



REOPENING OUR SCHOOLS 2020-2021

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Updated August 8, 2020

Please note:

- Questions and answers will be added to this document as we receive them.
- Answers are subject to change as new information is received from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Pomperaug and Torrington Departments of Public Health, or Governor Lamont's office.
- Some questions may not be answered completely as we collaborate with our district leaders and Medical and Public Health experts.
- Answers to some questions will be decisions made by medical and health professionals. While we can speak in general, those decisions or decision metrics will not be made by the school district.

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BAS PROGRAM / CHILDCARE

Q: Do you plan to run the Before and After School Care program at the elementary schools?

A: At this time yes, BAS is working to meet the state guidelines for child care facilities and maintain the before and after school programs.

Q: Unfortunately, the hybrid model as it's being presented by every town (2 days on for one cohort, 2 days off for another cohort, and a day off in the middle to clear) is not practical for working parents who cannot work from home. We cannot take two days off or work from home for two days a week. At the start of the summer, I heard whisperings that keeping elementary school students would be prioritized. In a situation where the hybrid schedule would be used, the middle school and high school would close and those students would move to distance learning and the elementary school students would be able to use part of those buildings in order to separate students more. Teachers would give instructions to the whole class and then the class would break out into smaller groups and be supervised by a sub or para. At first I was opposed to that idea, but if I had to choose between the current hybrid plan or that one, I'd choose the latter. Parents who cannot work from home will need to choose between one parent quitting his/her job (provided there are two parents in the child's life) to supervise children on the hybrid schedule, or trying to find a nanny for those days and paying extra. Both of these are additional financial burdens that will negatively impact families. Again, I know that the state required districts to come up with these plans. My hope is that as a district we can revise our hybrid plan to prioritize elementary students staying in school throughout the year (since older students are generally more capable of caring for themselves if needed), or to communicate with the state in order to let them know that the parents in Region 15 find the hybrid model impractical. I will be emailing them directly as well.

A: Yes, in the early stages of the planning process there were some models being discussed that involved moving elementary students to different schools and keeping the higher grades in a distance learning environment. These scenarios posed many issues with moving materials, furniture, and other aspects of our elementary schools to other buildings and eliminated the ability to run a structure like the Hybrid one outlined in our plan and the state guidelines.

We do understand the challenges the hybrid and full remote model creates for families and the district is in conversation with our local non-profit child care provider and the State Office of Early Childhood to help develop some options. Our hope is that by creating consistent models

across Western Connecticut, there will be the ability for others to create regional child care options. We are sorry to not have a more helpful answer at this time and hope that by providing families with the information they will have time to develop contingency plans.

Q: Should the district have only students come to school 2 days a week, what are working parents who are essential employees supposed to do? How does this schedule work? What will the district offer to these parents?

I don't think we should have to pay for any expenses to send our children to school. Expenses such as hiring someone to supervise our children at home or send to BAS. This is the district's problem to solve. Please advise.

A: If the district moves to a Hybrid model, it would be because of an increase in community spread and exposure to others needs to be limited. The Region does understand the challenges the hybrid (and full remote) model creates for families and the district is in conversation with local non-profit child care providers and the State Office of Early Childhood to help develop some options. The hope is that by creating consistent models across Western Connecticut, there will be the ability for others to create regional child care options.. While the Region is working on this, families should continue to develop contingency plans.

CLEANING

Q: Who cleans the classrooms and the desks between classes?

A: Every classroom will have a spray bottle with a green disinfectant that cleans on contact surfaces. The cleaner works with a dry time and therefore does not need to be wiped down. Every night there will be additional cleaning protocols by custodial staff.

Common spaces and other high touch areas will be cleaned by our custodial staff with increased frequency. This will include materials that may come in contact with students and any materials we know need to be shared will be cleaned and stored in a separate location.

Q: Another concern is the cleaning procedures. If the sanitizer is concentrated, how can there be any quality control over how it's mixed? If the solution mix is off, it won't work.

A: The primary cleaning solution is ordered in bulk as a concentrate. The custodial staff has had training in how to mix the appropriate quantities for maximum cleaning. The district moved to

this practice during the winter of last year in response due to increased rates of influenza in our schools. Our current practice was already in compliance for the cleaning protocols suggested to address disinfecting for the COVID-19 virus.

Q: First of all, as one of the parents mentioned during the public comments yesterday, I am very concerned about the chemicals used to sanitize and clean the schools, as well as, the buses. We try to minimize the amount of toxins in our household and using heavy, a lot of times, carcinogenic chemicals on a daily basis is very worrisome to me. This applies to hand sanitizers as well. I was wondering what is being used in schools and what is being done to protect our children from the harmful toxins?

A: The list of annual notices, radon, and cleaning information is located on the Region 15 website <http://www.region15.org/AnnualFacilityNotices>.

MASKS

Q: Who is going to enforce the masks rule? What happens when the kids can't go outside to have "mask breaks" because it's pouring outside or temperatures are freezing? (If we get that far into the months).

A: Currently the guidance from the State Department of Education and Medical Advisors is that wearing a mask is the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. At this time, the expectation is that all students in Grades K-12 must wear a mask when riding the bus or in school. Parents may want to start having their student practice wearing a mask for varying amounts of time prior to school beginning to help students become accustomed to it. The expectation is that everyone in the school building will be masked and there will be breaks provided throughout the school day. Where and when possible, covered outdoor spaces will be used for mask breaks throughout the day. If there is inclement weather where students will not be able to go outside, students will have space in the building for their mask breaks

Q: I do not feel comfortable with (my daughter) wearing a mask all day. This is an unreasonable expectation on a 5 year old. That being said, I'd prefer her to be registered in kindergarten like normal but do remote learning until mask restrictions are relaxed. Is there any problem with this? Is there a structure in place to show for this? Can Google Classroom be used for this purpose? I'd be happy to buy materials for any projects they might have and work out a way to hand them in. I tried listening for the answer to this question but I think I either missed it or didn't hear a complete answer.

A: All students in Grades K-12 will have access to Google Classrooms. If a parent chooses to keep their student home to participate in remote learning, students will have a schedule of when to log into the classroom live each day.

Q: Can you talk a bit more about mask breaks and the plan for that? Does this look the same for all grade levels? What is the plan during inclement weather?

A: Mask breaks will be somewhat different by school and grade depending on the student schedule and the opportunities provided by the buildings. Some buildings have courtyards and outdoor space that can be used as instructional areas, some have a larger amount of indoor open space. The age of the student will also be factored in. While there will be specific times throughout the day in a student's schedule, teachers will also have some flexibility to accommodate students. Indoor spaces in all schools will be designed to accommodate mask breaks. In addition the schools will have some outdoor spaces that are covered and can be used for breaks as well.

Q: There's no way that young children will keep the masks on for the entire day without touching/moving/ taking it off. Anyone with young children knows this. Why are we then trying to mandate face coverings for schools? In addition, the data from the US and the world clearly shows that the infection rate among children is minimal. There are also obvious health concerns with wearing face coverings, such as Hypoxia and Hypercapnia, especially in children with preexisting medical conditions. Speaking of which, I also wanted to ensure that there is a plan for children who cannot wear masks for medical reasons. Are parents going to have to write a letter to exempt their child from this requirement?

A: Currently the guidance from the State Department of Education and Medical Advisors is that wearing a mask is the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. At this time, all students in Grades K-12 must wear a mask when riding the bus or in school. Families will have the option to participate through distance learning should the student not want to wear a mask.

Q: What about the children who "refuse" to wear masks & they are allowed to because of their IEP & the ADA?

A: Currently the guidance from the State Department of Education and Medical Advisors is that wearing a mask is the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. At this time, all students in Grades K-12 must wear a mask when riding the bus or in school. If students have difficulty wearing a mask throughout the school day, staff will be working with the students to help them get used to wearing it.

Q: How will you handle students that may have an accommodation that allows them to wear no mask? As a parent, I am not ok with these students being in my child's class. We wear masks to protect others, not ourselves. It puts my child at higher risk.

A: Currently the guidance from the State Department of Education and Medical Advisors is that wearing a mask is the most effective way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. At this time, all students in Grades K-12 must wear a mask when riding the bus or in school.

Q: Could face shields be allowed instead? This way kids do not need to be constantly touching their faces, while their faces are seen and any potential issues are detected right away.

A: Face shields can be worn in conjunction with a face mask but not in place of a mask. While we understand that our students have to get used to wearing a mask for an extended period of time, the schools will be providing mask breaks throughout the day where students can socially distance and take their mask off. Prior to the beginning of school, parents may want to have their child wear masks for varying amounts of time to help their child get used to wearing one.

Q: Will the district be looking at the new recommendations from Dr. Fauci regarding goggles, gloves, and face shields in addition to face mask.

A: Wearing a mask helps eliminate the particles from the nose and mouth leaving one person and landing in someone's eyes and so current guidance from the State Department of Education and Medical Advisors is to wear a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19. When in close proximity with others (such as teachers conferring with students), teachers may wear a mask and a shield. The district meets regularly with medical professionals on the most effective mitigation strategies and will continue to update our approach as information becomes available or recommended practices evolve.

Q: Would students be permitted to use a face shield in lieu of a mask?

A: Face shields are not a substitute for a face covering. If there is difficulty with masks, a parent can contact the school and we will try to assist in getting the mask on the child. If they cannot wear a mask, they cannot access school. If a student is on an IEP and requires intervention for mask wearing, we will work on a plan to move towards that direction, but it will be an individual process.

Q: For children who are reluctant mask wearers, do we have a program in place to acclimate them to wearing masks? And supplies (multiple kinds of masks, face shields) to assist them?

We are working on some videos for families to teach their child the life skill of mask wearing. Families would have the obligation of finding the mask that works for their child. We will have the standard level 1 paper mask available if children need them.

Q: Will we provide guidance to students about appropriate mask usage? I am concerned about ineffective or aggressively meaningless mask usage, such as using masks with valves or mesh/crochet/lace masks. It would be impossible to police mask quality to a high degree, but I think we should have some standards.

A: There are some basic mask standards that will be a part of the back to school information sent out by schools. The district will follow the CDC posted guidelines for mask appropriateness.

AIR QUALITY

Q: Is the air conditioning filtration system being upgraded? This has been a huge topic of discussion for bringing large groups of people indoors safely? Having over 1,200 people in one building at one time is a huge concern.

A: In schools that have forced air heating systems or air conditioning units, the filtration systems in use by the district in our HVAC systems do meet the suggested levels of filtration short of the HEPA levels needed to mitigate the infectious disease floors of hospitals. Upgrading to this level of filtration would mean significant and unrealistically attainable modifications to our HVAC systems. We are working with our HVAC contractors to maximize air flow and increase the circulation of outside air within the capacity of our current systems.

Q: Studies have discussed the ease of virus spread through indoor air-conditioned spaces and recirculated air of indoor spaces. In discussing PPE and supplies there was a lot of discussion concerning air turnover and flow through opening windows and a brief mention was made of air filtration in Nurse's offices. Is there a plan or proposal for HVAC filtration upgrades or means of air filtration for entire schools with air-conditioning?

A: In schools that have forced air heating systems or air conditioning units, the filtration systems in use by the district in our HVAC systems do meet the suggested levels of filtration short of the HEPA levels needed to mitigate the infectious disease floors of hospitals. The district will add HEPA air filtration to the nurses offices and isolation rooms. There are no current plans to air condition entire schools as the cost and structural changes required would create significant costs and engineering studies.

Q: Since updating school HVAC systems with HEPA filtration is not being considered, will individual air purifiers be added to classrooms? This is a more cost-effective and practical solution being implemented by other school systems.

A: In schools that have forced air heating systems or air conditioning units, the filtration systems in use by the district in our HVAC systems do meet the suggested levels of filtration short of the HEPA levels needed to mitigate the infectious disease floors of hospitals. The district will add HEPA air filtration to the nurses offices and isolation rooms. There are no current plans to air condition entire schools as the cost and structural changes required would create significant costs and engineering studies.

Q: Re: Middlebury Elementary School: Given the lack of air-conditioning and known safety protocol to keep all windows closed, what consideration has been made given the significant heat/ degree of temperature in the building (specifically classrooms)? Has there been any discussion regarding the hot temperature in the school and its effect on the quality of the air respective to the comfort and breathing to our young children? What is the plan to control this environment?

A: There has been a discussion about the temperatures in the schools especially during the first few days of school. Therefore, the first few days of the school year have been proposed to change to early release days which could be a benefit if those are hot days. Additionally, windows and classroom doors can remain open to help with the circulation of air.

SCHOOL FACILITY USE/USE OF OUTDOOR SPACES

Q: What are the district's plans for investment in outdoor spaces at schools to provide more opportunities for lunch or learning in open air?

A: The district is working within local fire code to increase outside space through the use of tents and temporary coverings.

Q: As a PTO, Gainfield is discussing how we can support our school reopening with the purchase of outdoor tables or the creative building of outdoor seating areas or "classrooms" where student seating is created with hay bales or tree stumps (socially distanced) and there is a podium or white board for a teacher to do lessons. Before we make decisions on how to best support this, is the district already doing anything? (Is funding available?) And if not, could you please explain why not? I didn't hear any of this mentioned at the BOE Meeting. Would it be reasonable for the PTO to discuss how we could help create learning spaces under those tents? We could plan some volunteer work days in late August to turn the tented spaces into outdoor classrooms.

A: Some of the challenge is that we do not know yet what type of tent or how large it can be so it is probably too soon to make plans for learning spaces. It is also unclear to know what role any volunteer may play in interacting with students during the school day. While we have had some discussions about limiting volunteers, we have not settled on any specific policy just yet. I would speculate that if we end up in some type of hybrid model, no volunteers will be able to be in the schools, however I would not rule it out when our schools operate under the "all-in" model.

We are meeting with the fire marshalls for both towns to review the restrictions/ options for what kind of tents we can bring in. Once we have that information we will be able to provide specifics as to size, location and number that can be used.

Q: Is there any possible consideration to rethinking school facility usage? For example, all of PHS goes online for academics and then elementary schools' populations are redistributed to allow for greater social distancing by using PHS classrooms and facilities (allowing students in early formative years an in-person learning experience)?

A: The state has requested three phases for learning and the first phase is for all students to be in school at all times. If this request is relaxed, the Region can revise their plan. There are significant logistical challenges to this model and it was explored earlier on in the planning process. Student materials would have to be moved as well as space and furniture designed for

students of different ages. Teachers would also need to move with their students, so while space would be increased, actual class sizes and instructional ratios would not change.

Q: Are doors going to be propped open? The very specifics about public health safety were not really covered beyond the fact that hand sanitizer is going to be provided and masks are required. It sounded like social distancing is not going to be a primary concern as long as masks are worn. And worn properly.... over nose and mouth.... not just over the mouth!

A: The district is looking to increase airflow in any area where the building allows while maintaining the levels of safety and security we have put in place over the past several years.

Q. Outdoor spaces. You said that you are waiting for guidance from the fire marshal regarding tents and outdoor spaces. If the Governor had made allowances for restaurants to move outdoors, why can this also not be applied to schools? Can students at PHS be allowed to walk outside to move from class to class? and if not, why?

A: Student movement outdoors, during the school day has been limited in the past to increase student safety. In order to increase school safety to the threat posed by the current pandemic, we do not want to erode other measures put in place to keep students safe. We are currently looking for solutions that provide balance in protecting students.

COHORTS

Q: Universities are currently utilizing academic cohorts as a way of grouping students for consistent academic study and regionalizing exposure. Would you explain why Region 15 is considering cohorts by geography and not by academic study (especially in regards to PHS where a student has a varied level of classes)?

A: The Region's decision to cohort students by geography if the Hybrid model is used is to keep families in the same attendance cohort and to maximize the ability to spread students out for transportation. These are 2 things that higher education institutions do not have to account for.

Q: Can I request a cohort?

A: Students will be assigned a cohort in case the Region has to move into the Hybrid phase of learning. There may be some instances where the assigned cohort does not work for certain families/students. Each of these will be handled on an individual basis.

Q: I don't remember seeing anything about the middle level students being placed in smaller cohorts/pods and moving to classes as small groups. Some districts are grouping by 10 students to adhere to recommendations to keep down the spread of COVID. What is the plan for the middle schools (and high school)?

A: There is no state definition of the number of students who make up a cohort and this will vary by district and by level. The purpose of a cohort is to limit interaction of students and staff throughout the school day.. At the middle school level, a cohort will be a grade level. Students will have a limited interaction over the course of the day.

Q: I was wondering when we should expect to get our hybrid group assignments? August is going to fly by, and our family needs to figure out what to do regarding child care for the days our kids are remote learning.

A: Families should expect to receive their cohort group assignment (for the possibility of the Hybrid phase of learning) before the beginning of the school year.

SYLLABUS / COURSE OUTLINES

Q: It would be helpful for the uncertain possibilities of the school year and schedule changes if PHS teachers provided students with a semester long syllabus. This would allow students who are remotely learning or have uncertainty of class attendance to remain on track, see progress of classes, etc. My student has received a weekly syllabus from teachers in the past, but a semester long syllabus is not only helpful for all those uncertain of class attendance, health concerns, family hardships but all students benefit from knowing class expectations and progress. (Great prep for college as well!)

A: Teachers are working to create course structures in Google Classroom that may be semester based and have the ability to provide assignments further out. However, the expectation is that students and teachers will continue to meet together regardless of the phase that education will be in. If there are health concerns, family hardships, etc., the Region 15 administrators and staff are available to support families and students.

CALENDAR

Q: As mentioned by school board members in the presentation, I am in favor of going to school on Columbus Day and Election Day (any additional days as well) to "Bank" days in our calendar for the end of school. Providing of course that these days are then eliminated at the end of the school year, an earlier year end may provide a much needed respite from a rather challenging year.

A: The Region will take this under advisement and review the possibility. If these days were to be used as instructional days (students and teachers in school), there are several contractual issues that need to be accounted for including labor and several service provider contracts.

Q: Are the three half days for conferences at the elementary school level being eliminated?

A: No, the days for conferences at the elementary level are still in the revised calendar. How they will function will be determined by the community health parameters at the time.

STUDENT PRIVACY

Q: How will you ensure the academic, social/emotional and behavioral privacy of those students in the classroom? With the students at home, there are a number of people who could be observing and listening to what is happening within the classroom through the live feed. Including viewing and judging those students who receive additional support without professional knowledge of specifically what and why it is needed. It is my understanding that parents are not allowed to observe classrooms with other students in them for this very reason. How will we ensure privacy is still maintained for the students in the classroom?

A: If there is going to be a video camera in the classroom, the camera will only be pointed at the teacher or at the teaching materials. Teachers have the option to mute their microphones if they need to address a student individually.

DISTANCE LEARNING

Q: What specifically is being provided to ensure that best practices of online learning are going to be used by all teachers? What resources and professional development is being provided? Looking at the need to do the in person safety training, Google Classroom training, and principles of online learning in less than 2 weeks seems daunting.

I am also especially concerned that the regular assignment of grades is going to be utilized given the wide range of teaching modalities that are likely to be used this school year. I am concerned about equity and access of exposure to quality teaching.

A: The Connecticut Department of Education has released guidelines for distance learning for school districts and these will be incorporated into version 2 of the Region's plan. Additionally, The Region has a working group reviewing best practices and creating consistent guidance for teachers at different grade levels. There are various professional development structions that will be utilized throughout the school year. These include the use of three days of professional learning prior to the start of the school year, job-embedded professional learning throughout the school year for some grade levels/academic areas, and the use of the four early release days.

Q: How will distance learning be different from the Spring of 2020 for the 2020-21 school year?

A: Remote Learning is outlined beginning on page 12 of the Region's Return to School Plan. http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2408/24941/REOPENING_DRAFT_July_MASTER_COPY_v3.pdf. Additionally, the Connecticut Department of Education has just released guidelines for distance learning for school districts and these will be incorporated into version 2 of the Region's plan

Q: What will REMOTE LEARNING LOOK LIKE? Online team- we do not have an online learning teacher - certification; Hybrid and everyday; Meet when your class meets

A: While the expectation is that all students attend school in-person during this phase, parents may opt for remote learning. If this choice is selected, students will be provided with a schedule of times to log in to their classroom live.

Similarly, if Region 15 is in the Hybrid phase of learning, the days that students are not physically in school, they will be provided with a schedule for the times that they should log in to their classroom live.

Q: I understand that parents have the option to choose to partake in distance learning. I am more comfortable with easing my child back. This is a 2 part question. Could I start the school year distance learning and if all goes well in the first couple of months, choose to switch my child to in school learning? If so, what would be the process to do so (who should be notified, when should they be notified, etc)?

A: Yes, if the Region is in the In-person learning phase, parents have the option to have their students participate in remote learning. If remote learning is selected, the Region recommends that parents consider choosing this option to one or two trimesters at the elementary level or by semester at the secondary level. This is suggested because frequent changes in school participation can be disruptive to the educational process of the student.

Q: For myself, as well as, a lot of other working parents, as I would imagine, life streaming schedule and learning will be very hard to accomplish. I also would like to limit screen time that my child is exposed to. Is there a way to get a physical packet of work that needs to be done and materials that have to be covered (e.g. weekly assignment packets) that we can then submit back (scanned and emailed, maybe)? Again, I am talking about kindergarten and first

grade here. From my experience this past Spring, I had to do the bulk of the work with my child and it was very demanding. I did like Lexia for the online platform that we used, but I also had to deal with my child constantly complaining of eye straining and eye pain. I just wanted to look into other options.

A: The educators in the Region agree about screen time and will work to limit it to the extent possible. Even the synchronous learning may be broken into smaller time frames with some students independent. There may be options for paper based assignments as well based on the ability to distribute and collect materials.

Q: I understand the 3 different models of learning depending on the current state of Coronavirus in the state/region. Regardless of which state the schools are operating in, is it an option for a child to choose to distance learn full-time? In other words, can I choose to keep my child at home doing distance learning even when the schools are in 100% in-person or hybrid mode OR is this considered homeschooling? Ideally, I would hope my child could participate and learn remotely with her class.

A: Yes, parents will be able to decide to only access school through the remote learning option. If this is the choice parents make, the student will need to be able to accommodate the school's instructional schedule and our current expectation is that attendance standards would apply. The choice to homeschool would mean that the student and family are withdrawn from the district and no longer have to comply with school schedules or expectations. It would also mean that the family would not have access to district instruction or resources.

If remote learning is selected, the Region recommends that parents consider choosing this option by trimester at the elementary level or by semester at the secondary level. This is suggested because frequent changes in school participation can be disruptive to the educational process of the student.

Q: Is there a way that the district can go back to school 5 days a week and allow parents to choose what they feel is best for their children? Possibly keeping them home and having the teachers videotaped during the day while teaching lessons and possibly having a paper packet to follow along? I know that I am in the 50% of parents who feel that their child's mental health is just as (or more) important than their physical health & want to see life get back to "normal" as much as possible. I am hoping that my daughter can attend her 1st day at a new school with new friends and get the education she deserves.

