WESTHILL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

CAROL A. ILACQUA, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services
Phone (315) 426-3215

STEPHEN A. BOCCIOLATT
Superintendent of Schools

400 Walberta Road
Syracuse, New York 13219-2214
Phone (315) 426-3218
Fax (315) 488-6411

MARILEE P. HILL
Assistant Superintendent for Business Administration
Phone (315) 426-3210

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Dear Parent or Guardian:

This letter is to inform you that the State of New York has entered a heightened surveillance stage resulting from the presence of a swine flu virus that is making people sick in Mexico and in several states, including New York State. Although to date only mild illness has occurred in the United States, we realize that many people are worried and we hope this letter will help address those concerns. Despite confirmed cases of swine flu in a private school in Queens, New York City, we believe students can safely attend classes here and schools will remain open at this time (with the exception of the school in Queens at which confirmed cases were discovered).

State and local health departments have advised us that students can continue to come to school, as long as they are not sick and do not think they have flu symptoms. Flu-like symptoms include: fever (over 100 degrees F.), feverishness, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or stuffy nose. Additional symptoms may be experienced with swine flu, including muscle pain, fatigue, and sometimes vomiting or diarrhea.

Flu spreads easily. If you suspect your child is getting the flu, it is important that he/she does not attend school or go places—such as group childcare, the mall, or sporting events—where other people would be exposed to flu germs. If your child exhibits symptoms while at school, he/she will be dismissed from school following our normal building procedures.

It is also important to teach your children how to reduce their risk of getting the flu and protect others from infection.

- Teach your children to wash their hands often. Washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is ideal (that's about as long as it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice).

- Teach your children the proper use of hand sanitizer. Gels, rubs and hand wipes all work well, as long as they contain at least 60% alcohol. Hand wipes must be disposed of properly. Always read and follow label instructions when using hand sanitizer.

- Teach your children to keep their hands away from their face and avoid touching their mouth, nose, or eyes.

- Teach your children to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or by coughing into the inside of their elbow. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve—not your hands!

- Help your children to learn these healthy habits by setting a good example and always doing them yourself.

If we all practice good hygiene, health officials believe we can limit the spread of swine flu in our schools. We are consulting with local health officials regarding best cleaning practices for infection control in our buildings.

While the current situation does not warrant school closure, if swine flu continues to spread and more students become ill, it may become necessary to close schools for a period of time. We are working with our School Physician and County Health Officials to monitor the situation and will make all decisions in consultation with them and state officials. We will inform parents immediately if the situation changes and it becomes necessary to close schools.

If schools are closed, please do not make arrangements—such as sending children to a friend's home or group childcare—that will put students in close contact with other children. It is important to plan ahead. Have a family discussion now to consider options in advance of the event of a school closing.

We strongly encourage you and your family to stay well informed through media events as well as accessing the following information at **www.cdc.gov, www.nyhealth.gov, www.schoolhealthservicesny.com**, or the 24 hour toll-free hotline that New Yorkers across the State can use to get answers to their questions. The hotline is 1-800-808-1987. In addition, updates from the district will also be posted on our website at www.westhillschools.org. Thank you as we work together to keep our children and our schools healthy.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Bocciolatt
Superintendent of Schools

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Westhill Central School District
400 Walberta Road
Syracuse, NY 13219-2214

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