

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

22 VALLEY ROAD ~ MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY 07042

WWW.MONTCLAIR.K12.NJ.US

PHONE: 973-509-4020 FAX: 973-509-0586



Superintendent of Schools

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

April 16, 2021

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

We celebrate our opening for in-person/hybrid this week, and I am happy to report that with the collaboration of the Montclair Education Association and all of our administrative team, custodians and support staff we had positive experiences throughout the PreK and Elementary Schools. Security staff and our secondary administrators were also at the buildings with words of encouragement and first-day greetings while ensuring appropriate PPE protocols and procedures were being followed.

For a glimpse into the opening days, here are a few anecdotal comments from parents, principals, and a student:

- Principal to parent: "His enthusiasm is fantastic to hear and see; he said 'Hi' to me three times already!"
- Parent: "For the first time all year, he did math work in the book yesterday and came home and finished the last two problems on his own."
- Parent: "He participated in gym on Zoom yesterday afternoon without fighting me because he was so happy to be in school in the morning."
- Principal: "This whole time, we have just been a building. Now, with students and staff in the building, we are a school again."
- Student: "This is the best day ever."

As the saying goes, pictures are worth a thousand words; please see our [photo gallery](#). Our teachers have done an amazing job utilizing the technology. It was great to see our teachers and students back in the classrooms, engaged and making our buildings places of joy again.

Please see District updates below:

In-Person Learning for PreK-5

As our plans for in-person instruction began well before the CDC changed its distancing guidelines, and we have just started getting our students back in school, we are taking time to assess our procedures and instruction. We will also be implementing pooled testing in the near future. This testing, combined with evaluating the in-person environment, will provide an opportunity to reevaluate the six-foot distance.

In-Person Learning for Middle Schools and High School

On Monday we will be announcing an in-person date for Middle Schools. Please note that my team and I are working with the secondary principals on all of their needs including preparations for moving up ceremonies and graduation at the High School.

Equity, Curriculum and Instruction

The [District Equity Team application](#) closes on Friday, April 16. Please be sure to complete it if you want to be a part of the team.

Summer learning information will be emailed to families. We are asking all parents to complete a survey so that we can adequately plan for the number of students who wish to participate. For program descriptions please see our [website](#).

Spring 2021 New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) administration has been canceled by the New Jersey Department of Education. The Start Strong assessments in ELA, math, and science will be administered in the fall. See our [website](#) for further information on testing and graduation requirements.

Food Service

Please be advised that meals will be available on Mondays and Thursdays to any student who is attending in-person learning upon dismissal from the elementary schools. Additionally, parents/guardians can pick up meals on Mondays and Thursdays for one hour at any elementary school starting one hour after the elementary school dismissal time. For those parents/guardians who cannot pick up meals at an elementary school during the afternoon hours, please pick up meals at the High School on Mondays and Thursdays from 4 to 6 PM.

Pupil Services

Pupil Services was very excited to have our students back in the buildings for in-person instruction. Each school was supported by our Supervisory Team for their initial arrival. We would like to thank all our support staff members for their hard work and preparation prior to students beginning in-person.

Transportation

With the first week of hybrid learning winding down and after receiving feedback, we are addressing some issues to ensure an improved experience going forward. **Please be sure to monitor Genesis for updated bus assignments over the weekend.**

Technology Office

Every PreK-5 school was outfitted with the appropriate technology prior to the start of school and our entire technology team did an amazing job supporting the schools throughout this first opening week. In addition, all technology requests placed by teachers, building principals and office personnel have been satisfied. Of course minor glitches occurred and most were handled with a technician assisting teachers with logging in/accessing programs/cameras/sound, just to name a few issues. The Technology Office is monitoring the work order system to address technology needs if/when issues arise in a most efficient manner.

Community

MFEE is sponsoring a free **COVID-19 Awareness Event** for families, **Saturday, April 17, 1-2:30 PM**.

Bring the kids to the Montclair Community Pre-K Playground, 49 Orange Road, for supervised playground time and activities while adults engage in an interactive conversation about COVID-19 vaccines. Dr. Renee Baskerville and MFEE Community Health Workers (CHW) will provide information and answer questions. CHWs will be able to register attendees to receive the vaccine at Mountainside Hospital. [Pre-registration requested](#).

Montclair Mutual Aid, Parents Who Rock and Toni's Kitchen have teamed up to host another [Free Food & Music event](#), **Sunday, April 18, at Glenfield Park from Noon to 2 PM**. There will be live music and distributions of free bags of food, menstrual products, masks, toys, and games. The event is rain or shine.

Meet the [Montclair Scholarship Fund](#), through a [documentary](#) produced by 2016 Montclair High School grad Zack Bermack. Please consider making a donation in conjunction with **National College Decision Day (May 1)** to support our students with rising tuition costs. All donations go directly to fund the scholarships.

[Out Montclair](#): A new, nonprofit organization to focus on educational and social events, leisure activities and building community for LGBTQIA+ residents and allies is holding its first event on **April 27** for a panel discussion on gender/pronoun terminology. Councilor-At-Large Peter Yacobellis, Garden State Equality's Jahmila Smith and Celeste Fiore of the Transgender Affirming Alliance will lead the discussion.

Celebrating the Month of April

As a district that truly values diversity and respects the many cultures of our student, staff and family population, I want to take a moment to highlight a few April recognitions:

- [National Autism Acceptance and Awareness Month](#): Spreading awareness of the signs, symptoms, and realities of autism promotes acceptance and inclusion, not just this month, but throughout the year. The District is committed to supporting every student as it understands and respects that each student has unique needs, gifts and talents. We encourage school staff to show their solidarity in support of Autism Acceptance Month by wearing yellow on Wednesday, April 21.
- **Arab American Heritage Month**: We pay tribute to our Arab American families as their contributions are recognized and celebrated. According to the [Arab American National Museum](#), Arab Americans trace their origins to 22 countries across the Middle East and North Africa: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
- **Mathematics and Statistics Awareness Month**: According to the Mathematical Association of America, this year's theme for an awareness of mathematics is "Mathematics and the Cosmos." The association explains that, "mathematics is at the core of our attempts to understand the cosmos at every level." At the District we appreciate all of our mathematics teachers and their students as they aim to learn, compute, and deepen their understanding of concepts that encompass the world around us.

- **National Child Abuse Prevention Month:** This has become an annual observance in the country dedicated to raising awareness and preventing child abuse. The District is committed through its policies, counseling services and social emotional learning programs to promoting positive student and family well-being.
- **Sexual Assault Awareness Month:** Now in its 20th year of recognition, Sexual Assault Awareness Month is about awareness and prevention of sexual assault, harassment, and abuse. Campaigns focus on stopping sexual assault before it happens, changing behaviors and promoting respect. The District supports awareness efforts.
- **National Deaf History Month:** This observance actually spans March and April and ended on April 15. This month was organized to raise awareness of deaf issues, people and culture and also to celebrate the accomplishments of people who are deaf. Ludwig Van Beethoven, the great classical composer and pianist, is probably the most famous deaf person. The District is proud to support activism, perseverance, and education for all regardless of disabilities.
- **Ramadan:** A month of sacrifice, prayer and fasting from dawn to sunset began April 12. We wish our Muslim friends a most holy month and a joyous festival (Eid) during the last three days when the fast is broken. Eid Mubarek to our Muslim community!

REMINDERS

Technology

Please remember to complete the daily COVID form prior to coming to school each day. Please contact our Manager of Information Systems through Genesis Parent Access should you require any assistance with the form.

We continue to distribute technology to our families every **Tuesday from 9 AM to 12 PM and from 1 to 3 PM** at Hillside School (Entrance B on Hillside Ave. side). Please contact your child(ren's) school so a work order can be placed. Once the work order is placed, someone from the Technology Office will reach out to you and coordinate a date and time for pickup.

YMCA Before- and After-Care

The YMCA is offering families of children in grades K-8 before- and after-care. Please [see the flyer](#) for details and registration information.

Travel Guidance

The District will be following the [guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and the New Jersey Department of Health in relation to travel to and from New Jersey. Please be sure to review this as we put safety and health first for all. Persons who are fully vaccinated, two weeks past the second dose of Moderna or Pfizer or two weeks past the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, do not need to quarantine.

Congratulations to three of our students, Buzz Aldrin sixth graders Aaria Shah and Samaara Navani and Buzz eighth grader Ila Bhattacharjee, who were named winners of the Friends of Anderson Park Short Story Contest for middle schoolers. Friends of Anderson Park, a non-profit organization founded in 2006 and dedicated to thoughtful stewardship of the park, has been organizing the event since 2018. [Read more](#) about these talented students and their entries.

*I'd also like to congratulate the **Edgemont PTA volunteers** who won the **2021 Jan Harp Domene Diversity and Inclusion Award**. The National PTA and National PTA Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee select only one local PTA in New Jersey to receive this award which recognizes PTAs that best demonstrate outstanding achievement in the areas of diversity and inclusion as well as efforts to end discriminatory practices. Edgemont School submitted its work on a mural project, the MLK Day virtual jazz event and Roots and Shoots service project, Harvest Day, creating a space for dialogue to deepen awareness of racial literacy through virtual town halls, and facilitating discussions and outreach to parents to better understand their needs during this pandemic to garner this recognition. Thank you, Edgemont PTA and families!*

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent