

# MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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**Superintendent of Schools**

**Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.**

July 9, 2021

Dear Families/Caregivers of Special Education students and students with 504 accommodations,

I hope this letter finds you and your family well and enjoying opportunities to relax over the next two months. I am sure we can all agree that this past year has been intense and presented us with unprecedented issues which tested us in many ways. As complicated as the year was, it still enabled me and my team, in our first year, to observe and identify our strengths and weaknesses as a district. This information provided clear insights for our path of continuous improvement moving forward.

I am writing to you today to address Special Education as the needs of our students with disabilities became pronounced during this past year. To that end, The Montclair Board of Education hired Go Teach consultants to conduct a thorough, systemic and independent Special Education Audit. The Audit began in January 2021 and was completed in April 2021 with its findings reported at the May 5 Board Meeting. The overarching objective of the Audit was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the District's Special Education programs and services and ensure we meet compliance requirements.

As we look to this Audit as a framework for our actionable steps needed to improve our services, we are mindful of our magnet system and the varied programs in Special Education across all schools. The consultants used a process-based approach to analyze different components among schools and give us the background necessary to implement a **uniform system of service** with equity and quality for our protocols, processes, practices, and oversight across all programs and schools. Qualitative and quantitative data were reviewed and more than 200 people were interviewed from approximately 11 stakeholder groups which included Board of Education members, parents, high school graduates, CST members, social workers, principals, teachers, and more.

The data collection was both broad in scope and detailed in that IEP processes were inspected, disproportionality was analyzed and interpreted, and major themes and sub-themes were identified with recommendations for improvement. Please read the detailed findings and the full audit which will be posted to the website by Monday, July 12. You deserve to see and understand the areas and issues

that were found to be in need of improvement and reflect on the recommendations we are making to remedy each area of concern over the course of the next school year.

To accomplish necessary changes, representatives from SEPAC will join our “Build Back Better” committee which will focus on Special Education and begin work this summer. Although our committee work will be important as a tool to guide this process, we are not limiting ourselves to a singular focus. The District will put forward a comprehensive plan of action that will enable us to triage this important work, and more importantly, coordinate multiple endeavors at one time so the most important issues are addressed sooner rather than later.

A few of the immediate changes you will see:

- Hiring new administrative leadership in the Pupil Services Office
- Hiring appropriate and required staff to fulfill all IEPs
- Planning for intensive professional development of staff
- Implementing a consistent *Response to Intervention* process across the district
- Implementing Intensive training for Child Study Teams on the best practices of delivery of services and development of IEP goals for students
- Implementing a systemic implementation for inclusion across the district
- Increasing a focus on parent engagement

We will keep you informed of all systemic changes, and we encourage you to read the Audit as it lays the groundwork for where we want to go, how we will get there, and ultimately how we will best serve your children to the fullest extent possible.

While change can be a huge undertaking, we are determined to stand by our commitment of providing a high quality, equitable education for all. These efforts are among our highest priorities. Our commitment to “All kids can learn, and all kids are special” will fuel our efforts to do what needs to be done on their behalf.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Jonathan Ponds  
Superintendent