



# Ridgefield Public Schools

*...valuing each and every student*

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

As we make our way back to school today, I send you the warmest welcome and the best of luck on what should prove to be an incredibly successful school year. As the parent of a son who began his fifth grade journey today, I don't mind sharing the sea of emotions that I am feeling and the list of expectations that I have for his administrators, teachers, and staff. First and foremost, I expect them to keep my son physically and emotionally safe. I expect them to provide him with a whole host of engaging learning opportunities in order to continue the work that my spouse and I have started at home. And finally, I expect them to keep us well informed about his academic, social, and emotional progress. And in return for their work to ensure my son's wellbeing, I let my son's administrators, teachers, and staff know that I will support them in the variety of ways that they need me. I share this with you because I want to give you some insight into the father that I am and how that translates into the Superintendent that I am.

During these past two years, I have engaged Ridgefield's constituent groups in work to ensure all that I reference in the abovementioned paragraph. Starting with a strategic plan that lays the groundwork for our work through 2020, we have gone to great lengths to make the most of the resources we have in place and then create a framework and plans for building what we need to take our schools from good to great. During these past two years, we have achieved so much, including but not limited to the following:

- **Safety and Security Measures** that ensure the latest technologies and most effective protocols (e.g., systemic security plans; increased law enforcement partnering; faculty and staff training; and camera surveillance, single point of entry, lockdown, and notification security systems)
- **Communication and Parent Engagement** that has raised our reach from 50 to 95 percent coverage and significantly increased parent attendance (e.g., Genesis Parent Portal, Blackboard Connect e-blast and reverse 911, Smore newsletters, district website, parent workshops, and district-wide parent-teacher conferences)
- **Technology Integration** that has taken us to complete access for all teaching staff and dramatically increased access for students (e.g., Grades 2-12 student accounts, Grades 5-12 email accounts, new MacBook Air carts, new Google Chrome carts, Office 365, Google Apps for Education, blended learning individualized student learning applications, and additional SMART boards in classrooms)
- **Program and Instruction Measures** that have introduced early intervention guarantees, solid program advancements, data-driven instruction, and the professional development to support them (e.g., Quarterly benchmark assessments in all grades, Response to Intervention in Grades K-6, new reading, writing, and math programs, Physics first in Grade 9, comprehensive program studies)
- **Facilities Upgrades** that have created brighter, more comfortable learning environments for students (e.g., HVAC upgrades in most shared spaces and classrooms, new windows and doors, additional modular classrooms, refurbished classrooms)
- **Student Support and Services** that begin to provide better care for those who require a whole host of specific needs in both general and special education (e.g., smaller class sizes in K-2, a future forward model for School Counseling, expanded Learning Center programs)

...and so much more!

Suffice it to say that we have made the most of our limited resources. But we will not be able to sustain our improvements long-term and they will never allow us to provide the opportunities and skills that students ultimately need to not only survive but also thrive in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Our work is good, but it cannot be great without having the additional resources that so many other school systems have—resources that our students deserve. The fact of the matter is that in order to compete, we need to add people, programs, and tools. We need to further enhance the environments in which students learn. According to the New Jersey Department of Education, for the past decade, Ridgefield Public Schools have operated at an average state of inadequacy totaling \$1.2 million per year. Too many years of zero budget increases and fairly recent 2 percent caps on tax levy revenues have crippled and eroded our system, shrinking our human capacity. Against all odds, we have made significant gains and built a relatively good system. But without restoring our funding and several critical positions, we will never achieve our potential of becoming a great school system that serves each and every student well.

Good grades and successful college admission no longer guarantee a successful career. For the first time in recent history, this current generation of students no longer enjoys the guarantee of a better life than their parents had. Second order priorities such as content mastery and test taking are requirements that date back to the dawn of the industrial era. Yes, they are important, but they are only that—second order priorities. The recipe for success lies in the acquisition of skills such as but not limited to 1) learning how to learn, 2) communicating effectively, 3) collaborating productively and effectively with others, 4) creative problem solving, 5) managing failure, 6) effecting change in organizations and society, 7) making sound decisions, 8) managing projects, 9) building perseverance and determination, and 10) leveraging passions and talents to make the world better. All of this requires progressive programs that are appropriately staffed.

So, how do we plan to achieve these next steps in our evolution to greatness? A second question to increase school spending during the November 8, 2016 election would set our schools on track. For roughly 75 cents a day per average household, Ridgefield Public Schools could provide not only second order experiences but also first order necessities. I hope you will take the time to read the attached document that outlines our upcoming second question and plans to implement the abovementioned elements of success. It is five pages, so if nothing else, I implore you to read the intro, the red bold titles and the concluding paragraph. I promise you will find it worthwhile. I ask nothing more of you than coming to the November polls as informed parents and guardians so that you can make solid decisions about the future of Ridgefield Public Schools.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions, concerns, or needs for clarification that you might have. Again, welcome back to school!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Romano III". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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