

Walking in a District 26 WONDERland

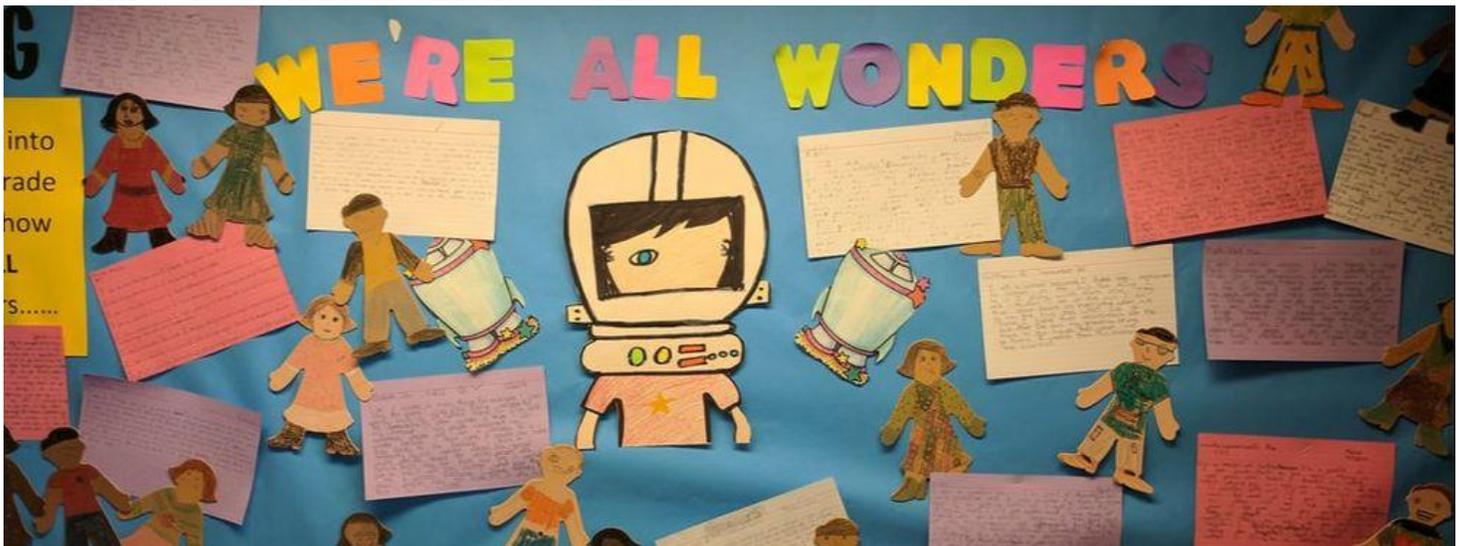
Winter 2018

How do we model (and provide models of) self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior for all stakeholders so that our district represents the very best of how we want our students to treat themselves and others?

What illustrates our commitment to upholding democracy, equity, diversity and social justice as pillars of the district, school, and educational experience for all students across District 26?

In our [Fall Letter](#), we stated these questions as our means to serve as a compass for our work. As the midpoint of the year nears, we are overwhelmed with the volume of high quality experiences that have taken shape which show us that we are headed in the right direction. If the fall has been an indicator of things to come, we are going to look back on this year as one of the most transformative on record. We can't wait to tell you not just about these different shining examples, but to also share with you some of the promising practices and approaches that have us brimming with joy as our District transitions into a Winter WONDERland.

We're All Wonders: A District Embraces a Mindset



The pictures around this section are but a small taste of how schools have rallied around the concept that every student is a "wonder." It takes an open stance to allow ourselves the patience and wisdom to see that everyone in our district has a powerful role to play in our collective excellence. When students are given

space and time to honor and value their own opinions alongside the beliefs of their peers, the quality, texture, and depth of that experience rivals the experience of hearing a symphony for the first time.

Our charge at the district office is to ensure that all community stakeholders can share in these types of experiences. It is for that reason that we have anchored so much of our initial work on the creation of Emotionally Intelligent Charters to serve as anchors for the time adults spend working together. Whether it is the District Leadership Team, Principals and Assistant Principals inside of their Professional Learning Communities, Teachers in our professional learning series cohorts, or our Parent Coordinators at their monthly meetings, all adults want to ensure impact, value, and purpose in their work, and the creation and work under our charters serve as models for what we hope the children of our district experience.

[#EmotionsMatter](#) in every moment. Daily, the lives of the children of our district are filled with powerful moments. Sometimes, moments are challenging to navigate. We are incredibly grateful for the poise and emotional intelligence that our school-based support teams have in supporting children, so that such challenges do not interrupt their experiences in our schools. Similarly, emotions matter in family life; the most powerful dynamic in a child's life is their experience at home. To further support parents and guardians in their unending service to their children, we continued our partnerships with Star Factor Coaching to provide district adults with an opportunity to experience some of the mindset work and social-emotional skill-building activities that are coming alive in our schools. So that this work does not merely live as a one-off experience, our monthly Parent Coordinator and Guidance Counselor Meetings are providing PCs and GCs with an ever-expanding toolkit to employ with families so that all parents will have opportunities to deepen their understanding and support for social-emotional learning and diversity efforts.





We had the distinct pleasure of School's Chancellor Carmen Fariña visiting MS 67 in October as an honored guest of a CDEC 26 Town Hall. Echoing some of her vision for excellence in our schools, we are incredibly proud of the work underway to ensure that academic excellence, community support, and innovation continue to be the hallmarks of our approach to educating our students. For our district to remain at the vanguard, we cannot be siloed in our schools, and we cannot be siloed in our roles. Once a month we have highlighted the practices of one or two schools aligned to a given E&E Initiative and provided opportunities for the community to come and see how they are demonstrating excellence.

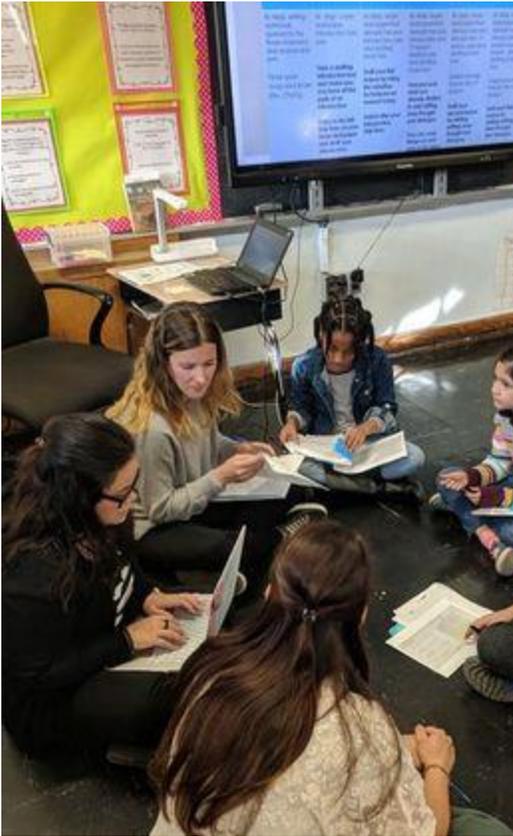
In October we saw the power of Inclusive Classrooms at PS 41 and PS 46. November's focus on Algebra for All took us into PS 98 and MS 67. Most recently, our December visits during [#CSEDWeek](#) to PS 31 and MS 216 brought us a glimpse of how the future is now in terms of integration of Computer Science as a concept learned in all classrooms. Between now and the publication of our Spring Letter, we will be visiting schools in celebration of our work surrounding College Readiness, Universal Literacy, and Pre-K for All. We can't wait to see this great work in action!

Spotlight on District Projects

This fall represented the most ambitious offering of professional learning to date. At present we have **eleven** different ongoing professional learning series taking place. Led by both school-based and district leaders, [#D26PL](#) is equipping key stakeholders in our community with the skills they need to further embed the principles of democracy, equity, diversity, and social justice into the fabric of our children's experience in school. While most of our professional learning series run the entire year, two of our experiences are ending in January and we want to highlight them at this time.

Proudly, our district has a long history of demonstrating proficiency in mathematics, and we have a range of methods for assessing students for proficiency. As we move our thinking about math instruction into the 21st century (and working toward our DCEP Goal of "Algebra for All"), it is mission critical that teachers challenge students to think deeply about concepts and approaches to problem solving *in addition* to arriving at the right answer. Nicole Colón (Principal, PS 133) and Matthew Paolano (AP, MS 74) have spent the fall engaged with a lead teacher from every district school in deepening their understanding of Mathematical Discourse through strategic planning and implementation of pedagogical strategies. These strategies embedded with content knowledge, support their goal of increasing student engagement and Mathematical discussions in the classroom. As you find yourself in our schools this winter, we encourage you to ask about their work and how it has begun to show up in your child's classroom!



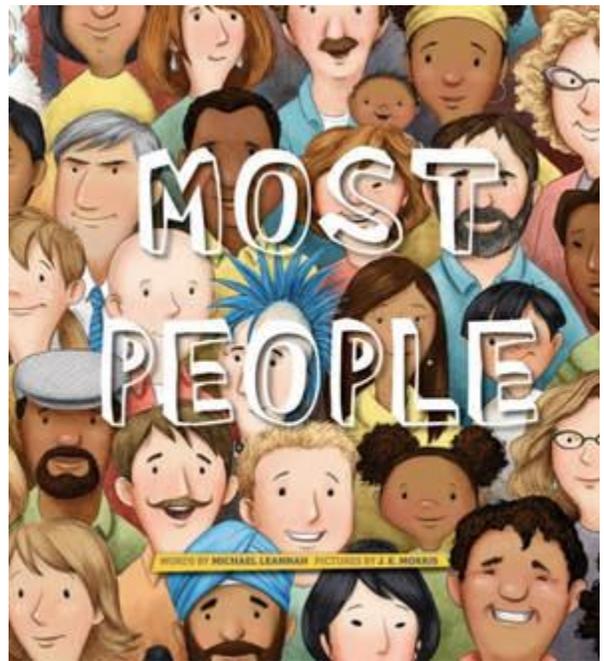


When it comes to feedback in schools, there are four key dialogues that shape the conversation. For all the emphasis we put on the act of engaging in observation-feedback cycles (School Leader-Teacher), assessment-feedback cycles (Teacher-Student), and peer feedback (Teacher-Teacher and Student-Student), there has been comparatively little time and space afforded to challenging our assumptions about these conversations. Brandon Contarsy (D26 TDEC) has been working with teachers across the district, and sessions have brought participants into live classrooms where they have honed their data capturing skills in service of rich discussions on the attributes of high quality feedback, and how people react to the feedback they receive. Central to this work has been the partnership with the leadership team of PS 173 who have created a culture of openness that has enabled these visits to take place.

Most People Make the Difference in Our District

With all the great work taking place, it can be challenging to maintain a commitment to reading. We hope you are finding time to support your own (and other's) healthy habit of reading. Of the many books that have captivated us this fall, we bring this letter to a close with a quote from *Most People*, by Michael Leannah and Jennifer Morris:

If you could line up all the people who want to be good and all the people who want to be bad, the good line would stretch from here to the tallest mountain. All the people in the bad line could crowd together in a dark and gloomy room.





From our vantage point in the District Office, it's hard not to read these lines without thinking about all the passionate, dedicated individuals who make the shared experience of excellence come alive in our schools. Indeed, we have an embarrassment of riches in our corner of Queens—far too many to mention in an update letter. Indeed: we are a district full of *Most People!* As we near the midpoint of the year, we want to thank everyone in the community that has contributed to our strong start. We endeavor to capture all of the excellence in District 26 and celebrate it with the world. If something from your corner of the district is resulting in a transformative experience for kids, Tweet it to us [@D26Team](https://twitter.com/D26Team) so we can ensure its place in the firmament.

Whether it's in the field or in the district office, we look forward to the next time we see you as we continue our journey through District 26's Winter WONDERland.

Sincerely,
Danielle Giunta and the District 26 Team