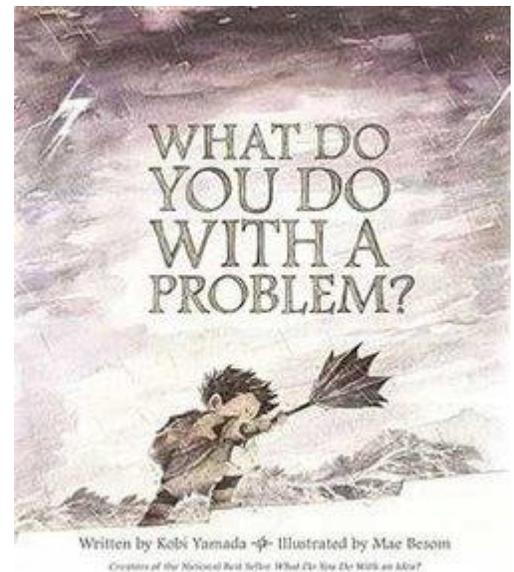
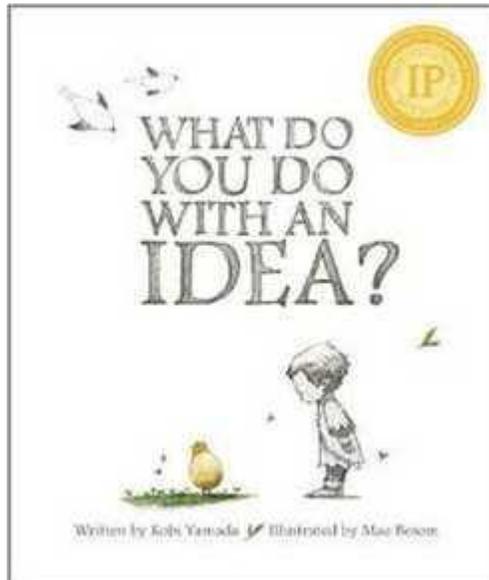


Dear District 26 Community:

*What Do You Do With an Idea? What Do You Do With a Problem?*

Not only were these fantastic books to anchor our work, their titles stand on their own as two simple questions to ask—and it's in the answers to these questions we are presented with the core of our work. Across the fall, winter and spring, we challenged our district to name problems and embrace the opportunities that lie hidden within them. Seeking out and engaging problems with thoughtfulness and patience is hard work, and there is a quiet courage required to say “yes” and take such a stance. We are so proud of all of the work that has taken place this year to solve those problems in service of the students of our district.



## Rigorous Instruction



Join D26 in redefining STEM:

- 🔍 Scan the world for problems,
- 🧑‍🔬 Test solutions
- 👏 Embrace Possibilities, &
- 🌍 Make a difference in the world!

Our excitement about **STEM**, led by Taso Lampoutis (MS 67) and **Computer Science**, with Dr. Tara Davidson and our partners at the Queens North Field Support Center have been a cornerstone of our [quarterly update letters](#). Not only is the shift to a problem-based approach to learning front and center in our theory of action, it is the

main vehicle by which students can access and succeed in rigorous instructional experiences. This year has shown us that when STEM and Computer Science experiences are presented to our students, they bring out the very best of what's possible in teaching and transdisciplinary learning. Moving into next year we are looking forward to further integration of these experiences as part of the everyday norm in our schools in meeting the demands of the “Equity and Excellence” initiatives, and whatever the heights are to come from our work in the coming years ahead, it is because of the work of all members of our district community have put in this year to lay such a solid foundation.

We spent much of the spring [touring the district's pre-kindergarten programs](#) and we were elated at seeing the evidence of the work done by the participants of Eve Sci (PS 186) and

Stephanie Famoso's (PS 46) **Pre-Kindergarten Professional Learning Series**. Teachers took a deep dive into planning questions for read-alouds that were a mix of all four levels of Webb's higher order thinking questions. They tested out the solution of linking the actions of students in centers to questions they can ask in service of promoting conversational exchanges. As we move into next year with this work we are excited to see how teachers are using and modeling language with the intent of developing their communication and thinking skills. When we embrace the boundless capacity found in our youngest, the sky is the limit!

