Dear Neighbor,

Yesterday afternoon, I met via Zoom with a group of community leaders to discuss the new positive COVID-19 cases that have emerged at Hotchkiss, Geer Village and within the Region One School system. The following is excerpted from a joint statement we drafted, that participants are releasing today:

The purpose of the meeting was to share information and to ensure consistency of communication with the public. The Zoom call, organized by State Representative Maria Horn, included the following individuals who represented the institutions and the towns most directly impacted by the emergence of the new COVID-19 cases:

Lisa Carter, Interim Superintendent, Region One School District
Mark Hirko, President, Sharon Hospital
Kevin O’Connell, CEO Geer Village Senior Community
Brent Colley, First Selectman, Sharon
Charlie Perotti, First Selectman, North Canaan
Curtis Rand, First Selectman, Salisbury
Robert Rubbo, Director of Health, Torrington Area Health District
Craig Bradley, Head of School, The Hotchkiss School
Hope Cobera, Chief Communications Officer, The Hotchkiss School
Jared Zelman, Medical Director, The Hotchkiss School

This letter provides notes from that meeting and is an accurate statement about the current COVID-19 situation in our towns. A summary of the discussion by institution is noted below. The representative from each of the institutions that has recently
experienced new COVID-19 cases provided information about their current situation to the other members of the group, who were able to ask questions:

Geer Village – Geer employees and residents have been tested since the onset of the virus last spring. There have been no cases until this week when 6 staff members and 11 residents tested positive as a result of routine testing: all are in or affiliated with the assisted living facility, and none are in the nursing home. All COVID-19-positive residents have been isolated and staff have been identified and quarantined. Torrington Area Health District has completed contact tracing and everyone who is a direct contact has been notified. Regular weekly testing of staff and residents will continue to ensure that any new cases are quickly captured and isolated. There are no visitors allowed and no one may enter the facility without testing negative for the virus.

The Hotchkiss School - All students and student-facing faculty and staff were tested prior to the start of the school year. Upon arrival, all students participated in a two-week quarantine in their dormitory rooms (or at home in the case of day students). During this period, students were tested by the School, and one student tested positive. That student and close contacts (also students) were isolated from the rest of the school population or sent home. There have been no other positive cases until this week, when four students tested positive during weekly routine surveillance testing. Those students and any close contacts have been isolated and quarantined at Hotchkiss or, in the case of students who can travel via private transportation, they have returned to their homes.

At this moment, all positive cases and any close contacts are all students, and no adults have been affected. Over the weekend, all students and student-facing employees will be tested. Any newly identified cases will be isolated on campus or in their homes off campus. Until this testing can be conducted, all students are under
quarantine in their dorm rooms. Classes are being held remotely, and day students are learning from home. Only absolutely essential staff are allowed on campus. This campus quarantine will continue until the all-campus testing is completed and any remaining incidence of the virus has been identified. Going forward, all-School testing will be conducted every week. As part of the School’s ongoing safety protocols, no students have been allowed to leave campus at any time to participate in travel sports teams, visit town, or for any other reason since the start of the school year. Visits to campus by parents are also highly restricted.

Region One Schools - There has been a total of four positive cases in Region One. One staff member in the Cornwall school district tested positive in the late summer and three individuals tested positive last week in the North Canaan School district. All three of those cases were connected to one another. The individuals have been quarantined and all close contacts have been notified and tested. The North Canaan Elementary School has not closed, nor have any classrooms been quarantined. There was only one close contact at HVRHS as a result of this recent case. That individual has been quarantined and has tested negative.

Sharon Hospital - As a result of the rise in cases, Sharon Hospital has closed entrances so that all patients enter through the Emergency Services entrance. No visitors are allowed and testing is reserved for those who are being screened for medical procedures, with the addition of expanded COVID-19 testing hours for to the community-at-large during the outbreak period in the community. The Hospital is seeking to expand its testing capacity in the future; however tests are in short supply and more funding is needed at the federal level to increase test production.

Everyone on the call agreed that the situation at each of the institutions where positive virus cases have emerged has been contained. Any new cases that are identified at The Hotchkiss School and Geer Village over the next week may represent the outcome of increased testing rather than concerning community spread. Any increase at Geer Village in the coming days is expected to be in relation to those cases already identified and will not represent an increase in new cases from another source.
Given this, the medical and public health professionals on the call concluded that pre-existing recommendations about testing should remain unchanged: if you are symptomatic, or if you have been exposed to someone who has tested positive, you should be tested. Social distancing, the use of face coverings and frequent hand washing continue to be the best way to prevent any new cases of the virus. Region One schools will continue to practice all of the mitigation strategies including social distancing, the use of face coverings and frequent hand washing to continue to prevent any new cases of the virus within its schools.

The participants in the meeting all agreed to share contact information and will share any communication with regard to any new cases this week and in the future. We want to ensure that there is broad community awareness of the public health situation as well as a collaborative and consistent approach with regard to a response to new cases.

We hope that by sharing this information, our community members will understand that while we have experienced an increase in positive cases in our area, they have been confined to identifiable clusters that are being closely monitored and managed to ensure everyone’s safety and good health. Please reach out to any of us with your questions or concerns.