It’s been a difficult few weeks for the PCSD family. Staff members across the district have experienced a number of significant losses which have resulted in many of us feeling sad, angry, afraid, confused, or some combination of all of those emotions. For a while, it has felt like a fresh wave of sad news has been hitting us almost daily.

The strength of any community is tested by how it comes together and supports its members through the most difficult of times. I am proud to be part of a community of friends and colleagues who so obviously care about each other, respect each other, and support one another. I have watched as people have comforted each other, given quick hugs to colleagues as they pass in the hall, have taken time from their daily responsibilities to go out of their way to check on people they care about, and have just been available to sit with someone for a few minutes of quiet reflection. We are a strong community of caring individuals, friends, and colleagues; we take care of each other and for that I am grateful.

I am also grateful to work in a field where no matter what else is happening, we don’t have to look very far to find happy faces, eager learners, and a true sense of purpose in our daily work. The energy and expectations that our children bring with them to the classroom every day can’t help but lift our spirits and remind us to focus on the good and the positive. Their blissful ignorance and sense of invincibility can provide for us a buffer for some of those difficult times that we all experience.

Times like this also serve as a reminder that we often don’t know the personal or family struggles with which many of our colleagues may be dealing. Who among us goes home to an ailing spouse, an anxious child, an elderly parent, or a stressful relationship? Who among us may be anxiously awaiting test results, or been awake all night with a sick child, had to put a beloved pet to sleep for the final time, or has a spouse who is out of work? We don’t always know.

Every day we come together as a community of colleagues, educators, and caretakers. While our primary mission is to provide the best possible learning experience for our amazing students, we can only truly accomplish that when we remember to appreciate and take care of each other, in good times and bad times. Be kind. Be grateful. Be patient. Smile more and complain less. Listen to each other. Laugh together. Lend a helping hand. The strength of our community, and our ability to weather the toughest of times together, depends on the little things we do each and every day to make this the very special place that it is.

Until next time… Melanie
Morning Meetings

As part of our continued work on Social Emotional Learning, many of our elementary classrooms have begun implementing Morning Meetings into their daily routines. Based on the work from the Responsive Classroom, the Morning Meeting provides a time for adults and children to greet one another, share information about their daily lives, engage in an activity together, and read a daily message from the teacher. The Morning Meeting blends social emotional and academic skill practice while setting a calm and respectful tone to the classroom environment.

I have enjoyed many opportunities to witness Morning Meetings taking place in classrooms across the district over the last several months. Starting in Kindergarten and continuing up through fifth grade, children learn how to politely greet their peers and teachers, by name, using eye contact and a special greeting for each day. The greeting is typically followed by sharing around a specific topic, a quick energizing game, and finally time for the students to practice academic skills by reading and discussing the morning message.

Successfully participating in a Morning Meeting requires students to be able to successfully practice a number of skills including clear and respectful speaking and listening, social problem-solving, attending, and following directions, to name a few. More importantly, perhaps, a consistent routine such as the Morning Meeting develops a community and culture within the classroom of respect, nurture, and caring. The Morning Meeting sets a tone that says, “Everyone in this classroom is important and everyone will be cared for. We are glad that you are here.”

For more information about Morning Meetings, click here, or check out the Morning Meeting book from the Teacher Center’s Professional Library.

ILC Update

At the Instructional Leadership Council meetings, we have taken time over the past few months to engage in some thoughtful discussions about the work of ILC itself. As a significant percentage of our membership is new to ILC in the past two years, these conversations have provided a chance for everyone to get on the same page relative to our role as a leadership committee in Pittsford. At our last meeting, we crafted a statement which we believe expresses our purpose and will anchor our work moving into the future. The statement reads, as follows:

ILC investigates and champions collaborative instructional systems that drive dynamic, innovative and responsive educational experiences for all learners.

We utilize current research and best practices in:
- curriculum and assessment
- instruction
- educational structures
- community partnerships

While, at face value, this seems like a relatively simple statement, the discussions that led to its creation were significant and meaningful. Using this as our guidepost, we will develop short and longer term goals in each of the four areas articulated as we work, collaboratively, to lead our curriculum and instructional program into the future. We look forward to sharing more about our goals as they are developed.
Timeline for new state assessments

