



## ***RICHARD MONTGOMERY HIGH SCHOOL***

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***Damon Monteleone, Principal***



August 2, 2020

Dear Richard Montgomery High School Community:

I hope this letter finds you well and that you are finding joy this summer with your family as we all continue to navigate these uncertain times. Normally, our work would have slowed a bit since the end of the school year, but with COVID-19 and the fluid state of public education, along with the national reckoning with racism our nation is going through, our leadership team has been hard at work navigating these issues as they relate to our school community. As always, our relentless drive to provide a safe and welcoming learning environment and the highest quality education for every student remains. Due to our outstanding staff, supportive community, and character of our students, Richard Montgomery continues to be recognized as one of the premier public schools in the state of Maryland and a model International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program for Montgomery County. I continue to be honored and grateful for the opportunity to be the principal of Richard Montgomery High School. It is not lost on me that I serve one of the most diverse, inclusive communities a principal could hope for.

It is because of the diversity of our community, the voices of our students, and our commitment to the IB's vision to "develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect," that the leadership team's summer work has been centered on the following two goals for the 2020-2021 school year: 1) ensuring that we implement an engaging, rigorous distance e-learning program rooted in student and staff well-being, and 2) taking the steps necessary to foster an explicitly Antiracist culture at Richard Montgomery High School. Through the formal structure of our instructional leadership team, as well through the effort of over 40 volunteer staff who have engaged in Antiracist workgroups (along with students), we have been hard at work developing structures and process with a focus on the following:

- a commitment from each staff member to engage in reflective conversations about racism with a focus on taking individual action to combat racism
- a commitment from each staff member to foster an antiracist culture at RM through:
  - Antiracist instructional content and pedagogy
  - Relationship building with students, parents, and colleagues
  - Elevating student, staff, and community voice and feedback
  - A professional development learning progression in partnership with the MCPS Equity Unit
- learning and implementing distance learning online technology and applications
- developing common course-alike instructional practices, routines, grading policies, and assessments to decrease the variability in student learning experiences
- explicitly teaching students organization, study, and executive functioning skills
- implementing trauma-informed practices

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, with an IB Middle Years Programme for all students, we continue to focus our work around the IB Approaches to Teaching and Learning. These are transferable academic and affective skills; which students apply across the curriculum. Moreover, we envision a community where all RM stakeholders embody the IB Learner profile traits (to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective). For the second year in a row, we saw an increase in the percentage of IB Diploma candidates who earned the IB diploma, up from 90% in 2019 to 95% in 2020 - and this with the most diverse group of students in memory. I tip my hat to all of our teachers, and specifically to Ms. Nancy Shay and Mr. Joseph Jelen for working tirelessly to ensure this level of success. We are proud of the fact that as more and more diverse students have accessed this once exclusive program, our success rate has increased. That said, we know we have a lot of work to do as a school in terms of truly living up to the aforementioned IB learner traits.

In addition to the work of administration and the resource teachers, the school has been humming with activity this summer. We continued to run RM Summer School 2.0, a series of cutting-edge virtual courses where students earned credit in MCPS classes. We were also pleased to be able to offer cost-free enrichment classes in a variety of areas.

I realize there are still many, many unanswered questions about the logistics of this coming school year. Please continue to monitor district-wide communication from [MCPS](#) regarding schedules, instructional expectations, and grading policies. As soon as I have concrete information to share, I always will. In the meantime, I would like to share the following:

### **Parent Meetings and Information**

In partnership with Mr. Dana Tofig, PTSA President, we will have a virtual Back to School PTSA meeting with me in the evening on Wednesday, August 19, 2020. We will also hold virtual grade-level specific PTSA meetings with each of the grade-level assistant principals at the end of August (see below for specifics). Please be on the lookout for more information from PTSA and Richard Montgomery for specific times, and login information for these virtual meetings in the near future. You will also receive an email from me in the middle of August with all of the specific opening of school logistical information, including teaching and learning expectations, as well as any important system policy updates or operational changes for the distance learning school year.

- Monday, August 24<sup>th</sup> – Senior Parent meeting
- Tuesday, August 25<sup>th</sup> – Sophomore Parent meeting
- Wednesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> – Junior Parent meeting
- Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup> – Freshman Parent meeting

### **9<sup>th</sup> Grade & New Student Orientation**

We look forward to hosting our freshman and new to RM upperclassmen at a virtual orientation on Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>. RM administration, in collaboration with student leaders, will lead the newest members of our Rocket family through an orientation that will be geared toward answering students' questions and providing space to share expectations around engagement and success in a distance learning school environment. Details regarding the virtual orientation will be provided closer to August 27<sup>th</sup>, but in the meantime, we want to hear from our future Rockets about questions they may have. Please take a minute to complete this [Google form](#) with any questions. Students' questions will help to guide the content of the orientation, so we encourage our students to ask any questions they have.

## **New Faces in Counseling and Administration**

We are pleased to share that Mr. Scott Durbin (former head of the science department) is our new assistant principal and will serve as the senior class administrator. Additionally, we've hired two new, outstanding counselors, Ms. Abrafi Mensah and Mr. Geoffrey Finch.

**Scott Durbin** is entering his 19<sup>th</sup> year of serving the students of Montgomery County Public Schools. In that time, he has taught at the elementary, middle, and high school levels and has served as a department head at the middle and high school levels. Mr. Durbin is also a master teacher who has worked as an instructional coach with MCPS. He is primed to take on a new role in supporting staff and students and contributing to the community of Richard Montgomery High School.

**Abrafi Mensah** is joining our counseling team from Clarksburg High School and will serve students with the last names that begin with the letters D, T, and V. She resides in Columbia, MD with her puppy and enjoys traveling, going to concerts, and powerlifting. Ms. Mensah is an MCPS alumni, having graduated from Sherwood High School. She looks forward to a fantastic year with Richard Montgomery High School.

**Geoffrey Finch** comes to the counseling team from Blair High School, where he is also an alumnus. In his free time, he enjoys tennis, cycling and traveling. He is excited to be part of the Richard Montgomery family and will serve students with the last names beginning with the letters Ba-Ben, and S.

I know each of us is experiencing these traumatic events of 2020 in our own way and with our own challenges. I also know we are facing the most challenging school year in modern history. As a diverse community, I believe we should strive to understand before demanding to be understood. We must try and listen to those who may see things differently than us and find empathy and compassion in our hearts. And perhaps most of all, we should rally around our shared experience of living through the events of 2020 and bind ourselves as a school community so that we may march forward as one. Only together will we navigate the uncertainties that lie ahead.

Respectfully,



Damon Monteleone  
Principal