



RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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*Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools*

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Dear Families and Students,

It's hard to believe that I am already writing this midsummer letter. That said, there is still plenty of summer left- so, embrace every last minute of it. It has been so nice to see the children walking downtown, riding their bikes, or having a snack on Main Street. All of the seasons are special, but certainly for those of us that work with children, the flexibility of the summer months allows us all to rejuvenate and gain the excitement and momentum needed to serve children, families, and our profession in the best way possible. Soon we will come together and have the opportunity to share how we have spent our summer months; the many moments that have made this time special; and our hopes and dreams for the coming school year.

RPS is a little quieter in the summer but not completely! We were joined by students and faculty for the second edition of our summer BRIDGE program. For those that follow social media, you can see why summer BRIDGE is so special. In addition to the efforts of our exceptional faculty, our summer program highlights student interest, socialization, and experiential learning. A big thanks to Cory Gillette, the Curriculum Department, our program directors Kristen Kleis, Jen Hildebrand, Shane Peters, Eileen Stewart, Jenn DeJulio, and Amanda Johnson and all the faculty and staff who bring our program to life. Not to mention, our many RHS student volunteers.

Our Extended School Year (ESY) summer program continues to provide extended learning for students with learning differences during the summer months. The partnership between summer BRIDGE and ESY shows how, when teams work together, we can truly provide a memorable experience for our students. Oh, and let's not forget "Best Buddies". You may remember from last year, the Best Buddies program invites peers who don't receive special services to socialize and engage with ESY students. We expanded Best Buddies this year for multiple weeks, and our students who participated had a tremendously fun and meaningful experience. We just wrapped up ESY this past Friday- so, now, it is a bit quieter. Dr. Tony Showah, our Assistant Director of Special Education, leads this program seamlessly....and as he says, he couldn't do it without his village of faculty and staff. Kudos to our ESY colleagues!

The summer is filled with many preparations for the start of the school year. A top priority for us here at Central Office, is the hiring of certified and not certified staff. I do have the great fortune of interviewing all new certified educators during the final phase of the hiring process. We noticed a difference this year when our

candidates answered the question, “why Ridgefield?” It was clear that each of us, including the parent community, in our own way, have made RPS an ideal place to work, and we should all be proud of that. Our curriculum writing teams use the summer months to write and revise curriculum based on what we have learned from our students and faculty over the course of the previous year. Summer months are when the heavy lifting happens! The facilities team has been hard at work with both capital projects as well as smaller projects to prepare our schools for fall. School security is certainly at the top of the list. You will hear more about security procedures for each of our schools in your principals opening day letters. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our facilities crews at each of our schools, who literally transform them during the summer months!

As you can tell, summer is a very busy time, even so, we too had some time to decompress a bit. This year, my summer journey brought me back to Portugal. It was a blessing to see family, while also exploring the country that means so much to me. Last summer, my letter described the frightening and exhilarating experience of navigating the winding, narrow horse trail from the top of Bryce Mountain. This year, the only difference is Bryce Mountain was substituted by the Douro Valley of Portugal. Yikes! My advice- rent a small car. The greatest gift of the trip was spending time with my now three teenage children, Andre’, 13, Izzy, 15, and Gabby, 17. It is hard to believe my “baby” will be a high school senior this year. Tears.

In addition to audiobooks, podcasts, and a Master Class or two, my most recent summer read, *The Social Emotional Learning Playbook*, written by Doug Fischer et al.. is a “guide” to teacher and student well-being. The book is a part of a small collection selected by our leadership team for our summer reading and book clubs. Like other texts from Doug Fischer, the playbook is straightforward, with a sharp focus on collective leader efficacy.

My colleagues here at Central Office have found time to enjoy their summer as well. Dr. Liz Hannaway, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services, shared, *“I am incredibly lucky to have many close friends and family living nearby, and spent this summer enjoying the outdoors with them. Most weekends I could be found with my kids, John (5) and Hugh (4) and the families of my close friends, swimming in local pools and on the beaches of the Long Island Sound. I made my first visit to Mohonk Mountain House, and fell in love with the Catskills Mountains. I enjoyed hiking, kayaking, stand-up paddle-boarding, and most of all... my new hobby - archery!”*

Cory Gillette, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction took a break after wrapping up another very successful summer BRIDGE program. She joined her extended family in Westport Point, Massachusetts. This year everyone came together to celebrate the life of her mother Joanie Gillette. There was music, dancing, and lots of love all around. The weather was perfect and Cory didn’t miss a day on the beach or on the boat. Besides working with her daughter on the college application process and obsessively taking classes with her new favorite Peloton instructor Callie, she was able to enjoy many Colleen Hoover books, and a few standouts by other authors, *The Lifeguards* and *Beautiful Little Fools*. “I was

especially reminded this summer of the importance of taking a real break from work and really being present with friends and family. I hope all of our faculty and families had that same opportunity. ”

Jill Browne, our new Director of Finance, began her summer a little earlier than the rest of us with a trip to Outer Banks, North Carolina. Jill was joined by her extended family, including her new grandson! Jill shared “*it was a special time with extended family as we gathered to celebrate my mom’s 80th birthday. We were lucky with the weather as every day was 85 degrees and sunny! Each day our group of 20 divided into smaller groups to go jet skiing, golfing, sky-diving (yes, my daughter and her roommate actually jumped from a perfectly good plane!), or just to the beach; then back to our beach rental for dinner - each family took on feeding 20 once during the week away – with food, fun & family we created memories to last a lifetime!*”

This was a quieter summer for Karen Dewing, Director of Personnel. Karen, like Cory and me, has a senior this year! So this summer focused on the college application process and scheduling final school visits. Karen stated, “*although I lived vicariously through my daughter’s travels this summer, my husband and I were able to attend several concerts. Music is a passion of ours!*” In addition, Karen spent much time with family and friends enjoying cooking and playing nighttime Bocce. There was lots of laughter during those times!.

Joe Morits, Facilities Director, began the summer touring the Gettysburg battlefield on horseback; immersing himself in the rich history of the 3-day battle. Once back to work at RPS, Joe, along with Brett Medders began scheduling over 45 projects for this summer. The challenges of material delays, supply chain issues, and pricing increases aside, Joe and his team are confident the schools will be ready for the 2022-23 school year.

Most importantly, we are hard at work preparing for our students’ return. Last year, our theme “Rebound” was anchored in the text *Leading the Rebound* by Doug Fisher. Our work last year focused on offering our students consistency, routines, and structures that our students have come to know and that our faculty knew worked well in their classrooms. This will not change. We will continue to build structures that are foundational and consistent while also thinking into the future. As we previewed at the very end of the school year, our theme this year is *Ridgefield Imagines*. While this year, we are not anchored in one sole text; we are anchored in the endless possibilities of the future of our schools. We know that during the pandemic we had to reorient ourselves and figure out how to provide services to our students in different ways. The significance of engagement, social/emotional learning, connections, professional learning, assessment, and the many other elements of teaching and learning could not be understated. We also know that our work ‘rebounding’ is not over. However, this year we want to wonder, question, be engaged and excited about what we can do differently to improve opportunities, access, and the experience for our students in Ridgefield, as well as our faculty. How do we imagine student engagement, climate and culture, providing diverse, relevant

and interactive professional learning? We look forward to working together, PK-12, in *Imagining* schools, *Imagining* the RPS of the future.

As we welcome students back, here are a few highlights:

- We welcomed two new Principals to our elementary leadership team: Ms. Mary Scalise (RES) and Interim Principal, Dr. Sheri Prendergast (VPES). Meet and Greet have been scheduled.
- We welcomed new Elementary Supervisors: Interim Tim Luchsinger (SES) and Chris Olson (VPES and FES)
- Angela King will join RHS as the new Special Education Supervisor, and Terry Houlihan as the Counseling Supervisor.
- The curriculum team has been working on updating our District website as well as updating the parent curriculum website- they are very excited to share their work. More information to come soon!
- School hours for grades K-12 can be found [here](#). The PreK will begin its half-day and extended-day program hours on September 6.
- Our school calendar can be found [here](#).
- Our food service company has changed from Chartwells to Aramark. We are looking forward to the delicious lunch options. You can find the press release [here](#).
- CSDE has issued “Launching Healthy Schools” guidance. We will provide any applicable updates closer to the start of school.
- Weekly family communications will continue to take place on Friday, beginning the week before students begin.
- The Technology Department is pleased to announce that starting with the high school, (throughout the first half of the school) all aging SmartBoards will be replaced with new ViewSonic boards.
- Like last year, 4th, 6th, and 9th graders will be given new Chromebooks to have for the duration that they are in that school.
- We are excited for the return of [Ridgefield Tiger Talk Podcast](#) this fall! Be sure to catch up on past episodes.
- We hope to share the first draft of our yearly priorities with the Board of Education at their meeting in late August or early September.

I hope your summer was filled with rest, laughter, and good health. Let the final weeks be the best that they can possibly be. We look forward to welcoming our students, K-9 on August 29 and our students in grades 10-12 on August 30.

Warmly,

Susie

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