

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent of Schools

Community Message SY 21-22 No. 22

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

June 23, 2022

Dear Families, Caregivers and Staff,

Moving up ceremonies around the schools took place last week and Montclair High School's Commencement is tomorrow. This school year was like no other, and through our many challenges, we remained focused on students. Focusing on students is not simply the right thing to say, it is the driving spirit, the heart, of every decision we make as educators in public schools. I happened to have a conversation with some students early in the year, and when they said, "School is starting to feel normal this year," it made me even more committed to standing by our students and providing them opportunities they truly deserve.

Reflecting on school year 2021-22 reveals how teaching and learning are centered on giving students those opportunities to succeed. After all, we believe that, "All Kids can Learn and All Kids are Special," and it is our responsibility to implement and design a teaching and learning environment for this premise and to be equitable to all.

2021 - 2022 - A Year in Review



School Security: Safety is always at the top of our list of priorities! We are happy to report that through a grant we are upgrading our security cameras in both High School buildings and The Aubrey Lewis Sports Complex. Additional upgrades are being planned for all of our elementary and middle schools. The district is working closely with the Montclair Police Department and our security consultants, Stonegate Associates. The Community Investment/Bond Referendum which will be up for a vote

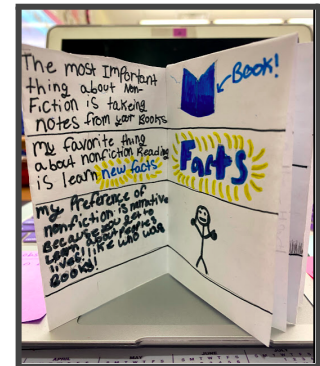
in November also includes safety and security features.

Orton Gillingham (OG): This was year two of training a second cohort of teachers to become certified Orton Gillingham instructors through the Fairleigh Dickinson University program. This method for teaching reading helps improve our sensory support instruction and provides both General Education and Special Education readers the additional support and skills they need to become proficient. In particular, OG is essential for teaching students with dyslexia. However, OG is not just for struggling readers but an approach to make all children effective

readers, writers and spellers. Every child should be able to read, and we aim to provide the tools our teachers need to make this a reality.



Reading: This year, our district adopted the use of a new reading assessment tool aligned with the foundations of the Science of Reading, Acadience Reading. All teachers of reading in grades K-6 received training in the essentials of this tool and also in how to interpret the data to provide meaningful instruction to students in areas of



need. Targeted professional development was also provided to teachers in the foundational components of the Science of Reading, including first sound and letter naming fluency, phonemic segmentation, oral reading fluency, accuracy and retell. Professional development in the Science of Reading will be ongoing next year with Domains of Language, Written Expression, and Structured Literacy. Our district will also continue to support the implementation of Acadience Reading through professional development.

Reciprocal Teaching/Socratic Seminar: Secondary teachers have been trained on the fundamentals of Reciprocal Teaching/Socratic Seminar teaching strategies and have been afforded opportunities to collaboratively grow their understanding and application of these strategies. Reciprocal Teaching and Socratic Seminars are student-centered instructional strategies that promote reading comprehension and critical thinking skills for students. Reciprocal Teaching uses multiple teacher-guided strategies where small groups of students each play a specific role in the comprehension of a text. Socratic Seminar uses formal discussions, based on a text in which leaders ask open-ended questions that increase critical thinking and articulation of thoughts.

Director of Elementary Education: We hired a Director of Elementary Education who works with principals to implement, monitor, improve programming and student support, and identify the priorities for program improvements and growth. This work is done in collaboration with the Director of K-12 ELA and Humanities to support language arts reading programming and assessments which are aligned with the foundations of reading for students.



Math Language Acquisition and Math Workshop Model:

We implemented training for grades 4 and 5 math teachers on Math Language Acquisition that is based on best practices from the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). SIOP is a research-based, instructional model that is highly effective in addressing the academic needs of English learners and applies to learning the language of math. The protocol provides a framework for



teachers as they design and deliver lessons that make content comprehensible. The Math Workshop Model training applies instructional strategies to engage learners in rigor, reasoning and modeling with fractions. It can be used for every lesson to ensure students are building a positive attitude towards math, exploring concepts rather than being told what to think, collaborating, and talking about their thinking.

