



West Orange Public Schools
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Superintendent of Schools

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.

August 2019

Dear Parents, Guardians, Caretakers, and Students,

Labor Day is fast approaching bringing to a close the summer chapter and ushering in the 2019-20 school year. With that in mind, I offer a warm welcome to families and students, new and returning. I hope the summer provided opportunities for you to recharge.

It has been a busy summer here in the school district. Our administrative team convened a week-long leadership summit in August at which we began to focus on the overall district goals for the year: communication, improving perception, and student achievement and access. We also welcomed and on-boarded 38 new certificated staff members and I was thoroughly impressed by the caliber of this year's recruits. I've had an opportunity to tour and walk through all of our school facilities. Although our buildings certainly have needs which should be addressed and will be addressed, I have also been impressed with the manner in which our buildings and grounds and custodial staff preserve and improve these beautiful facilities. Our maintenance staff has been incredibly hard at work over the summer getting the schools ready to open.

That being said, and although I did not want to burden you with an inordinate amount of information in this welcome letter, I understand that there may be some ongoing concerns with regard to air quality and Legionella in our buildings and offer my update: I met with the representatives from the environmental company that is conducting the remediation efforts with regard to Legionella. I'm happy to report that the remediation efforts are completed in all buildings in so far as the drinking fountains. All drinking fountains have had filtration systems added to them and a regular flushing protocol has been implemented in all those buildings.

Relative to air quality: although the CO2 readings in our buildings are safe and fall below the maximum level allowable under OSHA, the Board of Education and I strive to develop and create conditions which are optimal to our students and staff from a health and safety standpoint. The district, recently in collaboration with its architects, is conducting a comprehensive facilities evaluation to inform the development of a building referendum. This project, amongst other focuses, would seek to update, upgrade and replace all district heating/ventilation/air-conditioning systems to ensure the best air quality for all. There will certainly be more to come in this regard but we are actively working towards a solution and will need community support to accomplish this.

The recent tragedies in El Paso and Dayton are an all too common reminder of the troublesome dynamic which now exists in our country. And while, unfortunately, due to the frequency of these events I would not necessarily communicate with you after each and every one, I do feel that with

the close proximity of these incidents and my recent assumption of this position it merited a statement about school safety. I still believe that the surest way to ensure school safety in our buildings is to create environments where all students, staff and family members feel supported, safe and welcome. That being said it is also extremely important that we do all we can do to harden the targets of our schools through our security procedures.

To this end, we have worked with Stonegate Associates to update our emergency management plan which will be completed shortly. I will be providing updated trainings for the administration team and our entire school faculty at the onset of the school year. Similarly, Stonegate conducted an audit of all our facilities. I am in the process of reviewing those findings and will be making recommendations relative to our long-range facilities plan in the upcoming budget cycle to implement as many of these upgrades as possible over the forthcoming years. I had an opportunity to meet with Chief Abbott of the West Orange Police Department to renew and continue to build upon the excellent partnership that exists with our local law-enforcement officials. As we move through the school year, I remind everyone the important role they play in school safety: signing in and out at various check points, wearing school ID, abiding by the rules of each facility and remaining sensitive to the spirit of safety.

As you may be aware, the district has changed the food service provider to New Jersey based Maschio's Food Services, Inc. We are excited about this new partnership and are confident that it will represent an enhanced experience for students and staff. The transition should be seamless as we have retained all cafeteria staff and your food service accounts have been transferred over. As in previous years, you may go into your account prior to the beginning of the school year to deposit money into your child's account. The menu is available on the district website and additional information may be provided by your school principal.

Of all those important advisories noted, let me say how excited, proud and privileged I am to serve as your Superintendent of Schools. Thank you for all you do in support of your children and our schools, and thank you for the faith you place in our schools to educate and nurture your children. I consider it a sacred agreement, one which I vow to uphold with integrity and to the very best of my ability. The start of school is a time to celebrate, a time which for the parents of our littlest learners begin a new chapter and for our high school parents a time of nostalgia. Time goes quickly, let's enjoy it, as we come together to support our youngsters in building their futures, shaping their destinies, and preparing them to take their place in a global community committed to truth, justice, peace, and prosperity. Walk it, talk it, and believe it and it will be so!

On September 4th, our schools will be open to your children, as will be our arms, minds, and hearts.

Yours in service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Scott Cascone". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.
Superintendent