



# RIDGEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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June 8, 2020

Dear Ridgewood School Community,

Over the past several weeks, the world has been attempting to process the tragic killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, to name three people lost senselessly due to the color of their skin. These deaths, like countless others, are reminders of the systemic racism that is so prevalent and embedded in our society. Even after decades of work to advance equality, we still find ourselves repeating our collective tragic history. The circumstances of Mr. Floyd's murder have made me increasingly upset, confused, and frustrated, yet at the same time, I am hopeful when I see protests around the world, in our cities, and in our town demanding change. I am certain that our students are experiencing similar emotions. The Ridgewood Public Schools will continue to educate our students to recognize racism, subtle or overt, and work toward teaching citizenship that includes the good, bad, and controversial events that make us reflect on who we are and how we got here.

As a district, we are committed to advancing equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice in our schools and our community, and will work to teach our students citizenship in a society free of intolerance, racism, and bias, whether that bias is overt, unconscious, or institutional. One of the cornerstones of our strategic plan is that all students will learn in a culture that respects and capitalizes on our diverse community by encouraging and supporting open collaboration and communication. First steps toward our action plans around equity were taken on March 5 when Dr. Derrick Gay addressed high school students, administrators, and parents on the issues of diversity, empathy, cultural competency, and inclusion, opening a platform for honest discussion and reflection. This was only the beginning. We will continue this critical work with our administrators, staff, and students to create a stronger, more unified community.

On Friday, June 5, Ridgewood High hosted the George Floyd Forum, a panel discussion to address the issues of racial injustice raised by the recent protests. Organized and facilitated by our Social Studies Department, this discussion was developed to begin to engage our RPS community in much-needed dialogue and education on the issue of racism and privilege, as well as our role as a school district and how we can improve in this area.

I am hopeful that this movement will result in change that is meaningful and final. Freedom and equity must be 100 percent. As individuals and as a society, now is the time to look within ourselves, listen to others, and use our voice to achieve real and lasting change. Now is the time to recognize that the world is watching us. We must make sure our work is permanent, so racial injustice is brought to an end.

Following is a link that provides many resources parents can use with their children during this important and turbulent time in our history. <http://bit.ly/ANTIRACISMRESOURCES>

Please take the time to read the attached piece from the School-Based Mental Health Team titled *CHANGE IS HARD-FOUGHT: TRANSFORMATION, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE WILL BE HARD-WON TOGETHER.*



Below is information about two local events.

PLEASE JOIN THE MLK COMMITTEE OF RIDGEWOOD AND GLEN ROCK  
AND THE COMMUNITY PEACE AND JUSTICE FORUM.

***NOW IS THE TIME FOR ACTION.***

WEDNESDAY JUNE 10, 2020 4:00 - 6 PM

YMCA PARKING LOT - 112 OAK STREET

**MASKS MANDATORY - PLEASE SOCIAL DISTANCE.**

PEACEFUL SIGNS AND POSTERS

**YOUR VOICE MATTERS**

ORGANIZED BY RHS STUDENTS

CAN BE PLACED IN VAN NESTE SQUARE

MONDAY, JUNE 8TH STARTING AT 2 PM.

### **May 12, 2020 Election**

Late last week, we were made aware that 710 ballots in the May 12, 2020 Municipal and Board of Education Elections were rejected and, therefore, not counted in the results. There is not a lot of exact information available at this time as to why so many ballots were rejected. I can tell you that the Village Council and the Ridgewood Board of Education are exploring our legal options to determine why such a large number of ballots were rejected and determine if there is a remedy. Currently, based on the defeated budget, the Village Council required and the RBOE accepted a \$630,000 cut from the proposed 2020/2021 budget due to its defeat. Additionally, we have been informed that we will have at least a \$440,000 reduction in state aid for the 2020/2021 school year. We will work to make all necessary cuts to have the least impact on the student experience as possible.

The link below provides some information from the League of Women Voters on the July 7, 2020 Primary Election. Please make sure you carefully read all directions so your voice can be heard.

- <https://www.lwvnj.org/home/covid19#Primary>

### **COVID-19 RIDGEWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS REOPENING AND RECOVERY**

Over the past several weeks, people have been inquiring about what the plan is for the reopening of schools in the fall. Please understand that we are working on several different options and await some promised direction from the New Jersey Department of Education. Since we currently have no formal direction from the NJDOE, we are looking at what other states, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Colorado to name a few, have provided their schools and the public. This is what I can tell you. See the follow scenarios below:

- If we can come back without restrictions, we will be checking everyone's health on a daily basis. It is likely that we will be required to wear face masks. We will adapt some programs that have been reported to be more problematic than others, i.e., physical education, cafeteria service, instrumental and choral programs, to name a few.
- If social distancing restrictions are still in place, we will have to alter student schedules and provide a hybrid model of learning in which students will alternately learn in school and at home based on the impossible task of having all students come to our schools at the same time.
- If home instruction continues, remote learning will be enhanced to address areas of concern. We have done a great and unprecedented job with home instruction, but we have learned a lot and will work to make positive changes if we are required to continue with home instruction. Survey data from teachers, parents, and 6-12 students will be analyzed to inform how we can enhance our remote instruction program.

