



West Orange Public Schools
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Superintendent of Schools

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.

June 19, 2020

Dear West Orange Public School Families,

I hope this finds you all well, as the long and winding road of the 2019-20 school year comes to close. In spite of all the challenges, I remain grateful for the opportunity to lead your school district as the Superintendent of Schools and am tremendously proud of the way we have come together to see the school year through to fruition successfully.

I had the opportunity and privilege to attend all of the fifth grade drive by, moving up ceremonies this week and was uplifted by the joy and smiles on the faces of students and family members. I've never felt prouder of any students than I do for your children this year. They, like you, have persevered through these difficult times with success and with their hearts and spirits intact. This is a true testament to not only their character but the families who support and nurture them and the strength of this great community.

Next week, on June 23, the high school class of 2020 will graduate with a drive-by celebration and virtual graduation ceremony to follow. We are also happy to be able to offer them a modified on-site ceremony on July 8. Please join me in congratulating our outstanding seniors as they move onto the next chapter of their lives. Their senior year has been a year like no other, and they will always have a special place in our hearts and in our school district's history as a result of it. I would also like to congratulate our 6th and 8th grade students on achieving another milestone successfully. We look forward to welcoming them up to the middle schools and high school and supporting them on their continued journey to academic and extracurricular success. Finally, to the students graduating from our 18 to 21 program, we have been blessed and fortunate to have you with us. We will miss you, but wish you all the best as you embark on new challenges and adventures in your life.

As we bring closure to the school year with both a sense of satisfaction and certainly relief, we enter into our summer recess undoubtedly in a different frame of mind than usual. Many questions remain unanswered as to what school will look like in September, and we eagerly await further information and guidance from the state to help guide and inform our planning efforts.

As you are aware, notwithstanding the governor's authorization to operate on site summer programs, the absence of guidelines as well as the uncertainty of the health risk this virus still poses to our children and staff has left us with no other responsible choice than to offer our summer programs through a virtual format. We will be applying a number of the lessons learned through the experience this year to the online summer experiences and are confident that we will be able to effectively service our students in this manner. Further, we remain committed to closing any academic gaps which may have developed over the course of the closure of our school buildings.

I would be remiss, if I did not speak to the most recent current events, protests, and discourse which have been occurring in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. Since this tragic event, we have witnessed impassioned speeches from student leaders, meaningful and constructive dialogue, as well as individual and systemic introspection. When we examine the various data sets and metrics of student achievement and access, we do observe disproportionality and inequities along, for example, lines of race and socioeconomic status. We must collectively commit to rooting out these inequities wherever they may exist. To that end, we need not only take stock of our system as a whole; but also, as each and every one of us as individuals to understand how we can grow and better ourselves to best support this mission. This summer, the district's Diversity, Equity, and Access committee will be convening to develop a strategic plan which will provide not only specific objectives, but also benchmarks around which we may track our progress and report out to our community.

During the summer weeks, as has been previously disseminated to all Prek-11 grades, students are asked to place the district loaned Chromebook in safekeeping. Should the device require repair or other technical assistance, please avail yourself of the [Parent/Student Technology Request Form](#) which remains an active link on the district website. Beyond the last day of school and through June 30th, food services will operate as they have been, with regular pick up of lunch and breakfast at each of the elementary schools. As for food provisions throughout the summer, details will be made within the next week.

Finally, unlike most summers, during which there tends to be limited communication between the school district and family community over the course of the summer, this year will have to be different. Toward the end of this month, we will be releasing an additional survey to families and students to gather critical feedback to help inform our planning for the opening of schools. The “lion’s share” of this planning will occur aggressively over the month of July and it is our intention to be prepared to communicate to families, students, and staff in August with greater specifics as to what you may expect for the opening of schools. I and the administration will be communicating with the parent community on a regular basis throughout the summer in order to keep you up-to-date on any developments.

The time will come very soon when we will be ramping back up on our planning efforts. However, in the interim, over the course of the next week to 10 days, let us celebrate, reflect, unplug, reconnect with our families and loved ones and take some time to restore our minds, bodies and spirits.

I wish you a restful, safe, and healthy summer recess.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Scott Cascone", written in a cursive style.

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools