At our final District Standards Leader Team (DSLT) meeting of the year, I asked each member of the group to reflect on, and share with the group, an accomplishment from this year. I wanted them to think particularly about something that had occurred within their department about which they were proud, or something that took some courage as a leader on their part to help bring about. What followed was a moving and uplifting reflection of the school year as told through the voices of teacher leaders.

Standards leaders talked about curriculum projects that were underway and their excitement about moving that work forward. Others talked about significant revisions to assessments that had taken place over the past year and how the teachers involved in revising and administering those assessments were seeing real value and were enthusiastic about coming back together to further refine and improve the tasks. Some talked about work done to revise a process and the gratification of being able to share the outcome of that work with groups of colleagues across the district. In some cases, the celebration was not about a specific body of work but was more focused on the work done over time to establish more trusting and honest relationships among members of the department. Some Standards Leaders chose to talk about something that happened as long ago as last August or September; others were reflecting on something that occurred just last month.

What was the point of all of this time devoted to “feel good” sharing? In our business, we get to the final weeks of the school year and everything goes by in a blur. We get focused on making it across the finish line and often lose sight of all that we and our students have accomplished over the course of the school year. Our mind seems to gravitate to the things we didn’t accomplish, the student we didn’t successfully reach, the learning we had intended to do for ourselves but never really got around to (think about the pile of professional books and journals on some of our desks and nightstands!). We are living in a busy, hectic time and the end of the school year feels like the busiest and most hectic time of all. It is precisely at those times that it is important to stop and breathe. Pause and reflect. Remember and acknowledge. Be proud and smile. It was important to me to carve out time with the standards leaders to reflect and celebrate all that has been accomplished this year.

Perhaps the most significant thing to come out of our shared reflections at DSLT however was the recognition of the power of collaboration. There wasn’t one person at the table who talked about something that they had accomplished on their own or for themselves. The real celebration was how far we have come, as a system, in understanding and valuing the power of real collaboration. The kind of collaboration that goes beyond gathering the “right people” around the table; the kind of collaboration that doesn’t stop at the entrance to the classroom door. Individually and collectively, we were celebrating the kind of collaboration that requires trust, honesty, and risk-taking amongst adults for the purpose of having a profound and positive difference on the ability of all students to learn at high levels.

As we turn the page to summer, I hope you will each take a few minutes to pause and reflect on the many great things that you have been a part of accomplishing this year. Celebrate. Be proud. You deserve it! Have a safe, happy, and restorative summer.

Until next time... Melanie
Elementary Grade Level Release meetings

The dates for our fall, 2018 Elementary Grade Level Release meetings have been set. Elementary teachers should take care to put these dates on their calendars now in order to avoid the scheduling of field trips or other conflicts.

The Grade Level Release meetings will be held on the following dates/times:

October 16, 2018
8:30 – 11:00: Grade 2        12:30 – 3:00: Grade 5

October 17, 2018
8:30 – 11:00: Grade 1        12:30 – 3:00: Grade 4

October 24, 2018
8:30 – 11:00: Grade K        12:30 – 3:00: Grade 3

Monroe Assessment Project

For the past two school years a small group of teachers from Pittsford have been participating in the Monroe Assessment Project (MAP). This collaborative professional learning opportunity has focused on formative assessment and effective feedback. Teachers involved in the work have identified a place in their practice to apply this learning and through a continuous cycle of collaboration, creation, feedback, revision, and more creation have found ways to embed formative assessment more seamlessly into their instruction, while also honing the skills involved in giving students growth-producing feedback. In many cases, they have also created opportunities for students to provide feedback to their peers, and to be engaged in self-reflection and goal setting.

One of the things that has made this work really stand out is the way it has served as a model of good instruction. This has not been a “one shot sit and get” professional learning experience. Like the very best learning experiences that we craft for our students, this project has involved:
- Student Choice. Teachers selected the area of practice to apply this learning to, ensuring that they were engaged and motivated.
- Explicit and direct instruction balanced with ample, frequent, opportunities to apply the new learning and make it their own.
- Frequent cycles of formative assessment and feedback. Throughout the year, participants regularly shared their work with the facilitators of the program and received growth-producing feedback that helped them to revise their work on an ongoing basis.
- Collaboration. Teachers worked in small, self-selected groups, collaborating on their projects, giving each other feedback and support along the way.
- Challenge. Participants were stretched in their thinking as they were challenged to create better rubrics, more rigorous assessments, and more effective feedback.
- An authentic audience. As a culmination of the work, MAP participants from all over the region came together to share their work and celebrate their collective learning.

I appreciate the time, effort, and thoughtfulness of the Social Studies and English teachers who have participated in MAP during the past two years, and look forward to welcoming some members of our Science department to the wonderful world of MAP next year. Keep up the good work everyone!
Grading philosophy takes root...

Changing the way we think about grading is a challenge that teachers everywhere are starting to grapple with. In Pittsford, we took on this challenge four years ago with the establishment of our Grading Philosophy. This spring we took a major step forward in that work by articulating two specific practices that all teachers will incorporate into their own work.

The first of those practices is that no grade representing anything below a 50% will be used in grade calculations. This practice is related to our belief that grading policies should be set up to support student motivation to learn. While we acknowledge the need to communicate when a student has failed, the intention is to avoid having any one grade have a disproportionate impact on the student’s overall grade for the course.

The second agreed upon practice is to eliminate the use of extra-credit as a means of artificially raising a student’s grade. A student’s grade for the course should reflect their achievement of academic standards and not be conflated by other factors, such as extra-credit.

Additional information about these practices, as well as numerous resources to support our continued learning about improved grading practices, are available on the Curriculum Department page of the website.

In our continued efforts to support teachers in their efforts to align grading practices with our Grading Philosophy, the Teacher Center will once again be offering a number of workshops this summer focused on grading practices. Look for these titles in the TC Catalog and sign up to participate in the learning:

- Exploring Practices that Impact the Accuracy of Grades
- Grading EdCamp
- Grading Practices and Infinite Campus
- Re-dos and Re-Takes: Implementing them in the Classroom

It is exciting to see new practices that are aligned with our philosophy and that support student learning take hold across the district. Together, we are making a positive difference for our students.

Elementary Report Card work continues

Members of the Elementary Report Card Committee have been meeting all year to discuss and plan for revisions to the K-5 report card. Ultimately, we want a report card that:

- parents will understand and find valuable;
- teachers will be able to complete relatively efficiently;
- is aligned to the most important academic standards in each area;
- provides feedback on work habits and social emotional learning.

Teachers and parents at the elementary level have had, and will continue to have, opportunities to weigh in and provide feedback to the committee as they continue their work. Our hope is that there is an initial draft of a report card for classroom teachers to respond to in the fall. Work on the “special areas” report card will also ramp up in the fall. Work will then need to continue to revise those initial drafts and develop rubrics that will provide for consistency in marking report cards three times/year across five buildings.

While their work is not yet finished, a huge thank you goes out to the members of the committee: Dennise Zobel (ACE), Julie Shaw (JRE), Patty Mayer (MCE), Jill Pink (PRE), Greg Bischopping (TRE), Heidi Weins (parent), Traci Wachter (parent) and co-chairs Mark Balsamo and Melissa Julian. Thanks also to core standards leaders who have served in a consulting role to the committee.

We all look forward to continuing to support this work throughout the upcoming school year!
**Full Day Kindergarten - at last!**

The collective sigh of relief that you may have heard on the night of May 15 was the acknowledgement that at long last Full Day Kindergarten would be a reality in Pittsford. It was the fall of 2013 that we began the latest study of the value of bringing a full day kindergarten program to our community. Nearly five years later, we will be welcoming our first class of FDKers into our classrooms!

This has truly been a collaborative, community effort. From the initial study groups that were formed in 2013 through to the Pittsford Advocacy Team that successfully lobbied at the state level for increased funding that made this possible, nearly every member of the PCSD community had a hand in this work. Many thanks go to the Kindergarten teachers, the members of all the various committees that have been convened over time, the principals, standards leaders, and members of the Central Office Team. PTSA, PDAA, PDTA, BOE…there were so many “letter groups” involved in making this happen, it was truly a team effort.

And now, the real work begins! Classroom furniture and curriculum materials have been ordered (another huge thank you is in order, this time to Laurie Hummel and the members of the Business office for making all of this happen!), and professional learning for the new team of kindergarten teachers is being planned. We will be more than doubling the number of kindergarten teachers in the district as we anticipate having at least 16 sections of kindergarten across the five buildings. A full day program does more than just give our youngest learners more time in school. It will provide us with the opportunity to engage those learners in a developmentally play-based experience that includes more time for reading, writing, math, and content area skill development each day, but also more time for exploring, making friends, developing social skills, and building relationships.

A full day program is what our students deserve, and we are so excited to FINALLY be able to provide it to them. Thank you to everyone who was part of making this happen - which was really everyone!

**With thanks and appreciation...**

Teacher leadership is the backbone of our standards and curriculum work throughout the district. Without talented, passionate, hard-working, and collaborative teachers willing to take on the role of Standards Leader we would be at a loss. Being a Standards Leader can be a highly rewarding position; it can also sometimes be a thankless task!

This spring, we say farewell to four of our finest as they turn the page on a new chapter in life and enter retirement. Sue Stare (Elementary Math), Donna Nichols (Elementary Science), Ellen Crowley (Speech/Language) and Claudia Foti (Health/FACS) have all served multiple terms as a standards leader. In that role, they have led curriculum projects, provided professional learning to colleagues, introduced new programs, informally mentored countless new staff members, responded to thousands of emails and phone calls, participated in collegial circles, served on many committees, and been role models of exemplary teacher leadership.

Their individual and collective contributions to the Pittsford community will be missed. We wish them all good health, happiness, and good fortune in retirement!
A few favorites from the year...

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.