

Superintendent's Report

December 9, 2020



Special Recognition

As many of you know, our school district has been working diligently to strengthen our partnership with Fairleigh Dickinson University – particularly their Teaneck Campus. Our primary focus has been to offer FDU courses or programs that will further the educational development of our students at the high school and college level. One of these programs is the “FDU Girls Engineering Program” – and for the third year in a row, we have a new cohort of students who have completed this outstanding program. Tonight, we will be recognizing seven middle school students who recently completed FDU’s fall 2020 Girls Engineering Program. Congratulations to these bright young ladies, along with their families and their schools. A special thank you to our partners at FDU. We are currently exploring a new initiative with FDU and hope to be able to share that news very soon. The following is a link from the recent Girls Engineering virtual graduation ceremony.

https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipP_zr9cPYMu8YSV3HoVGtIKjtam7nDFaKgdIDCeb_8kzV1o2cNsJR-vv3RQcHA78g?key=cm1JQVR2ZEdDeFlWWjdiWDZrenVaY3dkOVRxTmRn

Our second recognition this evening is to honor three exceptional community leaders who have served on our Board of Education for many years. Tonight, is the last Board meeting for Mr. Howard Rose, Mrs. Clara Williams (our Board Vice President) and Dr. Ardie Walser (our Board President). I have had the good fortune to join this school district under their tenure, and have benefited from their guidance, support and heartfelt opinions. All three are pillars of the Teaneck community who have volunteered hundreds of hours each year to serve the children of Teaneck. Being a Board of Education member is not an easy assignment; but these three not only “show up”, they have made a lasting impact on the policies and practices that guide this district forward. Additionally, they have served as mentors to newer Board members who will strive to walk in their prestigious shoes. On behalf of Teaneck Public Schools, we thank you for your passion and commitment to the 3700 children and over 400 staff members you have served as a Board member and we wish you the very best.

Updated Return to School Plan

On November 18, I presented our Return to School Plan with the intention of returning all students/all grades by January 25. <https://www.teaneckschools.org/Downloads/Revised%20plan%20for%20Re-entry%20.pdf>. Yesterday, I sent a letter to the Board regarding our updated “phased in” approach for returning students and staff to their respective classrooms beginning January 11 and having all children return by January 25. Of course, parents/guardians will have the option to select in-class or virtual learning for their children. In fact, this week, our parents/guardians will receive an online form that will give them the option to return their child/ren to their respective in-school classroom or to keep their child/ren in an online learning environment.

It is important to note that although our school staff will be in their respective schools every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (with Wednesdays being used as an “all virtual” day for cleaning purposes), our General Education and Special Education Resource students will return per our new Hybrid Model (referenced in the Plan Link above). Students will be assigned to a cohort (Monday/Tuesday or Thursday/Friday) using a modified day schedule (not a full day schedule).

NOTE: Siblings will be assigned to the same cohort. Our Special Education Self-Contained and 18-21 Program students, however, will be in school for the full four days (with the Wednesday exception as noted above).

Once we have a sense of how many students will be returning to school, we will then work quickly to ensure that those who are eligible for transportation and those who will need after school care (via SACC), will be provided the necessary information.

Lastly, as I know there have been several questions on this topic, I have asked Ms. Simmons and Mr. Cox to present our district's updated COVID procedures and protocols at tomorrow night's Board meeting.

Happy Holidays

The holidays are upon us and I would like to wish our Jewish community members a Happy Hanukkah, which begins tomorrow evening (December 10th). Our holiday recess begins with a half day on Wednesday, December 23 and continues through Friday, January 1. To all who are celebrating, I wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy Kwanzaa. Lastly, I know we are all quite ready to say goodbye to 2020, so here's to a very Happy New Year for our students, staff and family members. Please continue to stay safe through the holiday recess and I will look forward to seeing everyone very soon.

Curriculum & Instruction

December 11th Professional Development

On December 11, the district will host its second half-day professional development session focused on best practices for hybrid learning and project-based learning opportunities. Teachers will have the opportunity to participate in choice sessions where they will continue to learn about best practices in hybrid instruction, instructional technology and practices for social-emotional wellness. At the end of the session, teachers will take time to review the goals and objectives for project-based learning. Teachers will be afforded an opportunity to reflect on their units of study and brainstorm ideas for possible projects.

Institute for Learning - Language Arts

The district is continuing its work with The Institute for Learning. On December 11, kindergarten, first and second grade teachers will review the attributes of high quality reading tasks. These tasks include querying the author, identifying and analyzing misconceptions, and writing reciprocal pieces, which demonstrate comprehension of text. Teachers will also review strategies for questioning the author and effective accountable talk moves.

Institute for Learning - Mathematics

In November, the district's Mathematics Enrichment Teachers worked to code mathematics tasks. Indicators that were coded included: created/used representations (equation, graph, diagram, table); used labels; connected representations; explained reasoning; used logical sequence of ideas and accuracy. Ms. Parra, Supervisor of Mathematics, worked with Mathematics Enrichment Teachers and principals to model best practices associated with coding and identifying high-level mathematics tasks.

In celebration of our partnership and work with IFL, Ms. Parra, Supervisor of Mathematics, and Mrs. Nunez, Hawthorne teacher, co-authored an article on accountable talk practices in the mathematics classroom. The article highlighted the importance of discussion in mathematics instruction.

Amistad, Holocaust, LGBTQ and Individuals with Disabilities Committee Update

The committee's work, under the leadership of Dr. Marisa King, is in full swing. The committee is currently completing the curriculum crosswalk, which will identify and highlight the Amistad mandate and the Holocaust mandate in our curricula. In addition, subcommittees have met a number of times to determine professional development opportunities for our district. Committee members have also begun constructing the upcoming student survey - all of which meet the goals of the committee and the district's Strategic Plan.

Co-constructing a Hybrid Instructional Model

On November 24, both teachers and administrators met as a think tank to define and create the district's hybrid instructional plan. After rich discussion and dialogue, the committee came to consensus on the importance of synchronous, live instruction for both in-person and remote learners. Additionally, committee members generated important questions and next steps regarding the implementation and execution of the district's hybrid plan.

School Counseling Department

- Support Services
 - Elementary Outreach Workers, School Counselors, and F.O.R.U.M. staff are available via Google Meets. Our parents and students should email their counselor for more information.
 - Grades k-8: The Mental Health Initiative has resumed. Students and families in grades k-8 have access to licensed mental health clinicians. Telehealth sessions are conducted utilizing Google Meets. Parents can access these services by contacting their child's counselor. Spanish-speaking counselors are available.
- College & Career
 - Sophomore & Freshman Parent Night
 - December 1: Webinar for parents/guardians. Topics included the role of the school counselor, planning for the future and tips for supporting their child
 - College Visits are virtual. Students are notified via Google Classroom, Naviance and the THS App of the following schools scheduled to visit. Students register via Naviance
- Upcoming events
 - Teaneck High School Open House: December 17, 2020 via Zoom.
 - Parent Workshops will resume monthly on Thursday's in January.
 - Thursday, January 7- "Thursday Talk with the School Counselors". Meeting joining information is forthcoming.
- Communication
 - "THS Connections" Newsletter - THS Counseling Department a monthly newsletter is available on the school website "School Counseling" tab.
 - YouTube Channel- All webinars will be posted for viewing. (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDw7prx6aDcxJmeyAo5sgQw>)
 - Follow @TeaneckSchoolCounseling on Instagram and Facebook

Special Services

- On November 2, the Special Education Department facilitated a high school department professional development session on strengthening social-emotional, and academic skills (in-person and online) through Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- Teaneck's Special Education Parent Association Group (SEPAG) and special education administration held its monthly meeting on November 17, with a focus on inclusive education-sustaining equity, access, and social justice during remote learning.
- Self-contained elementary and middle school special education teachers were retrained on implementing Orton Gillingham-based reading interventions using the ISPIRE reading program on November 17, 18, 19 & 24.
- On November 12, the department facilitated a follow up professional development opportunity for school social workers on The Little Blue Book to provide practical guidance on CST mandates of Initials/re-evaluations, mediation, due process, and SEMI reporting compliance.
- The Special Education Department facilitated a self-help session for child study team members and related services providers titled Survival During a Stressful Time (Presenter: Dr. Lynn Ciccantelli).

Communications, Community Relations & Volunteer Services*Internal & External Communications Plan*

Below is an update with regard to the district's approved Internal & External Communications Plan

<https://www.teaneckschools.org/InternalExternalCommunications.aspx> :

- *New Brand Initiative* – New Brand Identity Guidelines have been completed (e.g. new logo, business cards, letterhead, PowerPoint templates, etc.) and will be shared with all when we return from the holiday recess. We are working on creating a special website for internal use only where all of the documents/files will be accessible to our staff for their use.
- *District Website Redesign* – Per previous reports, we are working on the redesign of the homepage and Parent sections, which is scheduled to launch late spring 2021. One of our top priorities is to make the new website mobile friendly.
- *Student Involvement* – At last week's Board meeting, we recognized over 30 student and staff members who participated in a special project to create COVID-19 Safety Public Service Announcement videos (in English & Spanish) that are age-appropriate and meant to be shown to our children as they return to school. They are also now available on our District YouTube page so parents can watch them with their children over the holidays: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kF_3ywy14A&list=PLZiCUE9GziF47RKGC5_sUTORdn2iSDm98 . We are extremely proud of this collaborative effort - one that supports the goal of our Communication Plan to get more students involved in our go-forward communications. This also supports our Media Arts initiative that includes the Media production club that has now been in place for 2 school years.

Technology

The Technology Department has hired two new members, Natacha Rodriguez and Ernesto Taveras, to assist with technical support throughout the district. They will be assisting teachers and students with

any issues which may arise in-person or remotely. Additionally, they will work at the Chrome Depot helping students and staff with devices. During their first month, they assisted in preparing classrooms for hybrid learning. The additional support is needed due to the increased usage and reliance of technology in our new online learning environment in addition.

Bryant School

- Over 30 parents and staff joined the Bryant Prek Team at our two Bryant Family Round Table Events in November. Topics included Remote and Hybrid Learning, Prek Progress Reporting and Assessment, and Maintaining Health and well-being across our Preschool Community.
- The Early Childhood Department will be conducting a Winter Hat and Mittens Drive to benefit homeless and displaced families from December 14 to 18. Families and community members can drive-through and drop off new hats, mittens, masks, and socks to collection bins in the Bryant School parking lot from 9am to 3pm. The EC Department plans to work with the NAACP and the Teaneck Township Toy Drive to distribute the mittens and hats as families come to Bryant to collect their NAACP Unity Drive Toiletries kits.
- Bryant School Families are invited to join our Virtual Parent Meeting on December 8 at 5:30pm. Topics will include Hybrid Learning, Schedules, and Health and Safety Protocols. Families were sent a form to submit questions in advance. The Zoom link was sent to families on December 3 and will be sent again as a reminder on December 7.
- In the classroom: Bryant school's Google Classrooms are buzzing as children engage in this month's theme, Grocery Store! Children count cookies in the bakery section, write shopping lists for graphics practice, and get to know friends better when they "Share the News" about their favorite grocery store treats.
- Bryant Families have a new place to find the most up to date information about our Hybrid Learning program, as well as learn about local resources and events. The Bryant family Information Site is available in English and Spanish and has sections for Family Resources, Health and Safety Protocols, Arrivals and Dismissals, FAQs, and Staff Information.

Theodora Smiley Lacey School

- Held successful online SCHOLASTIC BOOK FAIR
- Coordinated Art donation (Phillip Smallwood & Theo Lacey)
- Assembled English Language Arts (ELA) K Education kits for all Kindergarten students and families

Hawthorne Elementary School

- During the month of December, we celebrate the character trait of compassion at Hawthorne School. Throughout the month, students will be engaging in activities, which allows them to understand the trait's meaning and its importance.
- This year, the Hawthorne PTA and Hawthorne School Faculty are collaborating to bring some joy to this Holiday Season with Hawthorne Cares. If you are interested in learning how you can get involved, please contact Natasha Pitt at npitt@teaneckschools.org.
- On December 10, Hawthorne School will be hosting its virtual families meeting at 7:15pm. During this meeting, Ms. Pitt will discuss the revised schedule as well as plans for the proposed hybrid schedule.

Lowell Elementary School

- 11/2/2020: Lowell Faculty Meeting w/Dr. Irving - District Update 12.8 - 12.10.2020:
- Start Strong Assessment ELA and Mathematics - 4 Grade Students
- 12.10.2020:
 - Lowell School Town Hall 4:50pm - 5:50pm: Mr. Green will discuss the Hybrid Schedule
 - Panera Bread PTO Fundraising Night, 4pm - 8pm. The PTO will be holding a Fundraising Event at Panera Bread. Lowell Families are encouraged to order dinner at Panera Bread, provide a physical copy or electronic version of the distributed flyer upon ordering. A portion of the purchase will be donated to Lowell School.
- 12.11.2020: Half Day, 1pm Dismissal for Professional Development
- 12.14.2020: Lowell School Staff to report to the building to teach/prepare classrooms for hybrid model approach (beginning 1.25.2021)
- 12.22.2020: Monthly Lowell School PTO Meeting
- 12.23.2020: Half Day, 1pm Dismissal for Winter Break
- As a reminder, we are continuously asking our parents to utilize the District and Lowell School website as we continue to update it with the latest information as well as provide links to parent resources.

Whittier Elementary School

- The Whittier PTO held its monthly virtual meeting on November 24. Principal LoGiudice presented the new schedule to parents which began on November 30. The next Whittier PTO meeting will take place on December 22.
- The search is on for a mascot to represent Whittier School. All Whittier students will have an opportunity to nominate a mascot (person, animal, object). Nominations will be submitted to the PTO until December 15. Once a mascot is chosen, 3rd and 4th grade students can participate in an art contest to design what the mascot will look like. Three designs will be chosen and staff and students will vote for their top choice. Art submissions will be due in January.
- The Whittier PTO hosted a virtual scavenger hunt on December 2. Students raced around their home to locate the 20 items on their list. Two students received Amazon gift cards from the Whittier PTO. Students also learned fun facts about Principal LoGiudice with a "Get to know the Principal" quiz.

Benjamin Franklin Middle School

- November provided a great deal of opportunities to teach, learn, and lead at Benjamin Franklin Middle School. In honor Native Americans, the school focused on the history, journey, and lives of natives by providing daily morning announcements and Fun Friday's events throughout the month.
- The "District Virtual Day" held on November 3, provided an opportunity to hold a schoolwide remote mock election. As students continued to work remotely, there has been a heightened interest in the 2020 election and our social studies teachers, led by our 2019-2020 Governors Educator of the Year winner - Mariam Muheisen, organized a great mock election for our learners.
- Along with the district, we continue to offer Math Tutoring from our Math Coach, Diana Spain. This will continue in addition to the District Tutoring Program that began in December.

- With the decision to remain remote, BFMS Admin Team collaborated with TJMS Admin Team to build a schedule to address the concerns of parents of middle school students. BFMS introduced “W.I.N. Periods” -an acronym for What I Need, and this allows students seek additional support in selected content areas. This new schedule began on November 30.
- Prior to the Thanksgiving Break, and in coordination with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Ms. Patricia Dent provided support for 3 families just in time for the holiday.
- Benjamin Franklin Middle School honored the work our several students who participated in the filming of COVID-19 Public Service Announcements (PSA) to educate their peers about social distancing. These students were honored at the December 2, 2020 school board meeting. Also honored was Javalda Powell, Behaviorist, for her role in organizing this event.
- Working with Dr. Watson, we began the work of beautifying Benjamin Franklin Middle School using funding from the grant secured this year.
- Three students from Benjamin Franklin Middle School successfully completed the Girls Exploring Engineering Program (GEE) at nearby Fairleigh Dickinson University.
- Lastly, we honored 20 students virtually for our November Students of the Month Ceremony.

Thomas Jefferson Middle School

- November 16 to 20 - American Education Week Parents and guardians were able to sit in on virtual lessons.
- November 17 - PTA meeting was held at 7pm via Zoom.
- November 20 - Report cards became available through Skyward.
- TMJS students who completed FDU GEE program will be recognized by the Board of Education at the December 9 meeting.

Teaneck High School

- Teaneck International Film Festival hosted a virtual film series for our students on November 13. The topic was “Youth in Action: Following their Lead”, which included the following film shorts:
 - Youth Rise Texas - an organization dedicated to uplifting the voices of young people harmed by criminalization and deportation so that they may heal, take action, and cultivate compassionate communities,
 - Rise For Youth - a Virginia based non-partisan campaign committed to dismantling the youth prison model by promoting the creation of community based alternatives for youth incarceration, and
 - Native Youth Alliance - an organization that focused on acquiring land for native youth homes, protecting the Omaha language from extinction, and stopping the Keystone pipeline.
- THS Honor roll for the first marking period has been posted in Skyward
- THS will hold its monthly PTSO meeting on Monday December 14, 2020 at 7:00 pm.
- Clubs are meeting virtually once a week;
- Students are getting ready for Winter Athletics.

Human Resource Management –

Staff Vacancy Updates – see attached document