August 25, 2020

Dear Parents, Staff, and Students,

I am writing to inform you of the school district’s reopening plans. Classes will begin on Tuesday, September 8th, and we will be following a shortened day schedule until further notice. Our plan calls for a full reopening with all students reporting to school every day unless you’ve chosen to either homeschool your child or you take advantage of our distance learning program.

We believe that given the current low level of virus transmission and using the guidelines and metrics issued by the State of Connecticut, schools are safe to reopen. We have chosen this particular model to begin the year for several reasons. First, our shortened day schedule will include a grab-and-go lunch and breakfast to be distributed to all students at the end of the school day. This eliminates lunch waves and reserves valuable space that can be used to spread classes and students out. Custodians who spend a majority of the day cleaning the cafeteria, can now be redeployed to assist in cleaning other high traffic areas of the building throughout the day. In addition, we have allocated funds through the Federal CARES Act to hire additional custodial help. They will be responsible for tasks such as lavatories, and high touchpoint areas throughout the day. Since we will be limiting the number of after-school activities and outside groups that use our facilities, the night custodial shift will begin their day earlier and overlap with the day crew creating a more efficient and thorough cleaning operation.

While lunch is a time when students can socialize and relax, it is also the least structured time of school day. Therefore it’s a time when germs can easily spread, and for the time being must be put on hold. Given that students will need time to adjust to a formal classroom setting after being out for so long, we believe the more time we can dedicate to instruction the better off they’ll be in the long run. We are also confident that teachers will make this an exciting return, providing students with creative ways to socialize and connect while maintaining social distancing.
As of today, approximately ten percent of our families have chosen to continue with Distance Learning to start off the year. We believe that by September 8th, that percentage will grow. In addition, many parents have expressed concern about their children riding the bus to and from school and will be providing their own transportation. Therefore, we’re confident that buses will not be operating close to full capacity. Like we do at the beginning of every new year, we will closely monitor the number of children on every bus and make any necessary adjustment to avoid large numbers. It is also important to note that children are required to wear masks while riding the bus; monitors will be assigned to elementary school runs. Winkle Bus Company has provided us with their guidelines and cleaning protocols, which is available to you on our website.

Our schools have done a great job of rearranging classrooms to account for social distancing. They’ve removed extra furniture such as desks, carpets, file cabinets, and tables to keep children separated as much as possible. During the day, students must wear masks, but breaks will be provided as needed. Wearing a mask is the best way to prevent the spread of the virus when social distancing isn’t possible. Schedules have been designed at all buildings to limit transitions and cohort students as much as possible. Most will spend the majority of the day in one classroom. While this was a difficult goal to achieve at the West Haven High, administrators there have developed a schedule that limits the number of transitions during the day by fifty percent.

We would like to begin this school year in the most “normal” way possible, however, large school gatherings such as Open House and assemblies will not be part of the back-to-school events. We’re still waiting on guidance from the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) with regard to fall sports, and we will follow recently developed State guidelines so that students can continue to take part in the fine arts classes and activities we offer. It is our hope that over time, restrictions will be loosened, and we can resume regular programing.

I’ve tried to summarize the changes and precautions developed by our administrators over the last several months. In addition, this Wednesday, August 26th, you will receive a building specific manual from the school that your child attends which will outline day to day details. Shortly, you will also receive notification of new student orientations, and other related information you’ll need to know to start school.

Our entire staff is truly looking forward to welcoming you back, and know that safety has been and will continue to be our number one priority. Please visit our website, and follow us on Twitter and Instagram for updates and breaking news. As I’ve said to you many times recently, given the nature of the pandemic, all plans are subject to change.
Finally, school administrators and I will do our best to answer your questions and concerns in a timely manner. If you have any, let us know immediately.

Thank you for all of your support and patience especially over these last several weeks. Know that with your help and cooperation, I have no doubt that West Haven will serve as model for the entire State when it comes to safely and effectively reopening schools.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Neil C. Cavallaro
Superintendent of Schools