

Wednesday March 25, 2020

As part of our ongoing commitment to provide our students with meaningful educational opportunities in a healthy and safe learning environment, our administrative team would like to advise you that we are committed to creating a pathway toward educational continuity and communication with our school community during the New Jersey mandated COVID-19 school closure. Last week, we provided distance learning instructional/activity packets to our families through the mail and will be sending additional packets home in the near future. Moving forward, we will also be providing our distance learning activities online. Every student has been sent a Chromebook to support the e-learning process.

### **Westbridge Academy (WBA) Distance Learning Plan**

Only twenty two days ago, on Tuesday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> the Westbridge Academy community was given initial direction from the New Jersey Department of Education via a conference call briefing chaired by Governor Murphy to begin reviewing our Crisis Response, School Safety and Security Plan in order to “plan” and “prepare” in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak. A subsequent guidance memo was received on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup> requesting a series of plans including our School Safety Plan, Crisis Response Plan, Health Related Closure Plan, and Enhanced School Cleanliness/Disinfection Plan.

All plans were drafted by Friday, March 6<sup>th</sup> and forwarded to the Essex County Executive Superintendent’s Office on Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, which called for an allowable Distance Learning Plan (DLP) should a “15 day public health related closure” be deemed necessary. A request was received on March 12<sup>th</sup> for our Public Health Related School Closure Plan and our plan was sent on that date.

Kudos to the Westbridge Academy Team for achieving this formidable task in under seven days. Specifically, I want to take a moment to thank our maintenance crew, clinical team, teachers, administrators, technology staff and office staff who worked tirelessly to ensure that we would be able to launch a viable 15 day DLP.

We are proud to announce that an even more robust DLP will be forthcoming that will be sustainable for the foreseeable future.

### **A Two Pronged Plan**

On Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup> all WBA families were notified regarding our Public Health Related School Closure/Emergency Preparedness Plan via the Honeywell Instant Alert System. Due to the Public Health –Related School Closure, effective Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, WBA embarked on providing instructional and eligible related services (as established by each student’s IEP document) to students through a distance learning platform. The WBA Emergency Preparedness Plan provides for equitable instruction for all students in that it includes two different but similar options for Distance Learning: A traditional paper and pencil model in which distance learning assignment packets are mailed home and a digital learning model for distance learning.

The digital learning model will be hosted on our school website. The main page will host all the information needed including: email contact information for our school during the building closure, resources for parents, and virtual “office hour” schedules for the entire Westbridge Academy staff. Additional information may also be posted on the Westbridge Academy Facebook page as well. Before any major updates are posted, a Honeywell Instant Alert will be sent out to all relevant stakeholders.

WBA student Chromebooks were sorted and packaged on Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup>, sent out on Monday March 23<sup>rd</sup> and most arrived on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Please be mindful of internet and website bandwidth and realize that some visitors may experience difficulties and delays. Never has the world attempted to remotely teach all students at the same time.

This current school closing, announced on Sunday March 15<sup>th</sup>, was set to span a minimum of two weeks, effective through Sunday, March 29<sup>th</sup>. Westbridge Academy will continue to re-evaluate the length of closure and follow guidelines provided by state and/or public health officials.

## **Expectations**

While WBA is well positioned to launch a distance learning experience, we ask that you remain supportive and patient in understanding that this is completely new territory for schools and it is our first experience at educating students, supporting families and districts in this manner. We believe that our staff members will be able to embrace this challenge due to the remarkable qualities that they possess. The DLP experience will evolve over time, as we adjust to a new instructional and therapeutic orientation during mandated closure. The goal is on supporting and connecting with our students and families.

This is a unique time, and the most important consideration is that staff, students, and families stay healthy – both physically and mentally. During this time, our teachers will not exclusively emphasize the grading of assignments. They will make the necessary instructional accommodations and modifications while focusing on three key elements of our core values:

- Feedback and discussion
- Support and coping strategies
- Encouragement and positive social connection

We are mindful that members of our school community (including WBA staff members) may face challenges ahead. As such, we have asked our staff members that if they do not hear from a student or parent for more than two days that a member of the school district child study team be notified in order to reach out via email or phone call.

## **Guidelines for Students and Families: Elementary, Middle and High School**

- A series of distance learning activities have already been created and sent home for students crafted with the individual student IEP at the forefront.
- In the near future distance learning activities will be made available on the Westbridge Academy home page.
- “*Virtual Office Hours*”: Staff will be available from 8:30AM-4:00PM. Certified Substitute Teacher Aides will be available from 8:30AM to 2:30PM. This will serve to facilitate distance learning and to address any questions and concerns.
- Parents should submit questions directly to their child’s Teacher, Aide, or Case Manager via email or phone. Please copy your child’s Case Manager on all email correspondence.
- If a response is not given within 24 hours, please reach out to your child’s Case Manager.
- Should you or your child need assistance or have not heard from your child’s Teacher within 24 hours you can call the school and leave a message at your child’s Case Manager’s extension.

***Chromebooks have been mailed home. Should you need technical assistance, please call the school and leave a voicemail on the general mailbox with your name, call back number and the best time to contact you. A representative from the school will call you back to assist. If parents/guardians have chosen the digital learning model, please make sure your child has access to the Westbridge Academy website and follows the Westbridge Academy Portal section on the main page. Please remember that Westbridge Academy devices and email accounts are only for school-related activities.***

## **Additional Information Related to Distance Learning**

For students that do not have internet access or need a device, please contact your child’s Case Manager so that a member of the administrative team can assist in arranging support.

- Xfinity WiFi Free for Everyone: Xfinity WiFi hotspots across the country will be available to anyone who needs them for free – including non-Xfinity Internet subscribers. For a map of Xfinity WiFi hotspots, visit [www.xfinity.com/wifi](http://www.xfinity.com/wifi). Once at a hotspot, consumers should select the “xfinitywifi” network name in the list of available hotspots, and then launch a browser.
- For eligible families, Comcast is offering a no contract home internet option. More information can be found at <https://www.internetessentials.com/>.
- Counselors, Related Services Staff and Teacher Aides/Substitutes will maintain contact with students/families, as needed, through email.
- Westbridge Academy administrators will be available to all families through email.
- Case Managers will make arrangements for students receiving free and reduced food to receive food at a district location.

Remember, social distancing is not social isolation.

We remain committed to the social, emotional, and academic needs of our students. Wishing you and your families much health and safety during this unprecedented time. Strive to maintain calm as together we navigate this uncharted territory.

Cordially,

*Dr. Viviana Litovsky*

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Director

VGL/AH/AM: