

WARREN HILLS REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

89 Bowerstown Road, Washington, NJ 07882 Phone: 908-689-3143 Fax: 908-689-4814

Earl C. Clymer, III
Superintendent

Dawn A. Moore
Assistant Superintendent
for Curriculum & Instruction



Donna Palmiere
Business Administrator

Dennis Mack
Director of Human Resources

www.warrenhills.org

August 31, 2020

Dear Warren Hills Community,

During this entire pandemic, the administrative team and I have shared with you through emails, forums and discussions that our strong belief is that our students need to be in school to receive quality instruction and an educational experience they deserve. We still hold this belief to be true, and I stated as much at the Community Forum on August 24, 2020 and at the special Board of Education meeting, in public session, on August 27, 2020. Through these discussions, we also shared with you that this situation is changing on an almost daily basis, that changes could occur at a moment's notice, and that some of the changes may be beyond our control.

On June 26, 2020, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) released guidance to school districts on the reopening of schools called the *Restart & Recovery Plan: The Road Back*. The guidance required districts to provide an in-person educational experience and address areas including, but not limited to, health and safety, transportation, cleaning and sanitizing, social distancing, connectivity and educational equity. At that time, we formed a Reopening Committee consisting of district stakeholders and sub committees to create a plan in compliance with the guidance released by the NJDOE. For the past few months, we have been hard at work ensuring that we meet, and in many cases, exceed the requirements for the safe return of our students, faculty and staff.

The Reopening Committee's efforts resulted in specific protocols and practices to ensure all students, visitors, faculty and staff entered a safe environment. To meet this goal, the district has introduced additional health and safety measures and purchased safety items including, but not limited to, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Thermal Imaging Cameras, non-contact thermometers, social distancing signage for hallways and classrooms and automatic hand sanitizers for every classroom and common area.

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The success of the committee's efforts resulted in a plan approved by the Board of Education and the NJDOE. The plan was built with the ability to adapt to changing guidance, maintain a focus on students first, and overcome every obstacle in the plan for reopening that we could control.

However, we are now facing an obstacle for which we do NOT have control and are struggling to overcome: a teacher shortage. The laws in New Jersey regarding requests for remote accommodations and leaves of absence were recently expanded under an Executive Order signed by Governor Murphy. The Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) entitles faculty and staff facing child care issues the right to request a 12 week leave. Additionally, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), also provides a 12 week leave for faculty and staff who request accommodations due to underlying medical conditions under COVID-19. The statutes and regulations governing FFCRA and FMLA have created an obstacle for the district to provide safe, appropriate and quality supervision for our in-person students. Currently, 31 faculty and staff (18%) have submitted requests for accommodations and/or leaves citing the FFCRA and/or FMLA regulations. Requests continue to be submitted from faculty and staff at this time. Further, the Board of Education and I were presented with a letter from the teachers' association containing nearly 100 signatures requesting the Board of Education and I open schools in the Remote Model, due to safety concerns. These issues place a severe burden on my primary responsibility to provide a safe, positive and quality in-person educational experience for your children.

Therefore, due to the teacher shortage, we are unable to provide coverage for all of our students and their courses and have no choice but to begin our school year in our Remote Learning Model beginning Tuesday, September 8th through Wednesday, September 16th. Our goal is to return to some form of our Hybrid in-person instruction model on Thursday, September 17th. At this time, based on the current situation, the Remote Model is our best option to provide the students with quality instruction. All students will receive instruction through the Remote Model and schedule with the exception of our self-contained students with Multiple Disabilities programs who will be provided with in-person instruction per our NJDOE approved Hybrid Model.

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The administration is working, and will continue to work, to find creative plans in light of the teacher shortage to return students to a quality in-person experience as soon as possible. We are scrutinizing our schedules to determine how we can adjust schedules and return students to our buildings. We have placed advertisements in the print media, on our website and through social media attempting to secure certificated teaching candidates to address gaps created by teacher requested accommodations and/or leaves.

I share in your frustration and disappointment in not being able to provide the in-person experience on September 8th. Please be assured, the district administration and I continue to hold firmly the belief that in-person instruction is a critical component of our students' education. We will work tirelessly to resolve the issue created by the teacher shortage.

Please pay close to attention to your emails over the next few days as we will provide you with additional information on our move to the all Remote Learning Model.

Very Truly Yours,

Earl C. Clymer, III
Superintendent of Schools