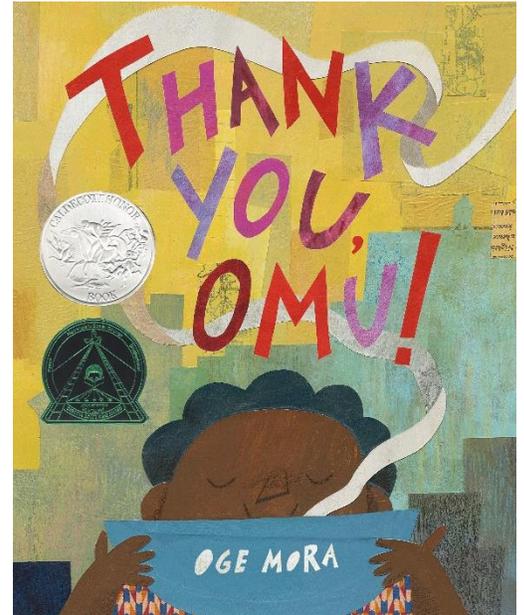


Last August, we opened the 2018-2019 school year in the gymnasium of PS 376 by having all of our principals, assistant principals, Borough Office and District 26 Team members ring the room and engage in a collective read of Simon Sinek's *Together is Better*. From that day, through to today, our year has been defined by the power, potential, and possibility that comes from passionate, dedicated educators moving towards a shared vision for our schools.

Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge.

Of the many powerful statements Sinek makes, the above quote stayed with us across the year, specifically when thinking about the distance that might exist between our collective WHY as a district (Advance Equity Now) and the individual motivations that drive our colleagues. Through this lens, taking care of those in our charge means making sure they feel heard; it means making sure they see their purpose as in alignment with the trajectory of the larger organization. In doing so, they are ready to share their gifts with the world.

We spend our year giving, steadfast in our belief that our gifts—our time, being a shoulder to lean on, allocating resources, our voice in advocacy for what's right—further our service to our children. We do our jobs so they can become the best versions of themselves. Our collective feeling every June is a reminder of what our service asks of us. No book more accurately captures this reminder than *Thank Your, Omu!*, by Oge Mora. Pronounced "AH-moo," Omu is the Igbo term for "queen." Omu has an incredible gift which she shares with the whole town. Just when she feels as though she has nothing left, the depth and breadth of her reach is truly known.



As we close out this year and build towards the next, we are proud to celebrate those in our community who gave in service of our children so that District 26 might remain as the gold standard for educational experience in our city.

Nurture and Inclusive Environment

Our closeout letter a year ago put forth several questions that we vowed to keep at the center of our work. We knew that if we did not pair our intent to engage in conversations about inclusivity and equity with the allocation of space and time to think deeply about them, such intent with wither on the vine. Positioning ourselves as learners alongside our principals and their designated equity leads,

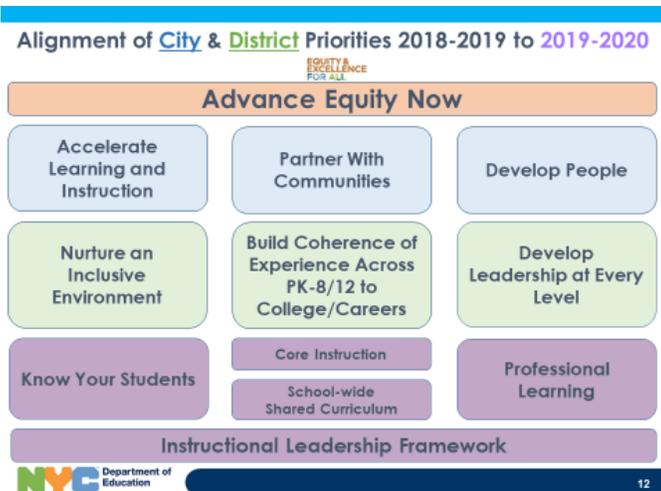
Educational equity means each student has what they need to:

- 1. define & experience their own success,**
- 2. experience joy in learning every day, and**
- 3. see themselves reflected in the content of their learning as well as the educators who serve them.**

-Régine Roman, NYU

we entered into a yearlong partnership with Régine Roman and [New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools](#). After a lifetime of work and lived experience that might not have placed conversations around race and equity front-and-center, holding such concepts object led us into a space of productive discomfort and necessary disquiet. If we are going to move our system towards equity, we need to accept that a plurality of experiences exist simultaneously. As individuals, our WHYS carry us through difficult conversations; leading with

#TogetherIsBetter acknowledges the [dangers of a single viewpoint](#) and continues to challenge us to hear all sides of the story.



Moving into the summer, our team is excited to deepen its understanding of, and connections to, the work of Noni Lesaux et al around the concept of [Advanced Literacy](#). Our passion to expand the influence their work has on ours exists because of how much their WHY intersects with ours. Per the authors' introduction, "students need to develop increasingly sophisticated literacy skills to thrive day-to-day; they need to communication (orally and in writing) in increasingly diverse ways and with increasingly diverse audiences; they also need to understand and use print for a variety of purposes. To be successful in school and beyond, from the earliest of years, our

students need to develop the skills and knowledge that go into advanced literacy." We cannot Advance Equity Now without providing all students with ample opportunities to practice their communication with diverse audiences, understand the variety of purposes publication serves, and to access (and participate in) arenas where knowledge is generated.

Build Coherence of Experience across PK-8/12 to College & Careers



It might be a broken record at this point, but it's a song we love to hear: collaboration is the lifeblood of our HOW. Our continuing mission is to provide the right and best educational experience for every child. To do so, stakeholders must be able to see their work with individual and groups of children within the context of their developmental journeys. Wherever possible, we organize professional learning opportunities to ensure the plurality of perspectives necessary to address the needs of our children is present, so they leave us with skills necessary to be tomorrow's leaders. In living up to the challenge of such a mission, ours was a banner year for collaboration. Whether it was through communities of practice, Showcase and Spotlight Visits, school-led collaborative rounds, or our leadership Professional Learning Communities, a record number of stakeholders participated in experiential learning opportunities that brought us closer to a shared understanding of how students learn best. We would not have been able to have such reach without all of our partners in this work. To all school-based, community-based, Borough and Central Office partners: thank you for giving from your pot of stew so

that District 26 Professional Learning experiences might nourish the minds of key movers of the work. As we expand the scope of this priority to encompass the whole of a child's experience, we feel ready for this challenge because of the strength of our shared sense of purpose.

Develop Leadership at Every Level

To ensure that our initiatives are HOW we move towards our WHY, we designed and implemented a robust professional learning plan, which had at its core opportunities to develop the leadership of others. Facilitated by District AP's, District Team Members, and in partnership with Borough Office and/or other partners where applicable, year-long PLC's were formed to support district stakeholders in understanding and implementing our Initiatives with fidelity. Known as "District Projects," experiences provided needed support to schools, while challenging their facilitators to learn about themselves as leaders. This spring, we continued the tradition having students lead the celebration of the leadership of these projects at our annual CDEC Ballroom Dancing and Awards Night. The night was an overwhelming success and further confirmed our belief that our children are capable of excelling in each and every situation we put before them. Moreover, the night supported our stance that anything is possible when there is strong partnership between our schools and the Community District Education Council—thank you for everything you do in service of our schools.

Developing leadership at every level is not just a charge for others—it is critical for our learning organization if we are to have success that endures. In the middle of this year, our team faced a moment of adversity when our Deputy Superintendent was recruited to join senior leadership at the Central Office. While it was announced and celebrated at different events across the spring, we could not accurately reflect on the work of developing leadership without acknowledging the work of our newly-appointed Deputy Superintendent Dr. Tara Davidson. Externally, there was no visible drop-off in the quality or breadth of our work in the community, and that was only possible because she spent the spring covering two desks. As we move into the upcoming school year we will be planning from a position of strength because Dr. Davidson continues to serve as the metronome for our team's work.

While Omu's big fat pot of thick red stew was empty, her heart was full of happiness and love.

For one person, for a family, for a class, for a school, or for a whole district—we are all Omu for someone. We all have a cause in which we believe so deeply in that we give and give until there is nothing left. If March, April, and May are the times which make us feel as though we are depleted of resources, the acknowledgements, celebrations, graduations, and representations of gratitude we receive in June are what give our giving meaning. At our final Principals' Meeting of the year, we anchored our closing circle to the question, "what has been the most delicious, scrumptious, delectable part of your school year?" The slideshow of responses you see alongside this passage are our principals' responses to this prompt. Their wins are our wins; that they found fulfilment in their work is the nourishment we need to replenish our reserves and begin to plan for another year of excellence in District 26.



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 collective team, we continue to be the living embodiment of "excellence in education!"

Enjoy your summer and we look forward to partnering with you again next year!

Sincerely,

Danielle Giunta, and the District 26 Team