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Dear Darien Community,

The School District has been busy over the summer! Over the past two months, administrators, teachers and other school personnel have been working hard to prepare for the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year. We look forward to welcoming your children back on Wednesday, August 27, for the beginning of another successful year.

On a personal note, I have spent the past weeks meeting with parents, teachers, staff and community members to learn everything I can about Darien and to get a sense of what is important to the people who live and work here. I have been impressed with this community's commitment to supporting public education and the sense of pride in our schools that has been evident in so many of my conversations. I look forward to meeting many more of you as the school year begins. Please do not hesitate to introduce yourself to me at school events.

As we move into the school year, keeping our families and community informed is a top priority. My personal style is to be generous with information. You can expect more frequent and transparent communication from me as we celebrate our schools' achievements and openly navigate challenges together. Below are some important updates to kick things off:

School Facilities

The facilities team was busy over the summer. In addition to the annual painting, waxing and general upkeep, some additional major renovations took place. Additions at Hindley, Holmes, and Royle are nearing completion. Furniture is being installed as we wrap up the summer work and complete the finishing touches. Crews have worked diligently to move into the next phase of the projects, the renovation of existing spaces. Tokeneke received upgrades to the main entrance and the repaving of the parking lot and bus loop. At Middlesex, a comprehensive facilities study was launched this summer. Architects from KG&D met with staff from MMS and began the process of evaluating the entire facility to determine necessary improvements. We anticipate that the study will be completed later this fall. At DHS, lighting fixtures have been replaced with energy efficient led units. This project will continue throughout the fall. In addition, parking areas for the B & C buildings have been resurfaced.

Curriculum and Instruction

Our commitment to strong teaching and learning remains at the heart of our work. Across the district, curriculum writing teams are continuing to refine and publish curricula —always starting with the question, *What do we want students to know*

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and be able to do? Curriculum teams continue to develop course overviews and associated units at all grade levels. District curriculum can be accessed on the Darien Public Schools Teaching and Learning page via this [link](#). We anticipate that just about all of our courses will be available for viewing by the end of this school year.

Hindley, Holmes, Royle, Ox Ridge and Tokeneke Schools

This year's work in all grades, K-5, centers on strengthening literacy instruction. Professional learning will strengthen our knowledge of the *Science of Reading* and effective instruction for phonics and phonemic awareness. Teachers will also explore strategies for teaching comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, writing and handwriting, while implementing our new K-3 literacy resource, *Into Reading*. Our youngest learners will continue to explore, create and grow through play-based learning experiences that spark curiosity and joy.

Middlesex Middle School

At the middle school we have adopted a newer edition of our math resource, as well as developed new units for Grade 8 Accelerated Algebra and Honors Geometry. Curriculum writing teams and school counselors are developing curricula for a comprehensive school counseling program aligned with state and national frameworks to support our work in implementing student success plans. Mandarin 8 will be added to complete the middle grades Mandarin sequence. Additionally, the middle school social studies curriculum is being revised for alignment with new state standards.

Darien High School

At the high school, we are introducing three new courses shaped by student interest—Astronomy, American Sign Language 3 and Cybersecurity—each designed to inspire discovery, broaden skills and prepare students for the world beyond our classrooms.

Cell Phone Policy

Last year, a new cell phone policy was implemented in grades K-8. As a reminder, cell phones are prohibited in grades K-8. Detailed information on K-8 guidelines can be found [here](#). This year, at DHS, students in grades 9-11 are required to store their cellphones in pouches throughout the school day. Detailed information on the DHS cell phone protocols can be found on our website [here](#). It is our sincere hope that removing cell phones from the school day will increase student engagement, decrease distractions, and lead to greater human connections.

Safety and Security

Across the district, we have replaced numerous doors to allow for more secure card access system installation. New fencing was installed at Tokeneke providing a greater level of security. Last year, we enhanced the districtwide hand held radio system to improve connectivity and we have begun the process of replacing radios in the schools as part of our replacement cycle. At DHS we have new signage for pedestrian safety with moveable and flashing crosswalk signs.

2025-2026 Calendar

I am sharing the [2025-2026 school calendar](#), which was approved by the Board of Education in June. We encourage you to review it carefully, as it highlights key dates. You'll notice dedicated time for K-5 literacy

professional learning and release time for staff at Holmes, Hindley, and Royle to facilitate important construction-related transitions. The expanded times for training in the new elementary literacy program and construction-related transitions are for this year only. The calendar also accounts for high school professional learning communities, elementary parent conferences and districtwide professional learning. I recognize that this year's calendar presents some challenges to families and I can assure you that we will use the time well to help improve our instruction and the school experience for all of the students.

Transportation

Bus routes will be available on ASPEN on August 20th at 3:00 pm and bus assignments will also be posted on the [Transportation page](#) of the District website on August 20 at 3:00 p.m.

Aspen

Aspen will be accessible to families on Wednesday, August 20, at 3:00 p.m. At that time, you'll be able to view your child's class assignment/schedule and bus assignment in Aspen. Please find [this helpful document](#) that will assist navigation of ASPEN.

Technology

The District's new website launched on July 29. The address is the same (www.darienps.org), but the site has been completely updated to allow for greater ease of use and functionality. Please spend some time browsing the new site to familiarize yourself with its many new features. Additionally, it is mobile friendly and can be accessed on any device. If you need any assistance, please fill out a [support ticket](#) and one of our techs will assist you. We have updated our anti virus system in an effort to provide greater protection to the District and all who use our network. Additionally, chrome books for grades 5-8 have been refurbished and replaced as per the District replacement cycle.

Once the school year has started, I will be sending out a community update each Friday afternoon. The goal is to keep the community updated on the happenings within our schools. I hope you will find it to be a helpful source of information. I wish you and your students a terrific fall, and I look forward to seeing you at school and community events throughout the year.

Sincerely,



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