

WEST DEPTFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear West Deptford Township School Community,

As the school year comes to a close, we would like to address some questions being raised about masking in West Deptford Schools. At this time, the District must remain in compliance with Governor Murphy's Executive Order 175 (EO175), which calls for the wearing of masks in schools with the exception of specific instances including extreme heat (temperatures exceeding 75 degrees), strenuous physical activity, and while eating. As you may or may not be aware, all instructional spaces in the district have air conditioning. Despite the inconsistencies between public scenarios that require masks and those that do not, we must remain compliant with the provisions of EO175.

At this time, no formal decisions have been made regarding masking for the 2021-2022 school year. Throughout the year, a group of representative stakeholders have met to guide the reopening process. This group will continue to meet throughout the summer in developing a plan for reopening that includes guidelines as they are released.

The Federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, Public Law 117-2, was signed by President Biden in March 2021. The purpose of the additional funding is to support local educational agencies (LEAs) in preparing for and responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on educators, students, and families. This grant requires school districts to develop a plan for the safe return to in-person instruction. Additionally, the grant requires that the district seeks community feedback regarding the proposed grant application.

On May 17, 2021, Governor Murphy announced that upon the conclusion of the 2020-2021 school year, portions of EO175 allowing remote learning will be rescinded, and schools will be required to provide full-day, in-person instruction for the 2021-2022 school year, as occurred prior to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. As a school district, we will continue to partner with our local Department of Health and collaboratively make decisions as new information and guidelines are provided to us.

Our plan is being created using the template that was mandated by the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), which incorporates the Federally-required components of the Safe Return Plan. The grant content is presented in the format that is required by the NJDOE. Many of the components are limited to a 1000-character count and, as such, we have succinctly captured the core elements of our plan. Additionally, the district leaders and school building leaders will continue to meet and collaborate with stakeholders on the comprehensive plans to safely restart school, co-curricular activities, athletics, and every other aspect of our district's operations.

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The district is seeking public comment on our draft plan and we are inviting you to share feedback via an online form. Please click [HERE](#) for the link to our Draft Safe Return Plan Overview. Please click [HERE](#) to submit community feedback. The district and schools will continue to keep you informed about our Safe Return Plan progress as well as any changes you may need to know.

In closing, we would like to reiterate that no decisions regarding masks have been made for the 2021-2022 school year. We expect that we will release the final plan over the summer to allow time for us to review and consider the guidelines presented to us from the State. We remain hopeful that our community will continue to exhibit patience and understanding about these issues that can inherently become divisive. The Board of Education and Administration look forward to reviewing the community's input as we collaborate on the reopening plans for the next school year.

We hope you all have a safe and refreshing summer break.

Sincerely,

Dr. S. Carvalho