Dear Community Members,

I hope you and your families are all healthy and well. We have settled into the 2020-21 school year – while I know that it is different, it is still filled with learning opportunities, success stories and activities that deserve acknowledgment.

Our technology has expanded immensely since last year – we have been using Zoom, Google Meet and an array of digital instructional tools. We hope that the back-ordered Chromebooks will arrive in December, and I am proud of our teachers’ enthusiasm in embracing change and continuing to hone new skills. We have had incredible professional development opportunities over the summer and during our recent staff planning days.

It has been wonderful to see our students in the classrooms – their vibrant spirit and excitement to learn shows through the masks. The fields have been full of energy as well; we had a great response to our intramural athletics programs at the high school and middle school.

We realize that families are eager to return to full-time, in-person school, and while space does not permit us to bring everyone back at this point, we are aiming to broaden in-school time for our secondary students. Our middle school special education students are back in school full-time and we believe that our high school seniors will benefit from attending school in person every day, with more frequent and direct access to teachers, guidance counselors, the Writing Center and Math Lab and peers.

We are still adjusting to hybrid instruction, and as I have noted before, this school year I ask everyone to remain flexible, patient and kind as we navigate bumps in the road. Our students’ health, safety and access to many learning opportunities are always the key factors in our decision-making. Our goal is to have everyone back full time as soon as we deem it safe.

Sincerely,

Kusum
Kusum Sinha, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Mental Health and Social Emotional Wellness

Mental health is an area of focus for the Garden City Public Schools in this year of change and is a partnership between the district and larger community. Throughout the district’s buildings, staff members are actively working to see that students and parents are coping well with the transition back to school and providing support wherever necessary.

Prior to the reopening, districtwide surveys were administered to parents, students and staff regarding concerns and feedback. Counselors and mental health providers connected with families and provided support as needed.

A great deal of attention has been given to mental health training for adults, as they are usually the chief sources of information for students. In recognizing the need for adults to give off positive and calm energy to children, efforts have been made to equip them with social-emotional tools. The district has been working with Long Island Crisis Center Director of Education Laura Campbell to emphasize the importance of self-care among staff members and parents, and in turn provide them with skills for emotionally supporting others. High school PTA meetings feature Guidance Spotlights that offer parents further support and information on varying topics.

The district has a Mental Health Committee, led by Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Leadership Development Nanine McLaughlin and High School Assistant

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The start of the 2020-21 school year has included many bright moments in the Garden City Public Schools. The district made many adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and staff members continue to find every opportunity to provide students with bright school days and a positive educational experience. Students and staff members have proven their resilience and commitment to learning by adapting well to changes that are in place.

With social distancing and mask-wearing requirements in the classrooms, teachers have been holding mental health and wellness webinar sessions for students. The high school workshops have covered mindfulness strategies, time management, gratitude and coping with anxiety, while those at the middle school featured positive mindsets, organizational tips for being a successful student and more. The high school guidance department also holds grade-level Zoom meetings to discuss any pertinent topics and offer support. Additionally, peer educators provide informational recordings that help reinforce positive decisions.

All the buildings celebrated Unity Day, which promotes kindness, acceptance and connectedness, and each school participates in its own lessons and activities that cultivate these qualities. Throughout the district, teachers are encouraged to incorporate mindfulness practices and social-emotional vocabulary into classes. High School psychologist Brittany Mauceri is piloting a six-session “Learning to Breathe” program through push-in visits aimed at teaching students to strengthen attention, regulate emotions and manage stress in their daily lives.

“Mental health is always an essential part of a strong education program,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kusum Sinha. “This year, our additional training at the staff level has helped us be proactive in helping students and ensuring that they are coping with the current circumstances. Our administrators, mental health providers and teachers care about our students and are always available.”
library provides a spacious area for studying.

Middle and high school students are also back pursuing their athletic interests via an off-season training and conditioning program. Collectively, approximately 1,000 participants between the two buildings have been engaged in after-school drills, practices, stretches and workouts run by coaches.

Featured sports include football, field hockey, soccer, cross-country, volleyball, cheer, kickline, tennis, swimming, golf, marching band, basketball, fencing, rifle, wrestling, track and field, bowling, lacrosse, softball, baseball and badminton.

Careful considerations were made in light of COVID-19 concerns, and all participants complete a screening before each session. Shared equipment is thoroughly sanitized after use, and social distancing, mask-wearing and hand-washing protocols are in place.

“We are off to a great start, and I thank everyone for their cooperation and enthusiasm,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kusum Sinha. “Our administrators and staff members impressed me with their eagerness to prepare the buildings for our opening and their resourcefulness in finding ways to make school exciting despite the challenges.”

The district is making every effort to protect the health and safety of students, staff members and the community. As part of the reopening planning that took place over the summer, preparations were made for any scenario and proactive steps were identified to help prevent COVID-19 and other illnesses from spreading.

Every day, students and staff members complete a health screening through a Smart App that generates a list of those who have been screened, so that medical staff can review it. The district has enforced other practices as well.

“We’re maintaining mask wearing and social distancing,” said Garden City High School Head Nurse Jean Cortese. “I believe that’s why our numbers are as low as they are.”

Students in all the buildings have plenty of access to hand-washing stations and sanitizer, which are used many times throughout the day. Strict cleaning routines are conducted each day and visitors are not permitted in the buildings to further limit exposure.

The school nurses regularly remind parents of the virus’s signs and symptoms. Every time a student goes home with symptoms, they must be medically evaluated and receive a negative COVID-19 test prior to returning. Contact tracing is completed both internally at the school and among families, and there is much collaboration between health staff throughout the district.

Students created PSAs on how to stay safe, which play in place of hold music on the district’s phone systems.
“My favorite thing about school is writing. I think it’s really fun because you get to make up a story. Right now I’m writing a realistic fiction book and I love it.”
~ Avery Mueller, Stratford

“What I like this year is that even though I’m doing remote school the teachers have gone out of their way to take extra time when answering all my questions and being patient with us doing our remote work assignments.”
~ Storm Whitley, Middle School

“Outside we do obstacle courses, fun things, exercising, stuff like that.”
~ Celina Aboura, Hemlock

“After the months in the Spring that we weren’t in school, it is great to get back in the school routine, see everyone, be in school.”
~ Brendan Staub, High School

“I like going outside for recess and having homework on Seesaw.”
~ Greta Loesch, Homestead

“My teacher, she’s the best! I learned math and all about school.”
~ Keegan Fitzpatrick, Locust

“Seeing my friends, learning new things and seeing my teachers.”
~ Leyla Vitale, Stewart