And just like that, we are one-quarter of the way through another school year. Wasn’t it just yesterday that we were all gathered in the MHS Commons, excited to be seeing each other and anticipating the first days of the school year? Now, here we are, 10 weeks later, wondering what happened to September and October. Wondering how we’ve managed to come so far, so quickly. Wondering at the progress our students have made over the course of this first part of the school year. Wondering where our energy levels have gone to now that we are entering the darkest weeks of the year.

We are about to enter what, for many, can be some of the toughest months of the school year. The excitement and anticipation of a new school year wore off long ago. The never ending responsibilities of lesson planning, feedback giving, and assessment scoring are starting to take a toll. Many of you have spent far too many weekend hours working on school work, with no real end in sight. You are spending time not just thinking about what you will teach tomorrow or next week, but worrying about the students in your class who are struggling, those who need additional challenges, those who don’t seem to have any friends, those who are making bad choices, and those whose home life you have come to know is stressful.

The New Teacher Center in Santa Cruz, CA, refers to this time of year as the time of “disillusionment”. It is a particularly pronounced slump for teachers in their first year of teaching, but it remains an issue for many educators throughout their career. Days get dark and cold, energy wanes, tempers flair, everything seems a little bit more challenging. The good news is these feelings don’t last forever and, knowing that it is perfectly normal to feel this way at this time of year can help as well. But, I would offer a more proactive approach to pulling ourselves out of the slump.

Look around you and take a moment to just notice. Notice the way a child’s face lights up when a friend does something nice for him. Notice the look of determination on a student’s face when she is trying her hardest to master a difficult task. Notice a colleague holding the door open for you. Notice the joy in the children’s eyes when they see snow falling outside the classroom window. Notice someone who offers to take bus duty for you so that you can get to an appointment after school. Notice the student who stops to help someone who has just dropped a pile of papers in the hallway. Notice the custodian who is mopping up the wet entry way for the 10th time today. Notice all of the amazing people who come together each and every day to make the Pittsford schools a truly remarkable place to learn and work. Notice the difference you make.

Take a minute and notice. Breathe it all in. And be thankful. Sometimes, that’s all it takes to change our perspective just a little bit.

Until next time... Melanie
Elementary Report Card work

Work to revise the elementary report card continues to forge ahead and it is exciting to see things coming together. A great deal of work has been done to identify the most essential standards to report on in each content area, and to write the indicators for those standards in clear and concise language. Significant changes are being recommended to the grading scale itself in an effort to provide a clearer picture to parents of their child’s progress at any given time of the school year. Finally, the previous “Work Habits” and “Social Emotional Learning” categories have been collapsed and rewritten as “Learning Skills” to reflect skills and behaviors that contribute to a child’s success in school. Elementary teachers had the opportunity to provide feedback on all of the recommended changes at Superintendent’s Conference Day. The feedback was thorough, thoughtful, and detailed and will be used by the Elementary Report Card Committee to further refine the revised report card.

Parent forums were held on Thursday, November 8th where the work of the committee was shared, and parents were invited to ask questions, make suggestions, and provide follow-up feedback via an online survey. All of this feedback will be considered, in conjunction with the teacher’s feedback, as we strive to create a final product that will meet the goal of providing a clear communication tool to families about student learning, while also being teacher efficient and aligned with our grading philosophy. Our goal is to implement the new report card for grades 1-5 next year.

Given the advent of Full Day Kindergarten, it made sense to work towards the goal of piloting a new report card for Kindergarten this school year, rather than waiting until next year. Meeting this goal has required a focused commitment from our kindergarten teachers and elementary core standards leaders. It has been exciting to see all members of this team work collaboratively to create a reporting system that meets the unique needs of the kindergarten program and learner. We are very pleased to be rolling the new K report card out this month, and look forward to getting feedback from the parents regarding the usefulness of this tool.

Revising report cards is never easy work, and it has been important to keep in mind the fact that there is no such thing as a perfect report card! The members of the Elementary Report Card Committee have worked incredibly hard, and will continue to do so, to create the best tool possible to meet the needs of Pittsford teachers, parents, and students.

ILC Update

The Instructional Leadership Council has spent time at each of its first two meetings discussing goals for our work as a leadership group that will assist the district in moving towards the Vision Statement adopted by the Board of Education last year. The Vision Statement, which paints a picture of where we as a district would like to be 20 years from now, is broad and ambitious. It talks about Pittsford as a leader in realizing the promise of public education. It speaks to the importance of developing transformational partnerships between parents, teachers, students, and the community. It reflects the importance of personal motivation, choice, and the joy of learning. It acknowledges the importance of transforming systems and structures in order to better meet the needs of our students.

Given the ambitious nature of the Vision Statement, what is the work of ILC over the next five years that will help us take steps in the right direction of eventually meeting our vision? How should we be thinking about our curriculum, instruction, and assessment in light of the new demands our future graduates will face? How can ILC support the collaborative structures in all of our buildings that we recognize as being essential to moving our work forward?

