



Public Comment Responses Received During the WPS BOE Meeting on 1/19/2021

Below is the public record of public comment responses received during the 1/19/2021 BOE meeting.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS - Comments are posted exactly as they have been received.

First and Last Name	Address	Please state your comment/question regarding non-agenda items
Anastasia Gussen	20 High Acre Road, Weston CT	<p>My name is Anastasia Gussen, I am a seventh grade science teacher at Bedford middle school. I am a lifelong Weston/Westport resident and I mention that only to say that I care deeply about this community. I would like to use my voice and privilege to bring attention to those who may be overlooked during this process.</p> <p>As far as I am aware since The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) expired December 31st there is no other safety net or system in place for people who may be exposed to Covid. I am very concerned that the absence of this or similar relief will put pressure on individuals to not report or underreport Covid exposures.</p> <p>I am fortunate enough to be a relatively young and healthy adult. But I know there are many teachers and other staff members that aren't as fortunate. I am very concerned about people who are differently abled, immunocompromised or may have other valid health concerns. These concerns should not be perceived as unimportant because the long term effects of Covid are not known. I am also concerned about what we will learn about the long term effects Covid will have on children.</p> <p>I hope the board reaches out to students for direct feedback. They have a lot to say and I worry their voices aren't being heard or respected. I am massively concerned for their mental state and well being. I worry that students won't feel safe in a fully open school and will interpret the decision as not having their best interest at heart. I want them to feel like they live in a community that supports people who are differently abled, have systems of support in place for people in need and prioritizes student physical AND emotional health.</p>

		<p>Thank you so much for your time and consideration.</p>
Brian Camus	Science Teacher, Staples High School	<p>Dear Board of Education Members,</p> <p>While I do not envy the difficult position you have been in for this school year, having to navigate our district through a pandemic, I must say I am continually disappointed by how teachers are undervalued and underappreciated through the actions of the Board. As an educator, I place my students at the center of all that I do professionally. They give me fulfillment in my job and are regularly the reason for my joy and happiness at work. Though I have had to drastically reshape my approach to teaching due to the pandemic this year, I would gladly do it again if it meant my students had a more fruitful educational experience.</p> <p>My disappointment stems from the feeling that I am not valued as a person, as a professional, and as a member of this community. Dating back to last summer, we were given minimal notice with the schedule and yet were expected to still be ready to receive students on day one. The opportunity to pursue remote teaching at the beginning of the year was never an option, even for those of us who are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Those of us with children have had to juggle logistical difficulties with their schooling and were simply told to make it work. As holidays approached in the Fall, it was apparent that many people would be traveling outside the state, increasing the risk of infection upon return to school. Neighboring districts had the foresight to move to full remote learning at these times to help mitigate the spread of the virus and to protect their staff and students, yet the only time we moved to full remote learning was when we physically could not staff our classrooms because too many teachers were quarantined. More recently, the move to full in-person learning at the elementary and middle school levels is simply irresponsible. Staff should be able to receive the vaccine before increasing their exposure. Finally, we learned recently that health insurance is likely to change come July 1, 2021. My understanding is that this will be a move to a high-deductible plan, which will come with less coverage. So it appears that the reward I will be receiving for making it through the most difficult year of my teaching career will be to have worse health insurance. Not to mention the fact that we will likely not even be completely done with this pandemic by that point.</p> <p>In short, I beg you to please see the humanity in my colleagues and in myself. Please consider that we deserve to work in a place where we feel safe and secure, where we should not have to face increased exposure to the coronavirus without access to the vaccine. And perhaps most importantly,</p>

		<p>we should be granted the opportunity to take care of ourselves and our family with adequate health insurance.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention during these unprecedented times, I hope you take these thoughts into consideration as we move forward together.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Brian Camus</p>
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DISCUSSION

1. Health Update and School Reopening Model Update - Comments are posted exactly as they have been received.

First and Last Name	Address	Please state your comment/question regarding Health Update and School Reopening Model Update.
Jen Greely	7 Caccamo Lane	<p>I'm a parent to three children - one at SES, one at BMS, and one at Staples. In addition, I've also recently started working in one of the elementary schools as a gen-ed paraprofessional. My perspective is perhaps unique, having children at each level of our schools and also seeing firsthand how the pandemic has affected the classroom experience and academic instruction across all the schools. I have many concerns related to this plan, especially as to how this will be done safely and equitably for children with varying health needs - including distance learners - but I will email you those thoughts separately.</p> <p>I would like to address the timing of this fully-open model prior to a vaccine being made available to educational "essential workers". This is worrisome especially for the gen-ed paraprofessionals who not only work across multiple K-2 classrooms, but under the fully-open plan, these same paras (not teachers) will monitor between 2 and 3 lunch waves, during which young children will be eating, unmasked, inside relatively small classrooms. This translates to one paraprofessional being exposed to 18-24 unmasked kids for 30 minutes each day per classroom. Put another way, if assigned to three elementary lunch waves, a paraprofessional will have exposure to between 60 and 70 *unmasked* kids (indoors, in a small classroom) for up to 90 minutes daily.</p> <p>My para coworkers are (mostly) middle-aged women, some of whom are the primary breadwinners for their family. They are incredibly caring, skilled, and an integral part of our young children's day. They are also cancer/chemo survivors, open-heart-surgery survivors, they live with autoimmune conditions, diabetes, or high-risk family members. Many of</p>

		<p>them are grandparents just a couple years away from retirement, having dedicated more than two decades to the education and well-being of our children here in Westport. I ask you this: During a global pandemic, would you ask your 63-year-old sister or mother to tend to 20+ unmasked children inside a small classroom for lunch each day without her being offered the safety net of a vaccine that is literally weeks away? And then ask her to move along to the next group of 20+ unmasked kids? And then another? And to repeat this every day?</p> <p>We talk about the importance of masks in minimizing spread. We talk about the importance of social distancing. We talk about health risks, and age as a factor for disease severity. But who are we as a community if we as a community turn around and embrace a plan that includes unmasked lunch blocks, minimal social distancing, and high risk employees.</p> <p>Trust me, I want my own kids back in school full-time with their peers, teachers, and Westport's robust in-person academic curriculum. However, to do so before a vaccine has been made available to every adult in our schools is premature, particularly given the more communicable Covid strains and the rate of new infections in town. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel - it's a matter of weeks now. Let's continue to work together toward the ultimate goal of a safe return to school for everyone involved.</p>
<p>Anthony Granata</p>	<p>11 Lorraine Drive Monroe CT 06468</p>	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and the Westport Board of Education, I would like to start off by stating that since I was a young child, I have always wanted to be a teacher. I love what I do more than anything, and during quarantine last March when me and thousands of other teachers were ripped away from our students, I struggled physically and emotionally in being separated from them and the thing I loved doing the most.</p> <p>This being said, it is disconcerting to hear our central office administration and our BOE state their deep respect and admiration for the work done by teachers on behalf of our students, yet hastily come to a decision to reopen schools prior to initiating any appropriate mitigating measures like vaccinations for teachers and staff. You come to these decisions through distanced zoom meetings in the safety and security of your homes and offices at the expense of the health and care of your staff. This action delivers a non-supportive and under-appreciated message to your teachers, and I'm both sad and disappointed.</p> <p>I appreciate your kind words regarding the services we provide for the students of Westport and for their continued successes, but you forget that our health is at risk each day. We continue to expose ourselves to countless students, even while students continue to travel and ignore social distancing rules/guidelines. On a daily basis I overhear students talk about group sleepovers at friends' homes or trips out of state. The only safety measures currently in</p>

		<p>practice are masks, social distancing of 6 more feet, flimsy plexiglass dividers that fall off desks, and arrows on the floors to help with traffic.</p> <p>Yes, Westport was the most conservative of school districts in Connecticut during hybrid learning this first half of the year, but now as percentage rates rise and this conservative approach matters most, you eliminate the very model that has kept us all safe. Going at full capacity will render social distancing moot and inevitably impossible, as will cramming 22 kids into a small classroom where they will take off their masks to eat. This places not only the teachers who supervise these students at risk, but further the students themselves.</p> <p>It is most definitely not unreasonable to say that on-site learning is most beneficial for our kids, because we all know that to be the case: but not at the risk of the health of your teachers and staff. Please hear me and understand this: we cannot support our students or provide the best for them if we are not supported by you.</p> <p>Please know that I have and will continue to happily greet my students, wishing I could give them a high five or that they could see my smile when they pass me in the halls, and that we will continue to have fun and learn during these challenging times. I eagerly look forward to the day when we can have concerts and celebrate their successes.</p> <p>You mentioned this evening that you are shocked that teachers were moved down on the priority list for vaccination. If this is truly the case, then I implore you to wait until your teachers and staff are provided with these vaccinations prior to reopening schools. This will ease our apprehension and provide us with some comfort and a level of security and safety, and also keeping students safe. Thank you for your time,</p> <p>Anthony Granata</p>
<p>Deb Goldenberg</p>	<p>17 Valley Road Westport</p>	<p>I want to make sure that everyone is aware of what this means for the elementary specials teachers if we continue to move forward with the full day, all in plan. This group of teachers will see the entire school population of students, 400-600 students depending on the school, every week for about 45 minutes at a time. This amount of exposure does not include staff members that might also accompany a class. From what I understand, there is not another teaching role that would equate to this amount of exposure for that amount of time weekly. In addition to that teaching exposure, we will be asked to have lunch duties in elementary classrooms where students will be eating with their masks off.</p> <p>As I am sure you can imagine, this is causing high anxiety among teachers that is resulting recently in physical</p>

		<p>responses. Some of my colleagues are having reoccurring reflux, hair loss, insomnia, neck and back pain as well as chronic headaches. We are not yet able to schedule even our first dose of the vaccine.</p> <p>We are being advised that the data of low transmission within schools supports this move. However, this data is not based on the new strains coming as their effect is yet fully unknown. With an all in, the mitigation strategies we have been using will be changed. The students will not be able to be spaced apart as they are now with increased numbers. We are probably looking at maybe 2ft in between them, including snack and lunch times unmasked. We don't know yet what transmission will be like from the new strains and how fast it will spread within our higher density from an all in approach at this time. This is understandably causing us tremendous worry.</p> <p>The union has shared this overwhelming concern, as well as the CT Teachers Union. We love our jobs and want what is best for our kids. We just want to feel safe doing it. I can't think of any job right now where people are being asked to be in a room with 400-600 kids and staff each week for 45 min at a time. Many of us aren't even doing indoor dining or in person grocery shopping. How are we supposed to feel safe being in a room with 20 kids eating lunch with masks off? Please ask yourself if this is something that you would feel comfortable doing?</p> <p>We have come this far, why can't we wait for us to be fully vaccinated? Some of us have family members with high risk health conditions or ourselves are at high risk. We are very concerned for our own safety and the safety and health of our family members that we will bring this high exposure home to.</p> <p>The additional recent news that our medical insurance PPO will possibly change back to the horrible HSA we had previously, was another blow. Due to the pandemic, many of us have lost supplemental income, have had to take an unpaid leave, and many spouses aren't earning usual salaries. So, to go to a high deductible plan with great increases to prescriptions is hard to swallow.</p> <p>We know that children can't learn if we don't attend to trauma or if they don't feel safe. We need to apply this right now to teachers.</p>
Ben Frimmer	Westport Public Schools	<p>To Mr. Scarice and The Westport Board of Education, I'm reaching out to you today because I bring a unique perspective to the Covid19 situation. As an EMS Instructor, Westport EMS Crew Chief, and Weston EMS Lieutenant and QA officer, I've been on the front line of this disease from day one. I had the first Westport "Covid ambulance call", was asked to teach our EMTs proper donning and doffing procedures, and currently serve as a point person for</p>

Weston EMS and Weston dispatch in providing updates on Covid+ cases as reported by the Westport Weston Health District. Given my unique position I wanted to reach out regarding the decision to fully reopen schools. I should add that I've already been vaccinated and wear an N95 mask in school so this is really not about me.

I have grave concerns about the health and safety of our staff and students in a full reopen model. While our students can and have tested positive for the virus, most children tend to do fairly well with their recovery. The issue with children tends to lie more in the realm of preexisting conditions and lack of true awareness of social distancing and proper mask wearing. In a full open model with limited space to spread out, students will inevitably be disease spreaders.

The bigger concern is that of the adults in the buildings. The long term morbidity in adults can be fairly significant. My wife, a radiologist, is seeing significant long term impact of adults in multiple body systems. What was once thought of as a respiratory virus has proven to be much more of a thrombotic issue. On the ambulance we're regularly seeing relatively young (40-60 year olds) adults with signs of stroke, heart attack, and other peripheral and central clotting issues like pulmonary embolus.

My biggest fear is in a full open model is that a member of our community experiences an exposure that leads to life altering morbidity. To be clear, most individuals who catch this virus recover, a relatively small number of young people die, but significant numbers of people have extended issues that may last a lifetime. None of these issues are not limited to people with preexisting conditions.

With the high rate of local infection, the current weather prohibiting significant time outdoors, and the availability of vaccination for staff just around the corner I respectfully urge you to postpone a full open model until the Spring. I believe that with lower infection rates, vaccine protection (95% effective two weeks after the second dose), and the ability to take groups outside, April 1st will be a much safer time.

I appreciate how challenging this decision must be. I for one would find it easier to have my student physically with me in class but easy isn't always right and easy isn't always good. Let me close by saying it's clear to me that there are people with good arguments on both sides of this issue. What pushes my emphatic plea to postpone is that of the physical well being of our community. When I go into a patient's home I wear an AV3000 mask with N100 respirator and complete face protection. That protection alone had me shaking every time I made a patient contact. Now with the vaccine in my body I am significantly more comfortable due to its 95% efficacy. It is literally one of the best vaccines ever created. I'm asking you to allow some time for the adults in our system to have some of those same front line protections I'm afforded.

I hope this email isn't being too dramatic but hey, I am a theatre teacher in one of the best district in the country. A job I love and cherish beyond my wildest dreams.

Respectfully Submitted

		Ben Frimmer, EMT/EMS-ITheatre educator
Anastasia Gussen	20 High Acre Road, Weston CT	<p>My name is Anastasia Gussen, I am a seventh grade science teacher at Bedford middle school. I am a lifelong Weston/Westport resident and I mention that only to say that I care deeply about this community. I would like to use my voice and privilege to bring attention to those who may be overlooked during this process.</p> <p>As far as I am aware since The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) expired December 31st there is no other safety net or system in place for people who may be exposed to Covid. I am very concerned that the absence of this or similar relief will put pressure on individuals to not report or underreport Covid exposures.</p> <p>I am fortunate enough to be a relatively young and healthy adult. But I know there are many teachers and other staff members that aren't as fortunate. I am very concerned about people who are differently abled, immunocompromised or may have other valid health concerns. These concerns should not be perceived as unimportant because the long term effects of Covid are not known. I am also concerned about what we will learn about the long term effects Covid will have on children.</p> <p>I hope the board reaches out to students for direct feedback. They have a lot to say and I worry their voices aren't being heard or respected. I am massively concerned for their mental state and well being. I worry that students won't feel safe in a fully open school and will interpret the decision as not having their best interest at heart. I want them to feel like they live in a community that supports people who are differently abled, have systems of support in place for people in need and prioritizes student physical AND emotional health.</p> <p>Thank you so much for your time and consideration.</p>
Angela Simpson	3 Horseshoe Lane	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and BOE members,</p> <p>I am writing to ask you to rethink bringing more students into the school buildings before teachers and staff are fully vaccinated. It is dangerous to bring more bodies into the buildings while the rate of transmission is on the rise, and is unnecessarily hasty when the vaccination availability for teachers is on the horizon.</p> <p>With infection rates spiking and new, more contagious strains emerging, now is not the time to bring more students into the schools. More bodies means more propagation and mutation of the disease, which is lethal to children and adults. Furthermore, an environment where mutation is encouraged could make the vaccine ineffective on newer strains, and we will fail to get ahead of the pandemic.</p>

		<p>We must all be patient and continue safe practices. This includes employing best practices outside of our schools. The better we do in school helps the whole community, and the safer the greater community is, the safer our schools are.</p> <p>Keeping the hybrid schedules in place and practicing better safety protocols in and out of school will help keep the virus at bay until the vaccine is more widely distributed. It won't be forever, but we must be patient and cautious. Please put student and staff health first. Keep the hybrid schedules and wait for teachers and staff to get vaccinated before bringing more students into the schools.</p> <p>Sincerely, Angela Simpson Westport resident and SHS art teacher</p>
<p>Rob Rogers</p>	<p>7th Grade Social Studies, Coleytown Middle School</p>	<p>Mr. Scarice and Members of the Board of Education:</p> <p>This school year marks my 21st year with Westport Public Schools and for every one of those years I have remarked on how lucky I have been to find a home in a district where I truly enjoy teaching. We have a staff that comes to school day in and day out and gives our students 110%; at the same time, we are here to help each other be or become better teachers. I know I speak for many of my colleagues who desire to be attending school in person, with a full class of students. We all know how difficult the last year has been on the educational community, on the students, and on ourselves as human beings. I wish to add my voice to the chorus and ask that you slow down the push to return to full time schooling.</p> <p>As I mentioned, I so wish to be back to normal in my classroom. Many of the things that makes Westport Public Schools an amazing district is what our teaching and support staff bring to the classroom. Despite the obvious logistical struggles when we moved to distance learning last year, we all made it work. The move to hybrid was a compromise that allowed us to continue to bring those skills to students in a live setting, but also maintain safety measures to keep us all protected. As we have seen, those measures have been working, far better than those in our neighboring district of Fairfield; however, now is not the time to return to full classes.</p> <p>Nothing has changed in relation to COVID rates of transmission, nor has the state relaxed any of the safety measures, so I struggle to understand the rationale of that choice, especially when the COVID vaccine is in sight for our staff and town community to receive. Studies show that after both vaccinations the efficacy rate is 95%. It is not worth the risk of physical and mental health of your staff by pushing</p>

		<p>forward with full time school, when a pause until the staff can be vaccinated seems prudent. I mention mental health, specifically because the staff of Westport Public Schools is at their limit. We worry about our student's health, our health, that of our own families. This includes their friends and school districts and of those of us who have lost loved ones or who are currently battling this virus.</p> <p>Furthermore, our teaching model will not change if we return to school full time. The challenges of the hybrid model will still remain, as some parents will surely continue to keep students home as they have all year. Returning to school will not change how we teach, but will just increase the chance that there will be in-school transmission. So far, we have been fortunate that no one staff member has become deathly ill, though I know of spouses of staff who have. I am worried that by moving too quickly, we will see more of our staff become ill. What an unnecessary and horrific tragedy this would be, when we are so close to receiving our vaccinations.</p> <p>I end with one added appeal which is not to change our insurance plan at this time. Cigna was an abysmal insurance company to work with and get coverage from, hence its affordability. The collective sigh of relief when we moved to Anthem was palpable, and I am thankful to have had that coverage this year. I would be willing to pay a higher contribution on my side, if it would avoid changing plans. Please work with the union to find a compromise that will allow our staff to have coverage that takes care of our physical and mental health. A healthy staff will lead to better outcomes for our schools.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration,</p>
Ethan Olmstead	4 Stone Dr	<p>Let me begin by thanking you for taking swift action and making the difficult decisions necessary to keep our children, and faculty safe 10 months ago when covid-19 began infecting our community. The decision to move to a remote model forced our children to quickly adapt to new models, and our teachers and faculty to work tirelessly beyond any semblance of a normal schedule to ensure our children would have the necessary lessons and materials to succeed in this new environment. Though my children are very young, and at the very beginning of their education, I am indebted for the faculty's dedication shown over the last 10 months. The school system truly pulled together in the best interests of the students and community to do what was necessary to keep the community safe.</p> <p>The decision to move to a full time schedule comes as a shock and completely out of the interests and actions that have kept our schools in session over the past year. To call</p>

		<p>this premature is an understatement. As a state, we are still at an infection rate equal to that of last April, one that was seen and acted upon as too dangerous for in-person learning. Believing we can open our schools full time without health repercussions is reckless, as national and global studies reflect the continued dangers of transmission. Believing we can "return to normal" endangers our children. Believing we open without a vaccinated faculty will push those who worked so hard to support our students away. This decision is in opposition of the very essence of reason, something we strive to educate our children in from a young age. Though the model we have been using over the last 10 months isn't perfect for students or staff, it has been working to keep transmission low, and keep our schools open. As we move forward, I implore you to use sound judgment when considering the brevity and consequences of these decisions, for students, for faculty, for parents, and for the community, who will all be affected, especially as high transmission variants of the covid run through our schools and community.</p> <p>As transparency has been important throughout the year, please make available the studies and evidence used to both make the decision to reopen, as well as the sources you are planning to use to make the inevitable decision to return to remote learning.</p>
<p>Caroline Davis</p>	<p>8th Grade - BMS</p>	<p>The following statements have been gathered from multiple staff members at BMS:</p> <p>Middle school staff has been working in crisis mode for over two years, many of whom have had to seek medical attention for mental health as a result.</p> <p>Health and safety of teachers and staff is not being prioritized.</p> <p>Not all classrooms have desks shields.</p> <p>Teachers and staff at the middle school level have succeeded at the herculean task of maintaining rigorous pedagogy and implementation of district curriculum throughout the last two years of the BMC/CMS crisis - even before Covid. We are nearing a breaking point and do not feel valued.</p> <p>Going back full should be a decision based on safety, not convenience.</p> <p>If staff can meet with all students IN PERSON, the school board should meet in person with community members invited to participate IN PERSON, and lead by example. This is similar to a SINGLE day of school for a teacher or staff member.</p> <p>Students are telling teachers they had Covid and it was not reported.</p>

		<p>Students and parents have admitted to a lack of community adherence to Covid guidelines regarding gatherings and traveling.</p> <p>You, as the Board and affiliate members, have been meeting from the safety of your own homes while teachers have been in person and on the front lines in classrooms with students. The above bullet points would indicate that pushing the system and its staff to accommodate a full re-opening of the school system before your most vulnerable asset (your teachers and staff) can be vaccinated feels like a matter of convenience and a massive betrayal. At the very least, it appears hypocritical for you to decide that teachers should be in a room multiple hours a day with 20+ students and student support staff without appropriate space to social distance. We are not asking for a year delay. We only ask for a few weeks until we, the staff, can be vaccinated.</p>
<p>Jeanne Bowles</p>	<p>22 Compo Rd No Westport</p>	<p>Good Afternoon Mr. Scarice and Westport Board of Education Members,</p> <p>I am writing to you as a Westport teacher and longtime resident of this town. It was with great dismay that I read your letter on Friday evening. The decision to return in full and forgo the successful mitigating measures at this critical moment does not make sense. You have mentioned many times, in your previous communications, that you believed our low transmission rates can be attributed to our mitigating measures. Now, at a time when new more contagious strains are being found and scientists are predicting that these will become more prevalent in the next two months, you choose to change our model.</p> <p>At the elementary level, this means students will not be able to social distance themselves in the classroom or on the bus. They will be removing their masks for snacks and lunch in classrooms. That will amount to 20+ people in one room spewing particles for up to 30 minutes a day. There will be no cohorting as multiple teachers and staff members will be in various rooms each day and some students will regularly leave and return from meeting with other members of the school community.</p> <p>Please understand I am in no way opposed to returning in full but I don't feel this is the appropriate time. Many school districts have already made arrangements for teachers to be vaccinated. I know first hand of teachers in Norwich, Trumbull, and Fairfield who, through their districts, were able to secure appointments for vaccination next week. We have heard of no such efforts being made in Westport. We are being asked yet again on a moment's notice to "pivot" to a new model with no consideration taken for our health and</p>

		<p>safety.</p> <p>With fewer mitigating measures, Westport is returning in full. With new, more contagious strains of the virus spreading, Westport is returning in full. With no scheduled vaccinations for our staff, Westport is returning in full. With a vacation coming up, during which we know many families will travel around the country if not the world, Westport is returning in full. I urge you at this time to reconsider this decision. This is not the time to make this change.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Jeanne Bowles</p>
Adrian Bowles	22 Compo Road North	<p>I am a longtime resident of Westport, whose three adult sons benefitted from our fine schools. I am also the proud spouse of a Westport teacher, whose dedication to her students is unwavering. I am also, selfishly, writing as someone who would already be eligible to get the Covid-19 vaccine in other states - based on age and respiratory issues - but who currently has no idea when it will become available to me in Westport.</p> <p>I find it ironic that I must submit my comments electronically to this Board, while you are holding a virtual meeting to ensure your own safety. Presumably, you all know how to use masks and practice social distancing for a brief meeting but - just to be safe - you are practicing remote governance. If only you would see fit to be that cautious with our elementary school children, and the faculty and staff of their schools.</p> <p>I believe that your decision to return our schools to a full schedule now is irresponsible and puts my family and our community at risk. Our relatively low transmission rate, which apparently justifies this decision, is in part attributable to the mitigation measures we have in place. Rather than maintain these measures while the vaccine is being rolled out, or at least until after the surge we can expect in Westport when some parents will inevitably take children away for the Winter break, you are putting us all at risk by restoring a full schedule too soon.</p> <p>Westport made the New York Times last year as an example of what not to do in the face of a pandemic. Please reconsider your decision - we don't need to do it again.</p>
Tom Lyle	12 Bolton Lane	<p>We are all on the same page that ideally we want kids to be in school full time and we want the pandemic to be over. However, the current reality is that we are living in a pandemic which is worse than ever and projected to get worse with the new variant. Current medical advice is to</p>

		<p>double down on the known/helpful mitigating strategies of masks and social distancing.</p> <p>The current school structure for elementary schools have been working well given the realities of the pandemic - balancing the well being of all parties and education of the kids. There has been consistency and the added benefit of small classes.</p> <p>In a couple of months things will be different in that the school staff will be vaccinated and the weather will be better. At that time it may make more sense to implement this plan. We have all put in so much effort to come this close and give up now. We just need to hold on for a bit longer and not risk losing the benefits of all of our hard working until this point</p>
<p>Mary Katherine Hocking</p>	<p>(Fairfield, CT) Faculty- Staples HS</p>	<p>The decision for a fully open model seems wholly antithetical to the Board and Superintendent's previous claims that the health and safety of students and teachers were of "paramount" concern.</p> <p>Fairfield is currently investigating a probable in-school transmission of Covid. The district's decision will bring more students into spaces that currently are thinly accommodating social distancing guidelines and will lead to increased need to quarantine which can be a huge interruption to our current academic pace. On top of potential academic stresses, this model puts staff and students at a greater risk with no added safety measures such as a vaccine.</p> <p>I implore you to hold off on a full reopen until staff and faculty are able to receive their vaccines and until vaccines have reached full efficacy. Staying the course for a few more weeks would be significantly less of an educational shake up than a fully remote model if the cases warranted, a possibility noted by Superintendent Scarice. Tonight, the board mentioned that the downshift in vaccine priority for teachers is "outrageous" and "frustrating". The district's push to reopen fully without waiting to get these vaccines in place is, indeed, "outrageous" and "frustrating".</p> <p>I love my job and couldn't imagine doing anything more valuable with my time and energy. I value my students' academic and social growth, their quirks, their strengths, their struggles. I place a high premium on their health and well-being as well as my own. The push to bring everyone back into the buildings, ostensibly, does not indicate a shared premium.</p>
<p>Roshawn Lawrence</p>	<p>3rd Grade Teacher Saugatuck Elementary School</p>	<p>Dear Board of Education Members and Superintendent Tom Scarice,</p> <p>I have had the pleasure of working in Westport for over 20 years teaching kindergarten, first grade, second grade, fourth grade, and this year third grade. It always amazes me how no matter the grade I am teaching my students always find a</p>

		<p>way to work together and create a strong supportive Team by working in small groups, with partners, and as a whole class. As we look toward full in-person learning the word “Transparency” comes to mind. This word has been used repeatedly this year throughout the district and I feel it really needs to be stated now more than ever.</p> <p>My 24 awesome 3rd graders will be sitting at 24 desks that are 27 x 20 inches in our classroom that is 33 x 16 feet. There will no longer be space for my small round meeting table or sections of the room for partnerships to go off and meet, work, or learn together. The mitigating measures of social distancing 6 ft will be non-existent instead it will be closer to almost 3ft. I know that I have a larger classroom compared to many other teachers in the district and know that for many students the lack of space to move around the classroom will be very challenging. This will become the new reality of sitting at desks for much longer periods of time during the school day.</p> <p>My 24 students will need to wash their hands before and after snack, lunch, book shopping, and recess. I am lucky enough to have a sink in my classroom which many of my colleagues throughout the district do not and the mitigating measures to wash hands for at least 20 seconds when multiplying by 24 students will add to the amount of time for transitions throughout the day. There is also the need to sanitize desks after and possibly before students eat their snacks and have their lunch. Along with the fact that 24 people will not have masks on during these times is another fact that should be noted.</p> <p>I know that there are many classes throughout the district that have smaller class sizes and some that are the same or larger than mine, but it is important that everyone has all the information possible about what the environment we will be teaching, learning, and sending students into will be like.</p> <p>Again as our leaders making decisions that affect us all in so many ways I ask that you make sure that you are sharing information with “full transparency” so that teachers, students, parents, and the Westport community know what it will look like as we return to full in-person learning because it will be a very different environment and everyone should be aware of this as we move forward.</p> <p>Thank you,</p> <p>Roshawn Cooper Lawrence 3rd Grade Teacher Saugatuck Elementary School</p>
Jenn Weber	267 Sturges Hwy	<p>If a class needed to quarantine what would the remote schedule look like, would it be in an am/pm cohort or full class whole day remote schedule? Would the cohorts be integrated if a temporary remote schedule was needed.</p>

<p>Naomi Weingart</p>	<p>4 Barn Swallow Drive</p>	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and Members of the Board of Education,</p> <p>I am writing to express my disappointment with the decision to fully reopen schools on February 1, 2021. I am a Spanish teacher at CES and GFS. I have taught Spanish in Westport for almost 20 years. My family and I have lived in Westport for almost 30 years.</p> <p>As a Spanish teacher I will circulate between two schools in at least 4 classrooms each day for 5 days each week. This will expose me to hundreds of students and many teachers each week, greatly increasing my chances of contracting Covid-19. Admittedly, teaching Spanish on Zoom has its limitations, but so will teaching full classes of Spanish students while masked to students who are also masked.</p> <p>We are presently experiencing a post-holiday surge. The number of positive cases is high, with more than 200 members of our school community under Covid quarantine. This number will most likely increase if we have more students and staff in school buildings at the same time. Lately, every time I read the papers or watch the news on TV, I see news about a highly transmissible Covid-19 variant that is expected to fuel huge spikes in the number of cases. Why would we open schools and reduce mitigating measures at this time? We do not know what this variant will do and how it will affect students and staff. This seems extremely irresponsible. We seem to be looking at the current situation through the lens of our experience in the fall, along with the added momentum of an announcement on December 22nd that addressed the issue of reopening. Unfortunately, things have changed rapidly and we are not in the same situation as were in at the end of December. A reopening at this time would put staff and students at risk.</p> <p>Finally, we have a reason to be hopeful. Millions of people have been vaccinated. School personnel are on the cusp of receiving the vaccine. Why put staff and students at risk when teachers are imminently scheduled to be vaccinated? A full reopening now simply does not make sense.</p> <p>Mr. Scarice and the members of the Westport Board of Education, please do not reopen schools fully on February 1. Please act in a way that will keep staff and students healthy.</p> <p>Respectfully, Naomi M. Weingart</p>
<p>Brian Camus</p>	<p>Science Teacher, Staples High School</p>	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and Board of Education Members,</p> <p>While I do not envy the difficult position you have been in for this school year, having to navigate our district through a pandemic, I must say I am continually disappointed by how teachers are undervalued and underappreciated through the actions of the Board. As an educator, I place my students at the center of all that I do</p>

		<p>professionally. They give me fulfillment in my job and are regularly the reason for my joy and happiness at work. Though I have had to drastically reshape my approach to teaching due to the pandemic this year, I would gladly do it again if it meant my students had a more fruitful educational experience.</p> <p>My disappointment stems from the feeling that I am not valued as a person, as a professional, and as a member of this community. Dating back to last summer, we were given minimal notice with the schedule and yet were expected to still be ready to receive students on day one. The opportunity to pursue remote teaching at the beginning of the year was never an option, even for those of us who are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19. Those of us with children have had to juggle logistical difficulties with their schooling and were simply told to make it work. As holidays approached in the Fall, it was apparent that many people would be traveling outside the state, increasing the risk of infection upon return to school. Neighboring districts had the foresight to move to full remote learning at these times to help mitigate the spread of the virus and to protect their staff and students, yet the only time we moved to full remote learning was when we physically could not staff our classrooms because too many teachers were quarantined. More recently, the move to full in-person learning at the elementary and middle school levels is simply irresponsible. Staff should be able to receive the vaccine before increasing their exposure. Finally, we learned recently that health insurance is likely to change come July 1, 2021. My understanding is that this will be a move to a high-deductible plan, which will come with less coverage. So it appears that the reward I will be receiving for making it through the most difficult year of my teaching career will be to have worse health insurance. Not to mention the fact that we will likely not even be completely done with this pandemic by that point.</p> <p>In short, I beg you to please see the humanity in my colleagues and in myself. Please consider that we deserve to work in a place where we feel safe and secure, where we should not have to face increased exposure to the coronavirus without access to the vaccine. And perhaps most importantly, we should be granted the opportunity to take care of ourselves and our family with adequate health insurance.</p> <p>Thank you for your attention during these unprecedented times, I hope you take these thoughts into consideration as we move forward together.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Brian Camus Science Teacher Staples High School</p>
Mary Gardner	12 Candlewood	Dear BoE members and Mr. Scarice,

Rd, New Fairfield,
CT

I would like to express my concerns regarding the full reopening plan. I was surprised to hear that you plan on a full reopening in just two weeks when social distancing will not be possible. This comes at a time when social distancing is more important than ever. The U.K. variant is already in Connecticut and is likely to become the predominant strain in the U.S by March. The CDC recommends doubling down on mitigation strategies due to its increased contagiousness. Therefore, we should be following the CDC's recommendations rather than loosening our safety strategies.

My wife and I are both immunocompromised, and have been strictly following CDC guidelines since March. The CDC recommends that we avoid large gatherings, especially indoors. For that reason, I have not attended any indoor gatherings with my family or friends, eaten inside a restaurant, or joined my colleagues for lunch. It has been proven that being indoors with people who aren't masked creates a higher risk of contracting the virus. Having students eat in their classrooms WITHOUT being able to distance is a recipe for disaster. A large part of the reason we have been successful thus far has been due to the fact that students are eating at home and are distanced in classrooms. Also, number 23 of the MOA states that teachers are not responsible for cleaning surfaces, and eating lunch in classrooms would create an incredible hardship on our custodial staff who are already overworked. My colleagues in other districts who have fully reopened have done so only because they are able to keep their students six feet apart. If our school district cannot follow the CDC recommendations to keep our community safe, this reopening plan should not be implemented.

Even though each of us have been struggling personally, we have worked hard to give our students a sense of consistency in the hybrid schedule. As you stated in your letter to us, Mr. Scarice, it is likely that we may have to go fully remote if there's a positive case with many close contacts. Staying open in the hybrid model is much better for our student's well-being than going full in then having to shut down. In the Wall Street Journal article linked below, ONE infected person in a German school likely spread it to 40 others, and that was before the U.K. variant was found there. The lack of mitigation strategies of this reopening plan poses many health risks for both teachers and students, and waiting until teachers and staff are vaccinated is paramount. I understand the district can't control the vaccine rollout, but you can control the safety of our school community by keeping the hybrid schedule. The risk of a full reopen without vaccines or distancing far outweighs the good. This decision endangers the health and safety of those in our community resulting in potential loss of life.

I miss my students. I miss seeing their faces in lessons and rehearsals. I miss the excitement of preparing for concerts,

		<p>and seeing my students shining on stage. But it's not worth risking my life or my student's lives to reopen fully without vaccines or distancing. When we are able to finally hold concerts again, I don't want anyone looking at an empty seat in the audience missing a loved one.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p> <p>https://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-schools-are-closing-again-on-concerns-they-spread-covid-19-11610805601?reflink=desktopwebshare_facebook&fbclid=IwAR3H85vkVU8xnaqSp82VeOIJpt47Kysejl4EeuqWw7_eONi640mRgWHQkNM</p> <p>Mary Gardner (she/her) LLS & GFS Band BMS, CMS, SHS Percussion BMS/CMS Percussion Ensemble</p>
David Turchi	15 Colony Rd	<p>Can you confirm that Distance Learning students will continue to have Specials with their regular elementary schools?</p>
David Greely	7 Caccamo Lane	<p>Thank you for the tremendous job you are doing keeping our schools safe while educating our children and supporting their social and emotional needs during this pandemic.</p> <p>I am concerned that we are reducing our mitigation efforts at exactly the point in time when they are most needed...</p> <p>The daily number of new cases in Westport are at their highest levels yet.</p> <p>New more contagious variants of the virus are spreading.</p> <p>Recent studies are showing that young children are as likely as adults to both become infected and transmit the virus. This is leading to school closures in many European countries that up until now were staunch advocates of full-time schooling.</p> <p>I am also skeptical of the benefits of the full-time "pandemic classroom" relative to the benefits of the current hybrid model.</p> <p>Under the hybrid model, low classroom density allows students the ability to move much more freely than in a pandemic classroom where distancing requirements would likely require them to remain in their seats, masked, for most of the much longer day.</p> <p>Under the hybrid model low student-teacher ratios in the classroom allow students to receive more individualized attention and allow teachers to be more attuned to the emotional state and needs of the students.</p> <p>We have largely been able to keep the schools open under</p>

		<p>the hybrid model. It would seem that the full-time model raises the risks of school closures and more time online.</p> <p>Thank you once again for all of the efforts you are making on behalf of our children.</p>
Nathaniel Brown	640 Ridge Road, Orange CT 06477	<p>The CDC guidelines for school considerations characterize the risks of spread among students, teachers and staff in a continuum with five levels from “lowest risk” to “highest risk”. The plan to fully open moves the new Westport model from the “some risk” category (hybrid) to the ‘highest risk’ category. With vaccination on the horizon, the community spread will decrease and a fully open school model will be safer for students. Infection rates are at an all-time high with projections that we have not yet peaked. It seems that a short-term investment to ‘hold-off’ on the fully open model will pay off in student and family safety until community rates predictably go down. Furthermore, the “high transmission” variant is now circulating in Connecticut. If anything, we should be increasing mitigation strategies, rather than relaxing our standards.</p> <p>https://drive.google.com/file/d/1enAGe3TS6fk8TN611OVyV4Ld8e_7jaLg/view?usp=sharing</p>
Jame'el Lawrence	Coleytown Elementary School	<p>Good evening Superintendent Scarice and Westport Board of Education Members,</p> <p>I’m writing to you on behalf of myself, as a Westport educator regarding switching from the hybrid model to full-time in class school.</p> <p>Teachers across the district have done a phenomenal job, adjusting to the pandemic and educating students via Zoom, Google Meet and other virtual learning platforms that have been used. Some have spent days and nights, thinking of ways to accommodate students and teach to the best of their abilities onsite while still adhering to the guidelines and mitigating measures. However, it is extremely disheartening to know that after all of this hard work, we will be put in harm’s way without the safety and security of receiving the vaccine. There have been approximately 230,000 cases and 6,670 deaths in Connecticut. Some of these cases and deaths are friends and loved ones of the Westport Staff. Just recently, a new and more contagious strain was discovered. The presence of these facts and the absence of a fully vaccinated staff create a recipe for disaster. Furthermore, the students will receive specials and lunch in the classroom. According to the CDC, the risk of COVID-19 spread increases in a restaurant setting as interactions within 6 feet of others increase. Lunch eating will require students to be among each other and staff for more than 20 minutes without a mask. Returning to school full in would greatly diminish any safety measures we currently have in place. In closing, CDC states that “health equity is when everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.” This</p>

		<p>current model should remain in place until we can reach health equity and ensure resources are available for all.</p> <p>Respectfully</p> <p>Jame'el Lawrence</p> <p>Coleytown Elementary School</p>
<p>Amy Glazer</p>	<p>Long Lots Elementary School</p>	<p>Dear Members of the Board,</p> <p>I write to you with sadness and dismay at the recent correspondence and directives that our staff have received in the last three days.</p> <p>The timing of the correspondence and manner in which the impactful shifts in the work experience as well as to our contract were not lost on me. I was surprised to learn of these major changes on Friday and over the long weekend that would border the next Board meeting. We were implored not to register for a vaccine appointment, which I understood as coming from the state. I ethically agree with this directive if those individuals in more dire need have not yet been inoculated. However, with a vaccine available and appointments accessible for educators on the horizon, it seems illogical to push for a full reopen until a majority of the staff can have access to a potentially life-saving measure. We are being pushed into a situation that is contradictory and feels like a moral dilemma. Wait, as we have been asked to do, or utilize a vaccine dose presently in order to prepare for a full reopen in two weeks. This seems like a very big ask of the district and one that should not be taken lightly.</p> <p>I have found many children to be learning and thriving in the smaller classes. Students with special needs have benefited from the increased focus on academics for short periods of time and we have significantly fewer behavioral and emotional difficulties from the student body as a whole. My first hand experiences lead me to believe that there would not be detrimental outcomes for students from waiting a few weeks for staff to be vaccinated. This can allow for a safe, welcoming and planful reopening of the schools. The mental health staff should be brought in on any discussions of student and staff well being, SEL needs as well as SEL curriculum in the school. Including the mental health staff and those directly working with the children, who have a unique pulse on the climate of the staff and student bodies, seems like the only logical approach to having an informed decision-making plan given that a main concern outlined leadership has been SEL. Teaching SEL in the classroom comes from fostering a positive climate where everyone feels that their wellbeing is valued. Key characteristics of any charter within the RULER approach includes feeling safe, valued and respected. These are not just aspects of our</p>

		<p>class charters, but of our staff charters as well. Unless these characteristics are addressed in present time, I feel that morale can be best described as being at an all time low. This has the potential to create a clear and damaging disconnect between the leadership of this district and those who do the work day in and day out with the children of this town on behalf of leadership.</p> <p>Furthermore, the unexpected announcement of changing our health care to a more expensive and less flexible health care plan during a global pandemic is concerning on many levels. With this decision, staff truly feel unvalued and disregarded. There appears to be a lack of genuine concern for the wellbeing of the staff and the families we work hard to support. This shift may lead us to find new providers, pay higher fees in addition to out of pocket costs until reaching the deductible, and all of this during a global pandemic. This may limit or lead to less accessibility to mental health services for staff members as well as their families, which is a critical component to maintaining wellness amidst a global pandemic or exposure to possible traumas (chronic illnesses, grief and loss). Additionally, this is one of many health care changes that the district has implemented over the course of the last few years. This creates stress and discontinuity of services for the staff when they need to change providers. This can be further exacerbated by the global pandemic and the possible need for increased medical care. Many individuals including myself have put off medical appointments and procedures so as not to overwhelm our ailing medical system during the pandemic. Only then to learn we may need to find new providers to access our long awaited medical care is overwhelmingly distressing.</p> <p>I would like to invite and strongly encourage you to join us in our daily work in the buildings. This can help inform an exploration of the current state of morale which is of interest to all engaged leaders. It has become increasingly concerning that there is a malignant climate across the district that can pervade everything that we do. I invite you to spend time in classrooms with students to be able to make informed decisions. Furthermore, the mental health staff are willing to consult on the reopening planning.</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read this note and for considering with openness the challenges and needs of individuals who staff this great school system.</p> <p>Respectfully Submitted, Amy Glazer, Ph.D., NCSP</p>
joanne pirone	4 peters lane shelton, ct	<p>Dear Members of The Board,</p> <p>I'm writing to you as an employee of the Westport school district for over 20 years as a paraprofessional as well as a single mother.</p> <p>I'm the head of my household and the only breadwinner as well as my teenage child's sole caregiver. I'm 50+ years old</p>

and rather healthy, the same demographic as the second highest group of Covid 19 fatalities. While I understand and respect the fact that Westport parents want a full opening for the schools, I passionately disagree with the decision that was made to move forward on February 1st. I have several reasons for my opposition at this time but I will list only the most important ones here.

First and foremost, I'm not against a full opening. I don't agree that it arbitrarily be set for February 1st. I implore you to allow your staff at every school to receive the Covid vaccine before fully opening. It really is a matter of life and death and I would appreciate your empathy at this time.

As a paraprofessional, one of my daily duties is to oversee lunch periods. I understand that planning is underway to separate the students during lunch so that there may be some social distancing. Please understand that even if students are separated between the classroom and cafeteria, I could still be responsible for a few dozen students during each lunch period. There will be no masks worn at this very social time and several of the younger students require a considerable amount of assistance, also. I will move through a room, in close proximity to people without masks, while they are eating and talking. It's part of my job detail to perform lunch duty every day so I will have no less than three duties daily, as has been the norm in past years. If recess is not included, I could be responsible for as many as five lunch duties daily. This means that I'll be in pretty close contact with dozens and dozens of people, 30 minutes per group, anywhere from three to five times daily. How I wish I were mistaken.

Another reason is the inevitable lack for social distancing. As of now, and since September, the classes in which I work have been decreased by at least half. Still, many empty desks remain in the classroom in the event that new students or former distance learners should arrive. In an effort to keep the group of students engaged and socially included, they are seated nearer to each other with about 2 ½- 3 feet of space in between, due to all the desks in the room. More students would mean even more desks and even less space in between each desk. Socially distancing would no longer be possible.

More students in the school would mean more walking in line in the hallways, too. Kindergartners and first graders have a very difficult time socially distancing while walking in line; they've been taught not to leave a 'gap' in line; they talk to each other in line which means whispering in each other's ears. For students walking in line with their class, is just another opportunity for socializing. Please know that we always do our best to monitor students passing through the halls but some behaviors (ie: at the end of the line) still happen.

Ladies and gentlemen, I beseech you to reconsider the choice you are making. This is a life or death situation for the staff. I'm not asking that a full opening be reconsidered, only that it is considered when it can safely be facilitated by staff that is protected with vaccinations. I understand how hard it

		<p>is for families to deal with the stress of students not being in school. However, my child and I can tell you that the stress following the death of a parent is even harder. Please rethink your decision, at least for the sake of my child. Sincerely, Joanne Pirone Paraprofessional @ LLS</p>
<p>Kerri Kohlun</p>	<p>Saugatuck Teacher</p>	<p>Dear BOE members and Superintendent Scarice, We, as teachers in Westport, are NOT okay! We have not felt heard or respected and we cannot be ignored. Letters have been sent from our union and the response given to concerns for our lives has been "thank you, we care about your health and safety". Please share evidence of this with our teachers now. We have not had any meetings with our superintendent or the BOE, via Zoom or socially distanced, to listen to us and see our concerned and worried faces. We have listened for hours to a handful of people on Zoom meetings who have pressed for fully reopen plans to be shared with parents, yet teachers have not even been given those finalized plans yet. Schedules will completely change, curriculum modifications will be required and social distancing will no longer be considered in just two weeks time and only one day given to staff to prepare. The only protection for our health will be to rely on face masks (which will be on and off throughout students' 6 hour days inside the classroom) and plexiglass at desks where young students struggle to remain behind them even now. Our voices have not been heard and we are the ones that are being affected most. We will now have only two weeks to prepare to change everything again? We have pivoted in circles and modified instruction and routines repeatedly and we are exhausted. Just when we think we can come up for air for a minute (a three day weekend and one just before the holiday break), we receive an email from our superintendent that tells us we are adding more to the stress, going full in person in two weeks time. Many of us will now spend the weekend worrying and writing letters instead of trying to take a moment for self care and recharging our depleted batteries. We can only "put on a happy face" for so long and keep stacking our plates higher and higher. I hope that the BOE is aware of what this means for the elementary specialty area teachers. We will see the entire school population of students, 400-plus students depending on the school, every week for about 45 minutes at a time. This amount of exposure does not include staff members that might also accompany a class. As I understand, there is not another teacher position that would require this amount of exposure weekly. In addition, we will be asked to have lunch duties in elementary classrooms where students will be eating with their masks off. Special area subjects are a vital part of the Westport curriculum and we have already been doing the most difficult</p>

work of teaching solely on ZOOM at the elementary level. Many of us are learning new technology daily and attending webinars, seminars, and creating new ways of teaching on our own time so that we can be there for our students during this pandemic and make it as normal for them as possible. We rely on families to help students attend classes and we give 100% of our energy to each of our lessons as we endure failing internet, failing devices, and ongoing technology problems. We are grateful to see all of our students' faces, their whole faces, as we provide them with engaging and meaningful instruction even online. We have made adjustments along the way and have been settling in to our new normal, only to now throw it in the air and start over, AGAIN.

Now, as we return to a full reopen model, we will all wear masks, and special area teachers will go from zero student contact to over 400 students per week. Classroom teachers are just as concerned as we are that we will enter their classrooms after having been in the rest of the rooms in the whole school each week.

Some teachers are managing this stress as best they can and some are not at all. Where is the vaccine for us? Why can't we wait to provide more of a realistic security to our safety? We cannot simply choose to stop working if we do not like this decision. That is not a choice and in most cases not an option either.

Also, there has been no final plan for elementary students who are DL to still receive their special area classes when the rest of the students go back in person. This will devastate many of those distance learning families who have been so happy to have their children attend Zoom lessons with their peers and feel connected with them socially and emotionally. Now, due to their health and safety or personal choice to have their child learn at home we will be cutting out curricular subject areas? Is that cut to their curriculum being discussed by the BOE?

