Public Input 11-14-20 Special BOE Meeting

Good morning,

Last night's board meeting concerns me on many levels. The in organization aside, what is most apparent, is that most of the board is having trouble understanding the public health crisis we are faced with.

Yes, it is important for parents to work. I understand the economic toll this has taken.

Yes, it is important that students are engaged in active learning. I have been a Hamden teacher for over 10 years, so I know the value of face-to-face education.

However, nothing is more important than the possibility of saving lives. The current (increasing) COVID-19 numbers in Hamden prove that teachers, staff and students should NOT BE IN SCHOOL. There are lives at stake, and I cannot understand why this is a decision that is even up for a vote.

To be blunt, I don't know how a board member could sleep comfortably knowing he/she is putting so many people in danger.

I fear for myself and my family. I fear for my students and their families.

And you have the ability to take away that fear.

Do what needs to be done.

Christine Patafio

Christine Patafio -Grade 3, Dunbar Hill School Teacher

Good Afternoon,

I am normally one to stay quiet on matters of discussion like this but after last night's frankly appalling Board Meeting I felt I needed to write some input. I am a teacher at the High School and I felt extremely heartbroken and disrespected after the meeting. I feel that while the Board sits comfortable meeting virtually while we are all on the front lines everyday, the lack of regard for teachers is quite embarrassing.

I will be the first to say that Distance Learning is not what any of us want. However, the safety of Staff and Students MUST come first. ALWAYS. I am empathetic to people who will struggle with childcare or support for online learning because many teachers have the same challenges at home with their own families. I myself am a Kidney Transplant patient who is at high risk but still comes to work each day and tries everything I can to support my students because I love my job. As much as I love my job, I am not willing to sacrifice my kidney and my health. What about people like me who put aside their own risks to take care of students each day? Do our lives not matter? What happens if the teachers get ill and nobody is there to watch the kids anyway. Also, God forbid, someone dies of Covid because they are put at risk when the numbers are clearly unsafe for us not to be remote during the holidays?

Teachers are working harder than ever and are so dedicated that they are even putting their lives on the line for students. Working in an environment where you do not feel community support, damages the teachers mental health and ability to be the best teacher they can be. Who wants to be in a position when they feel the harder they work, the less they are cared for?

It is time to start respecting the teachers and support going remote until it is safe to return. People's lives depend on this decision, and not supporting teachers would be a dereliction of duty as a Board of Education Member.

Thank you,

A Concerned Teacher - Caroline Schoenwald

Superintendent Jody GoelerMembers of the Hamden Board of Education60 Putnam Avenue Hamden, CT 06517Via Email Re: the Superintendent’s recommendation to move students to a remote learning platform starting on November 23rd and returning on January 19, 2021

Dear Superintendent Goeler and Members of the Board of Education:.

The discussion surrounding the proposed plan conflates two separate issues: (1) the health and safety of our community and (2) the staffing shortages. All the research indicates that brick-and-mortar schools do not spread COVID. The real issue is one of staffing, which was not adequately addressed or explained at the November 10, 2020 meeting.2.The question of why this proposed plan treats all schools and age groups the same has not been adequately addressed, and needs to be.3.The real question appears to be weighing on one hand the difficulties posed by remaining in a brick-and-mortar setting that might have to close without any notice and an orderly transition to distance learning on the other. This was not adequately addressed at the November 10, 2020 meeting, and, on balance, remaining in a brick-and-mortar setting as long as possible, even if it necessitates last minute closures for some schools, is the better choice.4.Because schools do not meaningfully contribute to the spread of COVID-19, they should be the last public institution to close in an attempt to get the COVID-19 numbers under control. Letter Let me begin by thanking you all, and especially Superintendent Goelerand the staff of his schools, for navigating the difficulties related to COVID-19 this school year.I commend the school district on a job well done thus far.

Letter to Superintendent Jody Goeler andMembers of the Hamden Board of EducationNovember 11, 20202I write here to share my thoughts on the Superintendent’srecommendation to move students to a remote learning platform starting on November 23rd and returning on January 19, 2021that was discussed last night, November 10, 2020, during the Board of Education meeting.First, I was very disappointed and upset that Ms. Saller, Ms. Mitchell, Ms. Campo and Mr. Morton all moved to vote last nighton the proposed plan, without providing the parents the opportunity to react to the information that Superintendent Goelerprovided for the first timelast night. To be clear: prior to last night parents had no understanding of why Superintendent Goelerwas making this recommendation. Theparents heard the information contained in the presentation for the first time last night, and rather than providing parents the opportunity to react and respond to that information, Ms. Saller, Ms. Mitchell, Ms. Campo, and Mr. Morton (with the backing of Mayor Leng) moved immediately to approve the proposed course of action. This was, in myview,unacceptable. Five hundred people attended the virtual meeting last night. Parents appear to be unanimously opposed to a fully remote learning platform (as shown by the public comment summarized during the meeting).Obviously parents wanted to engage with the issue, and these four board members and the mayor essentially sought to stop all debate and make the proposed plan a fait a compli. I am very glad that Mr. Perez-Cabello, Mr. Daur, Ms. Kaplan, Ms. Walker-Canton, and Mr. Walsh had the good sense to table the matter for another week. As an aside, I think Mr. Morton made an excellent point last night that when there is an issue that draws 500 people to a meeting, it probably makes sense to handle that issue first or alone so that people can actually engage with the issue rather than leave it until 3 hours into the meeting at 10pmon a week night. Second, during the discussion last night two separate issues were repeatedly conflated: (1) the health and safety of teachers, students, and the community at large and (2) the staffing issues at the schools. Starting with the former, let’s be clear: the best evidence to date demonstrates that schools do not fuel community transmission of the coronavirus.1This is especially the case where students and teachers adhere strictly to the safety guidelines set out by the district, which is the case here in Hamden as we heard from district representatives last night. Now it may be that this maxim holds less true for 1Seehttps://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/health/coronavirus-schools-children.html; https://www.npr.org/2020/10/21/925794511/were-the-risks-of-reopening-schools-exaggerated; https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/schools-arent-superspreaders/616669/

Letter to Superintendent Jody Goeler andMembers of the Hamden Board of EducationNovember 11, 20203teenagers and young adults –which relates to my third point below about approaching this problem with a “one size fits all” mentality. But, in my view, the discussions regarding putting our kids at risk or in danger by sending them to school is not borne out by the evidence.2Worse –it appears that this justification was brandished as way of forcing a vote on this issue last night. In other words,there appeared to be a deliberate attempt at obfuscating the justification for transitioning to remote learning. The real problemseemedto be one of staffing.Turning to staffing –it may be that the inability to sufficiently staff the schools is a good reason to transition to remote learning. I understand completely the need for teachers (and everyone else in the community) to quarantine when they are exposed or potentially exposed to the coronavirus, (though I do agree with Ms. Campo that teachers should not be travelling –no one should be travelling),but I would have liked to have heard more specifics about the staffing issues at the meeting. Last night, we heard that 80 faculty and staffhad to quarantine (across the course of the school year so far--notcurrently,as it was initially reported). What sorts of shortages did that create and where? How many people are currentlyquarantined?How many people are quarantined on average per week? Per school? What alternatives did the district explore in trying to replace those individuals? Obviously there was some success as we haven’t had to closeall theschools yet. We heard about a substitution shortage at the local, state and national level, and we heard that substitutes were costly –but how costly? Isit worth paying for these subs? If not, why not? If there are literally no substitutes available, how have we been able to proceed this far? These are all the questions I would have liked to have heard more about rather than just a “numbers are increasing and it is not safe” argument.Third, despite Ms. Walker-Canton’s and Mr. Walsh’s efforts, the question of why this proposal treats every school andevery age group the same has not been adequately addressed.It may be thatthe science bears out that high schools should be closed because the students there are older and more likely to contribute to community spread. Fair enough. Why does that mean that our K-6 schools need to close as well?Similarly there is a real difference between having a 12-year old log onto a distance-learning platform and a 6-year-old logging onto a distance-learningplatform. Regardless of Ms. Mitchell’s comments that “weare better at this now,” so that we can go remote, I can assure you all thatthat5-and6-year-olds are not better at 2If I am wrong about this, I would appreciate hearing about this from an expert, directly or otherwise, at the next meeting. As nearly everyone stated last night –no one at the meeting was an epidemiologist.

Letter to Superintendent Jody Goeler andMembers of the Hamden Board of EducationNovember 11, 20204logging into Google classrooms and navigating through the various tasks and assignments.3To the contrary, they will not be able to do it without a parent (most of whom work full time) hovering over their shoulder and keeping them on task. Even synchronous teaching requires parents to be attentiveto their 6-year-old. I readily concede that this is probably not the case for pre-teens and teenagers. And so this really, again, raises the question in my mind: why are we approaching this problem with a one-size-fits all mentality?Shouldn’t we be exploring options that keep our youngest children who need the most in-person help and who areleast likely to be transmission vectors in brick-and-mortar teaching environments? If not, why not? I think parents deserve to have this question adequatelyaddressed (not just an “it’s dangerous” argument) prior to moving fully remote.Fourth, it seemed to me that the real issue here, as I described above, was one of staffing difficulties. And so I understand that theschool district is trying to weigh on one hand the difficulties posed by remaining in a brick-and-mortar setting that might have to close without any notice and an orderly transition to distance learning on the other. This issue was not adequately addressed last night.I believe this is the crux of the issue. What is worse for our children, their families, the teachers, and the administrators: continuing in brick and mortar for as long as we can and then having to suddenly go remote without any prep, or an orderly, but perhaps unnecessary transition to remote learning now? In other words,do we stay on a ship that appears to be sinking until the last minute? Or do we all jump overboard now in an orderly fashion.From the district’s perspective, I have no doubt that continuing in brick in mortar for as long as possible is worse and a logistical nightmare. It requires the school to continue to try to find substitutes as necessary in an increasingly difficult environment, it requires the school to scramble at the last minute if it has to go remote suddenly, and the uncertainty alone is also probably an extreme stress on the teachers too.From a family’s perspective, however, I write to let you know that going remote now would be a complete disaster for all of the reasons that you heard from parents (and the district last night). They include,in no particular order, the following:3As the parent of a kindergartner in the spring, I found this comment way off the mark. It did not get easier as time went on to engage in distance learning. It got harder. Harder to get my childto concentrate, harder to continue to motivate my child, harder to get him to do all the assignments, harder to do my work, and harder emotionally for my child to have a father who is pestering him for hours every day about his education.

Letter to Superintendent Jody Goeler andMembers of the Hamden Board of EducationNovember 11, 202051.Students don’t learn as well remotelyand therefore fall behind;42.Parents have to figure out childcare;3.Parents of younger children have to helptheir kids on remote learning;4.Students of color do disproportionately worse when learning remotely;55.Students who are young and are left home alone while parents work are at greater risk of danger than if they are in school; and6.Students do not have the benefit of socializing in their development.This is an incompletelist. There are dozensofmore reasons that children do better in school.In my view, and the view of every other parent of young children I have spoken to, on balance, it makes more sense to have schools continue to deal with logistical difficulties and let in-person learning go on as long as possible. Especially because there is a chance that the schools may not need toclose if the school district continues to navigate the logistical hurdles as successfully as they have. I appreciate it is a burden on the school, teachers, and administrators. And, again, I want to congratulate Superintendent Goeleron doing an excellent job thus far under extremely challenging circumstances. But the alternative is simply worse. Especially for the parents of young children (which, again, goes back to my third point –why are we treating all schools and all ages the same).At a minimum, I would like this question discussed and seriously considered at the next meeting, because it appears to me to be the crux of the issue.4The question was posed last night “fall behind who”? There is some merit to this question, but the answer is two-fold. First, each other. Those students whose parents have the resources to support their children in remote education will do better than those who don’t. Second, the answer is students at private schools. As Mr. Walsh indicated, St. Rita’s, for example, is in person and fulltime right now. Remote learning at public schools put public school children at a disadvantage as compared to students at private schools who are in-person.5I found Mayor Leng’s self-described “bomb” at the end of the meeting offensive. He noted, in sum and substance, that COVID-19 disproportionately affected people of color and challenged that those of us who are concerned about equity to consider that fact before opposing a transition to a remote platform. This was an (apparently deliberate) oversimplification of the issueunder discussion. To begin, as described above, schools don’t meaningfully contribute to the spread of COVID. It’s a question of staffing. Secondly, it deliberately minimizes that all of the problems with transitioning to remote learningare more acutely felt by people of color because of socio-economic issues, and, in the process, belittles those challenges. It was a bad comment.

Letter to Superintendent Jody Goeler andMembers of the Hamden Board of EducationNovember 11, 20206Fifth and finally, everyone here sees the writing onthe wall. The numbers are going up and we’re just getting to winter. We will be remote eventually. I get it. But why on earth is the first thing we are closing our schools? Bars, restaurants, other businesses are all openand are all significantly more likely vectors of spread.6Why is the very first thing we are contemplating closing schools instead of businesses? This is like your house burning but being worried about your neighbor’s tree falling on your house. Yes, the tree is a concern, but maybe we should deal with the firefirst?I appreciate this is outside the purview of the Board of Education and the school district, but Mayor Leng attended the meeting last night and plainly and strongly advocated for closing the schools. I would hope that the Board of Education at the next meeting, as our elected representatives, would askMayor Leng why we should start with the schools,when there are so many other things in Hamden that are contributing to the risingnumber ofcases.Rather than sacrifice our children’s education and our parent’s sanity, let’s start by shutting down things that make sense to shut down to get these numbers under control.The schools should be the very last things that go remote.Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Respectfully,John T. Pierpont, Jr., Esq -50 Wakefield Street, Hamden, CT 06517

Dear Members of the Board,

We are writing as concerned staff of the Hamden Board of Education.  As a collective, we work at Wintergreen School in the Special Education IIC classrooms.

We find it alarming that the district would put the health and safety of the whole Special Education team at risk.  Safety regarding COVID is the primary reason we feel concerned with the proposal of continuing in-person learning for both students and teachers. Since the beginning of the school year, **Wintergreen has had at least one staff member out on 49% of school days, and more than one staff member absent on 23% of school days, up to this point.** When we have staff absent in our building, due to our students’ unique and individual needs, trained substitutes are required. Due to lack of available substitutes, our only option is to have staff from other “cohorts” in the building cover for those classrooms. This, in turn, leads to cross-exposure between cohorts and the inability to preserve the integrity of the small cohorts that were initially established.

The following are also barriers to our ability to maintain COVID safety protocols within our particular school setting.

* Students are unable to wear masks properly, even with daily practice in school.
* Students have limited understanding of social distancing.
* Students have emerging hygiene skills and require adult support with daily living skills such as handwashing, feeding, and toileting.
* Students are unable to communicate when they don’t feel well.

We request that we are given equitable protection that is consistent with the rest of the district’s plan.  We feel if it is unsafe for SOME of the staff in Hamden, then it is unsafe for ALL of the staff in Hamden.  We also request to be part of the discussion before making your final decision.  We recognize the challenges of this situation and the unknown that this pandemic has created for everyone. We also recognize that we need to do what is best for our students and staff, which at this time is keeping everyone safe. We are committed to doing what is best for our students, and teaching remotely will not diminish our commitment to our students and their unique and diverse needs.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Wintergreen IIC Special Education Team

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing you as a 45-year Hamden resident, and a Special Education Teacher with over 20 years of dedicated service with the Hamden Public Schools.

I urge each and every one of you to make the health of our school community your top priority, and vote YES to move our entire school district to all Distance Learning as soon as possible.

I fear that if you do not, someone in our school community will die as a result of continuing the hybrid plan.  If and when that happens, let that be on your heads; on your conscience. Remember, we are in the midst of a global pandemic, with a daily rise in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths occurring around the world, in the US, in CT, and, yes, even in Hamden.

I truly and painfully understand the financial needs of our parents who need child care in order to work to support their families, but what good will that all be if any of those parents or children die as a result?

In addition, each day that we are in school, you are putting all of your students, staff, teachers, and administrators at unnecessary risk of catching, spreading, and possibly dying of Covid 19.

Please carefully consider the dire consequences that a “no” vote would be. Would any one of you want to come and spend a day in any one of our schools? Would you like to go into a number of different classrooms in different grades like our Special Education Paraprofessionals do throughout every day? Would you like to spend the day with the students who are unable to keep their masks on properly, and maintain social distancing, or forget to cover their sneezes and coughs? Would you like to see how “socially distanced” our school classrooms and busses really are? Would you like to use the few bathrooms that all of the staff have to share?  Please come in and truly witness for yourselves what you will be voting on. Any takers?

You *all* need to do what you *all* need to do, and that is to keep everyone safe by moving the entire Hamden Public School system to all Distance Learning. Stand up for what is right and in the best interests of the entire school community. Vote “YES”!!!

Respectfully,

Priscilla Berlepsch

Special Education R​esource Teacher - Dunbar Hill School

pberlepsch@hamden.org

Residence: 27 Maplewood Terrace, Hamden, CT 06514 pberlepsch@snet.net

Dear Board of Education,

I am writing to express my distress that the Board did not support the students and teachers in Hamden by voting to switch to distance learning last night.

I have been a dedicated teacher in Hamden for 20 years and when I became a teacher I never envisioned that I was joining a profession that could potentially endanger my life.  While we all know that children learn best in the classroom, learning should not put their lives or the lives of the staff in danger.

We all acknowledge that these are tough times, but we need to make the tough call to switch to distance learning before we have an incident where a student or staff member contracts, or even worse dies, from coronavirus.

I encourage you to vote in support of distance learning.  Health and safety needs to be the first priority.

Respectfully, Brenna Symonaitis - Hamden Middle School

Good Evening,

My name is Christine Grady and I am a teacher at Ridge Hill School. After listening to the November 10th BOE meeting regarding the full closure of Hamden schools, I am extremely frustrated, overwhelmed, and quite disappointed with the preparedness and organization of this meeting as well as the remarks that were made regarding teachers. It is abundantly clear that some board members are not viewing the 2020 school year through the lens of teachers during a pandemic.

The preparedness and organization of this meeting was lacking. There are families, teachers, and other community members that took time to share their concerns and thoughts through letters to members of the board. The same board that make decisions that impact their families. It was so dismissive to not have read them in advance in order to gain a better understanding and full scope of the concerns of the community. In addition, knowing this decision impacts the families and members of the community, only 20 minutes were allotted to address these thoughts and growing concerns. How does that help the community stand by decisions made by the board, when they aren't being heard? Let's put this situation into context: If board members were sitting in a classroom where a teacher was not prepared for class, skimmed through some of the material, and just read what they could with the little time that was available; would that be acceptable?

Finally, the comments that were made about teachers were disrespectful and unwarranted. To say that we are "privileged" because we are given the time to quarantine or that teachers are essential workers and should just go to work shows how disconnected some board members are from the classroom. These rules/regulations come down from the state. The notion that teachers shouldn't have this time to keep themselves, their families, and coworkers/students safe is one that is difficult to process. Schools and universities are shutting down all around the state because it is NOT SAFE. Teachers are working HARDER than ever before and it frustrating to hear anything that would suggest otherwise.

At the end of the day, your decisions impact a lot of people in this community. Teachers are not trying to get out of working. But we are concerned about the health of our families, students, and ourselves. We have the right to be concerned about OUR health and safety. Even though schools are the safest place for students to be during this time, the DATA shows numbers are going up...and going up FAST. Students are being exposed to members of their families that are not following guidelines put forth by the state and are coming into OUR classrooms each day. Once they step foot in that school in that classroom, our health is immediately impacted and should be at the very least considered when making these decisions.

My recommendation for the BOE is to create a place for a teacher advocate. These advocates would represent teachers from both elementary and secondary schools. I know each school has a union representative, but I feel strongly that when decisions are being made, the people who are impacted the most should be able to share their perspective to inform members of the day-to day effects their decisions may have.

I stand by the board members who feel the urgency to make the decision to go full remote starting November 23rd and return January 19th.

Best, Christine Grady

Dear Hamden Board Members,

     Thank you to the four members who were in favor of approving the virtual plan for the 17 and a half days.  You understand that we have a public health crisis that is currently worsening here in Hamden and only going to worsen during the winter months with the holidays coming up.

    Disorganization aside, it truly saddens me there were five of you that don't seem to comprehend the safety of students AND staff as well as our families involved should be priority over anything else.  It was also disheartening to hear a member saying untrue remarks about teachers during the first lockdown.  I don't think anybody would consider working during this pandemic a "vacation" and to be honest I felt that (I can only speak for myself) I was working harder and putting in more hours than ever during the first lockdown. No one asked for this and not one teacher would be happy to see people sick and dying everyday;  to belittle teachers like that is uncalled for.  I would hope that being a part of the board of education you would support the staff instead of tearing them down.

   As the numbers of COVID are increasing, I am feeling unsafe at work, that I am putting myself, my family, my students and their families at risk.  I believe you all know deep down that safety needs to come first.  Let's stop deliberately putting our students, staff and families in danger and do what's right.

Thank you for your time & consideration,

Allison DiCrosta

Allison DiCrosta 5th Grade Teacher - Dunbar Hill School

Board Members,

Thank you for consistently demonstrating professionalism and putting in the extra hours in order to make a safe and well thought out decision. As a teacher, I understand how it feels to mentally and physically put in the extra hour's day in and day out. I work 2-3 jobs on top of teaching just to keep afloat and support my family.

After the last board meeting, the vibe from parents and guardians' emails are to keep students in school only because of child care reasons. This is understandable however; we aren't KinderCare or Right at School employees, we are Teachers. If the general consensus from the parents and guardians is childcare well, keep Right at School open and have them monitor the students as they normally do. Create a Right at School Student Schedule in which students have log in times, mask breaks, etc.

Below you will find a link with the current case information. As you know, they are rising and clearly the hybrid model was working until cases started to increase.  Weekly a message and email stating another Hamden Public School case has been found.  It's not safe to stay open anymore.  Board meetings are still over zoom and you think it's safe for teachers to go into a school with 200+ students with 16 students in a class? Also, don't forget about specials teachers that teach multiple classes a day. Keep us home, Keep us safe, Keep us alive and healthy, thank you for your time.

<https://data.ct.gov/Health-and-Human-Services/COVID-19-case-rate-per-100-000-population-and-perc/hree-nys2>

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West Woods Physical and Health Education Teacher
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It is with sadness and frustration that I address the Board today. As President of the HEA, I advocate for the teachers and truly care for the safety and welfare of students in Hamden. I have heard from many, many teachers since the November 10th Board meeting who are shocked, disheartened and truly in disbelief as to comments made, the lack of direction the Board took in not approving a plan and the requiring of more information to make a decision. I am still trying to process what more information is needed in order to secure a vote of approval to move to a virtual plan. You had the opportunity to get ahead of the curve and support the recommendations from Central Office Leadership, yet you disregarded the facts presented. The presentation by Central Office staff was on point and reflected the data and trend we are being challenged with daily. Since Tuesday evening we have more teachers quarantined, have closed HHS again because of staffing issues and have another cohort of students at home learning remotely. I received numerous calls since Tuesday evening from staff who have been exposed to COVID. Every day that we wait is potentially putting staff and students at risk. Other districts made decisions to close while giving no notification, no time to make arrangements. I don’t want to see that happen in Hamden, but it seems to be the direction we are taking.

This Board had the ability to take a proactive stand and make the statement that the safety and welfare of ALL students and staff are the priorities. Teachers are now questioning the Board’s stance on safety. We are living in unprecedented times and making difficult decisions have become a daily occurrence for many of us. Many times I must make decisions that not all 535 teachers agree with but I make them based on the facts and what is in everyone’s best interest. I thank Melinda, Walter, Gail and Lyn for attempting to get the vote passed on Tuesday evening as they listened to the facts presented. They had the foresight to want to get ahead of the problem and to protect and keep safe those in the education community. They realized the potential risks of waiting to vote and keeping families in abeyance yet another week. It is unfortunate not all Board members were in agreement.

Teachers have been stretched to the limit and to hear comments made about teacher privilege, quarantine being like a two- week vacation and comparing us to private schools is unfair and unwarranted. I understand that everyone is stressed and anxious but I always felt like this Board held teachers on a pedestal of admiration and respect for all we do yet suddenly we are the “privileged.” I am not the only one to feel this way- teachers have been inundating me with emails, calls and texts as to how this Board meeting affected them.

I have heard many times that Board members want to hear from teachers and that you support teachers. The events of Tuesday evening have certainly clouded that image. Every time I write to you I do so on their behalf and with their support. You will be hearing from teachers as to Tuesday’s board meeting. Let me add that some are afraid to write as they are afraid of retribution from the Board - NOT from administration or the union.

I hope that you act quickly and do the right thing. I just requested an update from Gary Highsmith as I am getting many calls from teachers, as I stated earlier. Since your meeting ended Tuesday evening, and I quote from the info I just received, “an additional 21 staff members (20 of whom are certified staff) have either been quarantined, or are eligible for paid leave because they do not have another suitable adult to care for their child (i.e. their child has been ordered to quarantine or the child’s school or day care have become unavailable due to COVID-19.” This just since Tuesday at midnight.

I appreciate your time and look forward to your action.

Stay safe- Diane

Dear Board Members:

It is my understanding that more than half of you determined, after hours of deliberation, that the timesensitive matter of the decision to move to remote learning could be safely tabled despite an uptick in CTCovid cases indicative of the second surge predicted by nearly every health professional in the world. Inlight of your decision to delay the vote, I have some questions:

1)How much time has each of you spent in our high school since we reopened under the hybridlearning model?

2)How many of you have a job which requires you to wear PPE for the duration of your work day?

3)What is the source and nature of the data you require to make an informed decision?

4)Why are there so many other school districts in CT who have already taken decisive actionregarding remote learning and how are those CT districts different from Hamden?

If the board members who need more information to inform their eventual decision have not spent time inour secondary facility then I’d like to ask you on what basis you have been able to determine that thehybrid model is a) functional, b) preferable to exclusively learning remotely c) beneficial to our teachersand students?

If your answer to question number 1 is that yes, you’ve shadowed a high school teacher for an entirecontractual school day, wearing your own PPE, trying to split your attention between the grid of ceilingfans, light fixtures, pixelated “virtual backgrounds,” and names in blank squares, fighting the intermittentwifi, abbreviated instructional time, and near constant interruptions while simultaneously monitoring theengagement of the despondent looking masked in-person cohort, whose numbers decrease daily, and youstill sincerely feel that this is somehow preferable to remote learning, please explain to me how you drewthis conclusion and what specific data suggests that it’s “working.”

My impression is that the board has not met in person but rather maintains contact and communicationvirtually, postulating that it’s safer that way, yet the same board sees fit to send hundreds of students andeducators into harm’s way on a daily basis. Is this because you truly believe that we’re doing our studentsany kind of actual service by dragging them into the building, muzzled and muffled by their masks,robbing them of any real opportunity to socialize, shuffling them around every 39 minutes through oneway hallways and making it impossible to be on time to class while further interrupting what passes asinstructional time?

On the basic most human level, I ask you if you’ve ever had to sit in a face mask containing a couple ofrogue hairs for seven plus hours using technology that doesn’t work properly to try your best to do a jobyou were never trained to do? Did you have to start bringing a backpack this year after a decade of servicebecause the water fountains are sealed off and you have to pack in your own water and leave each daywith all the materials you might need should a sudden shift to remote learning occur?

Every single one of you will earnestly insist that the needs and protections of our student population areparamount. If you would be so kind as to come observe me and my charges during cafeteria duty, I wouldchallenge you to defend your position on the matter.

I have never seen a sadder thing than our high school cafeteria which used to be a bustling, raucous,laughter filled display of teenaged exuberance but which has become a nearly silent feeding time thatlooks vaguely like a deranged educational prison camp. It’s devoid of all of the things that make workingwith teens a rewarding and fascinating experience. What information are you waiting on that will provideyou with the clarity necessary to make a decision?

I challenge you to answer the fourth question with any clarity. I can’t hazard a guess as to what hasinformed your decision to delay a move to virtual learning. It is the recommendation of oursuperintendent who is our leader. You are undermining the best judgment of the person who is taskedwith running our district while simultaneously asking us to have faith in his leadership and to continuealong, business as usual. This is the kind of political equivocation that divides us rather than unifying andstrengthening us.

I have been an educator for over ten years and I’ve spent the majority of those years serving Hamden. I used to love this job. I still love my students but lately I dread pulling into the increasingly empty parking lot each day, wondering which of my colleagues I may never see again. I dread the mask and how it’s stolen my ability to greet others and to smile reassuringly at my students. I miss the high fives, the rowdy hallways, the voices of over a thousand people. I miss wandering around the room during class so I can see progress happening before my eyes. I miss multiple choice mobility which is an activity I designed to help my AP students get accustomed to the process of elimination method of answering multiple choice questions under a time constraint. It’s also designed to keep them out of their seats but still learning. It’s challenging but fun.

When I was allowed to teach from home during our little snowstorm a few weeks back, I was overwhelmed by how good it felt just to use my face to talk to my students and to be relieved of the pressure I feel when I’m trying to teach two separate classes at once. The new hybrid model has tripled my workload. Even with the hour we’re given after school to post assignments and update grades, I bring more work home with me than ever before. Beyond that, I worry that I’ll also bring this terrible disease back to my own family.

I know that the best mode of instruction is full time, face to face, with all of our students but that simply isn’t a safe option for anyone involved or you wouldn’t be having a Zoom meeting to discuss next steps. I’d even go so far as to say that had you all met in person wearing the required PPE, you’d have come to a decision much more quickly because your own discomfort would have prompted you to act expeditiously. Please consider my questions for the next meeting and also take into account that there are many significant differences between the age groups and what is feasible and/or best for each age group in our district. There is even preliminary data that suggests that high school aged distance learners are outperforming the hybrid cohorts academically. Perhaps a one size fits all model doesn’t apply here. I implore you to make the responsible decision and to move us forward by immediately transitioning us to a distance learning model. The safety of our entire community is depending on you. Thank you for your careful consideration.

Respectfully, Elaine Livingstone

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Good afternoon,

My big takeaway from Tuesday’s meeting was that not all members of this board sincerely care about the well being of Hamden’s students and teachers. You have a school district filled with anxious, worried, scared, and unmotivated educators- yet you continue to not acknowledge us. I want to take this opportunity to state a couple things in hopes of providing the board with some clarity:

Teachers are not babysitters. Schools are not daycare centers.

We work harder when remote than when the kids are present in school. This is not a prefer situation for us.

We are also part of this world-wide health crisis, and have been conveniently identified as “Essential Workers” even though we are not, nor have agreed to be.

Health and safety thriumps the inconvinience of parents having to care for their own child during school times.

The current, and rapidly increasing COVID-19 cases in Hamden prove statistically that all teachers, staff and students should NOT be present in schools. Taking a look at this data, it is insulting to us as people, and professionals, that this is a decision is even up for a discussion. If you disagree with that statement take a look around your neighboring districts which many have already gone remote, or will be doing so in the next couple of weeks. My life, and the ones of those I love, are being put in danger when this all could simply be avoided by working remotely.

I am a partner to a small business owner whose restaurant would severely suffer, or even close, if we were to get sick.

I am a daughter to two parents, and two in-laws, with preexisting conditions.

I am the granddaughter to two 89+ year olds that I have not been able to hug since school began.

I am an aunt to a medically fragile 3 year old.

I am suffering from anxiety, exhaustion, and stress to the extend of seeking medical attention.

I am hesitant to begin a family of my own since I could get sick from coming work, and no one really knows what the outcome of that could be for a pregancy and newborn.

I am sick and tired of not being valued and respected as a professional.

I am a teacher who feels like she is putting her students, and their families, in constant risk.

Please listen to those of us who actually work in schools.

We speak from experience.

Sincerely,

Maria Sol Rachi, Ed.D.

Special Education Teacher

Dunbar Hill School

To the Hamden Board of Education Members:

The pandemic has brought challenges, hardships and heartbreaks we could never foresee.  School communities, including ours, are doing a fantastic job providing a stable environment that invites the best learning opportunities possible.  The protocols in place have kept all students and staff safe and I want to be in my school, with my students, teaching.

However, 80% of CT is now in the red zone and the holiday will help spread the virus.  In addition, there is a misunderstanding that if you have an underlying medical condition, or would expose a vulnerable family member, your option is to “distance teach.”  That is simply untrue.  I have a medical condition and that was not an option for me and many other staff members.  I am not wealthy enough to take a year off, which was my only option.  My family and I have been holding our breath, as I accept the risk entering the school each day.  If I do contract the virus, and survive, I will have devastating consequences.

With my fingers crossed and the hope that our protocols would mitigate risk while the numbers stay low, I teach as I have in this building for the past 25 years.  I believed that once it became unsafe and flu season began, the responsible decision would be made to move to distance learning for all.  I never thought some of the board members would question the recommendation of our superintendent or attempt to shame teachers for being afraid for the safety of their students and themselves.

I understand the stress a full distance learning plan will put on parents and that resources are sorely lacking to support families.  There are too many issues to name that we can’t control related to this virus.  But I can keep track of the schools around us that are moving to full distance learning and that over 80% of Connecticut is under COVID-19 Red Alert, including Hamden.  This isn’t a union issue, a parent issue or an essential worker debate.  I thank the board members that support this decision.  For those that do not, how will you console yourself if the virus is contracted at school and takes the life of a student, their family member or a staff member?

