



Watertown High School

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

I hope you have been enjoying the summer. Watertown High School has been quieter than normal, but we've still served as a hub for summer school and a variety of community activities. Our custodians and facilities crew have also been hard at work cleaning the building and taking care of projects. We look forward to greeting all students on Tuesday, September 6th, with a building and a staff that are ready for a year of fruitful learning and growth for the youth of Watertown.

In order to prepare for the start of the year, along with some announcements and updates from me, you'll see a newsletter from our guidance department with important dates and information, a health form from the school nurse and an application for free and reduced breakfast and lunch at the school. Please review these materials carefully. ***The athletics office has sent their summer mailing already with information about eligibility for fall sport participation. Students must turn in completed orange cards and have them cleared before they can practice, and practices start during the week of August 22nd.*** Get those cards in, and stop by the school if you need another. Call WHS and ask for Mike Lahiff, athletic director, if you have any questions or concerns. Meanwhile, ***keep in mind that the first day of school is Tuesday, September 6th. Ninth grade students report at 7:55 a.m. and tenth through twelfth grade students at 9:55 a.m.***

My own summer has involved a mix of management, vacation, and learning. This past week I had the opportunity to participate in a fascinating conference on the future of learning. Over several days, we examined new developments in mind/brain research that shed light on adolescent learning. We also examined trends in globalization and technology that are changing the world students are living in and impacting how we think about the education our children need. At Watertown High School, we'll work hard over the coming years to ensure that WHS is a school that matters to every one of its students, helping them to take hold of a brighter future in a rapidly changing world.

This year, we're making it our theme to improve in the realms of the command and care students experience in their school. We want all members of the Watertown High School community to experience it as a safe and orderly learning environment in which they are known and cared for. Following this letter, I list a few new things we're working on in this arena along with some other announcements and a few tips about communication to and from the school.

I look forward to seeing you at back-to-school night on October 6th. Here's to a marvelous start of the school year in the weeks to come!

Warmly,

Steve Watson

CARE

-In a very difficult budget environment, we are still doing our absolute best to offer the widest possible range of academics and extra-curriculars. In addition to our existing slate of academic, athletic, and extracurricular offerings, this year we are re-launching two student clubs that have fallen by the wayside in recent years: a service club and an international club. ***We hope every student excels in school and takes the opportunity to get involved in at least one extra curricular activity***, whether trying out for a sports team or play or joining a club to meet some new friends and explore some new interests.

-Our ninth and tenth grade students will take part in our new advisory program. Each week for half an hour in the morning, our underclass students will meet in smaller groups with a faculty or staff member to discuss topics of interest and think through some of the issues that help ensure students' academic and socio-emotional success in high school. We think these advisories will help our younger students make positive connections with each other and an adult in the building. Eleventh and twelfth grade students will be assigned to homerooms during this time or will have the opportunity to apply to be peer leaders in an underclass advisory.

-Ninth grade students will again report earlier on the first two days of school for new student orientation. Additionally, tenth grade students will report one hour early on the second day of school for an introduction to their advisories.

-Twelfth grade students will experience ***an expansion of our tradition of senior privilege***. For any period in which seniors are unscheduled, they will have the opportunity – with parental and school administration approval – to leave campus instead of attending a study hall. In return, we will ask them to ***complete an internship or complete some other independent learning activity***. We do not have open campus, but this freedom for seniors should help enrich their final year in high school and give them the opportunity to prepare responsibly for their increasing freedom that lies ahead.

COMMAND

-We continue to roll out programming to ensure that Watertown High School is a safe place for students to grow up from the boys and girls who arrive to the young men and women who leave. We have formed an anti-bullying task force and continue to train staff on bullying prevention. Beyond the advisory program we are launching, keep an eye out for other initiatives in this area.

