

Westampton Township Public Schools

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Good afternoon,

The first week of the new school year is done! It was truly great to see full hallways and classrooms, teachers teaching, and students learning. We are excited about our computer distribution to all students (and encourage you to sign up for GiantCare Insurance) and all of the things that come with the start of a new year.

The greatest frustration so far this year has been bus transportation. I want to sincerely thank the entire community for their patience and understanding. The drop off for all three schools has gone very smoothly and everyone has been polite and helpful in making it work. Bus arrival and dismissal times are still a great challenge, and I wanted to update you on where we are. I thought it best to answer for all some of the questions to which we have been responding.

What is the actual problem with bussing?

At its core, the problem is a lack of drivers. Between worker shortages, sickness, and quarantines, the bus companies all across New Jersey (actually, the entire country) has a significant shortage of drivers.

What problems does that cause?

The lack of drivers means that bus companies cannot cover every bus run at the same time. Most of our buses are also used by Rancocas Valley High School. A typical run for a bus is to go to RVRHS for a 2:30 dismissal, pick up students, and drop them at home. That bus will then come to our Middle School for a 3:10 dismissal, drop them home and come back to pick up either Holly Hills students or Intermediate School students. When the bus company is short a driver, they start this process with a "double run". This means that, after the bus does its first RVRHS run, it "doubles back" for a second RVRHS run. This puts it late by 20-30 minutes to WMS, which makes it late to Holly Hills or WIS. When multiple drivers are out, this occurs for several runs.

Can't we get another bus company to help?

We tried. This summer we put all of our routes out to bid to try to get more coverage for our bus runs. There simply is not enough supply (drivers) to meet the demand.

Will it get better as the year goes on?

Yes, and no. Every year the bus routes shave a few minutes off their time after the first week or so. Imagine RVRHS emptying and all the students going to their buses. Then drivers are navigating new routes and getting familiar with their stops. After a week or so, students get to their buses faster, the buses leave the schools faster, and the bus gets to their next school earlier. So, overall, times will improve. However, to be completely honest, the "double run" issue is not going away. We will be dealing with that likely all year.

Can we at least be made aware of when our bus will be late?

Absolutely. We need this week and next to understand exactly when buses will arrive at schools now that they have actually hit the road. We are working on a communication plan that will let families know when buses are leaving the school late, or if they will be late to bus stops. We are ready to communicate this now – and have tried as best we could this week – but we rely on our bus companies to let us know as soon as possible when they have an issue. That hasn't happened as consistently as we need it to, but we are working very hard on that. When we do implement this, it will be through text messaging, so please make sure that your contact information is correct in Genesis.

Our highest priority is getting children home safely. Late buses cause schedules to be interrupted and can cause some worry at home, but the students are always safe – either with a teacher, an administrator, or a bus driver. Our next priority is to keep you informed as best we can. The best way you can help us is to reinforce good bus rider behavior with your child. The quicker students get into their seats, keep their masks on, and keep the noise at a good level, the safer and more efficient the ride to and from school will be. We continue to greatly appreciate your understanding and support as we make adjustments to best serve our students.

Have a wonderful and safe weekend!