

Draft

Westborough Public Schools

Return to School 2020-2021

Proposal on Procedures and Planning



July 22, 2020

School Committee Update

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Introduction

Working collaboratively with planning teams and leveraging feedback from faculty and families, Westborough is developing a return to school plan. Our planning has centered on:

- Sustaining Relationships
- Supporting Equity
- Ensuring Health & Safety
- Prioritizing Emotional Wellness
- Providing Robust Learning

This memo outlines our draft proposal as we still await guidance from the state and as we monitor the COVID-19 infection rates in Massachusetts. On July 31 the district will submit an initial plan to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and a final plan following the vote of the School Committee at their August 12 meeting.

A primary goal of this report is to provide preliminary information to families and faculty so they can continue to thoughtfully plan for a return to school.

Following the guidance and expectations of the DESE's [Initial Fall Reopening Guidance](#) we are preparing three models:

- **A remote model** in case we can not bring any students back into the buildings
- **A hybrid model** that allows us to bring about 50 percent of the students back into the building on any given day
- **A full return model** where all students return to school

The state has also required districts to create stand-alone remote programs for students who will not or can not participate in the hybrid or in-person models.

Between now and August 12 our district planning and feedback teams will complete final details regarding each of the models, as well as safety protocols and other planning details. We continue to have confidence that we will return with the best possible plan in place for Westborough students and faculty.

Returning to In-Person Schooling

Throughout this coming school year, as the transmission rates of COVID-19 change, our recommended model of instruction may also change. We will rely on the local board of health, the medical community, DESE, and family and staff feedback to determine which model we will be using at a given time.

As the table below shows, each model has its pros and cons. The remote model will be used if the transmission rates are so high as to make it impossible to safely bring any students and staff into the buildings. The hybrid model will be used when it is safe to bring only about half of the students back into the building on a given day. The full return model will be used when it is safe to bring all of the students and staff back into the building.

Model	Features	Pros	Cons
Full Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 18-25 students per classroom• 3' minimum distancing• Students in school every day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most effective teaching and learning model.• Most effective model for taking care of our children's mental health.• Provides maximum time for students to work face-to-face with teachers and peers.• Best model for families trying to maintain regular work schedules and manage household needs, including childcare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hardest model to contain the transmission of COVID-19 because of the challenges of maintaining social distancing when the schools are fully occupied.• Transportation costs• Requires extensive reconfiguration of spaces to meet guidelines, and these space changes impact programs and teaching.
Hybrid	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9-12 students per classroom• '6 feet distancing• Students in school only 2 or 3 days a	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second most effective teaching and learning model.• Second most effective model for taking care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less face-to-face learning time than full return.• Parents need to find child care for

	week	<p>of our children's mental health.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some face-to-face time with teachers and peers. • Much higher quality teaching and learning than a fully remote model. • Social distancing is much easier to maintain than under the full return model. • Better model for families trying to maintain regular work schedules and manage household needs, including childcare. 	<p>days when children are not in school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents need to adjust work schedules.
Remote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students at home every day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best model to contain the transmission of COVID-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less effective teaching and learning model. • Less effective model for taking care of our children's mental health. • No face-to-face contact with peers or teachers. • Difficult model for families trying to maintain regular work schedules and manage household needs, including childcare.

