



Superintendent's Update 3/13/2020

1 message

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Replv-To: do not replv@westportps.org

Fri, Mar 13, 2020 at 8:51 PM

March 13, 2020

Dear Westport Families,

Over the past several days there have been significant developments concerning national, state and local efforts to counter the spread of COVID-19, which has been determined to be a pandemic by the World Health Organization. Governor Lamont has declared a state emergency and earlier today President Trump declared a national emergency. Locally, the District is taking our lead from the Westport Weston Health District (WWHD) through Mark Cooper, Director of Health, and the leadership provided by First Selectman Jim Marpe, through the Town's Incident Command Structure.

180 Day Waiver

By Executive Order, the Governor has established June 30, 2020, as the last possible day of school in Connecticut. This will be the case even if the current school year results in fewer than 180 days. Governor Lamont's waiver of the 180 day requirement does not mean that districts do not have to add days to their calendars in the event of closings due to COVID-19. It does mean that if events are such that despite reasonable efforts, districts cannot meet the 180 day requirement by adding days or limiting vacations, it would be acceptable to have fewer than 180 days of instruction.

School Reopening

District schools closed as of yesterday, March 12, 2020. Schools will remain closed through Wednesday, March 25th. During this time we will be consulting with the WWHD to evaluate COVID-19 status and its potential risk to our students and educational community. As of today, we are planning to reopen district schools on **Thursday, March 26th**. While schools are closed to students and staff, custodians will be deep cleaning our schools so that they will be in excellent shape for reopening. We are grateful for the dedication and hard work our custodians have contributed, from day one, with respect to helping mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Distance Learning

The State Department of Education (SDE) has strongly recommended that districts that have to close due to COVID-19, make-up lost days. During days when school is not in session they further recommend that schools provide supplemental academic activities for students. Toward that end, for the past few weeks our teachers and administrators have been hard at work developing activities consistent with the supplemental approach recommended by the SDE.

The SDE also has established a waiver application process, which if approved, allows districts to develop and implement a distance learning plan during school closures. Members of the Board of Education, along with parents and teachers, have strongly advocated for the shift from a supplemental to a distance learning approach - and we have responded to their concerns and suggestions.

The Westport distance learning plan is designed to provide for the continuity of learning for every student, including those with special needs. In the event that some special education services cannot be provided

through distance learning, services will be addressed on a compensatory basis through the Planning and Placement (PPT) process. Depending upon the availability of school days, compensatory services will be added to the school calendar, before June 30, 2020, or through Extended School year (ESY) services, after July 1, 2020. As of last week, all students in grades 3-8 have been issued Chromebooks and the district is taking measures to ensure that all students will have access to the internet.

Today, the SDE has notified us that they have received our application for a waiver. We are waiting to hear whether we have been approved. If so, we plan to make the transition to distance learning by Tuesday, March 17th or Wednesday, March 18th. We have developed the distance learning plan in partnership with the WEA (Teachers' Union) and we will be communicating more detailed information about the plan over the next few days.

Spring Vacation

Because distance learning days count as school days, as of today, our spring vacation, scheduled for April 6 – April 10th is a “go” as scheduled.

COVID-19 Risk

Understandably, we have been receiving questions regarding the degree of risk that exists in our schools. According to the WWHD, because we are in the community transmission phase of the disease, being associated with our schools does not make anyone at our schools at greater or lesser risk than anyone else in the Westport community.

Please note that no personally identifiable information for persons who have tested positive for COVID-19 has been shared with the district. This includes names or school affiliation. WWHD, as our community authority, maintains that information and, as appropriate, notifies persons deemed at risk. In addition, state statute prohibits the release of all such information unless specifically authorized by the State Public Health Commissioner. The WWHD website is an excellent source of COVID-19 related information and local updates.

<http://wwhd.org/>

Going forward, we will continue to provide updates during this difficult and complex time. And, we will do our best to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, toward the goal of providing healthy schools for our students and staff. In the interim, for additional information and a number of useful links, I recommend that you view the district homepage under Coronavirus (COVID-19) Updates. <https://www.westportps.org/>

Sincerely,

David E. Abbey

Interim Superintendent

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