Respectfully,

Yvette Budrow, Career and Technical Educator
Hamden High School, 2040 Dixwell Avenue, Hamden, CT  06514
phone:  203-407-2040 ext. 2214       fax: 203-407-2041

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Dear Board of Education members and associates:

It is with great concern that I craft this letter. When I listened to the meeting on the evening of November 10, 2020, I was appalled at the utter lack of empathy for not only our teachers and staff, but for the students that we have been working with every day since the beginning of our 2020-2021 academic year.

The implication that some members “need more information” to justify a vote to switch to remote learning is akin to saying that the rising numbers of positive cases and deaths across our state are not *quite* high enough yet. Must our laptops “ping” with another Positive COVID case and the rehashed robotic bullet points informing us to wear masks, wash hands, and that--not to worry--we’re all in this together across our screens yet again? An email from a parent suggested that there are “plenty of qualified teachers out there” ready to jump at the opportunity to teach. Where are they? We **ARE** the qualified teachers and **WE** are covering classes for our fellow qualified teachers. What data is needed to make a decision that places safety and education at the forefront? What criteria must be met before we make a decision that impacts our entire community?

As you make these statements from the safety of your zoom square we are continuing to meet with our students each day to create and maintain a warm, welcoming atmosphere that fosters diversity, culture, and community. We are learning how to use new digital tools in an effort to mimic the traditional learning model in an effort to maintain normalcy for our students. We come into school each day to face broken technology and budgetary constraints and yet we persevere for the young children who depend on us each day to be here for them in a time where we are all living in various degrees of isolation.

We are tired. We are stretched to the brink. We need your support. We need your compassion. We need you to look at us as not numbers, cases, and statistics--but as humans. If teachers are now considered frontline employees treat us with the respect we deserve. We have car parades, we write letters, and we continue to ask for support from our communities. And we continue to be ignored. We believe that you deeply want to make the right decision and that somewhere in your heart of hearts you know what must be done.

I write to you not only as an educator, but as a parent. I too have made sacrifices due to complications with childcare; I understand that keeping children of all ages in school is ideal. But, I also must point out that the justifications for keeping children in school due to childcare or having multiple children in the home must not be the catalyst for remaining in the hybrid model. Like you, I want what is best for my family--and that includes staying well.

Melinda Saller, Lyn Campo, Gail Mitchell and Walter Morton, we thank you for doing your best to address a completely incomprehensible situation. Your words gave me hope. Hope that someone is hearing us, hope that someone remembers when we were rapidly ejected from the building in March without warning, without closure, and without a moment to adapt. To the other board members, I plead with you, do not let your desire to “gain more information” and glean new data from some arbitrary source result in a drastic shift in an already tumultuous learning environment. Our children, and the teachers who spend their days with them, are depending on you.

Christine Gallo-Yatcko
English Department
cgallo-yatcko@hamden.org

Dear Board of Ed Members,

I’m a special education teacher within Hamden Public Schools. For the past 8 years I’ve taught an elementary IIC program and I’m currently a resource teacher at Hamden Middle School. I’m also a product of Hamden Public Schools. Dunbar Hill, Hamden Middle School, and Hamden High School helped make me who I am. My 3rd grade teacher is why I’m a teacher today. Yes, my 3rd grade teacher taught me academics but he also taught me so much more. I learned how to communicate, work collaboratively with others, handle disappointments, build friendships, play games fairly, celebrate my successes, and believe in myself. His way of teaching us academics wasn’t just a rote sit down and do worksheets. There are so many classroom lessons that I remember and I’ll never forget because he always found a way to grab our attention.

That’s the teacher that I wanted to be and that’s why I thought teaching would be the most amazing job. I’m a teacher that wants to be in the classroom with my kids. I want all the kids in front of me and I want to teach them academics, how to communicate, how to work collaboratively with others, how to handle disappointments, how to build friendships, how to play games fairly, how to celebrate their successes, and inspire them to believe in themselves. Yes, academics are important for all students but it’s not the only thing that is important.

I spent 8 years teaching an IIC where the kids weren’t able to access the academics. So, before I could teach them math, reading, writing, science, and social studies I needed to teach them how to handle disappointments, build friendships, play games fairly, work collaboratively with others, believe in themselves, and celebrate their successes. It’s not until they have those skills that they can learn math, reading, writing, science, and social studies. However, once they grew in those areas the sky was the limit with how much they were able to progress academically.

You asked a lot of questions at the last board of ed meeting and I don’t have any data or fancy facts and figures for you. You asked how the kids are achieving in the hybrid and the distance learning model. No teacher will tell you that the kids are more successful in distance learning because most aren’t. But it is a struggle all around. Their work completion is of course better when they’re in school. The full distance learning kids struggle with their work completion and need a little more of my time to be successful. However, when my hybrid kids are in school these are the statements I hear, “how can I get rid of this so I don’t get or give anyone covid?” “Do I have to take my mask off during the mask breaks?” “are we allowed to talk to each other?” “I need help but can you see my Chromebook from there?” “we missed a lot from the end of 6th grade, will 7th grade ever be back to normal”. They aren’t being kids. They’re completing their work but they aren’t building friendships because it’s more difficult with everyone wearing masks. They’re nervous to communicate and they aren’t as comfortable asking for help because they know I have to get closer to them. Our ability to give them opportunities to work with each other are limited and they don’t feel like they’re really at school. Their social well-being needs to be at the forefront of importance with everything that is going on.

We had a full distance learning day last Friday. I had all my kids on zoom and it was amazing to watch them all communicate, have their cameras on, joke with each other, and be able to be with all their classmates at one time. They’re used to me standing in front of the

classroom trying to balance communicating with my in-school kids and remote kids at the same time. They’ve seen me struggle with technical difficulties while trying to teach them. But they are never able to communicate with everyone because some are home and some are in school. They also aren’t super comfortable communicating with each other inside the classroom. This was the first time they were able to and it was amazing to watch.

I want to be in school teaching my kids. The decision of going fully remote isn’t because the teachers don’t want to do their jobs. If you actually think that then you haven’t taken any time as our board of ed to actually get to know any of the teachers that work in Hamden Public Schools. You keep saying you want to hear from the teachers about how they feel about everything but it doesn’t actually sound like you care about our well-being. The emotional health of the students and teachers right now are both important. You have no idea the amount of stress we are under and we worry about our kids every day. Right now, I’m teaching kids at home and at school at the same time. I don’t know how many of you have actually had to do that but it’s incredibly exhausting and challenging. I never feel like I’m giving each group of kids enough of me during that 39-minute period but I’m tying myself in knots trying to do just that.

No one wants to move to remote learning but we all know it’s going to happen eventually. We have the ability here to go into it on our own terms. I knew that I’d no longer be teaching an IIC before last school year ended. I knew my kids were moving onto other classrooms and different teachers and that I’d be relocated. I went in one day to do my job, the job that I love, and by the end of that school day I was told I’d be home for 2 weeks. That 2 weeks turned into a month and then quickly turned into the remainder of the school year. It was stressful and the unknown was anxiety provoking. If you think my students and their families didn’t feel the same way, well you wouldn’t know that because you weren’t on the weekly phone calls with parents and students reassuring them that it was all going to be okay.

I know this isn’t an easy decision. I’m aware of the struggles with parents working and the childcare issues. When we started remote learning last year, I was a sounding board for my students’ parents that were dealing with those same issues. I know there are a lot of parents that want their kids in school. As a teacher, I also want them in school. But as the covid numbers increase and staff members are out due to a variety of reasons, none of which are them not wanting to be at school, do their job, or because they’re acting recklessly. We are entering a time frame where moving into remote learning is necessary.

You can ask any of my colleagues, friends, or family members how I felt about going back to full remote learning at the beginning of this school year. I’ve been adamant about not wanting to move to remote learning at all. I was optimistic that we’d be able to stay hybrid and over time the balancing of remote and in school would become easier. But eventually reality has to be faced and now is that time.

I’m one of those teachers at the middle school covering classes during my prep times. Teachers covering classes has been essential to ensuring the middle school can run successfully. But that still hasn’t been enough. Tomorrow we do our second full remote learning day. As much as I’d prefer to be teaching my kids in person… I’m excited to teach them all on one platform again. I’m looking forward to watching them smile and interact with each other. Moving to full remote learning means I can finally, for the first time since March, teach my

students academics as well as how to handle disappointments, build friendships, play games fairly, work collaboratively with others, believe in themselves, and celebrate their successes!

I hope that you will take all this information under advisement when you make your decision.

Melissa Holt Resource Teacher, Hamden Middle School

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Board of Education Members,

Thank you for welcoming teacher input regarding the upcoming vote for the shift to remote teaching/learning for the 17.5 days proposed. I'd like to share with you the positives of making this move:

\*Going remote will reduce our risk of getting COVID. Less adults and children will get sick, become hospitalized, exhibit lingering/long term health issues from the virus or die.

This reason should be enough but I will elaborate.

Having the foresight to start our school year with a hybrid model established a solid foundation and I applaud the many hands and minds that created this plan. Circumstances have changed and because of this, we too must change our methods of instruction. Safety first. With positive cases and the death count rising, Hamden joins 80% of the state's red status. We must acknowledge this and take action.

After watching Tuesday's meeting, it appeared that the board favored hybrid learning over remote learning. While neither are ideal, there are many positives of remote learning you may not have considered.  I'd like to highlight the pros of going remote from a teacher's perspective. In the long run, it may be the best of our choices to foster equity during the pandemic.

1. With the approved ability to Zoom this school year, opportunities for connection are consistent daily. This is a major positive change from last year.
2. Remote learning allows for flexibility in the students' homes. Having recorded lessons allows all learners to access all learning.
3. Allows for the students to see their teachers' smiles; to make connections and increases social/emotional learning with face-to-face connection.(No masks)
4. All students can hear their teachers. (In class, I have students sitting 24-30+ feet from me and hearing me behind a mask is difficult, especially in the open environment in which I teach; 41 people in all).
5. All teachers can hear their students. (Behind the masks and at great distances poses difficulties, especially in the open space schools).
6. All students can see the material. (Projecting material for the in-class learners, especially those in the last row, can make seeing the material difficult.)
7. Students will have their materials. (The number of times students forget their Chromebooks, forget to charge them and leave materials home will not be an issue with remote learning).
8. We won't need to wear coats, hats or gloves during the school day. Today, at West Woods, the Oak unit recorded 59 degrees with 53% humidity.  Students and staff members are experiencing cold and damp classrooms. The State requirement of less recirculated air is good for reducing COVID risk, but is extremely inefficient for heating our school. Our heaters cannot keep up with the demand for an increased percentage of outside air in the building.  This issue will continue to get worse as outside temperatures plummet. Obviously, this needs to be revisited and going remote would solve this issue.
9. Remote learning will allow for routine without interruptions.  Children thrive when routines and expectations are present. We have many interruptions which include the necessary mask breaks, bathroom monitoring, and hand washing. Personally, my class shares one sink with another class; 29 people. My other colleague in this open space classroom has a sink in her corner (13 people). All of this takes time.  Assuming each student follows the 20 second hand washing guideline, my class spends 10 minutes for one hand washing session. Hands are washed before breakfast, snack and lunch.  Students are required to use hand sanitizer upon entering the building, after eating,returning from outside the building, and when returning from physical education. More time will be spent on academic tasks when these safety measures are eliminated from the setting.
10. Teaching and learning remotely is vastly different than last year. Teachers have participated in professional development training, received upgraded computers, and garnered experience.
And then the obvious:
11. Reducing possible exposure and transmission of COVID for our families and educators during a critical period of time.
12. Not adding more cases to Hamden's RED status by attending to learning in person.
13. Supporting our leaders (Mayor, Superintendent of Schools, Administration, HEA Union President and teachers) and becoming united in the commitment to health.

BOE is about education, not child care, as this was a great focus during last Tuesday's meeting. Statements about the possibility of keeping the elementary schools open were shocking.  Please do not consider such a move as this virus doesn't decide who gets exposure and who does not. Equity please. As a mother of 3,  I recognize there may be childcare hardships, but health and safety of our school community must take precedence. This global pandemic isn't over.  We must stay vigilant and do all we can to lower the transmission rate. Please accept Hamden's leaders' proposal; our lives depend upon it.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann-Marie Blake

Teacher/West Woods

Dear Hamden Board of Education,

I am emailing to reiterate my comments, concerns and questions regarding the superintendent’s proposal to close Hamden public schools effective November 23, 2020. Please see below. I also want to throw my support behind the attached letter from John Pierpont, who writes with great clarity about these concerns. Please give these the consideration they are due!

The safety protocols have been working. Since the issue is not safety, we as a community and you and the scoreboard need to come up with alternatives to the other issues that are pushing this proposed closing.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Laura Perkins Davidson

53 Santa Fe Ave., Hamden, CT 06517

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing with comments and concerns regarding the Superintendent’s proposal to move all Hamden schools to fully remote from the period of 11/23/20 until 1/19/21.

I have worked as a clinical social worker in the school setting for over 15 years, and it is in my professional capacity that I note that socially and emotionally, it is best for children to be in school. Prolonged periods of distance learning is particularly harmful to the most vulnerable children: the youngest, the exceptional learners (ELL, special services, etc) who need support, the children whose parents struggle to provide supervision during working hours. It is right and appropriate to close schools due to infection rates, but to close when health indicators aren’t there yet is harmful and burdensome.

I understand that the there may be challenges in maintaining appropriate staffing levels. The teaching community has been doing a wonderful job, and I’m 100% behind them! I am curious about what thoughtful and creative possible solutions have been kicked around to address this particular problem.