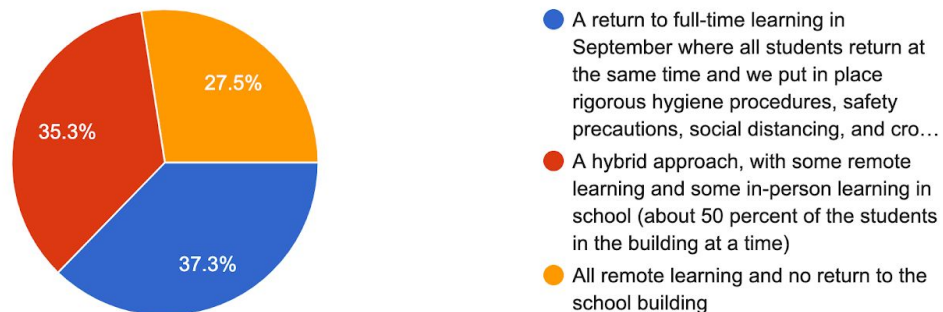
Parent and Staff Feedback

Survey data reveal that most of our families and staff are not in favor of a full return or in favor of remaining fully remote. Specifically, 37 percent of families support a full return, 35 percent support a hybrid, and 28 percent support remaining fully remote. This means that 72 percent of our families support some kind of in-person return (full return or hybrid return). Our staff feel similarly about a full return. Almost 60 percent of them report that they would be “extremely nervous” if they had to work under the full return model. Even with the hybrid model, 38 percent of them report they would be “extremely nervous” teaching under this model.

Parent Data

Given what we know today about COVID-19, if you could choose, what would you prefer for this child?

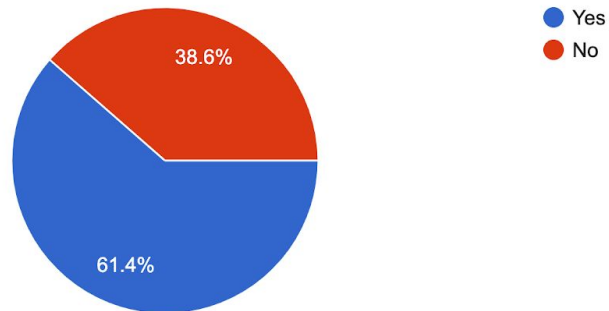
1,980 responses



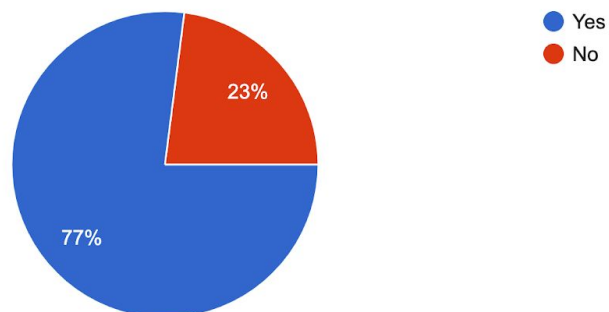
Given what we know today about COVID-19, if you could choose, what would you prefer for this child?

Grade Last Year	Hybrid	Full Return	All Remote
PK	30%	38%	32%
K	31%	40%	30%
1	32%	31%	37%
2	20%	35%	45%
3	35%	39%	26%
4	30%	38%	32%
5	34%	41%	24%
6	30%	28%	41%
7	34%	28%	39%
8	47%	38%	16%
9	37%	42%	21%
10	41%	39%	20%
11	44%	43%	13%
12	25%	63%	13%
Average	35%	37%	28%

Given what you know today about COVID-19, will you send this child to school in September if we return to full-time learning where all students return to school with appropriate safety measures, social distancing and crowd control plans?
1,958 responses



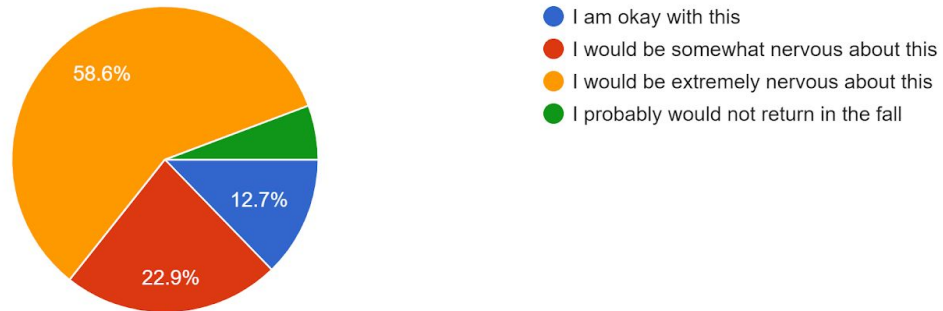
Given what you know today about COVID-19, will you send this child to school in September if we use a hybrid approach, with some remote learning and some students in the building at a time?
1,963 responses



Staff Data

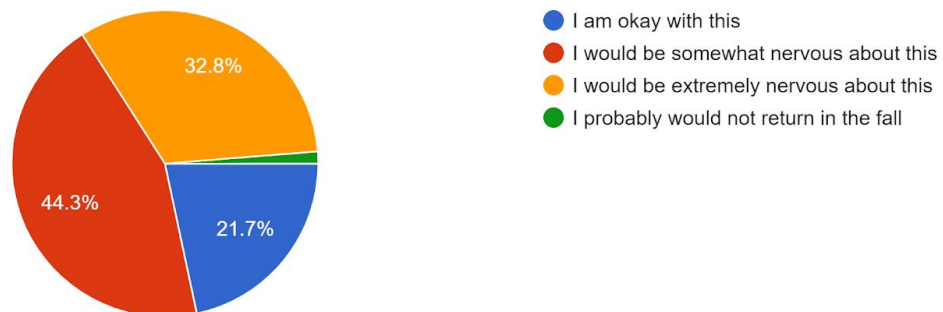
Given what you know today about COVID-19, how would you feel if in September we returned to full-time learning where all students return at the same time, with safety precautions, social distancing and crowd control plans?

314 responses



Given what you know today about COVID-19, how would you feel if we used a hybrid approach, with some remote learning and some in-person learning (some of the students in the building at a time)?

314 responses



Proposed Plan for the Fall

The leadership team is recommending that Westborough Public Schools begin the school year using a hybrid approach. We are basing our recommendations on the current COVID-19 transmission rates, the opinions of medical experts, the state educational guidance, and the views of our families and our staff. Bringing students into the school will allow the students to establish bonds with their teachers and peers. Creating these bonds

in the fall is especially important given that COVID-19 transmission rates could go up and that we might need to switch back to a fully remote model. Teaching and learning remotely without ever having any in-person connection is something that we would like to avoid. Not having seen students for in-person instruction in over six months escalates concerns about needing to assess both their emotional and academic wellbeing.

Cohorts

Our hybrid approach will divide our students into two cohorts, Navy and Cardinal. On the days Navy goes to school, Cardinal stays home. On the days Cardinal goes to school, Navy stays home. We will make sure that siblings will be in the same cohort.

Which days each of the groups will go to school is the subject of much debate across the state. Some districts are opting for a one week on and one week off model. While this has some advantages in terms of potentially reducing the COVID-19 transmission rates, this model has serious teaching and learning limitations. The longer students are away from school, the harder it is to keep them engaged and connected to their teachers and their learning. For this reason, we feel it is imperative that our students go to school at least two times a week, and that the number of days in between attending school and being at home be kept to a minimum.

The model that would achieve the most consistent connection with schools would be an every other day model. The problem with every other day is that there will not be a consistent set of days when childcare is needed. This occurs because there are an odd number of days in a week, and because there are holidays that fall during weekdays. Thus, an every other day approach would mean that every week, the child will be attending school on a different day. To avoid this inconsistency, we are proposing that Cardinal goes to school on Mondays and Wednesdays, Navy goes to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and they alternate Fridays. We are also proposing that either a substantial number or all Fridays be early release days so that staff can engage in professional development and planning. The number of Fridays and a clearly delineated calendar to help families plan will be provided in the final August 12th report.

Professional Development on Fridays

Numerous educational experts agree or acknowledge that effectively using the hybrid and fully remote models requires a significant shift in instructional delivery. Because of the complexity of teaching under either a hybrid or fully remote model, we are recommending that most or every Friday be an early release this school year. This will allow teachers, curriculum coordinators, and administrators to work together to make adjustments and enhancements to our curriculum and to the delivery of instruction.

