



MOUNTAINSIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

1497 WOODACRES DRIVE MOUNTAINSIDE, NJ 07092

908-232-8828

WWW.MOUNTAINSIDESCHOOLS.ORG

JANET WALLING - SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

September 13, 2024

Mountainside Parents & Guardians:

I hope that your children enjoyed their first full week of school and are getting into the groove of their new routines. I want to personally thank the entire Mountainside staff for their work over the summer, and these past few weeks, to prepare for an exciting school year with your children. As we look forward to Back to School Nights next week, and the year ahead, I would like to share some updates from the District and Board of Education. While the vast majority of our programs remain unchanged from last year, there are a few adjustments that I would like to bring to your attention:

- 1. Middle School Spanish:** As 6th and 7th grade parents are aware, the District has made every attempt to hire a Spanish teacher for these grades, however, due to a lack of qualified candidates the position remains unfilled. Therefore, the district has contracted with a company to provide hybrid instruction through a combination of asynchronous lessons and virtual live instruction by a NJ Certified Spanish Teacher, with all classes being monitored by district staff. We recognize that nothing can fully take the place of an in-person teacher, but we are confident this program will help students attain the skills necessary for world language development. We will continue our search for qualified candidates to fill this role.
- 2. STEAM:** You may notice that many children in grades 3-8 do not have STEAM classes identified on their schedule this year. Unfortunately, this program has been cut due to budgetary constraints that the Board faced when developing the 2024-2025 school budget. The district feels strongly that this program has significant value but we regrettably needed to make some tough decisions when preparing a fiscally compliant budget for this school year. Please know, however, we are fully committed to bringing this program back as soon as possible which is why the STEAM program is included in a Public Question that will be placed on the ballot for the upcoming election in November. More information on this Public Question is included below
- 3. Mental Health Support:** The district utilized federal grant funds to support student mental health needs over the past few years and contracted with Tri-County Behavioral Health to provide these services. Unfortunately, just before the start of the school year, we were informed that they are no longer providing services to schools. We understand the importance of mental health and are seeking out alternate providers with the hope of having someone new in place within the next month or so, and hope to expand services with the approval of the Public Question outlined below. In the meantime, our teachers, school counselors, and/or special services department are always available if your child needs additional support.

4. **Public Question:** As discussed since last spring, due to budget deficits, the Mountainside Board of Education approved placing a Public Question on the November ballot to raise additional funds for our general budget. Approval of this question will allow us to reinstate positions and programs that were cut, and to add impactful positions to enhance the educational experience for all students and staff in the Mountainside Schools.

- Specific information about the Public Question can be found on this [attached flier](#).
- The Board and I will be scheduling opportunities to discuss this Public Question in various forums as we get closer to the election, including my first Coffee and Conversation gathering, which will take place on **Tuesday, October 8th at 6pm**. I hope that you join us to learn more about this important proposal and how it will support all of the students and staff in Mountainside.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our Back to School Nights next week and appreciate your support of our schools and staff.

Regards,

Janet Walling
Superintendent