



**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
VERNON TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT**

P.O. Box 99/625 Route 517, Vernon, NJ 07462

Phone: 973-764-2900 Fax: 973-764-0033 Web: www.vtsd.com

Karen D'Avino

Superintendent of Schools

kdavino@vtsd.com

Dear Parents/Guardians,

There has been much discussion in Vernon regarding the reopening of schools and how we will most effectively follow recent guidelines released by Governor Murphy. Some of you are questioning the decision to sell or lease Walnut Ridge Elementary School amidst the crisis of the pandemic. This correspondence will provide additional information for you on this topic.

The decision to list Walnut Ridge for sale or lease was made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting our region. The Board of Education discussed the facilities footprint of our district during the October, November, and December work sessions in 2019. As many of you are aware, our Board of Education meetings are live streamed. They can be viewed on www.youtube.com on the evenings of scheduled Board meetings. You can also choose to subscribe to VTHS Studios or you can [click here](#). To review agenda items or minutes, please [click here](#). The goal of the Board and my office is to provide transparency to the community regarding the sale or lease of Walnut Ridge and keep you informed of other important happenings in our district. On February 13, 2020 the Board voted unanimously to approve the sale or lease of Walnut Ridge School. They also approved marketing and issuing an RFP (Request for Proposal) for a commercial real estate broker who could properly market our school.

The sale or lease of Walnut Ridge was predicated on declining state aid in upcoming school years and in response to community discussions regarding the right size of our district relative to our student enrollment. In order to reduce spending we looked at areas of reduction including closing a school. Many plans were reviewed. Some of these included discussion on closing other schools. Another plan included reassigning grade levels (redistricting). The smallest number of students are enrolled at Walnut Ridge therefore making the close of Walnut Ridge less disruptive than other options. Walnut Ridge also has an independent infrastructure which made this plan more optimal than other choices. The decision to sell or lease Walnut Ridge occurred in the efforts to reduce year over year spending. Costs in closing Walnut Ridge included facility costs, property insurance, utilities, salary and benefits. This is a total savings of approximately \$500,000 per year.

The process to vet the sale or lease of Walnut Ridge Elementary School has been transparent and was a topic for discussion at several meetings. The building is listed for sale. Any school district

that sells a building must follow a formal bid process which will occur in Vernon, in regards to our school.

The district continues to plan on how we will reopen in September and we are considering all options for our students. We have reviewed the data our community has provided evidenced by surveys, emails, and calls. Reopening options will adhere to the Governor's guidelines, embrace important health and safety needs and address educational needs of our students amidst a global pandemic. For the most recent, up-to-date discussions, please tune into our Board of Education meeting on July 16, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. Our Board of Education meeting will be followed by podcasts, town hall meetings (with virtual options for attendance), and regular correspondence to our families regarding the district reopening plan for September 2020.

Sincerely,

Karen D'Avino

Karen D'Avino

Superintendent of Schools