



Michelle Dutrow
Superintendent
516 Allport Cutoff
Morrisdale PA, 16858
Phone - 814.345.5615 x 4000
Fax - 814.345.5220
www.westbranch.org

Michelle Dutrow, Superintendent

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Greetings WB Families:

I hope this communication finds each of you and your family healthy and safe. It is hard to believe that it is already August and that the opening of the school year is just around the corner. First this afternoon, I would like to congratulate the WB Community as our local COVID-19 data continues to reflect minimal positive cases. I am encouraged by this community data and hope that all of us can keep following the recommended health and safety measures. This is the best chance for us to be able to have students and staff return to our property when school starts back up. I think it would be fair to say that all of us have many questions, concerns, frustrations, and anxieties as we think about the 2020-21 school year. Please know that we are continuing to work every day to iron out our various plans and the multitude of details that go into each model.

As we move through the month of August, you can expect a few additional communications from the school district. Our goal is to keep you informed, be transparent about our evolving procedures/protocols, and try not to bombard you with too much information in one letter. I think it's important that I state up front that when we post communications to our Facebook page, the District will not engage in any form of debate about those mandates, orders, procedures, etc. that folks are displeased about. While we appreciate that individuals are entitled to their own opinions, the District is nonetheless preparing for a school reopening in the safest and most efficient manner that is possible given the unfortunate set of circumstances that has come to define our current business of education. It quite simply serves no purpose for the District to engage in debate or arguments about what folks do not agree with. Parents have been given a choice of program options and the District will provide an educational program for all students within each of our educational models.

Each school district in the state of Pennsylvania is required to prepare a plan with various options to frame the 2020-21 school year. At West Branch, this plan was Board approved on July 27th, submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and posted on the district website as per the requirement. The plan includes the parameters for our Full Reopening model (with an In-house Cyber Option) and our Staggered Day model (with an In-House Cyber Option). In addition, the district must also have the Full Remote model ready to implement should the county or state be returned to the Red Phase. In my next communication, I will elaborate on each of the three education models shared in a communication earlier this summer.

At this time, given our current local community and school COVID-19 data, the District is continuing to move forward with our Full Reopening Plan. This decision aligns with the majority of families who have indicated their choice to return their child / children to school at the end of the month (90%+). Following are a few points of clarification for and information we need from families so we can continue our August work:

1. **School Reopening Survey:** If you have completed the survey sent out in June either via the link or with an employee who contacted you, we sincerely appreciate your responses. If you have not responded to the survey to date, the district must have a response from you ASAP so we can plan accordingly. Please contact one of the building offices to make arrangements to complete your survey. We are unable to confirm our bus rosters, classroom assignments, and alternate plans without your information. Failure to respond to the district about which option you are selecting for your child/children may result in us not being able to accommodate your children the first few days of school either here at the building or in our cyber program.

2. Staggered Day Preference: In the event we need to change our plan from the Full Reopening model to the Staggered Day model, we are asking parents for their preference. In the Staggered Day model, students in Grades PreK – Grade 1 will continue to come to school every day. Students in Grades 2-12 will be divided into two groups with students coming to school two days and working from home for three days each week. **Below is a link to a brief one-question survey asking if you have a preference on what days your children come to school. This survey will be open from today until the close of business on Thursday (48 hours). Only parents who have selected to return their children to school should complete the survey.** The District will assume that no response means you have no preference and we will assign your children accordingly. Siblings will be grouped together.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeSjU6rvpIyIKmpv70zzywmRTIkZI2twZMS_isGwBS0i4sMQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

3. In-House Cyber Option: if you have indicated in your survey that you plan to keep your children at home and have our in-house cyber program, you can anticipate a telephone call from one of our Principal's to explain the cyber guidelines and confirm that you do understand the requirements. I feel I need to clarify that our in-house cyber program is not the same program that was offered to our students this past Spring. The program this year must meet attendance and instructional minute requirements set forth by the state. There will be assignments and exams with due dates. There will be times your child/children will be required to participate in online sessions at scheduled times in addition to working on their own. Students will be graded and promoted/failed the same as how we operate our traditional program. While our in-house cyber is a great option for some students, it is a very rigorous program that requires good study skills and self-discipline.

The next few weeks will be a busy time for everyone, and we look forward to having our staff and students back in the building soon.

Micki Dutrow