

# Teacher NOTES

## Chancellor's

### Message

Dear Colleagues,

During my visits to your classrooms, I have been delighted to see the many creative ways you are aligning your instruction to the [Framework for Great Schools](#), our holistic approach to school and student improvement. Spring Recess is a great opportunity for educators to look backward and forward before the end of the school year, and self-assessment is one of the most important skills for every successful pedagogue. If you prepared a report card for yourself, what grades have you earned?

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### Collaborative Teachers in Action

Hear from teacher leaders from across the City about their experiences collaborating with colleagues and school leaders.

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### More Tips for Engaging Families

Discover new ideas to build and strengthen relationships with parents during the 40 minutes of dedicated parent engagement time each week.

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### Community Schools Update

Learn from a teacher about the exciting work happening in a Community School.

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### On My Mind

Take a look at the various resources and grade-specific examples you can use to support writing in your classrooms.

[Read More](#)

### Spotlight on Dual Language Programs

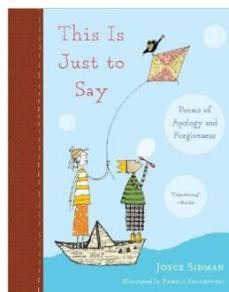
Cindy Cascante, a first-grade Dual Language teacher at P.S. 19 on Staten Island, discusses Dual

## BOOK of the Season

### *This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness*

(Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007)

By Joyce Sidman, illustrated by Pamela Zagarenski



Why does poetry have such appeal? I think because poetry promotes literacy, wakes our emotions, and makes us better listeners as we linger over carefully chosen words. In this season's book, poetry plays yet another role: as a springboard to a rich dialogue between classmates and the important people in each student's life.

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## Celebrating Teaching Excellence: Big Apple Awards

Students, parents, community members, school leaders and your colleagues submitted more than 4,800 nominations of teachers from more than 1,100 schools for the Big Apple Awards. The nominations have been inspiring: Stories of teachers who are working hard every day to help students learn and grow and are making your school community a better place for everyone.



I applaud your respect and admiration for each other, and the culture of celebration it has inspired. I encourage each of you to continue this practice by recognizing the professional achievements of your colleagues — large and small — throughout the school year.

For more information, visit the [Big Apple Awards](#) or email the [Teacher Excellence](#) team.

Language programs and why they benefit all students.

[Read More](#)

## Chancellor's Message

Dear Colleagues,

During my visits to your classrooms, I have been delighted to see the many creative ways you are aligning your instruction to the [Framework for Great Schools](#), our holistic approach to school and student improvement. Spring Recess is a great opportunity for educators to look backward and forward before the end of the school year, and self-assessment is one of the most important skills for every successful pedagogue. If you prepared a report card for yourself, what grades have you earned?



Here are some questions to reflect upon:

- Which goals for the year have I achieved? In which areas have I been most effective? Knowing that we all have areas of growth, which areas do you want to develop in?
- To how many content areas have I exposed students?
- With which students and families have I formed a strong connection?
- What professional development has enhanced my work? Who are the teachers I have either mentored or learned from?

Use your answers to revise your goals, both for yourself and your students. As part of this process, identify:

- Students who need extra support over the next few months.
- Families you can bring into the school community.
- Colleagues whose work has impressed you; seek out their advice and arrange to observe them in their classrooms.
- Ways to enrich your classroom curriculum so that students love coming to school and the classroom culture is set in a positive way.
- Improved coping strategies for students who need different approaches, both behaviorally and academically.
- Areas of competency you want to develop during the summer months.

When I was a third- and fourth-grade classroom teacher, one way I got a reality check was by asking my students to give me report cards. I got great grades for teaching literacy and social studies but consistently failed when it came to homework — students said that I gave too much, and I eventually agreed that overwhelming them with out-of-class work was not doing them any favors. Having our students give us feedback is a great way to give them voice and feel a sense of control of their environment. It also helps keep us humble and true to our values.

I am more convinced each day of the nobleness of our profession and the need to honor the trust placed in us by parents and the community at large. One way to do that is through rigorous teaching, which is also the best test preparation for our students. In anticipation of this year's State standardized exams, we have encouraged additional vocabulary work and more rigorous instruction in every academic area. And I believe our emphasis on teacher training around Common Core strategies has prepared our students well for these exams.

While I know there is always anxiety around test taking, please remember — and remind your students and families — that life is about meeting challenges head on. I ask that you facilitate positive discussions regarding any questions, frustrations, or concerns that students and families may have. For families who are considering opting out, encourage them to review this [Parent Guide](#) that is designed to help parents make a well-informed decision for their child. For families that ultimately choose to opt-out, I ask that you respect their decision and work to provide those students with an alternative educational activity, such as independent reading. As always, I encourage you to turn to your principal and to each other for support and guidance.

Finally, as we move forward with our [Strong Schools, Strong Communities](#) structural reorganization this summer, I want you to know that our goal remains to improve both student achievement and teacher satisfaction and retention. You are the critical lynchpin in all that we do.

I wish you a restful Spring Recess and hope you return reinvigorated for the work ahead.

Warmly,

Carmen

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## Collaborative Teachers in Action: Teacher Leadership in NYC

Groundbreaking work dedicated to the development of collaborative teaching is happening in classrooms and communities across the City. It starts with time dedicated to collaboration and professional development, and it comes to life through teacher leaders who facilitate learning for themselves and their colleagues.

Following the creation of two new positions in the [contract](#) — Master Teacher and Model Teacher — and pilot work funded through the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) more than 350 schools across the City have established formal teacher leadership roles. These teacher leaders work alongside their colleagues and collaborate with school leaders to provide peer coaching, share best practices, and model being reflective practitioners. They often open their classrooms, model lessons, and design professional learning experiences, in addition to supporting inquiry work in their school communities.

This is no easy task — the impact a teacher leader has is contingent on trust, vulnerability, risk taking, mutual respect, and the understanding that everyone is dedicated to the same goal — student learning. Developing a collaborative school community is a team effort between the classroom teachers, the school leaders, and the teacher leaders.

### Interested in learning more about the experiences of teacher leaders?

Throughout this issue of *Teacher Notes*, you'll discover reflections from teacher leaders across the City, like the ones below from Malissa McCants, a Model Teacher at P.S./I.S. 184 in Brooklyn, and Nunzia Magninelli, a Master Teacher at the International School for Liberal Arts in the Bronx.



## ★ Teacher Voices: Reflections on Collaborative Teaching Practices ★



**Malissa McCants**  
Model Teacher  
P.S./I.S. 184, Brooklyn  
Grade 8, ELA

"I am meeting more with teachers in their classrooms, doing more modeling and acting as a facilitator to demonstrate with teachers. I also just finished designing and launching a K-8 oratory competition where I worked closely with both students and teachers."



**Nunzia Manginelli**  
Master Teacher  
International School for  
Liberal Arts, the Bronx  
Grade 10  
Native Language Arts

"It's an open door policy. A teacher tells me, 'I need assistance with a solution to a problem. I've tried this and this. Do you have suggestions?' The solution comes from our connection; having someone listen to you. As teachers share their challenge with me [and I ask reflective questions], they often come up with their own solutions."

### Want to learn more about teacher leadership in the NYCDOE?

Check out the next [I Teach NYC](#) bulletin for upcoming opportunities,  
or email [Teacher Leadership](#).

## More Tips for 40 Minutes: Engaging Families Every Week

I am energized every time I hear an example of how you and your colleagues have been using the 40 minutes of parent engagement time each week. I am thrilled that you are getting creative about connecting with parents and families. This time is a crucial element of our [Framework for Great Schools](#). Together with school leaders, parents, and the entire school community, you are making a positive impact on both student learning and school culture.

Last December, I shared Volume 1 of [40 Ideas for 40 Minutes](#). Below are a few new examples your colleagues have shared. Following your parent-teacher conferences this month, I know you'll be thinking about how to keep that level of engagement with parents strong. Take a look and see if one of these ideas would be effective in your school community.



### PARENT ORIENTATION NIGHT

#### **P.S./I.S. 187, Manhattan \* Grades K-8**

During September's Parent Orientation Night, P.S./I.S. 187 parents and faculty offer their welcome presentation at an alternate time for working parents with inflexible schedules. Informal meet-and-greets before the presentations let parents and faculty mingle in a relaxed atmosphere. Additionally, the PTA provides a refreshments table.



### 7TH GRADE FAMILY FUN NIGHT!

#### **M.S. 228, the Bronx \* Grades 6-8**

The 7th grade teachers hold a Family Fun Night where families come together and participate in activities that support their children's academic progress at home. "Fun Stations" include a high school scavenger hunt that informs families about the admissions and enrollment process, multiplication bingo to help parents make learning math fun at home, and parent interviews that give students the chance to learn about their family history.



### STUDENT LED CONFERENCES

#### **Marsh Avenue Expeditionary Learning School, Staten Island \* Grades 6-8**

Student-led conferences begin at the start of the school year. These conferences help students build self-confidence and poise as they maturely speak for themselves about their own work performance and habits. At the student-led conference, students guide their parents through their portfolio and emerge from these conferences with a sense of fulfillment and direction.

## Share your success!

\* Let us know if one of these ideas worked for you and how you made it your own.

\* Your ideas may be featured in the next quarterly *Teacher Notes*, on the [40 Minutes](#) webpage, or in the handbook of best practices we are preparing.

\* Send your practices and ideas to [40Minutes@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:40Minutes@schools.nyc.gov).

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### ★ **Teacher Voices: Reflections on Collaborative Teaching Practices** ★



**Marcus Artigliere**

Peer Instructional  
Coach  
I.S. 220, Brooklyn  
Grade 6, ESL

*"TIF [Teacher Incentive Fund] taught me the value of facilitating and hosting regular inter-visitations to investigate a shared instructional focus. Our visits and debriefs are all on a volunteer basis. Mine is a formalized coaching*



**Tricia Switzer**

Model Teacher  
PS 146, Manhattan  
Grade 2, ICT

*"Before I [moved into this role] I was doing many of the same things. The difference is that this role, and our training, has given me more of a professional language base. We use Danielson's Framework for Teaching with*

role. With this responsibility comes mentoring, reading professional literature, and norming a common language of instruction for the teachers at our school. There was always talent in the building, but now when someone is doing that great lesson, people are invited in."

each teacher so it builds school wide. Previously, my support was more casual and sometimes we didn't close the loop. Now, we have a structure that fits my school and ensures ongoing support for teachers."

## Community Schools: Change through Partnership and Collaboration

Together, we are all focused on providing a great education for every student, regardless of what zip code they live in or where they go to school. Community Schools will be a large piece of achieving this goal, offering a coordinated approach to improving students' academic performance through partnerships among principals, teachers, parents, and community-based organizations. The Chancellor recently established a new [Office of Community Schools](#) to support 128 schools by infusing them with social services and expanded learning and partnerships with CBOs. One of the Community Schools is Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies in the Bronx.



Lauren Ardizzone  
Morris Academy for  
Collaborative Studies, the Bronx  
Grade 11, English

Eleventh grade teacher Lauren Ardizzone shared her experience as a member of the faculty and Principal's Advisory Council at the new Community School. To understand the community's needs, school leaders began by conducting focus groups of students, parents, teachers, and staff. The school is using the feedback to integrate academic and social services into the fabric of the school, including:

- Work programs for students and families within the school
- External SAT and academic tutoring
- A peer-to-peer whole school mentoring program
- Social workers and counselors to support the existing school-based supports
- Partnerships to assist students and families with basic necessities like driver licenses, bank accounts, and language acquisition

The goal is to ensure that all children come to school ready and able to learn.

One common feature of Community Schools is the commitment to giving parents and caregivers real and active roles in their children's education. "Since becoming a Community School and focusing extensively on parent engagement, we have seen the level of parent involvement increase significantly," Lauren said. A Valentine's Day Parent Brunch in February

drew more parents than any single event in recent memory. "Parents and families were thrilled to have an opportunity to provide input into how we structure ourselves as a Community School going forward," she added. An effort to communicate with parents in their home languages is expected to significantly increase turnout for Morris Academy's upcoming Community School Forum.

"Families feel that they are being heard in a new and exciting way," Lauren continued. "There is a general climate of excitement around all of the programs, initiatives, and supports we are bringing into the school. There is already an increased sense of school spirit and school pride."

Want to learn about the partnerships and creative ideas in other Community Schools? Check out the following videos featuring [P.S. 15](#) and [P.S. 78](#), as well as [press releases](#) from the [Chancellor's Office](#) and the [Mayor's Office](#).

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### ★ Teacher Voices: Reflections on Collaborative Teaching Practices ★



**Satwinder Kaur**  
Model Teacher  
P.S. 41, Brooklyn  
Grades 7 & 8  
Writing

*"The idea of collaborating with teachers and school leaders in bringing forth positive changes was most appealing to me. I knew that the Model Teacher position was the best next step for me; to be able to serve as a resource by demonstrating effective teaching strategies enabled me to develop as an educator myself."*



**Jonathan Rudd**  
Demonstration Teacher  
Jonas Bronck Academy,  
the Bronx  
Grade 7  
Social Studies

*"We have fostered an atmosphere where we can disagree about instructional choices, yet still feel supported by one another. On all my teams, I feel as though we are comfortable taking risks and discussing ideas and our students' next steps candidly."*

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## On My Mind: Ways to Support Writing in Your Classrooms

As I reflect upon my 50 years as an educator, I value how meaningful writing can be, and how it is part of our everyday lives. Our students need to be able to express themselves clearly and support their opinions and arguments. Strong writing programs are the backbone of this skill, and as I visit schools throughout the year, I am constantly on the lookout for evidence of good writing: narrative, expository, and persuasive. I'm particularly interested in seeing writing tied to content areas and how student voices are reflected in written pieces.

Your principal and superintendent have been discussing how we might raise the bar so that all students enter college ready to write deeply personal, carefully researched, and well-articulated pieces. If students have the training they need now, they will be able to write well-constructed essays and papers that are not cookie cutter or plagiarized later on in their education and career paths.

As a lifelong learner myself, I am always seeking models that might be replicated elsewhere. New Dorp High School is using the [Judith Hochman writing program](#) to teach analytical writing. I encourage you to read about it in [The Atlantic](#), [The Learning Cultures Curriculum](#) and the [Teachers College Reading and Writing Project](#) are two other highly regarded programs.

Here are ways you can support writing at the various grade levels:

- **Elementary School:** Emphasize letter writing, including student-to-student and class-to-class writing and letters to senior citizens or grandparents. Students can also write their own books to share with others. Very young children can write lists, like shopping lists. These are all evidence of real-world writing. Writing as part of social studies and science is a great way to teach informative and explanatory writing, as well as increase vocabulary and refine children's thought processes. Share the kinds of writing that your students are learning about with their parents and encourage them, in turn, to start a dialogue with their children about writing. Your [40 minutes](#) on Tuesdays with parents and families is another opportunity to inform and involve parents in their child's writing journey.
- **Middle School:** Teachers in every subject area have opportunities to support the teaching of writing, including physical education and arts teachers. Keeping journals, tracking progress, and writing critical reviews, reaction papers, lab reports, or other research reports are examples of the kinds of writing that can happen in different content classes. Encourage students to support their peers' writing efforts. This provides another voice of support and motivation. Create a culture of written communication that sets the bar high.
- **High School:** Writing is now in preparation for college and should emphasize stamina and quality. Stamina means kids should be able to sit and write for an hour and a half. I know that we can do more to keep the learning trajectory for writing moving forward. Recently, I came across recommendations in [The New York Times](#) on essays by the Common Application. Discuss with your colleagues and school leaders whether or not your ELA program would want to incorporate some of these essays.

The Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning and the Office of Literacy and Academic Intervention, have developed a list of [writing program resources](#). I encourage you to review and discuss these resources with your colleagues and school leaders.

If you are using a writing program approach that is particularly effective, please share it with

[me.](#)

This article was adapted from the "On My Mind" feature in the January edition of Chancellor Fariña's *Principal Notes*.

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## Spotlight on: Dual Language programs and Teacher Cindy Cascante

This year marks the first time in NYCDOE history that we have a Deputy Chancellor, Milady Baez, charged with leading our system's robust efforts to support English Language Learners (ELLs). These efforts include expanding services for ELLs and professional development of teachers, school administrators, and other school-based staff. As part of our commitment to student achievement and increasing multilingual programs across the City, there is a new

Chancellor initiative to open 40 Dual Language programs in the 2015-16 school year. Cindy Cascante, a first-grade Dual Language teacher at P.S. 19 on Staten Island, answers some questions about her program and the benefits and rewards for the entire school community. This is Ms. Cascante's 11th year as a teacher.



Cindy Cascante, Dual Language Teacher  
P.S. 19, Staten Island, Grade 1

### **There are Dual Language programs in Mandarin, French, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Japanese, and Spanish throughout the system. Which target languages does P.S. 19 offer?**

P.S. 19 offers Spanish as a target language through a partial immersion (50/50) model.

### **How do Dual Language programs benefit ELLs and English-proficient students?**

The goal of Dual Language is bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiculturalism. Research has shown that students who are literate in two languages outperform their monolingual peers. ([Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier](#)) ELLs and their families benefit tremendously from a Dual Language program for two main reasons. First, integrating ELLs with English-proficient students provides a clear language scaffold. Second, the Dual Language setting allows ELLs to experience a great sense of accomplishment as they help their English-proficient peers acquire second language skills. And all students benefit by taking on the roles of learners and experts.

### **How are parents of English-proficient students responding to Dual Language programs?**

We have seen a paradigm shift in recent years. More parents now value multilingualism, and

Dual Language programs are growing in popularity among English-speaking families of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Staten Island has one of the largest Liberian communities in the nation. Our Liberian families have shown great interest in our Dual Language program. Parents have embraced the idea of sharing a community with Spanish speakers and believe that their children can benefit from becoming literate in Spanish. Our Dual Language program is not only helping raise bilingual students. We are raising bilingual families. This is such a powerful thing!

**What kinds of professional development opportunities do you seek out for yourself as a first-grade Dual Language educator?**

Seeking out mentoring relationships has helped me grow as a Dual Language educator. I have been fortunate to work alongside Stella Sanchez within the Office of English Language Learners and the entire Estrellita accelerated reading program team. They have provided valuable support, and I often reach out to them for guidance in implementing strategies in my classroom. I regularly attend professional development sessions offered by the DOE, and I am happy to say that I have become part of a growing community of bilingual educators in New York City. Meeting with other bilingual teachers who share the same vision has been incredibly empowering. I have accumulated quite a bit of professional reading over the years and owe a lot of my professional growth to the experts who pass on their knowledge through books. I am a member of the National Association of Bilingual Educators, which allows me the opportunity to interact with experts in the field of bilingual education.

**What impact does a Dual Language program have on parent engagement within the school community?**

Our Dual Language program has had a positive impact on our families. Parents agree during orientation to attend workshops offered by our Dual Language teachers whose classrooms have the highest numbers of parent volunteers. Spanish speaking parents find it incredibly rewarding to be able to visit a classroom and read a book in their native language. With that sense of pride comes a commitment to our program. We now have parents with several children in the program and they run the orientations alongside the teachers.

**How does studying multiple languages impact the school culture of P.S. 19?**

The biggest benefit is in student-to-student interactions. Students are much more tolerant and culturally sensitive. There is a genuine curiosity and a willingness to learn about others' cultural backgrounds. Currently, we serve grades K-4. We made it a priority to disseminate information to all stakeholders. We held orientation sessions for parents and presented the many benefits of a bilingual education. Student work is proudly displayed in our hallways -- in both languages. Our program has evolved tremendously and our biggest advocates are now our parents.

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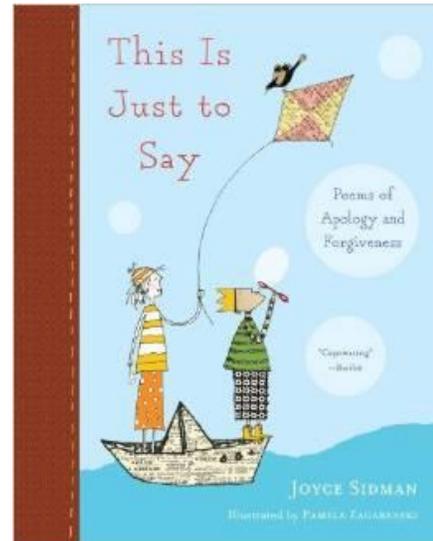
***This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness***

(Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007)

By Joyce Sidman, illustrated by Pamela Zagarenski

Dear Readers,

Why does poetry have such appeal? I think because poetry promotes literacy, wakes our emotions, and makes us better listeners as we linger over carefully chosen words. In this season's book, poetry plays yet another role: as a springboard to a rich dialogue between classmates and the important people in each student's life.



Acknowledging that it's not easy to say you're sorry, the fictional Mrs. Merz has her sixth grade class read the poem "This Is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams and then write their own apology poems. Students, inspired by Williams' words and structure, tackle a variety of topics dear to their hearts.

After reading the students' poems, friends, family, and school staff write their own poems in response. Some are humorous, others tug at your heart strings, as when Jewel's dad writes: "You are perfect. It's me who's not. None of the stupid things I have ever done are even close to being your fault."

Together, the two sets of poems evoke feelings of love, loss, disappointment, unrequited love, and of course, the joys of being a kid. The universal appeal of these themes, and the fact that each apology poem and its response can stand on its own, make this book a great resource for teaching poetry; you could easily replicate the activities in your own school. Reading the book to your staff would also be a great way to kick off [National Poetry Month](#) activities in your school this month.

As conscientious and dedicated educators, I know you lead by example. While you go about your work building trusting relationships with your entire school community — colleagues, students, parents and families, school leaders, and other community members — take time to appreciate the power and love of words and the special ways that language allows us to dig deep, express our understandings, and create and illuminate our lives.

In the words of Robert Frost, who said, "a complete poem is one where an emotion finds the thought and the thought finds the words," I invite you to find your poem.

Warmly,

Carmen

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