

# MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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### Superintendent of Schools

*Weekly Community Message No. 7*

**Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.**

January 29, 2021

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,  
Members of my administration, legal counsel, and I have been meeting with the Montclair Education Association (MEA) since Saturday, January 23, in an attempt to reach an amicable resolution to enable the elementary school teachers and our students to return to hybrid, in-person learning.

I understand your need for further information; however, this is a sensitive situation and because we are currently in mediation and working with legal counsel, we do not want to compromise either process. It is important for everyone to feel heard, know that their safety is paramount, and that we reach the common goal of getting our students back to the classrooms.

I understand how stressful the idea of reporting to work in-person could be for some of our staff. I understand the true anxiety surrounding much of what we are dealing with today given the worldwide pandemic. I understand the discussions surrounding batch testing for COVID-19 and the situation with the distribution of vaccines. I understand and do not discount any of these concerns.

Our discussions are ongoing and open, and we are considering various options in order to reach an agreement. Please know that as soon as I am able to communicate our next steps, I will do so. In the meantime, there is a lot going on in our virtual classrooms. Next week we kick off Black History Month with Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools Feb. 1-5, and despite the challenges of the remote environment, our students will be engaging in a multitude of activities which promote equity and fairness. We will be capturing these stories on our website.

Please read about highlights for Black Lives Matter Week of Action in School, Black History Month, and some housekeeping reminders below.

- **Health and Wellness**

#### **Masks**

The district will be following a strict mask policy during in-person learning. Details on types of approved masks as well as guidelines for drinking, snack time and medical considerations will be in your principals' newsletters.

- **Food Service**

Meals continue to be distributed Mondays and Thursdays 11:30 AM to 1:30 PM at Bullock, Nishuane, Northeast and Montclair High School.

- **Technology**

Reminder: The Technology Department is asking all families who are using personal devices to utilize their Google Chrome Browser when participating in virtual learning. Our district has invested in many online tools and various applications that work best with the Chrome browser.

Please call our Technology Support Line (301-259-1510) should you require any assistance. Lastly, please contact your child's building administrator if you are in need of a device.

- **Athletics**

Please keep in mind there are **no** spectators allowed at any of our winter sports events. We will be live streaming our **varsity** boys and girls **basketball games** and other sports from the Main Gym and Annex Gym. The games will be rebroadcast on TV33/34 and you can also view them on Montclair High School's web page under the *Parents* tab - [MHS Live Streaming](#).

- **District Honors Black Lives Matter Week of Action in School**

In September the Board of Education designated the first week of every February, which this year is February 1-5, as Black Lives Matter (BLM) Week of Action in School. The Week of Action is a national initiative that focuses on racial justice and equity in the classroom. During the Week of Action schools will focus on discussing and learning about Black history and culture, institutional racism, civil rights and anti-racism movements, and about how to take actions that will promote equity and fairness in schools. This designation coincided with the Board's [resolution](#) condemning racism and affirming its commitment to an inclusive environment for all as well as adding Juneteenth as a designated holiday on the school calendar.

TURN! (Teachers Undoing Racism NOW!) works to bring relevant and thought-provoking educational opportunities to Montclair educators throughout the year and will sponsor events during BLM Week of Action in Schools beginning with the rollout of the **Teacher Institute for Black Lives**. The Teacher Institute for Black Lives is an opportunity for teachers to share their best lessons with their peers on any topic related to studies of Africans in the diaspora. The primary goal is for teachers to expand their knowledge of African-American history and Africans worldwide, and then return to their classrooms with a better understanding of this topic and ideas for lesson plans.

- **Black History Month**

On Monday, the district will also begin celebrating Black History Month with a variety of unique and interactive virtual activities. In addition to the curriculum that integrates African American history throughout the year, in February, students will learn about, honor, and recognize those who have enriched our society with their contributions in government, sports, the arts and more.

- **National School Counseling Week**

National School Counseling Week, February 1-5, highlights the impact that school counselors have in fostering every student's academic and career plan and the difference counseling programs make in a student's social and emotional development. We salute our counselors for supporting our students throughout the year and especially now, helping them navigate these unprecedented and uncertain times. Take a moment to thank a counselor next week!

- **Montclair High's School of Visual and Performing Arts (SVPA)**

Would you like a virtual night out, perhaps a theater date? Montclair High's School of Visual and Performing Arts will hold its first virtual production. Despite numerous challenges, the student actors, designers and technicians have been working hard to make its "Zoom Theatre" the best it can be. The three-part virtual performance includes: **"The Audition,"** a play by Don Zolidis; **"Stranded - Views From Quarantine,"** a monologue play by Stage Partners Playwrights; and **"The Internet is Distract- Oh Look a Kitten!"** a comedy by Ian McWethy. [Register for the performances](#) which take place February 5 and 6 at 8 pm.

*Finally, you have my commitment that through this process I aim to forge a trusting relationship with the MEA, all of our staff, and the community. I firmly believe that a reasonable outcome can be developed collaboratively by all stakeholders with our students' best interests in mind.*

*I will continue to provide you with regular updates as this matter develops.*

*Stay safe and be well!*

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jonathan Ponds  
Superintendent