
Superintendent's Update 11-1-18

Westport School District Outreach Message <Connect-ED@westportps.org>
Reply-To: Connect-ED@westportps.org

Thu, Nov 1, 2018 at 1:41 PM



WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dear Families of Westport Students,

Fourteen days into our new school year, I made the decision to relocate our students and staff from CMS to another facility for what I believed to be approximately a month. As events unfolded, that decision not to return to the CMS facility expanded to the entire school year. Now, the District and Town will be faced with the next steps in either remediating this school or choosing to invest differently in the future of this District. There is nothing more sacred to any community than its school district; the quality of the educational process reflects the values of its citizens. Westport has never wavered from its commitment to a world-class system, and any next steps should encompass this belief as its foundational value. As we move through the next steps of clarifying the future direction, it is imperative that all stakeholders feel assured that any process will be inclusive of our community. We could never have the best outcome for our children's education if we did not work together to determine that pathway.

Below I have listed some key information to bring everyone up to date:

What do we know right now and what are the decisions ahead?

- The District has made a formal application for the right to install 6 modular classrooms at BMS and 2 at SHS through the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Working with our middle school administration, and James D'Amico and AJ Scheetz, they have determined that we can work through this year and provide science access for the 8th grade students without adding modular classrooms at SHS. When we go before the ZBA, we only request for the permission to add modulars to SHS as a back-up for future needs, but we will not order the modulars for SHS now. We expect the request to the ZBA to be for a period of 3 years - again, this is permission to put modular classrooms there, we don't need to have them for 3 years or we may never need them at SHS. It is a complicated and costly process to go to ZBA, and asking for possible needs of the future makes sense now.
- The 6 BMS modular classrooms (assuming we get all the Town approvals ASAP) should be installed in January 2019. All Town officials have been working in every way possible to assist our efforts, which has been so very helpful to move the approval process along.
- A revised schedule of classes was put in place this week for our middle schools to ensure no teacher has only a few minutes between classes to get to another school to start teaching again and to better use the classroom space.
- New lockers for CMS students will be installed next week at BMS.
- The Town attorney provided an opinion to us that we cannot seek to have a cover installed over any of our athletic fields at BMS given the various agreements that are in place with neighbors of the school property. We will not pursue the cover for the field based on this information. The new schedule at BMS limits PE classes to 6 at any given time, which can be accommodated with current gym/fitness space and the cafeteria for low-impact activities (non-lunch times.)
- The architectural firm will provide a comprehensive update of the CMS facility at the BoE meeting on Monday, November 5, at 7:30 p.m. We expect that they will provide a complete update of what it would take

to remediate the school, as well as the cost to build a new one. Given the extensive problems already identified with the preliminary engineering reports posted on the CMS website, we anticipate hearing that we will be out of the CMS facility through all of next year as well, no matter if the BoE/Town opt to repair the school or go another direction.

What does it mean if we find out we cannot use the CMS facility for the 2019-20 school year?

- We will need to plan to house our students next year with our 7 facilities and perhaps some modulars and/or rented space.
- We have a RFP out to identify a realtor in the next week or so to assist with our search for real estate that we could rent.
- There are a multitude of ways that we could house our District next year, and each approach will be vetted for feasibility/effectiveness. As we review various ideas for housing students, we will consider the ability to deliver the educational program in the space provided, transportation, disruption to students/family/District, cost, and any other relevant factors that impact how we serve our students and families.
- There are plenty of rumors, but some of the approaches we are considering include renting space for the entire CMS school, renting space for part of CMS, moving grade 6 back to the elementary schools (in various configurations) with BMS holding all grade 7/8, renting space for preschool and kindergarten and using elementary for grades 1-6 with BMS 7/8. As you can imagine, almost any way we can look at next year is being considered. While double sessions at BMS would be an option, there are numerous ways this would undermine the delivery of the educational program with a shortened day and there would be significant disruption to students and staff with the morning session from 7:00 a.m. to noon and the afternoon session from 12:40 p.m. to 5:40 p.m. At this time, we do not have plans to house other students at SHS next year. It is our goal to maintain SHS solely for 9-12, but we cannot guarantee at this time until the final plan for next year is completed.
- We are in the midst of creating a budget for 2019-20, and I am responsible for a complete budget proposal to the BoE for 2019-20 in January 2019, about 9 weeks from now. Needing to build the budget for the Town approval process will put added pressure on the District to decide how we will structure ourselves next year as soon as possible. We plan to bring forth the most promising proposals for next year in the next few weeks so the Board may weigh in on these as soon as possible. We will also create opportunities for families and staff to help give us feedback on options for next year as well before a decision is made by the BoE for 2019-2020.

Where are we going long-term, beyond 2019-2020?

- Once the BoE/Town officials have all the numbers of the cost of remediation, the decision needs to be made whether to repair or not. If the decision is made not to remediate, it would be appropriate that the District would contract to have all of its facilities assessed for future educational use in terms of the capacity of each school, educational use of the school, upgrades or repairs required, and other relevant facilities information on each structure. We may not have an answer to any long-term direction of space usage right away if the District/Town do not repair the school. Most likely that would be require a period of months to determine, with opportunities for all parents and citizens to have a voice in the process.

What will be the process for inclusion of all stakeholders if the District/Town determine CMS facility should not be remediated and other options should be considered?

- The Board of Education and the administration have worked to be fully transparent in all decisions and work thus far as the District has grappled with the very unexpected closure of one of our middle schools in the midst of a school year. Key documents and reports have all been posted online, either at the CMS website or on the District website where all Board meetings agendas, minutes, and videos of meetings are maintained.
- **The Board of Education has made a public pledge to ensure an inclusive process with all stakeholders if the CMS facility is not remediated and next steps for the future of the District are on the table. Until that decision is made regarding the future of CMS, it has been premature to articulate a definitive planning approach for the future.** If and when the decision would be made not to save CMS, the Board would act accordingly to invite the voices of all stakeholders.

What are the current conditions for our middle school students?

- First and foremost, if you have any specific concerns regarding your own student, please contact the respective principal directly to discuss. Both Dr. Rosen and Ms. Szabo welcome hearing from parents to assist in any way. If it is just an issue related to a specific course, it is best to start the conversation at the teacher level. However, if you have any concerns, let us know. Our team of professionals is eager to work with you to

resolve any lingering issues from the shift in facilities this year. We take care of our students one child at a time, and will remain focused on concerns until they are resolved in the best interests of each child.

- The instructional program remains of high quality to all students - teaching and learning are ongoing and our professionals are placing the needs of students as their top priority of their professional work.
- Have there been some adjustments to space and time? Yes, but the integrity of the educational program continues.
- Have there been some adjustments with clubs and activities? There have been a few adjustments, but not significant. Both Dr. Rosen and Ms. Szabo will participate in the update of our middle schools at the BoE meeting on November 5. They will personally speak to these issues and how they have creatively addressed some pressure points.

Sincerely,
Colleen Palmer

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