

Westford Public Schools

School Reopening Plan for 2020-21

Summary

We are all awaiting the day when the Westford Public Schools can return to being surrounded by our students, teachers, colleagues and friends. Connections that have served our students and staff so well for so many years.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought disequilibrium and uncertainty to school systems and our lives. Now, nearly five months after the initial closing of schools across Massachusetts, all school systems will be submitting detailed reopening plans to local school committees and the Massachusetts Department of Education.

After weeks of collaborative work and thoughtful discussions among the subcommittees, I have analyzed the available sources of information and will be recommending the following to the Westford School Committee:

Hybrid Model of Learning: This model is a combination of remote and in-person learning experiences for students. It provides children with face-to-face learning opportunities, while incorporating remote learning to limit the amount of students in the building at one time.

Students will be split into two learning pods (A & B) consistent throughout the district keeping families together and will follow a schedule specific to their pod, with each pod rotating between in-person and remote on a weekly basis. During a week when a pod is in-school, students will come to school for the first part of the day and be released for remote learning for the remainder of the school afternoon. During a week when a pod is not in school, students participate in asynchronous learning activities during the first part of the day, then log on for live remote sessions during the school afternoon. This model keeps both sets of students regularly connected and engaged.

Remote Learning Academy: As an alternative to the hybrid model, WPS will be developing a Remote Learning Academy as an option for families who have a child that is immunocompromised, or otherwise do not feel comfortable sending their child to school due to concerns related to COVID-19. This option will allow students to continue their grade-level learning experience in a full remote setting. This model is still under development.

A goal of 6', rather than 3' of distancing: The state has reduced its distancing requirements from 6' to 3' for students and staff. The CDC has indicated that "close contact" with respect to health parameters is less than 6' of distancing for a period of more than 15 minutes. Our Reopening Committee feels that a goal of 6' of distancing is needed to create a healthier work/school

environment. A hybrid model with cohort A & B, will allow for fewer students in the building at one time and allow for 6' of distance.

Face Coverings/Health & Safety: Westford Public Schools is requiring that all staff and students in kindergarten through high school wear face coverings in the schools and on the bus. Exceptions to mask/face covering requirements will be made for those for whom it is not possible due to medical conditions, disability impact, or other health or safety factors. Department of Public Health COVID-19 protocols will be carefully observed.

Transportation: Schools and buses will run on the traditional “early release” schedule. One student per seat will be allowed on school buses and all students and drivers will wear face coverings. Bus seats will be assigned. We currently anticipate accommodating 24-26 students per bus, using spacing of one student per seat, alternating window/aisle per row to further distance students.

Special education transportation will continue to be provided and once buckled in, the students will be physically distanced. In order to reduce the amount of “contacts” a student encounters, parent transportation is recommended for those who are able to do so. In some instances, the parent may be eligible for reimbursement and should contact the Special Education Office for further information. All transportation vehicles will be cleaned by the driver after each school route.

School Arrival and Departure: The early arrival option will not be offered at elementary schools this fall. Entry and dismissal times may be staggered by mode of transportation (car riders, walkers, bus) and entry/exit points may vary in order to allow students to enter and leave the schools safely and distanced appropriately.

Students will not be allowed into the school buildings before the specified entry time. Students will go straight to their classroom. They will wash/sanitize their hands as they enter the classroom. Lockers/cubbies will not be utilized. Students may store items in the classroom.

Classroom Set-Up/Procedures: Classrooms will be set up with individual student desks/tables positioned so students will be at least 6' apart. Seats will be assigned and positioned in the same direction facing forward. Classroom locations may change to maximize social distancing. Classes will utilize outdoor spaces, as appropriate for both instruction and periodic mask breaks.

Classroom student groups will be clustered together as a cohort whenever possible. This will better allow contact tracing if necessary.

Students will use personal school supplies, as appropriate. Sharing of supplies and materials will be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

Hand sanitizer dispensers will be available in all classrooms.

Transitions will be kept to a minimum as much as possible.

Technology: All Westford Public School students will be provided a Chromebook to use for the academic work. Please notify your school principal of any internet access concerns.

Lunch: Bag lunches will be available for students to purchase and take home to eat. The free and reduced lunch program remains in effect. Additionally, lunch kits may be offered to students for their “at home” week. No lunch will be consumed in the buildings.

“After School”: As students will be leaving school before lunch and continuing live synchronous instruction in the afternoons, there are no after school activities, field trips and/or athletics planned at this time. This may change as further guidance from DESE is received. The latest guidance for fall sports indicates a potential September 15 start.

No after-school care will be available in the school buildings.

Family Connection: Communication will be vital during this fluid school year. The Westford Public Schools will communicate through regular emails, video messages, the district and school websites, and any other communication tools we have available.

Necessary meetings will be held virtually. This includes but is not limited to: Special Education, 504, and parent teacher conferences.

Parent volunteers, student teachers, student interns and other outside speakers or guests will not be allowed into the schools at this time.

Cleaning and Disinfecting Procedures: WPS will continue to follow CDC and Massachusetts Department of Public Health guidance. Studies have shown that appropriate hand sanitization along with proper sanitization of facilities can significantly reduce the spread of illness.

Custodial Sanitization Responsibilities: Throughout the day, custodians will clean all commonly touched surfaces and areas throughout the building with an approved cleaning agent and/or disinfectant in accordance with Federal, State and Local guidance. This includes all classrooms, offices, student/staff bathrooms and common areas.

“Caring Room” and Dismissal Guidelines for potential COVID-19-related illness: Each school will identify a “Caring Room” (i.e., isolation room space) that is well ventilated and separate from the nurses’ office. If a student tests positive for COVID-19, school officials will refer to the [Protocol for responding to COVID -19 scenarios in schools dated July 17, 2020.](#)

Illness screening: Parents/guardians are encouraged to check for symptoms of COVID-19. Children experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 must stay home and should contact their

pediatrician. Children who demonstrate general signs of sickness are also encouraged to stay home and follow the district's protocol for returning to school.

Health Clinic Access: Due to the unique needs of students at each grade level, the nursing staff will work collaboratively with administration to establish guidelines that are age appropriate for clinic visits.

Facilities/Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC): HVAC systems in all schools are being evaluated by an outside contractor for proper airflow. Baseline air quality assessments will be conducted in all schools.

Hygiene Education: At the start of the school year, staff and students will participate in mandatory, age appropriate site-based training led by school nurses and health teachers.

Health Collaborations: The school nurses will work closely with the Health Director and Public Health Nurse regarding updated COVID-19 information and close contact tracing of students that test positive for COVID-19.

Modifications to the Westford Public Schools Reopening Plan may be made upon new COVID-19 medical information or guidance from the Commissioner of Education. We will have the capability of shifting between the three Teaching and Learning models if health conditions change. All decisions will be based on medical data from a variety of sources and guidelines from the Commissioner of Education.

The full Reopening document represents an "Initial Opening Plan" and will be submitted to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education by July 31, 2020.

Over the next few weeks, we will continue to update you with any necessary changes. We will be surveying you again regarding bus transportation. We will solicit and record your teaching and learning choice between the hybrid combination of in-school and remote learning and Remote Learning Academy.

We need your assistance to surmount these challenges to best support our Westford Public School students, staff and the Westford community.

Thank you.