



# MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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**JONATHAN PONDS, ED. D.**

*Superintendent of Schools*

### ***Welcome Families, Caregivers and Staff***

September 3, 2020

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

Welcome to the start of the 2020-2021 school year! I do hope everyone made the most of the summer to relax and enjoy family time. Beginning the year remotely does not, for one moment, dampen our spirits for feeling joy and excitement to greet your children. We are excited for our first day with students on **September 10**.

Every year brings change, challenges and opportunities. I think you most likely would agree that none of us could have anticipated the changes and challenges that we would face. However, by embracing the hidden opportunities in these changes and challenges, we can grow, create new ways to connect with students, and develop methods of instruction that are rich and engaging.

This 2020-21 school year is special, and we realize that you have been through a lot. You have my promise that we will get through this together as we begin anew. We want you to know that my team and I are fully committed to ensuring that your children experience high-quality instruction, they feel safe and secure, and they continue to grow, learn and achieve! Our district staff is focused on academics, social emotional learning, and of course, preparing for when we will be back in person.

Please see below a few items related to our reopening planning. A regular update will be issued next week.

#### **Before School Starts: Log On and Check Equipment**

Please be sure to charge your device for at least 30 minutes before starting. After that select the power button located at the top right-hand corner of the device. Before the first day of school, please check out the following links to become familiar with some of the tools and platforms we will be utilizing during remote learning:

##### **Google Meet**

<https://meet.google.com/>

**Zoom**

<https://zoom.us/>

**See Saw**

<https://web.seesaw.me/>

If you are still in need of a device, please contact your child's school. Our Technology Department is ready to help with technical questions, and you can reach them using helpline 301-259-1510 should you need assistance.

**First Day of School**

On September 10, the first day of school, teachers will be "meeting" with students and families to review routines, get to know one another, review expectations and procedures and go over the technology platforms they will be using. As a reminder, please check the [Remote Learning Plan](#) posted on our website for more details.

**Facilities**

Many of you have asked about the short- and long-term fixes for ventilation. The Board appointed EI Associates to do an in depth investigation as a follow-up to our initial assessment at its meeting last night. They have made short-term recommendations which include damper adjustments to increase outside air filter upgrades and needlepoint bipolar ionization technology. This short-term work has begun. Long-term fixes require more extensive remediation and include mechanical equipment replacement and supplemental mechanical equipment installation. As we mentioned last week, we are planning on short-term repairs to be completed by November 1.

**Food Service**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new waiver that will allow states to extend the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) through December 31. The SSO option allowed districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program to serve meals at no charge to all students, regardless of pay status.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA) has not provided guidance as of yet on any specifics on how it should be implemented. We are awaiting further direction from the NJDA. We will communicate in a **separate email** the meal service locations and times that will begin on September 10.

**Addressing Student Engagement and Social Emotional Needs**

During the summer a group of stakeholders comprised of administrators, teachers, and parents/guardians met to identify issues prevalent with student engagement in a remote academic setting and match those issues with appropriate interventions that promote the academic success and well-being of all students. The committee's priorities were to ensure that the social emotional needs of all students would be addressed and that remote learning would be accessible, practical, and developmentally appropriate for students at each grade level.

The Healthy Minds committee is addressing the mental health and social emotional concerns facing our students, staff, and families. Surveys have been sent to stakeholders and responses analyzed. We will begin the year with addressing some of the needs voiced and continue to enhance our offerings. We have established partnerships with MFEE, the YMCA and the Montclair Public Library as well as mental health organizations to assist us with creating short videos to help parents/guardians help their children during this difficult time, formation of online book clubs, organizing volunteers to lead remote social groups, and more.

*Back to school may look a little different this year but we would love to showcase pictures of our students excited and ready to begin the new academic year. **On September 10**, please submit your family's first day of school photos for inclusion on the district website to Jennifer Fusco, [jfusco@montclair.k12.nj.us](mailto:jfusco@montclair.k12.nj.us).*

*We have an exciting year ahead, and I will keep you posted with updates about our progress. I look forward to the days that our connections are not solely by email or Zoom, but in-person meetings and events. We are making progress, and those times will come.*

*Have a wonderful Labor Day!*

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jonathan Ponds  
Superintendent

*All Kids can Learn ~ All Kids are Special*