

## *Coming back...together*

I, like most educators, have always loved September. It is truly our “new year”, much more so than January 1st. September, and the first days of school, hold infinite promise of things to come and while this September is no different in that regard, it is different than most Septembers in many ways.

Coming back this year feels so much more momentous than normal. While we were certainly all “here” last year - even if we were working remotely - we were denied the feeling of togetherness that is such an important part of the school community. Our focus in September of 2020 was overwhelmingly on our health and safety protocols and adjusting to our Temporary Learning Models. The days and weeks leading up to the start of the school year were spent measuring rooms, blocking off seats, putting directionality arrows on the floors of hallways, distributing PPE, and doing countless other tasks that hardly seem the stuff of high quality teaching and learning. We were scared and sad, but also relieved to be allowed back into our buildings even if everything felt strange and difficult.

Together, we made it through the most challenging year of education in over a generation. Along the way, we learned invaluable lessons. We learned lessons about ourselves as educators; we learned lessons about our community. Some of our longstanding practices and assumptions were challenged and we adapted and learned new ways of doing things. We learned that taking care of our students social/emotional needs must always be at the forefront of any good teaching, and we learned how important it is to take care of ourselves, and our colleagues, in order to be able to take care of our students. We learned that, not only can we do hard things, we can excel at doing hard things! And, perhaps because we were denied so many opportunities, we learned how important it is to actually physically be together in the same space sometimes.

As we embark on a new school year, there is definitely some frustration and disappointment that we are not yet “over” COVID in the way we had hoped to be by now. We are still wearing masks, we are still needing to be thoughtful about crowding too many people together in a room for any length of time, and we are very aware of the fact that case numbers in our region continue to be high. We are also starting the year with the recognition that on a very real level, many people are just now beginning to grapple with the emotional toll that the 18 months-and-counting pandemic has taken on us. That applies to kids and adults; teachers and parents; students and staff members. Many of us are a bit fragile right about now, and we might not even know it until we start to crack.

That is why starting the year with a laser-like focus on being present with our students, supporting their social/emotional growth, and building and maintaining classroom cultures that are filled with respect, trust, curiosity, hope, and patience has never been more important. We are so happy to have all of our students and staff back together with us full time. But we are still adjusting to what that means, collectively and for each individual. We need to be a bit patient with ourselves and with others. Together, we will figure this out and we will continue to get stronger, together, as we embrace this new year.

Best wishes for an amazing school year.

Until next time...

*Melanie*

*The Pittsford Central School District 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.*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Instructional Roadmaps</i>	2
<i>Elementary Guides to the Essentials</i>	2
<i>Some of what to expect</i>	3
<i>Technology updates</i>	4
<i>Worth repeating</i>	5
<i>Welcome to new staff</i>	5

## *Instructional Roadmaps*

This was another busy summer for working on Instructional Roadmapping. Over 150 teachers came together to revise Roadmaps that had been created last year, or create new Roadmaps where none yet existed. In total, 49 secondary level courses received attention, including math courses from Math 6 right up through Algebra 2; Science 6 through Physics plus AP Environmental Science; the full continuum of Social Studies course from 6th grade through US History; English 7-11; and several World Language courses. In addition, several art, business, and technology courses were worked on, along with middle school health and FACS. Finally, elementary librarians, school nurse teachers, art teachers and music teachers all worked together on their K-5 Instructional Roadmaps.



The focus of this work continues to be on identifying, and documenting, the agreed upon most essential aspects of the curriculum. Doing this, in turn, gives teachers collective permission to let go of some of the “nice to knows” that may be challenging to get to, especially as we continue to prioritize students’ social emotional well-being. As teams of teachers worked together this summer, many chose to use this opportunity to add into their roadmap common resources as well information about common assessments. For everyone, there was the recognition of the way the Instructional Roadmaps and our PLC team collaborative discussions work hand-in-hand to support student learning and teacher professional growth.

The Instructional Roadmaps, as they were completed this summer, have been uploaded into NYLearns so that everyone can have access to them. You can find them by searching “Instructional Roadmaps” in the District Curriculum Maps tab in NYLearns. They have been clustered by department so, for example, if you are looking for any of the roadmaps developed for any of the science courses, you will find them linked to the Learning Activities section of a curriculum map entitled, Science Instructional Roadmaps 21-22.

Continuing to use our Instructional Roadmaps to guide PLC team collaboration, to anchor our shared work in the agreed upon most essential aspects of the course, and to provide guidance regarding the pacing and sequencing of instruction across sections, strengthens our collective ability to meet the academic AND social emotional needs of all of our learners.

## *Elementary Guides to the Essentials*

For K-5 classroom teachers, and the reading specialists, learning specialists, and others who support the work being done by K-5 teachers and their students, we took a little different approach to updating last year’s Instructional Roadmaps. All K-5 teachers were provided with the opportunity to give feedback, via a one-hour asynchronous learning module, over the summer to help inform the creation of the Elementary Guides to the Essentials. The goal was to continue to provide a document:

- ◇ that identified the most essential learning for all of the elementary core content areas;
- ◇ that was aligned to our November-March-June report card indicators;
- ◇ that would support teachers new to the grade level;
- ◇ but that also allows for a greater sense of flexibility for teachers to be responsive to the needs and interests of the students in their classrooms.

Thanks to the feedback from over 60 teachers, these documents are becoming increasingly teacher-friendly resources with hyperlinks built in to take teachers directly to online common resources, curriculum units, report card indicators, and district-created assessments. As time goes on, additional ideas/resources for integrating instruction across content areas will also be added. As of this writing, these are still very much a work in progress with much information still to be added, particularly for the second and third marking periods. The first draft of each grade levels’ Guide to the Essentials has been posted in the grade levels’ Team site so that teachers can begin to refer to the Guides as they plan their initial weeks of instruction within their PLC teams.

Over the next few weeks, elementary teachers can look forward to seeing the first draft of the Guides completed, and opportunities to provide feedback to help us continue to improve the utility and quality of this resource.

## *Some of what to expect...*

As we enter this school year, cautiously returning to “normal” in many aspects of our work, we are attempting to balance the need to prioritize teacher-student contact time with the need to breathe life and momentum back into some of our important work as a district. Much of that work is dependent upon our ability to resume many of our traditional meeting structures. At the same time, we do need to be thoughtful and conservative about time away from students, making sure that any time teachers are asked to be out of the classroom it is for work that is deemed essential to our collective work as an organization. What that means, specifically, for some of the structures connected to the Office of Curriculum and Instruction is the following:



### **District Level Committees - Instructional Leadership Council, PLC Advisory Committee, Elementary Academic Council, Secondary Academic Council**

These committees will all return to their pre-COVID meeting schedules. As of this writing, the plan is that all of these groups will meet in person. The district meeting calendar can be found [here](#). The meeting calendar contains dates, times, and locations of all of these meetings. The work of these committees is central to our ability, as a district, to continue making forward movement with our significant initiatives around equity, professional learning communities, grading and assessment practices, and more. Much of this work was put on pause last year and we owe it to our students and our school community to refocus our efforts in these areas.

### **Elementary Grade Level Release meetings**

We will NOT be scheduling our typical half-day grade level release meetings this fall. We want teachers to optimize their time building strong and caring classroom communities and regular presence in the classroom is a vital part of that commitment. We look forward, hopefully, to the chance to resume our grade level meetings in the spring.

### **Full Department and Steering Committee meetings**

Standards leaders have been asked to resume the practice of regular full department meetings, as well as Steering Committee meetings as necessary. These meetings, which occur after school, are critical to maintaining communication and collaboration among all members of the department, as well as to our efforts to continuously refine and improve our curriculum and assessment practices. All members of a department are expected, as part of their professional responsibilities, to attend the full department meetings facilitated by their Standards Leader.

### **Travel and Conference Requests**

With very few and limited exceptions neither teachers nor administrators will be supported in attending professional learning opportunities or conferences that would take them away from students and/or require travel out of the area. The only exceptions made will be for experiences that are viewed as essential for the district to do the work we are focused on doing this year, which is supporting our students as they transition back to full-time in person learning. Not only do we need to prioritize our time in the building with our students, but with the pandemic still in full swing, we need to do all that we can to minimize our collective risk. Of course, as a district, we continue to place a high value on professional learning that occurs both within our district and from the many high quality professional resources that exist outside of the district. We look forward to being able to “re-open” the door to conference attendance in the not-too-distant future.

If there is anything that last year taught us, it is the importance of remaining flexible and able to respond to changing conditions. We hope, of course, that conditions improve favorably and soon, allowing us to fully restore all opportunities for both students and staff that we are accustomed to. On the other hand we will adjust our practices back to virtual, reduced, and/or condensed meetings if necessary. Most importantly, we look forward to not only having our students back in school with us full time, but to valuable, in-person collaboration around the work that we are doing together.

## *Instructional Technology Platforms*

Once again this year we are requesting all teachers to make consistent use of Seesaw (K-3)/Teams (4-12) as part of their instructional delivery and communication with students and/or parents. These are the two platforms that members of our Instructional Technology department are prepared to support, as they have been doing all summer through a variety of professional learning opportunities. In addition to it being best instructional practice to use these tools in a consistent and meaningful way to support student learning, collaboration, and creation, it streamlines things for students and their parents/guardians to know that everything is “housed” in one place.