-Relationships of mutual respect are foundational to a successful school culture and learning environment. Just as faculty and staff will discuss these relationships at the start of the school year, ***we ask that each family have a conversation prior to the start of the school year about the kind of behavior – with peers and adults, in school and out of school – that will ensure that all members of the WHS community feel safe and respected. Talking specifically about the kind of language we use and don't use in school and the things we say or don't say about others online will go a long way toward starting the year with the respectful culture we're looking for.***

-All students will receive a student handbook at the start of the school year, a copy of which will also be posted on our website. It's critical that you review this handbook carefully; a signature page will need to be returned to the school in September. Please carefully review our attendance policies in particular. We need all families' cooperation and support in making sure students are in school and on time each day. ***If your child needs to be absent or late on a given day, we need your prompt cooperation in documenting the reason and following our attendance procedures. Unexcused absences and cut classes can have enormous negative impacts on student learning and carry large consequences for them as well.*** Family vacations and travel are one example of student absences that we can not excuse – please don't plan any travel outside of scheduled

vacations or before June 26th, the 185th scheduled day of school (in the event of snow days.) We appreciate your support in making sure that your children are in class, on time and ready to learn.

COMMUNICATION

At WHS, we send you very little mail. There are many other ways that we communicate with you, though. Our school website – <http://www.watertown.k12.ma.us/whs/> – is the hub of much of this communication. Let me highlight school communication you can access through that site.

-We send home with students' report cards at the end of each of our four marking periods and progress reports halfway through each marking period. These are our teachers' primary communication with you about student grades and attendance. Ask your children to see them. Also, ***sign up for our iparent service through our website.*** There, you'll have easy access to your child's records including all reports, grades and attendance. Click on the iparent link, sign up just once, and provide a valid email address for yourself.

-I send out an ***email to parents roughly once a week with news and updates.*** Those emails will start coming around September 1st. If you don't receive these, subscribe to the email list through a link you'll see on our website as well. Also each week, we update the calendar – ***This Week at WHS*** – on our website, with a schedule of a variety of events around the school.

-In an effort to best communicate and partner with you and the broader school community, I've also taken a dive into the digital communication revolution. I'm starting a blog I'm calling School That Matters, which you can access through our website, and I'm on twitter as WHSWatson. I'll highlight news in these spaces but also use them stimulate thinking and conversation around the issues and questions that matter most to high school education in Watertown and beyond.

-Finally, I encourage you to not just communicate virtually but make contact with your children's teachers and schools in other ways as well. Email your teachers any time you have a concern or need an update. Come to any of the headmaster's coffees for questions and discussion; the first is at 8 a.m. on September 15th. . And please, ***plan now to be at our open house/back to school night on Thursday, October 6th, at 7:00 p.m.***

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I'll introduce several new staff and teachers at the back to school night. For now, though, let me announce a new hire that is not new to WHS at all. Joining Ms. Boudreau and me in our school administration is long-time WHS science teacher Brian Brewer, who will be our Dean of Students while continuing to teach two classes in biology and anatomy and physiology. Mr. Brewer's primary focus will be partnering with Ms. Boudreau in managing student attendance and behavior and supporting student engagement and success.

Student schedules are largely finalized. In late August, we are able to make small changes to balance course numbers or correct mistakes made in our scheduling process. Schedules will be given to students when they arrive for their first day of school. ***They will also be available through iparent starting on August 16th.*** If you or your child has any concern regarding core academic classes in their schedule, you may make an appointment with the guidance department by calling the guidance secretary, reachable through the school's main number – 617-926-7760 or directly at 617-926-7736. Guidance counselors will be available for appointment on August 30th and 31st. ***Students who would like to register for a Virtual High School course – online learning in a variety of classes, receiving full credit at WHS – can register for a VHS class on Wednesday, August 31st.***

School starts this year on Tuesday, September 6th. For the first two days, all incoming ninth grade students report to the high school cafeteria at 7:55 a.m. and students in grades 10, 11 and 12 report at 9:55 a.m. This late reporting time for returning high school students allows us to help ninth grade students in their transition to high school. Dismissal is at 2:30 p.m. on both days. ***Thursday, September 9th and thereafter, all students will report at 7:55 a.m. and be dismissed at 2:30 p.m.*** These early days of school are critical for teachers and students in starting our year well, so please make sure that your children are present each day and on time.

Meanwhile, let's make sure no one forgets their summer work. ***All English and social studies classes have summer assignments, as do selected math and science courses.*** Information is available on the high school website and in the WHS Guidance office.