

3/26/2021

Good Afternoon Parents,

As with every week, I hope this finds you well. We are approaching the end of March and entering a crucial time of the school year. In a typical school year, this is an incredibly busy period, as leaders and teachers juggle the year wrap up tasks with planning for the future. Doing so during the pandemic has made this even more difficult. Your support, flexibility, and understanding makes this work vastly easier and more effective.

### **Early Release for BAMS, BUHS, and WRCC 3/30**

We are continuing our efforts to vaccinate our staff. We were selected to host a medium sized clinic on Tuesday, March 30th from 3:00 - 7:00 at the BAMS/BUHS/WRCC campus. Because the clinic starts during the official student day, we will be dismissing BAMS, BUHS, and WRCC students according to the early release schedules for those schools. All other schools will dismiss at their normal time. We do not anticipate any changes to our Wednesday schedule.

### **Calendar**

We are nearing the finalization of our calendar for the 2021-2022 school year. I will be announcing information about our start date in the coming weeks.

### **School Resource Officer**

In the last week, it was announced that the School Resource Officer (SRO) position will be suspended for the 2021-2022 school year. This decision was made after careful consideration and extensive reflection. The process of entering into a dialogue regarding the SRO position was anchored in a true desire to evaluate how we best build bridges and relationships with our community, including our local law enforcement. After hearing the many voices present in various forums, it was clear that we needed to temporarily halt the use of the SRO in order to create the space in which this conversation could take place.

Although I am not a prolific user of social media, what also was evident is that in a variety of networks, many viewed this decision as a 'win.' This, however, is unfortunate and inaccurate. As I have indicated, our intention from the start was to foster a conversation about the nature of our relationships with our local community. Placing this decision into a narrative of 'winners' also requires we have a counterbalancing group of those who have lost something. In my experience, this creates a seemingly limitless set of challenges to overcome. Further, it causes us to retreat even more deeply into our perspectives and makes us unwilling to engage in the most fundamental action - listening as shame becomes an overriding factor. If we do this, we have all lost. Dr. Brene Brown said it best, "Shame can only rise so far in any system before people disengage to protect themselves. When we're disengaged, we don't show up, we don't contribute, and we stop caring." This is powerful.

In order to reframe the conversation, we must approach this dialogue with openness, an assumption of best intentions, and a willingness to learn. I look forward to sharing a process in the coming weeks and seeking feedback from all our stakeholders, students, parents, faculty, and community members alike. School safety is a top priority and we are obligated to ensure we implement a supportive environment that meets the needs of all our buildings' occupants. The topic of school safety is one in which we must all seek common ground.

## **SBAC**

In the coming weeks, the Windham Southeast School District and Vernon Elementary School will be administering the Smarter Balanced Assessment, or SBAC, to students in grades three through nine. The SBAC is the state adopted annual assessment that is used to monitor student progress over time. Last year, the SBAC was not given due to COVID-19.

The SBAC is a computer-based assessment and students must take it while in a school facility; there is not an option for students to take it remotely. In the past, the SBAC has been used for accountability purposes and there have been attendance requirements related to participation rates. A waiver may be pursued by the state to avoid these accountability issues.

Many have questioned as to the benefits of the SBAC in a year that has been dominated by the COVID-19 virus, remote and hybrid learning, and the implications of the ever-changing nature of our current circumstances. The SBAC is mandated by law and does provide important information as to the progress of students. There is a perception that the SBAC is 'the big test.' This year, we are asking parents to encourage their children to do their best and to also emphasize that this is only one measure. The results we receive will provide us with a starting point for our planning and they do not exist as an end point. We recognize that we will be challenged to address many of the needs that have come from the pandemic and the SBAC results serve only as one data indicator in a field of many. Principals will share information about the SBAC with families in the coming weeks.

Have a wonderful weekend.

Andy

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