

MADISON

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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FEB 2018 NEWSLETTER

Madison School Community,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to my new monthly newsletter for parents, students and the community of Madison. Stakeholder involvement is paramount for our mission to provide a world-class education to all students. As such I am excited to begin sharing regularly some of the most important happenings in our schools, particularly from the district and Board-level perspective.

As many of you know, I joined Madison schools just in time for the start of the 2017-18 school year and have spent the Fall and early Winter embedding myself in our school community, learning as much as I can about the history and current state of our schools. This initial transition has been an exciting challenge that has involved getting to know our talented students and their families, overseeing a variety of construction projects, reorganizing an inspired leadership team, and working closely with the administration and Board to align our efforts and engage the community. Please know how grateful and passionate I am to serve as Dodger-in-Chief as we work collaboratively to make Madison Public Schools one of the premier educational institutions in the nation.

It is my hope that our communication initiatives, including this newsletter, will invoke a new era of investment and integration between our schools and the entire community of Madison. I look forward to working with all of you and I hope that you take the time each month to read these updates and become further invested in our mission.

Sincerely,
Mark Schwarz, Superintendent

NEW YEAR, NEW GOALS

I am very pleased to announce that on December 12, 2017, the Board approved three district goals for the current school year to guide our priorities and ensure progress on behalf of our students. I'd like to share these goals with you, along with some information regarding our progress.

GOAL #1 – BUILD OUR FOUNDATION

Prior to my arrival, our district had experienced a significant turnover in our central office. While our students have enjoyed consistent instruction from our dedicated and highly professional staff, basic supports for our employees and community had become somewhat destabilized. By engaging in several rigorous selection processes and creating newly-defined systems and processes, I am pleased to report that we have established an experienced and highly-organized district team that is operating with increased efficacy every day. Some of the tangible byproducts of this change are increased support for district staff through a new HR department, improved communication systems, increased availability of information for parents and public, and the fresh alignment of our efforts between schools and with community groups.

GOAL #2 – KNOW WHERE WE STAND

As I met with many members of our community, I found there to be a great deal of uncertainty regarding the status of our schools. Rankings from media publications and changes in leadership had caused speculation regarding the quality of our programs. As we dug deeper into the data, observed our faculty and students, and deconstructed the ranking mechanisms, we quickly discovered that our schools are foundationally strong.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities for growth that can be quickly realized by conducting a comprehensive analysis of our systems, sharing the data with the community, challenging our assumptions and converging our efforts. In pursuit of this goal, we are instituting new data collection systems including student benchmark assessments and a forthcoming survey campaign that will measure student, parent, and staff perceptions. Before the end of this school year, I will present these findings to the public.

GOAL #3 – SUPPORT THE HIGH ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL STUDENTS

Madison has maintained a tradition of being one of the top-performing districts in the state and nation, yet there is further excellence to be realized. While many of our students are high-achieving, roughly one third of our students persistently struggle to meet grade-level standards. Although this academic disparity may reflect our students' economic and cognitive diversity, we cannot accept the status quo.

Educational research strongly suggests that improving the outcomes of our most struggling students, while increasing academic opportunities for all, will result in improved outcomes across the spectrum. Thus, as we emphasize innovation and inclusiveness in our programs, all students will be empowered to reach their full potential. The pursuit of this goal has governed our decision-making this school year and will drive our planning for 2018-19.

YOUR ROLE IN GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

I cannot achieve these goals alone. To see them to fruition, I need your help. Embrace the potential of all of our students. Value the diversity of our community. Show your Dodger pride. Take the time to participate meaningfully in our surveys. Engage with students and parents. Communicate with staff, Board members and administrators. Attend events, including information sessions, Coffees and Board meetings. Let your voice be heard and listen to the dialogue in the community. We are all in this together on behalf of our students. In apathy we stagnate, in unity we rise.

NAME THIS NEWSLETTER CONTEST!

All great publications have a meaningful name and I would like to ask for your help. If you have a catchy and clever idea for a title to this newsletter, please email me at schwarzm@madisonnjps.org. Students, parents, staff and community members are welcome to participate.

If your suggestion is selected as a finalist, you will be credited in the March newsletter. The winner will have their selection become the permanent name for the publication and will win be invited to a lunch with the Superintendent! Deadline for submission is Friday, February 23, 2018.

ABOUT YOUR SUPERINTENDENT

Mark Schwarz began his service to Madison Public Schools on August 14, 2017. Prior, Mr. Schwarz served Rockaway Borough Schools in the roles of Vice Principal, Principal and Superintendent. He began his career as a high school social studies teacher, volleyball coach and curriculum supervisor in the Jefferson Township School District.

He holds his MA in Educational Leadership from Seton Hall University and is currently studying as a Doctoral student in SHU's K-12 School Administration program. The proud father of two boys and husband to fellow teacher, Sharon, he resides with his family in the Lake Mohawk community of Sparta, New Jersey.