An ancient Greek philosopher is quoted as having said, “the only thing constant is change”. The folks at the State Education Department must have been listening as we are on the brink of big changes when it comes to our state assessments. According to the latest information, our students will experience new assessments aligned with new standards and frameworks according to the following timeline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>Global History and Geography II Regents exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2020</td>
<td>United States History Regents exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2021</td>
<td>Grades 3-8 ELA and Math assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2022</td>
<td>Grades 5 and 8 Science assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2023</td>
<td>Biology and Earth &amp; Space Science Regents exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2024</td>
<td>Chemistry and Physics Regents exams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to prepare our students for success on these revised assessments, Standards Leaders and teams of curriculum writers have been, and will continue to be, working on necessary revisions to our curriculum and locally created district-wide assessments. While our success in Pittsford is measured by many things beyond our performance on state assessments, it is important that our students receive instruction that is aligned to the new standards, frameworks, and skill sets that will be reflected in these assessments. That instruction will prepare them not only to be successful on state tests, but to become more literate, stronger mathematicians, better thinkers, more critical problem solvers, and wiser consumers and producers of information.

In times of rapid change it is important to not only know what’s coming, but to understand why the changes are being made. In this case, changes are being made to allow us to better prepare our students for their future. Working together, we can embrace the changes reflected in the new standards and new assessments and support all students in Pittsford to learn at high levels.

Friends from Modi’in visit Pittsford

During the second week of December, educators from Modi’in, Israel made their way to Rochester as part of the Jewish Federation’s Education Bridge Program. In Pittsford, we were privileged to have teachers from Modi’in spend several days in multiple schools, working with students and collaborating with teachers. Staff members from all the Rochester area schools that are part of the partnership program, along with our colleagues from Israel, participated in an evening workshop that week designed to strengthen relationships and share some of what goes into building successful partnerships. The work that has occurred between teachers at Thornell Road and Asif School was highlighted as an exemplary partnership. We also came together on the final night of the week to celebrate the last night of Hanukah with a fun evening of dinner, music, and dancing.

As our partnership continues to grow, more and more of our students are benefiting from the opportunity to engage directly with students who live a half a world away, but who have many of the same goals and interests, strengths and challenges. Relationships are being built that transcend distance and time, and remind us that we are all part of this one big wonderful world.
**Elementary Report Card update**

The Elementary Report Card Committee continues to make good progress towards the goal of having a revised report card ready for the 2019-2020 school year. Feedback from parents and teachers has been reviewed, and the committee is closing in on final recommendations regarding the scale and the learning skills. Steering committees have been reviewing the feedback related to the academic indicators and at our next meeting, scheduled for the end of January, the Report Card Committee and the core area standards leaders will review any recommended changes in these areas. In the meantime, Art, Music, and Physical Education teachers have also been working hard to craft the academic indicators that will be used for their portion of the report card. We are on track for a final draft of the report card to be presented to the Elementary Academic Council (EAC), and the Instructional Leadership Council, sometime within the next couple of months.

Creating the revised report card is, however, just the first step in a successful implementation plan. The success of this report card will depend on teachers at each grade level having a strong and consistent understanding of the meaning of each indicator, and the types of evidence of student learning that would best be considered when marking the report card in November, March, and June (or January and June for special areas). As a first step towards building understanding and consistency, a significant portion of the April 8th Superintendent’s Conference Day will be devoted to this work. Teachers will need time together to discuss the indicators, talk about examples of evidence, and come to shared understandings about what should be expected of students for each of the three marking periods. No one knows the answers to the questions posed by this exercise better than the teachers at each grade level themselves, so everyone’s involvement in this process is critical. The spring Superintendent’s Conference Day will provide the first, but likely not the last, opportunity to engage in this work. Specific recommendations for how to structure the day will come from EAC.

Many thanks to all who have, and continue to be, involved in this important work.

**Secondary Grading practices**

This is the first year of implementation of our consistent grading practices at the secondary level related to grade calculations and extra credit work. While we are still experiencing some growing pains we remain committed to the belief that these practices are in the best interest of our learners. One of the difficulties encountered has been the handling of “incompletes”, or students who have not submitted assignments or completed assessments. In the past, it may have been “easy” to assign a student a grade of zero for that missing assignment, allowing both the teacher and the student to move on. We need to step back, however, and ask ourselves what the student is learning from that response. They are learning that they don’t need to do that work. They don’t need to engage in that learning. Perhaps that assignment wasn’t that important after all. None of us believe that is what we want our students learning. We want them to learn the management, responsibility, and good work habits, along with essential academic content. Some of our students need more help with these skills than others.

If you are struggling to get students to complete work that is essential to the mastery of your course content, and that is impacting your ability to assign appropriate grades, please reach out to the administrators in your building for help in working with these students. All of our secondary administrators are invested in supporting you as you support your students to be their best selves as learners.

**Mission Statement**

The PCSD community works collaboratively to inspire and prepare our students to be their best, do their best, and make a difference in the lives of others.
Out and about...