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November 10, 2020

Good Morning WB Families:

I thought we would start off this communication by giving ourselves a collective "pat on the back". It is November, we are into the 2<sup>nd</sup> marking period, and we are still open for school! This is quite an accomplishment all things given, and we do appreciate the patience and support shown by our WB families. Today's communication is an assortment of odds and ends to get us through the next part of our school year.

#### Positive Cases in School

Given the rise of cases in our area, we have done well thus far with our positive cases here in school and the need to quarantine students and employees on the back end of contact tracing. Our health and safety mitigation efforts in the building seem to be working and it will be vitally important that we continue with our plan. We are hopeful to continue on this path but will adjust accordingly as advised by the Department of Health (DoH). We will also use our parent notification system to notify you as new cases are confirmed that involve our students and staff.

#### Food Service

In September, we shared with you that the USDA had extended the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) program through the end of December. This program extension is what has allowed your children to be served a free breakfast and/or lunch each day. **We are pleased to inform you that the USDA has extended this program until the end of the 2020-2021 school year. All WB students in PreK-Grade 12 will continue to eat free through June 2021.** This is a terrific savings for our families, and we hope you will encourage your children to eat both breakfast and lunch each day.

#### Flexible Instructional Days (FID)

In an effort to avoid disruptions to a school calendar during any given school year, PDE has established a program called Flexible Instructional Days. These days will allow us to hold school at home on some of the days we cannot be in the school building with no need for make-up days. These days can be used for events such as inclement weather, power outages, or utility issues at the school. Districts are approved for 5 days to be used throughout the school year and the plan was approved for three years. PDE has guidelines that we must comply with and students will have schoolwork to complete on these days at home. **For this school year, West Branch will be piloting the use of FID days and as such may not be using all 5 days. If the need should arise, and it is a day off announced in advance, West Branch will try at least one FID day.**

Our teachers have prepared lessons and are working with students to load the lessons onto their school-issued devices in Grades K-12. Because every student must have access to the lessons on the actual FID day, all lessons are being placed on the devices off-line which means students can access them whether they have internet access or not. Our youngest students in Grades K-2 will have packets which also may be utilized instead of the computer if problems arise at home. Teachers will be available on these days to provide instruction and assistance as needed and will share their schedules as FID days are announced. We will continue to practice with the students here at school on how and where to access these FID lessons, and parents can expect to start to see FID packets in our K-2<sup>nd</sup> graders' backpacks shortly.

It is the policy of the West Branch Area School District not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, creed, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ancestry, national origin or handicap/disability in its educational programs, activities, or employment. Services and facilities are accessible to and usable by disabled persons as required by Title IX, Section 504 and Title VI.

We do understand that this will be yet another new thing for our families to learn. We will expect many questions the first time or two we use one of these at-home days and will work with everyone to settle into this new model. Because we are only piloting this new program this school year, every day off will not be used as a FID day. Some days may still need to be made up later as per our school calendar.

### Full Remote Model Reminder

As many schools and districts have been experiencing one and two-week closures around our area of the state, we do understand that we may find ourselves in a similar situation in the very near future. Once again, I feel I should gently remind our families that you should be making a plan for your children should we need to transition to the Full Remote model as the result of our local COVID-19 data. In this model, students will be responsible for a full school day while at home. Teachers will be providing a combination of synchronous (live) and asynchronous (recorded) instruction which means that students with internet access will need to log into their online classroom at scheduled times. Accommodations will be made for students without internet access at home or for students not able to log in due to childcare arrangements. If we move to this model, the WB faculty and staff will work with families as issues arise. For now, the best advice we can offer our families is to have your child practice at home accessing their online classroom. All our teachers have been practicing with the students at school and it is important that your children feel comfortable and confident about what they are to do if school is once again happening at home. Ask your child how they turn on and log into their computer/laptop. Have them show you where to go to access the schoolwork the teacher wants them to complete. Ask them to show/tell you how to get into the online classroom with their teacher for class. Any conversation on this subject will help your child be better ready should we need to close.

As always, please remember to continue to follow all health and safety guidelines, including wearing a mask if out of your home, using hand sanitizer frequently, and using social distancing when around others. We all are experiencing what has been labeled as "COVID fatigue" but it is vitally important that we stick to the recommendations, respect the science, and keep our kiddos in school!

Micki Dutrow