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## Wonder Years...an update! WPS 10-1-21



My students all knew how much I loved *The Wonder Years* series way back in the day when I was a classroom teacher. When I initially heard that it was getting a reboot on ABC this fall, I was disturbed to say the least. Once I heard the new premise, I was enthralled. Exploring the themes of the wonder years of adolescence through a different voice and perspective has been incredible. As a fan of the original, I enthusiastically approve of this new version.

Why do I share this with all of you?

My response to the immediate news was shaped by both the years of watching bad remakes of...well...anything and my intense connection to the original. However, rather than refusing to listen to why something I held dear was being reconsidered and reimaged, I remained open to the concept and now am enjoying what has quickly been recognized as a wonderful reinvention of an original and is standing on its own as an authentic narrative. The show has always been about growing up and understanding others' perspectives and that growing up isn't always reserved for the young.

A graphic was shared with me this week highlighting when the last "normal" school year took place for our students. Of course, with my years of experience working with middle school students, I am not sure what a "normal" school year is. But the point is well taken and rather striking to see: [The Last Normal](#)

When I see this, it is a startling reminder of both how far we have come in returning to a sense of familiarity as well as how important it is for us to recalibrate what “normal” is.

This week, Commissioner Riley extended the DESE mask mandate to Nov 1. Some of the information initially released created confusion as he also communicated a date of Oct 15 if schools wanted to consider exempting vaccinated students and staff from the mask mandate. In order to do so, the individual school would need to establish that over 80% of the students and staff in the building have been vaccinated. While the Town of Westford vaccination rates are very high, this new layer of information changes what our options might really be in the near future. For example, the vaccination rates for our 12-15 year olds here in town exceeds 80%, but neither middle school would be able to reach over 80% because the majority of 6th grade students are not eligible for the vaccine yet. Westford Academy is the only school at present that could be considered. Whether we make the decision or not is still to be determined, but Principal Antonelli is going to send out a survey that we have designed together in order to gather the necessary information regarding vaccination status to see if WA meets the threshold requirements. This survey is only to gather information, it does not indicate whether or not we will decide to advocate for vaccinated students and staff exemptions of the mask mandate. Many towns, including Westford, also have local mask mandates established by their Board of Health. So, we will be communicating with our BOH to determine when and if it would make sense to consider any exemptions at Westford Academy in relation to either their order and or the DESE mandate.

During this past Monday night’s School Committee meeting, we shared exciting news about our potential ability to use ESSER III funds to bring Tuition Free Full Day Kindergarten to Westford Public Schools starting in the 2022-2023 school year. That is a priority and conversation that has been on the WPS radar for a very long time. The financial impact of establishing such an opportunity must be considered over time in order to develop a sustainable program and build the option into the budget. The ESSER III funds will now allow us to decrease the immediate fiscal impact so that we can begin that process. More information about that will be shared in the future. Additionally, discussions about possible uses of the ARPA funds being provided to the Town of Westford are taking place as we partner with the many other boards and departments in town to best support our community.

Progress is more the tortoise than the hare :-)

Here we go, October!  
Chris

Dr. Christopher Chew  
Superintendent of Schools  
Westford, MA

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