



MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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JONATHAN PONDS, ED. D.

Superintendent of Schools

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Montclair Public Schools

Montclair Public Schools to go Fully Remote in September

At a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, August 13, Superintendent Jonathan Ponds announced that Montclair Public Schools would be implementing fully remote teaching and learning in September. Dr. Ponds, along with his Senior Staff team, presented a plan that was decided upon with safety and health for students and staff in the forefront.

His team, listed below, represents some of the many stakeholders that have been working side by side, day by day, and really minute by minute to design the district's next steps.

- Mr. Emidio D'Andrea, Business Administrator,
- Dr. Kalisha Morgan, Assistant Superintendent for Equity, Curriculum and Instruction,
- Mr. Damen Cooper, Director of Personnel,
- Dr. Felice Harrison-Crawford, Director of Operations and School Support Services,
- Mr. Tom Santagato, Director of Pupil Services,
- Mr. Chris Graber, Director of Technology, and
- Ms. Betty Strauss, District Nursing Supervisor

The following is directly from Dr. Ponds' Town Hall message:

Reopening plans in this fluid, ever-changing environment are challenging at best. Everything we are doing is contingent upon supporting the health and safety of our students and staff, and we are committed to doing so. We began this effort of designing a reopening structure with the collaboration of many stakeholders with the goal of bringing all students to school as much as possible with safety measures in place. This included the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), regular cleaning and sanitization of all facilities, hand hygiene, classroom layouts designed for six-feet of social distancing, and proper ventilation in our facilities.

Based on the information that has been communicated to me by my team, it is my judgement that we need to begin the school year in a fully remote model. Although, it is my understanding, that our ventilation system is adequate and appropriate for a typical school year. This clearly is not a typical school year. My determination, however, is based on the

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current information regarding the ventilation systems in all of our buildings. We need to make some changes to address the enhanced needs that this viral pandemic presents. We are working diligently with our architect and engineers to enhance our building ventilation where needed in response to COVID-19. I will be monitoring the work that needs to be done to safely resume in-person instruction in our buildings. As soon as we are reasonably able to determine the timeframe required to remedy this situation, I will provide dates and deadlines about this work to not only the public, but also to the New Jersey Department of Education.

This decision weighs heavy on my heart. I know that children and families alike were anticipating a return to school in some form and were waiting for normal routines. Sadly, this decision must be made in the interest of health and safety.

Remote learning will be rigorous. The spring taught us lessons. We have used this time to evaluate our methods of instruction and prepare for live instruction that is standardized across grades and schools. We are talking to teachers and parents and asking questions about their experiences with remote learning, like, What went well? What didn't? What do you need?

We are redesigning virtual learning, and I want to emphasize that it will most definitely include real-time interaction between students and teachers. Professional development will be rich and plentiful so that our teachers begin school with a toolbox full of fresh ideas and proven strategies for engaging students in a meaningful way. We are extending the start of school for students to September 10 to give us four days at the beginning of September for training and professional development. This professional development will continue throughout the year to refocus and analyze to ensure teachers, students, and families have the support they need. Our *Parent University* which will be rolled out in September will host resources and how-tos for families to help with remote learning as well as practical tips for handling the daily stressors of this new normal. We are also looking out for the social emotional wellbeing of our students, teachers and families with counselors and child study team members who will be ready to support and assist.

Rest assured that while we are going fully remote this September, we are proceeding with all our planning for a hybrid model. We are not abandoning our hybrid option, but are continuing to perfect the logistics so we are ready to spring into action when the time is right; the time is **safe**. We will be planning for that transition back to the classroom with our action plans ready when needed.

Your children will still be placed in a Mountie or Bulldog group early next week if you choose the hybrid model for when we are ready to go in person. We are working on remediation of our facilities and keeping a close eye on all safety factors. We have our supplies of PPE ready and thermometers and scanners for temperature checking.

This is an emotional time right now, and I realize that some families will welcome this change and others will not. It simply comes down to looking at the facts and keeping safety as the first priority and at the forefront always. The district is also keenly aware of the hardship of many families when it comes to childcare. We will have more details with how to get help through programs such as the YMCA. We will also continue to serve breakfast/lunch meals to students eligible for free/reduced meals and details on that will be in my updates.

In order to best prepare the community for what the future may hold, I will continue to share updates and more details regarding teaching and learning. We will alleviate our logistical roadblocks. You may continue to communicate with me. I am listening, my team is listening, we are going to offer a robust virtual schedule, and we will get through this together.

As I said in my talks with many of you, **I firmly believe that All Kids can Learn, and All Kids are Special**, and we will work to **turn this belief into a reality in Montclair**.

Thank you.

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Following the Town Hall, you may submit questions to the district at: Reopening@mpsdnj.us