

October 29, 2020

Westport Town Hall

**WESTPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION  
TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE**

**NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING**

**AGENDA**

(Agenda Subject to Modification in Accordance with Law)

**SPECIAL NOTICE ABOUT PROCEDURES FOR THIS ELECTRONIC MEETING:**

Pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order No. 7B, there will not be a physical location for this meeting. This meeting will be held electronically and live streamed on

<https://www.westportct.gov/government/departments-a-z/office-of-information-technology/live-and-archived-meetings>

and shown on Cablevision Channel 79 and Frontier Channel 6020. Emails to BOE members can be sent to BOE@westportps.org. Comments to be read during the public comment period must be submitted to the meeting's GoogleDoc during the submission period. Please see the following link for instructions and guidelines:

[https://www.westportps.org/uploaded/Procedures\\_and\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Public\\_Participation\\_in\\_Remote\\_Board\\_Meetings.pdf](https://www.westportps.org/uploaded/Procedures_and_Guidelines_for_Public_Participation_in_Remote_Board_Meetings.pdf).

We will use our best efforts to read public comments if they are received during the public comment period and if they state your full name and address. Meeting materials will be available at westportps.org along with the meeting notice posted on the Meeting Agenda page.

**PUBLIC SESSION:**

1:00 – 2:00 p.m., Held Remotely Via Zoom Pursuant to Executive Order 7B

**MINUTES:** January 16, 2020  
April 23, 2020

**DISCUSSION:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Policy 6172 Alternative Educational Programs<br>Referred for review by Policy Committee | Dr. Anthony Buono                       |
| 2. Debriefing Tri-State Report   | Mr. Thomas Scarice<br>Dr. Anthony Buono |
| 3. Incorporating Science and Social Studies into the<br>elementary program.                | Ms. Allison Moran                       |

**ADJOURNMENT**

\*The meeting will also be televised on channel 79 (Cablevision) and channel 6020 (Frontier).

*It is the policy of the Town of Westport that all Town-sponsored public meetings and events are accessible to people with disabilities. If you need assistance in participating in a meeting or event due to a disability as defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact Westport's ADA Coordinator at 203-341-1043 or [eflug@westportct.gov](mailto:eflug@westportct.gov) at least three (3) business days prior to the scheduled meeting or event to request an accommodation.*

10/28/2020 11:43 AM

January 16, 2020

Westport Town Hall

**WESTPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION  
TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**Committee Members Present:**

Jeannie Smith, Co-Chair  
Youn Su Chao, Co-Chair  
Candice Savin, BOE Chair

**Administrators Present:**

Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent of  
Teaching & Learning  
Stafford Thomas, Principal Staples High School  
Meghan Ward, Assistant Principal Staples  
High School

**PUBLIC CALL TO ORDER:**

1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Town Hall Room 309

**DISCUSSION/ACTION:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Mathematics Leveling - Grade 5 Elementary                           | Ms. Allison Moran                      |
| 2. Pathways – Staples High School                                      | Mr. Stafford Thomas<br>Ms. Meghan Ward |
| 3. New (state mandated) social studies course – Staples<br>High School | Ms. Lauren Francese                    |

**ADJOURNMENT: 2:30 P.M.**

April 23, 2020

Remote Meeting via Zoom and Google Doc

**WESTPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION  
TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**Committee Members Present:**

Jeannie Smith, Co-Chair  
Youn Su Chao, Co-Chair  
Candice Savin, BOE Chair

**Administrators Present:**

David Abbey, Interim Superintendent  
Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent of  
Teaching & Learning  
Kevin Cazzetta, Principal Greens Farms Elementary  
Mary Lou DiBella, Principal Kings Highway Elementary  
Debra Dunn, Principal Long Lots Elementary  
Elizabeth Messler, Principal Saugatuck Elementary  
Janna Sirowich, Principal Coleytown Elementary  
Adam Rosen, Principal Bedford Middle  
Kris Szabo, Principal Coleytown Middle  
Stafford Thomas, Principal Staples High School

**PUBLIC CALL TO ORDER:**

3:00 p.m., Held Remotely Via Zoom and Google Doc, Pursuant to Executive Order 7B

**DISCUSSION/ACTION:**

**Distance Learning Update**

Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent  
for Teaching and Learning  
Kevin Cazzetta, Principal GFS  
Mary Lou DiBella, Principal KHS  
Debra Dunn, Principal LLS  
Elizabeth Messler, Principal SES  
Janna Sirowich, Principal CES  
Adam Rosen, Principal BMS  
Kris Szabo, Principal CMS  
Stafford Thomas, Principal SHS

**ADJOURNMENT: 4:47 p.m.**

## Instruction

### Alternative Education Programs

The purpose of this policy is to recognize the need for alternative education programs for some District students.

The Board of Education (Board) is dedicated to providing educational options for all students within available financial constraints. It is recognized there will be students in the District whose needs and interests are best served by participation in an alternative education program.

"Alternative education" means a school or program maintained and operated by the Board that is offered to students in a nontraditional educational setting and addresses the social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs of such students.

The Board may provide alternative education to students in accordance with the guidelines established by the State Board of Education. Such guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, a description of the purpose and expectation of alternative education, criteria for student eligibility, and criteria for how and when a student may enter or exit alternative education.

In providing alternative education to students, the Board may use space in an existing school or establish a new school. Such programs must comply with state laws pertaining to the number and length of school days in an academic year and shall be subject to all other federal and state laws governing public schools.

The Board may form a cooperative arrangement with other boards of education, to provide alternative education pursuant to C.G.S. 10-158a.

Such an arrangement may include the establishment of a committee to supervise the program, with committee membership determined by cooperating boards. Such committee shall have the power, in accordance with the terms of the agreement, to (1) apply for, receive directly and expend on behalf of the school districts which have designated the committee an agent for such purpose any state or federal grants which may be allocated to school districts for specified programs, the supervision of which has been delegated to such committee, provided such grants are payable before implementation of any such program or are to reimburse the committee for transportation provided to a school operated by a cooperative arrangement; (2) receive and disburse funds appropriated to the use of such committee by the cooperating school districts, the state or the United States, or given to the committee by individuals or private corporations; (3) hold title to real or personal property in trust, or as otherwise agreed to by the parties, for the appointing boards; (4) employ personnel; (5) enter into contracts; and (6) otherwise provide the specified programs, services and activities. Teachers employed by any such committee shall be



subject to the provisions of the general statutes applicable to teachers employed by the board of education of any town or regional school district.

A list of alternative programs will be approved by the Board annually. The Superintendent may provide for the involvement of staff, parents and the community in recommending alternative education programs for Board approval. There shall be an annual evaluation of alternative education programs.

The Board, as required, will post on its website information about any alternative education offered, including purpose, location, contact information, staff directory and enrollment criteria. In addition, the Board recognizes its responsibility to give all children in the District who receive alternative education as nearly equal advantages as may be practicable compared to other children in the District. In addition, the Board shall annually submit to the Commissioner of Education a strategic school profile report for each alternative school or program under its jurisdiction.

Alternative education programs implemented by the District are to maintain learning options that are flexible with regard to environment, structure and pedagogy. Such programs include, but are not limited to, a separate school, tutorial instruction, small group instruction, large group instruction, counseling and guidance, computer-assisted instruction, cooperative work experience, supervised community service activities and supervised independent study.

Students, upon parent request, may be placed in an alternative education program within available financial resources if the District determines that the placement serves the student's educational needs and interests and assists the student in achieving district and state academic content standards.

**Alternative language to consider:**

It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent of Schools to identify alternative program opportunities to be made available to students at risk, to recommend such alternative programs to the Board for approval, and to familiarize students and parents/guardians with the availability of such alternative programs. The Superintendent shall, through cooperative efforts with other districts, schools, agencies and organizations, periodically recommend additional or modified alternative educational programs to the Board.

**Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes**

10-4p(b) Implementation plan to achieve resource equity and equality of opportunity. Assessment. Reports. (as amended by PA 15-133)

10-15 Towns to maintain schools.

10-16 Length of school year.

10-158a Cooperative arrangements among towns. School building projects. Student transportation.

10-220 Duties of boards of education (as amended by PA 15-133)

10-223h(c) Commissioner's network of schools. Turnaround committees. Operations and instructional audit. Turnaround plans. Report. (as amended by PA 15-133)

PA 15-133 An Act Concerning Alternative Education

Policy adopted: WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Westport, Connecticut



**Tri-State  
Consortium**

**Westport Public Schools**

**TRI-STATE VISIT 2020**

**Reopening Plan, October 13-16, 2020**

**(Remote Visit)**

**Table of Contents**

---

District Visit Personnel and Information ..... 2

Executive Summary ..... 3

Essential Questions ..... 5

Response to Essential Questions..... 6

Summary ..... 15



**Tri-State  
Consortium**

**Westport Public Schools**  
**TRI-STATE VISIT 2020**  
**Reopening Plan, October 13-16, 2020**  
(Remote Visit)

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## **Executive Summary**

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### **Background**

The Tri-State Consortium was invited to conduct a study, remotely, in the Westport School District from October 13- 16, 2020. The focus of the visit was assessing the response of the Westport school community to the school district's reopening model, particularly as it relates to instruction.

Like all school districts in Connecticut, Westport's schools were closed in March, 2020 and students were educated fully remotely through the end of the 2019-20 school year. During the spring, while schools were closed, the Westport Board of Education was involved in a national search for a new superintendent and hired Thomas Scarice, who began in the district on July 1, 2020.

Mr. Scarice spent the summer working with the district's leadership team, with input from the teachers' union and other organizations, to develop a plan for reopening schools in September. The elementary principals were key players in the creation of the K-5 portion of the plan, and the middle and high school principals had much input into the development of the plan for grades 6-12. The assistant superintendent, Anthony Buono, developed the approach to and schedule for instructional blocks. The plan was shared with the Westport Board of Education in August.

### **Westport's Reopening Plan**

The plan currently implemented in Westport has several components.

**Elementary:** K-5 students who attend school are split into two groups by alphabet, A-K and L-Z. The A-K group attends school five days per week, 9:00 am – 11:45 am. The L-Z group attends school five days per week, 1:00 pm – 3:45 pm. All literacy and numeracy lessons are taught while students are in school, not online. Science and social studies have not yet been taught directly. When students arrive in class, both in the morning and the afternoon, there is a meeting focused on students' social-emotional well-being, using the RULER program developed at Yale's Center on Emotional Intelligence. Each morning and afternoon there is a 30-minute block of time for all students called "WIN" (What I Need), during which services are provided for students requiring additional support and all other students participate in extension and enrichment activities. There is no lunch or recess time while students are in school. The time block from 11:45 am – 1:00 pm is used for sanitizing spaces and surfaces, for some special education students to receive required services, and for the teachers' preparation and lunch.

During the half days when students are at home they are expected to complete assignments given by their teachers. Students also receive their "special area" education – Spanish, art, music and physical education. These lessons are taught remotely and synchronously.

On alternate Wednesdays (once every two weeks) all K-5 students are educated fully remotely. That day is used for teacher planning, collaboration and professional learning.

**Secondary:** Middle School students who attend school are split into two groups by alphabet, A-K and L-Z. One group attends school in person on Mondays and Thursdays for the full day and is educated remotely on Tuesdays and Fridays through live-streamed classes and asynchronous assignments, and the other group attends school in person on Tuesdays and Fridays for the full day and is educated remotely on Mondays and Thursdays through live-streamed classes and asynchronous assignments. On Wednesdays, no students attend school in person and all students receive a half-day of instruction remotely. The other half-day is used for planning, collaboration and professional learning for teachers.

At the high school, students who attend school are divided into two cohorts. One cohort attends school on Monday and Tuesday for the full day. The other cohort attends school on Thursday and Friday for the full day. The group that attends school on Monday and Tuesday is educated remotely on Thursday and Friday, through live-streamed classes and asynchronous assignments. The group that attends school on Thursday and Friday is educated remotely on Monday and Tuesday through live-streamed classes and asynchronous assignments. On Wednesdays, no students attend school in person. Half of every Wednesday is devoted to remote learning for students, and the other half-day is devoted to planning, collaboration and professional learning for teachers.

**Fully Remote:** Approximately 8% of Westport's students are being educated fully remotely: grades K-5, approximately 170 students; grades 6-8, approximately 110 students, and grades 9-12, approximately 150 students. At the elementary level, these students are taught by designated staff members who connect them via live-streamed lessons and asynchronous assignments. At the secondary level these students participate in live-streamed lessons in their homes, and receive asynchronous assignments.

**Special Education Services:** Like all parents the parents of special education students have the option of having their children educated through the hybrid model implemented in the schools their children attend or having their children educated fully remotely at home. The Connecticut State Department of Education has issued a document that describes how school districts within the state are required to deal with all special education matters:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/COVID-19/Addendum6-Reopen-Guidance-for-Educating-Students-with-Disabilities.pdf>

In Westport, all special education students have an IEP Implementation Learning Plan if an individual student's IEP is being implemented differently as a result of the instructional delivery model (full in-person, hybrid, or remote). The Learning Plan describes the differences between how a student's IEP would be implemented if he/she were fully in school and how the IEP is being implemented in a hybrid model.



The district has made accommodations in its hybrid schedule to provide services to special education students without removing them from in-school instructional time, to the extent possible. For example, at the elementary level, during the 75-minute block between the morning and afternoon cohorts of students, special education services are provided to some special education students. At all levels, students who require more intensive services attend school 4 or 5 days per week.

To the extent possible, assessment of special education students occurs during their non-school time: i.e., students in Cohort A are assessed during Cohort B time. Although SRBI is not a special education service, it, too, occurs outside of instructional time – during the WINblock at the elementary level. All of this is done to permit students to maximize instructional time in school.

All Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings are held virtually. Additionally, because end-of-year evaluations of special education students did not occur in the spring of 2020, students are being evaluated at the onset of this school year: school psychologists are engaged in administering 160 evaluations by December.

Mike Rizzo, assistant superintendent for pupil personnel services, stated the vast majority of special education services are in place. Community-based services for transitional students are not yet in place and have been impacted by the pandemic. In lieu of these placements, the district is providing instruction to transitional students on life skills within the school setting.

### **Essential Questions**

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The Tri-State Consortium met with multiple groups of parents, students, faculty and administrators from all levels of the system – elementary, middle and high. We asked each group three broad questions:

- **To what extent has returning to school been successful?**
- **Instructionally, what has been the greatest success and the greatest challenge?**
- **Instructionally, what would you recommend the district modify or change?**

Where appropriate, we followed up these questions with conversation about some of the responses, and we closed each meeting by asking if there was anything we hadn't discussed that people wished to add. This report will be structured around the three large questions, and the views of the different constituencies will be presented within those questions.

## Response to Essential Questions

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### Essential Question #1:

#### *To what extent has returning to school been successful?*

The events of last spring were unprecedented. They required massive and abrupt shifts in thinking about how to educate students and creating new structures. Administrators, parents and students expressed enormous respect and appreciation for how the district's administrators and teachers responded to the crisis, with emphasis on how teachers adjusted their teaching practices and created new curricula.

Notwithstanding the kudos directed at Westport's teachers, almost everyone with whom we met – including the teachers – perceived that the work in which students were engaged during the spring was not up to the district's high standards. Thus, there was a fair amount of concern about what the reopening of schools during a pandemic would bring this fall.

The strong consensus among the constituency groups we met is that the reopening of schools this year has been highly, even unexpectedly, successful. This is not to say that concerns don't exist – they do, and this report will discuss them – but it is clear that the Westport school district has reopened schools in what most consider to be a smart, thoughtful way that places primary emphasis on the health and safety of students and staff members while simultaneously seeking to enhance instruction under very restrictive conditions.

Anecdotally, teachers and administrators are mixed about whether student learning has been diminished under the reopening model. At the elementary level, based on classroom work and early examination of tests administered to the students, it appears that student performance remains at or very close to the normally high levels of previous years. At the middle and high school levels, more teachers perceive that students are behind where they normally would be in the curriculum.

This dichotomy may be a function of the difference between the approaches used. While the elementary students in the hybrid model are in school every day (except for alternate Wednesdays), the middle and high school students attend school 2 days per week. Additionally, the middle and high schools are engaged in live-streaming lessons (which is seen as a challenging enterprise by the teachers) while the elementary schools are not. Live-streaming requires teachers to be attentive to three groups of students – those in the cohort sitting in the classroom, those in the cohort being taught at home that day, and those being taught fully-remotely. The elementary teachers do not live-stream lessons and instead work with half of their classes in both the morning and afternoon sessions.

The district's curriculum coordinators across all subject areas, building administrators, teachers, parents and students identified a number of meaningful successes, some of which they hope to carry into the district's post-pandemic work:



- Teachers initially were anxious about returning to school, not knowing if the conditions under which they would be working would be safe for them and their students. The models at all three levels have eased their concerns about safety. One teacher stated, “We haven’t had an outbreak yet. The anxiety around contracting COVID in school has simmered down.” Teachers also indicated that thus far the current model is a vast improvement over last spring. Teachers also feel they are better able to meet the social-emotional needs of their students. They attribute this to the small group size.
- It is clear that teachers do not support a return to full time five day a week instruction. They are fearful of safety/health issues as well as the impact crowded classrooms will have on instruction. They differentiated between returning fully to class and returning fully to a “pandemic” class in which lessons would be altered, movement would be restricted, students’ interaction would be diminished, and the use and sharing of materials would be prohibited, or at a minimum, compromised.
- Students, to a lesser degree, had similar worries about returning to school. After several days the students seemed to relax, fall into new routines, and comply with mitigation protocols. At all levels, school administrators and teachers report significantly fewer student disciplinary infractions than in previous years. Elementary teachers state that the students’ daily Mood Meter responses confirm that they feel safe and happy. One 7th grade student stated, “Going back to school was like a gift.” Parents also appreciate that their children are back in school and validate how pleased their children are to be back.
- At the elementary school level, several changes are seen as highly productive: small class sizes enable deeper connections between teachers and students, deeper teacher understanding of each student’s needs, and the ability to differentiate instruction; teachers can break students into small groups that move around their classrooms based on assignments; arrival and dismissal, while still time consuming, have become less frenetic; the morning SEL time has enabled students to share their feelings; and the WINblock has provided a time for students to receive additional services and/or enrichment without taking time from literacy and math instruction. One person said, “The teachers have been able to build a strong sense of community in their classrooms.” Another said, “The students have never been better behaved.” A third said that she is “observing meaningful conversations and growth as writers and thinkers” in small groups. A teacher said, “Academically, I have a clear picture of every one of my students.” A fifth teacher said, “I spend more time with each student in this model than I would if we were in a regular school year.”

The preponderance of elementary school parents with whom we met voiced strong support for the current model, indicating that their children feel well-known, strongly connected to their teachers, and happy and safe in school. Parents expressed great respect for the district’s teaching staff, reporting that teachers have been accessible and flexible. Many parents voiced admiration for the teachers’ abilities to change their



teaching practices so quickly and effectively. Specifically, the size of student cohorts, small groups of 8 -12 students, is seen as “ideal” by parents we interviewed.

- At the middle school level, a number of components of the reopening model also are seen as positive: the “crisis/emergency feel” of last spring has settled into a calmer set of routines for students and teachers; the quality of student work has impressed teachers and administrators; and livestreaming lessons, while demanding on teachers who have to focus on three groups of students simultaneously, has been appreciated by and worked well for most students. One person said, “There is a good feel in the school – kids come to class prepared and produce good work.” Another person said, “The teachers have improved their use of technology and are sending better assignments home for students.”

A 7th grade teacher noted, “The schedules and student accountability have improved along with their effort to complete assignments.” An 8th grade student remarked that, “My teachers are being very creative with their lessons!” Middle school students expressed their support of the model in place now and nervousness about returning to school due to safety concerns. One student stated, “I want to stay with the half-day, I feel like I’m learning a lot more and I would be nervous about getting sick.” Another stated, “I would be scared if we are all here.” Another, “I would not open full time, it’s too hard to wear masks every day.”

- The successes cited at the high school level include: the implementation of a block schedule (80 minute classes); an increased understanding and use of technology; many fewer student disciplinary problems – the vast majority of students are following the mitigation protocols; attendance has been strong for remote classes as well as in-school classes; all meetings are occurring as scheduled (e.g., 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Parents’ Night and Senior Parents’ Night), but by webinar rather than in-person; the school has maintained a robust extracurricular program by shifting clubs and other activities to on-line; and the high school teachers have been accessible to students when they have questions. One person said, “Back to School Night was really a positive event.” Another person said, “The teachers have been very responsive to students’ concerns and have risen to the occasion.” And another person said that the high school “has a college feel because students attend class twice a week and are responsible for doing work on their own.”
- Parents of special education students expressed appreciation for the district’s attention to their children’s needs. They perceive that the district is engaged in good-faith efforts to accommodate the services listed on their children’s IEPs and are appreciative of the communication they receive from staff members about their children’s progress.
- Many parents voiced appreciation for the communication they receive from the district.

## **Essential Question #2:**

### ***Instructionally, what has been the greatest success and the greatest challenge?***

Most of the perceived successes of the reopening model are discussed above in Question 1. This section of the report will discuss some of the challenges that have accompanied implementation of the Westport model. The first and clearest challenge has to do with ongoing support for the model. While most administrators, teachers and students initially felt strong support for the model, and continue to support it, the parents appear to have divided into two camps – some parents believe that the model remains appropriate for their children on both health-related and educational grounds, while other parents wonder why Westport is not bringing students back to school full time (or for longer periods of time) as several of the neighboring Fairfield County districts have done. This is a question that is likely to linger until the course of the pandemic is clearer and the district makes a longer-term decision based on that course.

Below are some of the challenges we heard in our conversations with coordinators, administrators, teachers, parents and students:

- Some parents and teachers are concerned that the plan to have elementary students switch from the morning session to the afternoon session, and vice versa, will be both confusing and upsetting for students, and wonder if this is still necessary. Other parents report that their children are looking forward to the switch.
- As mentioned above, secondary level teachers worry that focusing on in-person, hybrid-remote and fully-remote learners (through live-streaming) simultaneously results in them not feeling effective with any group. Some of the middle and high school teachers with whom we met lament that they are behind in their curriculum and that they are not connecting with their students as personally as they have connected in previous years.
- Some of the curricula and programs used at the secondary level do not lend themselves to the hybrid model. For example, the Teachers College Writers Program used at the middle school level requires students to conference with each other (and the teacher) and to work in small groups, neither of which is permissible under safety protocols. World language is another example – learning a language is heavily dependent on consistent use of the language in class, which is very challenging in a live-streamed class in a hybrid-learning environment. Advanced Placement teachers are concerned about their ability to cover the content with the reduction in instructional time.
- Special education teachers are concerned about the pull that making up last spring's testing is having on their ability to meet with their students for instruction.
- Teachers at the middle and high school levels, and special area teachers at the elementary level, point to a string of technological problems with live streaming. While praising the technology staff's competence, commitment and expertise, they are dealing



