

**GREAT NECK PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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“Smart Choices, Kind Voices”

Dear Saddle Rock Families,

Welcome back from what I hope was a very enjoyable and relaxing summer. My summer was spent with family and doing the types of things I’ve never done, including my first shot at skydiving from 15,000 feet above the Earth’s surface. It was quite the thrill, but it’s good to be back on solid ground! As I move forward into my eighth year as a principal and fifth year in this school, my excitement and enthusiasm grows as we begin another journey. Although the summer has been relaxing and enjoyable for me, I am looking forward to meeting and greeting all of the staff and students as they return on September 6th.

There have been many visible improvements to our school, thanks to our custodial staff and our Director of Buildings and Grounds, Alfredo Cavallaro. Among the improvements to our building are brand new drapes and curtains in our auditorium, a freshly painted ceiling in our main lobby, a newly paved semi-circle in front of the building, a new fence to replace the dilapidated one surrounding our kindergarten playground, and for the first time since this building opened over 50 years ago, our gymnasium floor was completely stripped, sanded, and topped off with a new coat of polyurethane for added protection. Lastly, it comes with great excitement that I tell you that a new playground was installed for our students to enjoy during recess. Wait till the kids see it – it’s a beauty!

The beginning of a new school year typically brings some new faces to our school and this year is no exception. As you know, we had three retirees this past June. They include Mrs. Kaplan who spent 24 exceptional years teaching kindergarten at Saddle Rock, our kindergarten enrichment teacher, Ms. Hoffman, and our school nurse, Mrs. Beth Bocian. They will all be dearly missed and we thank them for touching the lives of thousands of students over the years. In addition, Mrs. Castellana-Obiol will not be returning this year so that she could spend more time with her beautiful baby daughter.

Although nearly impossible, we are attempting to “fill their shoes” with new staff. We are confident that we have hired, through a rigorous and very lengthy process, four outstanding individuals to our faculty. Joining our fourth grade team are Mrs. Jennifer Green and Ms. Jaime Meehan. Both are experienced teachers coming to us from other school districts. Our new kindergarten enrichment instructor will be Ms. Lauren Costa. Ms. Costa student taught last year in our kindergarten classrooms and did such an outstanding job, we couldn’t let her go. In addition, we are very excited about the hiring of our new school nurse, Mrs. Kristin Birdie. The committee was so impressed with her experience, compassion, patience and love for children. You will have the opportunity to meet her at our first PTA meeting. I am completely confident when I say that all of them will be outstanding additions to Saddle Rock!

The first day of school for ALL students is Tuesday, September 6th. The regular school day is from 9:10 a.m. to 3:20 p.m. **The first day of school is a full day for all students, including kindergarten.** Faculty will be available throughout the building to assist any youngsters who may be unfamiliar with his/her classroom assignments on the first day of school. Please arrive no later than 3:10 to pick up your children for dismissal. We will be following our staggered dismissal once again this year as this has proved to be a safer and more efficient alternative to our former dismissal procedures.

As you know, we made some needed changes last year to our procedures to provide “courtesy bus passes” to some parents, despite them not being eligible. According to the New York State transportation regulations, students who are not eligible according to school district distance limitations do not receive a bus pass. However, we may distribute a very limited number of “courtesy bus passes” this year. We will continue with some important changes that were implemented last September. Once again, I will not approve the distribution of any “courtesy bus passes” until September 21st, at the earliest. If you are requesting a “courtesy bus pass,” you must pick up and fill out an application from our main office no later than Monday, September 12th. Please know that if we do not approve a “courtesy bus pass” for your child, it is because there is not a seat available on the bus. We must have a seat for every student who is truly eligible for one. Lastly, it is important for you to note that if we do provide you with a “courtesy bus pass” and the seat is needed for an eligible student, we will need to request the “courtesy bus pass” back. Please do not contact transportation if you do not receive a “courtesy bus pass” from us. The decision is up to the school based on availability of seats and the needs of parents. We are glad to help you where possible, but we will not compromise the safety of our students by placing too many children on any one bus. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

We have many more instructional initiatives on the horizon. For those of you who were able to attend some of the latter PTA meetings last year, you know about the work we are doing as a school, as a district, and as a nation with respect to the new *Common Core Standards*. For the very first time, nationwide standards were written and are being implemented beginning this year across the country. The standards were written and adopted for every grade level through high school and are more rigorous than the previous *New York State Standards*. In summary, we needed the standards to ensure that ALL students, regardless of where they live, get the best possible education. The *Common Core Standards* will also ensure consistency in what children are expected to learn in *every* school across the nation. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators will have a clear set of expectations that everyone can work toward together. More details will be outlined during the school year!

During the second half of last year, a wellness committee was formed in our school comprised of teachers, administrators, and parents. The committee met frequently to outline a much needed and long overdue policy in our school building. This policy will be shared with you in detail in the next few weeks. The Board of Education is committed to providing a school environment that enhances the learning and development of lifelong wellness practices. Therefore, we have established some clear guidelines at Saddle Rock that we are asking every staff member and parent to follow. The forthcoming guidelines will ensure a safer environment for our students with life threatening allergies, encourage students to make healthier choices, and will ensure consistency within our school. We are asking that you please read the guidelines carefully when you receive them. A lot of hard work and time went into the development of this policy. Please feel free to ask me if you have any questions.

In closing, please be reminded that my newsletters moving forward will be available on our school website at the beginning of every month. Although there were some minor “bumps in the road” last year, our initiative to “go paperless” was a huge success -- saving both paper and money. You will continue to receive weekly reminders to check our website for upcoming events and/or happenings. It is imperative that you check the school website *at least* once a week. As was the case last year, paper reminders and notices will not be distributed with only very few exceptions.

Once again, welcome back and I look forward to the many challenges we face and the opportunity to share in our successes. It’s going to be another banner year! See you soon!

All my best,

Eric