

Chancellor's Message

Dear Teachers,

In the September edition of [Teacher Notes](#), I highlighted our new education initiatives designed to raise achievement in all New York City public schools.



Our bold [Equity and Excellence](#) initiatives will improve our students' education and futures by starting their learning early, supporting strong teachers and rigorous curriculum, and engaging our parents and families to ensure we meet the needs of each school community.

In February, I was proud to [announce](#) the planning, progress, and practices we've started in service of these initiatives.

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nycschoolssurvey.com
Deadline: April 1, 2016

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- **Universal 2nd Grade Literacy:** This spring, reading coaches are being identified and schools are beginning to do their preparatory work. Reading coaches will receive intensive training this summer. If you are interested in this opportunity, please consider [applying](#). This fall, the first new reading coaches will be assigned to more than 100 elementary schools in four high-needs districts: Districts 9, 10, 17, and 32. Coaches will initially focus on supporting and collaborating with 2nd grade teachers to close the literacy gap. Reading coaches will be added in 14 additional districts during each of the next two years, so that all elementary schools have this support by September 2018.
- **Algebra for All:** This spring, fifth grade teachers have begun departmentalizing math in their schools. Over the summer, middle and high school teachers will begin their training. In September, over 150 teachers in grades 5–10 will return to their classrooms with expanded expertise in math instruction and strategies.
- **AP for All:** There will be new AP courses, and increased enrollment in existing courses, at targeted high schools that currently offer few or no AP courses. To be eligible, these schools will also be asked to demonstrate their readiness to begin offering additional AP coursework. All schools offering AP courses will also receive rigorous, subject-specific training for new and continuing AP teachers. And this fall, pre-AP support to strengthen student and teacher readiness will begin at targeted high schools. (Targeted high schools for AP expansion are being identified during the spring of 2016.)
- **Computer Science for All:** The City has plans to add over 50 new middle and high school programs through the expansion of the Software Engineering Program and the AP Computer Science Principles course. The City has also begun working to offer new computer science education in elementary schools, as well as professional learning opportunities for educators citywide. And I encourage you to consider spending your spring break with fellow STEM educators at the [Spring STEM Institute](#).
- **College Access for All—Middle School:** This spring, there College Access for All will pilot in approximately 20 middle schools, including student visits to a college campus. The pilot schools will provide actionable feedback on their experience, and continue to work with the DOE and other schools to strengthen the program. During the 2016–17 school year, College Access for All will be implemented in approximately 150 middle schools in 10 districts: Districts 5, 6, 8, 11, 14, 18, 19, 27, 29, and 31.
- **College Access for All—High School:** This spring, we have identified approximately 150 high-needs schools for implementation of this program in the 2016–17 school year. Starting in September 2016, these schools will receive training and resources that will enable them to serve more students with high-quality college access guidance. In

addition to school-based programs, we will continue to expand on citywide supports for building college awareness and readiness like College Application Week (October), Financial Aid Awareness Month (January/February) and the new SAT School Day (March). This month, 92 percent of schools participated in the pilot SAT School Day. In spring 2017, this event will expand to include all high schools.

- **Single Shepherd:** This spring, we will identify and hire more than 100 "shepherds." Over the summer, they will receive rigorous training. This fall, all middle and high school students in Districts 7 and 23—16,000 students across 52 schools—will receive support from a "shepherd."
- **District-Charter Learning Partnerships:** The first district-charter partnerships are being put in place at 20 schools during spring 2016. One member of the collaborative learning team of "Mentor" schools and one member from the "Learner" schools will focus on sharing best practices around instruction for English Language Learners, while a second team will focus on restorative discipline practices. Additionally this spring, schools at four-to-seven co-located campuses will collaborate to build campus community and share strong practices. All district-charter partnership schools will utilize the strategies they learn in creating action plans for the 2016–17 school year. Throughout spring and summer 2016, the DOE will identify additional opportunities for collaborative learning teams, collaboration at co-located campuses, and collaboration among superintendents and charter management organizations to start the school year in September 2016.

Thank you for supporting these initiatives and helping to make them a reality in your school communities. I am looking forward to continuing to build on our progress thus far with you, your colleagues, school leaders, parents and families, and our students.

If you have questions, I encourage you to visit the Equity and Excellence [website](#), speak with your colleagues who are involved in these initiatives, discuss the initiatives your school community is involved in with your school leaders, and, as always, please reach out to [me](#).

Future editions of the *Teach NYC* opportunities monthly bulletin and *Teacher Notes* will continue to provide information on how you can get involved.

Warmly,

Carmen

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Roundtable Interview: Leading, Learning, and Collaborating at River East Elementary

One of the key elements of our [Framework for Great Schools](#) is collaboration. *Teacher Notes* has featured stories of interschool collaboration that highlight our Showcase Schools program in our [December 2014](#) and [December 2015](#) editions. In this issue, we speak to three teachers from Manhattan's River East Elementary about their on-going collaboration and the impact it has had on their students and school community.



[Teacher leadership](#) serves as the foundation that supports this dynamic inquiry project team, and hundreds like it in school communities across the City. At the

end of the article you'll find information about how you can take on a formal teacher leadership role.

How did you become an inquiry project team?

Laura Ralph: *In the fall, all of the teachers at River East Elementary had the opportunity to select specific topics we were interested in exploring further in our classrooms for an inquiry project team. Teachers at our school are always trying to figure out better ways to reach our students.*

Natalie Holness: *I picked technology as my first choice. Together, Laura, Lauren, and I worked on incorporating technology into my fifth grade class's project-based work.*

Laura: *We initially focused on integrating technology into the classroom to enhance student learning and motivation. Yet our area of focus grew beyond technology. We started meeting weekly in teacher-led groups. In these groups we coordinated cycles of learning (i.e., pre-classroom visit meetings, taking low-inference transcripts on visits to each other's classrooms, and then debriefing after the visits.)*

What has been the most valuable outcome of your inquiry work together?

Lauren Packard: *Peer feedback and support that I can implement immediately. And support in developing practical next steps.*

Natalie: *After visiting my classroom, Lauren and Laura shared that it would be good for me to add graphic organizers to help the children take notes on what they were learning about Westward Expansion. I implemented the idea and it was very helpful, especially for my students who find it difficult to take notes.*

Laura: *Before each classroom visit, we made an agreement on what to focus on in our low-inference notes. We wanted to ensure that what we targeted in our notes would be beneficial for our colleagues. I always find it valuable to visit classrooms and share ideas with other educators, especially when the conversation is authentic and the setting is designed for all of us to learn. During this particular series of work, I think examining student engagement and having all teachers support each other in gaining a better understanding of a group of students and their learning attributes was most valuable.*

In what ways has your inquiry group influenced your teaching practice?

Laura: *It has been motivating to collaborate with teachers who share an interest and desire for lifelong learning. Working together has helped me develop and use objective language as an observer. In terms of hard skills, I have refined the strategies I use to leverage technology to support student learning in my own classroom.*

Lauren: *The flexibility [of our working relationship] allowed for organic questions to emerge. We had the space to pursue real issues, identify possible solutions, and have an immediate impact in our classrooms. I am definitely more open to other teachers visiting my classroom because of the non-judgmental structure we learned early on in our work together [through the teacher-led*



Natalie Holness
8 years teaching
Grade 4



Lauren Packard
16 years teaching
Art, all grades



Laura Ralph
13 years teaching
Science, All grades
Model Teacher

learning cycles].

Together, you have 37 years of teaching experience across your careers. When you were first-year teachers, what did you think your teaching practice would be like at this stage of your careers?

Natalie: *Every year I teach, I learn. And my teaching practice grows and changes based on that learning.*

Laura: *When I was a first-year teacher, I expected my teaching practice would continue to evolve, but at that point I didn't know how it would evolve or what I could do to grow. I did not picture myself as a teacher leader, but one of the most important things I have learned about leadership is that the greatest leaders are those who are in leadership because they are committed to serving others. Servant-leadership is a teaching practice that I believe has made me a more effective classroom teacher and collaborator among my colleagues.*

As you reflect on your careers, what core beliefs do you have about teaching and learning? How have your beliefs changed over the years?

Lauren: *It is critical to find authentic voices and ways of teaching. Laura mentioned the importance of being authentic earlier. I believe learning is most powerful when it is authentic to that individual teacher, when teachers have the flexibility and trust to explore their passions, and above all are happy.*

Natalie: *All children want to learn. As an educator, my job is to find the best way to help every child learn. I think technology is one way that gets many children interested in learning.*

Lauren: *Art is powerful and important for all students. It is a necessary part of intellectual, social, and emotional learning.*

Laura: *I think everyone, especially teachers, has an innate desire to learn, and it is our responsibility to not dictate or mandate learning but to create opportunities for learning to occur naturally, and to engage in it constantly ourselves. That is when it is truly effective and long-lasting.*

**Inspire and Grow Collaboration in Your School:
Become a Teacher Leader**

New York City's teacher leaders are inspiring and leading collaboration in their school communities across the City. Are you interested in learning more about this work, or how to apply for a teacher leader role for the 2016–17 school year?

There are upcoming opportunities for you to learn more about the journeys teachers have made to their teacher leadership roles, the benefits and commitments of each teacher leader position, and how to decide if one of these roles is the best next step for your career.

I also encourage you to consider participating with a team from your school in the [NY Teacher Leadership Summit](#), powered by Teach to Lead, this June.

Discover More about Teacher Leadership Roles:

- [Join](#) our mailing list to be notified of upcoming in-person information sessions and online webinars.
- [Read](#) a Teacher Career Pathways overview and Frequently Asked Questions.

Take the Next Step:

- [Apply](#) today to become a teacher leader. (Deadline: Monday, May 15)
- [Submit](#) a proposal from you and a team from your school community for the NY Teacher Leadership Summit. (Deadline: Thursday, April 14.)

For Questions about:

- Teacher Leader Roles, [send](#) an email to the team.
- NY Teacher Leadership Summit, [send](#) an email to Michael Bruno.

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Teachers Recruit Great Teachers

Who sparked your interest in teaching? Were you inspired by one of your teachers as a student? A principal you met during your time as a student teacher? A NYC Teaching Fellows subway ad? Or a current teacher you aspired to work with? You are poised to influence the next generation of teachers.

We are looking for new teachers for the 2016–17 school year who are just as passionate about guiding New York City's future innovators, leaders, and citizens as you are.



Does someone in your personal or professional network come to mind? Do you know a prospective teacher who is ready to make a sincere impact as a new addition on a school

community next fall? (Please consider currently certified teachers, as well as those on the pathway to certification by the end of August 2016.)

Visit TeachNYC.net and [Refer a Friend](#). Our recruitment team will reach out to them with details on how to apply to teach in New York City public schools.

Book of the Season

Little Tree

Written and illustrated by Loren Long
(Philomel Books, 2015)

Recommended for Grades K-3

Little Tree lives in a forest surrounded by other little trees, with little leaves that keep him cool during the hot summer days. Squirrels scamper up his branches to play, and the mourning dove settles on a branch to sing her "flutey song." From where Little Tree stands, life is fine just the way it is. But his future is threatened when autumn arrives and he refuses to drop his leaves.

Little Tree clings to his leaves through the winter. In the spring, the other trees grow new, green leaves while Little Tree's are brown and withered. Season after season, he hugs his leaves tight, his growth stunted, while the former saplings grow tall and strong. In time, Little Tree learns an important lesson: that, sometimes, we have to let go of what we know in order to grow.

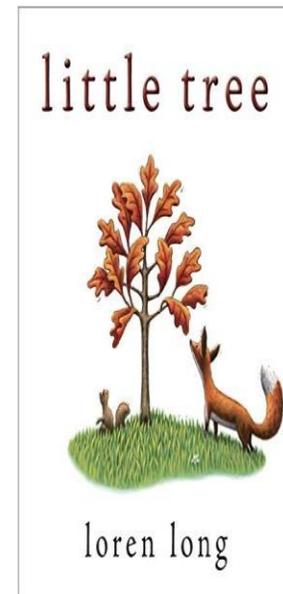
This enchanting fable will speak to students as well as adults and is especially appropriate this time of year, as many of our students prepare to transition to the next grade and phase of their academic careers. As educators, we must remember that parents as well as students fear the unknown. Change can be hard, even with encouragement and support.

Opening your classroom on designated school tour days can provide a space to lessen students' and parents' anxiety. Providing information sessions for incoming students can ensure that moving up is a joyful and smooth experience. Special consideration should be given to our students with disabilities to ensure transition programs and supports are in place.

Encourage your parents and families to remind students that change is part of growing up and moving on. As Little Tree learned, with courage and support, we can drop our brown, withered leaves and soar to majestic heights. We must teach students that even if they're content with the way things are, they must have faith that good things will happen if they step out of their comfort zones.

Warmly,

Carmen



Adapted from the March 2016 *Principal Notes* Book of the Month.

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