We have subcommittees working on different components integral to the transition back to school. One subcommittee is reviewing facilities. This group has focused on a variety of action and supplies needed to provide a safe environment for our students and our staff. The group working on instruction and operations continues to look at refining scheduling for all of the scenarios listed above, as well as improvements to remote instruction. Summer professional development for staff is being created to capture what we have learned and to plan for the fall. The wellness subcommittee is determining how many people may not be able to return to work or school based on underlying health issues and how that will impact teaching and learning, as well as an extremely long list of other health concerns, practices, and protocols that will have to be enacted and followed.

As soon as we have detailed plans, we will present them to the public. What we end up doing will be determined by what we are permitted to do by our Governor. The above descriptions are not detailed, but they should provide an overview of the behind-the-scenes work being done to provide for a safe and much-needed return to our schools. Since it is likely that students will be required to wear masks, parents are encouraged to start making or purchasing masks that are protective and can be washed.

### **ORCHARD UPDATE**

We have now received all the state, county, and local permits required to move forward with the soil remediation project at the Orchard School. The only reason for not moving forward earlier was the failed budget. The project was included in the 2020-2021 budget, but we were not permitted to send the purchase order for the project to the contractor until the budget was approved. We now have a budget and can move forward. I anticipate seeing progress on the project no later than July 1, 2020. The Orchard Remediation website has been updated to include all permits and pertinent documentation.

### **MESSAGE FROM THE BERGEN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**

Below is a link for Bergen County Mental Health and Community Support Resources accessible during COVID-19.

- <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1z4-ESuSCQqgVPdSW97Jc0jhXG3Xv0g9d/view>

### **NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH VIRTUAL YOUTH TOWN HALL**

All New Jersey middle & high school students are invited to participate in a Virtual Youth Town Hall event focused on the response to COVID19. Students will be able to do group activities and share ideas about what the future may hold for them. For more information, see the attached flyer.

- Register TODAY <https://bit.ly/2zne3eY>

### **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**

To view all episodes of the interview series, go to the link below and subscribe to the RHS Wellness YouTube channel.

- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQGUBDhjkAeVppI8PaMRFuw>

### **RIDGEWOOD NEEDS YOUR HELP**

While we can't get out and host a traditional fundraiser, we can still support our community. Below are links to help during this time of crisis. Please note these are community-based people or organizations who are working to help.

**Blood Donations:** The **Red Cross** is alerting everyone to blood and platelet shortage. Please donate if you can. <https://www.redcrossblood.org/>. If you are having difficulty finding a Red Cross site to donate, look at <http://vitalant.org/>. They have a local office for donations.

**Ridgewood Social Services Association:** The Social Services Association of Ridgewood (SSA) continues to serve our community amid the COVID-19 pandemic. While their physical pantry is closed due to the shelter-in-place, SSA is still providing food security via grocery store vouchers and door-step deliveries. They serve over 400 individuals who are already financially devastated prior to COVID-19. See the link below for donations. <https://ssaridgewood.us3.list-manage.com/track/click?u=532accffb616cd716abce83de&id=4421d27480&e=fd87ce9123>

**A message from SSA:**

**Even though the SSA Pantry is closed for donation drop-offs and client visits, we are still very active in creatively collecting donations in other ways, packing up bags of food, and delivering them to our clients.**

**We are asking our friends and neighbors to help out in a small way that is meaningful.**

**Whenever you go to the grocery store, pick up an item (or more) from the list in the red box below, and drop it at:**

Barb Crowe – 738 Hillcrest Rd. (bin on side porch)  
Ann Levitan – 256 Ivy Place (bin on the front porch)  
Martha Fickinger – 385 Beechwood Rd. (bin on the front porch)  
Mary Barnes – 413 Meadowbrook Rd. (bin outside the front door)

Items requested: Canned Tomatoes/Tomato Puree, Pasta Sauce, Canned Meats, Tuna, Rice, Peanut Butter, Cereal, Snacks, Canned Fruit, Boxed Milk, Coffee, Juice

**THIS WEEK'S ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS**

- Remember the Ridgewood Public Library has online resources. <https://www.ridgewoodlibrary.org>
- Book Club Book 12 - *Shakespeare's Restless World: Portrait of an Era* by Neil MacGregor. Read in our English 10 classes.
- **REMINDER: Fathers turn away. Father's Day is June 21st. 13 days away.**

**Support our local businesses. As all our local businesses start to open up, please consider making your purchases from a local small business instead of going to your favorite online store.**

I wish you good health, both physically and mentally! Most importantly, I wish you the strength to continue proper social distancing and the use of PPE as our community opens up.

Sincerely,



Daniel Fishbein, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

## **CHANGE IS HARD-FOUGHT: TRANSFORMATION, EQUITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE WILL BE HARD-WON TOGETHER**

An Important Message from Your School-Based Mental Health Team:  
Lauren M. DePinto, LCSW and Kevin M. Feeley, LCSW

COVID-19 presents us with many challenges across biological, social, economic, and psychological domains. Just as many of us courageously cope with the many disruptions it has caused in our lives, we now may find ourselves fatigued, frightened, and overwhelmed by an entirely different type of virus that is anything but novel and arguably as infectious, contagious, and lethal. Racism, injustice, and abuses of power require our immediate attention, reflection, and resolve to work together.

We are living amid two prominent co-occurring worldwide phenomena: the protests and social movements spurred by the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Aubery, Breonna Taylor, and many others, and the spread of COVID-19 and its associated social and economic impacts. Both of these historical events can have widespread psychological and traumatic impacts, as well. In some cases, these issues can lead to adjustment and acute stress disorders that manifest in many different ways, including but not exclusive to elevated anxiety and depression. We can experience difficult, perhaps conflicting emotions, and are challenged to examine our worldview and clarify our deeply held values and/or sources of bias, privilege, or ignorance. However, there are protective measures we can take and healthy, pro-social choices we can make as we encounter these intense events, as with any other significant stressors. We may discover that our efforts at caring for ourselves and our families can also empower us to continue our commitment to the promotion of self-evident human truths and inalienable human rights.

What to do with the other "virus", and its various identities and manifestations? What is the cure or the treatment? What weapons can we aim at this monster, this Hydra, that seems to come alive throughout history? Our society and other nations around the world have struggled with it in various ways and have undoubtedly made progress. Many social systems (education, a prominent one) contribute to the advancement of equality and fairness, the dismantling of racism, and the restoration of peace. Still, it can be very challenging for individual people and families to feel that they can make a difference in such a wide-ranging, layered, and complicated fight, especially during times of such heightened stress, uncertainty, illness, and loss.

Though it can be challenging to know where to start, we can be confident in our capacity for reflection, empathy, and communication. We have the power to contribute to the social-emotional health and wellness of our Village and learning community by creating and holding space for meaningful, on-going, reflective, and growth-focused conversations.

In order to achieve this, we must carefully consider our feelings, our thoughts, our reactions to what is happening. How do we feel, for example, as we hear about or see what happened to George Floyd? Or when we see videos of peaceful protests or violent clashes? How do we empathize with the life experiences of another? Do we feel compelled to participate in this important process? How do these reactions reveal our innermost values and ideals?

As we engage in this crucial self-reflection, we are naturally compelled to notice and consider the reactions, thoughts, feelings, values of others as well. We begin with understanding ourselves, then we rise to the challenge to empathize with and engage with others. Can we consider their viewpoints with empathy, when feelings become complicated and heated? Can we strive to understand differing opinions, and communicate our own ideas clearly? To be sure, some people will lack sufficient openness to engage in dialogue and will appear fixed and rigid in their beliefs. But progress against this virus demands a continued effort at flexibility, listening, an open-minded attitude, compassion, and a

concerted effort at communication and understanding. This effort is not easy. It is an extremely messy business and often entails miscommunications, missteps, confusion, gaffes, mistakes, insensitivities, empathic failures, confrontations, apologies, and corrections.

Nobody is perfect, and people certainly struggle to clearly articulate their ideas at first, particularly when the associated emotions are so intense and raw. Our country and other nations around the world have made progress, as we imperfect people have difficult, often painful, conversations. These "talks" (our reflections within ourselves, and our illuminating interactions with others) are necessary. They can serve to reorient us to the values and ideals within our own narrative, which may reduce stress and anxiety, and also help reinforce our empathy for and response toward others. We can empathize particularly with victims of oppression and those with different racial and ethnic backgrounds or life experiences, with people whose voices need to be heard, whose stories need to be told. Our self-awareness and our capacity for empathy are important components of our armamentarium against this common enemy.

Fear, hate, and pain brought us to where we are. But many throughout history--certainly, the best of us--have reminded us that LOVE is the universal language and transcending commonality that will reveal the roadmap to our recovery and will light the way to our future. When we work together and we fight together, we will heal together, and we will improve our world--TOGETHER.



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PRESENTS...

2020



June 11th  
11 a.m. -1 p.m.

Topics include:

- COVID-19: Q & A
- Emotional Well Being: Checking In
- Loss, Grief and Coping
- Expectations: Now What?
- In Your Community / In Your Voice
- The Upside

# NEW JERSEY VIRTUAL YOUTH TOWN HALL



As we prepare for a "new normal", all New Jersey middle & high school students between the ages of 13 and 19 are invited to attend a Virtual Youth Town Hall event focused on the pandemic. Youth will enjoy a brief presentation, have an opportunity to network with other NJ youth, share thoughts and feelings related to COVID-19, participate in activities and share ideas for what our new normal will look like.



REGISTER BY **JUNE 8TH** AT:  
<https://bit.ly/2zne3eY>

OR SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW:



Space is limited to 200 participants