management of cases and lack of spread in our schools. That is a testament to the work you, the superintendent, and the individual schools did at the beginning of the year as well as students on-going efforts to follow these protocols.

Upon hearing about the consideration of closing schools for two MONTHS, I would urge you to reconsider and look for alternatives. We have been doing great with our schools, and our efforts have worked! I cannot stress that enough. Are there not stricter protocols that could be put in place that would keep our children and teachers safe during this time? I have two elementary age children in two different Hamden schools, and it is important for them to leave the house and go to school in person. I would understand if schools need to be closed for a week after holidays, but simply closing for two whole months when efforts have been paying off seems unwise.

Sincerely,

Joe Grandelski, 112 Pleasant Dr
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I just wanted to add to my previous email that the newsletters and emails and the phone calls, even though a lot at times, have been very helpful and informative.

Mubarra

Dear Board Members,

Please see the below email. I endorse its contents and ask you to reconsider going to remote only learning. I have 2 children in spring glen.

Thank you,

Brian Gavigan

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I recently saw on Facebook that Hamden is considering shifting to all virtual learning from Thanksgiving to MLK Day. I thought it was a great idea! Less of an impact on student health since the phone calls seem to come fast and furious about positive COVID results and potential exposures in kids and staff. Letting everyone stay home and keep to their spheres is a great way to stem the spread and allow families to feel more secure about potentially getting together for the holidays, especially with cases rising dramatically statewide.

But then I spoke with a friend this morning who is a para in a special ed classroom and she told me that the plan seems to be to keep the special ed classrooms open for students and teachers. As A parent of a former Hamden SE student (mainstreamed), I have to ask- Are you all out of your minds? How can you say this is about protecting teachers, students, and residents if the possibility of exposure in school still exists? On top of that, how do you think it's okay to treat special ed students differently than the rest of the school population? Are these kids not worthy of the same care and protection that you are affording the rest of the school population? Are these extraordinary educators not worthy of the same treatment the rest of the teachers are getting? How can you say you're protecting all with half a plan? Time to do some serious rethinking, or to prepare for a lawsuit when the first student gets infected, as you'll be subjecting these kids to an higher risk of Covid that you didn't even consider exposing the general population to. How is that fair? How is that right?

Marci Petterson

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Dear Board of Education Members,

I'm writing regarding the agenda item to move to full distance learning for November 23rd 2020 through January 19th 2021. I understand the rationale behind this proposal, and there are many pros and cons to consider besides the impact on staffing and operations. I have spoken previously regarding the many disadvantages of fully remote education, such as the social isolation that leads to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, as well as the cognitive burnout of being on a computer and online for hours at end, not to mention the fact that many students at all levels of K-12 education have extreme difficulty learning via remote instruction, and as a result they can easily fall behind. I know as a college professor that my own college students also suffer from these same difficulties with remote education. So, you can imagine how much more difficult it can be for K-12 students who have not yet fully developed attention and self-regulation skills to learn via this mode of instruction.

That said, I am not writing to argue for or against the proposal, as the decision to move to fully remote will likely be made regardless of the input from parents and community members. I am writing because I am the Co-Director of the SCSU Reading Evaluation And Development of Skills (R.E.A.D.S.) Lab. We have recently partnered with Breakthrough Church in Hamden to assist with their community tutoring program focused on helping students in Hamden and New Haven with hybrid and remote learning. Our R.E.A.D.S. Lab is providing remote one-on-one reading intervention to K-2 students to help combat 'COVID Slide' (significant learning loss experienced by the pivot to remote education in March 2020, especially for at-risk students). Our lab has worked previously with Ridge Hill School, Church Street School, and Helen Street School. Even if Hamden Public Schools close for hybrid instruction, I hope that local churches and after-care programs will continue to remain open through this public health crisis so that children can get the assistance they need to succeed in school. Our R.E.A.D.S. Lab is available to help through Breakthrough Church's The Circle community tutoring program or to form new partnerships with after-school programs who are committed to helping students during this most difficult time.

Sincerely,

Cheryl C. Durwin

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Dear Members of the Board,

We are writing as concerned staff of the Hamden Board of Education. As a collective, we work at Wintergreen School in the Special Education IIC classrooms. It has been brought to our attention, through the district website and the news, that there is a possibility that as a condition of the District closing 11/29-1/19 that the Special Education students and staff will continue to meet in person, not virtually.

Originally we believed that the BOE would approve the recommended closure from 11/23-1/19 due to staffing concerns, however after reading an article where administrators were quoted saying one of the reasons for closure was due to a concern about increased COVID cases and our town being in the red alert zone. It is alarming that the district would put the health and safety of the whole Special Education team at risk. Safety regarding COVID is the primary reason we feel concerned with staying in-person for both teachers and the students. Many of the students in our program aren't able to wear masks properly, have limited understanding of social distancing and have emerging hygiene skills. Our students are also unable to communicate when they don't feel well.

Closing from 11/23-1/19 allows for families to quarantine after potential family interactions during both Thanksgiving and the Winter Holiday Break, however by keeping open the IIC classrooms you are removing this protection to your employees and students. We all have families, some with health considerations and some responsible for elderly care, and are

concerned about potentially exposing our family members to the virus during this heightened risk period.

We request that we are given equitable protection that is consistent with the rest of the district's plan. We also request to be part of the discussion before making your final decision. We are committed to doing what's best for our students and teaching remotely will not diminish our commitment to these kids and their unique and diverse needs.

Thank you for considering all of us and for supporting our belief that "we are all in this together".

The IIC Special Education Teachers
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Regarding tonight's proposal to go to full remote learning beginning on November 23, 2020:

- I am a parent of a HMS 8th grade student who is enrolled in hybrid learning.
- Adequate notice was not given to the parents about this agenda item.
- Parents constantly receive emails and phone messages from the district for everything including positive cases, food distribution dates, books and computers, but did not receive a phone message about this meeting; and only some received an email at 12:55pm. The parents still have not been called. This is simply unacceptable. Where is the transparency?
- The disease is not spreading from student to student. Governor Lamont just stated: the classroom is one of the safest places to be.
- HMS, specifically due to it's design, is laid out to separate pods of students and keep them safe.
- State Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona stated just yesterday that Connecticut is not at a point where schools need to close.
- All members of the Hamden school system, including teachers, must comply with the social distancing rules that we are asking are students and their families to comply with. Where is the accountability?
- The educational needs of the students of this town are once again not being met because of the wishes of the CEA. I am sure the CEA was aware that this item was on the agenda. Many parents found out about it on the news this morning.
- If the State of Connecticut and the State Education Commissioner don't believe we need to close now, then why are we doing so? We need to all ask that question. And we all deserve a straight answer.

Thank you.

Caroline Fargeorge
15 Leatherman Trail
Hamden, Ct 06518
Parent of a HMS student

Dear Superintendent Goeler and the Board of Education,

My name is Katie Ryan. I am a Spring Glen parent and taught at Hamden Middle School for 8 years. You will hear a lot of angry people tonight, a lot of uninformed suggestions for how you could do your job better, and a lot of completely unrealistic ideas about how schools run.

No one knows better than administrators, teachers and school staff how much kids need to be in school. No one is more aware of the social emotional benefits for students than the people who work with them every day.

As a current Hamden parent and a former Hamden teacher, I know you have wrestled with this decision. I would like to thank you for knowing when a situation has become unmanageable. This conclusion was not unexpected.

I support this decision 100% because I am smart enough and humble enough to know that I don't have all the information. Neither do any of the other people who will comment here tonight. You do. Just because someone pays taxes, it doesn't mean they know the first thing about running a classroom, a school, or a district. Mr. Goeler and Mr. Highsmith, you are telling us that you literally do not have the people to staff the buildings. The answer is not to shorten the quarantine period or bring more random people into the building, as some of the self-appointed educational and public health experts on town Facebook pages have proposed.

The people who we trust to run our schools are telling us that they can no longer operate buildings in a way that keeps our children safe, and people are pushing back and asking him to cut corners, make the standards a little less stringent? Members of the Board of Education, I trust you to stand your ground and keep our children safe. If that means that schools must close, I support you.

Katie Ryan, 8 Ingram Street

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Dear Hamden Board of Education:

I appreciate the fact that the BOE is attempting to be proactive with addressing this pandemic. Should the Hamden BOE vote to shut-down school, please understand that this decision is made unilaterally without a mandate from the Governor. Please understand that most parents who have their children in school work full time, and are barely able to have childcare with the current hybrid schedule. As parents of young children, our options for childcare are scarce and at this time there is no support from the Governor to address this concern.

The option for the Right at School Program seems counterintuitive to the intention of shutting down schools to help minimize the spread of Covid-19. That is, the Right at School option now exposes our students to a whole new cohort, as opposed to keeping the same groups that have been established since the beginning of this school year.

Additionally, what is the purpose of a temporary hiatus from in-person school? A vaccine has yet to be confirmed and distributed, and won't be for quite some time. When the children return to school in January 2021, they return with the same concern... contracting Covid-19. If teachers are facing their own childcare problems, what is going to change for them in January 2021? Nothing... the same concern. One of my fears is that we will continue to go back and forth between in-person and on-line learning, breaking the continuity of services for our children.

It seems a better option to assess each school individually and determine if they need to be moved to full on-line learning. It seems a better option to offer teachers support, which could mean hiring more teachers or teacher's aides. A decision to temporarily shut down schools, district wide, seems only to further complicate our children's education and fails to reduce our children's chances of being exposed to Covid-19. I implore the BOE to vote against temporarily shutting down the Hamden School District.

Thank you for your time,

Greg Bivens, Hamden, CT

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Public Hearing Comment November 10 2020,

I understand that the superintendent and his team will present a plan to the BOE this evening to propose full-distance learning platform for K-12 beginning on November 23, 2020 and ending on January 19, 2021.

I am the mother of a high school senior at Hamden High School and both my children have been the proud recipients of a Hamden public education.

I would like to make some recommendations to help support our students through this time:

- Require every middle and high school teacher to check in with each of their students individually over phone or zoom once a month during this time.
- Require every elementary school teacher to check in with each of their students individually over phone or zoom at least once a week during this time.
- Require each high school guidance counselors to check in individually with each of their students individually over phone or zoom at least once for grades 9-11 and bi-weekly for seniors who are completing their college applications.
- Plan several virtual gathering for students as part of the school community. Set up online tutoring sessions, movies, show old plays, sports, and performances where they can see their older siblings and neighbors, remember better times, and know they will be here soon. Please commit to providing at least one virtual social event weekly

- Post on the Hamden public schools website where students and parents can go for mental help support.

thank you for all you do.

Michele Helou

114 Woodlawn Street

Hamden, CT 06517