

WEST DEPTFORD TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

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WEST DEPTFORD, NEW JERSEY 08066-1999

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To all West Deptford Staff/Parents/Guardians:

This District is aware of the parental concerns that have risen regarding the need to open in a fully virtual model. This has been a difficult process with little time to find solutions. For reference - at the very end of June, the Governor announced that schools would be required to reopen with in-person instruction. The District immediately began to work on our plan and through many grueling long weeks, created our working hybrid plan. At the end of July, the Governor allowed a full virtual option. This mandated option required us to survey all parents, await their selection for their child, and then rebuild a schedule that allowed for in-person and virtual platforms. The aforementioned changes by the State forced us to alter our plan significantly and we attempted to shift personnel to cover students who chose virtual learning. Approximately 70% of WD families selected the hybrid learning option which would require a majority of our staff to report to the building as we must maintain small class sizes and social distancing, thus leaving 30% of WD families who selected full virtual. The West Deptford Schools run very efficiently and, currently, we do not have extra staff to be able to shift, especially in the area of special education. With resources stretched very thin and with only weeks to send out surveys and analyze the parent selections, we could not, with our existing staff, cover all of the necessary classes needed to run both hybrid and full virtual options.

It is for these reasons that I announced the need to move to virtual learning at Monday night's Board of Education meeting. Please know that we are working diligently to expand our staff which will allow us to offer hybrid and full virtual options in the future.

The decision to begin the year virtually is solely for the reasons explained above. As per our environmental expert, our buildings meet the minimum requirements for safety – our decision was *not* based on safety issues in the schools. Since our buildings meet safety requirements, we have dramatically expanded our Young Eagles Program (YEP) as a service to the community during this challenging time. Our certificated teachers are not available to staff that program because they are virtually teaching during the day. We have expanded YEP hours of care in an effort to assist working parents.

Our District receives \$2,085,600 annually through a Preschool grant from the New Jersey Department of Education. The District was given guidance that our Preschool program must offer the option of in-person and virtual instruction because there are no safety concerns preventing the schools from opening. Failure to offer the Preschool program would jeopardize our grant which would be a tremendous long-term loss for our community. To date, the Preschool program is fully staffed, our buildings are safe, and we are able to offer in-person instruction.

The District understands that this is a very difficult time. We, too, are frustrated and disappointed that we are unable to open with in-person learning in September. This year's virtual instruction will incorporate structure and a high level of synchronous learning (ie: live teaching). Please know our staff is working tirelessly to open the school year in the best instructional environment possible. It is our intention to return to a hybrid and virtual option for West Deptford families on November 10.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email us at reopeningquestions@wdeptford.k12.nj.us

Thank you for your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Gregory Cappello
Superintendent