



West Orange Public Schools
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Superintendent of Schools

J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.

March 13, 2020

Dear West Orange Families and Students,

As superintendent of schools, I am here not only to ensure that all students are provided a thorough and effective education, but also to listen and respond to the collective will the people. As you know, numerous school districts including all those schools in Bergen County have moved forward with a long term closure.

This morning, I met with various agencies including the department of health and, as of the time that I write this correspondence, we have still yet to receive a written directive to close our schools. The New Jersey statue which permits schools to use tele-schooling in lieu of instructional days explicitly states that a school district must receive this directive in writing from the state or local departments of health.

That being said, it has become clear to me that many of our community members would be uncomfortable with me allowing the opening of schools on Monday, March 16. However, I am also responsible for ensuring, as pursuant to the Department of Education memo and based on my own philosophy and beliefs, that all students have a goodwill access to the services.

Our team has worked day and night to prepare for transferring our school district to a virtual model. We have answered many of the questions relative to how this would get done. In a short period of time we have built a comprehensive e-learning platform for all schools and all teachers. All of our staff has been trained on how to use it and have begun to build out their content for those sites.

However, I would be disingenuous and doing a disservice to the children and parents of the school district if I were to move forward next week with this plan with so many questions still left to be answered. There are several key pieces which, while we have good preliminary plans, logistics still need to be ironed out. Furthermore, we need to ensure that all of our stakeholders have received adequate communication and understanding about how to access the services.

Namely, I speak of our Food Services and ensuring that our students eligible for free and reduced lunch understand how and where to obtain this food. Secondly, while we have an extensive amount of data relative to the students in our schools that do not have Internet or computer access, the fact remains that we have yet to zero in on all of those households specifically. Further, while we have hardcopy packets developed to go home to those households, the massive job of reproducing hundreds of multi-page packets and either distributing them to those households or placing them in

central locations still needs to be done. Finally, and from a social emotional standpoint at this time of uncertainty and even anxiety, to thrust our students, teachers, and families into the situation next week whereby, not only with the many seeking alternative childcare or asking others to care for their children, now we are asking them to embark upon an entirely new endeavor and enterprise with the learning.

In short, we need more time. Therefore, please be advised, that after discussing this situation with the Board of Education members, I have recommended that we shift our spring break vacation to next week. In this way, regardless of whether the governor or state department of health directs to close our schools, we will be in compliance. Not only will this break enable us to quarantine our facilities for 11 days, but it will also give our administration and our teachers the same amount of time to ensure that if and when we must convert to a virtual schooling model, we, the professionals and our community members, are as prepared as possible and more comfortable to do so.

We understand that some of our community members and staff members may have pre-scheduled vacations for that spring break week which is four (4) work days not including Good Friday. For those families and staff who feel that they are not able or willing to change their vacation plans, we will work with all of our stakeholders to be as accommodating as possible. There exists a distinct possibility that, at the time of our originally scheduled spring break, we may in fact still be in a quarantine situation with our schools and travel may be limited anyway.

I have spent many hours processing all the information and data available to me, and I am confident, while not ideal, this plan represents the only way in which I can fulfill my charge as a superintendent of schools.

Therefore, next week, beginning March 16, the schools will be closed for the entire week as follows:

March 16 Snow Day

March 17-March 20 Spring Break

If going into the week of March 23 it becomes necessary to remain closed due to the Coronavirus, e-learning or tele-schooling will begin on Monday, March 23. You should expect additional and ongoing communication next week to keep you apprised of the next steps concerning tele-schooling. I ask you to please check the district website periodically for updates and/or notifications.

I thank you in advance for your time and attention and wish you all the best for a restful and healthy spring break.

Sincerely,



J. Scott Cascone, Ed. D.
Superintendent