

Dear Mr. Pesco and Board of Education members,

After listening carefully to last night's BOE reopening presentation, I believe it is essential that the WTA now provides constructive input, clarification, and raise unmentioned concerns.

First, almost all Weston teachers strongly believe that being in school and delivering curriculum in front of students is the best way to educate students. There is no doubt that an in-person live classroom is the most important and effective way to teach, but we don't believe that it is the right thing to do at this moment.

The WTA's highest priority is the safety and health of students entrusted to our member's care, as well as the families of our students. The WTA firmly stands behind its stance that schools should reopen in the Distance Learning Only Model. We stand behind this knowing full well that it is not a popular choice by many parents, but we know it is the right choice. We are parents as well, we understand the struggles that come with Distance Learning and having to find ways to have children monitored at home, but we still believe that Distance Learning is the best and safest way to start the school year off.

It is important to note, the WTA asked repeatedly to be a direct part of all phases of the reopening plan development since the beginning of summer as, after students, teachers and paraprofessionals are the primary groups the plan affects. While there were Weston teachers who were WTA members on the "Reopening Task Force", that task force was solely advisory and had no part in the creation of the reopening document.

Consequently, at last night's meeting Ruby Hedge posed the question, "How are the teachers feeling?" The answer: "nervous". While that answer would be true for anyone returning, it is a vast understatement. More accurately, teachers do not feel that a Hybrid model is currently a safe or responsible way to reopen school.

WTA members have serious doubts about the district's ability to meet safety precautions, enforce social distancing, provide PPE, and have a plan in place prior to the start of school. They are worried for their own safety, the safety of their families, and the safety of their students. WTA members are extremely stressed as the district does not seem nearly ready to go to a Hybrid Model due to the lack of detail in plans, protocols, and procedures for health and safety, logistics, and academics.

Moreover, the most recent, August 11, Weston reopening plan is most problematic. The plan talks about breaking cohorts. Segregated cohorts have been a primary method in reducing COVID infection and contact tracing. However the plan states that cohorting staff and students will move to different classrooms and areas throughout the day, thus negating the cohort model. Additionally, cohorts will be broken while students are on the bus. In K-5 Specials, teachers are being asked to travel from classroom to classroom every 30 minutes, seeing hundreds of

students per 6 day cycle, putting themselves, the staff they come in contact with and their students at risk as they cross contaminate cohorts.

With reference to social Distancing and PPE the plan states (p.5,8), "Cohorting of students to the greatest extent possible with increased health and safety protocols when breaking cohorts, as feasible.". Simply, this is not encouraging to staff and the staff does not believe that adhering to cohorts will be followed. Additionally, listed under each Challenges section for the high school it is noted that cohorts will be impossible, "Unable to cohort. Staff and students move to different classrooms and other areas throughout the day." If cohorts and contact tracing are not possible at the high school, then how will other school levels be affected, especially considering that many high school students have younger siblings?

Additionally, listed in the high school challenges is "Open campus system limits the ability to adhere to safety requirements, monitor social distancing.". The district in its own words has said that it is a challenge for them to ensure the safety of students and staff. For each school there is a Containment Plan that consists of two points. One of the biggest concerns of staff is how a known or suspected case will be handled and to have a plan that consists of two points is underwhelming. The document speaks to the use of plexiglass in certain areas throughout the schools and outlines on page 11 that in the high school students will be able to use certain areas behind plexiglass as a "mask break". COVID-19 is an airborne virus, the purpose of plexiglass is an additional layer of protection. Allowing students to remove masks is allowing any potential person that is infected to spread the virus. A recent article on Forbes.com, [link here](#), citing two studies from different parts of the world, says, "Two new studies, though from different parts of the world, have arrived at the same conclusion: that young children not only transmit SARS-CoV-2 efficiently, but may be major drivers of the pandemic as well.". Wearing masks all day or even a half day will be difficult for students and staff alike, however allowing the removal of masks will inevitably result in spread infections.

Assertions that opening school while the threat of COVID remains will benefit students and contribute to their emotional health are hollow. The reality is that students will be confined to a room, many without A/C (no A/C: HES/WIS-not listed, WMS-20/50, WHS-26/60) for four hours a day with the same peer group. This does not lead to emotional well-being. Students will be managed by teachers, not necessarily taught. The distancing that will need to occur will make school feel sterile and not inviting to students. Teachers will lose that ability to have "teachable moments". We have taught our teachers that moving around the classroom, not lecturing, is the best method. However, now we are telling teachers that they need to distance, essentially removing that connection with students.

Weston has always strived to be a leader. That was apparent this past spring during distance learning as our teachers went above and beyond other districts to meet the demands of the administration with teaching live when other districts never held live classes. In every meeting I sit in I hear how Weston is a leader, how other districts look to Weston, but rather than be a leader now we are falling in line with area districts. We would like to see Weston be a leader

and set the example that Distance Learning is the smart, responsible, and safe choice to start the school year, to be the leaders we always talk about. With two weeks before the start of the school year, the WTA most strongly urges the Board to turn its focus away from a Hybrid model and to updating last year's distance learning plan. Thank you for your time and efforts. The WTA wishes the best of health for you and your families.

Sincerely,
Douglas Pregman
Weston Teachers' Association President