



HADDON TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

Broadcast

Dear Haddon Township School District Community,

Tomorrow is the first day of school, and we could not be more excited to welcome our students back for the 2026–27 school year. Our schools always have a different energy as we get ready for opening day. Over the past several weeks, our administrators, teachers, nurses, counselors, support staff, custodial and maintenance teams, office staff, and many others have worked hard to prepare for tomorrow. Our staff returned this week, and it was great to have everyone back together, focused on our students and the year ahead. A great deal is happening across the district. In this first update, I want to share several important reminders, welcome new team members, and provide a few program and facilities updates. Additionally, our administrative team has established three district-wide goals to guide our priorities, decisions, and work across all our schools this year. These goals are intentionally straightforward, but each carries a great deal of important work.

Strengthen Human Connection Among Students

Every student should feel known, supported, and connected to the people around them. As technology becomes an increasingly significant part of our lives, strong relationships, communication, empathy, belonging, and meaningful engagement must remain at the heart of a great school experience. This will require us to be more intentional about when and how we use technology during the school day and in work assigned outside of school. We want to create more opportunities for students to talk to one another, collaborate, solve problems together, engage directly with their teachers and one another, and experience the kinds of traditional learning structures that continue to have great value. Technology is an important tool, but it should never come at the expense of human connection.

Prepare for Teaching and Learning in the Age of AI

Artificial intelligence has rapidly changed how we learn, work, communicate, and solve problems. Our responsibility is to prepare students and staff to use these tools thoughtfully and responsibly while strengthening the uniquely human skills of critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and sound judgment. We have developed AI guidelines for our middle and high school classrooms and will help our staff and students understand the opportunities, limitations, and risks associated with these tools. We will explore AI and where it can genuinely enhance teaching and learning while maintaining appropriate boundaries, academic integrity, and necessary safeguards. Our challenge is not simply to prepare students for the world as it exists today, but for the world they will enter in the years ahead.

Maximize Every Dollar

We have a responsibility to ensure that every dollar entrusted to the district is used as effectively as possible to support students. After several years of reductions in state aid and rapidly increasing health-benefit costs, we must continue building a sustainable financial model while remaining mindful of the impact on taxpayers. That will require disciplined spending, creative planning, greater efficiencies, shared services, outside partnerships, new revenue opportunities, and an aggressive effort to secure every available source of additional funding for our schools. At times, this will require us to think differently about how we have traditionally done things. Our responsibility is to protect the programs and opportunities that matter most to students while continually asking whether there is a better, more efficient, or more creative way to accomplish our goals.

Welcome to Our New Staff

We are pleased to welcome several new members of the Haddon Township School District team this year:

- Gianna Marino – School Psychologist
- Catalina Senk – Spanish Teacher
- Olivia Gazzara – Kindergarten Teacher
- Lauren Efkowitz – Kindergarten Teacher
- John Bergner – Long-Term Substitute Music Teacher
- Julia Baran – Payroll/Benefits Manager

We had the opportunity to spend time with our new staff during orientation, and I am excited about what each of them will bring to our district. Starting in any new organization comes with a learning curve, and I know our staff, students, families, and community will help make them feel at home in Haddon Township. We are fortunate to have talented people joining an already outstanding team.

Important Safety Information for Tomorrow Morning

Ongoing construction on Cuthbert Boulevard across from Haddon Township High School, near the Acme, will continue. This work will continue, and there will be a significant police presence in the area during morning arrival. Students who walk to school, families transporting students, and anyone traveling or crossing in this area should use additional caution. Please stay attentive to police officers, construction activity, traffic patterns, and any temporary changes. The first few days of school always bring additional traffic, and the construction will add another variable to our normal arrival routine. Please allow yourself a little extra time tomorrow morning and, above all, be patient and safe. You may also notice CBS News crews on or around school grounds tomorrow morning as they film some of our back-to-school routines.

