

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent of Schools

Weekly Community Message No. 14

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

March 19, 2021

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

This week I am happy to report on some exciting news and great accomplishments of our students. At the same time we celebrate our good news, we must also pause to condemn the hate, discrimination and violence against Asian Americans. We, along with the country, grieve for the victims, stand in solidarity with the Asian community, and remain a district committed to diversity and anti-racism. We will always stand for what is right and teach our students the evils of discrimination in any form. Thank you for being part of these meaningful conversations with your children.

Watchung Receives \$10,000 Grant

Congratulations to Watchung Elementary School on being selected to receive a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey for Schools Grant funded by the New Jersey Education Association! Drury Thorp, Watchung's STEAM and environmental science teacher, and parent volunteer, Sarah Paulsen, submitted the grant proposal for "[The Connected Courtyard](#)" project that will turn the currently overgrown area into a thriving outdoor space featuring a native plant garden, bird and beneficial insect habitat, and outdoor classroom with STEAM centers. Sustainable Jersey for Schools is a certification program for public schools in New Jersey that provides tools, training and financial incentives to support and reward municipalities and schools as they pursue sustainability programs.

World Language

At the March 15 Board of Education meeting we recognized and honored our 19 seniors who achieved the Seal of Biliteracy, an official recognition from the New Jersey Department of Education. It is a national credential that attests to each recipient's unwavering dedication to proficiency and global citizenship. The Seal affirms that these seniors are prepared to utilize the language that they have acquired as they commence their post-secondary pursuits. All recipients of the Seal have demonstrated Intermediate-Mid or higher proficiency in at least one language other than English and have fulfilled

their English Language Arts graduation requirement. The district is proud of this amazing group of talented seniors and invites you to read more on our [website](#).

Science

The **Montclair High School Physics Club** [won the Physics Olympics](#), sponsored by the New Jersey Section of the American Association of Physics Teachers. This year the event, held annually for more than 30 years, was virtual and took place over two weekends. Out of a possible 300 points, Montclair scored 290.6. As a result of this win, the High School gets to display the Physics Olympics Bowl trophy for a year in its trophy case. Montclair's name and year will be inscribed on the Bowl.

Government Studies

Montclair High School's **Model Congress Team** won Honorable Mention at the Columbia Model Congress Conference last weekend. It also won a number of individual distinctions. The team did exceptionally well competing against students from all over the United States writing and debating for the passage of their bills in congressional committees and full sessions.

Please see district updates below:

In-Person Instruction for PreK-5

Principals will continue to communicate with families weekly on particulars associated with the start of hybrid instruction.

YMCA Before- and After-Care

When in-person instruction opens, the YMCA will be offering families of children in grades K-8 before- and after-care. Please [see the flyer](#) for details and registration information.

In-Person for Middle Schools and High School

Information will be released about the start of hybrid, in-person learning for the middle schools and the high school in the upcoming weeks. In preparation for this, we ask that you review your child's choice of either hybrid or virtual. **To request a change from virtual to hybrid for middle school, please contact your child's principal, and for high school contact your child's grade-level administrator.**

Please note that if you have selected hybrid for your child and wish to change to all virtual, you may do so at any time.

Pupil Services

For details regarding hybrid, in-person instruction for Special Education students in grades PreK-5, please see below:

- All self-contained students PreK-5 will attend five days a week following their school schedule.

- All Special Education students who have resource room or in-class support services in their IEP will attend with their associated cohort (Mounties/Bulldogs) following their school schedule.
- All related services will be provided virtually to the students. An exception being when weather permits, related service providers may choose to perform in-person therapies outside for students attending class in-person. Areas would be designated by the principal.
- All CST evaluations will take place in-person to the greatest extent possible.

Vaccinations for Staff

We are pleased to announce that Mountainside Hospital has increased the number of vaccines it can give to our staff to 100 per week. Staff members, if you wish to get a vaccine, remember to sign up when you receive the email from School Messenger with the link and instructions as soon as possible.

Pooled Testing

We will begin routine, scheduled Pooled COVID-19 testing (by consent only) for our students and staff shortly after school re-entry. This testing is another layer of mitigation and is used for screening to gain information at a population level, rather than an individual level, and an entire classroom can be completed in minutes. Students and staff swab each of their nostrils four times, then place their swab in a tube. We will pool up to 25 swabs in one tube.

Test swabs are sent to a Rutgers Lab, and the district will receive results within 48 hours. If any pool is positive, all parents and staff in that pool will be notified. The staff and students in that pool will be offered the following options:

- Quarantine for 14 days
- Individual PCR testing arranged by the district (paid for by private health insurance or COVID funding arranged by the lab). Those with negative tests may return to in-person school
- Private PCR testing. Those with negative tests may return to in-person school

In my [last weekly message](#), I provided a number of informational videos to which you can refer.

Budget

The first review of the Board-approved budget was held by the Board of School Estimate (BOSE) last evening. The public is always encouraged to attend and a video will be posted to the website by Monday. The next BOSE meeting will be Monday, March 22, and a link to join will be posted on the homepage of the website on the day of the meeting.

PTA Council (PTAC) Community Conversation - MPS Budget Process, Part 2

Have you ever wondered how our district is funded, how enrollment affects class sizes and both of these numbers affect the budget, or how principals are engaged in the budgeting process and what that ultimately means for your school community?

The high-level points of district budgeting were covered on March 4 when the PTAC hosted a panel discussion with myself, Business Administrator Emidio D'Andrea and Supervisor of Accounting Melissa Beattie. If you missed it, please watch the [video](#).

There were still questions and lots of interest after the first meeting so the PTAC is hosting another session on Thursday, March 25, 7:30 - 9 PM. Join to learn more and bring your questions (and a friend) to engage in the conversation. Please [pre-register for the event](#).

REMINDERS

Technology

Please contact your children's principal if they need a device. We continue to distribute devices every Tuesday from 9 AM to 12 PM and 1 PM to 3 PM at Hillside School (Entrance B, Red Door on the Hillside Ave. side). For immediate technology needs, please contact Support at **301-259-1510, M-F, 8 AM-3 PM**.

Calling all Families - Your Application Matters

The district has an opportunity to apply for Federal and State funding and resources that can help us implement Pre-K education. Please submit a [Free and Reduced lunch application](#). When applying for grants and funding, we must be able to produce free and reduced lunch statistics. **Please note that if your circumstances have changed, and you wish or need to be considered for assistance, please apply.** Again, your completed application is critical and will get us closer to applying for resources that will help our students.

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](#)) for details.

Montclair Neighborhood Development Corp. (MNDC)

MNDC is hosting a virtual [Career Development Institute](#) and is accepting applications through March 31 for students ages 16-18. Please call **973-744-9094** for more information.

Enjoy the start of spring!

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent