

# MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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### Superintendent of Schools

*Community Message SY 22-23 No. 1*

**Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.**

September 2, 2022

Dear Families/Caregivers and Staff,

Welcome to a new school year! I am filled with optimism that this year will be exceptional. We've been working hard all summer and the staff is more than ready to meet the needs of our nearly 6,300 students. We had time to reflect on what matters most moving forward and have set our goals as such. These goals are building capacity, strengthening communication, and deepening our community relations to ensure our motto of *All Kids can Learn and All Kids are Special* always rings true. New opportunities and prospects await us. Our departmental goals were detailed at the Board retreat and are available on our [website](#).

The year ahead holds many promises for a fresh, bright start. Please take a moment to read about a few significant highlights and happenings below:

#### **PreK Expansion Aid**

A wonderful opportunity is before us. We have applied for New Jersey's Department of Education (NJDOE) preschool expansion aid. If we receive this grant funding, we will be on our way to FREE, Universal PreK in the Montclair Public Schools in conjunction with community partners. Our team worked hard on applying for this aid even while on summer vacation, and the announcement about grant awards should arrive in the first two weeks of September. We are not letting a moment go to waste and are preparing for six, free, inclusive and full-day preschool classrooms for three- and four-year-olds beginning October 3. Four of these classrooms will be housed in the district (two at the DLC, two at Nishuane), one at the Montclair Community PreK, and one at the YMCA, Geyer St. facility. We are hopeful that our district will be awarded funding and will begin anticipatory outreach for registration which will be done by lottery. To read more and learn how to apply, please visit the [PreK webpage](#).

### **Student Achievement**

Over the course of the 2021-2022 school year, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding expectations on the Renaissance Learning (RL) ELA and Math Star Assessment, administered to students in Grades 2-5, increased. From the beginning-of-year administration to the end-of-year administration, students demonstrated an average growth of 7% on the elementary ELA RL Star Assessment and an average growth of 19% on the Math RL Star Assessment. We continue to work with our schools to provide targeted support to continue this growth. These results represent our formative, district-based assessments. We are awaiting results from our 2021-2022 State assessment, which will be presented to Board members and stakeholders in the fall.

MHS AP Math students continue to perform well above the state average on the AP exams. On average, 92% of our students scored three or higher on these exams. Kudos to teachers and students who worked hard. MHS offers AP Math classes in the areas of Calculus, Statistics, and Computer Science. We are preparing to expand opportunities for students by adding AP Precalculus.

### **New MHS Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs**

We are happy to announce that two new CTE programs have begun at MHS; namely, carpentry and manufacturing. These opportunities will afford our students alternate pathways upon graduation with certificates in hand for entering the workforce. These new programs are in addition to our Healthcare program and Weston Science Scholars which address the fields related to the health and STEM industries. We are determined to motivate our talented entrepreneurial youth as they delve into varied careers. For more information on these new programs, please contact your child's counselor.

### **Community Investment/Bond Referendum**

For almost a year, the Montclair Public School District has been working to present a community investment/bond proposal for voter approval. This proposal is designed to address very significant school facility needs regarding health and safety, code requirements and educational adequacy. The NJ Department of Education (NJDOE) is still in its internal review process, and we expect to hear back about projects deemed eligible for state school facilities aid. We will then prepare the question as it will appear on the ballot with the exact costs and submit it for Board approval.

### **New Administrators**

In keeping with our building capacity goal, a number of talented and experienced administrators will be joining our team. Some started late last year, others this summer, and a few will be starting later in September. Please join me in extending best wishes to Business Administrator/Board Secretary Christina Hunt, Assistant Business Administrator Edwin Brown, Transportation Manager Sheila Maurice, Executive Director of Communications and Community Engagement David Cantor, Director of Buildings and Grounds Tyreek Hunter, District Nursing Supervisor Tina La Gala, Pupil Services Supervisor Tameka

Stafford, District Mental Health and HIB Coordinator Maggie Dock, Northeast School Principal Terence Somerville, Glenfield School Interim Principal Dr. Lisa Rollins, Nishuane School Assistant Principal Brenda Coe, MHS Assistant Principal Jeffrey Gannon, and Director of School Counseling (K-12) Sophia Kenny. We will feature these new leaders in a website article shortly after school begins. Please be sure to check it out and learn more about them and their body of experience with business, mental health, communications, and more.

### Central Office Departmental Reports

#### **Equity, Curriculum and Instruction (ECI)**

**Math/Science:** This year we purchased new textbooks and resources from McGraw Hill called *Reveal Math* and *ALEKS* for the middle school math program. Teachers will receive ongoing professional development aligned with the *Reveal Math* instructional model. *Reveal Math* is strategically designed to [fuel active student engagement](#) and deepen conceptual understanding. This coherent, vertically aligned K-12 core math solution will help uncover the mathematician in every student through [productive struggle, rich tasks, inquiry opportunities, and mathematical discourse](#). Teachers will also use *ALEKS* this year as a benchmark and online practice tool to differentiate between intervention and enrichment. *ALEKS* is purposefully designed to help educators:

- Identify instructional gaps
- Personalize learning paths
- Track the progress of student learning and mastery

The Liberty Science Center has graciously agreed to continue donating \$15,000 towards professional development and student learning opportunities with its Education Team in honor of philanthropist Josh Weston. The team will train staff on state resources, lessons, and instructional strategies focusing on climate change.

We are collaborating with Montclair State University and other districts by participating in professional learning communities focused on the state's new Computer Science and Design Thinking Standards. Our district is committed to strengthening and expanding our Science, Technology, Arts, and Engineering (STEAM) program and student opportunities. Teachers in Grades K-12, counselors, and administrators will participate in this grant-paid opportunity.

**Reading:** The Science of Reading (SoR) has come to MPS! The SoR is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. This research has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies conducted in multiple languages. The SoR has culminated in a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop, why some have difficulty, and how we can most effectively assess and teach and, therefore, improve student outcomes through prevention and intervention for

reading difficulties. In the 2021-2022 school year, building leaders first received training on this initiative to be better positioned to support teachers. For 2022-2023, teachers of reading in Grades K-2 will receive this training. The district will be working towards implementing science and research-based reading instruction in every classroom. Teachers learning and using these scientifically proven strategies for teaching reading will help prevent students from struggling with reading throughout their lives.

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** Staffing for our multilingual learning classes doubled for the 2021-2022 school year. For 2022-2023, the ECI Department will post job openings to recruit (1) a bilingual liaison teacher in each ESL-designated school, i.e., Edgemont, Nishuane, and Northeast Schools, Buzz Aldrin Middle School, and Montclair High School; (2) Bilingual staff who can help interpret and/or translate written documents for our families of ELL students; and (3) *ESL Parent Outreach Team* to further support ELL families' and students' needs helping them learn about the variety of district services and community resources available to them.

**Genesis Tutorial for English Language Learners (ELLs):** Our technology team and our District Supervisor of World Language/English as a Second Language (ESL) are working together to create a series of bilingual video tutorials for our ESL families to navigate Genesis, the student information system. They will feature information about logging into Genesis, completing school forms, and finding critical information such as bus information, schedules, and updating emergency contacts. These tutorials will be accessible on our website in the fall. Our intent is always to remove any barriers when families attempt to find information about their child, their child's school or the district.

**World Language:** For the fourth consecutive year, the World Language Department will participate in the NJDOE Seal of Biliteracy program to promote foreign language study that prepares students for life beyond high school. The Seal is a nationally recognized credential that attests to recipients' 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 begin their post-secondary pursuits.

**Equity:** We will continue our partnership with the **National Equity Project (NEP)** and the **Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC)**. Our work with the NEP includes continuing to work with our youth to provide information on how we can make our schools equitable for all students. We had a great team of students last year, and we look forward to continuing our work with them in the 2022-2023 school year. Last year we trained key district and community members to be facilitators in the rites of passage program, **Discovering Rituals, Understanding Manhood (D.R.U.M.)**. This course introduced leaders to the Rites of Passage experience and prepared them to incorporate the D.R.U.M. framework into programs for boys and young men of color. **Brother to Brother**, our long-time partner, is actively working with D.R.U.M., and we are excited to incorporate impactful mentoring services. Additionally, we are expanding our partnership with **Sister to Sister** to provide our students a wealth of

opportunities to grow and engage in academic and social-emotional activities and skills for positive development.

### **Business**

**Food Service:** Please be advised that the Seamless Summer Option that allowed the District to provide free meals to all students expired on June 30. For this school year, lunch applications must be submitted to determine a student's eligibility for free/reduced meals. Please view the videos below (English & Spanish) for meal changes for this school year.

- [school\\_meal\\_changes\\_for\\_sy22-23 \(1080p\).mp4](#)
- [exenciones de comidas para el sy22-23 \(Spanish\) \(1080p\).mp4](#)

Please access the 2022-23 [online lunch application](#); it is important to submit the completed application as soon as possible (please note only **one application** is needed **per household**).

Should you have any questions regarding the lunch application and/or program, please contact the main office of your children's school.

**Transportation:** Please continue to check Genesis for bus assignments as they are being added daily.

- For Transportation questions, please complete the [Inquiry Form](#) and send back via email to: [cmattison@montclair.k12.nj.us](mailto:cmattison@montclair.k12.nj.us)
- Please refer to our website under [Transportation](#) for additional forms and information
- *Feel free to call our Transportation Office at 973-509-4000 Ext. 50610 with questions/concerns. Please note this is a new extension.*

**Buildings and Grounds:** The Buildings and Grounds team has been hard at work this summer. In addition to summer cleaning at all locations, many projects were completed, and others are slated to begin this month as September was the earliest date we could schedule contractors. The Hillside dance studio and stage floor, the Glenfield dance studio floor, the high school's wood shop floor and painting, Nishuane's auditorium VFDs (variable frequency drives), and bathrooms at Renaissance are some of the projects beginning this month. **This work is slated for completion this fall.** Repairing walls, painting, leveling floors, replacing carpets and installing air conditioners in a few locations are some of the projects that have already been completed.

We are hopeful that students and staff will find these upgrades attractive and welcoming. Buildings and Grounds are also completing projects under the Energy Savings Improvement Plan (ESIP). These ESIP projects include items like lighting upgrades, mechanical rooftop unit replacements, efficiency motors, piping insulation upgrades and building management systems. Lastly, please note that the Community

Investment Plan (Bond Referendum) will help address the much-needed renovations and upgrades to our infrastructure to provide the best learning environment for all of our students and staff.

### **Nursing Services**

Please know we have updated our website to reflect the [latest COVID-19 guidance from the CDC](#) and Department of Health along with community resources. As we follow their recommendations, we will no longer be contact tracing. Your children's health, safety and wellbeing are of our utmost priorities. All nursing staff and emergency response team members will be recertified in AED/CPR practices this fall. As always our nursing staff looks forward to being a helpful, friendly resource for all of our students.

### **Personnel**

We are proud to announce we had a very successful summer recruiting a diverse group of talented educators. Our efforts paid off by attending virtual job fairs last school year, and we attracted some of the most well-rounded faculty that are truly enthusiastic about working in Montclair. Although there is a nationwide shortage of educators, we have worked diligently to ensure all classes are covered. As a district, we try to fill positions internally and have had great success promoting some of our paraprofessionals to teaching positions. Additionally, we have plans for mentoring and training our newly hired staff in order to retain them and have them grow in experience in Montclair.

### **Pupil Services**

Summer didn't stop the Pupil Services Department! It was one of our busier times as the department operated four sites for our Extended School Year program. Staff worked with 432 students in the areas of mathematics, language arts, social skills, multi-sensory reading, while also continuing their related services in the areas of Speech, Occupational, and Physical Therapy. Additionally, members of our CST worked to continue evaluating students to ensure that programs and services are in place for the start of the school year for over 110 students.

Supervisors also worked on staffing -- hiring new psychologists, LDT-Cs, Speech Language Pathologists, BCBA's, and a Teacher of the Deaf. Supervisors are securing presenters and targeting topics for professional development for Special Education teachers, paraprofessionals, CST, and related service providers based on their completed *Spring Needs Assessments*. Part of this process was working closely with the EC&I Department to identify curriculum support teachers for training with the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education (IMSE) and continued collaboration with FDU for Orton Gillingham training as we continue to build capacity and support for multi-sensory reading instruction for our students.

Lastly, all the expectations for the Pupil Services staff have been shared with building administrators, as it is our goal to work as partners in ensuring that all staff read students' IEPs and 504s prior to students'

arrival on September 6. Working together, we are confident that our students will have a successful year of learning ahead.

### **Technology**

We are pleased to announce that Chromebooks have been purchased for all incoming Kindergarten, Grade 6 and Grade 9 students as these are the transition grades. Students can expect to receive their devices during the first week of school.

In addition, Chromebooks are prepared for any family that completed the Emergency Connectivity Fund Survey last year. Technology staff will be working with each school principal in coordinating a date and time to pick up devices when schools reopen. Please understand that these Chromebooks remain home and can be used anytime for homework and/or virtual learning. In addition, students will have access to school Chromebooks while in the classroom.

The Connectivity Fund Survey will reopen for the last time in late October. Communications will be sent out prior to the survey opening up.

### **Be the Change - Volunteer for PTAC 2022-23**

[Montclair PTA Council \(PTAC\)](#) serves our students and schools by working on initiatives, engaging our students in new avenues for expression and is a consistent and constant support for all. PTAC works with Central Office, Board of Education, teachers, families and multiple organizations that are involved with the school system. Do you have an idea, a creative solution or simply care deeply about the schools and want to meet and discuss topics of interest? Please consider [volunteering for PTAC](#).

*It is a privilege for me to begin this year with you. Hopefully our pandemic days are over, and we can truly enjoy the excitement of being together, working together and seeing your children flourish. We aim to keep the momentum strong and offer a safe, secure learning environment as we expand opportunities in academics and extracurricular activities, improve building infrastructures, enhance after school tutoring and Saturday programming, and build strong community partnerships. I look forward to seeing you as I visit schools on September 6 and in the months ahead.*

Welcome back!  
Dr. Jonathan Ponds