



MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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NATHAN N. PARKER, ED. D.

Interim Superintendent of Schools

June 30, 2020

Dear Colleagues, Families, Caregivers, and Community Members,

It has been a pleasure serving as your Interim Superintendent of Schools for the last 10 months. I have met many thoughtful students, parents/caregivers, educators, and community partners. My wife and I watched the virtual graduation. It was such a pleasure to see so many young, vibrant young people who represent many different backgrounds.

Response to COVID-19

I am especially grateful to all members of our 1200 member staff. These last four months have tested us all. My thanks go to all of our staff, students, and parents for learning along with us and putting your best effort forward in a most challenging environment. Some of the most innovative instruction has emerged during this period of time. We have also missed the mark with a number of our students.

I suspect there will be much learned about remote instruction that will carry over once things are “back to normal.” Most remarkably, people from distant locations are communicating with each other more than ever before.

We have tried overall, in spite of the challenges of COVID 19, to move the district forward by addressing a number of the concerns evident in September 2019. The Board of Education has successfully selected a permanent Superintendent who was appointed May 6. Dr. Ponds, although completing work in his prior district, has spent considerable time learning about the district before starting on July 1.

Governance

The Board of Education has modified its governance structure to build greater board member capacity and commitment. Leadership of the board will change annually as will the leadership of the committees. As a result, all members of the board will develop an overall detailed knowledge base of all district operations prior to becoming Board President.

Curriculum and Instruction

We have made incremental changes in all major district functions. Instruction has become more coordinated across the elementary schools and the middle schools. One major effort in the elementary schools was to improve the implementation of Go Math. In addition, curriculum articulation among the elementary, middle, and high schools has improved. All federal grants, such as ESEA, are closely aligned with curriculum priorities.

Human Resources

The Human Resource function is stronger. Appointments for difficult to fill positions, such as advanced placement physics, are now in place. Most faculty positions are filled for the fall. Performance assessment

at the classroom level and administrative level has been strengthened. We have reduced administrative positions to enable more focus on classroom instruction. We now have a much better process for properly placing teachers on the salary guide. Parent and Student Equity Advocacy has been placed within the portfolio of the Director Of Operations and School Support.

Financial Management

Financial management has also taken a step forward. The budget process began much earlier. The budget calendar spells out which sections of the budget will be presented when, so transparency and collaboration have been increased. In addition, the meetings with community groups regarding the budget - PTAC, SEPAC, NAACP, and MEA - were productive. This setting allowed for a closer examination of different sections of the budget than was possible at board meetings. We also linked the budget to educational outcomes. Budget expenditures prioritized the elimination of the achievement gap and higher student achievement. We introduced Zero Based Budgeting so all expenditures will be reexamined each year. This will take time to fully implement, as budgeting has historically been incremental in Montclair.

Special Education

Special Education programs continued to improve and as a result litigation decreased. We also concentrated on creating programs internally, which will enable more of our out-of-district placed students to return to the district. Furthermore, the need to improve multisensory learning and literacy for our youngest learners are now considered priorities.

Facilities

Our facilities have been poorly maintained for decades and building failures in the last couple of years highlighted this challenge. The Board of Education conducted a search for an architectural firm. EI Associates was selected to develop a five-year, Long-Range Facility Plan to analyze structural integrity, mechanical systems and educational adequacy. We know that educational adequacy speaks to the need for schools to be built for 21st century skill and knowledge acquisition. An early peek into EI's analysis of educational adequacy suggests exciting opportunities to repurpose sections of our schools

Communication

Communication with the press improved. In general, press coverage was positive. The unmet communication challenge of the district is management and response to social media. Although our website and twitter account increased the frequency of important postings, we were unsuccessful in countering the negative tone and misinformation posted on social media. We successfully kept staff and families informed throughout the spring responding to the constant ebb and flow of COVID 19 information.

I found meetings with the NAACP Education Committee and PTAC very helpful throughout the year. Both groups provided good sounding boards for new ideas and initiatives. In addition, collaboration with the city officials was critical to the success of the district. I especially want to thank representatives from the police department who helped us plan security improvements.

Meals

We provided meals throughout the COVID crisis. Each Monday during the summer we will deliver a week's worth of breakfasts and lunches to qualified families. In addition, also on Mondays, a week's worth of breakfasts and lunches can be picked up by all families at Toni's Kitchen.

Technology Equipment and Support

Technology equipment remains in homes throughout the summer for both students and faculty. More than 550 chromebooks and 55 hotspots were distributed during the COVID crisis and they will remain in the hands of our students over the summer. In addition, technology support will be offered throughout the summer. The self-service vestibule located at Hillside School every Monday from the hours of 9 AM to 12 PM for repairs and device distribution will be operational. You can also call the technology support line at 3010-259-1510 from 8 AM to 3 PM during the summer. Technology requests by teachers and administrators continue to be handled using Zendesk.

The availability of devices at home over the summer will continue options for additional learning.

Pre-planning for September

We surveyed parents and staff. Over 3300 parents and 802 staff responded to the surveys. Clearly we had an amazing response. Information gleaned from these responses will be helpful in planning for the Fall. Many thanks to all the parents and staff who completed the surveys and provided open ended responses. The parent survey responses are attached.

Five design teams were set up in June to begin envisioning what schooling might look like in the Fall. Special Education and regular education parents, faculty, and administrative representatives were members of the teams. Three design teams focused on needs identified during the Spring: **K-2 instruction, mental health, and students who disconnected from the learning process**. Two of the design teams focused on likely Fall scenarios: **the continuation of remote instruction and a hybrid model of in-school and remote learning**. The results of this preliminary planning are limited, as the teams were only able to meet two times. In recent days the state has provided additional frameworks for learning so the planning process may move in different directions.

In conclusion, we have made progress; however, there is still much to do to move the Montclair Schools forward. My best wishes to each of you for a safe and productive summer.

Sincerely,



Dr. Nathan N. Parker
Interim Superintendent