All of this makes for some challenging and heady conversations. We look forward to sharing our revised goals with you in the near future, and the concrete steps we plan to take to help us all meet those goals.
The growth of our PLC culture

Two years ago the District committed, in writing, to where we hoped to be within five years with regards to our work at becoming a highly functioning Professional Learning Community. We articulated the importance of teachers of like courses collaborating with a focus on evidence of student learning, framing their work around the four PLC questions, developing common formative assessments, and reviewing the data from those assessments in order to inform their instructional planning. We spoke of the importance of having structures in place that would allow teacher teams to provide the additional time and support necessary for all students to learn at high levels. And we acknowledged that buildings would need support from the District, in terms of professional development, curriculum design, data accessibility, structures and schedules, in order to fully achieve this vision.

Since that time, much work has been done and the culture of professional learning communities has taken root in many ways and places. Teacher teams in many buildings are planning together, creating common formative assessments, and sharing the results of those assessments with each other. Elementary teachers are using their WIN/RtI blocks with increasing creativity and effectiveness to provide targeted instruction to students. At the secondary level, teachers are actively involved in experimenting with ways to build collaboration and WIN time into the existing schedule. At the district level, we continue to work on the development of curriculum maps that are focused on the principles of understanding by design, making it easier for teacher teams to identify essential learning in order to provide all students with a guaranteed and viable curriculum. At the same time, we continue our work around developing high quality district-level assessments that serve as valid anchors of that curriculum. We are working on systems to get data from those locally developed assessments into teacher’s hands efficiently and in a manner which will help to inform instruction. And, we continue to build our repertoire for supporting the social emotional needs of all learners, but especially those who are most at risk.

There is still much work to be done, and we recognize that different buildings, different departments, different grade levels are at different places in this journey. We also recognize that we have more learning to do, we have structural impediments that need to be dealt with, and that to truly reach our vision will take continued focus and hard work. That’s OK. It’s OK because we know this is the RIGHT work. We know the work we are doing to grow our PLC culture encompasses and supports the work we are doing to improve our grading practices, to develop high quality curriculum and assessments, to address our scheduling concerns, to meet the social emotional and mental health needs of our students, and to become a more inclusive school environment. It’s OK that there is still work to be done, and that we are all in different places, as long as we continue to do the work we need to do and continue to take steps in the right direction on the journey.

Achieving our goal to become a true PLC culture, and not a district that does “PLC-light” as Rick DuFour would have said, is part of living up to our mission of being our best selves, doing our best work, and making a difference in the lives of others. It is also how we will achieve our vision of being a district where every student will have access to personalized opportunities, and will be able to acquire skills necessary to meet their potential and fulfill their dreams.

I look forward to our continued steps together in this journey.
**Partnership Work**

Pittsford’s partnership work with schools in Modi’in, Israel continues to grow. In October, we welcomed a dozen students from Mor High School in Modi’in to Sutherland where they spent the day shadowing a “buddy”, attending classes, eating in the commons, and learning more about the similarities and differences between life in Israel and life here in Pittsford. The learning experience extended in both directions and was a valuable opportunity for everyone involved.

During the first week of December, we will once again welcome the Educator’s Delegation from Israel. Teachers and other educators from Modi’in will spend time visiting and working with staff members in many of our schools. Thornell Road and Calkins Road have been partnered with Asif Elementary School and Irony Gimel Secondary School, respectively, and teachers from both of those schools will be here shadowing in classrooms, planning for joint curriculum-based projects to engage their students in across the globe, and building and strengthening relationships. We will also be honored to have teachers visiting other Pittsford schools during their time here in Rochester.

Through the generosity of the Jewish Federation, three staff members will represent Pittsford when the educator’s delegation travels from Rochester to Modi’in in February. The opportunity to spend a week becoming immersed in the customs, culture, and educational systems in Israel provides us with a unique chance to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the world around us. Building on those opportunities by providing chances for our students to connect with students in Modi’in in authentic and meaningful ways is evidence of our Strategic Initiative in action.

It is exciting, and rewarding, to see this partnership growing in rich and unexpected ways!

**Science standards being embraced...**

It’s been a few years since New York adopted it’s version of the Next Generation Science Standards, called the P-12 New York State Science Learning Standards (NYSSLS). Since that time, science teachers across the state, including those here in Pittsford, have been doing all they can to learn about the new standards and understand the implications for their implementation. The new standards represent significant changes not just in the science content to be taught, but also in the approach to curriculum and pedagogy. Disciplinary content is woven together with science and engineering practices and cross-cutting concepts and students are expected to experience more inquiry and phenomena based instruction than ever before.

It’s taken awhile to wrap our arms around the demands of the new standards and the impact that the full adoption will have on our science program and curriculum. That is work that is continuing. In the meantime, however, our science teachers have begun to embrace the science practices, they have started to reframe their lessons to be more inquiry-based, and they have begun to center their instruction around the idea of phenomena and storylines. Hats off, especially, to the Earth Science and Biology teachers who are working together this year to utilize resources from New Visions to experiment with new approaches to their instruction. Change is never easy, but their efforts will benefit the other members of the department as we look forward to revising our science curriculum to align with the NYSSLS in the coming years.
A few favorites ...