

Darien Public Schools - Administrative Offices

35 Leroy Avenue – P.O. Box 1167 – Darien, Connecticut 06820-1167
Tel: 203-656-7412 Email: aaddley@darienps.org

June 3, 2020

Dear Parents,

Good evening. I trust this finds your family well. Thank you for your partnership with the schools during the past three months in helping to provide meaningful eLearning experiences for our students. Thank you to our teachers for their extraordinary efforts and congratulations to our students on all of their achievements in the new learning environment. Collectively, we should be very proud of everyone's efforts and accomplishments during this health crisis. As this unique school year draws to a close, we look forward to a different type of summer and the likelihood of a very different opening to the new school year in the fall. Here are a few District updates as the students prepare for their last week of eLearning:

Graduation and Moving up Ceremonies: All of our school communities have planned meaningful culminating experiences to the school year for our students in grades 5 and 8. The Blue Wave spirit also rose to the challenge of ensuring our seniors have meaningful recognitions of their accomplishments and a fun celebratory farewell. Thank you to all the parents who assisted with the planning of these events.

Lunches: Grab-and-Go bagged lunches at the Middlesex Middle School will continue to be available through June 11.

Darien Summer School (DSS) and Extended School Year (ESY) Programs: Recently, the Commissioner of Education released the health and safety requirements for summer schools and ESY programs. As already communicated, given the significant logistics and health and safety requirements outlined in the Reopen Connecticut, Rules for Operating Summer School during COVID 19, and the CDC guidance for schools, the District is offering Darien Summer School and ESY instructional services through eLearning. Details on the most current information on DSS can be accessed on the District website.

Use of District Facilities during the Summer: This past Thursday, First Selectman Stevenson rescinded the April 8th Executive Order prohibiting the use of athletic fields and amenities of the Darien Public Schools. This paved the way for some summer events to occur on school grounds. A few District schools will be used by the Darien YMCA Summer Camp and the Town of Darien Summer Camp. All summer programming will conclude by August 7th to ensure the necessary cleaning of the schools for the fall. These summer camp programs must comply with all pertinent State Executive Orders and Office of Early Childhood Guidelines. All school fields are strictly for authorized use only. Approval for use of the fields must be obtained from the District Facilities' Office. Any approved activity must comply with the Governor's Executive Orders and Summer Camp Guidelines. In compliance with CDC guidelines, all school playgrounds will remain closed.

We ask that community members on school campuses strictly adhere to the most current social distancing and health & safety requirements contained in the Governor's Executive Orders.

FY 2021 Budget: At the Board of Education (BOE) meeting on June 9, the Administration and the BOE will continue its discussion regarding the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget. As approved by the Board of Finance, the Board of Education must reconcile an operating budgetary gap of \$1,025,156. This reduces the BOE operating budget from an increase of 3.40% to 2.38%. The BOE must also address the decrease in forecasted revenue due to Darien Summer School moving to eLearning.

At the last BOE meeting, the Administration made recommendations to the Board of Education for consideration to close this gap. These included some very difficult choices that would significantly affect the quality of education. Items included renegotiated contracts; deferral of equipment; pre-purchasing; changes to personnel; athletics; extracurricular activities; and, student programs. These reductions include reduced staffing for elementary art, high school talented and gifted, library staff, athletics and extracurricular activities. Details on these proposed reductions can be accessed on the District website. We encourage your participation in the process. Directions for public comment will be available on the District website by the end of the day Friday, June 5. The RTM will vote on the BOE's appropriation or recommend any further reductions at their meeting on June 8th.

School Closing and Reopening: During the last two weeks of school, the District's Closing School Taskforce is implementing health and safety practices and protocols to assist in the smooth and safe closing of the school year. The District Reopening School (DRS) Taskforce will continue to meet weekly during the month of June to plan for the District's reopening in the fall. Reopening practices and protocols in the areas of *Operations, Teaching & Learning, Special Education, Health & Wellness* and *Communication* are being developed and will be refined as new information and guidelines are received from the Commissioner of Education and the Reopen Connecticut Advisory Group. Progress updates on the plans for reopening in the fall will be provided at the June 9th & 23rd Board of Education meetings. Parents will receive progress updates on the work of the DRS Taskforce on June 12 and June 26.

Current Events: Finally, the events of the past few weeks and the images on television and social media have been very disturbing. In this midst of the national health crisis, racial tensions across the country are extremely high in response to the killing of a man of color by police. It is very likely your children have witnessed these images and are confused or have questions about issues of racism, hate and violence. The regular school setting would ordinarily provide an emotionally safe environment for teachers to discuss these matters with students. Nonetheless, even though the end of the school year nears and we are in an eLearning environment, this still remains a teachable moment for our young people. In the coming days, principals will be sharing educational resources with you for your consideration in discussing these complex issues with your children. Where developmentally appropriate, teachers will also address these events with their classes. As always, our teachers and support staff will be available for any student who may need to talk through these sensitive matters. Reflecting on these issues with our children will help contribute to safe and welcoming learning environments in our schools.

Sincerely,

Alan

Dr. Alan Addley
Superintendent of Schools