



## WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**DAVID E. ABBEY, PH.D.**  
*Interim Superintendent of Schools*

110 Myrtle Avenue  
Westport, Connecticut 06880  
Telephone: (203) 341-1025  
Fax: (203) 341-1029  
dabbey@westportps.org

March 20, 2020

Dear Westport Families,

In response to the escalating COVID-19 crisis, national, state and local governments continue to respond, on a regulatory basis, in order to mitigate its spread. During the past week Governor Lamont announced a number of Executive Orders, including those that directly impact schools. Superintendents throughout the state received updated information through Executive Orders and state-wide conference calls. Due to the fact that we are in a rapidly evolving environment information presented, at any point in time, may change at a moment's notice.

### School Calendar

Effective March 17<sup>th</sup>, all Connecticut public school classes are cancelled until March 31<sup>st</sup>. It is possible that the Governor will extend the period of time that schools are closed. In anticipation of additional school-year information, we will not be projecting a timeline for reopening schools. However, given the projections we are receiving regarding the escalation and prevalence rates of COVID-19, especially during the next five to six weeks, it is difficult to imagine that the District will not be closed for the foreseeable future. The prospect of reopening schools will only be made with the health and safety of our students and staff, utmost in our minds, and in consultation with the Westport Weston Health District.

The requirement of a 180-day school year has been waived and modified to allow all public schools to close (end) school on their normally scheduled end dates. Going into the current school year we were projected to end school on Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup>. We have lost four school days due to one snow day and three days lost to COVID-19. As such, if nothing else changes, our school year would end on Thursday, June 18<sup>th</sup>.

This coming Monday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Board of Education is scheduled to meet remotely at 7:00 pm, with call-in or virtual access. There will be one item on the agenda: "Potential Revisions to the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 School Calendar Including the April School Break in Light of Transition to Remote Learning Due to Public Health Considerations."

Presently, spring vacation is scheduled for April 6<sup>th</sup> - April 10<sup>th</sup>. April 10<sup>th</sup> is Good Friday. If the calendar remains as is, the last day of school would be June 18<sup>th</sup>. If four days, April 6<sup>th</sup> - April 9<sup>th</sup>, are taken from spring vacation for school or distance learning purposes, June 12<sup>th</sup> would be the last school day. Although additional instructions will be forthcoming by Monday morning, presently, the meeting can be viewed through cable television at Channel 78 and through the District's website.

### School Buildings

Our buildings have been thoroughly cleaned by our custodians. We are grateful to our custodians for their dedication and fine work. For the time being, we will be checking our school buildings on a daily basis, but will not return our full crews to work until we are planning to reopen school.

## Spring Sports

The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) has not cancelled spring sports. Nevertheless, while school remains closed, no practices, of any sort, should take place. Our coaches have been informed that until school reopens no practice can be held. Likewise, it is critical that no practice, of any kind, should be taking place – even those run solely by student athletes. We ask for everyone’s help in monitoring this situation, thereby helping us, help our students, to practice safe behavior with respect to COVID-19.

## Distance Learning

We have completed our fourth day of distance learning, as such, we wanted to thank our teachers and administrators for the tremendous amount of extra work that they have devoted to ensuring a successful rollout – a sentiment that we have also heard from many parents. This has truly been a team effort. The principals, with whom our central office team phone conferences with on a daily basis, report that the feedback from parents has been quite positive.

A number of parents have offered a range of suggestions as to how we might improve our program, including some who would like us to incorporate more virtual learning opportunities into our day-to-day schedules. Going forward, as we focus on further developing and refining our plan, we will consider, along with the advice of our teachers and administrators, suggestions for improvement.

Our goal, with respect to distance learning, is not to replicate traditional educational practices, but rather to concentrate on what we want students to know and be able to do - and then design activities and tasks that will make learning meaningful, engaging, and relevant. For this reason, our district supports a distance learning approach which includes using a variety of strategies to meet course/grade level goals and objectives. Ultimately, learning objectives will determine the technology tools and learning activities that teachers utilize. Assignments may include, but are not limited to, online discussion boards, interactive videos, readings, research, blogs, video and/or audio instruction, and live virtual classroom experiences.

In addition to having learning objectives guide instructional decisions, it is also essential that a distance learning experience provide regular interaction between students and teachers. As such, our goal is to design assignments that ensure student-teacher interaction is regular and substantive. Toward that end, utilizing platforms and software products that promote student-teacher interactions is an essential part of our professional learning plan.

Over the past four days, we have seen extraordinary examples of creativity and innovation by teachers and administrators. The district is committed to providing our staff with the training and support necessary to ensure innovative ideas are incubated, realized, and celebrated. In order to do so we will be integrating professional learning time into our daily schedules. As a result, at times, daily schedules for students will be modified.

Google Classroom and Schoology are district approved platforms that allow teachers to foster meaningful interactions, including live virtual experiences, such as video conferencing. During the past week, we have received many suggestions regarding software products that have similar features. Although we are grateful for the suggestions, at this time we need to look into these products in order to ensure that they are equipped to allow us to comply. Having said that, be assured that we are closely monitoring our plan, and will continue to explore strategies and consider software products that will enhance our ability to deliver instruction.

We believe that we are off to an excellent start and that we have done a significant amount of work in a brief period of time. However, we recognize that there is always work to do. And, for as long as schools

remain closed, or for that matter when schools reopen, we will remain committed to improving our school programs. Working together, we are confident that we can make this experience productive and meaningful for our students.

We will continue to provide updates regarding COVID-19. In the interim, we wish everyone a safe and healthy weekend.

Sincerely,

David Abbey  
Interim Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Anthony Buono  
Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning