



PUBLIC COMMENT

**February 8, 2021
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING**

Your plan states less reliance on county data and more on school data. Without testing student/staff and just relying on absence reports neglects that a large amount of spread is a symptomatic. Reducing distancing from 6 to 3 feet is not something that should be done with emerging variants that are most likely more transmissible. This report neglects the fact the the majority of families affected have not had the same chance to be vaccinated. Also the data is not in that the vaccine prevents spread. You will be putting the families of students at risk with this plan, all to give students 4-5 weeks more of in person. Many students have it engrained in their minds that 6 feet is safe, you will create a lot of student anxiety when you tell them it will now be 3 feet and more students. Now children will fear bringing the virus home. I would like to know what health experts have agreed that this is a good idea. Many parents would probably have chosen WVA the last time it was offered if they knew this plan was coming - **Chris Gaines**

I had a few questions regarding the reopening plans that are to be discussed this evening. Some may be answered in the presentation, but I had a couple of concerns that primarily deal with the airborne nature of the virus.

First, the CDC still recommends 6ft of social distancing in general. When we know the virus is airborne and new variants are more transmissible, how will schools reopen with less than this distance? The CDC is set to release guidelines for reopening schools this week. It could be that they change this distance. However, will the proposed plan be revisited to ensure Westerville City Schools are following any new guidelines if the CDC recommends something that is not already included?

Next, the science seems to be clear that ventilation is a key factor in helping reduce indoor spread of the virus. What is every school doing to improve ventilation and the number of clean air returns each hour for all of the classrooms and other indoor spaces?

Finally, will the public be made aware of the percentage of teachers and staff that will be vaccinated before the return? Thank you for your time. - **Jennifer McCullough**

Considering that only 8% of the population has been vaccinated, I do not understand how transitioning to a full in school is responsible for the students and their families, even with the teachers vaccinated. You are exposing kids to twice the amount of people as before and the majority of the population do not have an opportunity to be vaccinated yet, only essential employees. The second phase of the vaccinations, which is the majority of people that make up the school community, has not even been released yet, so a target date for safe return to school seems very preliminary, especially so soon. People under 16 years of age are not to receive the vaccine, as of now, so these are the majority of students in the district who still run the risk of being exposed to and contracting the virus. Although it is not as dangerous to them as to other groups, it still can be very bad and just as contagious.

Even with the vaccine, social distancing and masks are to be required. How is changing the social distance from 6 ft to the noted 3ft minimum in the plan allowed? If the hybrid plan was put in place because the schools primarily did not allow space to safely social distance the kids in the beginning of the year, how is it possible that they meet those requirements now? How is going to a full in school plan okay considering that the risk levels in both Franklin and Delaware County remain at a level 4 with high risk? The conditions are similar to when the hybrid model was put in to place last year, and although the current count of cases is as low as they were in October, they are still high and expected to rise again, especially with the new strains that are increasing in cases across the country and which the vaccines are not proven to fight against. Will there be a period of quarantining following the spring break as there was following the holiday and Thanksgiving breaks? That is also a time where people take advantage of the opportunity to travel and visit with family members, so it also she be considered a high spreading situation. Westerville has done an amazing job of being conservative when it comes to their hybrid model, which has proved to be effective throughout the year in keeping students, faculty, staff and families within the district safe. I do not see how this plan is a safe return to school, as has been the district's priority in the past, it is in fact quite the opposite that seems to come from pressures from the governor to get the students back in to school so that the teachers were able to receive vaccines. - **Kaitlin Corrigan**

Dr. Kellogg - We support your decision to bring all of the students back full time by the end of March. We know this was not an easy decision and are appreciative of all of the work you have done to ensure you have all the facts to ensure the students and staff are safe. We also want to thank the amazing teachers in this district! They have managed this difficult year so well and our children have missed them so much this year!

THANK YOU!!!! - Ben Brooks

The communication to parents stated that we will continue to follow social distancing guidelines. How is this possible with 30 student in one room? Students will not be able able to stay 6 feet apart. In many cases, I would think they would be less than 3 feet apart. How will breakfast and lunch be handled? Will students will be spending 20 or more minutes in close proximity to each other without masks?

Dr. Kellogg mentioned the new quarantine guidelines and suggested that close contact in a controlled classroom or bus environment no longer requires quarantine. Will I still be notified if my child is in close contact with someone who tested positive while on the bus or at school? Even if you don't require the student to quarantine, I would hope you would give parents that information so that we could monitor for symptoms and make decisions that protect everyone in our households. - **Gavin Emrich**

Please get our kids back to school - ALL IN - as soon as possible! - **Heather Johnston Welliver**

I want to bring to your attention the fact that if and when we return to 100% in-person instruction, the students and families put most in harm's way due to the inability to maintain even 3-foot social distancing will be our economically disadvantaged and minority populations. Given our district's declared focus on equity (and even without it), this is gravely problematic from an ethical standpoint. Please see pertinent numbers at the end of the email for examples.

If and when district administration decides to transition back to "all-in" instruction, what intentional steps and guidance will be taken and provided for these buildings which are at a distinct disadvantage? How can we in good conscience resume 100% in-person learning when we are putting some students and families at more of a risk than others?

Building principals and maintenance staff were not consulted prior to the plan being announced on Friday, February 5th, and the email certainly communicated that the majority of the ""return"" plan was already prepared prior to soliciting and receiving this information.

Even at the initial transition to blended, buildings were not provided with explanations or plans on how to handle distancing issues during class changes or lunches. This was negligent, and such an ill-planned transition once again is unacceptable.

For example, Walnut Springs cannot fit even one cohort in the cafeteria for lunch, despite splitting into six lunches. There's are currently three classrooms (and three lunch aides, which is the total staffing) being used for overflow. There is no solution once double the students are present at once.

Given the age of many of our buildings (and the smaller room sizes that come with it), many of our classrooms cannot accommodate 25-30 students at a time with 3-foot distancing.

We want our students in school. We also want our students, their families, our staff, and our staff's families to be safe.

Examples (number taken from the redistricting proposal information earlier this year)

District Stats: 53% white, 36% economically disadvantaged

Middle School

Heritage:

Enrollment - 906 (Versus proposed new enrollment w/ new building - 664 = 26% decrease)

Econ. disadvantaged - 48.1%

Minority/White - 54.8% / 45.2%

Walnut Springs:

Enrollment - 939 (versus proposed w/ new building - 665 = 29% decrease)

Econ. disadvantaged - 40.7%

Minority/White - 48.1%/51.9%

vs. Genoa, constructed most recently with bigger rooms:

Enrollment - 880 vs. proposed 736 (16% change)

Econ. disadvantaged - 22.1%

Minority/white - 38.5%/ 61.5%

Elementary School

Hawthorne:

Capacity – 600 Enrollment - 768

Econ. Disadvantaged - 57.2%

Minority/White - 71.5%/28.5%

vs. Alcott, constructed most recently with bigger rooms:

Capacity – 600 Enrollment - 548

Econ. disadvantaged - 20.1%

Minority/white - 30%/70%

Thank you. - **Beth Morvay**

Hello, I have over 300 questions that have been submitted via my Facebook page, We Support Westerville City Schools. First, we support the Board and the District. The biggest concern is re-entry, safely for all. Are the school nurses involved? How will you safely socially distance a full school? Will Dr. Kellogg hire staff to help the teachers in every school maintain safety protocols? Is the district willing to wait until after Spring Break to consider full re-entry? We only want everyone to STAY HEALTHY. Can you please advise?

I hope the Board understands that as a District, the silent majority does NOT want re-entry rushed, just to appease a few that have been louder. We are the other side of the district; we support your decisions, we support our teachers, staff, admins. We, as a district, just want every person to be considered. We are very diverse and every person needs to be considered.

I will follow up with a detailed email, that I will post to my Facebook page, We Support Westerville City Schools.

Thank you! - **Stephanie Matthews**

If the Westerville City School Board really cares about educating the children in its district, then getting them back to in class learning should be Priority One. Private schools have figured it out and have in class learning, so I don't understand why Public schools can't. The harm being done to your children and future leaders is considerably more significant than the harm by COVID-19. Look at the science, not the main stream media or the Teachers Union because there is not to support virtual learning. Kids are not at risk.

I know everyone talks about "social distancing" and yet the wording should actually be "physical distancing". The difference in the word "social" vs. "physical" is more than semantics. As human beings we need social interaction and that is not being gotten by having children in the current at home & or hybrid learning model. Levels of depression & suicide are on the rise and significantly more worry some than the spread of COVID-19 by those under 18 years of age. The spread is kept, according to the CDC, by staying 6 feet apart, which is physical separation. I know the WCSD is trying and I do appreciate what they have done and I just think it is not enough.

Teachers should be considered essential worker's because they are educating our children and that is what I believe is a constitutional right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Just like trucker's, grocery store worker's, manufacturers, etc. and so if they don't want to teach then don't pay them and get a teacher that will teach in class.

I am Not against safety procedures (e.g. masks, plastics barriers, physical distancing, etc.) and I think the schools have all these practices in place so continue to enforce these guidelines and get children back to school full-time not hybrid. Cases are up because testing is up and survival rates are more than 98% across the human perspective.

Has the vaccine been offered to all WCSD employees (e.g. teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, janitors, & administration personnel)? Since you have committed to opening because of offering the vaccine, does that mean in-person regardless of circumstances?

Did WCSD receive any of the \$265+ Billion in funding from the various "CARES" Act funding by the Federal Government? If yes, how much? Which obviously could be used to purchase all these barriers, cafeteria tables, desks, etc.

Science and these medical experts have proven that this shut down of public education is not necessary because the threat to children is not proven itself in positive COVID-19 case nor deaths. So if you really want to do what you were elected to do, this Plan presented by Dr. Kellogg needs to be approved.

I am obviously passionate about in class learning for the WCSD children. I have 2 still in High School, at Westerville Central. Interaction & discussion is the way to move forward.

Thank you! - **Karl Priedeman**

Regarding plans to return to full in person learning. I am glad that teachers and staff have begun to get vaccinated for covid 19. However students are not yet eligible to get vaccinated. Parents, guardians, and family also have yet to be vaccinated. In order to maintain social distancing, and protect students and families, I feel we should remain in the blended learning model until more of our community and families are vaccinated. Question regarding change to distancing during lunch times. If the 3 feet standard is with both people wearing masks, why is this being considered during lunch when no one is wearing masks? - **Kelly Welch**

If the AAP is the only group recommending 3-foot distancing, and our local health department (FCPH) still recommends 6-foot distancing, it seems you are picking the evidence to support your conclusion, rather than looking at the totality of the evidence.

Also, from an academic standpoint, after all the work teachers have done to set up for hybrid/remote teaching, and most families and children have become accustomed to that system, while it certainly is a change from before, and not ideal for some, how is switching again 3/4 of the way through the school year not causing more diisruption, rather than finishing out the school year as it is at this point, and changing back at the start of next year? - **Michelle Treaster**

Can we please wait until the high risk pool (asthma patients, obese patients, etc...) is vaccinated before returning children to full classrooms where they are more likely to bring home COVID? It shouldn't be much longer after Teachers are vaccinated.

How much are we improving the social experience for our children if they're sitting behind partitions and can't see or interact with each other? - **James Rollo**

We see bus drivers not wearing masks often - and students wandering the bus. What do we do about this? - **Erin Bates**

Is retro-fitting every single building the best use of our teacher's and building staff's time and energy right now? Why the push to make this happen immediately versus next school year? This year has been so tumultuous already. - **Hannah Dasgupta**

I am concerned with the discussion and the focus on partitions early on here, and I understand we may still hear more about ventilation in the rest of the plan. The science seems clear that partitions do not separate the air space. Maybe it helps keep kids apart, but it doesn't really do anything for the air itself. Dr. Joseph Allen - Harvard Public Health Professor, speaks to the importance of healthy air, and discusses the illusion of plexiglass barriers at the 2 minute mark of this interview (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ6DhgwtGw&feature=emb_logo). The Harvard-CU Boulder Portable Air Cleaner Calculator for schools (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1NEhk1IEdbEi_b3wa6gI_zNs8uBJlSS-86d4b7bW098/edit#gid=1882881703) also stresses the importance of universal masking, 6ft, and clean air delivery rates. Thank you for your time. - **Jennifer McCullough**

I believe that WCS should ultimately follow Franklin County Board of Health and focus on districts such as Worthington and Dublin that are closer models to Westerville. New Albany and Big Walnut are relatively small districts with small number of buildings. This is in no way apples to apples with WCS. I'm concerned with the rush to all in being pushed. The BOE have asked excellent questions that are brushed under the rug by Dr. Kellogg. While I understand that each school and grade level is unique, possibly a longer time frame than 3 weeks to once again rework the entire educational model would be wise. Many of these questions could be better thought out with a longer time frame. Specifically, we have been blended since October - so why have the plans for all-in been delayed to 3 weeks before moving to that model. - **Tina Dunmoyer**

I am concerned about spring break. I already know of multiple students going out of state for vacations (Disney world, beaches etc) are we allowing these students to re-enter the classroom right after break without them having to quarantine? - **Melissa Borger**

If our children are uncomfortable coming back to school full-time knowing that it will mean an inability to maintain 6 feet of social distance, especially during lunch, what options do our students have with continuing with blended learning? We are all concerned about the variants of COVID-19 and the fact that students can still be carriers and bring that home to their families who are not yet vaccinated. How can students possibly be kept safe in the cafeteria from catching the virus? With masks off and little social distancing possible? - **Lynda Martin**

Sitting here and watching this board meeting live as a parent of an All Day Kinder & 3rd grader is frustrating and very worrisome. I am not getting a feeling of confidence whatsoever from any of the administrators or from the Asst. Superintendent that have spoken that we have the tools or the space in a lot of schools to make bringing all of the kids back safely and in what seems to be a very rushed fashion . We are a Hawthorne family and I know for a fact that our cafeteria is so tiny and there is no way to get 100+ kids from one grade in that room 3 feet apart. I also find it irresponsible and ridiculous to compare our district in any way to other districts in the area that are so, so, so much smaller than ours (like 9,000+ students smaller). I ask that you keep students in the Hybrid model to finish out the school year as to allow more time to figure out all of the pieces to bring all students back full time next year. Thank you. - **Margaret Butler**

What is the timeline to implement the Pre requisite needs prior to moving in 100%. Our kids are in Hanby Elementary where the school structure and playground will have a challenge of implementing the recommended 3 ft. How will these schools be provided the assistance. Will there be an opportunity provided to move back to WVA if we are not comfortable with the plan? - **Ramprasath Rупpa**

I don't feel we are getting any real answers. Every hard question asked gets a response of "we will have the team look into it." My kid is in an elementary classroom that Ms Berka spoke of with 30 students. He will be in a classroom where a student will be in a far corner. I want an answer to how you will fix this. This is not acceptable. I also have a kindergartner and worry about his safety needing to move. I don't feel we have gotten a single answer to any questions on either of these. Just "there's dangers either way." No. That's not an answer. Don't blow off our legitimate concerns. Give us answers. - **Cassie Mumm**

From the bottom of my heart, I thank Dr. Kellogg and the entire team of Westerville City Schools for putting together such a comprehensive plan to return our students to their schools. I can't begin to express how important this is to so many families in our district. I have full faith in the district to keep students and staff safe while allowing for full-time attendance. I applaud the efforts to bring all decision-makers into the conversation and to find the way to make it work. This means so much to me and to so many others. Thank you, thank you, thank you. - **Rebecca Seum**

I do understand and agree safety should be top priority. I just do not understand why we wouldn't move to open the schools back up when other districts have been open since the beginning of the school year. Dr. Kellogg even mentioned today that Lakota schools has been open all year and they are about the same size as Westerville. We will live with risks for a long time (even into next school year) while the pandemic is around but it seems to be a greater risk when it comes to the effect this is having on my children and not being able to attend school in person every day. The data that other schools have been successfully open since the beginning of the school year should be a heavy influence on the decision to reopen. - **Jennifer Winters**

Thank you Dr. Kellogg for the thoroughness and clarity tonight in the presentation. I'm supportive of your efforts and confident in your team to overcome the challenges to implement. A special thank you to our hardworking teachers and staff. - **John A Brooks**

We are still not one to one with chromebooks, but we have moved our curriculum online this year. How do we move forward with an "all-in" schedule when only half of our students will have chromebooks at a time? Are students now allowed to share books/materials? Will we have enough tri-fold barriers for the desks in our classrooms (in addition to those being used in the cafeteria for lunch)? When we combine cohorts A & B, will students be removed from our giant study halls (high school)? What will we do about students singing in choir? The research is still changing about how long after the second dose of the Pfizer vaccine until we are immune, but most suggests between 10 days and 2 weeks. Shouldn't we wait an extra week instead of going "all-in" only one week after the teachers' second vaccinations? Fourth quarter starts March 15, so isn't that a more logical choice than March 8? It seems unwise to have Cohort A out of school for 3 whole weeks in a row (Feb. 15-Mar. 5), even at the expense of balancing the cohorts. Why has no one asked teachers for their feedback in all of this? Our voices matter too. Thank you for listening. - **Michelle Feige**