The need to significantly adjust our instructional approach when using the hybrid model is made by Justin Reich of the MIT Teaching Systems Lab, and Jal Mehta from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. They argue in [Imagining September](#) that a shift in our instructional approach is imperative because “a body of evidence has emerged that in large-scale implementations of online learning, average students do less well than in comparable face-to-face settings. In for-profit colleges, in virtual high schools, and in community colleges, students in online settings typically have lower GPAs and higher failure rates than students in face-to-face settings. This ‘online penalty’ tends not to affect the most high achieving students; students who will do fine anywhere do fine online. But the online penalty is often more severe for our least well served students: students with low prior achievement, ethnic and racial minorities, and students experiencing poverty.”

John Spencer and AJ Juliani note in their book, [A Beginner’s Guide to Shifting Toward Online and Distance Learning](#), that shifting from face-to-face learning to hybrid and distance learning is complicated. Spencer notes,

As an education professor, I had the opportunity to work as a Digital Fluency Mentor helping professors develop online, hybrid, and virtual courses. One of the most common questions people asked me was, ‘How do I convert my face-to-face course into an online course?’ The truth is, you can’t convert it. Learning isn’t like a file that converts between a .doc and a PDF and a Google Doc. We can’t simply substitute new tools and do the same exact activity. In other words, that rich, spontaneous, Socratic Seminar simply won’t work in a discussion board or through

a video conferencing system. That amazing collaborative design challenge doesn't transfer easily when students move out of the makerspace and into their own homes.

See, the problem with the idea of converting instruction is that you only see the limitations. You take a great in-person activity and then you try to do your best to substitute it with digital tools. But this will always lead to a deficit.

These arguments are also echoed in a podcast titled [9 Ways Online Teaching Should be Different from Face-to-Face](#). In the podcast, Jennifer Gonzalez interviews Melanie Kitchen, a Coordinator of Instructional Technology and Staff Development serving 19 school districts in Western New York state. Kitchen notes the increased importance of teacher collaboration. Gonzalez explains Kitchen's perspective. "Meeting the challenges of online learning gets easier when we work together. 'As we're all trying to get to know these students better,' Kitchen says, 'we need to be working together to do that.' That means working more closely with specialists to make sure our lessons and materials meet the needs of all students, partnering with others in our content area to plan instruction, working together on cross-curricular projects, and dividing up the things all students need (like technology instruction) among teachers on a team or grade level so students aren't doing the same lessons over and over and our work isn't duplicated."

Given these shifts, Reich and Mehta make the case for providing teachers with more time to collaborate.

"In a pandemic, with everyone teaching in potentially new situations (hybrid between in-person and at-home learning), creating the time and space for these kinds of collaborations is critical. Since inevitably some teachers, teacher teams, and schools will figure out things that work faster than others, if we build in the structural space for this learning, we can get better much faster. Conversely, if successful innovations remain localized, we have very little chance of adapting quickly enough at scale to create success. Key aspects of organizational learning include: (1) regular collaborative time to observe, reflect on, and iterate practice, (2) ways to network laterally across classrooms, teams, and schools to share emerging

practice and learn from each other, and (3) organizational responses that change the infrastructure to turn ongoing learning and emerging innovations into regular practice.”

Draft Hybrid Schedule

Thus, the hybrid model we are proposing is shown in this table below. It provides for students to maintain regular contact with their teachers, allows parents to know when they will need child care, and provides our staff with needed planning time to make sure that we can continue to refine our educational practices as we make our way through these extraordinary circumstances.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday (early release)
Cardinal Cohort	In-Person	At Home Remote	In-Person	At Home Remote	In-Person one week, at Home the next
Navy Cohort	At Home Remote	In-Person	At Home Remote	In-Person	At Home one week, In-Person the next

The “At Home/Remote” days will be learning days where students will apply and extend their learning from their in-person schooling. Students will be given robust and carefully structured assignments. Elementary students will be given up to 3 hours of at home work, middle school students will be given up to 5 hours, and high school students will be given up to 7 hours of work.

