

On the Matter of Reopening . . .

Quick Points of Clarification (Addressing a few informational items that echoed in the survey comments):

1. **Plan B Cohort Assignments.** When we have discussed Plan B plans, we've always assumed we would keep families in the same cohort to ease the burden(s) on families. The degree to which remote learning and hybrid learning are burdensome and stressful for parents is always on our minds. When possible, we want to decrease the stress, not add to it!

2. **Fresh Air in the House.** Our HVAC system already brings in fresh outside air as part of its normal functioning. We've been in conversation with our HVAC service company about changing our settings to allow even more fresh air in. As we let more outside air in, we potentially boost indoor air quality. In doing so, the system is also less efficient (and thus consumes more energy). We are also receiving quotes on integrating bipolar ionization to our HVAC system. Bipolar ionization technology releases charged atoms that attach to and deactivate harmful substances like bacteria, mold, allergens, and viruses. Many places use bipolar ionization so that they can reduce the amount of outside air they bring in and thus save heating and cooling costs. We would incorporate the technology for the health benefits – and likely continue to increase the amount of outside air we let in.

3. **Let's Get Back to Normal.** Some respondents would like for us to go "all in" and proceed with Plan A. Private schools in NC may choose to do that because they're not bound by the Governor's orders on reopening. As a public school, Woods is simply not allowed to consider Plan A at this time.

4. **What-If Scenarios.** If we proceed with Plan B, and if a student or teacher becomes ill and/or symptomatic, we have precise instructions from the NCDHHS that guide us on what to do next. This is not really a decision point for Woods. We have specific and comprehensive instructions to follow, to which our school nurse is well attuned. The guidelines are available online as *#StayStrongNC's Reference Guide for Suspected, Presumptive, or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19 (K-12)*. We also have explicit guidelines for reopening in the *Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit* and the *Lighting Our Way Forward* documents (both of which are publicly available online).

5. **The Great Outdoors.** COVID aside, we have an interest in getting our students outside during the school day. That's why we continue to build outdoor spaces (our trail system, the Council Houses, the Goliath Table, etc.) where teachers can take their

students. That said, with six-foot distancing, our current facilities are not adequate as a school-wide solution. We're grateful to have these spaces, but they will not solve the problem of the day.

Looking at Our Key Metrics

Our key metrics:

- the percent positive COVID test rate (14-day trend),
- the COVID hospitalizations (14-day trend),
- survey responses from Woods faculty,
- survey responses from Woods parents, and
- the experience of other charters and private schools that have opened under various iterations of Plan B.

Percent positive COVID test rate (14-day trend):

This metric has stabilized, but still remains at a high number. The fourteen-day average is still above 5 at 5.7%.

COVID hospitalizations:

This metric has also stabilized but still remains at a high number. We've had a few days when hospitalizations have dropped below 900, but the fourteen-day average is 913.

Survey responses from faculty and parents:

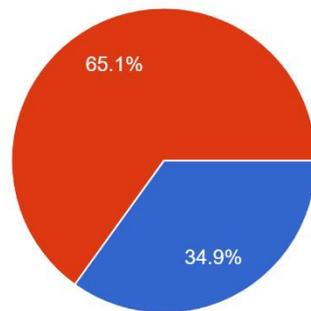
We had 68 faculty and 370 parents respond to our most recent round of surveys. (Board members have received these results and all survey comments separately.)

Faculty

July

With which plan do you think Woods should start school in August?

63 responses

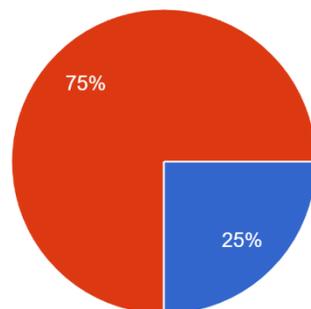


- Plan B (Moderately distanced. A mix of in-person and remote learning. No more than 50% present.)
- Plan C (Remote learning.)

September

Under which plan do you think Woods should operate after October 2nd?

68 responses



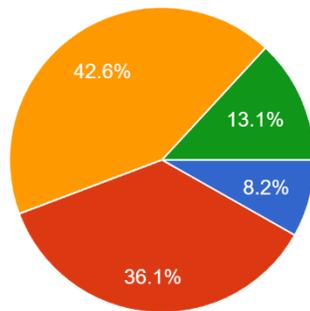
- Plan B (Moderately distanced. A mix of in-person and remote learning. Masks and 6' separation at all times.)
- Plan C (Remote learning.)

Faculty

July

The current Plan B Plan has students coming to school in A/B Cohorts for two days/week each. When you consider this plan, which statement best describes where you are . . .

61 responses

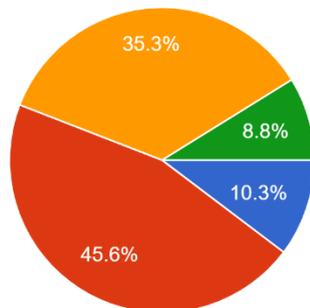


- I have (or can obtain) a doctor's note advising that I not be present at school at this time (because I am immunocompromised, medically vulne...
- I don't have a doctor's note, but I am not comfortable with returning to school at this time.
- I have some reservations, but I'm ready to go.
- I am ready to go!

September

Our current Plan B draft has students attending school in A/B cohorts for two days each week, with remote learning on the days a cohort is not at sch...h statement best describes your current thinking?

68 responses



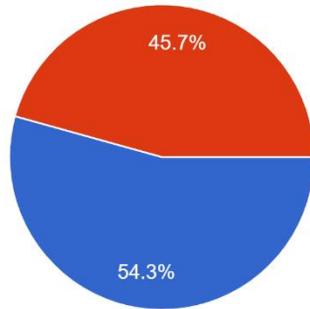
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- I don't have a doctor's note, but I am not comfortable with returning to school at this time.
- I have some reservations, but I'm ready to go.
- I am ready to go!