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## Supportive Environment

***“We were all told how being class president was a big responsibility, but I didn’t know what it meant to lead until I was part of this group.”***

**5th Grade S.O. President**

Each year we tap our 5th and 8th Class Presidents to represent the very best of our district and organize the efforts of their communities around **Student Leadership Projects**. With each letter from this year we have had something amazing to share with you about what this group has done for others, and this time is no different. While we are thrilled that this group's partnership and support of the Ronald McDonald house of New York raised over \$30,000 through its projects and participation in the [Queens Fun Run](#) in April, we want to spend time in this letter to thank Denise Gilrane (PS 173), Karen Strauzer (PS 221), and all of the school-based liaisons for creating a space for our young leaders to really grapple with [what it means to be a leader](#) and how the core values of communication, commitment, character form the foundation of personal leadership.

Engaging productively with the topic of **Diversity in Educational Leadership** is both challenging and deeply personal. Across our work in the schools, we have seen it as a topic worthy of deeper conversation and celebration; our team's identified problem was where to begin. Starting in earnest this past fall, a small cadre of school and district leaders began meeting to start that conversation. *Where are we in this work? How can dialogue help us grow?* These were just a few of the questions that guided this group as it quadrupled in size from six members to twenty four principals, assistant principals, teachers, and guidance counselors! A central driver of this work has been the belief that if we embrace the uniqueness of everyone's individual journey, we can affect great change both within ourselves and within the worlds we occupy. The first steps in this endeavor were taken this spring and shared at our annual [CDEC Ballroom Dancing and Awards Night](#) in the form of the first [I AM Project video](#). We are very excited about this work being at the heart of what we do moving forward into school year 2017-18 and are excited to see how you join us in this conversation.

***How do we continue to build inclusive communities?***

***How do we respect the journeys of individuals as we grow together?***

## Collaborative Teachers

***"The teacher leadership work has encouraged and fostered an environment of teamwork. I feel this way because this year we started new reading, writing, and social studies program and we collaborated with each other to navigate through the ups and downs of launching new curriculum."***

***- Teacher Leader***

Our most powerful work supporting teacher collaboration came through the work of Maria Lam, who joined us as a Teacher Team Leader through the Office of Teacher Recruitment and Quality. Teacher Team Leaders are skilled or "expert" teacher leaders with experience providing developmental support for other teacher leaders and emerging teacher leaders. Our initial thinking was that we needed to scan our schools for problems our teachers could tackle collaboratively. While that ended up being a necessary component of the work, equally as central was the need to assess our mindsets around inquiry and the inquiry process. Teacher Leaders (TLs) engaged in personal professional learning around separating person from practice, analyzing student work skills and protocols, and becoming reflective about their own practice. Over the course of the year, TLs assessed the impact of their plans, both at their schools, and periodically with their peers at Communities of Practice. In May the cohort held its Imprints and Impact Celebration Community of Practice where TLs had the opportunity to present the findings of their work to each other and distinguished guests. Teachers need time to develop this particular brand of leadership within their building—thank you, Maria, for coming into our district and starting a mini-revolution of inquiry!

## Effective School Leadership

In groundbreaking partnership with the Queens North Borough Field Support Center, our district leaders engaged in year-long collaborative study with their colleagues in **Professional Learning Communities**. Anchored to common trends they noticed when they scanned the district and their schools for problems in the fall, our principals and assistant principals met monthly to allow themselves time and space to think deeply about their practice as leaders and how their work is impacting teachers and students in their school. The quality of reflection and depth of impact recounted at our May conferences cemented our belief that our principals and assistant principals represent some of the best, deepest thinking about how students learn

***"One major shift in teacher practice I observed is that teachers are more thoughtful about planning their math lessons. They are beginning to think about the big mathematical concepts, end goals, and preparing for anticipated student misconceptions rather than planning each lesson as an isolated unit."***

***-D26 Principal reflecting on impact of PLC work***

best. It cannot be stated enough how invaluable our partners from the BFSC were in serving as facilitators of this work. We want to thank both the participants and facilitators for their level of presence on this intrepid journey and are excited to see what year two of this structure brings next year!



We all have the capacity to be leaders in our worlds, and some of the greatest moments of leadership this year came from this year's cohort of **Aspiring Leaders**. Personal leadership comes from a place deep within us where our passions intersect with our core values. When this year's cohort was challenged to engage with that intersection, it came alive in our schools [in many forms](#). The fresh energy participants brought to this experience was, and continues to be, an inspiration to all of us as we think about the work moving into next year. Thank you, Melissa Corbett, June Dunn, and Calia Kelly (all MS 158) for dedicating yourselves to the development of this year's cohort, and an extra big THANK YOU to all of the principals and assistant principals who either mentored or created space inside of your school for these projects to flourish.

### **Strong Family & Community Ties**

The **District 26 Challenge** called upon all members of our school communities to find at least one new way—big or small—to get involved at their school, and it warmed our hearts to see the posters and literature related to it adorn the entrance ways to our schools. We know that the communal success we experienced would not have been possible without our Parent Coordinators and PTAs for their unwavering commitment to our schools and communities, as well as our incredible local elected officials for their generosity and support. Our support of and desired engagement with the community does not end with the end of June. We are offering a number of FREE Parent Workshops and Classes over the summer. Check out the full list of offerings on the [Family Engagement page](#) of our district website.

Moving into the summer, we want to make sure that you have all of the resources available to you to stay in the loop in the run-up to the start of the 2017-18 school year:

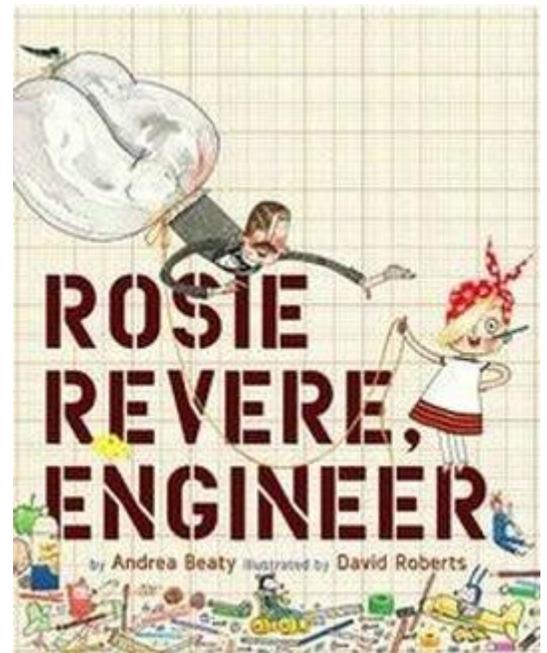
- Join the close to 500 people who have followed us on Twitter: [@D26Team](#)

- If you haven't done so already, create an [NYC Schools Account](#) so that you'll be able to access your child's test score data when it is released later this summer

## Looking Ahead

If there was one takeaway from this year for our team, it would be that the solution to a problem is just as much mental as it material. Space and time to solve a problem are secondary to the belief that you have the ability to make a difference and that others value your attempts at improving the world around you. In this light, and against the backdrop of our work with STEM, the most fitting way we could end our work for the year, and at the same time cast an eye towards our future work is with the book *Rosie Revere, Engineer* by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts. In the book, Rosie (with the help of her famous great aunt) learns that perfect can be, at times, the enemy of good. Sometimes, more is learned in process than at the end of an experience. As such, we must experience failure in safe spaces so that we can lead others as they engage in the hard work of self-discovery. In this vein we are excited about the work we have begun this year around **emotional intelligence** and mindset. Like Rosie, if our students are going to build the next generation of greatness, it will come because our schools were places where they could feel safe to appropriately access their emotions and use their understanding of their feelings as a base of strength for their development. We are excited to use these thoughts as our anchors for planning the upcoming school year.

***“Your brilliant first flop was a raging success! Come on, let’s get busy and on to the next!” She handed a notebook to Rosie Revere, who smiled at her aunt as it all became clear. Life might have its failures, but this was not it. The only true failure can come if you quit.***



As we enter the summer, we are deeply grateful for all the smart, thoughtful work that all members of the District 26 community engaged in to make this another year of excellence. Before we close the book on this school year, we want to take a moment and extend a very special THANK YOU to **Marianne Sheridan** for her years of service to the children of our district as an administrator at PS 133. Our district is one of excellence because of leaders like you, and we wish you well as you enter this next chapter of your life!

It has been an incredible year in District 26 due to the commitment and dedication of the tremendous students, parents, community members, elected officials, and DOE staff supporting us. As a team, we continue to be the living embodiment of “excellence in education!”

Enjoy your summer and we look forward to partnering again with all **27** of your communities in September!

Sincerely,

Danielle Giunta, Superintendent, and the District 26 Team