HYBRID At Home/Remote	Examples of what it is	Examples of what it is not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The day at home is a learning school day following the in person classroom instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent work building off of previous classroom learning Some small group or 1:1 learning with a paraeducator, tutor, or other specialist teacher Follows a schedule Online work with other students A full school day in work Work that will 'count' and be graded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a remote plan that uses any live casting of the classroom to guide the day at home Not a day off from school Not a day supported by live virtual instruction from the classroom teacher because they are at school instructing the other student cohort

The Westborough Stand-Alone Remote Learning Program (WSRLP):

The state has required that school districts create stand-alone remote programs for families to support children who can not come into school and attend our hybrid or in-person models. The details of how we will staff and run the Westborough Stand-Alone Remote Learning Program (WSRLP) are still being developed, and we anticipate having more details within the next couple of weeks.

It is important for families to realize that students attending the WSRLP will not be taught by the faculty who are teaching in the fully remote, hybrid, or full return models.

Westborough, like many districts throughout the state, is looking at three options. Option one would be to staff the WSRLP with Westborough Public School teachers who (because of medical reasons) can not make an in-person return to our school buildings. Under option one, we may or may not have enough teachers, or properly certified teachers, to staff the WSRLP. Option two is to use an online curriculum and learning platform created by a third party. Several school districts are exploring platforms like [VHS Learning](#), [Edgenuity](#), and

[Edmentum](#). Option three would be to create a shared, robust, stand-alone remote learning program that would be run by collaborating with surrounding communities.

Draft Safety Protocols:

As a school district, our greatest priority is the physical and emotional well-being of our staff, students, and families. Ensuring that our schools remain a safe place for our staff and students requires looking carefully at what we know about the transmission of COVID-19 and how that intersects with bringing groups of students and staff members together in an engaging learning environment.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded, we have carefully reviewed guidelines from the the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), Governor Baker's office, the MA Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the MA Department of Public Health (DPH), the town of Westborough, the Westborough Board of Health, and available medical literature on COVID-19 related to children and school settings. We will continue to monitor all guidance as it relates to the well-being of our community and will update our plans as needed. We realize that even with our safety plan in place we cannot guarantee 100% safety, but we believe that we have developed a strong set of mitigation strategies that greatly reduce the risk of infection. If there is one thing that we have learned during this time, it's that we must be vigilant, we must be flexible, and we must care for one another.

[The Draft Safety Protocols](#) developed by a subcommittee will be reviewed and finalized in the coming weeks by the faculty working groups. Safety protocols will continue to be refined as each school uses the procedures and as the medical knowledge continues to evolve. The Safety Committee will remain in place throughout the school year to respond to questions, to monitor implementation, and to stay current on updated state procedures.

A "data dashboard" of important district benchmarks will be developed and reported to the School Committee regularly.

Special Education Services

The special education team will welcome back families as we continue to innovate the learning experience based on the three very distinct models that DESE set forth. We anticipate being flexible enough to experience a variation of all of the learning models at some point during the school year, based on state or local health data. Staff are committed to keeping your child's physical and emotional safety and well-being at the forefront of our work as we settle into our next normal in the realm of public education.

The Westborough Public Schools will provide special education services in accordance with your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) within the context of the three learning models prescribed by DESE during the 2020-2021 school year. The school/family partnership is essential in the collaborative planning necessary to provide each child with a disability a "free and appropriate public education" (FAPE) consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of all students.

In accordance with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (DESE) [Comprehensive Special Education Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year Memo](#), students must receive all of the services documented in their IEPs through in-person instruction, remote instruction, or a combination of both. Regardless of the learning model, the district will collaborate with parents to meet each child's individual needs as outlined in his/her IEP. According to the most recent DESE guidance, students with significant and complex needs, as well as all preschool children, will be prioritized for full in-person instruction.

Parent engagement will be ongoing and essential to support a positive learning experience and IEP service delivery for your child as we work to ensure your child's safety and well-being in each of the three learning models. Ongoing communication and feedback with families will be critical to a successful school reopening phase. Parents can expect special education administrators, liaison, and IEP TEAMS to establish regular communication at the outset of school reopening to ensure that your child's needs are being met. District survey results regarding your child's remote learning experience and IEP TEAM feedback in the Spring of 2020 have provided us with valuable data to assess areas of need upon re-entry. If there are changes to the overall school structure, environment,

and/or learning models, special education providers will engage in conversations with caregivers about how special education services will be provided differently.

Because the district is currently recommending that we begin in an In-person, hybrid model, parents should expect communication from their special education administration, liaison, providers, or IEP TEAM to discuss how their child's special education services will be provided within this model when school resumes. The district is awaiting final guidance from DESE regarding the administration of special education services based on each of the three learning models. Parents will be contacted to discuss and then notified in writing of how the services will be provided differently, following an initial adjustment period when school reopens.

The district is currently working to identify the best platform for holding IEP meetings in the fall. It is anticipated that, in keeping with the state's social distancing efforts and to reduce foot traffic in the schools, IEP meetings will continue to be offered via Zoom or Google Meet. The subsequent IEPs will continue to be delivered to families via first class mail or electronically with options for parents to respond. For those students whose initial evaluations or three-year reevaluations were interrupted due to the closure in March, your child's Special Education Coordinator, school psychologist, or liaison will contact parents to determine an appropriate timeframe for completion of the testing and assessments when school reopens. We strongly urge parents to wait on any testing in September to allow each child to adjust to the new school year and new classes, reacquaint with friends, and become socially and emotionally grounded before any such testing. Your continued collaboration and support as we work together to support your child's learning experience and growth in the Westborough Public Schools is appreciated.

Calendar Decisions & Supporting Child Care

Westborough has made some organizational decisions to support faculty, staff, and families as they plan for the start of the school year. To ensure that faculty have adequate planning and training time prior to the return of students, the week of Monday August 31

through Friday September 4th will be faculty and staff days. Students will return for the start of school on Tuesday, September 8th.

For the 2020-21 school year to support faculty and family day care needs, the Westborough Community Education Program is finalizing a contract to lease Teamworks on the Westborough/Northborough line, that will allow us to safely care for 250 students. The program will run Monday-Friday from 7:30am - 4:00pm for students in grades K-6 (with 4-year-olds allowable for faculty children). Priority will be given to faculty first, with any remaining open spaces available for Westborough students. This is an exciting opportunity for quality coverage where children can get support on completing school work and enjoying socially distanced activities during days they are home from school and parents need to work.

Unknowns and in Progress

Westborough has been actively communicating with surrounding districts to address issues and to compare planning ideas. While each of us face varied timelines and different unique circumstances, we will be collaborating on areas of potential support and shared resources. Between now and the submission of the final proposal on August 12, there are several areas to refine:

- Which students will be in the Cardinal cohort and which will be in the Navy cohort
- The structure of the Westborough Stand-Alone Remote Learning Program (WSRLP)
- Transportation details
- Fine Arts guidelines
- Athletics: Decisions on athletic competition will be ongoing. Guidance will be provided by MIAA and Westborough will implement programming within the guidelines. The most recent announcement was as follows:
 - [Email MIAA Update and website links](#)

Time Sensitive Next Steps

Our planning timeline is tight. Knowing that Westborough has selected to open with the hybrid model, between now and Friday July 24th, both faculty and families will receive follow-up communications requesting additional information to further plan our return to school.

- Families will need to complete a short form indicating their intention regarding several decisions for their children.
 - Will they be sending their child to school in our hybrid model?
 - Will your child be riding the bus?
 - If your child is not returning for in-person, what are your plans for schooling?
 - Are you interested in daycare coverage if we have open spaces available?

As our plans take shape, it will remain important to carefully read communications from both the district and the building level.

There are still extensive planning details to finalize for a strong hybrid implementation. The faculty planning committees, leadership team, Board of Health, and School Committee will continue to collaborate and plan for our return to school in September.