Westerville teachers want to have all students back in the classroom when it is safe and logistically possible. Working with teachers to see what it would look like is an important step in the plan. - **Rhonda Gilpin**

Plain and simple question. If today is an exception to your decision to not read public comments out loud as was stated at the start of tonight's board meeting, how different is that from the fact that the board meetings so far have taken away our First Amendment right to freedom of speech as our comments were intentionally not read to silence those who you serve as so decided by our Chairman? Thank you. Point of information on the slide where it shows Cohort B in person learning the entire week of February 1st. Feb. 4th and 5th were all remote days so B only had 3 in-person days. Can't believe that was ignored. - **Todd Lotz**

How will the plan address social distancing concerns for schools that are already facing overcrowding? (E.g., Walnut Springs and Heritage). These schools already have staggered lunches because of the number of students, and during the pandemic they struggle to place students during lunch so they can eat safely. They have crowded hallways that do not allow for 3 feet distance between students. The classrooms are smaller, with poor ventilation, and many classes have 27-31 students. How will these situations be accommodated if our district goes all-in?

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Please talk about your most overcrowded schools and lunchroom and classroom spacing being 6 feet apart. Why aren't your other principals on this meeting-the ones from the most overcrowded schools, to give their insights to the board and community on the challenges this causes their schools? - **Laura Gledhill**

Hi! Thank you Board Members for doing your best to handle this crazy situation. I am a senior this year and in WVA. I was wondering how graduation planning is going. What are the safety measures that will take place to ensure that people like me feel safe attending if it were to be in a large group setting. Thank you! - **Brendan Leonard**

Did I hear correctly that students may not take standardized testing this school year? Some sort of testing needs to occur to ensure kids are learning and developing as desired. Are students going to progress even if they cannot really pass their respective grade? How are kids in kindergarten moving on without knowing sight words and being able to read? This is not acceptable and students are hurting on many levels is they "pass" to the next grade. How are you handling this situation?

Are all teachers and staff required to get the covid vaccine?

Regarding busses, it was suggested to open windows during the ride to and from school however what do you do during inclement weather? Kids will be kids, how do you prevent kids from violating protocols regarding the covid guidelines? - **Ami Latham**

What is the plan for some of the small middle and high school classrooms that can NOT physically seat 30 students at 3 feet apart?

Years ago the district drastically cut the custodial staff. Are more custodians being hired to help with this? Has anyone in administration asked the custodians (the ones who are in the buildings daily trying to keep our students safe) for their feedback on this plan?

On days we are fully remote, why are we seeing lots of school buses parked at different schools? Shouldn't we be encouraging the drivers to stay home and distance?

If it's safe for hundreds of high schools students to eat in a cafeteria unmasked, why wasn't it safe to have the 12 high school graduates at the meeting in person tonight? Just a thought." - **Vicki Fouse**

In regards to State Testing, is there anything we, as families, can do to also support forgoing those tests for this year and next year? I believe parents can opt out but do we have other ways we can support this measure? - **Brooke Payne**

I am truly concerned about all-in. I feel like spread hasn't been happening because of the mitigation efforts. Without the social distancing. We don't know what will happen. When we signed up for the traditional route, we were under the impression that we would be all-in when we were on a yellow, possibly orange level. We are still on red. And, to reiterate what some of the board members mentioned, we need to see all the details first. - **Meredith Bryant**

I sincerely appreciate the effort to get our children back in school. There will be hurdles but instead of dwelling on them we need to figure out how to overcome them. Thanks to the board and looking forward to getting our kids back in school safely. Our children need this. - **Lindsey Stout**

Hello, I'm writing in regards to bringing kids back to school full time. As much as I would love for that to happen I have very serious concerns on their health safety. It's great the teachers are getting vaccinated and will be protected. But our children are not vaccinated. So why would you have them all come back to school just because the teachers are vaccinated. Children can still catch covid and they can then bring it home to us their parents. Please remember all Parents do not have the vaccine. I'm not on the frontlines and neither is my husband. I don't know when I will be able to get the vaccine. I feel as though I don't want them all back to school together. For my well-being, the risk of them coming in contact with someone who has covid and bringing it home is much higher. There's no way to recognize physical spacing if all kids are there together. And these non-medical grade masks that they wear is not enough if they are all close to each other. Please consider this before making the decision to bring them back this year. Everyone should have the chance to get the vaccine. By next year, yes. But not rushing back in this year. Thanks for your consideration. - **Lauren Payne**