High School Parking Notice

I also want to make our high school students, families, and community members aware of an important parking issue. The AutoZone parking lot is not an authorized parking location for Haddon Township High School students, families, or visitors. Historically, some students and visitors have used the AutoZone lot when attending school or visiting the high school. AutoZone is now actively enforcing its parking restrictions, including towing unauthorized vehicles. Please do not park in the AutoZone lot when attending school, visiting the high school, or participating in a school activity. Students who drive to school should use only authorized school or public parking areas and follow all posted parking regulations. This should be clear at the beginning of the year so that no student, family member, or visitor has the unfortunate experience of having a vehicle towed.

Academic and Program Updates

Several exciting academic and program developments are underway this year. At RMS, we are introducing a new mathematics acceleration opportunity for a select group of our highest-performing eighth-grade students. Traditionally, accelerated students have completed Algebra I in eighth grade and Geometry in ninth grade. This year, selected students will have the opportunity to complete both Algebra I and Geometry during eighth grade, creating additional opportunities to pursue advanced mathematics courses during high school. We are also strengthening student support and character development at the middle-school level through initiatives including BOOST and Choose Love. These cost-free programs are intended to strengthen skills that contribute to long-term student success, including decision-making, relationships, personal responsibility, resilience, and belonging.

At the high school, we will be launching a chapter of the National Honor Society this year. The transition will include some changes to our internal application process, while the criteria for membership will remain consistent. We believe this transition will strengthen the experience for our students by aligning our program with the nationally recognized standards, expectations, and distinction of the National Honor Society.

Facilities and Bond Projects

Our bond-referendum work continues across the district. Current projects include Emerging Technologies spaces, improvements for art classrooms, and additional instructional spaces designed to provide students and staff with improved environments for creativity, technology, and hands-on learning. Major construction also brings challenges, and some finishing work will continue as the school year begins. We will continue working aggressively to complete the remaining work properly and as quickly as possible while minimizing disruption to students and staff. The planned High School Wellness Center has also been delayed after environmental testing identified residual motor oil beneath the former automotive-garage area. While this is certainly frustrating, there is only one responsible path when an environmental concern is identified: properly remediate the area and ensure that the site is safe before proceeding. That work is underway, and we will move forward once that process

is complete. Additionally, planned field improvements originally associated with Lower Recchino have shifted to Van Sciver School based on project costs and changing priorities. These represent long-term substantial investments in our schools, and we remain extremely grateful to the Haddon Township community for supporting the referendum and making these improvements possible.

Partnerships and Opportunities

Partnerships will continue to play an important role in our work. We will continue our relationship with the New Jersey Tutoring Corps, which has provided additional mathematics support for elementary students. We are also exploring other partnerships that can bring resources, expertise, services, and revenue into the district without automatically adding long-term costs to our operating budget. Public schools like ours must be increasingly creative in this area. Shared services, grants, sponsorships, philanthropic support, community partnerships, and responsible revenue generation all deserve consideration when they can meaningfully benefit students.

Growing Enrollment

We also continue to see encouraging enrollment trends. Our incoming kindergarten class is approaching 160 students, which is an exciting indicator for the district's future. Young families continue to choose Haddon Township, and our entire community should be proud. At the same time, growth requires thoughtful planning. We will continue monitoring classroom space, staffing, schedules, programs, and resources to ensure that increasing enrollment does not compromise the quality of the educational experience we provide.

Final Thoughts

The first few days of school always bring a great deal of excitement, and they also require some patience. Traffic patterns settle in, schedules are adjusted, and students learn new routines. We appreciate everyone's flexibility as we work through those opening days together. Our most important goal is simple: that every student walks through our school doors tomorrow feeling welcomed, supported, challenged, and excited about the year ahead and leaves knowing that they belong here and that the adults around them are invested in their success. Thank you to our teachers, nurses, counselors, support staff, administrators, custodial and maintenance teams, office staff, Board of Education, Haddon Township Police Department, families, and community partners for the tremendous amount of work that has gone into preparing for this school year. We are ready and excited to welcome our students back.

Have a wonderful first day of school.

-Sincerely,

Robert J. Fisicaro, Ed. D. Superintendent