

June 7, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

When asked why we work in public education, many of us will credit that special teacher in our lives, the one who believed in us, the one who knew exactly how to get us to move academically by pushing us at just the right moments. When I visit our schools, I am encouraged by our students' work—and yours. There is a tremendous amount of potential in our classrooms, and it is our collective responsibility to see that this potential is fully realized.

In the past five weeks, I have met with principals, teachers, parent coordinators, parent organization members, and community-based organizations to discuss our instructional vision for the upcoming school year. The energy and enthusiasm expressed by these groups has been very motivating. I wish I could meet with every single one of you, but the reality is that with a teaching force as large as ours this is not feasible. And so, today I am writing you to talk about the work to come.

Over the past several years, we have increased our high school graduation and college acceptance rates substantially. This should be celebrated. It is a tribute to your efforts across the city, from Pre-K through 12th grade. At the same time, however, too many of our children are leaving high school without the skills necessary to succeed in college or a chosen career path. My team and I have articulated a set of instructional expectations intended to ensure that *all* of our students are engaged in cognitively demanding learning experiences in every grade to address this challenge. The Common Core Learning Standards, which were adopted by New York State earlier this year, provide us with a powerful opportunity to revamp our curriculum, assessments, and pedagogy. These new standards will be part of the state assessments in 2014-2015. Given the deep work required to prepare our students for these assessments, we cannot afford to wait. We are setting instructional expectations for schools to engage in the following work:

- In the fall, you should review samples of student work and identify the gaps between what students currently know and are able to do and the demands of the Common Core. Understanding the gaps between the two will help you determine what students need to learn and inform your decisions about what to teach in response.
- Throughout the winter and spring of 2011-2012, all students will have the opportunity to try at least one literacy culminating task and one math culminating task. Each task should be embedded in a well-sequenced unit of instruction that is aligned to the Common Core.

While final decisions about specific subjects and teachers will be made by principals, we encourage schools to engage in collaborative planning and decision making. From years of our work on collaborative inquiry, we have learned that a focus on student learning and outcomes, combined with teamwork and peer-to-peer support, can have a huge impact on the success of a school. We encourage school leaders and teachers across the city to use the collaborative inquiry process to get started.



**Department of
Education**

Dennis M. Walcott, Chancellor

Your professional growth is a central component to this work, as it is strongly connected to our students' academic growth. This will be new work for some of you and may present challenges. Because of this, we are asking principals and other administrators to spend more time in classrooms, engaging in short, frequent cycles of observation that will result in concrete feedback and clear next steps for those being observed. This is particularly important as we all prepare for the implementation of the new state law requiring a new teacher evaluation system, subject to negotiations with the UFT.

In schools where collaborative inquiry has taken root, teachers and administrators have used the school-based option (SBO) process thoughtfully and creatively to allow teachers to meet during the school day and better balance their workloads. I want to encourage you to work with your administrators to consider use of the SBO process to facilitate collaborative inquiry in your schools.

I have asked my team and particularly our principals, network leaders, and superintendents to look for opportunities to continue the conversation about our work together in the coming months. There will be challenges ahead, but we are counting on your knowledge and drive, your dedication to your students, and your passion for education to help transform our classrooms and our schools. Together, we will achieve our ambitious goals. Our children deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis M. Walcott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'D'.

Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor