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WEST ELIZABETH - JEFFERSON HILLS - PLEASANT HILLS

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Supervisor of Special Education/Pupil Personnel

March 21, 2020

Dear Parents and Students,

This past week has been challenging for us all. As we continue to navigate these uncharted waters, I want to be sure our lines of communication remain open. I understand the undue stress and pressure that this pandemic has placed on our families. Some have lost their jobs and others struggle to keep their families safe, healthy, and fed. The African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child" has never been more meaningful than it is right now. First and foremost, I want you to realize that the school district is here for you as a resource. Thanks to our food service, transportation, and security departments who have put concerns about their personal health aside so we are able to deliver meals to ALL students in need, not just those that qualify under federal guidelines. In addition, our partnership with Allegheny Health Network has afforded us the ability to provide mental health care via teletherapy for those in need. Even though the district has been closed, we haven't stopped working to help our students and families.

I can totally understand why school may not be one of your family's greatest concerns right now. That said, I want you to know that I am struggling with the amount of instruction we are losing because of this challenge that we are facing. In the last few days, we have had many meetings across the county and within the district. Yesterday, all of the county superintendents met with many members of the state legislature to discuss our concerns and potential legislation that will be introduced next week to provide further guidance and relief to school districts. The last few days have brought some clarification. For one, we are not being held to the 180 day or 990/900 hour requirement due to the uncertainty of how long schools will be closed. We also learned that as long as we have the means to provide an online education and meet the needs of ALL students, we can do so and count those days as instructional. In addition, we learned that the state testing program, which includes the PSSAs and Keystone Exams, has been cancelled and that we do not have to adjust our original last day of school. **Thus, the last day for students will remain June 9<sup>th</sup> as originally planned.** However, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has recommended that we try to facilitate as much learning as possible during this closure. In order to maximize our time, we will need to utilize April 9th and April 13th as online instructional days. May 28th and 29th may also be used as online instructional days, depending on the feasibility of having prom and/or Kennywood Day. It is certainly our overall goal to have both of these events and celebrate with our students and families if we are able.

We are fortunate to be part of a school community in which every child in grades 1-12 has a device. We also have programs and applications that are built around the goal of personalization while employing technology that our teachers already utilize every day as part of our curriculum. **For that reason, we have decided that it is in the best interest of our students to transition to an online model beginning March 30<sup>th</sup> for the**

**remainder of the time that schools are closed.** This closure could be for a month, or it could be the remainder of the school year; right now, we do not know. Our administration and teachers have already started meeting virtually to design and coordinate what an online schedule and model of delivery look like. The program will zero in on the skills and content needed for our students to meet success in their next stage of learning. Whether it's first grade or a four-year college, we want to be sure they are prepared. At the same time, we recognize that many parents are still working and there is a lot more going on in your lives than just your child's education. As such, it is our intention to make this transition as seamless as possible. In most cases, instruction will be disseminated primarily from Google Classroom and other programs that our students already utilize such as Pathblazers, IXL, Khan Academy, and ALEKS. Instruction will be asynchronous, but all teachers will be available during live "office hours" every day to provide assistance and additional instruction. Please understand this instructional model will appear slightly different between subjects and grade levels. So as to not overwhelm our students, our focus is on essential skills and concepts.

Students that have a special education plan in the form of an IEP, GIEP, or 504 agreement will be contacted within the next week. This includes services such as ESL, OT, speech, counseling and PT. Parents that have a student receiving speech and language services will need to sign a consent for their students to be added to Google classrooms. This will be available through Skyward. All meetings will be conducted via Google Hangout and will be arranged by your caseload manager. We have already spoken to many of our providers and are prepared to continue most of these services while online. When developing our plan, know that our special needs students have been at the forefront of our conversations. While we realize that a fully online program may not be the best method of delivery for some of our students, we plan to be as flexible as we need to be in order to make sure that all of our students are prepared for next year. Students who attend Steel Center will start with just their program at Thomas Jefferson High School, until Steel Center is able to get an online program up and running, or is able to go back to school.

As things change, we will adapt. I cannot say enough about how our teachers and administrators have risen to the challenge of still providing our students with a quality education. My hope is that this is all for nothing, and we can get back to school and a "normal" life as soon as possible. Remember that the health and safety of our families should come before anything. I believe our "village" within the West Jefferson Hills School District is up for the challenge of ensuring that this COVID-19 pandemic doesn't affect our students learning any longer. You will be receiving more information on the framework and building schedules next week. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to email me, any of our other central office administrators, or building administrators for help. We are all working remotely and available. Wishing you and your family health and well being during this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Ghilani

Superintendent of Schools