



West Orange Public Schools
179 Eagle Rock Avenue
West Orange, New Jersey 07052
(973) 669-5400, ext. 20512 Fax (973) 669-1432

Superintendent of Schools

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.

September 24, 2021

Dear West Orange Public School Families,

I hope this message finds you well as we start the autumn season. I am glad to provide you with the following information that is both timely and important.

Food Services

The [menu](#) for next week has been updated with hot food options. Moving forward, food services will be offering a hot option daily which will be served using every precaution and maintaining COVID-19 safety measures. The menu items are subject to change if the item is unavailable at time of order. Food services will make sure it is replaced with another hot option and change the online menu accordingly. Although there is nationwide shortage of food, produce and packaging, Maschio's Food Services is committed to ensuring a hot lunch option will be available daily in all schools. [Click here](#) to view the welcome back letter from Maschio's. The menus are subject to change due to the changing availability of products. Maschio's is distributing additional cases of water on a monthly basis at the elementary schools.

Activity busing for middle and high school: As explained in a previous district communication, due to the state-wide driver shortages, the third-party company with whom the district contracted for the after school activity buses, for the time being is unable. In spite of making every effort to identify an alternate third-party contractor or private bus company to run these routes, we have been unable to do so as of today. In the interim, it is the district's intention to continue to offer extracurricular, artistic, musical, and athletic activities to both middle school and high school students. The 5:00pm and 6:30pm bus at the high school will continue to service students for now. Any club activities that can be offered virtually will. The district is also exploring the potential of running some activities on weekends with transportation offered from pick up points centralized within the district. We are also exploring the possibility of creating supervised after school study halls where students can remain until the later bus pick-ups occur. We certainly share in the sentiment that this is an unfortunate set of circumstances; but circumstances which at this time are largely out of our control.

Digital Citizenship: You may be aware of a troubling trend on TikTok most recently. It is a challenge which is encouraging and instigating young folks to commit acts of vandalism and recklessness. This has resulted in damage of property and serious consequences for students committing these acts. I am not going to dignify this challenge by stating the name. However, all of the building administrators have been alerted to it and are messaging to the student bodies accordingly. I would kindly request the assistance of all parents, guardians, and caretakers to engage in conversations with your children about good digital citizenship, the importance of using good judgment relative to things which they may observe on social media, and their social media and technology use habits. In short, do not allow some faceless, nameless influencer to allow oneself and others to be placed in harm's way, damage their reputation and their future, and perhaps as importantly, destroy and deface one's own community and home.

Chromebooks 1:1 Middle Schools

Presently all middle school students have access to a Chromebook in all of their classrooms while in school. Prior to the 2019/20 school year, middle school students were bringing their Chromebooks home. This practice

was discontinued in the 19/20 school year due to a significant amount of breakage and damage experienced during those times. Presently, the district does not have the inventory to ensure that broken devices would be able to be replaced in a timely fashion. Our middle schools are trying to ascertain which students have no access to technology at home. When this list of students is determined, the technology department is currently working on accommodating additional devices to serve as loaners either through additional purchase; and/or refurbishing and redeploying devices previously tagged for decommissioning and disposal.

As a reminder, we are asking all parents to complete a very important survey. The data collected from the survey will be used to apply for federal funding for student chromebooks. This is funding that is to be used strictly for the purchase of technology for students who currently do not have a device at home for learning outside of school hours. Please click on the following link to access the survey:

<https://forms.gle/89nCrZFbyy96sLvQ7>

The window to complete the survey has been extended until Sunday, October 3rd.

Student Covid Testing: The district has applied and received confirmation of its application to participate in the state department of health end-to-end testing program, this would be available to both students and staff members. In the interim, as it is uncertain as to whether the state would be able to begin this program, the district is finalizing its selection of a partner with which to engage in voluntary opt-in testing for both students and staff. Details regarding this program will be forthcoming in the upcoming weeks.

Unavoidable Travel

Now that the school year has started, it is important to stress the importance of limiting travel to that which is unavoidable (i.e. family emergencies, etc.). This will ensure the overall health and safety of our school community, as well as minimize students from missing instruction during travel and needing to quarantine upon returning from travel.

Symptomatic Students

Students with COVID-19 compatible symptoms are defined in NJDOH K-12 school guidance as follows:

- At least **two** of the following symptoms: fever (measured or subjective), chills, rigors (shivers), myalgia (muscle aches), headache, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, congestion or runny nose; **OR**
- At least **one** of the following symptoms: cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, new olfactory disorder, new taste disorder

Per our district physician and local health authorities, symptomatic students should not return to school unless they have had a **negative regular or rapid PCR test**. It is important to note that a negative rapid antigen test will NOT be accepted.

If a symptomatic student is not tested, the student may return after completing a 10 day isolation period since symptom onset. Symptomatic students must be fever free without fever-reducing medications for 24 hours with symptom improvement (in both cases referenced above).

COVID-19 Exposure

The District will continue to conduct contact tracing when an individual tests positive for COVID-19. In the event a close contact is identified through the contact tracing process, the District will inform parents/guardians if their child is a close contact and will notify staff as well.

Per the current most recent NJDOH K-12 school guidance, *“In the K–12 indoor classroom setting, the close contact definition excludes students who were within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student (laboratory-confirmed or a clinically compatible illness) where both the infected student and the exposed student(s) correctly and*

consistently wore well-fitting masks the entire time. This exception does not apply to teachers, staff, or other adults in the indoor classroom setting. Students within 3 to 6 feet of an infected student should still monitor for symptoms for 14 days.”

In such a situation as outlined above in this new guidance, students may not be identified as a close contact if they remain 3 feet apart wearing a well-fitting mask, however, parents/guardians will be notified of potential exposure in order to monitor their child for symptoms.

Goals for 2021-2022

At our most recent Board of Education meeting, the 2021-2022 Goals for the [Board](#) and the [District](#) were approved. I encourage all to familiarize themselves with the initiatives outlined as some are new, some are ongoing, and all have been informed by stakeholder feedback, collaborative thought, and planning.

Local Event

You may already be aware that the Love + Unity Fest takes place at noon on Saturday, September 25th at Edison Middle School. The organization has teamed up with the Board of Education and the Township to create a festival complete with music, food trucks and activities for children. In addition, a mobile pop-up clinic for COVID-19 vaccines will be available at the festival courtesy of the West Orange Health Department.

And in the spirit of unity, I hope, like me, you sense a wave of strength and compassion as we navigate this 21/22 school year. We have all learned through hardship and disappointment that while we may lay great plans and place muscle behind each for eventual fruition, now more than ever, we must remain flexible, assess daily, and weekly, and continually adjust and strategize. The fallout from the pandemic ensues, but our endurance as a community of strength is unending. I know I speak for students, staff, volunteers, and administration when I say your patience and understanding is appreciated; your support and applause for every success is humbling; and together we **Return, Reconnect, and Reimagine.**

Sincerely,



J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.
Superintendent