

# MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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### Superintendent of Schools

*Weekly Community Message No. 11*

**Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.**

February 26, 2021

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

February was an exciting month around our schools. Each year, Black History Month is celebrated in our classrooms with a variety of interesting and vibrant activities. In addition to lessons and projects across subjects and grades, students also had the opportunity to engage in unique virtual experiences including historical and cultural presentations and assemblies. See an example of the creativity of our teachers and students: Sherry Ayres 4th grade class at Northeast recited and recorded [Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise."](#)

As part of its Black History Month activities, Glenfield Middle School captured the town's history and sense of community in a virtual forum featuring Montclairions who spoke about their experiences growing up here through a racial lens. Social Studies teacher Vincent Pelli and Montclair Community Leader Diane Anglin hosted the annual speaker series, renamed the [Karen Wingfield 'Growing Up Montclair' Speaker Forum](#), in remembrance of its co-founder and long-time district educator.

See a [compilation](#) of the Black History Month highlights from around our schools.

February also means budget season is upon us. In addition to presentations at our Board of Education meetings, the Montclair PTA Council is hosting a public forum where the district will discuss the budget process and there will be an opportunity for questions. Please see details about this forum at the end of today's message.

Please see some district updates below:

### **District Seeks to Compete for Grants**

The district will be pursuing grant opportunities to allow us to enhance our educational services for all students. Grants provide us additional revenue so that we are in a position to extend students' learning time, create additional extracurricular activities for them, and prepare them for goals beyond high school. We aim to expand the choices that students have with high school programs so that they are equipped to continue their education at colleges, universities, or seek trade or technical careers. As we look into applying for grants, the 21st Century and the Early Childhood Grants are top on our list.

### **Update on Delayed In-Person Instruction**

As we are still in an active litigation matter, the district is not in a position to comment at this time.

### **Free and Reduced Meal Application**

Now, more than ever, we ask you to submit an updated Free/Reduced Meal Application. Please note that if your circumstances have changed because of COVID or another setback, and you are out of work, you may qualify. We want to make sure the district is receiving all the Federal and State funds to which it is entitled. Please remember that all information reported is confidential and is not disclosed to anyone including teachers, staff or other students.

The 2020-21 Free/Reduced Meal [Application](#) is on our website. If you cannot access it online, please call your school office or the Business Office, and we will arrange for you to get a paper copy of the form.

Montclair will continue to participate in the USDA Child Nutrition Program with benefits approved through June 2021 so that every student can receive a free meal seven days per week regardless of their free/reduced meal status. See [flyer](#) for details.

### **Toni's Kitchen Delivers**

No family should ever go hungry. If you are experiencing hardship during these troubling times, please see the flyer ([English/Spanish](#)) or details.

### **Pupil Services Update**

Thomas Santagato, Director of Pupil Services, met with the faculty from FDU this week to discuss next year's Orton Gillingham program and the addition of another cohort of 12 teachers. There will be an informational seminar for all staff who may be interested in the certification program on April 22 at 2 pm. This will coincide with our Curriculum Thursday Professional Development opportunities. Students who are currently participating in the FDU after-school program will have an opportunity to continue next year if they qualify. We are happy to announce that the Orton Gillingham program will expand next school year to include students who qualify in grades 4-8.

### **Registration Reminder**

Registration for the 2021-22 school year began on February 15. For more information on the registration process and documents required to register, please visit our [website](#). All registration events will remain virtual for the 2021-22 school year.

### **Technology**

To help keep our children safe online, the district is in the process of adopting online services provided by GoGuardian. Please be advised that this has **not** been a districtwide initiative. We have piloted this in several technology classrooms and have recently conducted a training for our high school teachers. Additional training sessions and communications will be forthcoming.

**First and foremost, GoGuardian is only in effect when students are logged in on a district Chromebook or other device while ONLY using the school's domain the MPSDNJ.US account. Go Guardian cannot access personal devices and files.** When students are signed into a Chromebook or Chrome browser using an @MPSDNJ.US account on any device, teachers can close tabs for students, send messages to students, and lock students' screens. Messages between a teacher and student on GoGuardian are logged. Students can only message the teacher, not other students.

We will communicate more about this service to all stakeholders before it becomes a districtwide initiative and get feedback and comments from our families. It may be helpful to know that 10,000 other schools, including our neighbors Millburn, Livingston, So. Orange Maplewood, and Orange, use GoGuardian.

### **The Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence (MFEE) Annual Appeal**

MFEE is in the final two weeks of its Annual Appeal. MFEE is Montclair's local education fund, an independent non-profit that raises private dollars to engage and empower students, teachers and supporters of public education. Please consider [making a donation](#) that will go toward supporting grants, creating innovative programs, and developing district-wide and community initiatives that align with the district goals.

### **Montclair PTA Council (PTAC) Community Conversation - Understanding the Montclair Public Schools Budget Process - March 4, 2021, 7:30pm-9:00pm**

Join the PTAC for a [panel discussion](#) about the budget process where I will be speaking along with Business Administrator Emidio D'Andrea, Supervisor of Accounting Melissa Beattie, and former district Business Administrator/PTAC Vice President Brian Fleischer. Learn more about the processes, procedures, inputs, regulations and parameters under which the school district develops, revises and finalizes the annual operating budget and capital budget.

Registration required: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAlcOmpqDlqHdVlzZN3HhlgSwq2pmjgvl2o>

To submit a question in advance, email [ptapres@montclairpta.org](mailto:ptapres@montclairpta.org).

*Reminder: If you or a family member needs to be tested for COVID-19, the YMCA is offering [free COVID testing](#) at its Park St. facility.*

*Enjoy the warmer weather this weekend, even if it means carrying an umbrella!*

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jonathan Ponds  
Superintendent