

Friday June 26, 2020

Manhattan High School Community,

For the past few days, the team has jumped into more graduation ceremonies than would have been possible before. You have each worked with your teams to honor the Class of 2020 while delivering messages that reflect your values and beliefs as leaders.

We heard some of you speak to using the power of the ballot to vote and to engage in protest when you want to see a change.

We learned more about the history of the Black Lives Matter movement, who your heroes are, and where you turn for inspiration.

We saw you share images celebrating the brilliance and creativity of your students.

We witnessed remarkable resilience and adaptation as we entered a completely unfamiliar way to be "in school" and shelter in place.

We grieved with friends, colleagues, students and families.

We heard you call out systemic racism and spoke to what it could look like to live an antiracist life.

In this time of distance learning and working remotely, we have experienced surprisingly deeply personal connections as we got to know each other more completely. The home/work boundaries blurred as did some of the professional/personal connections.

We have been inspired by how you have led your school communities this year as we work collectively to adapt and reimagine our schools in an unpredictable world with a focus on equity. Our whole is greater than the sum of our parts. We need one another to help each of us be accountable for doing this work. We have much to celebrate and more work to do.

Fourteen weeks ago, we took a collective deep breath and I asked that we make sure we stay connected. The work described below is evidence of how we responded.

Principals

Back in March, within one week, you all led your students, teachers, parents, staff, and community to abruptly shift into remote learning. You quickly shifted gears to ensure your school prepared for what was at the time the great unknown of teaching and supporting students via social distancing and quarantining under a global pandemic. Regardless of the challenges and unanswered questions, you worked to provide 30,000 students with uninterrupted learning. Then last month we observed you address the great racial injustices of this nation, often putting voices of Black and Latino students at the center of that charge. Building on our continued work of adaptive leadership, equity, CR-SE, and courageous conversations about race, you all rose to the occasion and met the challenges of 2020 by working with and leading your school community to a successful completion of the school year.



Assistant Principals

Sending lots of gratitude to all of the district assistant principals who participated in the district leadership series this year. The work at the beginning of the year asked each of you to develop a department project designed to narrow identified achievement gaps through implementing Advanced Literacy and Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education in the curriculum and in pedagogical shifts. As part of this work each of you engaged in the instructional rounds process, where the level of engagement and commitment you all exhibited with and for each other deepened everyone's leadership practices. In remote learning you all rose to the challenge in sharing best practices across the district and taking care of your students and staff in the face of racial injustice.



Data Specialists

This year, our school based data specialists experimented with small group professional learning communities (PLCs) and SharePoint sites for gathering resources and data. Thank you for making the PLC model work and for being thoughtful about the equity data collected and how you challenged your schools to take action. Much appreciation to the PLC team leaders who took on extra responsibilities and served as unofficial mentors to our newest Data Specialists

Parent Coordinators

Words are not enough to recognize the remarkable work of our parent coordinators. The family engagement work has been focused on five core values: Equity, Parent Voice, Leadership, Collaboration and Connection to Student Achievement. Despite all the new priorities that emerged with transitioning to remote learning, these core values have continued to drive the work. PCs have exhibited leadership, compassion and collaboration throughout these unprecedented times. With families now at the center of their child's learning, the innovation and persistence of parent coordinators has been fundamental in the well-being and success of our students. They all rose to the challenge and we are extremely grateful for their contributions.



Student Equity Leaders & Adult Allies

Thank you adult allies for your support of our young men. Your partnership proved to be incredibly important and crucial during remote learning. Thank you student equity leaders for your work and dedication. Your initiatives and recommendations from having students on hiring committees, to leading courageous conversations about race, to providing feedback on remote learning will transform your schools. From you we learned more about the needs of our school communities and of those of Black, Latino, and Bengali students. You also confirmed the value and power of student leadership in bringing about real change in schools. Finally, you reaffirmed our beliefs in the brilliance of Black and Brown young men. Thank you! ¡Gracias!

AP Symposium

We continued to build on strong cross school collaboration and convened Advanced Placement teachers in order to share promising practices and units of study. Special shout out to the planning cadre, whose feedback made sure that our year's plan would be focused on what AP teachers really needed and would find useful. You have each been great resources to each other and reaffirm that we all grow as practitioners when we have the space and time to learn with and from one another—even when we have to work remotely.



New Principals

To see what our new principals have done this year is both humbling and inspiring. What you have done, and done with and poise and positivity, is nothing short of amazing. Certainly, there were times (and there will be more) when you were frustrated or overwhelmed but, whether you reached out for help, redoubled your efforts, took a different tack, or started over, you led. You led with your values and heart and the leadership each of you has exhibited in your first year under unprecedented circumstances is something we see, are grateful for, and truly appreciate. I won't kid you, it only gets a little easier, but you do get better. And you have a remarkable group of principal colleagues (and a district team) that value you and have your back. Lean on them when you need to - it can be a lonely job - they know what it is like to be "living the dream!"

Teachers

We would be remiss to not acknowledge the myriad of ways teachers across our district stepped up to support their students during remote instruction. We have appreciated those teachers who were able to share their practices with all our principals during our conferences this spring. Many of your principals love to share examples of the work you have done with students that forced you to learn new tools and strategies in such a brief period of time. On behalf of Superintendent Vivian Orlen, she is thrilled to announce that 151 teachers across our 48 schools were approved for tenure this school year and looks forward to celebrating with each one when we return in the fall...either remotely but hopefully in person. Thank you to each of you for your hard work, commitment to serving all students and working to create more equitable classrooms.



We wish you all a restful and healthy summer and look forward to continuing our collective work in whatever structure we are in this fall.

In gratitude,
Vivian Orlen, Superintendent
Damaris Frias, Family Leadership Coordinator
Helen Napoli, Administrative Assistant
Mark Ossenheimer, Field Support Liaison

Mark Rush, Deputy Superintendent
Christopher Legates, Teacher Development and Effectiveness Coach
Elizabeth Rivera, Family Support Coordinator
Jared Vitolo, Director of Advanced Academic Access