

Dear parents and guardians of Westampton School students,

Happy September and welcome to the 2019-2020 school year! This is my 29th September as a public-school educator and I am as excited about the opening of school this year as I have ever been. Just a few hours ago, I had the opportunity to address our entire staff – teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, custodians, etc. We talked about how we have many different jobs but we are one team, with one goal – the best educational experience for each and every child that we can provide. I was proud to be standing and addressing that group of people as I know they are as dedicated and hard working as any staff in New Jersey. They are all excited to see the students on Thursday!

We really feel that we have been building on years of success from a talented veteran staff and that the last two years have allowed us to identify our greatest priorities to address. This year, I am very happy to announce, we have completed the plan to have 5 sections of every grade level from Kindergarten to 8th grade. This brings our class sizes down for ALL grade levels in our district. Over 70% of our classrooms will start the year with 21 students or less! Nearly all of the rest will be less than 24. Our 3rd grade continues to be our largest class and, even with 5 sections, we will see one or two classrooms with 25. Hopefully, they will continue to be the exception. Part of the trade off of opening new classrooms is always space – and we are running out of it! But, for now, we have enough classrooms to allow us to keep class sizes pretty low. I am also very happy to have Yashanta Holloway-Taluy as our new WMS Principal and Anthony Browning as our new Supervisor of Student Supports/Vice-Principal. Having a new Principal and the addition of an administrator who will be fully immersed in the day-to-day support of our students have us very excited. We have also added two new special education classrooms as we continue to provide a greater spectrum of opportunities for our special education population. We have worked hard this summer to make sure transportation runs smoothly this September – as always, we ask for your patience as the drivers work through the first couple of days.

I have always said that the magic of a school happens “behind the classroom door” – meaning that what happens in the classroom between children and their teachers is at the heart of everything we do. The best way we can help is to create an environment where students are taking personal responsibility for their learning. That means they have to feel safe, they have to feel empowered, they have to see the value of their school day, they have to have pride in their school, and they have to want to protect their neighbor’s right to learn as much as their own. We want to be a community of learners – staff, students, and parents – all dedicated to helping one another reach their potential.

To do this, we need the students to work towards focusing their attention on school. We will have high expectations this year for our students, because we know they can meet them. There is no reason to get “in trouble” on the bus and no reason to disrupt a classroom lesson. If students are truly concentrating on making the most of their school day, then they will not want to spend time outside of the classroom. We want to encourage students to look out for one another and protect the learning time of their classmates. We are asking you to help us send this message to the children – school is precious time for you. It is important time. It matters. That will be our message this year and we ask for you to support that so your children know that all of the adults in their lives are “on the same page”.

September is an exciting time and the possibilities are endless! We are ready for a great year in Westampton Schools! See you at back to school nights!