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Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am pleased to share that we have just completed a wonderful opening month of school, and we now shift our focus to October. Much has transpired during the month of September. Most importantly, we welcomed our 3,445 students to their first days of school. After spending the summer preparing for the arrival of students, it was truly rewarding for our faculty and staff to experience the vibrant energy that only our students can infuse into our schools. Our students add the greatest element of joy to our work and welcoming them each day rejuvenates and inspires us.

Prior to the arrival of our students, we welcomed back the wonderful and highly-talented Yorktown faculty and staff. You may view our welcome back ceremony by [clicking here](#). We opened our school year with two wonderful professional learning days. On the first day that our full faculty and staff gathered, I shared a vision for the Yorktown Central School District: The *20/20 Vision for 2020*. This vision honors the great work already happening in our district and articulates a pathway forward to ensure that our schools are developing learners with the necessary skills to be successful in an unpredictable global climate. The *20/20 Vision for 2020* states:

The Yorktown Central School District will:

- ❖ *cultivate empathy*
- ❖ *celebrate creativity and innovation*
- ❖ *promote critical thinking and authentic inquiry, and*
- ❖ *provide opportunities to nurture one's ambitions*

*in pursuit of developing students who have the capacity to **influence change in the world**.*

This is a lofty vision for any school district. Developing students who have the capacity to influence change in the world is enormously aspirational. I believe, with every ounce of confidence, that we can, and will, achieve this goal for our students. Our students will influence positive change in the world as the leaders of the next generation--I am certain of this.

This vision will take time to achieve, and I am proud to see our district embark on this journey. Ultimately, the *20/20 Vision for 2020* centers around a single concept: ESTEAM. You are likely familiar with STEM education--science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. You may also be familiar with STEAM education, in which the arts were added to the equation as a recognition of the importance of the aesthetics of our innovations. However, you likely may not have heard of

ESTEAM until this school year. The Yorktown Central School District is a pioneer in infusing the work of empathy in the STEAM studies. Empathy underpins all of the work of STEAM education, and I believe that STEAM cannot exist, with any level of authenticity, without first teaching students to be empathetic.

The notion of infusing empathy in creativity is well-documented in the research. As you think of the greatest inventions of our generation, some small and others more transformational, you will observe that they were all in response to a societal problem. The larger the problem, the more transformational the solution. In order to provide solutions to the problems facing individuals or, on a larger scale, problems facing a society, one must first learn to be empathetic. One must be able to put himself or herself in the shoes of those experiencing the problem with a profound level of sensitivity. Once our students can apply empathy to a problem, it is then that they can work toward a solution.

In truth, we do not know what problems the world will face 10 years from now. As one ponders the transformation that our global economy has undergone over the last 10 years, one must also think of the new employment fields that have emerged. App development and cloud storage security are fields that have absolutely boomed in recent years. In addition, companies are thinking differently about how they conduct business, and they require employees who will think differently as well. For example, Uber is the world's largest taxi company, and they own no fleet. Air B&B is the world's largest accommodations provider, and they own no real estate. Facebook is the world's most popular media owner, and they produce no content. The world has changed. The only certainty, in my opinion, is that all of our students will need ESTEAM to solve whatever unpredictability they will face as adults so they may influence positive change in the world.

As you move throughout our schools you will hear more and more about ESTEAM. This concept of ESTEAM is the magical coalescence of kindness, sensitivity, empathy, creativity, innovation, imagination, science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics, and fun! You will also notice that we have redesigned some of our facilities to be ESTEAM labs; places where children can use the skills they learn to solve authentic, real-world problems, both large and small.

While we infuse ESTEAM into teaching and learning, our instructional program continues to embrace the importance of reading, writing, spelling, vocabulary, social studies, public speaking, music, physical education, world languages, and all of the other very important content areas that our students learn about. These content areas are extremely important to all students and they continue to have a prominent role in our classrooms.

During the first month of school I have tried to meet with as many students and teachers as possible. I have attended sporting events, after school activities, grade-level assemblies, and most importantly, I have visited classrooms. Interacting with our students, across all grade levels, has me even more optimistic about the work ahead in the Yorktown Central School District. Our students are a treasure. Their intelligence, curiosity, and imagination are the perfect recipe for achieving the high aspirations of the 20/20 Vision Plan for 2020.

Around the District there has been a tremendous amount of great work taking place. We initiated a new Robotics Club at Yorktown High School this school year. This truly is an exciting endeavor that will ultimately see our students presenting in international FIRST Robotics League competitions. Currently, 28 students are enrolled in the first year of this program. Additionally,

nearly 40 faculty and staff members at both Crompond School and Mildred E. Strang Middle School underwent robotics training earlier this month as part of our district's commitment to infusing ESTEAM into the instructional program. At Crompond School, our students will be using Lego WeDo technology to infuse coding and robotics into their learning, and our middle school students will be using Lego's Mindstorms.