In addition, as we watch the concerning rise in Covid cases, county-wide, it is prudent to keep in mind that we may have significant numbers of students periodically absent for extended periods of time due to either their own illness or being quarantined as a close contact. Having the ability for those students to access their assignments will help ease the stress on students, parents, and teachers. And, of course, if the “worst” happens and an entire class needs to be quarantined... need I say more?

All of that being said, it is important to keep in mind that unlike last year, we are not planning at this time to distribute district-owned devices to students in grades K-5 or 10-12 who may not have access to a device at home. So, if you are giving students an assignment to do at home via your tech platform, you may need to provide some students with an alternate, paper-based version of that assignment.

## *One-to-one laptop initiative*



Over the summer months, our Technology Services department took receipt of approximately 1500 laptop devices and worked to image all of them in preparation for our first foray into being a one-to-one school environment. Students in grades 6-9 will each receive a district-owned laptop that they will keep with them all day, taking it home every night, to allow them to access and complete assignments.

Last year, during our Temporary Learning Models, the middle schools were able to create a quasi-one-to-one environment by making use of every device in the building to give each student in the hybrid model a device to use all day during school hours. The experiences of both the teaching staff and the students working in that environment last year illustrated the power of purposeful, consistent, meaningful integration of instructional technology on our teaching practices and student learning.

Like any instructional tool or strategy, the laptops (even in a one-to-one environment) are not intended to be used all day every day. Teachers are expected to make judicious use of the technology to enhance, and not replace, other equally powerful pedagogical approaches.

Under the guidance of the District Technology Management Committee and the Instructional Leadership Council, we will study the impact of this year's one-to-one initiative to determine next steps, including the possibility of expanding to additional grade levels in coming years.

## *Zoom licenses*

Last year, given the nature of our Temporary Learning Models, all teachers, plus many additional staff members, had access to a district-provided Zoom license. This year, all elementary teaching staff will again have a Zoom license to facilitate parent communication. At the secondary level, staff members who are frequently responsible for scheduling and facilitating parent meetings will also continue to have Zoom licenses assigned to them. This will include Counselors, Team Leaders, and Social Workers. In addition, all Standards Leaders, Administrators, and TOSAs will have Zoom licenses in order to facilitate large group meetings as necessary. Teachers wishing to collaborate virtually who do not have a district-provided Zoom license are encouraged to use the video conferencing feature in Teams.

## *Worth repeating...*

In my final newsletter of last school year (June 2021) I shared a list of things that Standards Leaders had brainstormed in response to the prompt: “What did we learn this year that we don’t want to forget”? Last year was unique and challenging in many ways, but great things came out of it as well. Too often, when a new school year begins we kick into “automatic” mode as we jump on the hamster wheel that is our school year. I hope that we can all take a few moments to remember some of the things we learned last year and incorporate them into our interactions and practices this year. In that spirit, I offer up a list that I believe is worth repeating!

- ◇ We value the importance of connections with kids; kids above content!
- ◇ The alignment between teachers and schools - vertical and horizontal- was powerful. Roadmaps were a game changer.
- ◇ Don’t sweat the small stuff. Learn to let some things go. We don’t have to be perfect.
- ◇ PLCs provided a place for teachers to help teachers to grow.
- ◇ There is a growing willingness for teachers to focus on what is really essential.
- ◇ We have seen that there are ways of doing things that are not the way we’ve always done them, but are just as valid and allow us to meet students’ needs in different ways.
- ◇ It is important to find and use alternative ways to assess student learning that go beyond traditional pen and paper objective assessments.
- ◇ There is power in a virtual environment to include parents, grandparents, and extended family members in classroom celebrations; to take students on virtual field trips; to have guest speakers address the class; and to have quick face-to-face meetings with parents and colleagues.
- ◇ It’s (more than) OK to stop and focus on social emotional and mental health needs of our students and our staff.
- ◇ The world needs more mercy; let’s be kind.

I’m sure each of you have had the opportunity, over the summer, to reflect on additional important lessons learned over the past 18 months. Put those lessons learned to good use as you think about welcoming students back to school!

## *Welcome new staff members!*



Just as we are always excited to welcome new students into our classrooms in September, we are also excited to welcome new staff members to our district. We have new staff in every part of the organization this year and across all of our buildings. It’s exciting to anticipate each of their contributions to our organization and the way they will be part of continuing to make Pittsford an exceptional place to be.

During our New Teacher Induction program this summer, we welcomed and worked with approximately 30 new teachers including many new elementary classroom teachers, several new learning specialists, a handful of new math teachers, a couple of reading teachers, and a smattering of other folks! It was a wonderful group of new colleagues, with all nine school buildings represented. I am very much looking forward to getting to know these new-to-Pittsford teachers as they become important contributors to our school community.