



Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools

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A National Blue Ribbon District of Excellence

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Dear Hastings Families,

Welcome to the 2020-21 school year!

Charles Darwin once said, “In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” While it may not feel like we have prevailed, we have. The start of every new school year is another opportunity for educators to inspire our young people, excite them about learning new ideas, acquiring new knowledge and skills, applying the new knowledge and skills to discover and solve interesting problems, and cultivate a passion that could someday lead to a future pursuit.

I know that you have been on pins and needles with worry about what to expect on September 8 and the days and months ahead. Regardless of the mode of instruction, you can expect all educators, administrators, and staff members to welcome back your children with excitement and love.

Let us not allow the pandemic to rob us of hope and make us forget our superpowers of resilience, agility, and perseverance. Our children need to see how we uphold the dignity and humanity of all people whether they agree with us, look like us, worship like us, love like us, or speak the same language as us. When the pandemic loosens its grip on humanity, we still have a nation to heal so that our children embrace a future filled with happiness, fulfillment, and prosperity.

Uncertainty is not something we have a high degree of tolerance for as humans. Regardless, not knowing can create fear, apprehension, and even anger. After all, our lives have been upended and we have had to pause and rework our plans and still not know if what we’ve planned will come to fruition. Speaking of revisions, we will continue to update our Remote Learning Plan, School Reopening Plan, and FAQ on our website www.hohschools.org. Throughout the school year, the virtual Superintendent’s Chats will occur so that community members can ask questions, get answers, and clarify information. Regular informational updates from me and the building leadership teams will be provided. We have streamlined information to the community through the creation of the *Hastings Daily*, which is how we will collect all school, District office, and community information to distribute once per day rather than sporadically throughout the day. In this way, all families, regardless of which school their child attends, will learn about what is happening throughout the District. In addition, the

Board of Education has introduced the *Hastings Board Brief*, a weekly summary of important topics as well as information from the Board of Education meetings.

The death of George Floyd sent shock waves across the nation because it reminded us of the brutality of racism and the serpentine grip that it has on our nation. Moreover, it stifles our march toward creating a fair and just democracy for all. During our August 31 Welcome Back to Faculty and Staff Program, conducted virtually, we showcased the social and racial justice work of our community partners and the District's Diversity Committee chaired by Jenice Mateo-Toledo. The following community partners were represented and addressed the faculty and staff:

- Hastings R.I.S.E. (Racial Inclusion & Social Equity)
- Hastings High School Student Affinity Group
- Parenting Children of Color
- Race Matters Committee
- The Hastings Parent, Teacher and Student Association Inclusion Working Group
- 914United
- *Silent in Volume/Loud in Voice* Project by Eryn Reigner

As a way to introduce members of the District's Diversity Committee, each member was asked to select and read a quote that symbolized their commitment to social justice and anti-racist practices, beliefs, and behaviors. These quotes are [here](#). We will continue our efforts in the months ahead. Along with Tesfa Stewart, Assistant Director of Special Education, and Jeanette Kocur, Director of School Counseling, I will invite students to a monthly conversation called *Time to Talk About Racism*. This forum is an opportunity for middle and high school students to have conversations, in a safe and welcoming environment, about issues of social justice and racism. So far, the insights from students have been powerful and point to opportunities for us to examine some of our practices, beliefs, and attitudes that we will discuss with the faculty and staff.

In closing, I want to thank all District staff members for the countless hours spent preparing for the reopening of schools. I express my gratitude to the community for your support, patience, and assistance this year. The custodial, cleaners, and buildings & grounds team whose hard work has created the safest physical space possible for students and staff, and the administrators who have spent their summer creating and refining plans for remote learning and the reopening of schools.

When it is all said and done, your children will feel the admiration and joy expressed through the eyes and smiles of their teachers, teacher assistants, teacher aides, monitors, nurses, school counselors, social workers, psychologists, speech and language specialists, related service providers, administrators, clerical members, custodians, cleaners, buildings and grounds members, bus drivers and bus monitors who have prepared for yet another wonderful school year.

We are going to get through this and we will prevail.

Have an enjoyable Labor Day holiday weekend.

Sincerely,

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte