



Superintendent's Report September 23, 2021

Congratulations to everyone at Hillside Elementary School on being named a 2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Award winner by the U.S. Department of Education. Hillside Elementary School was among 325 winners nationwide announced by the U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona on September 21, 2021. This is one of the highest education honors given by the federal government. Hillside Elementary School was successful in earning this recognition due to:

- Our teachers' skill and dedication;
- Our students' outstanding academic performance;
- The school's innovative programs, including STEM, Hillside News Network, music, art and physical education programs, and our own ICARE character education program;
- The continued support of parents, the PTO, the KPG, and the Board of Education;
- The delivery of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic using both an in-person and fully-virtual option for students.

The United States Department of Education will formally recognize all the honored schools in recognition ceremonies on November 4 and 5, 2021, in Washington, D.C. We will have an in-district celebration soon after November 5, 2021. Congratulations, Hillside Elementary School community. All of Closter is proud!

We are still working through the challenges of the school start times. I ask for your patience as we attempt to address this challenge, which isn't solved as easily as it appears. I understand the frustration of parents with students in both schools. With regard to drop-off in the morning, I remind parents to use the drop-off line without getting out of the car. If you need to get of the car with your child, please park your car in a place other than the drop-off line. This will greatly assist in making the drop-off line operate smoothly.

As I stated at the start of the year, our top priority this year is to keep schools open while keeping our students and staff as safe as possible from COVID-19. Please know that we are following all guidelines from the CDC and NJDOH (through the Mid-Bergen Health Department) to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. You can review the mitigation strategies we are following in the Safe Return Plan, which is posted on the district website. With regard to quarantine, the Safe Return Plan says we will require quarantine – we will follow the guidelines of the CDC, New Jersey Department of Education and New Jersey Department of Health. The quarantine protocols are dependent on the COVID-19 activity level in our northeast region of the state. We are following the exclusion criteria found in *The Road Forward*, pages 12-13. This document can be accessed on our district webpage.

Back to School Nights were held virtually for parents of students in Grades PreK-2 and Grades 5-6, with a good turnout. There will be two more virtual Back-to-School Nights as follows:

- Grades 3 – 4 (not Ms. Cohen’s 4th grade): Wednesday, September 29, 2021, beginning at 7:00 p.m.
- Grades 7 – 8: Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Teachers have been assessing students using Linkit! an online assessment tool. Students in grades two through eight have already taken, or will take, a grade level benchmark assessment in language arts and mathematics. The data from the assessment will be used to assist teachers in identifying where students are in their mastery of skills and standards. This assessment is only one of the multiple measures that teachers will use to make instructional decisions. Teachers in Kindergarten and first grade will use Aimsweb, along with other reading, writing and mathematics assessments to determine students’ progress toward standards.

The NJDOE Start Strong Assessments will be given to all students in grades 4 through 8 starting in October. The *Start Strong* assessment will be given in English Language Arts grades 4-8, Mathematics grades 4-8, Algebra I, and in Science grade 6. These assessments will be in place of the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA) that were not given this past spring. The *Start Strong* assessments are intentionally brief (taking about 45-60 minutes) and will provide immediate results to teachers. Parent reports will be provided as well. The *Start Strong* assessments utilize three performance levels: “Strong Support May Be Needed”; “Some Support May Be Needed”; and “Less Support May Be Needed.” Principals will provide more specific information about when students in grades 4-8 will be taking the Start Strong assessments.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Vincent Mc Hale". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.