



June 25, 2021

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Dr. Edwin M. Quezada
Superintendent of Schools

Dear Yonkers Learning Community,

The 2020-2021 school year is about to end as our community, state and country enthusiastically begin to welcome back more “normal” times. Our community can be proud of their school district. The last fifteen months were enormously challenging, testing the resolve of our staff, students, parents/guardians as well as community members. Nevertheless, we took responsibility to follow the COVID-19 CDC health guidelines, receive the vaccine and, most importantly, stay committed to Yonkers Public Schools. Our united fortitude accomplished amazing results for our students.

Be proud of the 1,581 June graduates in the Class of 2021. Our seniors received almost \$120 million in scholarships and are on their way to impressive colleges, universities and to serve our country in the military. Let us commend our administrators, teachers, students, parents and caregivers who swiftly adapted new skills for remote instruction using Teams, Seesaw and Zoom. In October 2020, Yonkers was one of the first large cities in the State to begin in-person instruction using the Hybrid model in all schools. This was accomplished by collaboratively working together to benefit our most precious possession, our children. Next school year, when everyone returns to full in-person instruction, we will continue to use this collaborative approach throughout the district.

The school year is finishing with strong convictions and aspirations, as well as the expectation that *all* children will be back in their schools this September. And, we are off to a great start this summer for over 4,000 of our students enrolled during 2020-2021. On July 1, secondary students in grades 6 through 12 begin their summer programs at Yonkers Middle High School including the high school credit recovery academy, and the high school and middle school summer enrichment academies. On July 7, students in grades prekindergarten through grade 5 begin elementary Academies of Excellence at 10 schools. All summer programs are full in-person instruction and will follow State Department of Health and CDC guidelines.

The 2021-2022 school budget enables us to revitalize and implement a restructuring process in our District that creates conditions for ALL students’ success. This budget demonstrates that sustainable funding occurs when our elected officials, employees and families band together around equity for Yonkers’ children. We managed to do what has not been done in decades. Our State delegation accomplished a new 3-year phase-in increase in the Foundation Aid formula and our City officials once again increased the Maintenance of Efforts. This united effort demonstrates that when we remain committed to building the capacity of the City’s public schools, the result provides sustainable solutions for student success 2021-2022 and beyond. This budget recognizes and addresses the challenges that our students, families and staff have faced over the last fifteen difficult months. At the same time, it offers a foundation to rebuild, equip and transition our learning community to actualize years of strength, success and meaningful accomplishments for all students.

What to look for in 2021-2022!

162 Additional Staff Members – The District’s budget continues all current programs and services that continue to build on our system’s proven strengths. Simultaneously, we are developing new, innovative transformational approaches to support the academic, social and emotional needs of our students and families. The emphasis of our restructuring plan enables educators and support staff professionals to quickly strengthen our students’ academic and social-emotional needs. Providing appropriate staffing levels in all schools is the first step. Students will have access to additional school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and registered nurses. **More teachers will ensure robust and enriched Culturally Responsive Education curricula throughout the District.** There will be additional teachers for art, music, physical education, library media, career & technical education, English language learners, foreign language, special education, speech and reading specialists. Also, we are adding assistant principals, school aides, clerks, custodial workers and computer technicians. A robust sports program will once again thrive.

September may present some challenges. For the first time in a year and a half, we are expected to be fully back to in-person instruction for everyone – students in their classrooms with teachers and assisting adults learning together. **Beginning the first day of school, September 3, we must establish trust, build community and create safe, caring learning environments.** Every adult in the learning community is expected to support all children and families. **Everyone must be an active participant in this process, and this starts with being present in school every day. As we begin our full in-person instruction next school year, daily attendance for students and staff will be carefully monitored to ensure there are no underlying issues deterring anyone in our learning community from attending school.**


The health and well-being of students and staff alike depends on our collective efforts. To that end, we will continue to vigorously utilize **Restorative Practices as an effective program that promotes social-emotional learning, fosters interpersonal and intergroup relationships, supports self-discipline and strives to prevent, reduce, and/or change inappropriate behaviors.** School personnel must recognize that students are an essential asset to, and a resource in, establishing and sustaining safe and supportive schools. A restorative approach to discipline changes the fundamental questions asked following a behavioral incident. Instead of asking who is to blame and how to punish those engaged in the behavior, the following four Restorative Questions are asked:

- What happened?
- Who was affected or harmed by the behavior?
- What impact has this incident had on you and others?
- What needs to be done to make things right?

There are many challenges ahead for both adults and children. Nevertheless, we cannot compromise our commitment to educate and improve the lives of ALL of our children. This must be our collaborative mantra. As you rest and enjoy your “normal” summer activities, we urge you to consider being more involved in our schools in September 2021, to give of yourself, to volunteer and to assume a position that strengthens not only the schools but also *our Yonkers community*. By embracing this concept together, through our strength in numbers, every challenge will be transformed into meaningful opportunities for everyone.

We are #YPSUnstoppable. Our students deserve nothing less!

Sincerely,


Dr. Edwin M. Quezada
Superintendent of Schools


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