
4-17-20 COVID-19 Update

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April 17, 2020

Dear Westport Families,

I hope that all is well with you and your loved ones.

In an attempt to meet the challenges associated with COVID-19, government officials at the state and local levels continue to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Recently, Governor Lamont extended school closures to May 20. In order to respond to this new reality, and the distinct possibility that school will remain closed for the remainder of the school year, we are continuing to develop our distance learning program - with an emphasis on communicating with families and connecting with students. I am grateful for the dedication, hard work and creativity that our teachers, administrators, and many other staff members, continue to devote to the challenges inherent in remote learning.

As we work to enhance our school programs we are also mindful of our District's responsibility to the greater Westport community, and the obligation that we have to support the extraordinary and often heroic efforts of Town government and Town agencies - who are doing so much, each and every day, to keep us safe and healthy.

This update includes information about our District's endeavors to support the community and information regarding recent school-related developments.

School-Town Collaboration: Staff

John Bayers, Director of Human Resources and General Administration has served as the District's representative to the Town Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the broad-based Town group, which is at the center of managing the COVID-19 crisis. As the District liaison to the "Town side", John has also been instrumental in forwarding town-wide communications from the First Selectman's Office to ensure that residents receive up-to-date information on a consistent basis.

Along with Mr. Bayers, Chief Financial Officer Elio Longo, has been instrumental in overseeing the transfer of a significant amount of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from our District to Town agencies. Mr. Longo led the effort to re-institute the District food service operation after schools closed.

Under the leadership of Suzanne Levasseur, Coordinator of Health Services, our school nurses and health assistants have assisted in organizing and distributing PPE to Town agencies - such as hundreds of N95 masks, cloth masks, gloves, gowns, thermometers and office supplies.

Collaborating with the Westport Weston Health District and the Town's Department of Human Services (DHS), school nurses are reaching out to seniors in the community through weekly phone check-ins. In addition to checking on their clients' physical and mental health, seniors are assisted with obtaining vital supplies, such as medication and food.

School Security Officers have been monitoring school athletic fields to assist in the town-wide priority of limiting the number of citizens who congregate for recreational purposes.

Food Service

We have arranged for Chartwells, District food service vendor, to provide grab-and-go meals for Westport police officers. The District is also working closely with DHS in order to identify and support school families in need of food beyond the grab-and-go lunches and breakfasts that the District currently provides.

Supplies and Equipment

In addition to PPE, through our science department, we have supplied goggles for Town firefighters. We have distributed sanitizing wipes, cleaners and hand sanitizers to help fortify the Town's supplies. And, we have given the Town access to equipment which has enabled Town personnel to sanitize emergency vehicles and office spaces, in a rapid and efficient manner.

Recent School Events: Coleytown Middle School

Coleytown Middle School Building Committee (CMSBC) Chair Don O'Day updated the Board of Education (BOE) regarding construction progress at its meeting on Monday, April 13. Mr. O'Day reported that, primarily due to staffing issues associated with COVID-19, the Coleytown building project would be delayed by a month, "...maybe a little more". BOE members thanked Don and other members of the CMSBC for their hard work and dedication – particularly during this time of crisis.

Newfield Construction, the General Contractor for the project, will be providing a revised construction schedule on or about May 1. As such, Mr. O'Day is planning to share a revised timetable to the BOE at its May 4 meeting.

Anticipating the possibility of a delay regarding the CMS project, the BOE had directed the administration to develop contingency plans. Dr. Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, reported on the scenarios (plans) that he had developed with CMS Principal Kris Szabo and Bedford Middle School Principal Dr. Adam Rosen. The scenarios, which are still being refined, are available on the District homepage under District Update on CMS Facility. www.westportps.org

Before School Programs

Dr. Buono updated the BOE concerning the progress that had been made in leading the work to establish before school programs for the 2020-2021 (next) school year. The proposed program, which will be run by the Westport YMCA, is detailed online on our homepage at www.westportps.org under School Start Times. Dr. Buono will be sharing information regarding the fee structure within the next couple of weeks.

BOE Budget 2020-2021

The BOE accepted the administration's proposal to reconcile the budget in response to the Board of Finance's budget allocation. Thankfully, no further reductions in personnel were necessary. The Board will not be requesting budget restoration from the Representative Town Meeting (RTM). The next steps in the budget process are a meeting with the RTM Finance Committee on April 23, and a meeting with the RTM Education Committee on April 29.

BOE Meeting Monday, April 20, 2020

This coming Monday, there will be a special meeting of the BOE, with Mr. Thomas Scarice, our new Superintendent of Schools. There will be one agenda item – Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Superintendent. Along with Mr. Scarice, Attorneys Tom Mooney and Jessica Richman Smith will be participating. As a reminder, Mr. Scarice will be joining the District on July 1.

Thank you for your support of the work that is being done by our staff during this difficult time. It is greatly appreciated.

I hope that you have a safe, healthy and enjoyable weekend.

Sincerely,

David Abbey
Interim Superintendent of Schools

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