A: Yes, if the Region is in the In-person learning phase, parents have the option to have their students participate in remote learning. If remote learning is selected, the Region recommends that parents consider choosing this option to one or two trimesters at the elementary level or by semester at the secondary level. This is suggested because frequent changes in school

participation can be disruptive to the educational process of the student. Those students who participate in remote learning will have a schedule of times to log into their classroom live.

Q: In regards to the board meeting this evening, I feel unclear on the remote option. If the state decides that school will open in the In Person or Hybrid models, will families who are uncomfortable with this have the option to do remote learning through the school OR will they have to unenroll to homeschool?

A: If the Region is in Phase 1: In-Person Learning or Phase 2: Hybrid Learning, parents have options. Parents can decide to have their student work fully remotely or they can homeschool their student. Participating in remote learning would mean that the student would log into a Region 15 classroom live at certain times throughout the school day. If a parent chooses homeschooling, the student will unenroll from Region 15 schools and the parent is responsible for the curriculum and schedule of learning activities for their child. The policy for homeschooling and form to complete can be found at

http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2419/7420/6172.3_Home_Instruction.pdf

Q: Do parents need to be present during Distance Learning?

A: In accordance to the Connecticut State Department of Education's plan titled *Adapt, Advance, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together*, Addendum 1: Temporary Opting into Voluntary Remote Learning Due to Covid-19 states that parents are “expected to supervise and engage their children to fully and effectively access the remote learning programming that is offered through the public school district” (p. 2).

Q: As an educator I empathize with the decisions you are going to have to make. As a parent I implore you To seriously consider keeping schools closed and continue with distance learning for the time being uNtil the dire and of the virus is stopped or a vaccine has been developed in order to keep our community safe & healthy .

A: Currently the district has been asked by the State Department of Education to produce plans for the three possible ways it may open in the fall. It is unclear at this time which version will be put into place, however we do know that the decision to open and under which model will not be that of the Region 15 Schools alone but will be collaboration with the Health Departments, Medical Professionals, and the Commissioner of Education, and the Governor. We do know that whatever the conditions we face, our district will be ready to meet the needs of our students to the extent conditions allow.

Q. If a parent wants to homeschool their child, are they able to access Region 15 curriculum and resources

A: Once a student is withdrawn from the Region 15 Public Schools under the State's Home School structure, the student will not be able to access the district's curriculum, resources, or any program offered by the district. The Region 15 policy for homeschooling can be found at http://www.region15.org/filestorage/158/2563/2266/2419/7420/6172.3_Home_Instruction.pdf

Q. As a parent if I choose to send my child to in person school, can he shift from in person to distance learning? For example, he wakes up with a cough and we decide to keep him home for a few days, can he then shift to distance learning while home? Another example, we decide to visit a college in another state, now he must quarantine for 2 weeks, can he shift to distance learning while he quarantines?

A: If remote learning is selected, the Region recommends that parents consider choosing this option by trimester at the elementary level or by semester at the secondary level. This is suggested because frequent changes in school participation can be disruptive to the educational process of the student.

Q: Will classes be recorded and available at a later time/date?

A: The recording of classes will be dependent upon the phase of learning that the district is in. In most cases, the entire class will not be recorded. However in certain classes and grades, portions of the class may be recorded to be viewed at a later date.

SNOW DAYS AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Q: Would snow days go away now that we're prepared for distance learning?

A: At this time the Connecticut State Department of Education will have to make the decision about using distance learning during snow days. So far the indication is that snow days will remain and districts cannot use weather as a determination for distance learning without approval from the state department of education.

CHROMEBOOKS

Q: My children will both be entering Memorial Middle School for 6th grade and own their own chromebooks from home. Would they be able to bring their personal devices to school to

use for their school work? I know the district said they would provide chromebooks, but wanted to see if personal devices were an option.

A: At this time, students cannot bring their own devices into school. Students need to use a Region issued device so that we can assure access and security.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Q: I have a daughter who attends the special needs pre k program and will NOT currently wear a mask (Question has been edited/modified).

A: Currently state guidelines are that students of any age need to wear masks while riding on school buses. While they are not required for pre-school aged children while in schools, it is recommended. Our expectations will be that when in common areas, preschool students will also learn to wear a mask. We believe that this is now a life skill for students as well as part of the transition to a school environment.

COMMITTING TO SAFE COVID PRACTICES

Q: Is it possible to have Region 15 families sign a document committing to safe Covid practices (similar to a safe internet policy)? For example engaging in only low risk behavior? I will attach some visuals. Maybe that isn't possible, but I feel that if all families and staff strictly adhere to social distancing and mask wearing that that we can all be more protected. Perhaps those who refuse to sign are grouped together?

A: The district is working with the State Department of Education and our legal council to review what types of assurances we can require from families and to what extent the district has the ability to enforce them. The state currently has a quarantine in place for anyone traveling to an area of the country seen as high risk. While the district can ask if families have traveled, we cannot compel them to be honest and forthright. Our ability to keep schools open, and keep students and staff safe will depend to a large extent on how we take responsibility for each other's safety and place the priority to follow suggested protocols above our individual needs.

Q: How children can even have recess if they can't be within 6ft of each other. You can be closer than six feet if everyone is wearing a mask.

A: The current CDC guidelines allow for fewer mitigation measures when in an outdoor environment. Recess will be provided in larger spaces so that students can be without a mask and activities will encourage socialization while maintaining appropriate distancing.

Q: How will daily health checks be done?

A: The initial health check will happen at home each morning. Once children are at school, any student showing signs of fever or infection will be evaluated by the school nurse. Currently the district is evaluating several different options for families to report any concerns that arise during the morning health check.

Q: Who makes the decision to move between Phase 1, 2, and 3

A: As of Monday, July 27th, the State Department of Education and the office of the Governor delegated the decision to school district Superintendents in collaboration with local health departments. We expect additional guidance from the State Department of Education on specific metrics and conditions that will inform these decisions.

Q. If one person in a family has to quarantine, does that also apply to all family members, siblings, etc.?

A: The exposure risk and quarantine levels are dictated by the contact tracing done through the regional health departments and is governed by a variety of factors.

Q: On what date will the district look at the status of Covid cases in CT and make a decision about which of the 3 options (all in school, hybrid or all distance learning) we will choose?

A: Now that this decision has been delegated to local districts, we expect to have a plan and decision to families in the next week or two.

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING

Q: Will the region address the issue that many students may or may not have made educational gains during the online classroom? How will the teacher assess and address any re-teaching, review and remediation that students may need in order to move forward in their current classroom assignment.

A: Last Spring the district administered a volunteer assessment as a pilot to 600 students in Grades 2-9. We expect to expand the use of the assessment this coming school year to all grades through 9. In Grade 10 and higher, there are other nationally normed assessments students are able to participate in. This universal assessment will help to inform students, teachers, and parents about the relative strengths and challenge areas for students as they relate to grade level peers. It will also help us to provide more tailored instruction to the individual needs of students.

SURVEY RESULTS

Q: I'm interested in the write-in information from the surveys. Is there a reason this qualitative information was not shared and an emphasis was placed on quantitative? Also, it should be a MAJOR concern that over 60% of 6-8 parental respondents felt the Spring was done poorly.

A: The planning committee placed a large amount of value in the more than 8,000 comments made by students and parents. Many of the comments relayed very personal and specific stories relating to the questions asked and could not be shared publicly in order to protect the privacy of the individuals. We do believe that the proposed reopening plan addresses the concerns expressed by students and parents at all grade levels and that the qualitative responses mirrored the quantitative results that have been published.

SPORTS/MUSIC EDUCATION

Q: Will there be after school sports?

A: After school sports programs will be governed by the CIAC in conjunction with the school district.

Q: Will there be music education (we had heard rumors that there might not be) orchestra/band?

A: Depending on the grade of the student there may be some changes to how music instruction is taught, however at this time, no programs have been eliminated.

Q: If we opt for distance learning are these two options (Sports and Music Education) still available?

A: Students who opt for remote learning may still have some remote access to school based music programs however, at this time students will need to be in school in order to participate in any athletic programs.

Q. Will Extra-Curricular / Sports activities be held?

A: All extra-curricular activities and athletics will be evaluated based on the phase of operation the schools are in and the ability to maintain the same safety measures in place during the school day. Athletics are governed by the CIAC, the state's athletic conference and all decisions will be made in conjunction with them.

TRANSPORTATION

Q: Has Region 15 considered adding school bus monitors for the first few weeks of school to monitor mask wearing, loading/unloading procedures, and student behavior? Asking bus drivers to monitor these items while focusing on driving is unrealistic. Bus monitors are being added in other regions to assist drivers during the transition back to school.

A: The district is working to have bus monitors in place for the first few weeks of school but a decision to keep monitors long term has not been made yet.

MISCELLANEOUS

Q: How will my teacher and school communicate with me?

A: There are multiple ways that teachers and the school can communicate with parents. Some ways parents may receive communication are via emails, schoolmessenger, conferences, newsletters, phone calls, social media, the school and/or district website, etc. If a parent would like more information about their student, they may contact the teacher or school directly.

Q: Will students have to change elective course selections?

A: At this time the district has not eliminated any course offerings and while some classes will look different or need to be modified, students will not need to change their course requests.

Q: Will volunteers be allowed into the buildings?

A: Currently, the district may have to limit the number of visitors and volunteers who enter the school building in order to ensure safety. Visitors and volunteers must contact the administration of the building to provide a purpose for their entry and to set up a time to enter the building.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for tutoring?

A: The district has an intervention structure for any student who meets the criteria.

Q: Given the impact school closures have had on the well-being of students, what resources will be available this year to support their mental health?

A: In addition to the resources that Region 15 currently has in the district (guidance counselors, social workers, school psychologists) to ensure the social well-being of students, staff will have professional development prior to the beginning of the school year on social emotional health and trauma.

Q: If 368 adults cannot congregate safely for a BOE meeting so it has to be conducted over Zoom, how are we supposed to have children that close together?

A: As stated at the July 20, 2020 BOE meeting, the next BOE meeting in August is scheduled to be in-person, however the current phase of the state's reopening is still under consideration.

Q: The overall impression I got from the meeting was there are a whole lot of "unknowns", & decisions will have to be made on the fly, leaving parents with limited choice as September creeps closer.

A: School districts were asked by the State Department of Education to prepare for three possible scenarios (in-person, hybrid, remote). While the Governor has stated that the primary choice is for all students to return, this will be based on the health conditions of the state as we approach our expected return dates. Regardless of what phase we are in, parents have choices of participating in the phase of the plan the district is operating in, choose remote learning, or to homeschool their student. Criteria are currently being established that will inform the movement between phases.

Q: Leaving us all up in the air until the very last minute is unfair to parents who need to plan as well as unfair to the kids who have no definite answers whether they'll be able to be reunited with friends.

A: There currently is a plan in place according to the CT State Guidelines. As of right now, July 31, 2020, the plan is for all students to go back to school for full in-person learning in the Fall. Parents have the choice to send their children to school for this or to have their child participate at home (logging in online at specific times) OR parents have the option to withdraw their child and homeschool. The other phases of the CT State department of Education required plan will be determined in consultation with local departments of health and state guidance.

Q. Schools are institutions. Will they be treated similarly to nursing homes? Will the number of COVID infections in a school be made public similarly to a nursing home. Also, will employees of the schools be routinely tested similar to nursing homes?

A: Schools are not similar to nursing homes. School districts fall under the jurisdiction of the State Department of Education and the State Board of Education. The rate of infection and the number of infections are reported by the community. Staff will be self reporting symptom checks

regularly, but the frequency or necessity of regular testing will be done on the advice of state and local medical advisors.