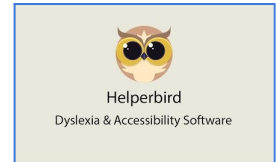
Response to Intervention and Intervention and Referral Services: New framework and training modules were created this year and are being used throughout the district for consistency of practice. Our goal is to reduce the number of Special Education referrals by supporting students with appropriate interventions.



English as a Second Language (ESL): We support our English Language Learners and their families. This year we held a series of workshops for parents so they could acquire English language skills and to support their children. We are happy to encourage parents to be active participants in their children's education. The spring Adult ESL Workshop ended on June 13 with great community participation. We also provided Sheltered English Instruction training to all General Education

K-5 teachers working with ELLs in their classrooms.

Helperbird: The Immigrant Advocacy Club at MHS aims to make a safer, more inclusive space for immigrants and ESL families and to provide all students with equal opportunities for success. Members worked on getting a translation service called Helperbird that works with Chrome to assist ESL students. Helperbird is also a platform with resources to help students with dyslexia. The company was so moved by the appeal, it gifted the district a free two-year subscription. The Helperbird extension can be found in the upper right hand toolbar at the top of a district Google account page. A pop up menu provides options for translating, reading and more.



Gifted and Talented: With the collaboration of a broad group of stakeholders, the identification process and gifted programming supports were revised creating a more comprehensive profile focused on equity and inclusion.



World Language/Seal of Biliteracy: Twenty-one MHS seniors earned the prestigious *Seal of Biliteracy* award from the NJDOE for their world language accomplishments. This is a nationally recognized credential and this year's representative languages were Spanish, French, German, Hebrew, and Latin.

National Equity Project (NEP): With a generous donation from MFEE our district became a member of NEP in August 2021, and we participate in NEP's Building Equitable Learning Environments (BELE) network. The monthly meetings and circle groups include national convenings, ongoing coaching and connections to resources to support the district's work on addressing issues of racial inequities. Our youth members of the Circle Team are fully engaged in these activities.

Montclair Neighborhood Development Corporation (MNDC) After-School Partnership: I am excited about our new partnership with MNDC to enhance our after-school programming. This new initiative takes the village approach to support and help all our children with tutoring, extracurricular activities, and more. More details will follow before the start of school.

Discovering Rituals, Understanding Manhood (D.R.U.M.): The district has partnered with the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) and our mentoring partners MNDC and Brother to Brother to use the rights of passage method (D.R.U.M.) of support for our students. D.R.U.M. is a researched-based framework and program designed to raise rates of attendance, graduation, and post-secondary college/career success among male middle and high school students. D.R.U.M. is particularly effective with helping students who are experiencing a range of challenges that impede their academic and social success. The D.R.U.M. approach aims to strengthen students' academic achievement and nurture their self esteem and social emotional growth.

Compensatory Education: When we returned to in-person instruction, the Pupil Services Department identified students who had missed services during the Pandemic and in conjunction with the Equity, Curriculum and Instruction Department developed comprehensive and individualized plans to deliver those services.

Community Based Instruction (CBI): The CBI program is a transition program that provides opportunities for 18-21 year-old students to gain independent living skills, social skills, employment and self-advocacy in real-life settings and to participate in age-appropriate activities in their communities. The district thanks Michelle Kroeze, Business Manager/Director and staff at the Salvation Army for providing a wonderful space and support to our students for nearly a decade.

Pupil Services Quarterly Newsletter: The Pupil Services Department launched a quarterly newsletter to provide updates to parents and the community. The goal of the newsletter is to not only share updates on department initiatives, but to also highlight activities in classrooms across the district and spotlight the work of both teachers and students. The newsletter is shared via email with parents as well as on the district [website](#).

Pupil Services Professional Handbook: At the start of the school year, a restructuring of the Pupil Services Department prompted changes to the professional handbook provided to district staff members. This professional handbook is a living document that will be amended as needed.

Pupil Services Supervisors: The district added an additional Pupil Services Supervisor to provide instructional support throughout the schools for principals and teachers. This allows for opportunities for coaching on differentiation, effective classroom management, and effective implementation of programming.

Restorative Justice (RJ): Training was implemented for Teachers on Special Assignment and administrators to provide Restorative Justice practices at all schools including circle keeping and supporting social emotional needs. New RJ spaces were created at the high school with a serenity room, drop-in counseling room, mobile library, and a courtyard with a farm-to-table garden for student gatherings and discussions. We hope to expand these spaces to other schools in the future. The district is committed to RJ as it promotes a culture of positivity and helps students feel safe, nurtured and welcome in school.



Culturally Responsive Training: A series of workshops were held throughout the year on cultural responsiveness and will be offered on an ongoing basis. Schools recognize the many ethnicities, traditions and celebrations throughout the year and this year we introduced Lunar New Year and Juneteenth on the district calendar and after Board approval will be including Diwali. We also emphasize hiring a diverse staff workforce.



Hiring Diverse Staff Members: The research shows that teacher diversity has an impact on student achievement and students benefit from role models who look like them. This year we made a concerted effort to hire the most qualified and diverse teachers, administrators in all of our schools and administrators at Central Office. We attended diversity fairs and recruitment events at HBCUs. We are committed to cultural diversity in the district as it strengthens deeper connections and more engaged learning between students and teachers and colleague to colleague.

Career Technical Education (CTE) at MHS: Through a partnership with the NJ Manufacturing Extension Program, students can participate in credentialed courses in various aspects of manufacturing, logistics, supply chain and more. This is a free program whereby students can learn valuable skills making them marketable for alternative [career pathways](#) after high school.

MHS Science Opportunities: The following programs have been made possible by generous funding from Mr. Josh Weston and CASE (Center for the Advancement of STEM Education) who have contributed over \$100,000 in STEM tuition scholarships. We are grateful for our partnerships with Montclair State University (MSU) and Hackensack Meridian Mountainside Medical Center as well.

MADE: Montclair Academic Dual Enrollment is going into its fourth year for rising seniors to take college level courses in the fall and spring semester at MSU for college credit in the STEM, business, dance, music, foreign language, and social sciences fields.

WHIP: Weston Health Internship Program begins this summer for students interested in pursuing a career in medicine who will spend three weeks shadowing doctors and hospital administrators at Mountainside.

Weston Science Scholars: This program which began in 2000 is rapidly growing, and this year we will have 40 students spending five weeks at MSU conducting hands-on research with scientists in the field of marine biology, biochemistry, physics, computer science and evolutionary/molecular biology. This program also features a guest lecture series and field trips.



Closing the Digital Divide: The district has not only become a 1:1 district with a device for every student but has provided internet connectivity services where needed. The divide is further closed as we provide devices and connectivity for year-round learning, meaning devices will be distributed for at-home use through the summer. To date the district has received approximately 1,708 requests for staff and student devices and is distributing them over the next few weeks.

The highlights of 2021-22 are samples of district work in the teaching and learning arena and new opportunities for our students. There are so many more. You may have read a story on our website showcasing a school, been involved in a community service project, or have attended a musical or drama production that will be long remembered and be the impetus for students seeking careers in the entertainment field. When you have a moment, check out our stories on the [website](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) for recent news. We couldn't be more proud of our talented students and the administrators and teachers who guide them!

To our community partners, the YMCA, MNDC, MFEE, Brother to Brother, Sister to Sister, IMANI, the Montclair Public Library, and the Montclair Art Museum, to name a few, we extend a huge thank you for creating a village of support with wrap-around services for our families and students that definitely feel like a warm hug!

It goes without saying that we are so appreciative of the services provided by our Township with special emphasis and applause to our Township Council and Montclair Police and Fire Departments. They always help and assist us in our times of need.

Thank you all for your continued support. Please know that as we pause to reflect on this year, we eagerly anticipate what is yet to come. I am confident that we will do the very best we can to keep our district moving forward in the best interests of our students, families and staff.

I wish you a relaxing and enjoyable summer!

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent