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## Superintendent's Update: Quarantine Supports, Transportation, Equity Study Update

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Thomas Scarice <do\_not\_reply@westportps.org>

Fri, Oct 8, 2021 at 3:01 PM

Reply-To: Thomas Scarice <do\_not\_reply@westportps.org>

### 1. **Support During Quarantine:**

We continue to revisit our mitigating practices, such as the ways we support our students who are asked to quarantine. After some feedback, we have increased the level of services provided during quarantine. Please see [this document](#) for the changes by level (i.e. K-2, 3-5, 6-8), along with a "sample Google doc" for middle school students to access providing information for all of their classes.

Students with IEPs will receive all the supports provided to general education students. In addition, in days 0-9 of a quarantine, cumulatively in the year, students with IEPs will have contact with their special education teachers and related services providers via email, phone, or Google meet at the same frequency as they would if they were in school. If students are quarantined for more than 10 days in a school year, the students' teachers and providers will collaborate with families to deliver IEP services virtually. For our most complex learners participating in our Intensive Resource classrooms, IEP services will be delivered virtually beginning on day 3 of quarantine.

Fortunately, the Covid numbers continue to drop nationally and locally. However, increasing these services is necessary at this point in time.

### 2. **Transportation Contingency Plans:**

Transportation has been a major challenge this year. Busing delays and late arrivals have impacted the student school day and led to confusion and anxiety among parents and students.

Across the state and nation, a crippling bus driver shortage has impacted school district transportation services leading to closures and cancellations in some towns. Our transportation provider, Dattco, had been able to staff our buses by reallocating office personnel with the appropriate licensure to serve as drivers. However, the impact of the shortage has now hit Westport. To compound the challenges, there has been a marked increase in the volume of traffic on town roads.

Due to the shortage of drivers and increased traffic, routes are being consolidated while other routing options are being explored. The primary goal is to get all students to and from school on time. While consolidating routes could lead to delays, this temporary practice is necessary at this point in time.

Our newest drivers are becoming more familiar with our routes, which will enable routes to be completed more quickly. Schools will continue to communicate with parents at first notification that buses will be impacted by consolidation or a driver shortage.

Efforts are being made by Dattco to secure more drivers with incentives such as signing bonuses and expedited training for licensure.

Historically, all buses were expected to clear the school yard within 30 minutes of dismissal. Some schools were much quicker than this, and others took the full 30 or so minutes to clear. That standard, applied to our current start times, would estimate that our elementary schools should clear their buses for dismissal by 4:15pm (Saugatuck 3:45). The district is working to ensure that fully staffed buses depart by 4:15pm.

Combined runs could likely depart later than 4:15pm. When that is the case, principals will work with our transportation coordinator to provide as much advance notice as possible, with a specific time of departure from the school so parents can plan accordingly.

This resolution will be temporary until additional drivers can be secured.

Given this critical driver shortage, please have a morning and afternoon contingency plan, as you would with an inclement weather delayed opening/early closure, in the event of a significant delay due to the lack of a driver or the

consolidation of a route. Building principals will communicate this information to you as soon as they are made aware.

This is not a permanent solution to this problem, but rather a way to provide transportation in a crisis. We will continue to work with Dattco to develop strategies to secure more drivers.

### 3. **Equity Study Update**

Last week I was asked to respond to a posting on the “06880” blog related to concerns about “critical race theory” and the priorities of our school district. I would like to share that statement with our parent community [here](#).

Over the past few weeks there have been questions raised about the equity study the district began last year, the timeline of how the study will unfold, whether a public report will be shared, how this works fits into the overall district strategic plan, and the selection of NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools.

In fairness, the district takes pride in high quality communication, yet the communication on this work could have been better and I am ultimately responsible for that.

In addition to the comments I shared last week in the link above, I’d like to address these questions with some further context.

#### **Background**

The district’s commitment to a culturally responsive education, with a focus on equity, inclusion and diversity, began a number of years ago and was captured in a statement in the 2017 district strategic plan.

Statewide, it’s important to note that on February 3, 2021, the CT State Department of Education formally adopted a [position statement](#) on culturally responsive education, followed by a [joint statement](#) this summer in collaboration with the CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE), CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), CT Association of Schools (CAS), CT Educator Association (CEA), and American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Given the district and town’s commitment over the years, and the fact that this focus is currently a part of the educational landscape across the state and nation as illustrated above, the question is how to pursue this work.

In Westport, the initiation of an equity study last year began with a focus on ensuring equitable access to all programs and services for all students, establishing a strong sense of belonging in our schools for all students, and delivering a curriculum and instructional program that prepares all students for thoughtful citizenship and a very diverse global economy.

The district is still in the study phase as no new curriculum units or Board of Education (BOE) policies have been adopted as a result of the equity study.

Local district data has been reviewed as a part of the study. It is common for organizations to analyze their data for discrepancies and disproportionality. For example, local police departments analyze their traffic stop data for disproportionality. For schools, academic and behavioral data can be used for analytical purposes.

In our equity study, local academic and behavioral data has been reviewed, focus groups have been held with students and parents, and this information has been interpreted by a committee of educators and community members with an interest in the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion. The district established a tab on our website last year with information for the community and it will be updated to include access to the data reviewed. Following that data and information informed subsequent steps in the process.

#### **Upcoming Timeline:**

At this point in the process, the formal committee meetings have concluded and three areas of focus for action planning have been identified: teaching/learning, professional development, and data systems. Further work in the equity study action plans will continue, but ultimately this work must fold into the overall district strategic plan, which will be available for public review and formally presented to the BOE for a vote. It is anticipated that the initial goals and objectives of the district strategic plan will be presented in December.

#### **Equity Study Report:**

Prior to the BOE adoption of a strategic plan in December a final report of the equity study will be presented publicly to the BOE as an information item for public discussion. It is expected that this will occur in November.

#### **Selection of NYU Metro Center:**

Last December, a formal Request for Qualifications was issued for the purposes of consultation on conducting an

equity study. A number of applicants were reviewed by a committee of local educators. The deciding factors in selecting NYU Metropolitan Center by the committee were experience in consulting and research, the focus on a collaborative approach in co-creating action plans, the capacity to customize the study for our district, and the committee approach that precluded imposition by an outside group. The final action plans will be the work of WPS educators and community members, not handed to the district by an outside agency. Finally, the checks and balances of public education ensure that any formal action plans that will be folded in the district strategic plan will be voted on by the BOE in public session.

**Closing**

There is a great deal of information to review in this message. Full transparency and open communication is a priority for the district. Ordinarily, new information begets more questions. We will continue to share information on the work of our district moving forward.

**Podcast**

I am very pleased to announce that I will be interviewed on this topic next week by Dan Woog on his show, "06880: The Podcast". I will be sure to send out the podcast link to our school community when completed.

I hope that you and your families enjoy this beautiful weather and have a wonderful weekend.

Sincerely,  
Thomas Scarice  
Superintendent of Schools

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