

A new beginning, a fresh start...

September is always the time of new beginnings when you work in a school. Clean classrooms and clean hallways beckon us back to the start of a new year. Rosters of student names hold nothing but promise, and we are excited to be reunited with friends and colleagues we last saw in June. September is full of optimism, hope, and the best laid plans.

This September that sense of optimism and hope feels particularly strong and poignant. We desire nothing more than a return to normalcy and are excited about the prospect of that happening. The small group tables are back in our classrooms, we aren't focused on procedures to facilitate contact tracing, and we can look forward to actually seeing our students' (unmasked) faces every day. There is a palpable feeling that we have been through the worst of things and come out on the other end, ready for a fresh start. Ready to embrace what this new year has in store for us.

As we embark together on this new year, this year that holds so much hope, the messages that we heard on Opening Day were inspirational and important. A significant part of our "return to normalcy" needs to be a re-investment in all of our PCSD Core Principles, but particularly the principles of being **highly collaborative** and creating a **supportive environment for all**. We know that we do our best work when we do it together. When we slow down, involve others in a decision-making process, share our thinking with critical friends, seek input from those who may not think like we do, we inevitably arrive in a better place than where we started. When we acknowledge that none of us can do our jobs in isolation, that we all need a colleague to plan with, a shoulder to cry on, a friend to celebrate with, a smile and a word of welcome, a helping hand or someone to say, "I've got this", we create a better, healthier, and more sustaining environment for all members of our community.

From the District perspective, we are committed this year to slowing things down, taking the time to restore and rebuild relationships and collaborative processes, and being cautious about what we are asking of others. Our focus in every classroom, every building, every department, this year needs to be on establishing and maintaining supportive relationships; relationships between and among students and adults. While we are excited about the return to normalcy, we all need to keep in mind that we are all—children and adults alike—still experiencing the trauma brought about by the past two and a half years. More than ever, we need to actively attend to relationships, because without those, who are we?

As you prepare to welcome students to your classrooms take a moment to pause and celebrate the opportunity for a new beginning and a fresh start. And know that you have an entire community around you supporting you, applauding you, and wishing for you your best year ever!

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.

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Elementary Grade Level Release Mtgs.

As of this writing, we are planning to return to half-day grade level release meetings for teachers, grades K-5, in both the fall and spring semesters with all teachers of the grade level meeting together at the same time.

The dates for our fall grade level release meetings have been established and are listed below. Teachers, please mark your calendars and put in your request for a substitute! More details will follow.

Kindergarten:	October 18th	8:30—11:00
1st Grade:	October 19th	8:30—11:00
2nd Grade:	October 26th	8:30—11:00
3rd Grade:	October 18th	12:30—3:00
4th Grade	October 19th	12:30—3:00
5th Grade	October 26th	12:30—3:00



One-to-one laptop initiative expansion

Based on the success of last year’s implementation of our one-to-one laptop initiative, we are expanding the reach of this project. Beginning in September, all students in grades 5-10 will now have a district-provided laptop. As students enter 6th grade and 9th grade, they are issued a new device which they keep throughout their time at the middle and high schools respectively. So, last year’s 9th graders will be bringing their devices back to school as they return in September for 10th grade.

In addition, we have now outfitted all of our fifth grade classrooms with enough devices to create a one-to-one IN school environment for 5th graders. Students will be assigned a laptop which will be theirs to use in school all year. Those devices, however, will remain in school overnight and on the weekends and are not to be sent home with students.

Feedback that we received from students, parents, and teachers last year regarding the one-to-one initiative was overwhelmingly positive. Benefits included easier access to assignments and materials; strengthening of students’ writing, research, and communication skills; improved organization skills; ease of accessing help from teachers and/or peers; an increased sense of responsibility; and the ability to keep up with school work when absent from school.

As with all instructional tools, the laptop devices are meant to be used judiciously and purposefully to further student learning. We would not want, or expect, to see students spending all day in front of the laptop screen. The consistent and reliable availability of devices provides for some powerful learning opportunities; but those devices will never take the place of time spent reading with your students, engaging them in a meaningful discussion, or co-creating an anchor chart with them!

A HUGE shout-out to our entire Technology Team for making all of this happen!!!

Zoom licenses

We have continued with the provision of Zoom licenses for identified staff members to facilitate communication with colleagues and families. This year, elementary certificated staff members 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.

Professional Learning Communities

In Pittsford, we place a high value on working collaboratively to ensure high levels of learning for all students. We believe in a collective responsibility for all students' learning. We recognize that our work is complex and no one person can do it alone, and we strive to continuously do better for our students and ourselves. We also recognize that not all of our teachers currently have access to schedules or structures that make working collaboratively with colleagues on teaching and learning possible during the school day, while others do.

In an effort to support ALL teachers, no matter where they are in their journey towards being part of a high-functioning PLC, the PLC Advisory Committee pulled together a wide-variety of resources last year that have been organized into a "[PLC Playbook](#)". It is our hope that collaborative teacher teams will access the resources in the playbook to meet their needs, answer their questions, and give them some guidance and suggestions regarding "next steps" in the journey. We will continue to grow this bank of resources, over time, as we discover things that may be helpful to others. You should always be able to access the PLC Playbook from my [website](#).

If you have any questions about anything you see in the Playbook, or if you have suggestions for resources to be added to the Playbook, please reach out to me, or any member of the PLC Advisory Committee!

Focusing on the Essentials



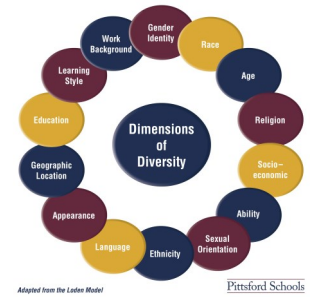
As much as it pains us to admit this, there were a few good things that came out of the "Covid years" in Pittsford. One of the best, and most powerful, things was our increased focus on identifying what is most essential in our curriculum, K-12. Those couple of years forced us to acknowledge that we could not possibly do everything with our students that we were accustomed to doing. Because we knew that our instructional time with students was limited, and we recognized that students would be experiencing academic gaps, teams of teachers responsible for teaching the same course, or the same grade level, worked collaboratively to identify and agree upon the essentials for their course. Those essentials were documented in our Instructional Roadmaps, grades 6-12 or the Guides to the Essentials, grades K-5.

Having agreed upon Essentials is not just for "Covid years". Having agreed upon Essentials allows us to guarantee that all students, regardless of their teacher or their building, will have a similar experience, and be held to a similar set of expectations anchored in the same set of prioritized standards. Having agreed upon Essentials means that when you greet your new students in September, you can be confident about what they are coming to you having learned last year. Having agreed upon Essentials opens the door wide to ongoing conversations about teaching and learning; opportunities to look collaboratively at student work for evidence of learning; and opportunities for shared planning. Having agreed upon Essentials means that we agree upon what we DON'T need to do; it allows us to take things off of our plates, and the plates of our students. Having agreed upon Essentials does NOT mean that those are the only things we do; it means that those are the things we MUST do; they are the things we agree all students need opportunities to master, even if they require more time and instruction to get there. The agreed upon Essentials help us focus our assessments on what is essential and they help us to know how to appropriately accommodate assessments for students who need accommodations. Having agreed upon Essentials has brought about greater alignment in our curriculum than ever before, while still allowing for, and encouraging, teacher autonomy in the planning of the instruction that meets the needs of their students.

In other words, those Essentials that we worked hard to align ourselves around over the past two years should still be alive and well in all of our planning. Teachers should continue to access those documents that were collaboratively created; and if you aren't sure where to access them please reach out to your standards leader.

Equity Series

This summer, we were pleased to present eight different two-hour professional learning modules that all fell under the umbrella of our newly launched Equity Series. The learning was anchored in the NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework and included topics such as an Introduction to the CR-SE Framework, and Introduction to the Social Justice Standards, Implicit Bias, Discussion Protocols to Support Equity, and more. Each of the eight modules was planned and co-facilitated by a team of teachers and administrators representing different buildings, grade levels, and content areas. It was great to work with such a dynamic and passionate group of educators on this project.



It was equally great to have so many teachers participate in the Equity Series workshops. We had several people take all, or almost all, of the modules offered this summer and many more who were able to join us for three or four different sessions. Most of the sessions included an eclectic mix of teachers representing all grade levels, departments, buildings, and ranges of experience in Pittsford. The conversations were honest, meaningful, and insightful. As we closed out each session, I felt inspired by the commitment demonstrated by our teachers to continue learning, growing, and providing culturally responsive-sustaining experiences for our PCSD community of learners.

We will continue to make some of these learning opportunities available throughout the school year. Check out the fall Teacher Center catalog as soon as it is released and join us for some important learning.

Diversity and Representation in Instructional Materials

One of the Equity Goals that the district established in the summer of 2021 was the development of a series of Equity Analysis protocols. The goal is to have a common set of tools to help us frame our thinking around a whole host of things in an effort to make sure that the decisions we make about materials, experiences, and practices reflect our commitment to equity and inclusivity.

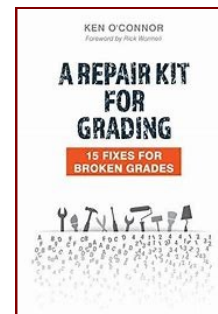
One of the first protocols to be developed is the Protocol for the Review of Instructional Materials. This comprehensive document, which is in its final stages of review, is intended to be used by standards leaders and teams of teachers when making decisions about instructional materials to be included in curriculum across the district. Textbooks, units of study, common supplemental resources, etc. would be expected to be vetted through the use of this multi-faceted protocol.

However, many of the instructional materials that teachers use on a daily basis with their students are not things that are common across the district. They are things that individual teachers choose to use as they plan their instruction to meet the needs of their students. In an effort to assist all of us in thinking about those kinds of instructional materials through an equity lens, we have developed a “Quick Guide”. This one page document contains a series of questions related to diversity and representation in instructional materials. The goal is not to be able to answer all of the questions in the affirmative about everything we put in front of our students. The goal is to begin to “train our brains” to think about issues of diversity and representation so that we are consciously providing our students with high quality materials that represent balanced and accurate portrayals of a variety of experiences. We owe it to our students, and ourselves, to be thoughtful and careful about anything we use for instructional purposes and we need to make sure that those materials meet the highest standards for quality, accuracy, developmental appropriateness, and alignment to our curriculum and standards. The “Quick Guide” is intended to be one more tool in our toolbox as we consider our instructional materials.

The [Diversity and Representation in Instructional Materials: A Quick Reference Guide](#) has been added to the PCSD Equity Toolkit which can always be accessed from my [website](#).

Continuing our work on grading

The past couple of years have tested our processes and procedures in a number of areas. Among those was our approach to grading, particularly at the secondary level. While we have a grading philosophy that articulates shared beliefs, and a couple of agreed upon practices for all teachers to follow, we have experienced changes to how we think about the organization of our curriculum, as well as changes to student behavior that have raised some new questions, and resurfaced some long-standing questions, about assessment and grading. It is important that this year we spend time refocusing our energies and expertise on doing what is necessary to put equitable grading practices into place.



Some of the questions and considerations that need our attention this year are things like:

- ◇ What systems and structures are in place, or need to be put in place, to support teachers in this work?
- ◇ How do we consistently hold students accountable for doing the learning that we need them to do?
- ◇ Do all department members have a clear and shared understanding of the essential learning for their course(s) and have teachers of the same course agreed upon what “proficiency” (or mastery) of those essential standards looks like and how it will be assessed?
- ◇ Since we agree that learning behaviors are important but should not be reflected in a student’s grade, how DO we report those learning behaviors?
- ◇ What are equitable grading practices for all?

I’m looking forward to re-igniting these conversations, and arriving at answers to some of these questions, this fall through work with both the Secondary Academic Council and Instructional Leadership Council members.

To further the conversations, all secondary teachers will have the opportunity to participate in an online book study using the latest edition of Ken O’Connor’s book, *A Repair Kit for Grading 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*. Julie Barker and I will co-facilitate this asynchronous book study, taking time to examine each of O’Connor’s “fixes” and discuss their applicability to our work in Pittsford. The book study is anticipated to kick off the first week in October and run through December, giving participants plenty of time to engage in the learning. Each participant will be provided with a copy of the book.

Be on the lookout for your chance to sign up to be part of the book study! We are excited about this opportunity to re-ground ourselves in best practice.

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 English teachers, a couple of new World Language teachers, two new music 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.

