

January 11, 2021

Dear WCASD Community,

I am writing to provide an update on our opening of schools plan and to ask you to complete an important form, depending on what model of instruction you choose for your child. As you know, we are returning to our hybrid learning on Monday, January 11. Special education students who attend five days a week in person, based on need, will continue in person. Sports and after-school activities will resume January 11 with social distancing guidelines in place.

During the month of December, like many school districts in our area, we noticed many parents choosing to keep children in a remote setting, resulting in many classes with very few students, especially at the secondary (middle and high school) level. As we plan to best utilize our instructional spaces while adhering to the guidelines of maintaining six feet of social distancing, **we are asking parents to commit to either remote learning or the hybrid model until the end of the third marking period (March 31)**. By doing so, we can better use the space to bring additional students in for instruction four days per week in the hybrid model.

- We have said repeatedly that you may keep your child home, learning remotely, at any time - however, we offered that option for students who may feel sick, or who had a potential exposure, or for times when a parent was concerned about a spike in community spread. We didn't anticipate that we would end up with empty classrooms. (Parents and students have told us that as classroom attendance has fallen, many students say it's simply not as enjoyable to be in person.) We know this may feel like we are changing the rules, and we still want to offer flexibility - which is why we have a hybrid, remote, and cyber option. We recognize the need for families to have flexibility, but we also want to be able to offer in-person spots to students who are struggling the most.
- If you choose to keep your child remote-only until March 31, you will *not* forfeit an in-person spot for the final marking period.
- Direction and conditions have changed repeatedly throughout the pandemic, however the recommendation from the state and the majority of other health officials to maintain 6 feet of social distancing has *not* wavered. For the time being, our District will continue to follow that.

We are requesting that parents who want to keep their child learning remotely until March 31 complete this form by January 15, with the change to take effect on Tuesday, January 19. *If you want your child to remain in the hybrid model (2 days in-person and 3 days remote) you do not need to fill out the form.* In addition, parents whose children are attending our cyber program do not need to complete this form. **We only need parents to fill out the form if you are committing to a full, five day per week remote (learning from home) format.** This will help us know how many students we can bring back to four-day per week instruction, while maintaining the six feet of social distancing guidelines.

Also, we do understand that students who remain in in-person hybrid may occasionally need to learn remotely because of illness or other situations. If you choose hybrid but need to keep your child remote for a day or more, simply send a note to your child's teacher/principal/attendance secretary.

Links to Forms

[Elementary Form](#)

Secondary Form

How are we determining which students we can offer a four day a week placement? In addition to examining the space that we have available in our classrooms, we have been evaluating how our students are doing. Each school has a team of teachers, counselors, reading specialists, administrators, and other staff that reviews student progress to determine instructional needs. These teams meet weekly throughout the year - even before the pandemic. This year they are reviewing and considering student failures, special learning accommodations (IEP and 504 Plans), mental health concerns and issues, and math and reading support to determine needs. Because we have limited space due to our social distancing guidelines, the teams must prioritize those students meeting multiple criteria when determining the need for additional in-person instruction. Parents/guardians of identified students will be notified by an administrator or counselor.

How will I know if my child is being offered a four day a week placement? In some instances, administrators/counselors may have already reached out to families, knowing that many have some space in our classrooms, since some students have moved to our cyber program. In other instances, we will need to wait to see how many students commit to remaining remote until March 31.

If my child is able to return four days a week, will that be for the rest of the school year? Not necessarily. If a number of students commit to learning remotely until March 31, then choose to return in-person for the final marking period, we may not have enough space in our classrooms if we are still being asked to follow 6 feet of social distancing.

How does the new state guidance impact West Chester's ability to bring more elementary students back to in-person instruction? The [new guidance](#) allows school districts to operate elementary schools in a hybrid format even when COVID-19 cases are in substantial rates. That new guidance pertains to school districts that are in an all-virtual format and does not have an impact on WCASD since our plan already includes a hybrid model for elementary students when we are already in the substantial zone.

We are also still following [guidance](#) from the PA Department of Education which outlines the number of positive cases of COVID-19 necessary in order to close a school from hybrid or in-person, to a remote learning format. Again, our goal is to maintain in-person instruction as much as possible.

Our staff, students, and parents have done an incredible job in extremely challenging circumstances. We fully understand the importance of in-person instruction, and our goal is to remain in-person, with mitigation efforts in place, as much as possible. With a vaccine becoming available, and rapid testing also more available, I am hopeful the second half of our school year will bring us several steps closer to normalcy.

We will continue to communicate as we move throughout this challenging school year. Thanks for everyone's continued support and patience.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent