

Dear Members,

In the upcoming week you will be receiving a communication from Human Resources Director, Paula Ceglowski regarding your ability to return to work on August 26th. It is IMPERATIVE that you fill out and return the information requested.

I'm sure most of you have been reading the paper, watching the news, or gathering information from other sources in regards to how surrounding school districts will be starting their school year. At this point, our superintendent has elected for Westfield to begin school in a hybrid model, with a four level phase in. This plan has not yet been approved by the School Committee so anything and everything addressed in this letter could change by the end of the week. The decision to return in a phased in hybrid model is the decision of the superintendent and School Committee alone, it is not negotiable, the only things the union can negotiate are issues that have contractual implication.

The WEA negotiations team has been meeting in subcommittees and in full negotiations throughout the months of July and August. Up until this week we haven't had anything to report to you. The information that will be shared in this letter is meant to explain and hopefully answer any questions you may have.

Before we get into what the return to school will look like some definitions and clarifications need to be shared.

**In person return** - the employee will return physically to the building they are assigned to perform their duties.

**Telework** - the employee will be working away from the building, following a negotiated schedule, and using technology to perform their duties. In order to be able to qualify for teleworking the employee must meet certain criteria (which will be addressed below) and provide the appropriate documentation.

**Primary caregiver** - the employee is responsible for taking care of someone who may live in or outside of their home on a regular basis.

**FFCRA Child Care exemption** - this is a biggy - and it is explained in the letter coming from HR

-the employee has children whose districts are fully remote OR do not have child care, and having them home and dealing with their educational needs would prohibit the employee from either teleworking or returning to in person work.

**Not returning to work in either capacity** - the employee is unable to meet the teleworking criteria and is choosing not to return to the building to perform their assigned duties. This would essentially be a leave of absence from your position.

**Appropriate documentation** - if the condition that is prohibiting the employee from returning to work, either in person or remotely, is medical, the documentation needs to come from a licensed medical professional. If the situation surrounds child care, you must have documentation from the district your child attends or the child care institution. This would be in the form of a letter from the superintendent of the school district or the site manager of the child care facility/child care provider.

The first day of school for ALL Unit A members is August 26th (Units B and D should report on the day they are scheduled to return as well). The expectation is that everyone will return in person to the building they are assigned. Itinerant faculty should check with their coordinating supervisor as to where that is.

This is where the information HR is asking for comes into play. We realize that not everyone is going to be able to return to work; however, the reasons and mechanisms of reporting have changed since the pandemic started. The qualifying criteria for an exemption for returning to work are the following:

1. If you have a medical condition that **prohibits you from returning to work and you are able to and wish to telework**, you need to report that to HR on the designated form and provide the appropriate documentation.
  
2. If you are the primary caregiver **for a family member who has a medical condition that would prohibit you from returning to work and you are able to and wish to telework** , you need to report that to HR on the designated form and provide the appropriate documentation.
  
3. If you have children whose district is beginning fully remotely, and/or you are unable to find child care for them, and/or have children who are not of school age which prevents you from returning to work, and **you are able to and wish to telework**, you need to report that to HR on the designated form and provide the appropriate documentation.
  
4. If you have a medical condition or you are the primary caregiver for a family member who has a medical condition that **prohibit you from returning in person or teleworking**, you need to report that to HR on the designated form and provide the appropriate documentation. Your absence will be covered under FMLA and you will be able to use your sick leave.
  
5. If you have children whose district is beginning fully remotely, and/or you are unable to find child care for them, and/or have children who are not of school age which prevents you from returning to work, you qualify for FFCRA coverage, which is detailed in the letter that Paula Ceglowski will be sending out. You will not be able to use your sick time to cover this absence.
  
6. If you do not have any of the qualifying criteria or cannot provide the appropriate documentation and choose not to return to work in either the in person or telework model you will have to apply for an unpaid leave of absence. This will impact your seniority and longevity.

The first two days (8/26, 8/27) will be district professional development days. The next ten (10) days of professional development will be for teachers to plan and collaborate with each other on how this process is going to run. There will be more guidance and

direction coming as the nuts and bolts are negotiated. The first phase of students will be reporting for school on September 14th.

Conversations have begun and will continue surrounding the calendar for this year. At this point there is agreement that we ALL will be working remotely over February break. Snow days will become “remote learning days”. We will be utilizing a district wide calendar where students who are returning to in person instruction will attend school one week and work remotely the next (we’re calling this an A/B calendar)

The district will be providing Personal Protective Equipment for every teacher and student in the district. They went on the assumption that every student would forget their masks every day and teachers would need one every other day. Masks, gloves, gowns, face shields, hand sanitizer, and soap have been ordered in abundance. Disinfectant wipes are being ordered.

This is the information that can be shared at this point, much more will be coming in the next several weeks. Please continue to check your emails. Also, if you have questions please call me so we can have a discussion. One person called me asking if the district is going to be providing them with the hazmat suit they were told they were going to have to wear. I was glad that I could have a conversation and assure them that hazmat suits WERE NOT going to be mandatory wear.

I can be reached at

[timex614@gmail.com](mailto:timex614@gmail.com)

[l.lyncosky@schoolsofwestfield.org](mailto:l.lyncosky@schoolsofwestfield.org)

413-427-8332

You can call or text me. If you text it would be enormously helpful if you would identify yourself so I know who I am speaking with.

The negotiations team is working as fast and as furiously as they can to get answers and to make reopening as safe as it can possibly be. They have attended zoom meetings while they've been on vacations and their dedication is to be applauded.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Lyncosky

WEA President