

August 14, 2020

Good Afternoon Parents and Families,

Researcher, professor, author and public speaker Brene Brown has talked about the importance of assuming positive intent. By approaching situations with an understanding and ethos that everyone is doing the best they can, we are able to avoid our rush to judgement and the act of shaming. Further, it enables us to act with empathy and compassion. I mention this as we have just wrapped up one of the more emotionally laden and heavy weeks of the summer. Locally, our COVID-19 rates are among the best in the country; nationally, we are struggling. Parents have grappled with the weighty decision to select in-person or remote instruction in the context. Staff members have further contemplated their health risks as well as those of their close family members, many of whom may be vulnerable. Given the range of options, our current situation and the unique needs of our families and staff members, I understand how deeply personal this situation is and I want to unequivocally state that your decision is yours to make, and that only you know what is best for yourself and your family. There is no right or wrong, just what is best for you right now. Our role is not to judge but rather to support our families and staff members, fulfilling our mission of serving the needs of our students. Please know that we recognize the difficulty and stress in making these choices and we are here for you.

In our update this week, I have opted to include information from Central Office. The purpose of this is to provide you with as much information prior to our start of school on September 8th. We will continue to utilize our website as a place to store information.

School Schedule, Teachers, and Classes

With the selection process for in-person or remote teaching finished, our school teams are assigning students to classes. Generally, for those that selected remote instruction, we are assigning students to cohorts from their home school whenever possible and feasible. In some cases, though, class sizes would either be too large or span too many grades to create the best learning environment. To address this, our K-8 schools will be partnering as necessary to combine cohorts. Students will still have an opportunity to be connected to their schools as a larger community. In combining groups, we will be able to create and deliver a more effective remote learning experience for our students while simultaneously being able to implement differentiated professional development for remote-only instructors.

We anticipate that schools will be able to send schedules to families in the coming weeks. Please keep in mind that scheduling is a three dimensional Tetris puzzle and that our school leaders are working diligently to make all the pieces fit together. This year is a little more complicated than most but we have a great team with the skills to complete the task at hand.

Health Screens

Families will be required to administer and report daily health checks related to symptoms for COVID-19. In addition, all students must be administered a temperature check by a school employee prior to entering the building (at the point of first contact). We are currently evaluating if it is safe or feasible to administer this temperature check on our buses. We will have more information in the coming weeks as we release more detailed information for families but, as a general rule, parents should be available to pick up their child immediately in the event the temperature is higher than 100.4 degrees. I am sharing this now as I realize it has implications for family schedules.

BroadBand

There was a story on VPR recently about the state's efforts to expand broad band internet access

(<https://www.vpr.org/post/schools-start-four-weeks-state-scrambling-set-broadband-students>).

According to the Department of Public Service:

The Line Extension Customer Assistance Program ("LECAP") provides up to \$3000 in assistance to qualifying and eligible consumers who seek to extend telecommunications lines to their homes. Hundreds of Vermonters without 25/3 Mbps broadband service live just beyond the reach of current cable and other Internet Service Providers' networks.

The LECAP program is available to Vermonters who can demonstrate a COVID-19–related need, such as remote learning/telehealth/telework, lack of a minimum of 25/3 broadband internet service, and are "near net" for a cable video provider or other Internet Service Provider. Consumers must request the line extension from the appropriate service provider and also apply for the line extension financial assistance program from the Department of Public Service. Approval will be based on need, cost-effectiveness, and site-appropriateness of the line extension. Payments from this program will be made by the Department directly to the service provider on behalf of the consumer.

<https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/vermont-covid-19-line-extension-customer-assistance-program>

While this does not address all the challenges with internet access, it may be a starting point for some families.

WSESD Meals Plan

WSESD Leadership, in conjunction with FreshPicks Cafe staff, have developed the following plans to provide daily meals to all students who qualify based on state regulations regarding school meals programs.

For students who have opted for remote learning

- Meals will be available outside of the student's home school at a designated site weekly on Mondays and Thursdays for pickup for students who have enrolled in distance learning.
- Times of these stations will be announced by each individual school.
- On Mondays, families will pick up breakfasts and lunches for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Thursday pickups will have meals for Thursday and Friday.

For students who have opted for hybrid learning on the days they are in school

- FreshPicks will consolidate their food production systems to run out of two centralized kitchens, and deliver meals daily to outlying schools.
- Daily menus will be limited in scope (likely 4 options for daily lunch, for example). Instructions for how to order will be shared closer to the start of school.
- Meals will be consumed in classroom spaces (elementary) or in cafeteria spaces with appropriate spacing (BAMS and BUHS) while we are in phase 2 of reopening as defined by the Vermont Agency of Education.

For students who have opted for hybrid learning on the days they are NOT in school

- Elementary and Middle-School aged students who are opting into the meals program will be provided three days of meals (breakfast and lunch) on the final of their two days in school to take home with them. For example, if a student attends school Monday and Tuesday, they will leave school on Tuesday with a bag of meals for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, or if a student attends Thursday and Friday, they will receive a bag on Friday afternoon for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. These meals will follow the FreshPicks menu of meals that would be provided in school. These will follow the remote feeding menus.
- Plans for BUHS students will be forthcoming.

Out of State Travel

As we get closer to the start of the school year, we are dependent upon all our families and community members to work with us for a successful reopening. There is a far greater likelihood of community based exposure to COVID-19 than in a school. As families are wrapping up vacations and possibly time away, please be careful to monitor the COVID-19 travel advisories and follow the guidelines for quarantining upon return if necessary. Please review the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development for more information.

<https://accd.vermont.gov/covid-19/restart/cross-state-travel>

Child Care

The following information was shared regarding child care. As this has been a frequently asked question, I am hopeful that this may be of use to you.

- Families can access child care through the state-wide child care referral network. Child Care Referral Specialists at statewide Community Child Care Support Agencies can match families

with available child care options, including for school-aged children. There is no charge for this service, and it is available to all Vermonters. For more information:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/cccsa>

· Families can receive financial support for child care by talking with an eligibility specialist. The Child Care Financial Assistance Program helps families pay for child care. Families with a household of four people can make up to \$77,256 per year and qualify for help. Eligibility specialists maintain an ongoing connection with families who receive this benefit and help them as their needs change. For more information:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/ccfap>

Bus Survey

This is a repeat of information shared the last two weeks. Due to the need for safety and contact tracing, we are requiring families who are in the busing zone and need transportation to register with our bus company. This sign up will allow us to have an accurate bus roster. This is necessary in the event of a positive COVID-19 test result. As stated in the presentation to the Board on Monday, July 27, our buses are starting at a Step 3 in our reopening process. Because there are fewer physical distancing guidelines in this step, we are encouraging parents to transport their children to school if possible. The sign up sheet can be found at:

<https://forms.gle/5CSmYBHxyNYDRQbk7>. **Please note, your child will not be assigned to a bus or bus route without completing this online form. Please call the Kuzmeskus Busing directly if you have any questions or need assistance with this survey at 802 490 2817.**

Facial Coverings and the Learning Environment

This is a repeat of information shared last week. Now is the time to start building child endurance and stamina for wearing masks. While we will have opportunities for students to engage in outdoor activities and experiential learning, students will be required to wear masks while in the building and in close proximity to each other outdoors. *In the event you feel your child may have difficulty complying with the requirement for wearing a facial covering, you may wish to consider remote instruction.*

Please see:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wear-cloth-face-coverings.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mn6axdkbGd4>

Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Andy Skarzynski
Superintendent of Schools
Windham Southeast Supervisory Union

Information From Special Education

Hello to parents and families from the special education administration. We want to assure you we will be acting in good faith to provide your child with the special education and related services that are reasonable and appropriate for all involved as we return to school environments this September. As we approach the start of the school year, expect contact from your child's case manager in order to discuss what IEP services may look like in the context of the educational environment--remote or hybrid--your child is attending. We will be scheduling IEP meetings with you in order to discuss your child's needs and develop service delivery plans in collaboration with classroom teachers. It is our goal to be in regular contact with you to monitor student progress and adjust plans as needed. Your input is very important to us and is highly valued.

When school closed in mid-March, many students were scheduled to begin an initial evaluation for special education eligibility or complete a triennial evaluation. This created a situation in which we were not able to complete some necessary in-person testing for students. Our staff is working closely with our WSESU health and safety team in order to create protocols and procedures to restart in-person evaluations for students when school resumes. If you have questions about the status of your child's evaluation, please reach out to us at Central Office (802-254-3748) or to your child's case manager so we can provide you with an update. Every effort will be made to complete these evaluation obligations to our students and families.

If you have further questions or concerns, please reach out to your child's case manager or contact our Central Office at 254-3748. Thank you so much and be well.

Sincerely,

Shelley Wilson
WSESU Special Education Director