



MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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JONATHAN PONDS, ED. D.

Superintendent of Schools

September 25, 2020

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

Your feedback remains a valuable resource to us. Your concerns, suggestions, and reflections on remote or hybrid learning, utilizing tents for outdoor learning, physical education practices, technology, grappling with how to assist with related services for special needs children, and more are the kind of comments we need to serve your children well. We care so deeply about all your children, and while actions may not occur as quickly as you would like, our intention is to return students for in-person learning done safely and consistently.

Thank you for following our safety guidelines of mask wearing, social distancing, and hand washing while we take precautions to keep each other safe. These measures are important especially as we are approaching flu season.

College Board Scholastic Assessment Tests (SATs)

On Wednesday, September 23, Montclair Public Schools' staff and parent volunteers successfully administered the SAT to approximately 180 of our MHS seniors at the Charles H. Bullock School. The district is pleased that we were able to offer this opportunity to our students and extends a special thank you to all for their efforts! The next administration for MHS seniors will be Wednesday, October 14. Registration information was sent out to the high school seniors and as a reminder registration for the next test is September 29 from 2 to 5 pm.

Social and Emotional Activities

As a way of making connections for students with peers and mentors, the Healthy Minds Committee has partnered with the Montclair Public Library to offer a Book Buddies Program. We will be recruiting teen volunteers who will be trained by our professional library partners on how to conduct reading sessions. Our younger children will be paired with a teen buddy. Please use this link ([Reading Buddies Program](#)) to sign up your child by October 2 to participate. Our teen volunteers will be signed up at a later date.

Health and Wellness

As COVID-19 continues to spread, we hope our families are following suggested guidelines of mask wearing for everyone in your household over the age of two, social distancing and hand washing to halt the spread of COVID-19. Mask wearing may be the single most important thing we can do to keep ourselves and others safe.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and public health experts are encouraging influenza vaccinations, especially this year. Contact your healthcare providers with any questions.

K-2 Students

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to speak with a Neuropsychologist. We spoke about the remote learning experiences and impact on our youngest learners. During remote teaching, we knew that breaks would be beneficial for all students, especially our youngest learners. I learned that the science shows that breaks used intermittently within a lesson or between lessons should be no longer than 5 to 10 minutes in length. If they are longer, it is difficult to regain the students' attention back to the class. Managing break time is one small, concrete technique our teachers will be utilizing to give the students flexibility but also retain attentiveness. We will continue to review and rework our practices for the best interests of all learners.

Please continue to reach out to your child's principal for specific and individualized information about your child's schedule and daily instruction. By now you should have either picked up classroom materials to use with your children at home or received a message from your principal regarding a schedule for pickup.

Remote Classroom Guidelines

Online learning is new and different for students and also for parents/caregivers. We ask that parents/caregivers work with us as partners and at the same time respect the teacher's role in the classroom. Even though instruction is taking place in your home, it is still a classroom with rules, and teachers need your courtesy. Please be mindful that the teacher is developing relationships with students and setting the tone for classroom management. We are all in this together and appreciate your consideration.

Special Education

Pupil Services Director Tom Santagato and his administrative team are revising their plan to meet the needs of our most at-risk students. They are working with our medical team and school district doctor. The plan will be finished by the middle of next week, and I will report out in my next update.

The FDU Orton-Gillingham program will begin conducting sessions with students on September 30 and continuing every Wednesday for the entire semester. Our evaluation and testing will resume at a timelier pace.

Facilities

The work continues on diagnosing our HVAC systems and ventilation across the district. Our long-term work is progressing with the assistance of our professional engineering firm (EI Associates), an outside mechanical contractor (Sanders Mechanical), and our own internal staff. We have identified parts or entire systems that need to be replaced and are inoperable. As far as short-term repairs, several smaller problems throughout the district are being addressed as well as identifying the scope of work for further assistance from qualified mechanical contractors for larger issues. Our overall goal is to bring systems back to their intended design state. We are constantly reevaluating and resolving newly identified issues as we move forward. Most recently all 200 portable HEPA filtration units with a UV component have

been delivered. These will be used for the spaces without mechanical ventilation or areas of concern. As of today, we are on schedule for a return to school in November.

Technology

The Office of Technology continues to distribute devices to families in need. Please contact your children's school so that a work order request can be made.

We have been addressing various concerns regarding Chromebooks for sound and/or video issues and using Zoom and Seesaw. In this regard, we are pleased to share our first edition of our [Montclair Public Schools Chromebook Troubleshooting Guide for staff and families](#). Please take a look at this resource for tips, suggestions and instructions to get your devices operating properly.

Lastly, we encourage anyone who is having technical difficulty to contact our Technology Support Line at 301-259-1510 between the hours of 8 am to 3 pm, Monday through Friday.

Student Representative on the Board

If you virtually attended the Board of Education meeting on September 21, you were introduced to our student representative on the Board, Ms. Genesis Whitlock, a senior at Montclair High School and Student Coalition President. We are excited to have this new addition to our Board to advocate for and represent the student voices, especially those who are marginalized. Through her conversations with fellow students, she hopes to foster community, focusing on issues of racism in and outside of the classroom, social justice, environmentalism and more. She is committed to making sure the needs of students are met, providing resources, being a supporting voice and engaging her peers in advocacy and helping mobilize action. As we learn from these deeper conversations about racism, microaggressions and equity, we build our capacity for enacting change.

New Board Member

Our Board of Education is now complete with the appointment of its seventh member Allison Silverstein on September 21. Ms. Silverstein is enthusiastic about her work on the Board and serving our students and community. You can read more about her on our [website](#).

Community Resources

The New Jersey Department of Human Services is providing tuition assistance to parents/caretakers with school-age children ages 5 to 13 in need of childcare due to remote learning. [Details and application](#).

On Monday, September 28 from 4 to 6 pm, Essex County will be offering rapid COVID-19 testing at our George Inness Annex parking lot. The tests are by appointment only and are being offered to Essex County residents free of charge. To make an appointment, please visit www.EssexCovid.org or call 973-877-8456.

Through the USDA Child Nutrition Program, nutritionally balanced, free lunches for all students [are available for pickup](#) Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm through December. The [free/reduced lunch program](#) is also available to families who qualify.

Reminder: The district is closed Monday, September 28 for Yom Kippur. For those of you who observe Yom Kippur, I wish you a meaningful fast.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent

All Kids can Learn ~ All Kids are Special