



RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

May 22, 2020

Dear Families and Faculty,

As I reflect on the past few weeks, I have been thinking about the complexity of the Budget process. In every district, it begins late fall and ends late spring. It is long, yet invaluable in that it represents the values and priorities of a community as well the Mission and Vision of the Ridgefield Public Schools. The current world circumstances and nature of our lives have added an extra layer to its complexity. Regardless of the Budget outcome, discourse is critical in ensuring transparency, as well an understanding of perspective. The next level of work will require an added level of clarity and dialogue, as most of our recommendations and/or decisions have not and will not be easy. What you do need to know is that our administrative team has worked hard and prioritized the needs of children first.

Memorial Day seems to have snuck up behind me, and while I hope the long weekend provides some respite for all, I urge our students to take the time to recognize those of 'then', and 'now' who have fought for the freedoms that we are so fortunate to experience.

Warmly,

Susie

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COVID-19 and Other Items

Budget

On Thursday evening, the Board of Finance voted on a 1.75% budget increase for the Board of Education. We will continue to work with our administrators and the Board of Education on ways to meet this reduction to our current Board of Education budget request of the 3.96% increase. We discussed options with the Budget, Finance and Operations Committee of the Board of Education on May 22, 2020, and will be continuing those discussions at the Board of Education's regular meeting Tuesday May 26, 2020.

Personal Items Pick-Up (and Student Materials Drop-Off)

District days for drop-off of school materials and pick-up of student items will take place on the following days:

- Middle Schools: June 10-12
- Elementary Schools: June 10-15
- RHS Seniors only materials drop-off: May 27. Click [here](#) for details and procedures.
- Grades 9-11: You will be notified in August with details.

Each school Principal will reach out to families with the specific day and time as well as the safety procedures that have been developed. The District has made the decision to allow students to maintain their chromebooks during the summer months while we assess our needs and plan for fall.

RHS Graduation Events

Dr. Gross and I have received many emails from families regarding graduation. While we have been answering each of the emails separately, I thought it would be helpful to share the nature of these inquiries. Most of the emails we are receiving are requests to honor our Seniors by having an outdoor ceremony of some kind. Requests or ideas such as 'lawn seating with social distancing' 'drive-in', and 'drive-throughs' mostly. We plan on having an open discussion about graduation plans on Tuesday evening at the Board of Education meeting, as we are finalizing our requests/approvals with the Health Department. All of our proposed plans must follow Connecticut requirements, as well as those from our local health department. RHS has 381 Seniors- which means that special considerations need to be made for the size of our graduating class.

Once final decisions are made for RHS, we will then finalize our 5th and 8th grade end- of-year recognition/moving-up/promotion events.

RPS Summer School

Parents of students who have been found eligible for Extended School Year (ESY) Special Education and/or Related Services were sent a survey today via their child's case manager to elicit their feedback regarding the ESY program design and their preferences for participation. Dr. Hannaway and Dr. Showah are reviewing the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and CT Department of Education guidelines for safely operating an in-person program and assessing if RPS can meet these requirements. Virtual programming will be provided, and once the parent survey and full assessment is completed, a decision regarding in-person programming will be made and communicated. The CDC requirements can be found [here](#), and guidance from the state of Connecticut [here](#).

Re-Opening Committee

The District is forming a 'Re-Opening' Committee that will be chaired by Dr. Hannaway, Assistant Superintendent for Special Services, and Karen Dewing, Director of Personnel. This committee will consist of stakeholders from all over the District and will consider state and local

guidelines as well as best practices as we plan for the fall. We will keep you posted as we further refine our structure and processes in light of fast moving information and dialogue with our colleagues and others across the nation.

eLearning

If any family is still experiencing difficulty accessing the internet, please click [here](#). The state of Connecticut has gathered (from many providers) a list of plans to help families gain internet access.

A big 'shout-out' to students and families for supporting our eLearning efforts. Student attendance and engagement have been improving and are close to 100%.

You can find updates on Twitter *Twitter:* @RPS_DaSilva, Instagram *Instagram:* rpssuper, [RPS News](#), and of course on our new Podcast, click here: [Ridgefield Tiger Talk, with Dr. Deeeeeesantis](#) or search 'Ridgefield Tiger Talk' in your favorite podcasting app. Joining us in this week's show is Jamie Palladino, the Principal of Ridgebury Elementary School. We talk about the modern elementary learning experience as well as some challenges and highlights.

Elementary projects: RES "Catch a Heart" staff video - click [here](#).

Parent Live Webinar

On Thursday, June 4, RPS mental health faculty will host a live parent webinar called ***Nothing about this is normal: Helping your child cope with social distancing and online learning***. See event flyer [here](#) for details. All parents in the District are welcome and encouraged to join! The discussion will include strategies to combat the effects of isolation, coping with disappointment, and prioritizing needs. If you have questions about the event, feel free to email Dr. Elizabeth Hannaway at ehannaway@ridgefieldps.net.

Feedback from Students

The Regional Education Service Centers (RESC) are collecting feedback on Distance Learning from students through the Thought Exchange to share with the Commissioner of Education and State Department of Education. The survey is geared toward students in grades 5-12. Bolded below is the request that I received from our local RESC:

Dear Connecticut Student,

We know that current events related to Covid-19 have caused major disruption in the lives of students. The sudden move to distance learning has been a challenge for all of us. As this school year comes to an end, we would like to hear ideas from students like you on how to improve distance learning should we need it again for some part of next school year. The feedback gathered here will be shared with the Commissioner of Education, the State Board of Education, and other leaders across the state as they consider decisions on reopening.

Thoughtexchange keeps confidential who shared each thought and who assigned what ratings. You can rate as many thoughts as you'd like before moving on to

Discover where you can see all the thoughts sorted by the average star rating. The entire process is described in the introduction. Thank you for participating in this important conversation.

Notes about this process:

1. **It could take you as little as 5 - 10 minutes to participate.**
2. **You can complete questions at your own pace and come back to review your answers at any time.**
3. **There are three ways you can access the Thoughtexchange**
 - **Please click HERE <https://my.thoughtexchange.com/542224813> to participate.**
 - **Go to www.thoughtexchange.com click on the “Join” button and enter the code 542-224-813**
 - **Download the Thoughtexchange app (IOS) only, click on the “Join” button and enter the code 542-224-813**

Thank you for participating in this effort.

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