As a 20 year veteran teacher, I have never written to the board. This is paramount. We want to teach. We want to see children. We want to live our lives too. We did not sign military contracts where we agreed to put our life in danger to teach students reading, math, art, PE, music etc. We have however, been expected to put our lives in danger now when it is not absolutely necessary. Our colleagues support each other and ask each other how we are doing each day. Many reply "eh, okay" or "hanging in there". We try our best to be positive and we keep on teaching. Our teachers all have different levels of comfort and acceptance of this new reopen plan, please show them you respect their concerns and give them answers to questions and give them accommodations as needed, just as we would our students.

We ask for you to help us be okay. Please allow us to receive vaccines so that we can focus more on our teaching, the job that we signed up for and the job we love. This,

		<p>again, is paramount.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>
Katie Bloom	Saugatuck Elementary School, Second Grade	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and Westport Board of Education,</p> <p>I have been a classroom teacher at Saugatuck since 2004. For months the district has boasted about our successful hybrid model and how effective the mitigating measures such as social distancing, mask wearing indoors, students not eating (in elementary schools) and cohorting have been. Our schools have remained largely open with these measures in place and I have felt generally comfortable and safe at work. If this model had been so successful why are we rushing to abandon it now?</p> <p>I am disheartened that now as transmission rates in our community are high and with a vaccine that will soon be available to teachers, that we are suddenly rushing to reopen schools in full BEFORE staff can be fully inoculated and possibly before we get our first dose of the vaccine. Students have the option to stay safe and stay home. As a teacher and a mother of three, I do not have this option. I need to go to work to support my family as well as my students. But I also need to feel safe while doing so. Within the next month or so teachers should have the opportunity to be administered both doses of the vaccine. Many of the surrounding towns have already had their teachers vaccinated. This process has not started for Westport teachers and we still do not have a date for when this will begin. We have been battling this pandemic for 11 months. Why would we throw the mitigating measures out the window now with a vaccine on the horizon?</p> <p>With a full return, desks won't be 6 feet apart or even 3 feet apart in many situations. Students will be unmasked for snack and lunch time increasing the risk for spread within a small classroom that they will now only leave briefly for recess. Cohorting will be much harder with more children in classrooms, more children on buses and many families sadly are not practicing safe social distancing outside of school.</p> <p>I see children playing unmasked, in groups and not socially distanced in the community after school on a daily basis. Students excitedly tell my colleagues and I about play dates, sleepovers, vacations, trips to Disney, in person parties and other events that they attend regularly. Although it's nice that some of our students are happy and are getting to have these normal experiences, it makes me feel extremely vulnerable as I stay home in an effort to not only protect myself and my family, but also to protect my students and their families. At this time I'm comfortable in the classroom, but in a small classroom filled with students I will feel far less safe. I continue to hear that the district cares about the health and safety of the staff. It doesn't feel that way right now.</p>

		<p>The other thing the district has talked about is the benefit of the hybrid model because it allows students to move about the classroom and work in partnerships using distancing so that we can continue to utilize best teaching and learning practices. As a result, our elementary students have done great! Sadly with a full return this won't be possible in most classrooms as there won't be room for children to spread out, move and work in groups in the same way. They will be stuck at their desks most of the day unable to move freely which is not developmentally appropriate for our youngest learners. I will say that even with the smaller class sizes right now, it's a challenge to keep the students distanced 100% of the time. I find myself reminding them of this constantly and this is with ample space available to spread out. I know it will be harder with twice as many kids and far less room.</p> <p>Please reconsider the timing of the full reopening. We've come so far and our district has done beautifully. Let's not give up now when Covid rates are so high and we are so close to a vaccine. As teachers we put the children of Westport first and act in their best interest on a daily basis. Please do the same for us.</p> <p>Katie Bloom Second Grade Teacher Saugatuck Elementary School</p>
Robyn Babina	29 Burr Farms Road - Long Lots	<p>Its our understanding that the distant learners will remain part time while everyone else begins to go back full time. Can someone please explain why they are remaining half day learners when the rest of the student body gets the additional time in classrooms?</p>
Susan Price	45 Great Ring Rd, Monroe, CT	<p>Why can't we wait until the faculty and staff are vaccinated before going back to a full opening? We're almost there. Many of us have already had to quarantine due to exposures at school and have put our own families health at risk. Some of us have underlying health conditions that put us at greater risk. It seems very reckless to fully reopen without those vaccines first. Hybrid has been working well. We care about students getting back full time like all the parents do but by risking our own health to do so is very troubling.</p>
Lisa Weand	BMS-7th grade	<p>Good evening. I would like everyone to close their eyes and imagine the following scenario. The bell rings and it's time for Language Arts. 28 students enter their classroom, children's faces (not desks) are hopefully 3 feet apart. Then, with lunch not happening until 1:30, the teacher announces that students can take their masks off for a snack break. All students in the room are now completely exposed. Unfortunately, you don't need to imagine very hard, because that is exactly what the middle school classrooms will look like if we open fully. There will also be less group work, minimal movement throughout the classroom, and assigned seats. Currently, teachers are actively identifying "high risk"</p>

		<p>students and arranging for them to come in 4 days a week, while still keeping class sizes small and children at a safe distance. With covid numbers high and new variants of covid on the rise, I implore you to maintain the current hybrid model for the safety of students and staff. Thank you</p>
<p>Kimberly Kassay, Melissa Sakowich, Yasu Wade, Amy Glazer, Cristina Andreassi, Cheryl Tyler Balkcom, Kelly Barker, Elizabeth Calabro, Dan Cohen, Deborah Duke,</p>	<p>Bedford Middle School, Coleytown Middle School, Coleytown Elementary School, Long Lots Elementary School, Kings Highway Elementary School, Staples High School, Stepping Stones Preschool</p>	<p>This year has been the most difficult one that the majority of educators have ever, and hopefully will ever, face. And yet, the Westport Public Schools staff have risen to and exceeded all expectations and have provided high quality instruction and a welcoming learning environment for students since the first day of school. When our students walk into school each day, they undoubtedly know that they are cared for and have the support of their teachers and school professionals even in the most uncertain of times. However, our school staff have been the ones bearing the burden of teaching in a pandemic, trying to maintain their safety and the safety of their students, and managing their own anxiety, frustration, and stress levels every day.</p> <p>School staff are putting themselves and their families at risk to do the job they love: teach. Our staff is incredibly dedicated and talented at the work they do and deserve to feel safe, valued, and respected at the very least. This year, they do not. At a back to school faculty meeting at an elementary school this year, staff were asked to check-in on the mood meter. The feelings they reported were heartbreaking to hear, especially for a staff that is generally optimistic and enthusiastic for the start of a new year. Feeling words reported included: overwhelmed, stressed, scared, disconnected, anxious, uncertain, nervous, lonely, worried, exhausted, tense, drained, and uneasy. As mental health professionals, we hear from staff on a regular basis that while they have adjusted to the current hybrid model, they frequently continue to feel these ways. Although there was some talk of “self-care” earlier this year, little has been done to truly support staff in their social-emotional security. Mr. Scarice’s announcement, at 4 p.m. on Friday before a long weekend, caused significant distress to many individuals. The reprieve they were hoping for was quickly snatched away and they were left feeling scared and angry. Not only were they being put in an increasingly dangerous situation, but it was being thrust upon them with little time to prepare and no indication of consideration of their safety or needs. The people on the front lines of the pandemic in our schools were not consulted before district level administration made this decision. Nor was their professional opinion sought as to the need for this sudden change at a time when there is an end in sight (vaccination) and risks are increasing (higher cases in our schools and more contagious COVID-19 variant spreading across Connecticut). If it had been, they would have learned that staff are already doing everything possible to create the best learning environments for our students given the current circumstances and they have been overwhelmingly successful in doing so.</p>

Additionally, the confusion around vaccination eligibility this weekend added another stressor to an already extremely difficult situation. Staff were understandably upset when they learned that other districts had prioritized registering their staff in VAMS when Westport had not. We understand that the real problem was a miscommunication with the state and logistical issue with the system. However, the district's decision to suddenly register staff while at the same time "imploring" them not to register for an appointment, put them in an ethical dilemma at a time when they were already struggling emotionally. At the same time, they were being told that they were about to be confronting greater exposure to a potentially deadly virus and that they had the ability to secure an appointment that could keep them safe, but that they should not because it was not the "right" thing to do. This is a decision that no one should have to make, yet it was put upon staff in the middle of a holiday weekend.

We know that chronic stress leads to burnout and we believe that teacher stress at this time is at an all time high in our schools. Teacher burnout can impact their relationships with students, ability to manage student behaviors, and effective teaching. The emotional exhaustion can also lead to increased absenteeism, early retirement or resignations. As the mental health professionals, we believe that teacher morale has already been impacted this year and this decision to reopen at the end of the month would create a much more dire situation.

Under the best of circumstances, transitions and adapting to change can be difficult for our students. They have shown tremendous resiliency throughout the pandemic as they work to navigate their new environments, rules, and routines. We thank our teachers and staff immensely for all the work they have done to support our students to understand and adapt to our changing times, as they themselves have had minimal bandwidth and support to do the same. With the plan to shortly reopen schools at full capacity, it has been oft referenced that a goal of this is our students' social and emotional well-being. However, at no point have we, as the front-line mental health professionals in the district been consulted in the planning. Dr. Krech of the World Health Organization has stated that, "Decisions to reopen schools should be driven by data and the safety measures in place, but also address the concerns of students, parents, caregivers and teachers. These concerns are best addressed if reopening approaches are co-designed with students, parents, caregivers and teachers." Our staff concerns have not been addressed nor have we as mental health professionals been a part of any designs. A decision for full reopening at this time is a significant change for staff and students with little notice. There is limited time for transition planning (emotionally and logistically), especially as the middle school students have just had a large transition in the changing of school environments and corresponding schedule changes. There will be an increase in riskier

situations (snack, lunch, recess, specials, more students in classrooms and buses, less time for cleaning, lack of social distancing), which have not been discussed with staff, and therefore not discussed or practiced with students. We have seen a decrease in behavioral and social challenges for our students this year, which will likely increase as the number of students in school increases. This will further tax our teachers and mental health staff, without any prior consultation on preventative steps that may assist. Safety and security are considered basic psychological needs. While it seems time and consideration have been given to planning for the physical safety of our students, there has been little to no planning for the psychological safety of students, and no planning for the psychological safety of our staff.

As mental health professionals, our primary role is to advocate for our students. We seek to provide a viewpoint that accomplishes this goal with regards to their social-emotional well-being. First, we are in agreement with Mr. Scarice's past assertions that many of our students have shown positive outcomes, especially with regards to social-emotional functioning, in the current hybrid model. We cannot overlook that some students are having their best year of school, despite all odds, during a global pandemic. We fear for the loss these students will experience without adequate preparation for a full reopening and without the same level of support. The smaller class size, individualized attention, and shorter school day have allowed many students to thrive in what could have otherwise been an extremely challenging year. We have seen teachers, despite enormous challenges, develop strong class communities and have seen our students make progress academically and behaviorally. We see many children upbeat and smiling as they attend school. We see children retaining friendships and a sense of connection. This has been fostered by a school model designed for their comfort with their developmental needs (especially considering the need for restrictive mitigating measures) placed at the forefront. The hybrid model has proved advantageous to our students who have made friends in a more intimate group, have connected with their teachers more deeply, and who feel their daily workload is more predictable and manageable. In general, we have encountered fewer behavioral crises and social conflicts than in previous years. In smaller classrooms, teachers are able to provide the warm, responsive and nurturing environment that a pandemic warrants for all children. One of the proven ways to mitigate chronic stress in children is a relationship with one caring adult. We want our students to have more time with the caring adults in their school life as we enter month eleven of the global pandemic, not less. The impact of continual stress has lifelong physical and health outcomes for children and we must seek to mitigate this. Of course, our students desire a return to the status quo of last year, as we all do. These feelings are normal, valid, and expected in the current context. Still, we can adapt in our present model to

make it the best it can be, without altering school completely once more.

We view with significant apprehension a situation that increases the risk of our students being placed on quarantine and the probability of a full school closure. We are concerned that the negative impact of these factors outweighs the positive benefits that a full reopening could afford at this time. Quarantine periods create disruptions that increase student and family stress levels, interrupt continuity of learning, introduce unexpected changes in routines, and create a sense of loss of safety due to anxiety about risk of imminent illness. These are challenges that have been identified by the CDC to impact mental health during COVID-19 and will be real concerns for our most vulnerable students, those with emotional and developmental disabilities, who may not have the skills to properly cope (CDC, 2020). A recent study which sought to comprehensively review articles related to youth mental health and COVID-19 identified that prolonged closures have “debilitating effects on educational, developmental, and psychological attainment” (Singh et al., 2020). We do not support a reopening position that could increase the risk of a full closure or that has the increased potential to expose children to the trauma of severe illness in a close family member or educator. We feel that the current hybrid model has been protective in this regard thus far. Further, the viral concerns Mr. Scarice outlined in the Fall when a full reopening was last considered have only worsened. Our children deserve the safest environment possible to support their social-emotional well-being. Educational progress in the absence of physical safety and social-emotional security is unachievable. This is the base of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. As such, full reopening at this time does not seem safe, reasonable, or in student best interest.

That being said, we are in support of a full reopening when it is safe to do so (when transmission rates are lower, all staff have been vaccinated, and student travel is reduced) and when provided with adequate preparation. We believe our students will benefit from a return to a routine that approximates a typical school year, as this will allow them to have a more full and familiar experience with increased social-emotional opportunities during lunch, recess, and after-school activities. However, by reopening schools now, in the current environment, it is not logical to assume that a positive impact on well-being will just automatically happen. Additional time and energy needs to be devoted to social-emotional wellness and learning, as school right now, even if fully reopened, will likely not approximate the regular routine in many crucial ways. Our students will notice this and it will impact them. For some, including those with disabilities, it will be anxiety-provoking and push them to their limits of their flexibility. We were promised at the start of this school year that social-emotional learning would be prioritized. The Board and Mr. Scarice will benefit from

considering whether RULER has been utilized to its fullest extent and whether additional support is needed now. To our knowledge, the school staff has not been given any COVID-specific social-emotional training this year, only academic professional development, and mental health staff have not received additional support in the form of training or hiring of additional providers. Greater access to mental health support is documented as necessary for children at this time and yet we are left with the same resources. Before a full reopening, the district should consider training staff in trauma-informed teaching practices and providing greater professional development to mental health staff. While we are experts in our field, none of us have been mental health providers in a global pandemic before. Our needs are not being met and this will impact our students. It is reductionist to state that changing the school structure will eliminate or mitigate existing social/emotional or psychological problems. Your staff, the psychologists and other mental health providers, will need to do real work to achieve these outcomes. We need a culture that promotes us in reaching these goals.

We have already asked our resilient students to adapt once to a new school model this year and we find ourselves questioning if it is really necessary to put them through another change, another stressor, right now. We believe in our students and believe they are capable of handling this transition, but not on their own and not without support. However, it is certainly far from best practices that those tasked with providing this support for them, including their teachers and mental health providers, have themselves only been given one week to adapt to these changes.

Furthermore, the unexpected announcement of the change in our health care to a more expensive and less flexible plan during a global pandemic is concerning on many levels. With this decision, staff truly feel unvalued and disregarded. There appears to be a lack of genuine concern for the wellbeing of the staff and the families that we work hard to support. This shift may lead us to find new providers, pay higher fees in addition to out of pocket costs until reaching the deductible, and all of this during a global pandemic. This may limit or lead to less accessibility to mental health services for staff members as well as their families, which is a critical component to maintaining wellness amidst a global pandemic or exposure to possible traumas (chronic illnesses, grief and loss). Additionally, this is one of many health care changes that the district has implemented over the course of the last few years. This creates stress and discontinuity of services for the staff when they need to change providers. This can be further exacerbated by the global pandemic and the possible need for increased medical care. Many individuals have put off medical appointments and procedures so as not to overwhelm our ailing medical system during the pandemic. To now learn we may need to find new providers to access our long awaited medical care is

		<p>overwhelmingly distressing.</p> <p>We would like to invite and strongly encourage Mr. Scarice as well as Board of Ed members to join us in our daily work in the buildings. We welcome you to spend time in classrooms and related service offices with students to be able to make the best informed decisions. Furthermore, the mental health staff are willing to consult on the reopening planning. We would be willing to support further investigation into the matter of student and teacher mental health to systematically determine how our population is doing in this regard.</p>
Vanessa Weinbach	6 Riverfield Dr	<p>1) lunch and snacks — Will they be allowed to talk with each other while eating? How will kids buy hot lunches? 2) music — Will kids be singing together in the classroom? Will they play any mouth instruments (recorders, etc)? 3) PE — WHAT HAPPENS DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER? 4) Recess — WHAT HAPPENS DURING INCLEMENT WEATHER? 5) Bathrooms — Will someone be monitoring bathrooms to be sure children aren't congregating or removing masks? 6) hand washing — how will this be regulated throughout the day?</p>
Sari Reid	Saugatuck Elementary, LMC paraprofessional	<p>Hello to all Board members and Mr Scarice,</p> <p>First, I want to begin by thanking everyone for your hard work, commitment, and dedication.</p> <p>I implore the Board and Mr Scarice to reconsider the decision to open up to full days with all students, especially at the elementary level.</p> <p>Having just spent the last 4 weeks recovering from a Covid 19 infection that brought me to the ER with pneumonia, I know first-hand the frightening grip this virus can take on one's life.</p> <p>If we open fully to all students, I believe many will pay a steep price. I will only speak to the elementary level because that is where I am employed and I know that, as we have many more classes than paraprofessionals, paras will need to cover 2-3 lunches a day, 30 minutes each, in rooms tightly fit with 18-25 students at each session. Were we to divide a class to allow more distance, will we have the staff to cover all the lunch groups, and what does this do to cohorting for paras who will cover multiple classes, especially if one tests positive? All students will be UNmasked while they eat, cough, laugh, and sneeze, and it will be difficult to remain even 6 feet away in many of the classrooms. What about respiratory droplets remaining in the classrooms well after the children have finished eating? This goes against every safety guideline that has ever been published by any respected health agency in the world regarding Covid 19.</p>

		<p>This is clearly and undeniably a health hazard that could lead to devastating effects, especially knowing we have new and more highly-contagious strains amongst us now.</p> <p>I'm not fearful for myself as I have already suffered for those coveted antibodies, but I write this for my peers, for our hard-working staff members and custodial staff in the hopes that this decision will be reversed, at the very least until a couple of weeks after all staff in the district have received their booster vaccine as this is when, studies show, an individual will reach his or her optimal antibody levels.</p> <p>I can imagine the terrific strain the AM/PM cohort has on many of our families and I, too, look so forward to the time when we can bring all of our children together again, but there could not be a worse time in this pandemic to make this change. Again, please let us wait until we have all been vaccinated with the booster so we can better avoid further illness, or worse.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p> <p>Stay safe.</p> <p>Warm regards</p>
Maggie Parkhurst	4 Pequot Trail	<p>Lee Goldstein addressed in BOE meeting last spring that each classroom should be equipped with an additional air filtration system. While the plexiglass shields are helpful, clean air is always welcome, even post pandemic. Will the BOE reconsider providing each classroom with an additional air filtration system?</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>I am a Westport resident and a CES employee</p>
Kim Herzog	Staples High School Teacher	<p>I am deeply concerned about the decision to transition students back into full-time learning models, despite national warnings about additional, easier transmittable strains of this virus which will be widespread as early as March, and without our staff being vaccinated. There is even a chance that there will not be enough vaccinations for Connecticut educators "because the vaccine supply, as it stands right now, will only meet the needs of citizens 75 or older" (John Bayers). Time and again, we have been assured of our value within our school system, and especially to our students, but this disregard for the health and safety of staff during a worldwide pandemic whose numbers just broke 400,000 deaths in the US alone is in opposition to those sentiments.</p> <p>If the high school returns to full capacity, there is absolutely no way to maintain safe social distancing (which, when not policed by adults in the building, is constantly disregarded); no safe space to eat lunch or spend a free period; no way to avoid the herding of students from one period to the next through narrow hallways; and these are just the obvious concerns. This decision jeopardizes the physical and mental</p>

		<p>health of students and staff alike.</p> <p>Now more than ever, we hope you recognize that we are not simply cogs in a wheel - we are individuals with our own health issues, with families who rely on us, and who are constantly at risk because of our level of exposure which exceeds most, even being in a hybrid model. The same is true in your intended goal to change our healthcare - healthcare that is important now more than ever. During a pandemic, there has to be other ways to meet budgetary needs without sacrificing healthcare coverage. I speak of this on a personal level as a mother of a four-year-old with serious immunodeficiency issues, who lives in fear each and every day of exposing her son to strains that his immune system simply cannot fight.</p> <p>I will continue to take every precaution necessary to protect him and the rest of my family, as well as my colleagues and students, in every way I can, because I see this as my duty as a mother and an educator. I only hope you do the same by reversing this decision to transition back to full-time learning models with the continuation of our current insurance coverage. I love my job, and am passionate about reaching and teaching every student, but our lives need to take precedence here.</p> <p>With respect, Kim Herzog</p>
<p>Michele Anderson</p>	<p>Bedford Middle School - teacher</p>	<p>I would like to express my concern on what appears to be a rush to fully reopen our schools on February 1st. As much as we are being told that teachers have done a remarkable job thus far, I am concerned that we have not been given an opportunity to have our voices heard. Since teachers are the ones on the frontlines encouraging and educating our students each and every day, not being able to view or provide input to a full reopening plan makes us feel undervalued as professionals.</p> <p>It is disheartening to see Board of Ed meetings continually taking place over Zoom from the comfort and safety of people's homes. While I realize this is a governor mandate, it is incomprehensible to me why it is acceptable for students and teachers to gather by the hundreds and thousands in a school building five days a week with masks being our only safe mitigating measures.</p> <p>The hybrid-teaching model, while certainly challenging at times, has kept our students and staff safe for the most part. As a teacher who was forced to quarantine due to an exposure at Bedford Middle School, I believe we should continue with the hybrid model until all employees have been given the opportunity to be vaccinated against COVID-19.</p>
<p>Sarin Cheung</p>	<p>24 Webb Road</p>	<p>My heartfelt appreciation for the teachers, administrators, nurses, BOE members and all the employees of WPS for the</p>

		<p>creativity and commitment you have demonstrated in this unprecedented and difficult year.</p> <p>What is the administration’s plan on classrooms that are currently above the maximum class size. In October, Tom mentioned LLS 5th grade/SES 3rd grade being the 2 groups reaching their maximum count. Per the budget 2021-22 document, as of October 1st, SES 3rd grade class has met their minimum student count of 74 to have 4 sections. Currently we are at 3. Over the last few months, at least 1 or maybe 2 more students have joined this grade. To fit everyone in the current classrooms, at best 2 ft, not 3, not 6 like the rest of our school, can be between each desk.</p> <p>According to the Board policy, this grade should now have 4 sections. Will there be another section added so each child and their teacher can be properly distanced from one another, especially when they are not masked at lunch/snack times? If not, why not? Thank you.</p>
David Roth	SHS	<p>January 18, 2021</p> <p>Dear Mr. Scarice and Members of the Westport Board of Education,</p> <p>I have been a teacher in the Westport schools for over 27 years and I believe this is the first time I have ever written to the Board of Education. I could no longer stay silent after the three pieces of stressful news that teachers received at the start of our three day weekend, a time meant to provide a break from our stressful work.</p> <p>I was shocked and disappointed to find out that Westport would continue with plans to open fully despite the fact that Covid-19 continues to rage and is predicted to have killed half of a million people in the U.S. by March. New scientific research now shows that cloth masks are no longer effective enough to protect against the new, highly contagious variants that have arrived from Great Britain and elsewhere and are predicted to soon be widespread in our country. I am having trouble understanding how the Board came to this decision - how can we consciously put teachers and students in greater danger before vaccination? How do you know that the schools will not become a “hot-spot” in the months to come? We have been told recently that our health is “paramount” but we all know actions speak louder than words. These actions do not seem to be considering the health of the Westport teachers.</p> <p>Regarding vaccination, I was also disappointed to find out that teachers had been left out of the most recent wave of vaccines. While I understand that the Board can not control the distribution of the vaccine, it was upsetting to hear that teachers from neighboring towns (such as Fairfield and Trumbull) had their names uploaded to the VAMS system a week ago and were able to schedule vaccinations. Westport</p>

		<p>had chosen not to upload our names until just two days ago - after most of the vaccination appointments were gone. We were also informed that all of this was a mistake and that we should not try to get an appointment. This situation and Westport's handling of it is beyond confusing.</p> <p>Finally, we received news that our health insurance will be changed yet again. I believe we have been forced to switch at least 4 times in the last 5 years. The process of changing carriers is extremely stressful - especially if you have many out-of-network specialists, as my family does. The high deductible program through Cigna was the absolute worst coverage we have experienced and the most confusing we have ever had. Cigna regularly made mistakes on claims, took months to process bills and were extremely difficult to communicate with. Their representatives regularly did not understand their own policies and my wife often found herself having to explain to their agents how to correctly process claims.</p> <p>I know that everyone has been having a very stressful year - teachers, administrators and the Board alike. However, these decisions seem to show a lack of concern for teachers' welfare and mental health on the part of Westport schools. I love being a teacher. I know that my colleagues love teaching, too - getting to work with passionate educators is a special part of the Westport School System. However, we are being spread thin this year - we have been keeping up the best we can and continuing to plan, refocus, adapt and refocus again. I love my students and would make many sacrifices for them. But there's only so far that we can go - we have to consider the health and safety of ourselves and our families. Please consider listening to those in the classrooms, on the front lines. We only want what is best for our community.</p> <p>Thank you, David Roth Staples Theatre Teacher and Head of Staples Players</p>
<p>Faith Sweeney Distance Learning Kindergarten Teacher/ K-5 Literacy Coach</p>	<p>Coleytown Elementary School</p>	<p>Dear Board of Education Members,</p> <p>I am currently working as a Kindergarten Distance Learning teacher in the mornings, and serve as a K-5 literacy coach in the afternoons. I have worked tirelessly to provide my online students a learning community that is a safe engaging place. I want our future leaders to thrive. All while, trying to maintain collaboration, support, and communication with my K-5 teams to support the literacy work at CES.</p> <p>I applauded the Superintendent and Board's decision to remain in a hybrid model up to this point. This model has proven to provide consistency to even our youngest learners. I understand that we must assess all factors before making a decision to change the course of our instruction. What I can't understand is this timeline.</p> <p>This timeline reminds me of the two days before returning to work, this school year, and being informed that I would be</p>

		<p>responsible for a virtual classroom of Kindergartners. Of course, I do whatever ever it takes for our children, but what was sacrificed? Time, collaboration, and self-education for my new role.</p> <p>Since March, I have felt like I have been flying the plane while building it. This year, with this new role, even more! The collaboration time is minimal, the time for reflection is rare within the confines of school. I spend hours beyond school reflecting, redesigning, and collaborating to make it through this pandemic school year.</p> <p>Like me, many teachers are working on a thin thread to be the public school system that we dream it to be for our children. But we feel left out. We feel forgotten. We feel, we are not taken seriously but we need to keep teaching.</p> <p>What steps have you taken to build coalitions and partnerships with our community resources and businesses to help provide childcare for our students; and provide relief for families? This pandemic has proven that schools can no longer be the sole childcare providers for our children.</p> <p>Teachers, and our school system, have been charged to bear the brunt of this societal need. By going in full, you will limit our resources that are currently providing our students with consistent learning environments.</p> <p>Now, the ever-looming date to bring all students back is upon us. Teachers, like me, question the February date. Without proper time to prepare for safety in buildings and lack of time for teachers to adjust schedules and curriculum because we are still teaching. The uneasiness is not giving me the permission to feel sound about this decision.</p> <p>Based on the latest emails, by HR, saying to withhold, then go ahead and register for an appointment for a vaccine gives teachers no faith in this February 1st date. The physical space of our classrooms needs to be safe for teachers and staff that provide the schooling the community expects their children to have through a pandemic. What happens when you limit your resources because of this decision to go in full, without a vaccine insight before February 1st, 2021? Please reconsider and keep the hybrid model.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration,</p>
Rosie Curtis	4 heritage ct	<p>As PTA Co-president of Kings Highway Elementary School, I would like to ask the district to make sure the SpEd community is seen and heard during these unsettling times. There have been some concerns and questions surrounding scheduling in the full reopening model and with an influx of sped students we'd like to see how the district hopes to address the needs of all the SpEd students, while not overwhelming our SpEd staff. We appreciate you all and we are encouraged by your attention to our children's social emotional health, especially for our most vulnerable students. Thank you and we really hope our school superheroes get to be vaccinated sooner than later! ♥</p>
Robert Harrington	7 woody lane	<p>Want to give high praise to all the work Central office and all the principals have done here.</p>

		<p>I support the move to reopen the schools in this thoughtful way but only once ALL the teachers, teaching assistants, support staff and janitors have been vaccinated fully - should they be willing to do so. Our kids need to be back in school but we can't do this without fully protecting our teachers and other workers with full - both dose vaccinations.</p>
Chris Scholz	65 Easton Rd	<p>Are the DL specials that are meeting live separate by grade level (6 different live meetings) or lumped all into one meeting K-5?</p>
Sarah Bell	Bedford Middle School grade 6	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and Westport Board of Education Members,</p> <p>As I'm sure many, many teachers and staff are this weekend, I am writing to implore you to reconsider the current re-opening plan.</p> <p>Certainly, the entire purpose of school is to educate and nurture young people. Of that, there is no question. However, a school community consists of many more people than just students, and for optimal outcomes, all members of school communities must be able to fully engage in our important work. Teachers' responsibilities - and accompanying stresses - have increased exponentially in recent years from active shooter drills down to this new global pandemic-related safeguarding of public health. We do what needs to be done because it all needs doing.</p> <p>At the same time, we are human people with our own unprecedented anxieties and families to care for and protect. I am bewildered and disheartened that we should be expected to accept such reckless disregard for our safety and emotional wellbeing as we move toward doubling the number of students in our classrooms.</p> <p>When I returned to my classroom on January 4, I found 25 desks spaced 24 inches apart. I had a visceral, panicked reaction. I had spent the first three months of this year crying most mornings as I drove to school, knowing that I would spend the day in cortisol-overdrive, trying to meet the needs of students in the room, students simultaneously on Zoom, my own need to feel safe, and my desire to hold myself to high standards as I deliver instruction and assess learning. I adjusted, gathered many new strategies for my new 'pandemic era teacher's bag of tricks,' processed new research about in-school transmission, and found myself crying less frequently. I was able to be more present and focused on my students. It came to feel sustainable.</p> <p>Doubling the number of in-school learners (with its accompanying increase in classroom management both COVID and non-COVID related), maintaining the option for students to stay home, eliminating the possibility of social distancing in class, doubling the number of maskless students in the cafeteria (or worse, having students eat in</p>

		<p>classrooms)... all when teachers are quite close to being able to access the vaccine... It's simply thoughtless. Honestly, it feels disrespectful, dismissive, and even a little bit mean-spirited.</p> <p>A few years ago, we, the Westport Public Schools, adopted a set of Guiding Principles. They are for us to be 'emotionally and socially aware, principled in thought and action, kind with sincerity, and learning always.' There is also a statement that students (but I would argue all members...) will 'connect with and be accountable to their learning community.' Please, please, consider delaying the full re-opening of schools until circumstances are better for the well being of those who are, frankly, as powerless as we are dedicated. That one decision feels as though it represents a commitment to the Guiding Principles of our community.</p> <p>Thank you, Sincerely, Sarah Bell Bedford Middle School</p>
Ellen Hardy (teacher)	29 Crescent Street, Ansonia	<p>I feel the decision to open at this time is extremely unwise for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the Connecticut COVID response website as of January 15, 2021, COVID-19 cases are still on the rise as is the death rate from these cases. • As of January 8, 2021 the new, more communicable strain of COVID has been found in Connecticut brought in from people who traveled out of state. Considering many families in Westport will no doubt be traveling during the February break the possibility of more cases being brought back is fairly high. Though this strain does not appear to be more lethal it spreads more easily meaning more people at once could become ill causing a complete shut down of a school and full remote learning, which, I would think, we would want to avoid – and so far have avoided with the hybrid-teaching format. • The HIGHEST RISK of spreading COVID-19 is from INDOOR EATING without being socially distanced. If we go back to full in teaching, students will be eating indoors and droplets will be spread everywhere not only through the air but on touch surfaces and in many areas of our buildings. Custodial staff is already stretched thin and cleaning all these areas in a timely and thorough manner is problematical. Therefore the possibility of widespread infection will be very great. • With more students riding buses the ability for the driver to make sure masks are being worn at all times is greatly reduced, again raising the risk of infection. • Teachers have been told NOT to sign up for a

		<p>vaccine yet. When I went to the site to see how soon I might be able to get a vaccine via the schedule it was not until FEBRUARY, and the longer we are not allowed to sign up for a vaccine the farther away that date will be – especially if hundreds of teachers are trying to get vaccines all at once – meaning it could be March or April at least before many teachers could get their FIRST vaccine with 3 more weeks before they could be fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Taking all this into consideration I feel we are much better off to continue with the hybrid-teaching model. If the one thing the BOE wishes to avoid is a total shutdown such as we had last March this seems the wisest course of action. I believe we should continue as we are until such time as all teachers have been able to be vaccinated against COVID-19.</p>
<p>Jen Ackerman</p>	<p>Long Lots School</p>	<p>(Make sure this isn't a duplicate! My wifi glitched before I submitted before! Sorry, John)</p> <p>Good evening.</p> <p>I'd like to suggest that we begin our transition back to full day and full classroom density well after February break. We continue to have families that choose to travel out of state, many now using the new travel advisory protocol and some families not using any. As we saw after Thanksgiving break and after our holiday break, Covid numbers jumped and continued to rise. We get daily notifications of our positive cases and we are able to manage these positives because of distancing and because we are all staying masked. Both of these mitigation strategies are compromised when we go full day. Classroom density will not allow for recommended distancing and students will be unmasked while eating. Not to mention, in our building, students do not all have access to sinks in their classrooms and are reliant upon community bathrooms which are also small in numbers. I'd like to hold off on a full return until the community is all safely back at home after February travels. Moving the full reopening to later in February also allows the district more time to manage a vaccination plan.</p> <p>Staffing continues to be a large issue at the elementary level. We are short staffed. Currently in our building we are deficient two full-time building subs. Our paraeducators are pulled to cover classrooms and other uncertified staff are asked to substitute. Being short staffed then leaves duties uncovered and also impacts teacher prep and planning time. Everyone is pitching in to make this year work but we are stretched.</p> <p>The school day is too long at the elementary level using the model that is being introduced. Having students seated from 8:45-3:45 with limited opportunities for movement just seems counterproductive and asking for problems. The lovely New England climate limits outdoor study spaces in winter and again limits additional opportunities for movement. We are all</p>

		<p>very flexible and creative, but even the most optimistic of educators can see the drawbacks with this model, for this amount of time. I ask that if we return to full that the elementary school day for students ends sooner.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration and for supporting students, teachers and families.</p>
Robyn Babina	29 Burr Farms	<p>Don't you think its unfair to the remote learning students that they are losing out on so many subjects? They are clearly not going to be keeping up academically with their in person classmates, even though they all deserve to have an equal education.</p>
Michele Niedermeier	BMS	<p>Middle Schoolers will need to understand the expectation that they remain facing forward while they eat without a mask and will not be allowed to turn around and speak with another unmasked student within 3 feet.</p>
Amanda Ingrassia-Staples High	Fairfield, CT	<p>Does the district have data on how many teachers and students have been infected from other infected individuals in the buildings?</p> <p>Has random testing been considered to catch symptomatic and presymptomatic cases (which accounts for more than half of transmission according to CDC)?</p> <p>Will the board consider waiting for widespread vaccinations among teachers before reopening?</p>
Allison Birge	Greens Farms Elementary	<p>Dear Mr. Scarice and the Members of the Westport Board of Education,</p> <p>I write to you to express my concerns regarding the full reopening of schools, specifically for our youngest learners. I worry that many who are in favor of this return are not fully aware of the effect it will have on the students at the elementary level. Many parents and students who I have spoken to seem to be under the impression that the daily routines will be returning to the normalcy of last fall, with the addition of students wearing masks. Below I have outlined the many ways in which this is not true. As you read each change I ask you to envision being a 5, 6, or 7 year old experiencing your school day in this way.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will be required to stay in the same seat for an average of 5+ hours each day. <p>In an attempt to maintain as much distance as possible, students will be seated for all academic lessons, snacks and lunches. They will also remain seated at the same desk for specials when teachers push into the classrooms.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Snacks and lunches will need to be eaten in silence. <p>To limit the transmission of small speech droplets while</p>

		<p>students are in the same enclosed room, less than 6 ft apart, and not wearing masks, they will be asked to eat in silence.</p> <p>3. No partner/group work</p> <p>Currently with such small classes we are able to partner children to work 6 ft apart behind plexiglass and they are still able to hear one another, albeit difficult at times with the masks. When we have a full classroom the noise level and lack of space will not allow for this to be possible.</p> <p>I believe these changes to our school day will have a significant impact on our young student's social/emotional well-being as well as on their attitude toward school and toward learning. For those thinking full classes would allow more opportunity for socialization, the changes noted above prove that to be false. The two short recesses where students are required to stay in a specific space, without touching or getting too close, can only do so much. Not to mention many teachers are already finding ways to fit in some outdoor time with the smaller cohorts.</p> <p>For our young children to be emotionally available for learning they need to move, they need to engage with their peers, and they need change of scenery and lesson design. (Our current hybrid model allows for this!) For these reasons I implore you to consider waiting until the weather begins to warm. The ability to take classes outside for lessons will provide more flexibility in how we can best engage our students. We could space them out for partner and group work, be more creative with movement breaks, etc.</p> <p>We want our full classes back, but we want them back when we know that we are able to provide them with the education they deserve in a safe and nurturing environment.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p> <p>Allison Birge First Grade Teacher Greens Farms Elementary</p>
Scott Weiner	28 Rayfield Road	<p>1. Please provide more information about the density of classrooms and distancing in Bedford, especially in rooms that do not have windows. Are any new/improved ventilation measures being considered both here and more broadly across the district, now that we are obviously populating our classrooms with more children.</p>
David Turchi	15 Colony Rd	<p>Our first comment reflected our hope that Distance Learners would be treated equally in this transition. We are deeply disappointed that this does not appear to be happening. Please reconsider. Distance Learners depend on zoom specials to stay connected to their schools, classmates, and beloved specials teachers. What you have presented is not equitable.</p>

Athena McAlenney	26 Bauer Place	Removing WIN and moving intervention to outside of school hours is a smart move to add instructional minutes for the elementary distance learning cohort. It is clear there is some interest on the Board for more instructional time and live specials for the DL students. I hope you carefully consider capitalizing on this. Another 15 - 30 minutes for small group learning each day, live art and music even every other week, would make a big difference. Perhaps just two or three additional staff members could support this. Remember a whole new cohort of teachers graduate in January every year and are looking for jobs! Fall hiring challenges do not mean there is no hope to hire now.
Michelle Benner	61 Hillspoint Road	I know we all agree on the ultimate necessity and myriad benefits of full-time, on-site school for our children. However, if Westport is to move forward with full reopening plans amid a raging pandemic, more contagious variants emerging, and persistent community spread, I believe we should at the very least be more protective of our teachers and school staff. Students and families have the choice to attend school remote or not. Teachers do not have this choice. Despite reports from other districts, nobody knows what might happen with a denser population combined with fluctuating case rates and more contagious variants among us. It's really anyone's guess. Are we as a community willing to risk the health and safety of our teachers and staff based on a guess? Is this how we repay our devoted teachers and staff for 10 months of working their hardest and very best to ensure an incredible education for our children despite a global pandemic which has sadly killed over 400,000 Americans? We have the vaccines in sight. Why not consider waiting just a little longer to allow for our teachers and staff to be fully vaccinated before increasing in-school population?
Tori Wagner (Teacher)	36 Woodridge Circle, Trumbull CT 06611	Many of my colleagues have already made excellent points about our concerns about reopening schools. I'll keep it to the point. I simply want to make sure my silence was not mistaken for approval of the current plan to reopen schools before vaccinations for adults in our school buildings. Thank you for your time.
Dorie Hordon	12 Manitou Road	Thank you Tom and the Administration for all of your work towards getting students back into school full time. This has not been an easy undertaking, but it has been done with much thought. We have wonderful schools in Westport because of the dedication of our teachers, staff and administrators- thank you!
Melissa Augeri	14 Lincoln Street	Mr. Scarice - Thank you for your email last Friday and for including a mention of Staples High School students. Now that there is a plan to transition K-8 back to the classroom more often and eventually full time, I would like to request that you consider a similar plan to return SHS students back to the classroom full time also. They are able to wear masks, understand distancing and follow rules and protocols. While some families will choose or unfortunately may have to

		<p>choose to remain in a distance learning model, they will continue to have the option to do so until June. There are many families who would like to have an equivalent option to return our high school students to the classroom. We do not currently have this option. We all acknowledge that in person is a better option for our children and would like to learn more about plans to make this happen in this school year. Thank you for the difficult work you and the administration, teachers, staff for the work you are doing to best serve our children.</p>
<p>Jennifer DeLeonardo</p>	<p>23 West Branch Road</p>	<p>My questions/comments relate to the distance learning program changes: (1) What happens to orchestra for distance learners? Will they still have virtual lessons? Can they attend morning orchestra virtually via Zoom, even if it's just watching a camera of what's going on in the room? Or are they just excluded from this program now? (2) Some WIN interventions, such as workshop, are a mix of in-school and distance learning students. Will the schedule for this be synced, or are DL students now excluded from workshop and similar programs? (3) You mentioned libraries will now be open for lending, etc. Some of the DL teachers are school librarians, how will this be handled while they are supposed to be teaching distance learners? Will their attention be divided? (4) A general comment regarding the approach that's being taken to distance learning, in particular the fact that science, social studies, art, and music will now be asynchronous for DL: I find it a bit frustrating (and insulting) to be told that there isn't enough staffing for distance learning students to be taught at least some of these subjects live, particularly science and social studies, when there is enough staffing for this and more for the in-school students. Parents keep on being told that if we don't like the decision that's being made to go to full-time, we can choose distance learning, but it feels like that decision is being penalized. Our students are part of the Westport public schools, we are Westport taxpayers, and I don't understand the justification for treating the DL students like second-class students. Why is there enough staffing to provide a full slate of specials, science, and social studies to in-school students, but for distance learners, we just shrug our shoulders and say there's not enough staffing? Why are the distance learning students considered less important in terms of allocating staffing? I am happy that so many who want to go full-time will now get this opportunity, but I would think the school system has an obligation to educate students somewhat fairly and equitably. This is especially true in the upper elementary grades, where adding some additional time on Zoom is less of an issue than it might be for a kindergartener, and where not having access to the additional instructional time, particularly science and social studies, will have a greater impact on middle school readiness. Additionally, if there is closer to a 5-10% shift over to DL as Mr. Scarice cited in his email, this may all happen in a context where DL students may have to contend with increasingly crowded classes (I know there are only 6</p>

		<p>students switching currently, but among the 1/3 that have not responded, the responses may break differently). By staying home, the distance learning families are already providing decreased density in the schools, lessening risk for both staff and those who would like to go full-time; but now, we are also subsidizing staffing by having our students taught for substantially less time by predominantly non-classroom teachers, who apparently can not be spared for additional time from the math/reading coaching and librarian duties they perform for in-school students. This is not to knock those teachers, they are doing amazingly, adapting to curriculum they never anticipated delivering in a classroom setting and doing several jobs at once. It is to say that Westport should be able to do better for ALL of its students.</p>
Karen Nordberg	4 Nappa Drive Westport CT	<p>The comments that have been made are the reason why we have degrees in specific fields of study. I respect teachers as much as I do physicians so with all due respect I ask that you prioritize your job which is to teach. Leave the job of health and safety to those of us that have spent lifetimes studying it. Listen to the CDC, AAP, and National Academy of Sciences, who have all stated that at this point in the pandemic returning children to school will not change the outcome that you're imagining. As the parent of high schoolers I can clearly see the roadblock we face getting the high schoolers back to Staples. So my only ask at this point is that you allow the seniors to return and finish out their senior year. Many may still choose to remain hybrid but please give others the option to return.</p>
Shiri Homler	7 Sniffen Road	<p>When my daughter who is in K at CES heard that the school will be going full-time her first question was, "Does that mean the virus is over?" If we go full-time now, this is the message we will be giving and this is the wrong message. This decision will inevitably give people a false sense of normalcy, leading to irresponsible decisions outside the school which will in turn then affect the in-school population. Now is not the time to go full-time. I urge you to reconsider this decision. Our children look up to their teacher for guidance and a sense of comfort. If teachers and staff do not feel safe, how can we expect our children to feel safe? If we are really concerned about the mental well-being of our children, then we should stay the current course...not forever...just for now.</p>
Vanessa Weinbach	6 Riverfield Dr	<p>I am writing to ask — plead — that you reconsider the plan to move to full time on 2/1. The timing for this changeover is extremely concerning with the rising COVID rates, spreading variant, new data on community spread in European schools, and our February break 2 weeks later (with many families making plans to travel).</p> <p>With the COVID vaccine available to staff and teachers very soon, I urge you to consider a delay. The hybrid model is working! It is not ideal — we are a two working parent family so we get the complaints — but it is a good balance of education and safety. If we move to full time 2/1, we and</p>

		<p>many other families are likely to feel forced to pull their kids out to full distance, which is so hard for the kids and families affected by this. My 1st grader in particular is devastated by the prospect of being home full time again, but we are pushed to make that choice to prioritize our kids health above all.</p> <p>Despite all of the complaints, most families have adapted to the hybrid model and are making it work. Kids have as well. Please don't make us have to go full remote and disrupt the little normalcy these kids have. Not now. Not after all of the measured and balanced choices you've made so far. Academic and social deficits (if there even are any with the hybrid model) can be made up; lifelong health consequences and (of course) death cannot be undone.</p>
Erick Hong	62 Lyons Plains Road Westport	<p>Dear BOE and superintendent,</p> <p>Thank you for your work on this issue. I won't reiterate the many comments that have been made about the concerning risks with the current reopening plan. My comment is that as as parent - I am deeply distressed to hear that teachers have not been adequately consulted on the reopening plan. To hear so many teachers express their concerns tonight has been heartbreaking. I hope you'll do the right thing and slow your decision process to take the time to weigh their input.</p>
Melanie Heiser	6 Smokey lane	<p>I completely support moving to a full school day on February first. Our children have been deprived of the education and full day school experience to which they are entitled for nearly a year. Mitigation measures have worked, and will continue to work. There is almost zero transmission of the virus in the school setting, and this is worldwide. The focus needs to shift to the well-being of our children.</p>
Jeff Benner	61 Hillspoint	<p>put a 3 minute clock and don't read if off topic. bad idea to change the public comment rule midstream. Your staff is deeply concerned and they need to be heard, no matter how long it takes.</p>
Laurel Syah	12 Cranbury Rd	<p>Dear Superintendent Scarice and members of the BOE,</p> <p>I have a different interpretation of the early survey responses than the positive one Candice Savin provided. To me the superintendent is offering the equivalent of "Sophie's Choice". Have your child receive full in school instruction with reduced health and safety mitigation measures or no in school instruction at all. Why wasn't there a question on the survey asking if we would prefer to keep the hybrid model? A model that has on balance been working and follows CDC guidelines? Or a question asking why a parent made their selection? Changing modalities to a less safe option before vaccinations are fully available, in the middle of winter with fewer opportunities to go outside, and on the heels of new strains and variants seems highly irresponsible.</p>

2. FY 2022 Proposed Budget of the Superintendent of Schools - Comments are posted exactly as they have been received.

- **Staffing**
- **Technology**
- **Special Education**
- **Teaching and Learning**

First and Last Name	Address	Please state your comment/question regarding FY 2022 Proposed Budget of the Superintendent of Schools.
Sivan Hong	62 Lyons Plains Rd	<p>As the Chair of the SpEd PTA, I want to thank Mike, Tom and the BOE for positively addressing the gap between the number of SpEd staff and the growth of SpEd students in the district. Providing the right staffing ratio keeps the quality of SpEd instruction high and reduces staff turnover. There is a clear and direct link between this and the outcomes we see in our children. We truly appreciate what this BOE and administration has done and will continue to do on behalf of our SpEd families.</p>
Rebecca Martin	185 North Avenue	<p>I am a parent of a special ed student and two typical students, writing to support the requested budget increases for special education to keep pace with our increased enrollment. A special education program that fully meets the needs of its students is not only required by federal law and vital to the success and growth of our special needs students, it makes for a better education for all of our students. When special education students are supported, general education teachers are able to better meet the needs of all of their students, typical students often benefit from the extra support that paraprofessionals provide in their classrooms, and all of our students benefit from learning and growing in an inclusive community. In providing a fulsome program, the district can benefit financially by avoiding costly outplacements.</p> <p>The weakness in our excellent special education program for years running now is when our kids transition out of school. While other districts provide local programming for graduating students as they move into the world, Westport students are left to look elsewhere for programming often without the support they need to identify good options. Please invest this year in a meaningful transition program for these students that provides them with adequate information and supports, as well as programming, as they move beyond school and toward the end of their public education support.</p>

3. Discussion of Capital Projects Plan with Finance and Facilities Committee - No public comments were received on this item.

DISCUSSION/ACTION

- 1. Capital Project Funding Request – Greens Farms School Cooling Tower** - No public comments were received on this item.
- 2. Capital Projects Soft Costs Request** - No public comments were received on this item.
- 3. Revisions to 2021-2022 School Calendar** - No public comments were received on this item.