

September 4, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians, Students and Staff,

Welcome to the 2020-2021 school year! I hope you had the opportunity to enjoy your summer break and that you share in my enthusiasm for an exciting year ahead.

You have heard me say many times that our new vision – *The Teaneck Advantage: Educational Excellence for All* – means that I am determined to see Teaneck Public Schools become a leader in public education. Certainly, the safety of our students and staff was our top priority for the start of this school year. However, I assure you that we remain steadfast in our commitment to ensure your children receive a high quality education, and in the fulfillment of our five year District Strategic Plan.

Over this past week, our staff participated in four full days of professional development specifically focused on teaching and learning in a remote environment. Our professional development for staff will continue during the week of Tuesday, September 8 (when our students begin their online classes) through Friday, September 11, as we will follow the “Half Day” schedule. In this same spirit, I was pleased to hear that many of our parents took advantage of our Parent Academy in order to better familiarize yourself with Google Classroom. I truly appreciate that we are in this together! We will continue providing additional training for parents throughout the year.

In fact, as we look back on last school year (the first implementation year of our District Strategic Plan) we really did accomplish so much together. This includes receiving a \$3.3 million School Transformation Grant that has enabled us to provide support and mental health services for our families; reorganizing our Special Education Department to better meet the needs of our children and their families; piloting and further establishing the partnership with the Institute for Learning out of the University of Pittsburgh which will serve to guide our academic work in our classrooms moving forward; and further expanding our preschool expansion roll-out which will now offer over 300 seats for the 2020-2021 school year.

We also distributed Chromebooks to all middle and high school students at the start of the year, added our elementary students when we went remote in March, and now all of our students, at every grade level, will have access to this technology.

The 2020-2021 school year will “kick off” by welcoming our eighth district school – the Theodora Smiley Lacey School – led by Mrs. Leslie King as principal and serving 180 kindergarten students. We are also excited to open Bryant School as our new preschool center led by Ms. Danica Davidman school principal and serving 300 pre-k children. Then in October, we will open our new District Office on Teaneck Road (in front of Thomas Jefferson Middle School).

Moving forward for this school year, we will begin to offer or work on the development of specific “Year Two” goals noted in our District Strategic Plan, including:

- 1.) Offer a low-cost SAT Prep Program for our juniors and seniors
- 2.) Develop an Aspiring Leaders Academy for faculty who want to become district leaders
- 3.) Redesign of Gifted & Talented Program for elementary and middle school
- 4.) Launch of our new Internal & External Communications Plan
- 5.) Redesign the New Teacher Foundation & Orientation Programs
- 6.) Begin to explore new academic pathways for Teaneck High School

Finally, as I said in my last communication, we realize this will be a very difficult time for many of our families and staff members. We are making sure that you will have access to school counselors for mental health services, as well as:

- Providing childcare services during and after the school day for our families in greatest need (limited spaces; to apply please go to: <https://forms.gle/eH4MvyGYW9fHAcWg7>). More information on this is coming in a separate email.
- Offering free breakfast and lunch which will be available for pick-up on Mondays & Thursdays at three drive-in locations (Bryant, Whittier & Teaneck High School) from 10:45 am to 1:30 pm. You will be provided meals for the following days. *NOTE: With Labor Day on Monday, this will be available on Tuesday, Sept. 8.*
- Addressing any technical issues with your Chromebook by offering our “Chrome Depot” station at the same three schools during the same times as the meal distribution.

Additionally, as we navigate through this pandemic, it is very important that everyone follows specific protocols with regard to online instruction and visiting schools or district offices. You will be receiving more information on this from your school principals next week.

In closing, I am truly excited about the future of Teaneck Public Schools. We have a very strong leadership team, exceptional staff, supportive parents, generous volunteers, and a highly energetic and dedicated Board of Education.

My thoughts go out to all who have lost loved ones during this pandemic; and I will continue to pray that our Teaneck families will remain healthy and safe. Our current situation is not a permanent situation; and I cannot wait to walk the halls of our schools and see you all in person. Until then, I know we will all stay focused on our children and will work to support each other through this difficult time.

Happy Labor Day weekend and best wishes for a successful school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Christopher Irving
Superintendent of Schools