

Supplemental Emergency Plans: Interim Policy for COVID-19 Related Issues

The Westfield School Committee recognizes the many disruptions to all aspects of society caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular to education. Students, families, and staff were forced to adjust to a rapidly changing set of challenges when schools closed from mid-March 2020 until June 2020 and schools needed to switch to remote learning. These challenges continue as the District plans for the new school year. The Committee recognizes: the concerns of students and families; the need to ensure the health and safety of students and staff; the disruption of the traditional school day and year; the challenges of lack of adequate internet access for many of our students and teachers; the uncertainty of funding; and the growing number of issues that will affect public education.

Therefore, the School Committee establishes an emergency, interim policy to:

- promote public safety and the health and safety of students and faculty,
- maintain to the extent possible the high and efficient level of educational services,
- ensure support for students in general and in particular for those at highest risk educationally as well as those at social and economic risk, and
- comply with the emergency orders of the governor and adhere to the extent possible, to the guidance of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and other agencies of state and federal government, and expedite the safest strategy for returning students to school.

The School Committee will approve the final plan submitted to DESE which will outline the Districts' strategy for returning students to school and the Committee will, in collaboration with the Superintendent, make such modifications to the "back to school plan," and district policies as may become necessary. The School Committee will also authorize the Superintendent to suspend, revise or create protocols to facilitate implementation of the plan and ultimately the safe return to school.

The Superintendent will designate the appropriate staff members to oversee the safe administration of COVID-19 related policies during the period of the pandemic emergency and shall make such recommendations to the School Committee as needed.

The School Committee will authorize the Superintendent to act expeditiously in executing the "back to school" plan in accordance with current laws and regulations and will, where noted, authorize the Superintendent to suspend, revise, or recommend policies, rules and protocols as needed to serve the best interests and safety of students, their families, and the community.

The "back to school" plan shall constitute the policy of the School District during the pandemic emergency, and the Superintendent shall exercise the authority provided in law to carry out the plan as needed.

The Superintendent, with the advice and consent of the School Committee, may suspend or modify individual District policies to address the COVID-19 emergency as declared by the Governor. Such suspension of policy shall expire upon the end of the emergency as declared by the Governor.

The goal of emergency pandemic policies shall be to:

- ensure the safety and health of students, faculty, staff, and all persons who may come in contact with them;
- provide the most effective educational services as possible to students under the circumstances;
- authorize changes to operating protocols as needed to open and operate schools effectively from various venues or platforms;
- conduct the district business and operational functions of the district as efficiently as possible;
- allow the superintendent and staff to act quickly to carry out a "back to school" plan and, facilitate the re-establishment of a safe and productive school day and year.

Subject to guidance from DESE, state and federal laws, and the provisions of collective bargaining agreements where applicable, the “back to school plan” may address, and the Superintendent may need to make changes, that affect:

- School calendar
- Time on learning
- Student assignment to schools
- Class size
- Attendance
- Transportation and busing
- Pivoting between in-school and remote learning based on COVID-19
- Home schooling, as well as families opting for remote learning for health reasons
- Grading and retention
- Graduation requirements
- Discipline and suspension
- Job descriptions
- Attendance and participation in extracurricular activities
- Visitors to school buildings
- Illness and contact tracing
- Operations and facilities maintenance

As such, the School Committee grants authority to the Superintendent to suspend or revise the policies relating to the above listed topics for the duration of time in which the emergency declaration relating to COVID-19 is in effect or upon revision of this policy by the School Committee. In all cases the privacy and rights of students shall be upheld.

Any changes that need to be made due to the COVID-19 pandemic shall be communicated in a timely fashion.

1st reading: September 8, 2020

2nd/final reading & adopted: September 21, 2020