



West Orange Public Schools
179 Eagle Rock Avenue
West Orange, New Jersey 07052
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Superintendent of Schools

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.

November 13, 2020

Dear West Orange Public Schools Community,

I hope this letter finds you all well and amidst a time of great challenge and uncertainty; finding peace and comfort in the company of family and loved ones and the daily gifts and blessings which the day may offer.

As I initially communicated in my [Hybrid Cohort Concerns 11.2.2020](#) correspondence and then in the [Hybrid Model Postponement Update 11.5.2020](#), in consultation with our district physician and local public health and emergency management authorities, the decision was made to postpone the start of our hybrid model due to rising COVID-19 cases in our community and county.

The Board of Education and I appreciated the feedback and questions which we received last week during the public session of our November 4th board meeting. During the Board meeting, a recurring question was raised that merits specific attention, “If it’s not safe to return to school now, then when?” In other words, what is the metric being used to assess the level of risk and the corresponding instructional approach: hybrid or virtual?

From the onset of this global pandemic, I have vowed (as I should) to follow the advice and counsel of public health and medical authorities as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, I would like to provide some additional insight into the thought process and medical recommendation which led to the postponement of the commencement of the Hybrid model.

I have captioned a table below which has been excerpted from a document created by the New Jersey Department of Health, the COVID-19 Risk Matrix. [Click Here](#)

COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix
**For use by LHDs when providing guidance to school districts*

Low Risk	Moderate Risk	High Risk	Very High Risk
Evaluate alternatives to in-person learning to ensure continuity of work or educational services. In response to COVID-19 positive staff or student, follow COVID-19 exclusion criteria; work with local health department to identify and exclude close contacts following CDC guidance; refer to guidance on cleaning and disinfection. In response to ill students and staff, follow NJDOH School Exclusion List. * If ill person had potential exposure in past 14 days, follow COVID-19 exclusion criteria; wait at least 24 hours and clean/disinfect areas where ill person spent time. Permit limited activities involving interaction with multiple cohorts, ensuring adherence to precautions.	Consider a mixture of remote and/or hybrid learning approaches, and/or fully remote learning. In response to COVID-19 positive staff or student, follow COVID-19 exclusion criteria; work with local health department to identify and exclude close contacts following CDC guidance; refer to guidance on cleaning and disinfection. In response to ill students and staff with COVID-19 compatible symptoms, follow COVID-19 exclusion criteria; wait at least 24 hours and clean/disinfect areas where ill person spent time. Minimize activities that involve interaction with multiple cohorts.	Consider implementing fully remote learning. <i>If schools remain open for in-person learning:</i> In response to staff or student who is COVID-19 positive <u>or</u> who has COVID-19 compatible symptoms (not yet tested), follow COVID-19 exclusion criteria; work with local health department to identify and exclude close contacts according to CDC guidance; refer to guidance on cleaning and disinfection. * Decisions on when ill person’s close contacts can return to school are dependent on the ill person’s medical evaluation and COVID-19 test results. Restrict activities that involve interaction with multiple cohorts.	Implement fully remote learning

This document provides Local Departments of Health with guidelines for advising school districts relative to the community risk associated with COVID-19 cases/spread and the advisable mode of operation for schools: Full In-Person, Hybrid, or Virtual.

The primary metric which is used by the State Department of Health to determine when a region and/or local municipality moves from one level of risk to the next is the percentage positivity rate. The percentage positivity rates and ranges for each level of risk are noted in the table below. These are extracted from the aforementioned State Department of Health document (Page 2). [Click Here](#)

Table 1: COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) ^{6a}					Table 2: COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) ^{6b}		
	Value	Case Rate ³	Percent CLI ⁴	Percent Positivity ⁵	Legend	Final Activity Level	CALI Score
Low	1	< 1	< 1.68%	< 3 %		Low	1
Moderate	2	1-10	1.68 - 5.51%	3-10 %		Moderate	2
High	3	10.01-25	5.52 - 13.08%	10.01-20 %		High	3
Very High	4	> 25	> 13.08%	> 20%		Very High	4

The West Orange Township Department of Health and County Department of Health track the percent positivity rates on a weekly, if not daily basis. As of today, the West Orange Department of Health and Office of Emergency Management informed me that the local positivity rate is 14.8% and as of November 7th, 2020 the county's percentage positivity rate is 12.64%. Noteworthy, is that the local positivity rate at the time of the decision to postpone was 14.3%.

When cross referencing these percentages with the above table, one concludes that our county and local community are in the category of "high risk". This served as the rationale for the initial postponement of the full scale implementation of the Hybrid model and the continuation of that postponement at this time.

The District will continue to monitor the local and county percentage positivity rates until such time that the positivity rates have fallen into the "moderate" level of risk. Weekly updates will be provided in this regard.

I understand the disappointment, frustration, and hardship this represents for some and I am neither indifferent nor insensitive to that. In fact, I feel it and live it on a daily basis as your superintendent. I cannot, however, ignore or disregard the very guidelines with which I have been provided to make decisions. Furthermore, I cannot speak to how or why districts and/or other institutions of learning whose communities are demonstrating the same percentage positivity have chosen to open or remain open notwithstanding the guidelines presented herein. Their children and employees are not under my care and I am not intimately acquainted with the factors driving their decision-making.

In the interim, as we continue to operate in a virtual model, we have listened to feedback from our families and are in the process of modifying the daily schedules to not only afford students additional live instruction but may include opportunities for synchronous instruction on Fridays. The plans will be presented at the November 16th public meeting and subsequently shared with the community on the district and building levels.

Sincerely,



J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.
Superintendent



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Superintendent of Schools

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.

13 de noviembre de 2020

Estimada comunidad de las escuelas públicas de West Orange,

Espero que esta carta los encuentre a todos bien y en medio de un momento de gran desafío e incertidumbre; encontrar paz y consuelo en compañía de familiares y seres queridos y de los dones y bendiciones diarios que el día puede ofrecer.

Como comuniqué inicialmente en mi correspondencia [Hybrid Cohort Concerns 11.2.2020](#) y después en el [Hybrid Model Postponement Update 11.5.2020](#), en consulta con nuestro médico de distrito y las autoridades locales de salud pública y manejo de emergencias, se tomó la decisión de posponer el inicio de nuestro modelo híbrido debido al aumento de casos de COVID-19 en nuestra comunidad y condado.

La Junta de Educación y yo apreciamos los comentarios y las preguntas que recibimos la semana pasada durante la sesión pública de nuestra reunión de la junta del 4 de noviembre. Durante la reunión de la Junta, se planteó una pregunta recurrente que merece una atención específica: "Si no es seguro volver a la escuela ahora, ¿cuándo?" En otras palabras, ¿cuál es la métrica que se utiliza para evaluar el nivel de riesgo y el enfoque instruccional correspondiente: híbrido o virtual?

Desde el inicio de esta pandemia global, he prometido (como debería) seguir los consejos y los consejos de las autoridades médicas y de salud pública en lo que respecta a la pandemia de COVID-19. Por lo tanto, me gustaría brindar información adicional sobre el proceso de pensamiento y la recomendación médica que llevaron al aplazamiento del inicio del modelo híbrido.

He subtitulado una tabla a continuación que ha sido extraída de un documento creado por el Departamento de Salud de Nueva Jersey, la Matriz de riesgo de COVID-19. [Click Here](#)

COVID-19 Regional Risk Matrix

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Este documento proporciona a los Departamentos de Salud Locales pautas para asesorar a los distritos escolares en relación con el riesgo comunitario asociado con los casos / propagación de COVID-19 y el modo de operación aconsejable para las escuelas: Totalmente en persona, Híbrido o Virtual.

La métrica principal que utiliza el Departamento de Salud del Estado para determinar cuándo una región y / o municipio local pasa de un nivel de riesgo al siguiente es la tasa de porcentaje de positividad. Las tasas de porcentaje de positividad y los rangos para cada nivel de riesgo se indican en la siguiente tabla. Estos se extraen del documento del Departamento de Salud del Estado antes mencionado (Página 2). [Click Here](#)

Table 1: COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) ^{6a}					Table 2: COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) ^{6b}		
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El Departamento de Salud del Municipio de West Orange y el Departamento de Salud del Condado rastrean las tasas de porcentaje de positividad semanalmente, si no diariamente. A partir de hoy, el Departamento de Salud y la Oficina de Manejo de Emergencias de West Orange me informaron que la tasa de positividad local es del 14.8% y que, al 7 de noviembre de 2020, la tasa de porcentaje de positividad del condado es del 12.64%. Cabe destacar que la tasa de positividad local en el momento de la decisión de posponer era del 14,3%.

Al comparar estos porcentajes con la tabla anterior, se concluye que nuestro condado y nuestra comunidad local están en la categoría de “alto riesgo”. Esto sirvió como razón fundamental para el aplazamiento inicial de la implementación a gran escala del modelo híbrido y la continuación de ese aplazamiento en este momento.

El Distrito continuará monitoreando las tasas de porcentaje de positividad local y del condado hasta el momento en que las tasas de positividad hayan caído al nivel de riesgo "moderado". Se proporcionarán actualizaciones semanales a este respecto.

Entiendo la frustración y las dificultades que esto representa para algunos y no soy indiferente ni insensible a eso. De hecho, lo siento y lo vivo a diario como su superintendente. Sin embargo, no puedo ignorar o ignorar las mismas pautas que se me han proporcionado para tomar decisiones. Además, no puedo hablar de cómo o por qué los distritos y / u otras instituciones de aprendizaje cuyas comunidades están demostrando el mismo porcentaje de positividad han optado por abrir o permanecer abiertas a pesar de las pautas aquí presentadas. Sus hijos y empleados no están bajo mi cuidado y no estoy familiarizado íntimamente con los factores que impulsan su toma de decisiones.

Mientras tanto, a medida que continuamos operando en un modelo virtual, hemos escuchado los comentarios de nuestras familias y estamos en el proceso de modificar los horarios diarios para no solo brindarles a los estudiantes instrucción adicional en vivo, sino que también pueden incluir oportunidades para la instrucción sincrónica los viernes. Los planes se presentarán en la reunión pública del 16 de noviembre y posteriormente se compartirán con la comunidad a nivel de distrito y edificio.

Sincerely,



J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.
Superintendent