

## Chancellor's Message

Dear Colleagues,

There were people who said we could not bring meaningful change to our school system in only eight months, but thanks to your extraordinary efforts we proved the naysayers wrong. This September, we welcomed a record 51,500 four-year-olds to free, high-quality, full-day pre-k, doubled the number of after-school programs for middle schoolers, and opened the first of 40 new community schools.



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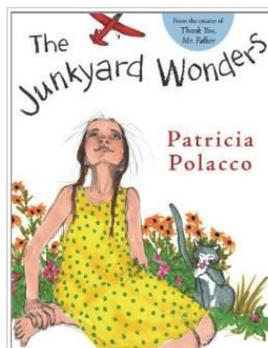
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## On the Chancellor's Bookshelf

*The Junkyard Wonders* (Philomel, 2010), written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco

Dear Readers,

In **The Junkyard Wonders**, our heroine Trisha is in a special education class in California, struggling with dyslexia. When, after much hard work, she finally learns how to read, she longs to be free from the stigma of being in a special class, she arranges to move in with her "gramma" in Michigan and start afresh in a new school.



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## Give & Take:

### Sharing Wisdom

You asked for PD led by your peers, and that's exactly what's happening.

[Read More](#)

### Teacher Voices

Hear how your colleagues spent their summer, in their own words.

[Read More](#)

### Tips for Engaging Parents & Families

Discover new ideas to build and strengthen relationships with parents during dedicated time this year.

[Read More](#)

### National Bullying Prevention Month

Now that the new school year is fully underway, let us take a moment to talk about preventing bullying.

[Read More](#)

### The Word Gap

Ideas and resources to

## Share Your Best Practices

**"What are your most effective classroom engagement and management strategies for students returning from school break?"**

Click [here](#) to share your response.

Your resource or best practice submitted in response to the following question may be featured in the next edition of Teacher Notes coming out in mid-December!

inspire you and your colleagues to develop your own creative strategies for vocabulary instruction.

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### Quoting Carmen

A sound bite of advice that I hope you can apply to your own classroom.

[Read More](#)

### Lessons Learned

I love reflecting back on my time in the classroom. Hopefully my lessons learned will spark your imagination.

[Read More](#)

## Chancellor's Message

Dear Colleagues,

There were people who said we could not bring meaningful change to our school system in only eight months, but thanks to your extraordinary efforts we proved the naysayers wrong. This September, we welcomed a record 51,500 four-year-olds to free, high-quality, full-day pre-k, doubled the number of after-school programs for middle schoolers, and launched the first of 40 new community schools.

You all deserve so much credit for a flawless school opening. Many of you spent the summer learning and growing professionally, and I applaud your commitment to our students. As I shared with you in my [school opening webcast](#), I am intently focused on bringing you even more professional development opportunities this year.

I know how hard you work to support our students academically, socially, and emotionally - and I am delighted to introduce my new quarterly publication, *Teacher Notes*, to better support you. Each issue will feature a topic aligned to one of my Four Pillars, tips on engaging parents and families, helpful resources, education headlines from around the country, and stories from some of your fellow teachers - and me. *Teacher Notes* will complement *I Teach NYC*, a monthly publication that will resume again in October. But this communication does not function as a one-way street: I want to hear from you.



As a classroom teacher for 22 years, I am aware of how exhausting the first month of school is, so I'm going to try to keep it simple by sharing my five "C's": straightforward beliefs that have guided my career and, I hope, will inform yours.

- **Curriculum.** Rigorous, content-rich instruction must be at the core of all that we do, but it must not be a passive experience. When I visit classrooms, I don't want to be able to hear a pin drop. I want to see students engaged in lively discussions that show evidence of their content knowledge.
- **Communication.** I am beyond thrilled about the additional time created for parent involvement in our new contract with the UFT, particularly the 40 minutes set aside on Tuesdays. I encourage you to talk to parents about how they would like to use this time. Options include workshops, small group meetings, and presentations of student work, but the sky is the limit.
- **Collaboration.** All teachers - whether new or experienced - benefit from collaboration. This year, you will have many formal opportunities to work with your colleagues, but I encourage you to also look for informal ways to share strategies and resources, such as after-school programs or extracurricular activities.
- **Celebration.** Our children need to be reminded that they are not just a collective unit in a classroom but are valued as individuals. When I was a teacher, I sent parents a "wow" letter praising something about their child. I also made a point of talking to at least one child personally every day, even if it was just to say, "I'm glad you're in my class." A positive connection is sometimes all it takes to keep a student motivated and engaged.
- **Common sense.** Often, teachers have to forego the usual routine and use their common sense to determine what is in the best interests of a student. When in doubt, ask yourself, "Is this going to improve instruction?" If you can't answer "yes," go back and rethink the situation.

The five C's have kept me focused on why I became an educator: to make a difference in children's lives. Please let me know how they work for you, and do share your thoughts about *Teacher Notes*.

I am in awe of the amazing instruction going on every day in our classrooms. Thank you for making a difference in our students' lives.

Warm regards,  
Carmen

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## Sharing Wisdom

In every issue of *Teacher Notes*, I will introduce a program or initiative designed to support

teachers that is in alignment with the [Four Pillars](#), my vision to ensure all of our students gain the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in college, careers, and beyond:

1. Improve student achievement by providing high-quality instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards
2. Restore dignity and respect to the craft of teaching and school leadership
3. Engage parents and families in every aspect of school life
4. Create new collaborative and innovative models



I'm excited to share our efforts, and hope they inspire you, guide you, and help you to grow professionally. In this first issue of Teacher Notes, I am focused on Pillars One and Two.

Beginning this fall, teachers will be an integral part of the design and delivery of the Core Curriculum Implementation Course (CCIC). Last year, four new common core-aligned curricula were launched across the City - [ReadyGen](#), [Go Math!](#), [Code X](#), and [CMP3](#). To support their implementation, professional development sessions were led by the vendors or publishing companies. During this time the Common Core Professional Development support team listened. They learned. Throughout the year they began to take on a larger role in the content and delivery of these sessions. They discovered what teachers wanted - what teachers said they needed. Teachers said they wanted to learn from teacher colleagues who had classroom experience with these curricula and had established best practices. In order to meet that need, I am pleased to share that the 2014-15 CCIC will provide that teacher voice you asked for, plus a community of peers to collaborate and learn with.

These CCICs are led by New York City teachers and focus on effective use of Core Curriculum programs and strategic adaptations to meet students' needs. Each course includes curricular content, examinations of teaching practice, time to examine student work, the chance to incorporate learnings into classrooms, and finally the opportunity to come together as a cohort to reflect on teacher implementation of the curricula thus far. Courses will be held across the five boroughs after school and on Saturdays, so that instructional time is prioritized.

The [teacher facilitators](#)\* selected to lead this work participated in a rigorous selection process that included an application, principal recommendation, interview, and classroom visits or model lesson presentations. Teacher facilitators are building their leadership and facilitation skills and deepening their content knowledge and curricular expertise. Through this skill building, they will be impacting a larger scope of teachers and students, beyond the walls of their classrooms. This ripple effect of learning and growth will benefit us all.

I'm proud of the collaborative work across our central and teacher teams in designing these courses for ReadyGen, Go Math!, Code X, and CMP3. Their efforts embody my [Pillars One and Two](#): "Improve student achievement by providing high-quality instruction aligned to the Common Core State Standards" and "restore dignity and respect to the craft of teaching and school

leadership." This course acknowledges the teacher leadership in our schools and builds on that knowledge to support your colleagues.

If you are interested in participating in the CCIC, please first discuss with your principal and then register using this [link](#)\*. (Please note the registration deadline is Monday, October 6). If you have questions, please reach out via email at [curriculumpd@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:curriculumpd@schools.nyc.gov).

\*Intranet webpages, which can only be accessed from a DOE network computer

## Teacher Voices: Summer Learning Opportunities

Summer is a time for rejuvenation, and growth - and the perfect time to take advantage of professional learning opportunities. I want to commend all of you for your dedication to the development of your teaching practice throughout the calendar year. This past summer, teacher learning opportunities ranged from three-day off-sites through external organizations to teacher teams working together at schools across the City. Here is what a few of your colleagues had to say about their summer experiences:

*"Since our school has just started and is now starting to blossom, I think everyone is trying to wrap their heads around all the new things that are happening. [The summer PD program] [iZone's iCamp](#) has been a real opportunity to actually sit down and delve deeper into our ideas ... The iCamper Designed workshops [conferences on various topics including blended learning, socio-emotional learning, PBL] - I think that was the best part because I got to see what certain educators were skilled in and just the natural way people clustered together...I now have a network to reach out to."* -**Christine LaBoy, Bronx Compass High School (X561)**



*"The Red Flags Crisis information was invaluable information [during the [Fundamentals of Behavior Support: Tier I Strategies from Life Space Crisis Intervention](#) training session] that will help me to curtail a*



*"I was interested in participating in the [Go Math](#) writing team because I wanted to share and learn strategies for teaching ELLs. I was quite eager when given the opportunity to work with my mentors [in the Department of*

crisis situation before it starts. I plan on meeting and greeting each of my students as they enter my room, observing their behavior and will also take a second before responding to unusual behavioral responses, based on what I learned during your PD." -**Michael Gilpin, Special Education Teacher, The Academy of Applied Mathematics and Technology (M.S. 343)**

English Language Learners and Student Support]. It was an amazing experience because I gained a deeper understanding of how to provide multiple entry points for my students ... I am looking forward to continuing my work with the Department of ELLs and learning strategies for teaching academic language in mathematics, best practices for ELLs with IEPs, and effective co-teaching." -**Amanda Mercado, Elementary Bilingual Special Education, grade 3, The Sunset Park School (P.S. 169)**

Are you interested in participating in learning opportunities this fall? Click [here](#) to find the right sessions for you.

## Tips for Engaging Parents & Families

### Maximizing Weekly Time with Parents and Families

Developing a love of learning starts early. Creating an educational foundation, starting with [Pre-K for All](#), is the best way to create that interest and excitement in school. Starting this school year, you will have a dedicated 40-minute block each Tuesday to focus on engaging with parents and families, which supports student learning and adds value to the entire school community. Teachers are encouraged to use this time for more frequent in-person meetings, phone calls, or email, and can include identifying learning activities for parents to do with their children, reviewing content being covered in the classroom, or discussing services that students need.



Recently, my colleagues had the opportunity to talk to teachers and discover their strategies for communicating and involving parents in the classroom, no matter the age of the student. Here are a few ideas:

**Joe Pesqueira, an 11th grade social studies teacher at the Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics**, has planned how to use this time strategically this year: "It's important to get more involved with parents. This year, I'm going to collect emails at parent-teacher conferences for use throughout the school year. My plan is to send a weekly email overview on what's going on specifically in our classroom, as well as throughout the school. We need multiple mechanisms to ensure that information gets home." The [Parent-Teacher Communication section](#) of the [Harvard Family Research Project's website](#) is a great resource for teachers looking to maximize parent engagement.

**At P.S. 149 in Jackson Heights**, science teachers gave families a hands-on experience through a lesson that students will complete during the school year. Additionally, teachers were

encouraged to hang "welcome signs that honor the languages and cultures of families" as well as host Family Fridays when families are welcomed to read and write with their children in their classrooms.

**At P.S. 206 in East Harlem**, the focus was on building an effective School Leadership Team; the student council was invited to observe and participate as well. And **at P.S. 69 in the Bronx**, a monthly "homework dinner" led by teachers detailed learning strategies that parents and kids could work on together.

**Phyllis Berk, a pre-kindergarten teacher at P.S. 188 in Queens** shared, "We do a lot of home-connection activities to engage parents in the classroom. We study each child's name - Where did the name come from? Are they named after someone? The parents write the information in story form and we share it in the classroom. We aren't asking parents to research, we are just asking them to support their child. If parents start feeling like they are an integral part of the classroom in pre-k - just as a child is learning classroom expectations - the contributions and participation will continue in later grades."

**At Marsh Avenue School for Expeditionary Learning in Staten Island**, staff will hold student-led conferences, helping students, particularly in middle school, reflect on their progress and what it



will take to improve or continue on a successful path.

**Paul Kehoe, an 8th grade humanities and 7th grade science teacher at Westside Collaborative Middle School (M.S. 250)**, shared, "Student-Led Conferences

[SLCs] represent the intersection of many of our core values. Students are asked to be reflective not only about the successes and challenges of learning in the content areas, but also about making choices for themselves around the use and application of

academic goal-setting. The SLCs offer parents and students many unique opportunities. Parents are able to see their child taking real ownership of their learning outcomes in a way that truly fosters responsibility and accountability; while students are able to establish themselves as not only participants, but as experts in their own process." For students, leading conferences is a chance to show what they know and inform the adults what they feel is important, as well as what is or is not working for them as learners. Parents benefit from learning about achievements and struggles from the source, which lets them better engage in supporting their child. Teachers not only shift the paradigm of "teacher as the sole evaluator" (since students are asked to also evaluate their performance), but teachers also get an opportunity to educate students and families on ways to discuss school in a thoughtful way. This is a critical component to further academic success and an essential part of college and career readiness. To learn about student-led conferences and other thoughtful action steps, please read [Parent-Teacher Conferences 2014-15: Maximizing Potential to Improve Student Progress](#).

#### **Engaging Parents and Families New to the U.S.**

Many families may arrive in the U.S. with limited-English language proficiency. To ensure all parents can stay connected and informed of their student's progress:

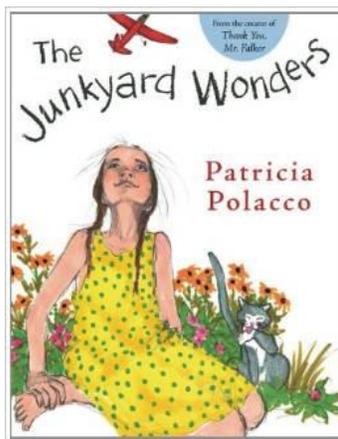
- Encourage all parents to indicate their preferred language of communication on the Emergency Blue Card they received at the beginning of the year.
- Partner with your school's Parent Coordinator or language access coordinator. Free interpretation and translation services are available in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Urdu.
- Make a list of the key documents you'd like translated and talk with your principal to make a request to the Translation and Interpretation Unit on your behalf. This office is available to translate documents at any time during the year.
- Have problem-solving conversations with your colleagues to address any language barriers you encounter when communicating in person, or in writing, with parents and families.

If you have practices that are working, please share them with [me](#). We are preparing a handbook of best practices to share with you soon and welcome your recommendations.

Below are resources for you and your colleagues to expand your current efforts to engage parents:

- [Family Engagement Resources: A Common Core Library](#)
- [How to Reach Out to Parents of ELLs](#)
- ["One Stop Shop" for Back-to-School: Resources for Parents](#)
- [Welcoming ELL Parents into the Classroom](#)
- [Harvard Family Research Project](#)
- [Translation and Interpretation Unit](#)

## On The Chancellor's Bookshelf



*The Junkyard Wonders* (Philomel, 2010),  
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Dear Readers,

In **The Junkyard Wonders**, our heroine Trisha is in a special education class in California, struggling with dyslexia. When, after much hard work, she finally learns how to read, she longs to be free from the stigma of being in a special class, she arranges to move in with her "gramma" in Michigan and start afresh in a new school.

But on the first day of school, Trisha is devastated to discover that she has been placed in the "junkyard," a class of all misfits. Trisha is amazed to learn that her teacher, Mrs. Peterson, doesn't

see the kids that way. She greets the class by reading the definition of genius and tells the students to post it on their mirrors, read it each day, and memorize it - as it describes each one of them. The definition includes: risking without fear of failure, understanding without research, ability without practice, imagination without boundaries, and creativity without constraints. In a nutshell: extraordinary intelligence.

It becomes clear to Trisha that her teacher sees each student as a unique wonder, full of possibilities. "What some see as bent and broken throwaways are actually amazing things waiting to be made into something new," Mrs. Peterson says. "Something unexpected. Something surprising." And because the teacher sees her students this way and treats them as the geniuses she knows they will become, a class of misfits is transformed into a class of treasures. Trisha has found her "tribe" and a safe, nurturing place in which to develop her own unique talents.

This heartwarming story is based on the author's own experiences as a child with dyslexia; in fact, Ms. Polacco didn't learn how to read until she was almost 14 years old. Today, she is a highly regarded author and illustrator and real-life example of the difference a caring educator can make in a child's life.

Let us recommit to protecting and honoring the "junkyard wonders" in our school communities so that all of our students can transform themselves from misfits into treasures. By our words and deeds, let us demonstrate that each child is special and unique, as is each teacher. After all, you are in a special position to release your genius and make the most of every possibility for your students.

Warmly,  
Carmen

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## The Word Gap: The Value of Vocabulary Instruction

Literacy can change a child's life by opening so many doors, and for that reason, has always been one of my top priorities as an educator. A cornerstone of strong literacy is increased vocabulary development for students of all ages, which plays a critical role in our students' reading comprehension, communication, and overall academic achievement. Yet research has shown a troubling word gap between at-risk children and their peers, one that only widens over time.

I believe that, together, we can shrink this gap, an important mission that will change the lives of thousands of children for decades to come. Our historic pre-k expansion is a tremendous step in

the right direction: our four-year-olds will learn 1,000 words during this first year of formal schooling. We must now harness this momentum and hone our vocabulary instruction for students in all stages of their education, from pre-k all the way through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

There are multiple methods for supporting vocabulary development in our schools, with studies supporting a few key strategies:

- Rich vocabulary-learning contexts that engage students
- Frequent exposure to targeted words
- Explicit vocabulary instruction

For our younger learners, story time, songs, and conversations are excellent avenues for introducing new words. For older students, one of the best ways to encourage vocabulary acquisition is by promoting reading: students who read 20 minutes each day are exposed to almost 2 million more words each year than those without daily reading time.

As we work to expand and elevate our vocabulary instruction, I challenge you to utilize these and other impactful strategies and resources. I urge you to delve into some of the very exciting and actionable research on this topic, including [A Review of the Current Research on Vocabulary Development](#).

[Word Generation](#) is a useful, free tool that offers one-week discussable units around social or civic dilemmas designed to promote students' academic language and argumentation skills. We are currently evaluating other good programs and will be coming out with a list of resources in the coming months.

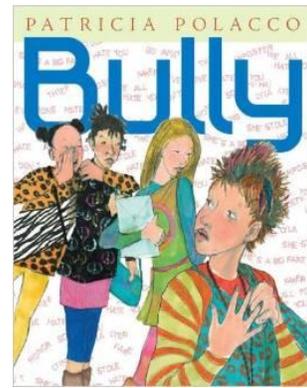
I also encourage you to brainstorm your own creative and effective ways for improving vocabulary, and subsequently, literacy. For example, word walls in classrooms or vocab bees at lunchtime - be original! Let's move beyond the stale practice of students listing definitions or looking them up in a dictionary, and instead, repeatedly and explicitly expose them to words in enriching and meaningful contexts-in ways in which they can see the real-world usefulness. When we make this a reality in all of our schools, I am certain the results will be remarkable.

I look forward to monitoring and overseeing our innovation and progress on vocabulary development and instruction.

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**National Bullying Prevention Month**

October is National Bullying Prevention Month, and to help promote awareness and eliminate all forms of bullying in our schools, I encourage you to develop and implement lessons and activities to educate your students and families on bullying behavior. I know that you share my deep commitment to protecting our children from hurtful words and actions, and we need to send our children the message that there is absolutely no place, nor is there any tolerance for bullying or bias-based behavior in our schools. Our children need to understand how important it is to respect each other and work together regardless of background, as this will help them become responsible and tolerant adults.



One of the ways to initiate discussions with students about bullying is to encourage them to read books that offer important perspectives. One I highly recommend is **Bully** by Patricia Polacco, a story of social cliques in school and the damage on friendships incurred through cyber-bullying and exclusion. There is an important lesson taught in this book and I hope, if you choose to have your students read it, that they will apply these lessons to their everyday lives.

We need the entire community rallying behind the effort to dispel bullying and must engage our parents in this work. I recommend that you visit the [Respect for All Library](#) to access a curriculum and resources that you can use in your classrooms and share with your students and parents.

## Quoting Carmen

"When you come into class with something on your mind, the kids sense it. I think it's important to come in with a cheerful demeanor, even if you have to force it a bit. Students should feel that school is a haven where people care about them."

-Carmen

## Lessons Learned

From my very first days of teaching, I have always loved [social studies](#) and literacy - and I believe that my energy for these subjects manifested into ability, and ultimately, benefited my students. While I was fully capable of teaching math, there was another teacher in my grade level at P.S. 29 who was simply better at teaching the subject. He could grab students' attention and describe mathematical concepts more clearly and effectively than I could.



So, he and I devised a plan that played to each of our strengths: we swapped classrooms once a week so he could do something extra in math for my class, and I could share my passion for social studies and literacy projects with his students. It allowed both of us to do what we do best - and more importantly, both our classes benefited by having a stronger teacher.

Every teacher has strengths, and even if it may be difficult to admit, all teachers have areas in which they do not teach as adeptly as others. Use your skills and talents to your advantage in order to get the greatest outcomes from students. You are your colleagues' greatest resource and well of knowledge, and they are yours. Particularly in elementary school, we ask teachers to be good at everything, and it's almost impossible. So find the one thing you're passionate about and share it with others - and make sure it's around curriculum.

Warmly,  
Carmen

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