PHS SCHEDULE QUESTIONS

Q: *What is blended learning?*

A: While the term is new to PHS, blended learning has been utilized at both high school and collegiate levels for many years. This style of learning allowed many colleges to more smoothly transition into full virtual learning back in March. There are many resources on how this can be done successfully such as <https://www.blendedlearning.org/>. At its root, this type of instruction blends learning through technology resources with more traditional in class learning. Our teachers will be working in Professional Learning Communities to use resources such as this and others to design assured experiences for students across common content areas. The assignments or activities will vary based on curricular needs. For example, students may be meeting virtually with a teacher or a group of students (both those in school as well as those that have elected to learn in a synchronous virtual environment) to complete a group project or they may be working on a collaborative lab report for an activity that they will complete in class on the next day. While in the classroom students will have a time period that they are required to work for a specific amount of time on each of the two classes in the same manner that they have a specific time period for in class instruction. Another benefit to this structure is that a consistent advisor will be monitoring students and helping them with learning how to manage online learning. This was a need based on the feedback that we received from parents in the Spring. The teacher will be able to monitor the student and help them manage their time to stay within the allotted timelines for their different projects. As the period will be in school, the time also allows for students to meet with various support staff, including students who need to access specific resources on an individual basis. The period is also in the middle of the day because it allows for a consistent structure for lunch. This does not replace homework, rather it is a learning style that blends two environments. Work that is not completed during the allotted time may be allowed to be completed at home, but that is the same as in class instruction as students vary in the amount of time that it takes them to complete assignments. There will still be other activities that will need to be completed as homework. Similar to previous years, homework is based on the specific curricular need and as a result will vary by class.

Q: In-school all 5 days a week...Option 1 specifically relating to high school. The model presented has students seeing each of their teachers once a week unless the day repeats on Friday. They spend 45 minutes of their day in “empty” time for passing classes and

what specifically is the middle two hours of the day -blended learning in their Advisory classroom? That sounds like a self learning/independent study hall. With this scenario, students are only having productive classroom time with 2 teachers each day(morning class from 7:20-9:20 and afternoon class from 12:05-2:05), so what are the students specifically doing from 9:20 to 12:05 each day? That's a 2 hour and 45 minute chunk of time that seems to be unproductive every day! Limiting exposure is one of the key elements in reducing spread. This model does not seem like they are limiting exposure. Why can't this middle block be a third class session?

A: The full return model at PHS builds in extended time for transitions in order to stagger how many students are in the hallway at a given time and allow them to manage social distance with a one way traffic flow. The extended transition time will also be needed to sanitize class resources and desks. This model also minimizes the amount of transitions with only two during the school day. In doing this we are limiting exposure to the greatest amount possible. The students will complete Blended Learning activities in a consistent setting during the middle block that will be their primary cohort of students. This learning will be an extension of the classroom learning similar to a Flipped Classroom approach. While in this class period, students will be expected to be working and a teacher will be monitoring them while also working with students virtually. These activities will set the pace for the periods that meet on the next school day as an extension of the class period. Students will also be going to lunch as a class during this period.

Q: The hybrid model. Having cohorts A and B and going to school 2 days versus all 5 gives the students the same face to face time with teachers as the In-school 5 days a week model and seems to be a more productive use of the days the students are in the building. My question here regarding the high school level students is how does that work with the geographical piece in deciding who goes to school on what days? And how does this work? For example, AP Gov class may be primarily students that live on one side of town. Meaning that cohort A day there are 14 kids in the class and cohort B there are 3 kids in the class, just because of geographical location of homes. The same could work for electives classes and classes that have limited sections. So on the days the kids are not there, do they remote into the actual class session so the class is essentially all being taught at one time to all students? This would seem to allow for all students to

have the same instruction covering all the same material. Please provide clarification as to the way this would work.

A: Yes, students will connect to their specific class when they are in the remote cohort.

Is each student in the room on their own device watching the class happening in another room? Will school provide devices? Is it a recorded lesson? Will there be opportunities to ask the teacher questions? Will the students be required to sit for that 2 + hours in one room with a mask? Will they be eating lunch in the same room?

If we choose to do strictly online distant learning would my child be logging on at class time to each period? Or would the teacher just send assignments which is what occurred in March-June.

A: Blended learning activities will be completed virtually and allow an opportunity for students to continue the learning that occurs during the in class setting. These activities will set the pace for the periods that meet on the next school day as an extension of the class period. As a result, students will need to bring their laptop or chromebook to school every day. The school district is creating a plan to provide devices for students to use during this time. The activities may vary depending on the curriculum. They could be cooperative learning groups, individual readings, etc. Teachers may be available during that time or during the in person class on the following day. Students will have a thirty minute lunch break where they will be escorted to their eating area (Cafeteria, Auxiliary Gym, or AP Room) after buying their lunch.

Q: Who is allowed entrance to our schools? Only students and employees? Substitutes? Consultants? Volunteers? (This is somewhat addressed in document, but I don't think it speaks to volunteers such as room parents and PTO members).

A: For the beginning of the school year, visitors to the building will be very limited, if not eliminated. We will need to see how the year progresses before consideration for visitors that are not related to student instruction will be allowed in the school.

CONTRACT TRACING / REPORTING COVID TESTS / TESTING METRICS

*Q: I'm not sure what our numbers will end up being, but the Republican American reported that 20% of parents are considering homeschooling for next year
(<https://www.rep-am.com/local/localnews/2020/07/16/survey-20-of-state-parents-may-be-home-schoo>)*

ling-their-children/). However, they did not distinguish between homeschooling (independent from school district) and distance learning (in conjunction with school district). Judging from my own discussions, I think a substantial number of parents will opt for the former or latter (if they perceive improvements are made from the spring). Also, with a high turnaround time for SARS-CoV-2 test results (I am seeing 5-7 days), some students may need to self-isolate for extended periods of time. I have heard cases where an adult may test positive for 6-8 weeks after their initial infection. So it seems there will be ample need for students to be able to migrate to and from an in-person and digital environment. Will that be supported? For one example, if out of caution I pull my child out for a day due to a low-grade fever that disappears later in the day, can I participate in online learning on the missed day, and return to school the next day?

A: We will have criteria to follow to assist with these decisions. We will still be seeing your typical illness that always happens during the school year and we will follow our existing procedures in those instances. One or two days out sick will follow the regular procedure. If it is COVID-related then the student will need to access virtual learning. There is a difference between a family choosing to access school through distance learning and one who is ill from a non-covid related illness. We will be asking families choosing to access learning remotely to commit to a specific duration so that we can plan accordingly. The choice to access school remotely is different from a short term, illness related absence.

Q: Assuming we remain on track to open schools in September, what metric or metrics would be used to close or reduce access to schools? If possible, I would prefer we use data proactively than wait for a confirmed case or case(s) inside one of our schools if other metrics are trending poorly. So, I think the percentage of positive tests, wastewater testing (if possible), ICU bed capacity, and/or other metrics should be proactively tracked, and should have a place in decision making.

A: The CSDE released metrics for decision making on July 29 that will be utilized for these decisions. We expect the criteria to be further clarified in the weeks ahead. All decisions will include local health professionals and medical advisors. The state department of education has also set up a weekly public health meeting for districts to discuss related issues and seek guidance

Q: What is our plan if...

- 1. A child tests positive for SARS-CoV-2?*
- 2. An immediate family member of a child tests positive for SARS-CoV-2?*
- 3. A caregiver, or someone at a childcare center attended by a child in Region 15 tests positive?*
- 4. A youth sports league or community group (scouting, etc) attended by a child or children in Region 15 has a positive case?*
- 5. A teacher with direct contact with students tests positive for SARS-CoV-2?*

6. *A staff member without direct contact to students, but contact with other staff tests positive?*
7. *A staff member inside a building, but potentially with no direct contact with other staff tests positive?*
8. *A staff member with access to multiple buildings tests positive?*

A: We have many of the above protocols in place for our summer school program. They are currently being reviewed in order to accommodate changes required by larger scale implementation. Protocols for all of these above scenarios as each are very different and have multiple layers. However, numbers 3 and 4 are not under our jurisdiction.

Q: What tools do we or will we have available to aid in infection monitoring and contact tracing? Will we actively promote these tools to our school community? If not, how will we ensure they are used sufficiently to be effective?

A: We are looking into software programs that will easily allow families and staff to self monitor for symptoms and allow the district to monitor overall reported health. It is our expectation to have this in place prior to the start of school and for parents to have a daily checkoff that their student is symptom free. Families will need to be as truthful as they can to help mitigate the spread. Contact tracing for positive cases is conducted by authorities outside the school system. However, we will have clear lists of where students are and with whom at each point of the day.

Q: What data will Region 15 have available about new positive cases? Will we be notified if a student or student's family has a positive test result? Presumably the health district is verifying addresses, could those be cross-referenced with student information to provide us a picture of infection at each school? Or are there HIPAA/FERPA concerns that can not be addressed by scrubbing data or using a 3rd party? Do we need to rely 100% on families self-reporting? If so, what will we do to create an environment that is supportive of sharing that information with schools?

A: Reporting of cases is based on the type of risk to the school population. It is possible, that after review of the case, that there will be no notification. Being a small community, it is easy to "figure out" who a case could be. If the case warrants notification and action, that will occur. The level of notification and risk to students, staff and community will be determined by local health professionals and medical doctors.

Q: Cases in Southbury and Middlebury have been ticking up 1 case at a time for the past 6 weeks. Were all these cases single people living in isolation? Are we not accounting for families of people who tested positive? Not even as "probable" cases?

A: We are not privy to this information. However reports are for positive confirmed cases only.

Q: Please define what is a "probable" case. I would have assumed "probable" cases to exceed confirmed cases, but there are only a very few "probable" cases in each community.

A: “Probable” is an unconfirmed case but with confirmation of symptomatology. These cases are awaiting results of testing.
Q: *We have 3 reported cases of children ages 10-19 in Southbury, and 0 for children ages 0-9. Are we testing children in Southbury? If we did and there were positive cases, would they be shared with local health authorities in the same way? We know the rate of family transmission is high, so if a parent tested positive, would a child be considered a “probable” case, even if no symptoms were reported? If a primary caregiver tests positive, it seems highly likely that children and adults in their care would also be positive. But if asymptomatic children continue to go to school while a symptomatic parent awaits test results, we could already have community spread in schools.*

A: Unfortunately, this is the reality of the situation. People are under no obligation to notify the school of their health status. It is the community spread risk that requires all of use to use masks to the extend possible and that the use of masks is the most effective mitigation factor.

Q:*There has been some limited up and down fluctuation of numbers in Southbury and Middlebury. When, if ever, are cases removed from the count? If they are not removed, why did the Southbury count reduce on July 16, June 29 and June 20? Why in Middlebury on June 30? When are case numbers reported to local health districts? Let’s say a community member has symptom onset. They wait a day or two to feel confident that their headache/diarrhea/cough is more than just bad digestion, allergies, etc. It then takes a day to make an appointment and get a referral for a SARS-CoV-2 test, and then it takes 5-7 days for that community member to get results. I presume it then takes some days for those test results to be shared with local authorities. So, what is the range of days from symptom onset until that data is available to local authorities? Should we assume we are making decisions based on 1-2+ week old data? Do we have the ability to do contact tracing? Who is responsible for contact tracing? Would contact tracing only be performed for confirmed cases? Would probable cases be included? If test results are not available for 5-7 days, and it is even longer before that information is shared with local authorities, are people supposed to account for their whereabouts for 2+ weeks? If a parent tested positive, and their children attended Region 15 schools, would we perform contact tracing for both the parent and child’s connections?*

A: Contact tracing is completed by the medical community/health district.