



# MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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**JONATHAN PONDS, ED. D.**

*Superintendent of Schools*

August 28, 2020

Dear Families, Caregivers, and Staff,

Even during these uncertain times, the district has hired 28 new teachers who are eager and ready to begin their teaching and learning journey with our students. Hiring and preparing these new staff members are some of the most important aspects of our work, and as such, the district will be providing two days of virtual presentations. They will participate in a Zoom call with me, Central Office Administrators and their Principals. Aside from learning about policies and procedures their orientation will include a glimpse into Restorative Justice practices. We are proud to welcome these highly qualified educators from diverse backgrounds to Montclair!

Also next week, the district will be holding virtual professional development sessions for our staff. This is one of the ways we are consistently working to support our staff members and their growth as educators. These sessions are aimed at enhancing the delivery of remote instruction and will include Google Classroom, Zoom, and Seesaw for our younger learners. Professional development will be ongoing throughout the year so that we fine tune our skills, increase our knowledge base and develop a tool kit of best practices that may be used in classrooms daily.

A few areas that you asked about this week are below.

### **Choosing Remote or Hybrid Options**

A survey to choose between a remote or hybrid option for your children is on hold until after we begin the school year. We are currently revisiting the hybrid option and will issue a handbook similar to our remote handbook. You will have time to review the hybrid option before we seek your responses to a survey. Additionally, please note that the next survey will allow you to choose different options for each child. Do not be concerned if you have chosen an option in a prior survey and now would like to change your mind. You may do so with the next survey.

### **Online Platforms**

To enhance our students remote learning experience our teachers will be utilizing tools from the Google for Education Suite. *Google Meet* and *Google Classroom* will be utilized throughout the district for grades 3-12. *Google Classroom* makes it easy for students and teachers to connect inside and outside of our schools by saving time and paper, create classes, distribute assignments, communicate, and stay organized. Google for Education shareable devices and collaborative tools will assist our teachers in preparing our students with new, more engaging ways to learn the skills they need to succeed. Most importantly, Google for Education will give our teachers the opportunity for more time personalizing the learning experience, and less time managing it. Our students will be immersed into 21st century

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problem solving and the skills they'll use in their future careers, with accessibility features that will help **all** students do their best work.

In addition to Google Education Suite, our teachers and students will be able take advantage of some of the new advanced features of *Zoom*. *Zoom* has the ability for students to join break-out rooms for smaller group instruction, a much-needed tool for students to collaborate and work one-on-one with their teachers. Teachers have the opportunity to select the best tool that complements their teaching styles while teaching to their students' learning styles.

For our younger learners, K – 2, we have purchased *Seesaw*, an engaging interactive platform. *Seesaw* gives our students a place to document their learning, be creative and learn how to use technology. Each student will receive their own journal and will add things to it, like photos, videos, drawings, or notes.

### **Classroom Assignments/Schedules**

Classroom assignments and schedules are still being developed. We will release these to our families through Parent Access on September 3 by the end of the day.

### **Childcare**

The YMCA will be open for childcare and you can contact them directly. Details and registration information can be found here: <https://www.montclairymca.org/lec/>.

### **School Start Times**

Due to contractual obligations and logistics, such as bussing, we are unable to change the start times for schools this year. However, we will be revisiting this for the **next** school year. I will be asking some families who have emailed to meet with me and a diverse group of staff members to explore new start times. As this year will be one of adjusting to a new normal, we will use it as an opportunity to plan, collaborate and efficiently work through obligations and logistical areas.

### **Facilities**

The district consultants have completed the survey of the ventilation systems throughout the district. We have a roadmap detailing our ventilation systems with a myriad of operational, minor repair and significant repair situations that require short-term and long-term remediation.

The district has ordered 200 air purification/sanitizer systems from Timilon Corporation to be placed throughout classrooms and offices where appropriate as the initial first step. We have coordinated with Energy for America, our energy conservation specialist, to run our ventilation systems for an additional four hours per day to increase fresh air into the buildings.

Additionally, we are in the process of placing a district-wide order for increased filtration efficiency HVAC filters to meet current Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) guidelines, where applicable and based on manufacturer's recommendations. MERV 13 filters or higher, will be purchased for systems able to accommodate them. Modifications will be made to filters and systems where appropriate.

Our expectation for bringing students and staff back to the buildings is November 1. However, we will continue to keep you posted on our progress in this area and will be monitoring all schools to identify when it is indeed appropriate and safe to bring students and staff back. We will continue to work with our engineer and architect firm as we proceed with remediation.

**Pandemic Response Teams/Health Related Concerns**

Every school has established a Pandemic Response Team to support building-based management of COVID-19 as per the New Jersey State Statutes and Regulations. All pertinent information will be relayed to the Central Office Administrative Team and medical questions will be relayed to the Medical Response Team (School Physician, Montclair Health Department, and Supervisor of Nursing). This Pandemic Response Team will be on hand to oversee the health and safety measures of the district's reopening plan and provide safety and crisis leadership. Staff will be supported and trained.

A lot of questions have been asked about how we would handle positive cases of COVID. Since the CDC and New Jersey Department of Health guidelines are changing frequently, we will release protocols closer to the time that we begin hybrid instruction. For now all decisions about testing, notification and contact tracing will be made on a case-by-case basis while following local and state guidelines.

*As we prepare for the opening of the school year, we remind you to check the district [website](#) regularly for updates, news and important calendar dates.*

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jonathan Ponds  
Superintendent

*All Kids can Learn ~ All Kids are Special*