daily with issues related to placement of cameras in classrooms, microphones not working properly, sound going dead and then springing back to life, and other assorted difficulties. Middle school students discussed the difficulty they have with seeing teachers' whiteboards and how hard it is for teachers to respond to questions they pose in the 'chat' function of Zoom. Several parents also mentioned concerns about the "waiting room," with some indicating that their children were placed in a waiting room for as long as 30 minutes.

Some teachers reported that the placement of the camera(s) in their rooms require them to stand in the front of the class, which is counter to the way in which they would prefer to teach. Teachers and parents also identified the older Chromebooks as problematic because they cannot accommodate some of the required software and they bump students off-line without warning.

On a positive note, the district's coordinators reported that at the secondary level the science teachers will be getting iPads and some English and social studies teachers will be getting document cameras, both of which will help.

- Monitoring student progress at the secondary level, and in elementary level specials (art, music, physical education, Spanish), is challenging because the students are being educated mostly remotely. Elementary classroom teachers report few problems with monitoring student progress.
- Taking attendance has emerged as a concern. It is time consuming (sometimes taking as much as 10 minutes from instructional time) and cumbersome (at the secondary level teachers have to enter data for three groups of students). Moreover, special area teachers are responsible for emailing the parents of children who fail to show up for a remote class. It should be noted that attendance is challenging in another way – some students who decide not to attend school in person on days they are scheduled to do so instead expect to attend remotely and be marked as "present."
- The block schedule was mentioned above as a component of successful implementation of the model. However, high school teachers and parents identified the 80-minute block as a challenge for students being educated at home. Sitting in front of a computer screen for 80 minutes is daunting. Preparing lessons for an 80-minute block is also daunting for some teachers who have not received adequate professional development in how to structure instructional time in a block. High school students and parents also mentioned the challenge of completing laboratory assignments remotely.
- At a time when research urges less screen time for students, parents at all levels expressed concern about the amount of screen time their children are required to experience. Some parents mentioned that their children are developing eye and vision problems. Other parents talked about the inevitable boredom that accompanies 7 hours of staring at a computer and described how their children occasionally-to-often drift away from live-streamed lessons.

- Providing adequate time for special education students has proven challenging. At the secondary level students who require intensive services are seen four days per week. However, students with less severe needs, depending on their IEPs, follow the regular school schedule, which is seen as insufficient by the special education teachers. Some special education teachers report that it has been difficult for special education students to make up the learning they lost during the spring months.
- High school teachers begin their workday at 7:30 am and teach until 2:45 pm, with a 27-minute break for lunch. Given that they are working in 80-minute blocks, often teaching 3 groups of students simultaneously, many are reporting feeling high stress and are expressing concerns about fatigue.
- Along these lines, teachers at all levels indicate the need for more preparation time devoted to collaborative planning. Given the uniqueness of this year, many teachers expressed the desire to be in lock step with each other as the curriculum is taught (by grade and/or by course), and perceive that they do not have enough common planning time to do this properly.
- Teachers and parents understand that the pandemic has diminished students' opportunities for the social interactions that are so critical for social development. As examples, student interactions with each other have declined on transportation to and from school, during lunch, during recess and through in-class group work. They also are interacting less with each other in larger group activities, such as chorus, band, orchestra, physical education and clubs. The students with whom we spoke seem to be taking these changes in stride, expressing understanding that safety concerns override their desire for more interaction with their peers, but parents are worried about the potential long-term impact on their children's social-emotional development.

### **Essential Question #3:**

***Instructionally, what would you recommend the district modify or change?***

This section begins with a reiteration of the support the faculty and administration have for the current model, which they view as imperfect but necessary for the current circumstances. Students, too, seem supportive of the current model. Parents are divided, with some in support of the current approach and others perceiving that the district is able to bring students back to school, safely, for longer amounts of time.

In response to Question 3, administrators, teachers, parents and students offered numerous thoughts on ways in which the current model might be enhanced.

- Teachers understand that decisions about the structure of the hybrid and remote models had to be made initially by administrators. However, now that there is a flow to the new school year, teachers would like to have the ability to make more of these



decisions themselves. They have come to know their students, have grown comfortable with the model.

- Teachers and students discussed the importance of mask breaks, and suggested that they occur more frequently throughout the school day.
- The one-way hallways and staircases also were mentioned by teachers and students as ineffective (because they do not seem to be enforced) and unnecessary (because students can walk in both directions maintaining social distance by sticking to opposite sides of the corridor or staircase).
- If live streaming is to be effective going forward, the technology concerns mentioned in response to Question 2 require addressing. Moreover, students and parents expressed confusion about the relationship among Google Classroom, Schoology and PowerSchool and wonder if there can be a way to organize clearer – and fewer - transitions among platforms.
- Middle and high school students and parents asked if teachers could record their lessons. Since some students at home are experiencing technical difficulties they sometimes miss most or all of a lesson. If the lesson is recorded, they can watch it once the technology issue at home is resolved.
- Middle school parents and high school parents expressed the desire for more interactive and engaging work during their children's days at home. They perceive that some (many) lessons require children to sit passively at the computer for hours on end. They suggest that more project-based work might be helpful for their children, and wonder if more small group instruction might be possible during live-streaming. Right now, as one parent stated, students being educated remotely are "more audience than participant."
- Teachers, especially special education teachers at the middle and high school, expressed the desire to have special education students attend school for longer periods of time. They perceive that special education students are at greater risk of losing ground through remote learning.
- Special education parents expressed concern about remote services for their children. For example, one parent described the challenges of an occupational therapy session conducted via computer. Parents of special education students wonder if these services can be provided in school.
- Teachers report that taking attendance for two or three groups of students simultaneously is unwieldy and time consuming, taking time from instruction. They wonder if there is a more streamlined way to handle this task. Teachers also report that at the elementary level dismissal of students takes too much time and suggest there might be better ways to structure the end of the day for students.



- Most elementary students and teachers would like to have special area classes (art, music PE, world language) occur during the portion of the day they are in school rather than remotely. They understand the desire not to reduce instructional time devoted to the core subjects, but wonder if there is a way to build specials into the schedule.
- Middle and high school students would like to have the opportunity to select the person they eat lunch with and not be assigned randomly. They feel very strongly about this and articulated their “social” needs and the loss of social interaction they are experiencing.
- Teachers across all the schools expressed a need for more professional development in how to use Zoom.
- Middle school special education teachers suggest that students be grouped for live instruction by needs and not by the present random alphabet system.
- Wednesdays present opportunities that haven’t yet been fully seized. Most teachers appreciate having the time for collaborative planning and professional learning on Wednesdays. However, parents and students are less supportive of how Wednesdays are used. One student described Wednesdays as “chaotic,” and other students pointed to unclear assignments and expectations. Parents also have concerns about what their children are expected to do on Wednesdays and would appreciate greater clarity about the flow of the day. Most parents wonder if Wednesdays can be used to bring more students into school with greater frequency. High school and middle school parents, in particular, advocate using Wednesdays to create more in-school time for their children.
- Teachers and parents both expressed concern about social studies and science not having been taught yet at the elementary level. While they understand and agree with the decision that ELA and math are to be taught daily in-person, they are worried about the loss of instruction in social studies and science.
- Teachers are wrestling with a conundrum about testing. Some see the NWEA screener as an important tool in gauging and tracking student progress, while others see testing as inappropriate, unnecessary and even harmful under the current conditions. In the upper grades, parents and students report inconsistency in how tests are administered - some teachers have their students take tests remotely (which is seen as inviting cheating) and others give open-book exams (which is seen as providing greater equality).
- Elementary school parents offered the following suggestions for improving their children’s experiences under the current model. To begin, they wonder if science and social studies can be taught outside of the time their children are in school, perhaps after school, perhaps remotely, perhaps by “specialists” hired by the district, perhaps via pre-recorded videotapes from teachers, and/or perhaps through providing parents with lists of National Geographic resources (for science). Another thought is partnering with



community organizations, such as the public library, the League of Women Voters and the Westport Historical Society.

Next, parents suggested bringing children from the AM and PM cohorts together in small groups through remote activities such as book talks. Also, parents would like to see Wednesdays used for meaningful, in-person instruction. Next, parents wondered if it is necessary for their children to participate in all special area classes rather than being allowed to select the ones in which they have the most interest. And finally, parents voiced concern that their children will become bored with at-home work from the same programs (e.g., IXL, Lexia, Typing Agent) every day and suggested that mixing in teacher-made worksheets might be helpful.

- Middle school parents offered several suggestions for enhancing their children's experiences, both in school and at home. One idea is changing the teachers' professional development day from Wednesday to Friday. Currently, no-school Wednesdays create two problems for students – they disrupt the flow of the week and they necessitate two consecutive days of computer-based work, either Tuesday/Wednesday or Wednesday/Thursday. Second, the parents suggested that students be encouraged to use their planners, both to keep track of assignments and to enhance study skills (parents also think that they, themselves, would benefit from training on how planners can be used with their children). Third, parents reported that their children are stressed about grades in elective and special area courses, and suggested that making these subjects "pass/fail" could reduce anxiety.

Fourth, some of their children report that the work they are assigned is not relevant to the events occurring around them every day – the coming presidential election, the protests around social justice, etc. Parents wonder if these topics can be covered either in social studies courses or through daily current events discussions. Next, parents suggested that a virtual homeroom might help their children connect more deeply with their peers and teachers. Finally, parents stated that middle schoolers' need to connect with friends might be facilitated by the creation of more clubs and the assignment of more group projects (to be completed remotely and apart, but collaboratively).

- Parents of high school students voiced a number of suggestions about ways to improve the experience for their children. First and foremost is concern about the amount of time spent in front of computer screens - parents wonder if there might be a way to assign work that doesn't require as much computer use. Next, most high school students have five consecutive days away from school - might there be a better way to schedule the cohorts so that this number is reduced? Similar to elementary school and middle school parents, high school parents see using Wednesdays for in-person instruction as potentially enormously beneficial for their children. Parents perceive that the quality of their children's experiences with technology is teacher-dependent: some teachers are highly adept at teaching through technology and others are less skilled. The parents suggested that more professional development for teachers, or additional assistance (such as having tech-savvy seniors work with certain teachers), could be

helpful. Next, parents wondered if it might be possible to increase students' in-school time by utilizing off-site facilities such as the public library and the town "Y."

Most parents suggested that opportunities for their children to connect with peers, through clubs and other extracurricular activities, would be beneficial. Finally, in response to concerns about their children's social-emotional well-being parents wondered if the guidance counselors might be able to play a role in easing students' stress about falling behind in the college preparation process, not being fully prepared for college, and other concerns that are plaguing students not just in Westport but throughout the nation.

- Parents at all levels voiced concern about their children's social-emotional well-being. There is appreciation for the district's implementation of the RULER approach, but also a sense that in the throes of a pandemic more may need to be done. These concerns caused us to wonder whether redeployment of the district's guidance counselors, school psychologists, health education teachers, and other staff members might be in order, at least temporarily.

## **Summary**

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We recognize that not all of the ideas presented by teachers, administrators, students, and parents in this section of the report are addressable, but many are. And it is important to acknowledge that (a) the focus group interviews we conducted account for only a small fraction of each constituent group so we're not able to know with certainty how broadly representative these views are, and (b) there likely are educational, contractual, structural, logistical, and financial reasons that not all of the suggestions can be addressed. We present them because the people with whom we met offered them. We urge the central office and building level administration to engage the teachers, students, and parents in discussions of these ideas and develop a set of priorities for change.

We are enormously grateful to the people who took time from their incredibly busy schedules and lives to meet with us and share their thinking. The large majority of people with whom we met recognize that decisions about the model have been made with the best of intentions and with the students' and staff members' health and safety in mind.

Finally, our thanks to Natalie Carrignan and her team, Mary Ann Stokes, Jennifer Caputo, and all those behind the scenes who assured us that we would have a generally seamless experience. Coordinating invitations to join groups, assembling participants, and being available to us was deeply appreciated.





# K-5 Curriculum Updates



BOE Teaching and Learning  
Committee  
10-28-20

# Science & Social Studies

- Curriculum At a Glance
- Science Coaches
- Modified Curriculum
  - School Launch
  - Independent, Self-Paced at Home Activities
  - School Closure
- Literacy Integration: Grade 3 Research Reading & Writing
- Curriculum At a Glance
- Virtual Lesson Designer
- Modified Curriculum
  - School Launch
  - Independent, Self-Paced at Home Activities
  - School Closure
- Literacy Integration: Grade 5 Non-Fiction Reading & Writing



# “What I Need” (WIN) Block

- Previously known as the Intervention Block
- PD Focused on differentiation strategies
- Students have additional time for...
  - Teacher-led small group instruction
  - Partner and/or group work
  - Reinforcing games and activities
  - Enriching projects and problem solving
  - Reflection on and revision of past work / learning

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- Jessica Tomorelli, LLS
- Peter vonEuler, SES



# Curriculum Guide

## WPS Curriculum

### PARENT RESOURCES

STANDARDS • INSTRUCTION • DEVELOPMENT