



West Orange Public Schools

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**Assistant Superintendent for
Curriculum and Instruction**

Mrs. Eveny de Mendez

April 14, 2020

Dear Parents / Guardians:

I hope that this communication continues to find you and your family healthy and well.

At a time when our world continues to be confronted with unprecedented circumstances that impact the health and wellness of our loved ones, as a school district, our utmost concern continues to be the well-being of the children of West Orange. While we are primarily responsible for their education and the corresponding state mandates, we also very firmly believe that the role of teaching and learning in this new paradigm goes beyond content standards and rigor. In addition to instruction, our teachers are seeking ways in which they can provide students with a sense of normalcy in the midst of a time when normalcy may understandably be more difficult to achieve. Further, they are regularly looking for opportunities to provide structure and consistency, whereby students will know what to expect. In other words, their online presence may serve to remind students, that it is their teacher who is on the other side of the assignment, and that until things return to "normal" - we are getting through this together.

Relationship over rigor.

Governor Murphy, last week, declared an additional 30 day extension to the stay-at-home order and indefinite closures for New Jersey public schools. Over the past week, Dr. Cascone and I have been meeting daily with each of the principals to listen to teacher feedback, review parent concerns, and reflect on suggestions moving forward. This communication outlines the different strategies which we have communicated to our Grade PreK-5 teachers in order to best support our students and families as we continue with virtual learning for the foreseeable future. In the weeks ahead we will continue to evaluate our practices and make adjustments as needed.

We are sharing this information with parents so that you are aware of some of the refinements taking place and are grateful for your continued support and cooperation.

Elementary Clarification Points & Expectations

Work / Home Life Balance

It is important to consider that many of our teachers are also parents who must provide instruction for their own children at home and/or tend to their families. To honor their work/home life balance, we have instructed teachers to:

- Engage in teaching and learning and instructional interactions with students during school hours
- Identify a specific three hour window for “Office Hours” in which teachers will be available to communicate and respond to parent communication.

You can expect teachers to communicate these hours with you, as well as a response to your inquiries within 24 hours.

Due to the fact that students may have to complete assignments outside of regular school hours, assignments are not due until 11:59pm on any given due date. In these instances, teachers will promptly respond to students the following school day.

Length of Lessons

We understand that lessons and assignments may be taking students a longer time to complete at home, independently. In response, we have asked teachers to:

- Simplify lessons and assignments, being mindful of how long it might “actually” take the student to complete the assignment given that they are working independently, in a new learning environment, and getting accustomed to the technology.

You can expect lessons to be revised so that students can complete classwork and/or assignments in 30 minutes or less. This may result in teachers “chunking” the lesson over multiple days.

Attendance by Assignment

For Grades K-2, the district has formally identified Raz-Kids as the method for recording “attendance by assignment”.

- Please make sure your child “logs-on” to Raz-Kids daily to complete their reading assignment. Upon doing so, the teacher will mark the student Present.

You can expect that if a student has difficulty completing the Raz-Kids assignment, yet engages in the instructional plan located in their Google Classroom, the teacher will also mark the student Present. If this is the case, kindly communicate with your teacher.

Elementary Clarification Points & Expectations

Assignments

Daily assignments for each content area are *not an expectation*. Daily assignments are proving to be overwhelming for some students to complete and for teachers to provide consistent feedback across all content areas.

You can expect teachers to spread assignments over the period of a week so that students are not overwhelmed by the entire task. For example, you may see:

- **Day 1: Introduction of the primary content**
- **Day 2: Varied ways for teacher:student / student:student interaction**
- **Day 3: Time for independent practice** (such as: viewing of resources that support instruction; online activities that support primary objectives)
- **Days 4-5 Demonstration of learning over a multi-day period**

For students who move quickly through their lessons and assignments and would like to engage in additional enrichment activities, we encourage them to visit the following pages on the E-Learning site for interactive and engaging activities that will extend their learning:

- Library Resource Site
- School Counseling Site
- Electives (Art, Music, PE, Health, World Language)
- Intervention

Google Meet

Google Meet is an **optional** instructional tool for teachers to use to interact virtually with students and teachers have discretion for how they will implement the *Google Meet* feature in their classrooms. The *Google Meet* tool is meant to serve as a support for small group interaction and may be implemented in multiple ways, to include:

- Screen share only with voice
- Audio and Chat features
- Video features

The *Google Meet* feature is not meant to serve as a tool for individual tutoring, but interaction and small group instructional support.

You can expect a varied approach to the use of Google Meets. When used, students will be assigned to small groups in order to effectively manage the virtual classroom and best meet the unique needs of each student.

Elementary Clarification Points & Expectations

Modifications to Instructional Schedule

Beginning Monday, April 13th, the modifications have been made to the PreK-5 instructional schedule to include a reduction in instructional time across content areas and the introduction of Flex-Friday.

- *English Language Arts (ELA)*
 - The ELA block will decrease to a total of 60 minutes per day for Reading, Writing, Raz-Kids and/or Foundations (K-2).
- *Social Studies / Science*
 - Grades K-3: Social Studies and Science will be taught 2x per week each
 - Grades 4-5: Social Studies and Science will continue to be taught daily for 30 minutes
- *Electives*
 - Electives will be taught 1x per week to include: Art, Music, PE, Health, World Language
 - Library is serving as a resource to students and has been included as part of Flex-Friday as outlined below.
- Fridays will be designated as *Flex-Fridays*.

This day will be used for:

- Students can “catch-up” on assignments, visit enrichment classes, participate in electives of their choice, visit the school counseling pages for community and wellness activities, and explore library resources and lessons.
- Teachers to plan, provide feedback to students, grade assignments, return emails, participate in professional learning, etc.

Students can expect to see the following posted to their Google Classrooms:

- Expectations and examples of the purpose of the day
- A 5-10 minute “Do Now” or “Reflection Question” for attendance purposes.

Parent / Teacher Conferences & Report Cards for the 2nd Trimester

- Formal parent conferences will NOT be implemented for the 2nd Trimester

You can expect teachers to continue to communicate with parents and students regarding their progress as we move forward with E-Learning.

Elementary Clarification Points & Expectations

The end date for the 2nd Trimester (Grades PreK-5) has been moved up to March 12, 2020, the last day of instruction prior to the school closures.

- Report Cards for the 2nd trimester will be completed based on student work completed prior to the school closure only.

You can expect your child's Report Card to be emailed to you the week of April 27th. If an email address is not available, the report card will be mailed to the student's home address.

- For the 3rd and final trimester, grading for elementary PreK-5 will move to Pass / Fail.

We are confident in the value of the district's E-Learning platform insofar as its offering of quality teaching and learning opportunities for our elementary students. However, the shift to virtual learning has required us to reevaluate our ability to accurately and fairly assign grades to student learning.

Instituting a Pass/Fail grading system at the elementary level will allow teachers to prioritize learning and growth. Consequently, students will have more opportunities to demonstrate their best effort, to make mistakes, and thus, improve, without the tension or anxiety of a grade. Careful thought and deliberation has led us to conclude that this needs to be a time of flexibility during which the outstanding work that is being completed by students, parents and teachers alike can be appropriately acknowledged and formatively assessed.

We hope these points of clarification and modifications to our procedures and expectations will provide your children and you with some additional support and relief. If you have further questions and feedback, please continue to share these with your school principal. Rest assured, the internal examination and adjustments of our virtual instructional practices and procedures will continue as appropriate and necessary.

Stay healthy, well and safe!

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eveny de Mendez', written in a cursive style.

Eveny de Mendez

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction