

STA Statement to the Sharon Community:

We, your children's teachers, wish we were living in a time when we could be back safely teaching in classrooms. Like you, we are devoted to your child's learning and development. Like you, we want normalcy, and want to see your children make connections with peers, socialize, and have opportunities to connect with topics that spark their curiosity and interests. Like you, we want school to be a fun and welcoming place, where warm relationships lay the groundwork for learning.

Like you, we experienced trauma and disruption in the Spring and found the experience of remote learning to be extremely challenging. We teachers had no time to prepare, no guidance and, like you, no previous experience with large-scale, full-time remote learning.

And yet, we have learned from the experience. We've spent the summer reflecting on what worked and didn't work. We've read articles, watched videos, and held discussions about ways to make online learning more engaging and student-centered. While remote learning is not the same as in-person learning, we are confident that we can still make deep connections with our students and teach them effectively using a remote model.

Our district has stated that it plans to start the year with a hybrid model because of the problems that were encountered this past Spring. However, many of the problems that occurred were due to the lack of preparation, a lack of communication, and to policy choices, such as making student work optional. The hybrid model that has been proposed will introduce another phase of chaotic and untested learning. Rather than learning from our experiences of the Spring, the district is proposing a whole new approach that will be detrimental to learning and social emotional health as it continues to undermine stability- another key component to a successful education model

Contrary to what many may imagine is the case, teachers would actually have more face time with students in a well-designed remote learning model than with the hybrid model that the district is proposing. They would also have more opportunities to work one-on-one, and in small groups with students, and students would have more opportunities to collaborate with each other.

In the district's proposed hybrid model, teachers' time will be divided between the "in person" students and the students who are joining class via Zoom as teachers "live stream" those classes. Aside from the extra distractions and potential technical issues that this approach poses, it is a model whose pedagogy will be limited by safety restrictions. Teachers and students wearing masks will have a harder time communicating, especially not being able to pick up facial cues. This will be amplified for students who are connecting to participate remotely. How are they to hear their teacher and classmates? Who will be making sure that they are kept engaged if their teacher is focused on the students present in class? For the students who are in class, how will they be able to collaborate with peers when they are sitting 4-to-6 feet apart, in rows facing the front of the room. How will this be an environment that is conducive to exploration and discovery?

Let's also consider some of the social-emotional aspects of this plan. Keeping students distanced will not aid with socialization, but in fact may make the classroom feel more isolating. How can we console a crying child and still maintain social distancing? How are teachers to build a sense of community and relationships with their students while ensuring adherence to safety protocols? How do teachers ensure everyone's safety without traumatizing children and instilling fear when student masks are not on properly or a student gets too close to a friend? Students will not be able to congregate with their friends. They will not be able to hug a friend or teacher when they need comfort. They will not be able to share items with each other. They will not be allowed to sit next to each other, even during break times.

The description painted above doesn't even begin to touch the surface of all the issues with the proposed plan. There are so many details that must be in place to make sure that all of the moving parts of a typical school day can be done safely. Each of these details will have an impact on the way learning occurs in the classroom.

We understand the concerns that many families have with remote learning. Everyone wants to return to school, especially teachers. None of the choices are ideal. Any choices we make will have their benefits, limitations and drawbacks. But we, the teachers of Sharon, for the reasons stated above, believe that remote learning is the best option for maintaining academic stability and quality as well as safeguarding the community's health and safety. We respectfully request that the

Town of Sharon reconsider its decision to adopt the hybrid-learning model and embrace remote learning to start the school year.