

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent of Schools

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

December 18, 2020

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

What a year this has been! Challenging and unprecedented have been used to describe it throughout the nation as we saw the pandemic change the way we live, work and educate. Now more than ever, I am honored to be in Montclair as we work through these times together. We have had our share of ups and downs and twists and turns, yet through it all our community has shown its strength, courage and adaptability.

Since becoming your Superintendent in July, I have strived for quality virtual experiences for our students until we can safely return to in-person instruction which is scheduled January 25. We are addressing our facilities with our short, medium and long-term plans. We are evaluating our literacy instruction, response to intervention, intervention and referral services, new strategies to support students with dyslexia, culturally responsive training, Students Accelerated in Learning (SAIL) and beginning a Special Education audit just to name a few of the areas that support our students.

We saw a movement unfold in the nation to address systemic racism. Here in Montclair we witnessed our young people stand up for what they believe. One of the driving forces that brought me here was the diverse community. I believe that *All Kids Can Learn* and *All Kids Are Special*. In this district, we are committed to that mantra and to ensuring and promoting equity, inclusion, access and opportunity for all students in all classrooms, multicultural education, restorative justice, racial and cultural competency, and of course, diversity.

I am impressed with the way our students continue to thrive as they explore ways to be entrepreneurial and philanthropic, receive their first college acceptances, and excel in sports and the arts. Additionally inspiring is how our families support one another in times of need and advocate for their children. While I wish we could have met in person, I have sincerely enjoyed getting to know you virtually and am eager to continue building relationships with our students, families and community members. We have also seen some administrative changes, and I can confidently say that they and our staff have gone above and beyond to adapt and lead our district through this new educational environment.

I'd like to share a few updates below:

- **Equity, Curriculum and Instruction**

The **Students Accelerated in Learning (SAIL)** committee convened for an initial meeting this week. Stakeholders in attendance included Board of Education members, building and central administrators, teachers, as well as parents and guardians. The committee was joined by a gifted and talented educational consultant, Dr. Lenore Cortina. She provided a comprehensive overview of New Jersey regulations and laws, program and service models, as well as identification in the area of gifted and talented education. The presentation was followed by a robust conversation, as well as the articulation of goals focused on continuity and equity in regard to gifted and talented programming throughout the district. The SAIL committee's work will be ongoing throughout the duration of the 2020-2021 school year. The community will be apprised of updates as the district continues to evaluate and refine the SAIL program.

- **Food Service**

During the winter break, we will continue to offer meals as follows:

- One day distribution on **Monday, 12/28**, at **Bullock, Northeast, Nishuane, and Montclair High School** from **11:30 AM to 1:30 PM**.
- Meals are for 12/28 through Jan. 3.
- A whole pizza will be provided for the seven days of meals for each child in each family.
Each pizza will be packed in a pizzeria pizza box. The pizza will be par cooked and frozen. Cooking directions will be placed on the outside of the pizza box.
- Seven breakfast kits will be provided.
- A gallon of milk will be distributed to cover the normal 14 half pints of milk that would usually be distributed (seven breakfasts/seven lunches).
- Fruits and vegetables for the seven days will be included.

- [A Season of Giving](#)

- **Student Accomplishments and Acts of Kindness**

- Four Watchung students were selected as winners in last year's 4th grade County of Essex Poster Contest and featured in the 15-month 2020-21 calendar. Students were asked to express their appreciation for the history, people and beauty of Essex County. Those students, now Watchung 5th graders, are Calen O'Neil, Chloe Stoilkovic, Ilija Jakimoski, and Isabelle Hayes. Congratulations!
- Montclair High School Girls Soccer player Claire Manning was nominated by MHS Athletic Director PJ Scarpello to receive an award for National Girls and Women Sports Day which will take place virtually on February 3, 2021. Claire will receive recognition, a certificate, and the accolade of being named New Jersey Woman of the Year for Montclair High School!

- Jack Pitts, a third grader at Charles H. Bullock, recently completed his second annual neighborhood coat drive ("Thanks and Giving") benefiting Toni's Kitchen. It was a huge success! His sister, Jayla, a second grader at Bullock, also helped, as well his youngest sister, Julianna, who is 3 years old. The kids delivered fliers throughout their neighborhood asking for support in their mission "to keep everyone warm this winter." Since the Friday after Thanksgiving the siblings have been sorting/organizing the generous donations and this week Jack dropped them off to the delight of Toni's Kitchen staff. His donation of blankets was put to immediate use by Montclair Police Department Officers who need warm items for those who are homeless. The coats and winter accessories will be available to others in need.

- **Technology**

We will be distributing devices to students/families who have previously requested them from their building principals on Monday, **December 21** at **Hillside School** (Entrance B on the Hillside Ave. side) between the hours of **9 AM to 12 Noon and from 1 to 3 PM**.

Before the new year unfolds, I would like to thank everyone who has been so kind, patient and supportive these past few months. I am grateful to serve as your Superintendent and to be working with a talented, dedicated team of educators and support staff.

Wishing you health, love, peace and joy this holiday season and all through the new year. It is my hope that you will relax and spend time with your loved ones and that the new year brings many reasons to celebrate.

From my family to yours, Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas, Happy Kwanzaa, Feliz Navidad, and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent