

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

22 VALLEY ROAD ~ MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY 07042

WWW.MONTCLAIR.K12.NJ.US

PHONE: 973-509-4010 FAX: 973-509-0586



Superintendent of Schools

Community Message SY 23-24

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

September 12, 2023

Dear Families/Caregivers and Staff,

The beginning of each school year is a flurry of activity and while we have new initiatives in place, we also wish to reflect on our accomplishments. Firstly, I am grateful for our Board of Education, administrators, staff, and families who have shown trust and flexibility in making adjustments to keep our focus on students and always strive to find new ways to make things better. It is my sincere privilege to work in a district that truly believes *All Kids can Learn and All Kids are Special* and one that is welcoming and culturally responsive *to meet everyone's needs*. There is no better way to open a new year than with pictures of our smiling students excited for the first days of school.



Check out more pictures of our [first day of school](#).

What's New and Highlights from 2022-2023

Pre-K Expansion

We are very excited to announce that our District has been accepted for **Preschool Systemic Change Facilitation in the New Jersey Preschool Inclusive Education Project (NJPIEP)** sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education. Our dream for FREE, Universal PreK in the Montclair Public Schools in conjunction with community partners is on the rise. A state



All Kids Can Learn ~ All Kids Are Special ~ Email: jponds@montclair.k12.nj.us

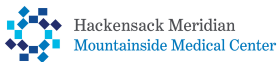
team will be working with our school-based team to improve positive outcomes for all students and support us with high quality resources, tools and strategies to improve preschool inclusive education practices. We will be hearing more about this important work and program expectations in the coming month.

Through collaborations with Montclair Community Pre-K and the YMCA, we have provided free preschool education to students across multiple locations in addition to our in-district classrooms. We are grateful for our partners' support in expanding our program and are excited to announce further expansion this year including additional classrooms at Montclair Childhood Development Center (Headstart) and Neighborhood Childcare Center.

Our introduction of the *Tools of the Mind* curriculum began the process of providing a strong foundation for our students' cognitive and social-emotional development. Additionally, our commitment to professional development has led our teachers to observe other prekindergarten programs, expanding their knowledge and receiving warm welcomes from partnering schools.



We are thrilled to announce the addition of a Preschool Instructional Coach and a Preschool Intervention Specialist to our team. These roles will enhance instructional quality and provide valuable support and professional development for our staff members. The Preschool Intervention Specialist will address the unique learning needs of each child, working closely with students, families, and staff. Furthermore, our commitment to curriculum-focused professional development will continue, equipping our staff with the latest strategies and approaches for exceptional instruction.



Community Schools

Glenfield and Hillside are serving the community as *Community Schools* on Wednesdays from 4:30 to 6 PM. We are grateful for our community partners who have helped us realize this service for all members of the community. Hackensack Meridian Mountainside Medical Center is at the core of this endeavor, providing free medical services, clinics and lectures at our two schools. Please take a



moment to visit our [website](#) for details. Pictured above is the CPR clinic which received rave reviews.

MHS Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs

We continue to expand CTE offerings that provide our students with alternate pathways to success after high school. A strong partnership with Essex County Schools of Technology allows students who are interested to pursue either full-time or shared-time enrollment and learn specific trades that can lead to the workforce. Last year we had 10 students partake in a carpenters' union program and they all passed an exam which will allow them to go to the head of the line for apprenticeships. Twelve students are enrolled in this same program for this year.

In the Weston Health Internship Program (WHIP) students interested in pursuing a career in medicine can shadow doctors and administration at Hackensack Meridian Mountainside Medical Center. From the first cohort, last school year, to this year's cohort, the program doubled in size.



Dual Enrollment Opportunities at MHS

The Montclair Academic Dual Enrollment (MADE) program held at **Montclair State University** has grown nearly 300% since its inception four years ago. Dual enrollment is available in business, environmental science and STEM courses. This year's cohort will take two courses per semester. Also at Montclair State University is the Weston Science Scholars program which runs every summer and is in its 24th year. Established by Josh Weston and his late wife Judy, 39 MHS students studied alongside MSU professors and conducted research about stinging jellyfish in Barnegat Bay (marine biology), locating black holes using gravitational wave data



(astronomy/spectroscopy), next-generation DNA sequencing (evolutionary biology), and the use of brain imaging to determine if music therapy alleviates symptoms of various disorders (neuroscience).

In partnership with **Essex County College (ECC)**, our students have access to dual-enrollment courses and they could graduate with a high school diploma and possibly an associate's degree depending on their course work. Students started course work this summer and will continue with the fall semester taught by MHS teachers who are also certified as adjuncts of ECC.

First Construction Project of the Referendum Complete

A groundbreaking ceremony at Woodman Field last May marked the beginning of the first of 25 projects in the \$188 million referendum approved by voters last November. The new field is ready for our athletes. The revamped baseball field will be ready for this year's spring season. At the July 17 Board of Education meeting a report was given about all the projects which are currently **ahead** of schedule and **under** budget.

Who's Who in Central Office

Consolidation and reorganization are taking place at Central Office. We have a few new members on our team. **Dr. Shivoyne Trim** joins us as the Director of Pupil Services, succeeding our Interim Director Dr. David Goldblatt. Dr. Trim is well-known to the high school community and has been involved with Special Education as a counselor, psychologist and Special Education interventionist for the NJDOE.

In a reorganization plan, Business Administrator **Christina Hunt** will also oversee the Personnel Office and **Ms. Eileen Gilbert**, former MHS Assistant Principal, is serving as the new Assistant Personnel Director. Ms. Gilbert comes to Central Office with nearly 30 years experience as an educator and administrator. Also joining the Business Office is **Mr. Reddrick Robinson**, Director of Food Services, and **Ms. Sophia Fleno**, Purchasing Specialist. Mr. Robinson will oversee the entire food service operation which includes free and reduced lunch applications and payments. Ms. Fleno will assist Ms. Hunt, our purchasing agent, with RFPs, bidding, vendor maintenance, and contracts.

In addition, **Mr. Damen Cooper**, formerly the Director of Personnel, is now the Director of Secondary Education in the Equity, Curriculum and Instruction (ECI) Department. His experience in secondary education includes principal and assistant principal positions. **Ms. Carla Perez**, formerly Supervisor of Pupil Services, will work in concert with the ECI and Pupil Services Department as the Director of Student Support Services. She will be supporting principals and overseeing the implementation of research-based Response to Intervention.

Our directors in Central Office will also have satellite offices at the schools, giving them increased opportunities to provide direct support to principals and enhance efficiency of workflow between the

building level and Central Office. This team at Central Office is designed to work with school leadership to implement goals, enforce policy, and most importantly, positively impact student learning and achievement.

Reading

All teachers in grades K-2 have been trained in the Science of Reading (SoR). Teachers in grades 3-5 began training on the first professional development (PD) day of this school year, Sept. 5. SoR is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. The evidence from SoR

informs 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. Teachers learning and using these scientifically proven strategies for teaching reading will help prevent students from struggling with reading throughout their lives. We are also in the third year of utilizing the Acadience assessment tool, which provides more information on how to best help students.



Instructional Learning Time

Schedules at all schools have been adjusted to provide expanded learning time in reading and math. Extra time in core subjects is meant to positively impact student outcomes. Additionally, a new assessment tool, IXL, will be implemented to provide progress support and allow teachers to readily see where students may be struggling and identify targeted support and interventions quickly and efficiently.

Math

Teachers in grades K-12 have had PD to increase student engagement and address multiple learning styles. Materials included research-proven strategies in *think aloud*, making sense of math tasks and diving into deeper learning that requires high levels of thinking, reasoning and problem solving. Our goal is to improve instructional math programming and provide ongoing PD to support our teachers as they, in turn, support the students.

English as a Second Language (ESL)/English Language Learner (ELL)/now Multilingual Learner (ML)

Our ML population is growing, and we have designed our staffing to support our students. Sheltered English Language instruction took place on our first PD day to support teachers who have MLs in class. We recruited and have (1) a bilingual liaison teacher in each ML-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 MLs; and (3) ML Parent Outreach Teams to help multilingual families and students learn about the variety of district

services and community resources available.

Free adult ML classes and parent/family

workshops will be held throughout the year.

At a culminating event last school year for ML

families, representatives from two of our

partners, Essex County College and Essex

County Schools of Technology, were in

attendance. They presented to families and

offered ESL classes this past summer.



World Language

Twenty-six Montclair High School seniors were honored at a ceremony at Montclair High School for having attained the New Jersey Seal of Biliteracy across five languages: French, Italian, Polish, German, and Spanish. The Seal of Biliteracy is an official recognition from the New Jersey Department of Education. The Seal is a nationally recognized credential that attests to each recipient's 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 commence their post-secondary pursuits.

No Place for Hate



We are proud to recognize our secondary schools -- Buzz Aldrin, Glenfield, Renaissance, and Montclair High School -- as participants in the Anti-Defamation League's widely respected *No Place For Hate* anti-bias and anti-bullying training program. While this was mentioned last spring, it begs repeating as fighting bigotry and building a culture of inclusivity, respect and equity are our priorities. The District continues to invest time in training all levels of staff in cultural responsiveness.

Pupil Services

The Pupil Services Department, encompassing the areas of **Special Education, Nursing, and Mental Health**, has worked to build partnerships and implement programs for the benefit of our students.

In working to bring multi-sensory instruction to its students, Pupil Services expanded its offerings to teachers from the FDU Orton Gillingham two-year program to include training from the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education (IMSE). Through IMSE, teachers have received 30 hours of hands-on, interactive and personalized training. They developed an understanding of the essential five components to literacy, and the tools necessary to apply it in the classroom, as well as the knowledge of how to assess and teach students in all three tiers of *Response to Intervention (RtI)*. Through the two programs, 43 teachers have been trained this school year, spanning Kindergarten through grade 8, general education, Special Education, and curriculum support. Additionally, 14 teachers are currently completing IMSE's Fidelity Certification, which verifies that our staff has the knowledge necessary to implement the strategies with fidelity to help our students meet their literacy goals. This month we will expand IMSE training focused on morphology, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension and how to apply it in the classroom -- moving our training from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*.



The Child Study Teams were engaged in professional development related to processes and procedures for the school year to ensure smooth and efficient delivery of services.

In ensuring support for our students' **Mental Health and Wellness**, Pupil Services has partnered with Family Connections, chosen with our support by the Department of Children and Families, to be the hub service provider for the new NJ4S initiative for Essex County. This collaboration with Family Connections will allow the District access to a myriad of support services for students, parents, and educators, and will allow for a representative from Montclair to sit on its Community Advisory Board to ensure that services best meet the needs of our community.

To strengthen the processes and procedures in regards to **Mental Health and Wellness**, a District-wide risk assessment survey was implemented and the safety plan following a risk assessment was reviewed and revised. In focusing on improving school climate, coordinated initiatives to increase school/district HIB self-assessment grades were established in the areas of reporting process, data collection, and NJDOE submission compliance. Additionally, the District held and will continue to coordinate school

climate committee and anti-bullying specialists' meetings that exceed compliance standards. Additional initiatives include school climate surveys and partnerships with mental health community providers. These continued efforts will enhance support systems, increase communication, and expand upon professional development opportunities to help improve school culture.

Additionally, the District was selected for participation in the three-year NJDOE *DREAMS* Program, which will provide free professional development and support to enhance educational practices in the middle schools to support mental health of students, utilizing the "Nurtured Heart Approach."

The **Nursing Office** has made great efforts this past school year to educate and train all staff on how to recognize and stabilize life-threatening bleeding using the *Stop the Bleed* program and to recognize and treat opioid overdoses. In partnership with an emergency medicine physician at Clara Maass Medical Center, approximately 70% of staff have received training. Tourniquets and *Stop the Bleed* kits are available in all nurses' offices and AED machine cabinets. In regards to recognizing and treating opioid overdoses, NARCAN training was coordinated with Rutgers University to allow students 16 and over to participate with a parent. NARCAN training was also available to MHS administrators.

Finally, the District wishes to thank **Kate Stanton Paule** for her dedication and service specifically to the **Community Based Instruction (CBI) program**. We wish her all the best in her retirement. The District also wishes to thank our vendors who partner with the CBI program. Through this partnership our students ages 18-21 are provided with various opportunities to work and participate in work experiences within their community. Additionally, the District is abundantly grateful to the Salvation Army, which has provided a space for students and staff by way of classrooms, a kitchen for life skills cooking and resources on a daily basis. Since these students have met graduation requirements from MHS, having a new space to extend their growth is empowering. This year in addition to use of the Salvation Army facilities, we are in partnership with the Montclair Neighborhood Development Corporation to use the Wally Choice Center. The District is working with stakeholders in the Montclair community to explore additional ways to support these students with the tools and the skills needed for employment after high school and provide them with alternate pathways for success.

Emergency Management

The full assessment of security and emergency management systems has been completed in collaboration with the Business, Operations, Buildings and Grounds, Technology Offices and StoneGate Associates (our emergency management consultants). While we cannot reveal specifics for many items due to security, some of the upgrades include: Alyssa's Law Compliant Duress Alarms connected directly to the Montclair Police Department to speed response, the communication system throughout the district, a card access system installed for all school buildings, main entrances equipped with video/intercom systems to control visitor access, updated video management system and cameras installed in Montclair High School and the Annex (being mapped for all other schools), and a

centralized “Security Console & Workstation” located at MHS. This workstation, which is in progress, will integrate the various technologies into a proactive model and enhance the effectiveness of security officers. The safety of our students and staff is our utmost priority, and we continue training of new and existing staff on an ongoing basis. New training will be coordinated with StoneGate, the Montclair Police Department and school senior management.

#

The District continues to explore ways to expand opportunities in academics and extracurricular activities, expand our Community School initiative, stay focused on the oversight of capital projects, enhance after-school tutoring and Saturday programming, and build strong community partnerships. We are committed to educating our youngest learners through high school in innovative, challenging and engaging ways.

I look forward to seeing you throughout the year!

Dr. Jonathan Ponds