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August 14, 2026

Dear Darien Community,

I hope you have had a wonderful summer! The School District has been especially busy these past two months. Our administrators, teachers and other school personnel have been working hard to prepare for the beginning of the 2026-2027 school year and are very excited to welcome your children back on Wednesday, August 26, for the beginning of another successful year.

While many of us were off on summer break, our custodial and facilities staff worked hard in hot, humid conditions making building improvements and cleaning our schools in preparation for opening day. Please join me in thanking them for all of their efforts this summer. Additionally, there is a small but mighty group of twelve month employees who manage everything from purchasing materials, registering students and installing technology. Please join me in recognizing the hard work of this dedicated group as well.

As we move into the school year, keeping our families and community informed is a top priority. As you probably already know, my personal style is to be generous with information. You can expect 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:

Communication

We are making a big change in how we communicate with families for the start of the school year. Moving to Parent Square as our mass communication system will dramatically improve our communication with families. As we transition from School Messenger to Parent Square, you may receive multiple messages from us. For the time being, in addition to using Parent Square, we are also sending messages via Aspen to ensure that everyone has the critical information needed. We will continue this practice for the first few weeks of school as families register with Parent Square. Thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.

ParentSquare

Earlier this week, you received an activation link to set up your ParentSquare account. This two-way communication platform will make district-wide communication more efficient and effective, as well as on individual school levels with more streamlined communication from principals, teachers, and staff members. If you have not set up your account yet, please do, as we do not want you to miss crucial information such as welcome letters, emergency alerts, and other important updates from your child(ren)'s school(s) without an activated account. If you still need to activate your account, please go to <https://www.parentsquare.com/signin> and input the email address that is on file with your child(ren)'s school(s) in the "Register" box. If you run into any issues while activating your account, please contact Caitlin Wardlow, Director of Communications, at

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Curriculum and Instruction

Our commitment to high-quality teaching remains at the heart of everything we do. Guided by our District's Mission, Vision, and Vision of the Graduate (Communication, Creativity, Curiosity, Empathy, Independence, Integrity), educators refine learning goals around one core question: What should students know, understand, and be able to do? By the end of September, families will be able to view updated course overviews, unit guides, and curriculum story boards on the district website via EduPlanet21, our curriculum platform. At that time, we will share with families clear directions on how to view and read the curriculum documents.

To help every child thrive, Darien Public Schools uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. MTSS supports the whole child across academics, social and personal learning, behavior, and attendance. Through collaborative, data-informed decisions, the MTSS framework will help us to deliver personalized support at just the right time, providing strong core instruction for all, targeted help for some, and intensive support for those needing it most.

In addition, this year we will begin providing much more detailed assessment information to families of students in grades K-8. We will improve our family communication by sharing parent/guardian Universal Screener reports beginning this fall. Each time we administer the Universal Screener (Fall, Winter, Spring), families will receive a report with results.

School Facilities

Elementary Schools

The additions and renovations at Hindley, Holmes, and Royle (HHR) are nearly complete. While there still may be punch-list and smaller items to address, the vast majority of the work will be completed next week. All parking lots at the HHR schools are being milled and paved as well. In addition, all HHR schools have received their new hand-held radios as part of our safety and security upgrades.

Middlesex Middle School

The repair of two chimney caps from the 1940's section of the school were completed in July. This project secured the brick and caps from further deterioration. Additionally, we continue to meet with building leadership to discuss and refine the Educational Specifications for a potential renovation project. An update to the Board of Education is planned for this fall.

Darien High School

Beyond the regular summer cleaning, the majority of the work at DHS has been in the repaving of parking areas and sidewalks. Center oval sidewalks were milled and paved last week, and the center oval itself has been milled. We anticipate this project wrapping up by the end of this week. In addition, all hallway light fixtures have been fully converted to energy efficient LED technology.

Cell Phone Policy

Two years ago, a 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](#). 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](#).

Technology

As we prepare for the 2026-2027 school year, we are sharing the significant technology changes rolling out across the district that will reduce daily in-school screen time, increase interactive teaching and learning methods, and enhance the overall academic experience for both students and teachers alike. These changes come with research and data that supports our students and their learning journeys in the most effective and positive ways possible, and we thank you in advance for your patience and openness as our various schools enact them. Please see below for the changes, organized by level/school:

Elementary Schools (Hindley, Holmes, Ox Ridge, Royle, Tokeneke)

- The internet filtering was redesigned. This shifts all five elementary schools from a block-known-harms posture to an allow-only configuration, in which students may reach only pre-approved resources and everything else is denied by default.
- **Grades K-2:** Moving from individual student Chrome Tablets in classrooms to 6 total tablets per classroom, with a full cart available per grade.
- **Grades 3-5:** Existing Chromebook carts in every classroom will remain, but Chromebooks will NOT be allowed to be taken home as they have been for Grade 5 students in the past.

Middlesex Middle School

Middlesex Middle School will be moving to a limited tech learning plan and environment. Changes that will be most obvious will be the shift from a 1:1 Chromebook policy that allowed students to take home their Chromebooks each day to the devices staying at school on carts that teachers will be able to reserve for their classrooms as needed for specific projects or lessons. Should a student need a Chromebook to take home for schoolwork purposes, there will be a check-out process and students will be able to pick up their loaner device at the end of the school day, and return it the following day. Those students with IEPs or 504 plans requiring a 1:1 device will have exceptions and families will be communicated with by the school to accommodate these plans.

Safety and Security

We welcome a new security partner, Altaris Consulting, that will support new training and the updating of safety and security protocols across the district. As part of this new collaboration, Mr. John Shaughnessy will be our full time on site Director of Safety, Security and Emergency Preparedness.

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.

2026-2027 Calendar

I am sharing the [2026-2027 Calendar](#), which was approved by the Board of Education in June. The calendar has significant shifts at the elementary level that we believe will be helpful to all. We encourage you to review it carefully, as it highlights key dates. The calendar accounts for high school professional learning communities, elementary parent conferences and districtwide professional learning. We have also built potential snow days into the school calendar for the 2026-2027 school year.

Transportation

Bus routes will be available on ASPEN on August 19th 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 19, 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.

Instagram

Be sure to follow @darienpublicschools_ct on Instagram for pictures from events in all of our schools and for important information and announcements.

Once the school year has started, I will again be sending out an update each Friday afternoon. The goal is to keep the community informed on the happenings within our schools. I hope you will find it to be a helpful and welcome 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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