



MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Superintendent of Schools

Jonathan Ponds, Ed.D.

Community Message SY 21-22 No. 17

Mid-year Progress on Goals

March 18, 2022

Dear Parents/Guardians and Staff,

There are a few housekeeping items before I begin my message today about the progress on our district goals.

School Tours

In-person school tours are back! For those of you considering a shift from the feeder route, you can now visit schools in person for a tour with a PTA volunteer and hear from the Principal. If you have friends or family new to town, please be sure to let them know that our schools welcome them coming by during their school's tour time to learn about the great things happening. See [Tour Schedule](#) in Announcements on the district website and the new online feature to register for a tour. We could not have accomplished this effort without our dedicated and hard-working PTA families!

New COVID-19 Guidance

Please be sure to see our new [FAQ](#) and [Quarantine/Travel guidance](#) posted on the website as we recently made adjustments to align with the CDC, NJDOH, and our medical team.

Progress on Goals

In collaboration with Senior Staff I gave a presentation at the Board Retreat in July on goals for the district with the overarching premise that "All Kids can Learn and All Kids are Special." In this message I am pleased to provide a mid-year progress report which strategically aligns with our premise.

Equity, Curriculum and Instruction (ECI)

This department addressed the need for consistent reading instruction, targeted and meaningful professional development, a consistent *Response to Intervention*, and established an equity focus that would be evident across curricula and schools.

Instruction:

- Implemented after-school and Saturday programming to extend learning beyond the regular school day.
- Implemented reciprocal teaching and Socratic seminar at the middle and high school levels.
- Provided professional development in recognizing and supporting students with dyslexia for our teachers in Grades PreK-3.
- Provided a math language acquisition workshop to Grade 4 and 5 math teachers to develop their students' mathematical language and discourse to stretch their conceptual thinking, problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- Developed a district framework with templates and tools to support schools with consistent implementation of *Response to Intervention*.
- Twenty-one seniors have been awarded the Seal of Biliteracy attesting that they are accomplished and literate in two or more world languages.
- Provided (and continuing) reading professional development for teachers aligned with the foundations of Science of Reading research and measures from the Acadience Reading screener to support teachers with reading strategies to support core instruction and interventions.
- Convened a K-5 Core Instructional Materials Adoption Committee of teachers and administrators to review qualitative and quantitative data, research instructional materials and make decisions to ensure ELA instructional programming is aligned with the science of reading research and ELA needs with a focus for a pilot for next year.
- Developed a K-8 Gifted and Talented Comprehensive Program Plan with a lens on equity and inclusivity for students. Committee members presented to the Board of Education. Teachers were provided with professional development regarding the plan and identification of gifted learners. Staff was trained and administered the aptitude measure for identification. A family Information Session for identifying gifted learners has been planned (date forthcoming).

Acadience Reading: A universal screening and progress monitoring assessment that measures acquisition of early literacy skills from K-6 was adopted and teachers have been trained in its use. This tool's assessment data will provide timely instructional support and prevent occurrence of later reading difficulties.

Middle School Math Committee: This committee is reviewing and making recommendations for programming, textbooks and resources.

Social Emotional Learning: SEL teams have been created at each school and are being trained by Erin Bruno, a consultant referred to us by Dr. Maurice Elias, Professor of Psychology and Director of Social Emotional and Character Development Lab at Rutgers University, to implement best practices.

Equity Work: Goals have been developed for the work associated with the National Equity Project and these will be reviewed by the district's Equity Team. The AAPI History Committee is currently reviewing history curriculum for inclusion of AAPI studies.

Pupil Services

The goals in Pupil Services were aligned with the recommendations of the program review which we commonly refer to as the Audit from May 2021. In addressing the audit findings we:

- Realigned duties and restructured the chain of command in the department
- Established a strong link between Gen Ed and Special Ed

- Created an internal program guide for IEP planning and placement
- Instituted ongoing training for CST members on the IEP process
- Implemented ongoing professional development with focus on Dyslexia provided by the Robinowitz Education Center to both staff and community
- Collaborated with community-based parent groups on various issues
- Reviewed caseloads with supervisors and building administrators at a minimum of bi-monthly
- Created a quarterly newsletter
- Published a professional staff handbook approved by the Board in October
- Hired a supervisor in January with the main purpose of supporting instruction and professional development for staff.

Dyslexia/Reading Disabilities: In collaboration with ECI, implemented Acadience as well as Science of Reading training for administrators. Pupil Services continues the partnership with Fairleigh Dickinson University for Orton Gillingham training. There is a cohort of 12 teachers graduating in May from the Orton Gillingham program and an additional 7 teachers who will continue next year

Equity: Pupil Services continues to review programs throughout the district, working to ensure continuity of programs across buildings.

Compensatory Education: Students with disabilities or 504s who had learning loss and missed services due to the pandemic were identified and a compensatory program was established to recoup those services. A comprehensive plan is in place at all schools with the exception of the high school which will begin in the spring.

Technology

We have successfully implemented our 1:1 program in grades K-12 and with the Emergency Connectivity Fund we are supplying Chromebooks and internet connections across the district. We have also made progress in our infrastructure with both Email (Office 365) and Financials (Edumet) migrated to the cloud. Procedures are in place for ordering, repairing, and supporting all district hardware and software.

Personnel

As staffing was a challenge during the pandemic, we worked with local universities to hire student teachers as substitutes that could help staff after-school programs as well as the regular school day. And, we increased our pay rate for substitutes to attract more candidates.

The department prioritizes the recruitment of diverse candidates by attending college fairs including HBCU colleges. The department also consults with local organizations to ensure the district has access to highly qualified minority candidates.

Operations and School Support Services

Consultants have been approved to coordinate a comprehensive Emergency Management/School Safety and Security Plan. In relation to this plan, all building walk-throughs are complete and a new camera system proposal has been approved. This department continues to work with partnership programs to determine the impact on student achievement and the number of students served as well as the demographics of those students. Ongoing policy work is completed in conjunction with the Board Policy committee. A revival of the School Action Teams for Partnership is underway and schools are conducting meetings.

Business Office

Buildings and Grounds personnel have been hard at work since the pandemic addressing the needs of very old buildings. We are happy to report that the Phase I plan for ventilation in our buildings is

complete, and our next step will be writing a bond referendum to continue the infrastructure work and also include structural enhancements that impact instruction. The Watchung Playground was completed and a regulation Field Hockey and Boys Lacrosse Field was constructed at Watchung. We also refurbished the Catchings Owens Community Suite at Glenfield School ensuring that we are equitable with upgrades in all parts of town.

Transportation created two additional routes at both the south and north ends of town using a two-mile threshold. This lower mileage threshold allows us to service more high school students.

Cultural Responsiveness

Training has been completed for a teacher cohort and district counselor team and more training is planned. In April the entire Buildings and Grounds Department will participate in this professional development as well.

We established three new holidays on the district calendar: Juneteenth, Eid-al-Fitr, and Lunar New Year as well as recognizing Indigenous Peoples Day in October and Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action in February. Creating culturally responsive libraries, engaging with consultants in the “Six Elements of Social Justice,” and book studies are a few of the ways the district and all our schools focus on celebrating and honoring holidays, heritages, identities, and traditions of students, staff and families. This month we celebrate Irish American Heritage Month and wish our Irish American families, students and staff a month of enjoying and spreading the cheer of your culture. In addition, today marks the Hindu holiday Holi, also known as the Festival of Colors, marking the arrival of spring.

The district takes this work seriously and aims to create environments where everyone feels respected and valued and where people begin to recognize how unconscious bias impacts relationships.

There is much to learn from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are focused on keeping a positive light on what we've accomplished and looking forward to doing more. Our students, staff, and families have all been impacted by the virtual, hybrid, and then return to in-person learning. Everyone pitched in to do extraordinary things to meet student needs, and I am incredibly proud of our accomplishments thus far.

And let us not forget that March is Women's History Month. We take this time to pay tribute and celebrate great women in history for their trailblazing and accomplishments. I also wish to give a huge shout out to all the women throughout the district and the community who play vital and enriching roles in our lives.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jonathan Ponds
Superintendent