At Mohansic School, it was a pleasure to see our students happily enjoying their first few weeks of the new school year. First, all who visit Mohansic will now be greeted by a lovely welcome sign to the immediate left of the main entrance. Additionally, upon walking near the kindergarten playground, one will enjoy the very special Family Brick Walk where families and community members created and donated customized engraved bricks as part of a lasting tribute to Mohansic's students and families. When inside Mohansic School, visitors will see their new colorful stage curtains, new child-friendly shelving in the library, redesigned learning spaces, and new welcome carpets showing the school mascot, the monarch butterfly.

In my visits to Brookside School, I have been amazed by the wonderful students, faculty, and staff. The kindness walls that are posted throughout classrooms and the school set a very inspiring tone for our work in fostering a culture of kindness and empathy. In addition, the newly renovated ESTEAM lab provides students a venue that supports the cultivation of curiosity, creativity, collaboration, and innovation.

Yorktown Students Shine

Congratulations are in order for many of our Yorktown High School students. We recently announced Ellen O'Callaghan as the Valedictorian of the Class of 2018, and Marlee Pincus as the Salutatorian of the Class of 2018. I have met both young ladies, and they are remarkable. While these honors certainly require high academic achievement, I was struck most by their kindness and keen sense of purpose. Our entire school community extends its congratulations to Ellen and Marlee.

I am also delighted to share that we have three Semi-finalists in the 2018 National Merit Scholarship Competition: Joseph Cibrario, Connor Koelsch, and Rory O'Brien. This is a tremendous honor! There are approximately 3.5 million students in the nation who were eligible for this recognition, and only 16,000 students were selected. That is equivalent to less than half of one percent of high school juniors across the country. We are honored to have three Yorktown High School students represent our district. We also had six Commended students in the 2018 National Merit Program: Deva Barer, Jessica Gerdis, Pranav Krish, Amanda Montgomery, Ellen O'Callaghan, and Connor Thomas. We are extremely proud of the fine accomplishments of our students.

In athletics, our boys and girls teams are in the midst of successful seasons, and we have already had our first Con Edison Award winner. Brett Makar was honored multiple times this season for his tremendous accomplishments both on the football field and in the classroom. He was named to LoHud's Super 11 Team, earned the Con Edison Award, and has twice been named LoHud football player of the week. Brett has amassed these honors only five weeks into the football season.

In tennis, defending state singles tennis champion, Caitlyn Ferrante, is undefeated in singles play this season. Caitlyn had a brilliant season last year, and is duplicating her outstanding performance this season. In addition, the doubles duo of Jessie Gerdis and Jayden Carrillo are

also undefeated this season. The two athletes play seamlessly as a unit and have experienced tremendous success. In all, our girls tennis team has seven wins and only one loss. I wish all of our student-athletes continued success.

Calendar

Please note that our school calendar has undergone a slight modification from previous years. We will be closing all Yorktown schools the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving (Nov. 22) and modifying the last four school days in June for elementary school students. Traditionally, students in grades K-5 have been dismissed after a half-day during the last days of the school year. While students will still be dismissed early, from June 19-22, we will be extending the school day slightly and using the additional time to focus on fun team-building and character-education activities heading into the summer months. Students will spend the additional time working in larger groups allowing them to make new friends from across the entire grade level. Monday, June 18, remains a regular full-day of school for students in grades K-5. The calendar during the last school week of June remains largely unchanged for students in grades 6-12. Additional details will follow in the months ahead.

Safety

The safety of our students is something we take very seriously as a school district. Each of our schools practice fire drills, evacuation drills, lockdown drills, and shelter-in-place drills. While many of the drills are announced, we also hold several unannounced drills during various parts of the day. We hold many of our lockdown drills in conjunction with the Yorktown Police Department so they may provide us feedback on best practices in emergency situations. Additionally, all of our staff undergo even further training to ensure we provide a swift and calm response in the face of any kind of emergency.

On the school buses, I ask that you remind your children to wear their seat belts. When traveling in our own vehicles, fastening our seat belts is second nature; there should be no difference when riding the school bus. We reinforce this message in our schools, and we ask that you do the same at home.

District PTSA

Mrs. O'Shea and I had the pleasure of meeting with our District PTSA as well as some of the PTA leaders from across our schools earlier in September. They are a wonderful group of supportive and devoted volunteers. If you are interested in joining the District PTSA mailing list to receive updates on some of the happenings in our district, you may [click here](#).

Closing Thought

Finally, I leave you with my most heartwarming moment of September. Friday, September 29th was Unity Day at Mildred E. Strang Middle School. Two post-its with encouraging messages were placed on the mirror in the girls' bathroom. Later, a marker and a stack of blank post-its were found next to the sink. A few hours later, the mirror was covered with inspiring messages that the students had written to each other on the post-its. This was the most remarkable thing I have ever seen. I have attached two pictures below so you may share in the same wonderful experience. I have also included some additional pictures from our opening of school.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ron Hattar