Parents

July

With which plan do you think Woods should start school in August?

429 responses

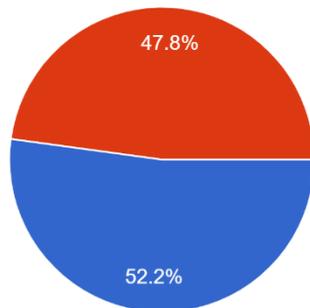


- Plan B (Moderately distanced. A mix of in-person and remote learning. No more than 50% present at any one time.)
- Plan C (Remote learning.)

September

Under which plan do you think Woods should operate after October 2nd?

370 responses

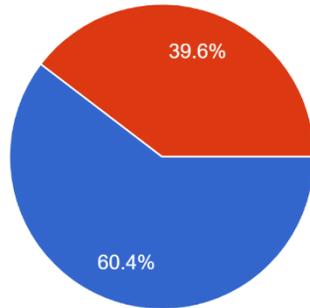


- Plan B (Moderately distanced. A mix of in-person and remote learning. Masks and 6' separation at all times.)
- Plan C (Remote learning.)

July

Our current Plan B draft has students attending school in A/B cohorts for two days each week, with remote learning on the days a cohort is not at school. Which statement best describes your current thinking?

429 responses

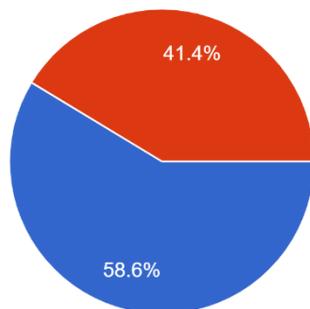


- My child/children would attend under the Plan B Plan.
- I am not comfortable with my child/children attending in person at this time. I would opt for a remote learning option.

September

Our current Plan B draft has students attending school in A/B cohorts for two days each week, with remote learning on the days a cohort is not at school. Which statement best describes your current thinking?

370 responses



- My child/children would attend under the Plan B Plan.
- I am not comfortable with my child/children attending in person at this time. I would opt for a remote learning option.

What can be learned from schools that have attempted some form of reopening?

- Drop-off is problematic and time-consuming. An app that allows daily self-reporting is helpful but expensive.
- There is a decline in faculty/staff morale. In some cases this has been severe. Biggest challenges: 1) teaching the students who come in and then teaching those who stay at home feels like two separate jobs, and 2) it's stressful to be indoors with lots of other people for many hours.
- Larger schools have an economy of scale to leverage in addressing the needs of those who stay at home. (e.g., a school with four first grade teachers has designated one of those teachers as the remote teacher for the year while the other three provide in-school teaching.)
- Hallways are a challenge. It's very difficult to ensure six-foot distancing in hallways for MS and HS.
- Schools have to hire more teachers and assistants to account for faculty who have to stay at home (because they're immunocompromised, sick, quarantined, etc.). It's difficult to find people willing to come in to schools right now as teachers, assistants, and substitute teachers.
- It's helpful to have a close relationship with your health department liaison for assistance with cases and clusters.

Based on our current accounting of these five metrics, the Admin Team recommends that we stay in remote learning until after Winter Break and reevaluate at that time.

(We also considered the end of the first trimester on November 20th as a natural time to reevaluate, but there are only three weeks between Thanksgiving and Winter Break, and some predictions have a high number of cases occurring at that time.) The risks (levels of exposure) of moving ahead with a plan B scenario do not outweigh the rewards, particularly when we remember that students would likely still only attend two days a week under plan B.

When might we reopen? If not now, when?

1. We might reopen when we know more about the particular "personality" of this virus. We've all become armchair epidemiologists, but actual experts do not have precise consensus on several key points:

- When will reliable vaccines be available for teachers and students?
- Given that the COVID-19 virus seems to mutate very quickly. How will this feature affect the efficacy of vaccines?
- When do we forecast that some form of herd immunity will be achieved?

- How long are people who've already had the disease "safe" from contracting it again?
- What is the specific relationship of COVID-19 to Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)? How prevalent can we expect MIS-C to be in the months ahead?
- Clearly certain underlying medical conditions put people at risk for a more severe experience of COVID-19. Otherwise, why is the virus lethal for some and practically a non-event for others?
- How common are the long-term effects of COVID-19? What is the range and severity of symptoms experienced by the "long-haulers"? What is the long-term prognosis for long-haulers?
- What will be the effect of cold weather and flu season on the contagiousity/communicability of COVID-19?
- What does the virus's current resurgence in western Europe presage for the U.S.?

2. We might reopen when our key metrics decline for a substantial time period. Our key metrics are stabilizing but not significantly declining. Our percent positive testing rate for the past fourteen days has averaged 5.7% and our hospitalizations have only dropped below 900 on a few days. The fourteen day average is 913. It's good that the rates have not continued to increase; it's not good that we've stabilized at numbers that are still very high.

3. We might reopen when more of our parents and teachers feel safe enough to be in an indoor space with lots of people. Seven faculty members reported that they have, or could obtain, a doctor's note advising that they not be present at school at this time. An additional thirty-one were uncomfortable with returning. Those two groups account for fifty-five percent of our faculty. Forty-one percent of parents, on our last survey, were not comfortable sending their child(ren) to school. As the scientific and medical communities gain consensus on the questions named above in item #1, it is possible that anxiety and fear will decline.

4. And we might, in time, consider a phased reopening that would allow younger grades to come back ahead of older, more numerous, more "COVID-dangerous" older students.