



Weston Public Schools
Office of the Superintendent
William S. McKersie, Ph.D.

MEMORANDUM

TO: WPS Families and Staff
FROM: William S. McKersie, Ph.D., Superintendent
DATE: November 20, 2020
RE: Decision Process & Timing for Modes of Education this Fall/Winter

Background

I am writing to advise all WPS families and staff that the increased community spread of confirmed COVID-19 requires us to consider shifting from *Hybrid* to *Extended Temporary Remote Mode*.¹ No decisions have been made, but we all need to know the main points and timing of the decision process.

Our aim is to continue with *Hybrid* as long as possible, always including Voluntary Distance Learning, knowing that we will have *Short-Term Temporary Remote* phases for specific classes, grades or schools.

Situation

We want as much in-person teaching and learning as possible, which *Hybrid* allows. No one should question that WPS educators deeply value and prefer in-person education. However, the health and safety requirements of mitigating COVID-19 spread are making it difficult to provide continuous, consistent and predictable school and class schedules.

Required quarantines of staff whenever there is confirmed exposure have increased to the point that it is not always possible to provide in-person teachers for each class. Moreover, when we have administrators on quarantine, the safe operation of school buildings is a problem. This situation is similar in every district in the region and across the state.

At some point, the best way to optimize teaching and learning may be to shift to *Extended Temporary Remote Mode* for a several week period, with a regular review of when we could return to a *Hybrid*. Advance warning of a shift to *Extended Temporary Remote* would help families and staff maximize a less than ideal situation, and we will strive to provide as much notice as possible. Given that we cannot guarantee advanced warnings, everyone should be on alert that such a shift may be required.

¹ We have had to create new terminology as we proceed. In this memo, please note three terms describing our Schooling Scenarios: Hybrid, Short-Term Temporary Remote, and Extended Temporary Remote. The word “temporary” must be included because we would intend to return to in-person during this school year. (We understand the redundancy from a pure writing standpoint.)

Decision Process & Timing

A decision to shift will be based on consultations and outreach that have consistently been underway since the onset of the pandemic.

- I confer with the principals, Cabinet, WTA leadership, teachers, the Fall 2020 Task Force, PTO presidents, and area superintendents. The consultations with district personnel include input on what they are hearing from a broad set of families and staff.
- The advice of our public health and medical advisors is paramount, and is a daily source of input and guidance.
- Data on COVID-19 spread is most important, both regionally and within Weston and WPS. We look closely at the weekly data (every Thursday) from the CT DPH/CSDE for Fairfield County. We also review the extent of spread within the Town of Weston and WPS. For the district, we look at both the total number of confirmed cases and the extent of quarantines, since the level of staff quarantines affects our ability to provide quality in-person instruction.

Per this week's DPH/CSDE report (11.19.20), Fairfield County's Leading Indicator continues to move north rapidly.² It now is 49.3, rising from 34, 25.2 and 16.1 the previous three weeks. We are well above the 25-point demarcation for the High Risk Range, which means we should be operating with reduced in-person schooling by instituting hybrids and other blends incorporating remote learning.

The DPH/CSDE Portal also lists data for each town. We have to be cautious as to the validity of the data for comparisons among towns, but it is examined by each locality as the infection rates increase. Weston's figures show a notable jump from last week, with the Leading Indicator rising from just over 20 to 39.7.

WPS continues to see evidence of the rapid increases in community spread. Fortunately, from what we can determine, our positive cases have originated nearly entirely outside of the district. Staff and students have been effective at preventing within school spread by adhering to the major mitigating strategies. As of today, we have 12 confirmed COVID-19 cases (eight students and four staff) and 204 in quarantine (176 students and 28 staff). We had 164 quarantining at this point last week.³

Our Options

We have two broad options going forward:

- Stay with *Hybrid* as long as possible, always including Voluntary Distance Learning, knowing that we will have *Short-Term Temporary Remote* phases for specific classes, grades or schools.
- Shift to *Extended Temporary Remote* for several weeks or more based on the status of community spread, with regular check-ins on when a return to *Hybrid* would be viable.

Regardless of these two options, immediate shifts may be required due to staffing and other challenges. Thank you for being flexible and patient in what is an extraordinary time for all of us.

² The Leading Indicator is "the number of new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 population per day (14-day average)." The latest data is for the timeframe 11/1-11/14/20, and is available at the DPH/CSDE Portal: <https://data.ct.gov/stories/s/CT-School-Reopening/ddy2-ijgu/>.

³ Source: WPS COVID-19 Dashboard

(<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1x9nswxZtZmRbMZwZXFzHNG1NR7v3Adgog15pOtSF8/edit#gid=0>.)