

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent of Schools

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

October 30, 2020

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

As some of you already know, a confirmed case of COVID was reported this week in the Watchung Elementary School. Watchung families were informed of the cleaning steps and staff members in the building are in self-quarantine. As a result, we have moved **our hybrid reopening date for PreK-Grade 5 until November 16 and for Grades 6-12 until November 30**. Although disappointing, this decision reflects our best judgment regarding the health and safety of all concerned.

Our Buildings and Grounds team along with outside contractors are focused on preparing our hybrid classrooms. We are endeavoring to answer your questions and address your concerns as quickly and efficiently as possible. Likewise, we understand that even after in-person classes begin, new questions and concerns will arise. We appreciate your patience as we prioritize tasks and communications and remain confident in our plans for a safe and engaging learning experience.

The details provided below will help you understand the scheduling and logistics for the classrooms in PreK-Grade 5. More information about the Grades 6-12 hybrid reopening will be available in the next update.

Arrival and Dismissal

School principals will communicate to their families specific guidance for the arrival and dismissal of students with a focus on the fulfillment of all safety protocols. Earlier we indicated that students could arrive 10 minutes before the bell, but that procedure has changed. **Please do not drop off students until each school's designated [start time](#)**. This will allow the teachers time to enter the building and follow their own safety procedures before student arrival. Our apologies for any confusion.

Hybrid and Remote Teaching and Learning - A peek into the classroom

The district's Department of Equity, Curriculum and Instruction, working with colleagues in the Department of Technology, have been researching best practices to create a model for teaching *all* of our students—those who choose to come into the school buildings for face-to-face instruction and those who opt to learn remotely. Their research included consultations with educators from other districts, including Livingston and Princeton, as well as a site visit to the Millburn Public School District.

The model in brief: PreK-Grade 5 classroom teachers will work with both an assigned district laptop and additional device to engage students learning remotely even as they interact with those at their desks. Both in-classroom and at-home students will see the same Smartboard—*life-sized* in the classroom, *screen-sized* at home. Teachers will be fully trained in this mode of instruction by the time doors open.

For a glimpse of this teaching model in action, a video will be available on Monday.

Changing from Hybrid/Virtual

You may request to change your child from hybrid to virtual at any time by notifying the teacher and the principal. A change from virtual to hybrid is only allowed at the end of a trimester in Grades PreK-5 and at the end of marking period in Grades 6-12. Please note that we are making a correction to the date for switching from virtual to hybrid for elementary students.

- **Elementary schools:** The first trimester ends on December 10, and if you wish your child to return to hybrid for the second trimester, you must notify your principal by **December 1**.
- **Middle Schools and High School:** The date remains the same. If you wish your child to return to hybrid for the second marking period, you must notify your principal by **January 6**.

Mounties and Bulldogs

All families will be notified through Genesis of their children's placement in the Mountie or Bulldog cohorts. We are currently balancing the groups.

Transportation

You will be notified of your children's bus stop the week prior to school reopening for the hybrid model.

Before and Aftercare

The YMCA of Montclair, working in partnership with the Montclair Board of Education, is committed to providing before and aftercare programs for the Montclair School District beginning November 30. A YMCA satellite program will be in all elementary and middle schools provided a minimum enrollment is met and space is available. Space will be limited due to new state guidelines and rooms available in each school. More information will be forthcoming.

Online registration will begin November 16, and you can find further information on the [YMCA website](#).

Facilities

The work on mechanical systems in our buildings continues as we move toward opening the elementary schools on November 16.

Our schools—including Charles H. Bullock, our newest building—have both mechanical and natural ventilation. Areas in which the sole source of ventilation is natural or where repairs are still in progress will be supplied with air purifiers. If mechanical ventilation is working properly, air purifiers are not needed.

The Montclair Police Department will be increasing patrols around all of our schools as an extra security measure, as we will have windows open in certain rooms.

The proposed medium-term project of bi-polar ionization is currently in the design phase and will take several months to complete. The long-term, more involved projects will take longer. A timeline is currently being developed and this will not affect the reopening of schools in a safe manner.

For your convenience we have put together a Facilities Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document which is posted to the [COVID page](#) on our website.

Health and Wellness

As we approach re-entry, please make sure your child's required health records have been submitted to your child's school nurse. The nurse can answer your questions regarding these records.

Before students return to hybrid, families will be required to complete a COVID-19 health and wellness contract which will be available in Genesis in the coming weeks.

Reminder: With Halloween approaching, the state has provided [guidance for celebrating safely](#).

Reminder: Addressing positive cases of COVID-19

While we are in the hybrid model, we will be addressing positive cases of COVID-19 on a case-by-case basis. We will follow all guidelines from the CDC, Montclair Health Department and our medical team with respect to contact tracing, notification, quarantine periods, and class and/or school closure. If someone is excluded from school because of COVID, we will require several factors to be met before allowing return, such as symptoms, quarantine time, and medical clearance note. The school nurse will be your point of contact should the need arise. As always, your health and safety are of utmost importance.

Food Service

Please be advised that based on the new dates for the hybrid opening, a revised food service schedule will be released in the coming weeks. Food service is available for every child regardless of free and reduced meal status.

Technology

If you are in need of a device or a hotspot, please email your child's principal as we are only a few weeks away from our hybrid opening. We will continue to distribute devices/hotspots to our students and families in need. Anyone who is having technical difficulty should contact our **Technology Support Line at 301-259-1510**, Monday through Friday from **8 AM to 3 PM**.

Reminder: Devices are distributed at Hillside School on Tuesdays, from 9 AM to 12 PM.

At this time, I'd like to thank Ms. Terry Trigg Scales for her support and hard work as Montclair High School's Interim Principal since September. Officially, her last day is today; however, we know that she will always be a Mountie at heart. The families, students, and staff of Montclair High as well as our entire district truly appreciate her service, especially during these challenging times. We wish her the

best. Ms. Eileen Gilbert, currently Assistant Principal at Montclair High, will be taking the helm as Acting High School Principal on November 2. High School parents will be receiving an update about next steps for the high school leadership later today.

As we gear up for the cooler temperatures and wonder how we will cope with limited outdoor time, I'd like to share an [article](#) that one of our counselors brought to my attention. Taking care of our emotional health is just as important as our physical health.

Please remember the district is closed Tuesday, November 3, for Election Day; and Thursday and Friday, November 5 and 6, for the NJEA convention.

Wishing you a safe, healthy, and relaxing week.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent

All Kids can Learn ~ All Kids are Special