



HADDON TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

Broadcast

Dear Haddon Township School District Community,

As I begin my sixth year as Superintendent of Schools in Haddon Township, I remain grateful for the opportunity to lead and serve this outstanding community. Each school year brings new challenges and opportunities, and I'm proud of the steady progress we continue to make together.

We're now in the active phases of the \$30 million bond referendum. This community-backed investment is improving our facilities, enhancing safety, and updating learning environments across the district. These changes are about more than buildings; they reflect our shared commitment to giving students the best possible foundation for the future.

At the center of our work is a focus on the whole child. We want every student to feel safe, connected, and valued. That includes strong academics, meaningful relationships, a sense of belonging, and space to grow as people. We continue to emphasize wellness, inclusion, and the kind of learning that builds both skills and character. I have always believed that schools should help students find purpose, not just performance.

That means we support effort over perfection, progress over comparison, and the process of learning just as much as the outcome. We want our students to challenge themselves, bounce back from setbacks, and exit our schools prepared to make a positive difference in the world. As we start the 2025–2026 school year, the question is before us:

How can we help every student aim high, stay grounded, and grow into the kind of person who leads with authenticity and impact?

Please join me in the excitement of another school year, and see below for key updates and summer progress from across the district:

Bond Referendum Projects: Construction & Facilities Update

Attached to this message is a presentation from last night's Board of Education Work Session, highlighting the progress of our major construction efforts at the high school and middle school. The photos included offer a glimpse into the scale of demolition and the transformation already underway.

I've received several recent inquiries regarding the delayed start of work on the turf field. This was due to a coordination issue between the manufacturer and the installer. That said, I've been assured **the turf project is still scheduled for completion by the originally anticipated date of early November**. Additional facility updates include the high school's

new main entrance and secure vestibule, **which remain on schedule** for completion before the first day of school. The upper gym will also receive new lighting, wall padding, and fresh paint, allowing us to utilize the space for study halls and student overflow as we temporarily lose access to the media center, IMR/VMR music rooms, and auditorium during the early part of the year. I'll continue to provide updates in September with more specific timelines for the completion of the longer-range projects.

Updated Cell Phone & Electronic Device Procedures

As previously shared, we've spent the summer reviewing and revising our procedures regarding cell phones and personal electronic devices. Beginning this school year, you will see new expectations in place to help create more focused, respectful, and distraction-free learning environments across all grade levels.

For students in **grades 8–12**, cell phones will no longer be permitted on their person during instructional time. Upon entering each classroom, students will be required to place their phone in a designated wall caddy located on the back of the doorway. Phones may be retrieved at the end of class when students exit. The only exception to this policy will be during the **lunch period** for students in **grades 9–12**.

For students in **grades K–7**, our recommendation to families is to avoid sending students to school with smartphones, due to the increasing risks of early screen exposure and digital addiction. However, if a student must carry a phone for communication before or after school, the device must remain **powered down and stored away** throughout the school day.

We believe these changes will support better engagement, stronger classroom culture, and healthier tech boundaries for students of all ages. As always, we appreciate your partnership in reinforcing these expectations at home.

Before & After Care Program: Scheduling Options

We're pleased to offer families three flexible scheduling options for our Before & After Care Program this school year:

- **5-Day Option:** Monday through Friday
- **3-Day Option:** Monday, Wednesday, and Friday
- **2-Day Option:** Tuesday and Thursday

Once a child is enrolled in one of these standard scheduling options, families **will continue to have access to flex tickets** for unique or emergent situations that may arise throughout the year. Our goal is to provide reliable, reasonably priced, and convenient care that supports both students and working families.

Elementary Configuration Planning

The Board of Education's previously planned July retreat, which was tentatively scheduled to explore possible reconfigurations of our elementary schools, did not take place. Now that the district's **Tax Levy Incentive Aid** has been officially approved, there is no interest in pursuing any configuration changes for the 2026–2027 school year. That said, I continue to recommend that the district engage in **long-range contingency planning** in the future for the following reasons:

Fiscal Preparedness: Should the district face another severe budget crisis in the coming years, it's important to have studied all options, including the possibility of school closure as an absolute last resort.

Instructional Demands in Upper Elementary Grades: As the future complexity of instruction in upper elementary grades continues to increase, it may one day no longer be practical for individual teachers to cover all content areas. Team teaching and subject specialization, already in place at Strawbridge and Van Sciver Schools, could become a more widespread need and may require structural adjustments to support this model.

Strategic Alignment with State Priorities: If New Jersey continues to expand universal Pre-K funding incentives with on-site and mixed delivery model options, having a dedicated Early Childhood Center could position the district to maximize state aid and be intentionally designed with age-appropriate spaces and resources tailored to the developmental needs of young children.

Zoning and Enrollment Equity: If our current "dotted line/solid line" zone methodology no longer accommodates present enrollment patterns, especially in areas without safe walking routes, adjustments to school configurations may be necessary to preserve equitable and secure placements.

While there are no planned changes in the near future horizon, the past five years have made one thing clear: we can never predict what tomorrow's news will bring. From navigating a global pandemic to enduring multiple years of state aid reductions and managing two consecutive years of difficult staffing cuts, our district has weathered a great deal of uncertainty. **These experiences have reinforced a hard but important truth: thoughtful, forward-looking scenario planning is not a luxury; it's a responsibility.** By preparing now, we give ourselves the best chance to make smart, mission-driven decisions in the future, rather than being forced into reactive ones.

Community Notes & Reminders

- Please join me in congratulating **Julian Craft**, who recently earned the distinguished rank of **Eagle Scout**. For his final service project, Julian contributed to the renovation of the community garden at the historic Champion School. This honor reflects not only Julian's leadership but also his commitment to service, and we applaud his accomplishment.
- A heartfelt thank you to all staff members and families who supported our **Summer Rec** and **Summer Enrichment** programs. Despite the ongoing construction work across the district and township, these programs continued to provide safe, fun, and

meaningful experiences for our students. We are proud of the work that goes into making each summer memorable.

- My office has received inquiries regarding the specific mechanics of the state's **Tax Levy Incentive Aid** program. If community members have questions about their **individual tax bills**, please contact the **municipality's tax office**, as they are best positioned to provide accurate, up-to-date information.
- Please note that **this year's school calendar does not include any built-in snow days**. Due to the way holidays fall this year, the only available option would have been to bring students back for a single day between Christmas and New Year's, an option we chose not to pursue. While we hope for a mild winter, if we do experience a weather-related closure, **Monday, February 16 (Presidents Day)** will be used as our first designated **make-up day**.

Thank you for your ongoing trust, support, and partnership. I'm excited for the year ahead and all we will accomplish together.

-Sincerely,

Robert J. Fisicaro, Ed. D. Superintendent