Other members of the community have made a number of important points about this issue, including the following:

- Utilize the young adults home from college as a backup workforce,

- Keep elementary and middle schools open and reallocating staff from the high school to work at the open schools,

- Support teachers with backup childcare in the event that their children’s schools close,

- Plan on a shorter period of closer that allows for more preparation time: for example mid-December to mid-January,

Note: if the public schools close, then the private and parochial schools should close too. The Mayor should only back suggestions that he is willing to implement for his own child as well.

Thank you for your time!

Laura Davidson 53 Santa Fe Ave, Hamden, CT 06517

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Dear Superintendent and Board Members,

Most of us watched the BOE meeting on 11/10/2020 and heard all the input from our community members and all the latest Covid-19 information. The Paraprofessionals at Wintergreen would like to make sure that we receive equal protection and equality when BOE makes the tough decision about moving to full remote learning or not. With the numbers on the rise, our community here at Wintergreen is at greater risk. Our students do not know what it means to socially distance. They need us to guide them and stay close to keep them focused and safe. Most of our students are still learning the skill of wearing a mask, as much as we try to encourage mask wearing all day, for most of our students it is impossible. In our community our students are still learning very important communication skills and are unable to communicate that they do not feel well.

With that being said, we want to continue to support our students and teachers in the best and safest way possible.

We hope that when you do finally vote on this important matter you remember your most at-risk communities and do what is best for all of us.

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Thank you, The Paraprofessionals at Wintergreen

Dear Board Members, Given the town’s recent RED ZONE status, we feel the teachers deserve an explanation of why we are still unsure when or IF we will start teaching remotely after Thanksgiving break. What other data or information is necessary to make that decision? We need time to plan should we be teaching remotely. That is an undertaking that requires prior notification. We need to get materials to our students before working remotely begins. Again, that takes time. We are getting daily reminders of how close we are to this potentially deadly virus, and we feel it is time to error the side of caution, and not be met with disdain, but with respect and compassion, as you want us to show to our students.

Yesterday’s classes were done remotely, and were some of the best we have taught since the first day of school because all of the kids were on ZOOM together, and we could focus on the entire group, not switching back and forth, unable to fully engage with those here or at home at the same time. Many students remarked that they were happy to finally “see our facial expressions.” How sad that they can not see our smiles, or sense our enthusiasm and warmth because of our masks. Many of our students are in quarantine now, and every day the risks get higher and higher. Is it truly worth putting the faculty at risk when there is way to safely teach? We urge you to consider the safety of your teachers, and let us do our work remotely. If we are truly “all in this together” we should consider the health and well-being of the staff and the students here at HHS.

Thank you,Christine Frumento Christina Annunziato Gina Ligouri

Members of the Board of Education,

As requested by Mr. Perez-Cabello, I will keep this extremely short and to the point:

PLEASE VOTE TO KEEP THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN HAMDEN OPEN.

On Wednesday, Commissioner of Education Miguel Cardona, along with the Acting Commissioner of Health, Deirdre Gifford, issued a memo to all superintendents urging them to “keep schools open for in-person learning, “unless and until local conditions specifically dictate the need to” disrupt our children’s education. They specifically stated that they do not believe that “arbitrary, date-based closures of school are warranted at this time.” I watched Tuesday 11/10’s entire meeting with a mounting sense of frustration and despair, realizing how quickly certain members of the BOE were willing to jump to close the schools, without stopping once to consider any feasible, safe alternative. Other districts nearby are closing their high schools/middle schools, but keeping the elementary schools open (Waterbury, Milford, Hartford, West Hartford, and Bridgeport, for example), and we have not yet heard a compelling reason why Hamden cannot do the same. Please think outside the box. Our children are depending on you. Literally every single day that my child is able to safely attend school matters.

My comment from last week’s meeting is copied below.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Sara Gross Kaczmarek 123 Santa Fe Avenue

Dear Board Members,

I am writing to share some information regarding Hybrid and Distance Learning for special education students.

My name is Lisa Goodrich.  I am a special education teacher of a grade 2-3 IIC at West Woods School.  Let me first stress that we are ALL in agreement on 1 thing, in-person “non-hybrid” learning is best for all students and all teachers! Unfortunately, COVID has changed our priorities at this time, nothing is more important than everyone’s health.  All other problems can ultimately be fixed.  I support the district’s decision for distance learning and this should include IIC students.

There have been concerns about regression of skills for all students but in particular, students who receive specialized instruction in an IIC.

Here is what I can tell you about my IIC class:

* There is no evidence of significant regression during time of distance learning March-September.
* March 2020, my students had never used a chromebook and had limited computer skills in general.
* ESY improved instruction by allowing us to do direct instruction through zoom.  This had a drastic positive impact on instruction.
* In September 2020 we returned to school, 8 out of 10 (80%)students returned for in-person learning.  These students were not only able to quickly re-adjust to being in school, but also adapted to the new norms of social distancing, mask wearing, and utilization of chromebooks.
* September 2020, upon returning to school in-person, 8 out of 8 (100%) students maintained critical previously acquired reading skills
* September 2020, upon returning to school, 2 out of 8 students demonstrated significant growth in reading skills.
* September 2020 ,upon returning to school in person, 8 out 8 (100%) students maintained critical/previously acquired math skills.
* March-September, during distance learning, 2 of my students who have 1:1 IPP Behavior therapists demonstrated no spikes or regression in behaviors.
* September 2020, upon returning to school, the 2 students who have 1:1 IPP behavior therapists, initially demonstrated improvements in behavior despite all of the changes to the learning environment.
* March - November all students demonstrated significant improvement to their technology skills. (teachers too!!!)
* Hybrid learning includes extensive planning, explicit instruction and implementation to prepare the IIC students to transition to distance learning at any time.

On a personal note, the initial transition to distant learning was extremely challenging! Teaching online is NOT easier!! In my almost 30 years of teaching special education, this has by far been the most difficult.  After working a full day, balancing the dance between in-person and at home learners, after my job as a mother and wife have settled,( and maybe a quick catnap) I end each evening with about 2-3 hours in front of the computer, reviewing the completed work of my students, creating materials, google slides, turning worksheets into interactive google slides,  posting assignments, and continuing to improve my overall computer skills.  As I stated before, in-person, non-hybrid learning is best for all.  With that said, I fully support the district's decision to move to distance learning, including IICs.

Lisa Goodrich

Special Education

West Woods IIC

I urge the Board to approve the Superintendent's proposal in order to preserve the health and safety of all community members. I am a teacher currently quarantined and I wish anyone exposed or that has tested positive, a safe and healthy recovery. After working remotely for over a week with my students, I am confident we can be successful. Live teaching offers opportunities we did not have in the spring. Without a prepared transition, we will lose the enthusiasm for learning that we have been able to foster thus far.

Thank you,

Kiely Giusti, Hamden Public School Teacher

1 Skiff St. Extension, Hamden, CT 06514