

WESTERN HEIGHTS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. I-041

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Office of the Superintendent

April 22, 2021

Oklahoma State Board of Education
Oliver Hodge Building
2500 North Lincoln Boulevard
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Dear Board Members:

In response to your letter of April 16, 2021, I wanted to bring you up to speed on the efforts the district is making toward cooperating in the probation process. Below, I have answered each of the areas noted in your letter.

1. It is OSDE's understanding that the District's board of education voted on April 12, 2021 to provide in-person instructional opportunities to students, beginning April 26, 2021. As a part of corrective actions, the District shall establish a plan for the return to in-person instruction and ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to offer students equitable opportunities for in-person instruction, beginning no later than April 26, 2021. The District shall make publicly available on its website and seek public comment, taking such comments into account in the development of the plan for the return to in-person instruction. Special priority should be placed on resuming in-person services to students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), or students served under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, whose Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans provide for in-person services and supports. These supports and priorities should include convening IEP team meetings as needed, to review each student's IEP and make any updates determined appropriate for in-person instructional services and accommodations. See OAC 210:35-3-1; OAC 210:35-3-101; OAC 210:35-3-21; see *also* American Rescue Plan Section 2001(i).

The Western Heights Board of Education voted on April 12, 2021 to return to in-person instruction on an A/B schedule. The schedule and plan are attached for your review and has also been placed on our website and Facebook page for parents to review and make comments. The proposed plan includes a section on how the SPED department will deal with students returning to school and those who choose to remain virtual. We also produced a video on both sites that easily describes the return to learn plan. Our website has been updated to reflect a

contact section where parents or stakeholders can submit comments or suggestions to the district anonymously.

2. The District shall ensure full compliance with all standards and requirements for special education services to students with disabilities pursuant to the IDEA, and alternative education program services to students identified as at risk of not completing high school pursuant to 70 O.S. § 566 *et seq.* Further, the District must continue implementing corrective actions required by OSDE Office of Special Education Services for FY 2021.

I contacted my SPED Director on Monday, April 19, 2021 to help me fulfill this request and help in answering the alleged deficiencies discussed at the April 9, 2021 OSDE Board Meeting. Attached is his response on the work his staff has been completing and comparisons to other districts (see attached).

3. To mitigate the effects on instruction and student services of a 25% staffing loss over the past two (2) years due to termination or voluntary departure, the District shall prepare a staffing plan providing for the employment of adequate personnel to deliver all instructional and support services students are entitled to.

Our administrative team has been working on a strategic plan since January. We are no different than any other district in the state when it involves guesstimating next year's enrollment and will the kids actually return. Locating bus drivers has always been a problem for every district and the competitiveness between districts on recruiting continues to increase. I recently viewed a TV interview with Edmond's Superintendent where he expressed the same concerns every district is having – the unknown on enrollment next year, staffing and bus driver shortages. In fact, the Oklahoma School Board Journal (Spring 2021) had an article this month dealing with continued teacher shortages in Oklahoma as well.

At our last Board meeting, the Board did vote to rehire (180) certified staff and will rehire the majority of the remaining Emergency Certified staff in May once the Oklahoma Legislature determines the extension in the coming weeks. We have also put a contingency plan in place with Edmentum if we are short personnel due to unexpected high enrollment. We also plan to rehire most of our support staff at the next Board meeting in May. Just like all other districts, we are always actively recruiting SPED teachers and bus drivers. As far as the 25% staffing loss alleged over the past two years, I am currently having my HR Director and Board Clerk review and submit to you actual numbers of staff leaving versus new staff being rehired. That should provide a more accurate picture and reflect employees throughout the year rather than a point in time.

4. The District shall immediately cease imposing any barriers to the enrollment of homeless students, and implement with fidelity the requirements of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act includes the provision of timely enrollment access to homeless children and youth-with no barriers to the enrollment of a homeless student, such as requiring documentation of residency-and the clear identification of a District homeless services liaison responsible for ensuring homeless youth in the District are served.

I am not aware of any barriers being imposed in our enrollment office. I also spoke with our enrollment clerk and District Homeless Liaison and they were not aware of any barriers being imposed either. The recent federal audit also did not address any concerns or barriers being imposed. In fact, I have never received a complaint to date regarding a homeless issue. I will need to call upon OSDE on how to resolve since we are not aware of any complaints or enrollment issues in the recent audit of our homeless students.

5. The District shall demonstrate implementation of the corrective action plans addressing specific actions that will be taken to rectify findings and concerns identified in the FY (Fiscal Year) 2019 and FY 2020 school district audits.

During the FY 2019 audit of Western Heights Public Schools, I was not the Superintendent of record at that time. I became the Superintendent of Western Heights on August 1, 2019. I will say that our auditor has indicated that a lot of other school districts in the state have done the same and to date no regulatory agency interest or inquiries have been made until March of 2021 when OSDE inquired about Western Heights. The auditor also stated the bonds in question were revenue bonds issued by the Oklahoma County Finance Authority to finance the lease-purchasing financing and not general obligation bonds or the expenditure of any general obligation bonds approved by the Western Heights voters as claimed in the April 9, 2021 presentation to the Oklahoma State Board of Education.

As far as the FY 2020 audit, please see management responses attached to audit and recommendations on corrective action plans moving forward. I also plan to have our auditor come back in three (3) months to conduct a procedures audit to assure the Board and myself that everything has been resolved and sound procedures are in full effect.

6. The District shall demonstrate the use of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to acquire the technology and devices to enable all students in the District to successfully implement the District's Distance Learning Plan, as represented to OSDE's Office of Federal Programs. Verifiable evidence includes purchase orders, invoices, claims to the Office of Federal Programs and itemized inventory listing the equipment purchased with CARES funds.

No CARES ACT monies were ever misused in FY 2020 as alleged. When in fact, the OSDE approved the revised budget of the CARES

ACT monies and also approved the expenditures of Title I monies to purchase the computer devices in question. The hotspots were also purchased with CARES ACT monies in FY 2021 and we plan to claim those expenditures this month. We are currently collecting all of the approvals mentioned and will submit to OSDE in the coming weeks.

7. The District shall immediately ensure that all employee insurance and benefit plans, including but not limited to any cafeteria plans funded through the Flexible Benefit Allowance, are in good standing with no late or outstanding payments due from the District.

This has been a nightmare and work in progress since I inherited the new payroll system first contracted in April of 2019 and began its first payroll in September 2019. Since the new payroll system was never able to achieve the sequencing required through OCAS, I discontinued the contract in April of 2020. However, our payroll department was forced to recreate all the payrolls and deductions in the old system (ADPC) from September 2019 – through April 2020. This included many of the plans and deductions. However, we have been working diligently with American Fidelity on getting everything corrected. Last week, they were able to balance from October 2020 – current and are continuing to work on accounts prior. They plan to issue a letter explaining the current situation and how Western Heights has not been behind on payments rather it's an accounting issue caused by the previous payroll vendor.

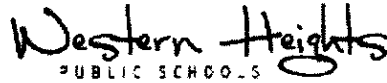
8. Pursuant to OAC 210:35-3-26, the District shall make opportunities available to the community to express desires, concerns, questions, and suggestions concerning the school district and its programs. Further, upon receipt of information from the District community, the District should provide reasonable consideration to the information and respond in a timely manner. To protect against concerns about retaliation that have been raised by community members, the District should also provide a means for the anonymous submission of questions and concerns.

As previously addressed, we have already made it possible for concerned citizens to submit complaints anonymously on our website. We also have public discussion at every board meeting in which many have taken advantage of the opportunity. This month, we had one (1) speaker and next month we have (2) speakers signed up to speak for five minutes each. We also send out questionnaires to our staff consistently asking for their opinions as well as questionnaires in the enrollment center and in packets for parents to fill out. I've had several students reach out to me via email and personally met with numerous parents and students since I have been Superintendent. I also have both certified/support that takes advantage quite frequently of my open door policy. We also participate in Title night where our administrative staff is available to parents and kids.

In conclusion, it is my desire to continue to work with the OSDE and to answer any questions you may have in expediting the process of releasing our school district's probation status so we can all work together for the children of this district. The current situation has caused hardship on our community, district, staff and the hiring of future staff.

Respectfully,

Mannix Barnes
Superintendent
Western Heights Public Schools



Dear State Leaders:

The Department of Special Services at Western Heights Public Schools (WHPS) ensures that every student with a disability is offered a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). WHPS was given a corrective action plan (CAP) on March 16th, 2021 from the Office of Special Education Services. WHPS complied and has been working on improving in the areas cited on the CAP. On April 15th, 2021, WHPS received a review letter from the Office of Special Education Services indicating that the district had already made great progress on correcting the files that were found noncompliant. In two weeks, WHPS corrected 10 MEEGS and 8 IEPs. As of today, WHPS only has 4 MEEGS and 3 IEPs left to correct before May 7th, 2021.

The WHPS special services team was disappointed when all of the state leaders implied that our department was not offering students with a FAPE. In case you were wondering, WHPS is not alone when it comes to receiving a CAP. In Oklahoma, there are 166 districts that are considered level 2 (needs assistance) and 49 districts considered level 3 (needs intervention). However, this was never mentioned in the state board meeting. In total, 215 districts are not meeting the State compliance indicators. To say the least, we are disappointed that the state only mentioned WHPS as being a level 3 district.

We are currently looking at our caseload numbers to ensure that our teachers are not exceeding the 1.0 FTE. On Friday, April 23rd, the leadership team will meet to discuss staffing needs/concerns.

We want to express that we strive to provide every child in our district with the best possible appropriate education. We constantly communicate with our families and document all of our attempts in OK EdPlan.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us.

Thank you,

Western Heights Public Schools Special Services Team



Western Heights Public Schools

Soaring to New Heights

Return to School Plan-Spring

SCHEDULE

Students will return to in-person learning beginning April 26, 2021. The last day of school is May 27, 2021. We will follow an AB schedule for the remainder of the school year.

- Northside (families who live north of SW 15th)
 - Students attend in-person on **Monday and Tuesday**
 - **Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday** are Virtual Days
- Southside (families who live south of SW 15th)
 - Students attend in-person on **Wednesday and Thursday**
 - **Monday, Tuesday, and Friday** are Virtual Days

Your child's school will be contacting you with specific information surrounding the schedule. For those families who prefer to remain virtual for the remainder of the year, you will need to communicate that information to the school site when you are contacted. Please keep in mind, once this decision is made, we ask that you remain in this environment (in-person or virtual) through the end of the school year.

We will resume normal start and end times for our school sites:

- **Middle School and Bridgestone:** Classes start at 7:30 AM and end at 2:30 PM. Doors will open at 7:05 AM.
- **Elementary Schools:** Classes start at 8:15 AM and end at 3:15 PM. Doors will open at 7:50 AM.
- **Ninth Grade Center/High School:** Classes start at 9:05 AM and end at 4:05 PM. Doors will open at 8:40 AM.

All students who attend in-person learning are required to wear a mask or a face shield prior to getting on the bus and throughout the day. Students will be required to wear their mask at all times with the exception of lunch, outdoor PE, recess, or athletic practice.

COMMUNICATION

In order to further protect students and staff members, we are asking parents to drop their child off at the door. We will only have students and staff in the buildings. If you need to meet with a staff member, we ask that you make an appointment.

The easiest way to communicate with staff members is through email. If you do not have an email address, there are many free email options available. Gmail, Yahoo Mail, AOL and other sites have free accounts. We highly recommend you set up an account and ensure that your child's teacher has your email address. Please share your email with our enrollment center so we can easily send messages through our district system.

LUNCH SCHEDULE

We will adjust our current lunch delivery/pick-up schedule. Starting April 30th, we will deliver 5 days of Breakfast and Lunch to the designated stops, or you may come to Council Grove for curbside pick-up from 10:30 am – 12:30 pm on Fridays.

Families who choose all virtual (everyday) may send current students to their school site on the 2 in-person days to eat lunch if needed. (Please follow the schedule above for in-person learning).

Please see our website for more information regarding feeding.
<https://www.westernheights.k12.ok.us/resources/child-nutrition/>

TECHNOLOGY

Students who attend Western Heights have been provided a mobile device as part of our distance learning plan. On your designated in-person learning day, we ask that you please have your child's device fully charged the night before and bring it with them to school each day.

These devices are property of Western Heights and are filtered to ensure students are not exposed to inappropriate materials. By accepting the device, you agree you will be responsible for proper care of the device and that any damage or loss could result in financial liability while it is in your possession.

Students and parents agree only the student may use the device. Friends or younger siblings not in WHPS District, should not use another's device. Responsible use of the device is expected.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The special services department will be calling all parents/guardians to offer both in-person and virtual services. Parents/Guardians have the option to choose between both options. Each site coordinator will be amending IEPs, providing copies of written notices, and ensuring parent participation throughout this entire process. Students with unique disabilities will be offered mask/face shield accommodations so that WHPS ensures every student receives a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- **We will resume bus routes; all students and staff are required to wear a mask or face shield while riding the bus.**
- All areas of the building will be sanitized daily.
- We ask parents to check your child's temperature and do not send a student to school with a temperature over 100.4° F. Any student who exhibits a fever of 100.4° F or higher will be sent home immediately. Per CDC guidelines, students should not return to school until they have been fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications (tylenol, motrin, etc).
- For any student who exhibits COVID symptoms, we will follow CDC and State Health Department Guidelines. We have the ability to COVID test students if the parent requests a test. We must have a signed consent form from the parent/guardian. If a situation arises, you will be contacted by one of our school nurses.
- Due to safety precautions, water fountains will not be available, therefore we ask families to please send a water bottle with your child so they can hydrate throughout the day.
- On virtual days, students are still required to complete all work and attend zoom sessions as directed by the teacher.
- All students returning to school **must be current on all immunizations required by the state department of health.** Please bring verification of immunizations when directed by our school nurses or staff members.

<https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/health/health2/documents/for-parents-vaccines-required-to-attend-school-in-oklahoma-school-year-2020-2021.pdf>

Return Plan

- For students who are making C, D, or F, we will highly encourage these students to come in person. Principals/Directors will make final decisions on who will be recommended to return. We need to let them know they are currently not progressing academically in the virtual environment. We feel your child would be better served by returning to in-person learning. (parent of course has final decision).
- Teachers need to make a list of students not making sufficient academic progress.
- Teachers will begin contacting parents and logging information (Script will be provided)
- Communicate with parents, those who remain virtual will be required to connect to all live Zoom sessions. All virtual days will have zoom sessions live M-Th.
- Attendance-In-Person as normal, Virtual-must be present via zoom daily.
- Students north of 15th Street will come Monday and Tuesday in-person, and students south of 15th Street will come Wednesday and Thursday for in person.
- Once a parent makes a choice of virtual or in-person, the student will stay in that format for the remainder of the year.
- If students are not current on immunizations, they must remain virtual. Kelly will be providing a list to the sites.
- Friday we will continue with what you are currently doing.
- Students will bring charged iPads/Chromebooks daily.
- Teachers will post lessons in Canvas and students will continue to do lessons in Canvas.
- We do not have the inventory to have 5 extra devices in each classroom. If a student does not have a device, we will deal with that on a case-by-case basis. Daryl will address devices in the meeting today.
- Food will be delivered on Friday with meals being provided for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. If a student is virtual on Monday, they will receive an extra breakfast on Friday. If they are virtual on Monday and Tuesday, they can pick up food on Monday which will consist of one breakfast and two lunches. If students are virtual on Wednesday and Thursday, they will pick up food on Wednesday which will consist of 2 breakfast and 2 lunches. Time to be determined.
- Breakfast and lunch will be eaten in the cafeteria. Try to distance as much as possible.
- Classrooms will be sanitized daily, but teachers are responsible for keeping floors picked up and desktops cleared.
- PE and music will only be during in-person days-no virtual for elementary. Secondary will discuss this topic.
- Water fountains will be roped off and students will need to bring a clear water bottle.

- All teachers will be provided a thermometer and teachers will check temperatures prior to students entering their classroom at the beginning of the day.
- Face shields will be provided for all staff. (working on this)
- Students will be required to always wear their masks except for lunch, outside PE and recess. Teachers will need to also always wear shields and/or masks. (Unless it is stated as an accommodation on the IEP)
- Parents will not be allowed in the building. If you must meet with a parent, do it via zoom or outside if possible.
- Jose will work with Paula to deliver Sped teachers/paras with gloves, gowns, shields etc....
- Please designate an isolation room for students appearing with Covid symptoms. It is best if it is NOT the nurse's office, they will need a place to work when they are in your building. We are looking at ordering cots for these rooms for kids to rest on if they are placed in the room. You might also set up a couple of desks, so they can work if they are not feeling bad.
- If a student calls in sick, they can return to school once they have been fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication.
- The district will not provide transportation to Francis Tuttle.
- Academy will remain virtual, with the option to come in-person for assistance.
- Principals can begin in-person staff meetings, but everyone is required to wear a mask and social distance.
- We will have security at secondary, and as needed at the elementary sites.

Dealing with illnesses:

Isolation Room - before you send a student into an isolation room, you must contact Jessica or Colby. They will decide if the student will enter the isolation. We are currently in the time of year where asthma is acting up due to allergy season, plus the weather keeps changing back and forth. Some symptoms might mimic COVID, but both nurses will make the determination on the symptoms.

(Only exception to isolation:.) A student who exhibits a fever of 100.4°F or higher should be immediately isolated in a predetermined room. A parent should be contacted, and the student should be sent home. You can let the parent know we can do a COVID test. If the parent says they want to test their child, get a phone number for the parent, call your designated nurse ASAP, and give them the parent's number. The nurse will contact the parent to provide instructions. The parent will be required to sign a waiver. But remember, the parent is NOT required to COVID test with us, it is a service that we are offering.

Please keep in mind as you take temperatures that you should not take a temperature immediately after a student has been out in the heat or just finished with recess or PE as the likelihood of elevated inaccurate temperatures are likely to occur. Give them a few minutes to cool down.

We have assigned the nurses to specific buildings, so please contact your assigned nurse. Remember, they will not visit your building based on a schedule.

**Colby - JG, BS, GV, 9th Grade
Jess - WW, MS, HS, CG**

We will follow CDC and Department of Health Guidelines. All communications about potential exposure will come from Mannix, Vicki, or myself. As we did throughout the year, if you are told by a parent that the student or something in the family has tested positive, you should immediately contact Kim or Vicki and we will provide your next steps. We are still required to report all positive cases to the Department of Health.