



RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

April 30, 2020

Dear Families and Faculty,

I hope this communication finds you all well.

While folks are settling into their new 'normal', it is clear that we are all yearning for *real* personal interaction, especially with our students. I am hopeful this will all be behind us soon. In the meantime, we continue to forge ahead, and like many of you, have settled into our personal and professional routines. This communication includes a few updates that you might find helpful, as well as highlights from the week's eLearning experience.

It looks like we will have a milder weekend ahead. I hope we can all enjoy the outdoors a bit!

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions, and/or concerns.

Warmly,

Susie

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Updates (COVID-19 and Other)

Camps

This is the time of the year when many of us begin planning for summer 'Camps.' While the District does not receive extensive information on camps or have the authority to make decisions on the opening of camps, I thought I would share this memo ([linked here](#)) with guidance on Youth Camps from the State of Connecticut Office on Early Childhood. I hope you find this helpful.

Budget

While I did not have the opportunity to create this FY20-21 budget last fall, I have been working closely with the leadership team to understand the details of our school budget. I can assure you that we are working hard to maintain the current level of programming that students and families have come to expect from the Ridgefield Public Schools, while also supporting its core values. That being said, you have heard many discussions across the Tri-Boards on the community needs and the Board of Education budget. We also discussed the FY20-21 budget at the Board of Education meeting on Monday, April 27, 2020. You can find that discussion [here](#) (the discussion is toward the end of the meeting). During this meeting, we discussed the Board of Education budget that included an increase of 3.96%.

The community budget process is different this year as a result of the Governor's directive. Therefore, the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance will be making the final budget decision regarding the FY20-21 budgets. The Board of Selectmen met last evening and rescinded their non-binding recommendation of 2% to the Board of Education budget. The discussion at the Board of Selectmen meeting focused on a recommendation to the Board of Finance of 1.5% or lower. A reduction to a 1.5% increase would result in reducing the Board of Education approved budget by more than \$2,400,000.

As shared at the Tri-Board meeting, our goal is to partner with the Town Boards as we review and determine how we can help decrease the school budget. Our process has been comprehensive. We have looked at all cost centers, line by line, and prioritized students in alignment with the District's core values. I can say, cuts to this budget will not be easy.

Grading

As discussed at the Board of Education meeting on Monday night, we made a subtle, but important shift in grading at the high school level. Students will now have three grading options:

- Option 1: Take a letter grade for Marking Period #4 and the course
- Option 2: Take a 'Pass' for the entire course after receiving the fourth quarter grade
- Option 3: *(new)* Take a 'Pass' only for fourth quarter

Considerations from students and families helped us in making this shift. Click [here](#) for a link to the RHS grading letter sent by Mr. Creller on Wednesday, April 29. Again, I appreciate the thoughtful feedback from parents.

Return to School

As of today, we have not received a return to school date. The Commissioner of Education, Dr. Cardona indicated on the Governor's call last evening that the 'reopening committee' is discussing the start of school in the fall, but the decision for **this** school year will come from the Governor. We have begun planning for students' return, whether it is in the spring, summer or fall. When we have a return date, we will share our preparation plans with you. Of course, our preparations will align and include Health and State Regulations/Guidance. This may also be a part of a discussion at a future Board of Education meeting.

As a reminder, we continue to plan spring events (virtually) where it makes sense to do so.

Student Focus Groups

As shared in my last memo, we are continuing the search for a new RHS Principal. I will be holding Focus Groups for RHS students only on Tuesday, May 5 from 12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. Students will be provided an opportunity to share their thoughts on what they believe is important to them in a high school Principal. RHS students **only**, *please join me using the link here*: Focus Group with [Dr. Da Silva](#)

The Silver Lining

School systems are 'learning' organizations. This applies to the adults as well as our students. Throughout the past weeks, our staff have learned a great deal in a short amount of time. In the absence

of a Director of Technology, many of our staff members have stepped out of their 'traditional roles' to teach others and to ensure our faculty has opportunities for professional learning and our students have access to eLearning. Creativity is booming! Here are a few examples:

The new **“Ridgefield Tiger Talk”** Podcast. Now available on all major platforms: Apple, Google, and Spotify, and even a few of the smaller ones (Stitcher, Overcast, etc.). You can also access the [site for the podcast](#) then click on the service of your choice. There will be a mystery guest each week!

Community, “Digi-Break” Video: How do students stay motivated? What do you do for a Digital-Break? We hope you can help add to this video. Linked [here](#) is an open, shared Google drive where you can upload a picture or short video (10 seconds or less) of how you stay focused and engaged. If you have trouble uploading a picture or video, please email it directly to

Dr. Wes DeSantis at wdesantis@ridgefieldps.net. The District will edit the complete video over the weekend and have the finished version out to you early next week. *Please note: by submitting your pictures and video, you are allowing RPS to edit and post our Digi-Break video.*

You can click on the links here to see a few highlights from the past week from both the [Elementary Schools](#) and [RHS](#). I am sure you will share my enthusiasm for our students and staff.

BMES Pre-K Program

The Barlow Mountain Elementary School PreK Program has been implementing its Continuity of Learning Plan with students and families. Faculty have been active in live, pre-recorded, and guided activities for our youngest students. Questions have been asked by parents along the following topics:

- **Will there still be new PreK peers invited into the program for the fall?**
 - Yes, we will be holding spots in our PreK classes for non-disabled peers for the fall.
 - Those parents who sent in PreK peer applications this spring will be contacted next week regarding what to expect of that process moving forward.
 - As of right now, we will not be holding a virtual peer screening process.
- **I am a parent of a three or four-year old in Town, and I want to refer my child because I think he/she may need special services. Can I still do that at this time?**
 - Yes - please contact the PreK Supervisor, Mrs. Christina Salvestrini, at csalvestrini@ridgefieldps.net
- **My child receives special services from the CT Birth-Three system, and they are going to turn three during this closure. What will happen when they turn three with these services?**
 - We have received guidance from the CT Office of Early Childhood that Birth-Three services may be extended past the third birthday for those children turning three during the COVID-19 school closure period.