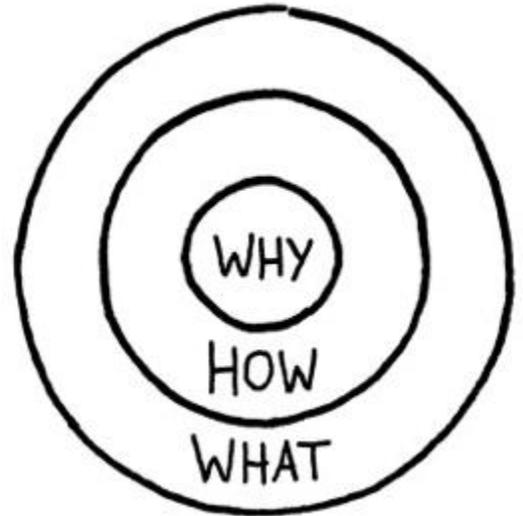


What is your Why?

The year is in full swing and we are so proud of all the work that has taken place in the four months since our work began at August's end. We have much to share in celebration of the dedicated stakeholders supporting and driving our work. Before we report out the highlights of a busy fall, we need to share with you a major shift in how we are viewing our work, courtesy of the same mind that inspired our thinking that together is better. In a Ted Talk, Simon Sinek codified his thoughts through the advent of his "Golden Circle." Simply put: everyone knows *what* they do, some people and organizations know *how* they do it, but very few organizations are able to speak to *why* they do what they do. We intend for this letter to serve as the *How* for us to explain the ways in which our *Whats* have been in service of moving with purpose towards our *Why*.



[If you have twenty minutes we can't recommend his [Ted Talk on the Golden Circle](#) enough. If you only have 5 minutes, check out [Michael Jr.'s segment from Break Time](#) that sums it up with a song.]

Alignment of City and District Priorities 2018-2019



Our [Welcome Back letter](#) reaffirmed the major priorities for our work, alongside the belief that our only path to achieving greatness through them is with the conviction that #togetherisbetter. In our guts we knew that these were worthy endeavors—but why are these the right priorities for right now? Before we even had a moment to think deeply about this, we received a tremendous boost when the Chancellor outlined the city's priorities for this school year. Beyond our quiet pride that there was such alignment between the citywide and district priorities we noticed that the banner for the city was an overarching statement: Advance Equity Now. Those

three words sum up the why of our work. Our schools need to work for all students.

On their own, each of the district priorities we have leveraged could be viewed as a *Why* worthy of our attention and efforts. Framed against the backdrop of the banner Advance Equity Now, however, our *whys* might be more closely linked to *how* we are going about our work.

Nurture an Inclusive Environment

We can start a revolution when we know what we stand against. To create change that lasts, we need to know what we stand for.

We stand for building inclusive spaces within our schools. We cannot see a path towards our *Why* of advancing equity without it. The first update worth sharing with you is the extent to which our schools have made this district priority their own. While it takes many different shapes, at its core, our principals are bringing the RULER training they received into their



"Social justice lives in my pedagogy. It's not what I teach. It's how I teach."

Another incredible day w/ [@MisterMinor](#) inspiring D26 to continue advancing equity through everyday tchg & lrng experiences.

This is the work.
Now is the time.
We are the people.
-[@CWATSONHARRIS](#)

- R**ecognizing emotions in self and others
- U**nderstanding the causes and consequences of emotions
- L**abeling emotions accurately
- E**xpressing emotions appropriately
- R**egulating emotions effectively

in exploring how SEL can enhance the types of questions students are challenged with in daily instruction to further define their sense of self.

At the district level, our SEL continues to permeate everything we do. Our District Leadership Team continues to be governed by the Charter we developed, as is the same with our professional learning communities. New for this year we have partnered with NYU to engage the whole district (K-12) in a series on equity and implicit bias. The conversations that these sessions are producing aren't always the easiest to navigate, but they are putting disproportionality front-and-center and challenging us to confront who we are in the work. This level of coherence would not be possible without our team coordinating efforts with Executive Superintendent Lawrence Pendergast, Superintendent Elaine Lindsey, and their respective teams.

Build Coherence of Practice across K-8 Feeder Patterns

The opportunity is not to discover the perfect company for ourselves. The opportunity to build is the perfect company for each other.

work with all stakeholders in our schools. Whether they are called charters, pacts, or something else altogether, we are incredibly proud of the places which are swapping the top-down dissemination of rules for the collaborative approach of arriving at a shared sense of how we want to feel while we're at school. We hope you have noticed the presence of Mood Meters in the hallways, classrooms, and in some rooms, at individual children's desks. Our schools at the vanguard of this work are taking risks

To reduce implicit bias, we must first confront the biases we hold within ourselves (**self-awareness**). Biases are normal and natural, a result of our experience and exposure, and are held by even the most well-meaning among us. By developing an awareness of and better understanding our own biases, we can then work to manage them (**self-management**) and mitigate their influence on our attitudes, actions/behaviors, and decisions, as well as those of our students (**social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making**).

– New York State Framework for SEL



The cornerstone of our work to develop coherence across our district is the existence of our Principal and Assistant Principal Professional Learning Communities. A significant shift in practice this year is that there is now alignment of focus between P-PLCs and their corresponding AP-PLCs. This means that all school leaders in a given K-8 feeder pattern are now having the same conversations across their meetings. Through our feeder pattern work, #TogetherIsBetter is both an idea and a physical construct. Our PLCs for Guidance Counselors and Parent Coordinators are now grouping participants by feeder pattern to ensure the development of a shared sense of a child's journey in from Pre-K through 8th grade, to high school. We are also very excited to report that our expansion of Computer Science

Professional Partnerships to K-12 is off to a strong start. We are hoping to not just deepen our understanding of the role CS plays in redefining college readiness, but also what are the critical needs of ensuring partnerships across superintendencies can meaningfully move us towards our *Why*.

Developing Leadership at Every Level

Stars want to see themselves rise to the top. Leaders want to see those around them become stars.

New for this year is the ascension of teachers into leaders of district-level professional learning for teachers. Specific shout-outs are due for Jennifer Schecter (MS 158, Music), Matthew Carneiro (PS 188, Math), and Steve Blum (PS 205, CS) for stepping up and offering opportunities for others to learn from them, while at the same time being reflective on their own practice.

The work of our amazing Assistant Principals continues through their leadership of our district-run school-facing professional development. (So many APs and Borough Leads are leading district initiatives that we had to spread our share fair across two monthly meetings, so everyone could be appropriately briefed!). At our December AP Conference we had the leaders of the District Projects for Kindergarten, Guidance Counselors, Math, Paraprofessional Development, and STEM all present on how their work is developing key stakeholders as leaders within their buildings.

We remain committed to supporting principal leadership as they become maestros—arranging and conducting symphonic brilliance in their buildings. Aligned to the city's 4 ALL Initiatives, our District 26 Spotlight Visits provide our leaders with a stage to share how promising practices in their school are keeping our district at the forefront of student experience. This fall we visited three schools for Spotlight Visits: PS 188 (Algebra 4 All), PS 26 (Universal Literacy), and PS 94 (Computer Science 4 All). Across all three schools we saw wonderful examples of what our school leaders are able to accomplish when they dream to fail big. Many thanks to everyone who attended and extra thanks to those at the schools who made it possible. Enjoy adjacent slideshow; the pictures don't do the power of the visit justice.

The value of our lives is not determined by what we do for ourselves. The value of our lives is determined by what we do for others.

We are charged with being Warriors for Equity, which is a monumental call to action. When faced with a daunting, high-stakes endeavor, sometimes, for fear of imperfection, we do not know how to begin. We have been able to start this journey because critical stakeholders in this work were willing to take a leap of faith with us, and at the center of this start has been Deputy Superintendent Lucius Young. Through his work with all levels of our community, we have been able to lay the groundwork for the big shifts in thinking. It is bittersweet that just as these shifts are starting to have deep impact on student experience in our schools, we have to use this space to wish him a fond farewell. While there is some temporary sadness over his promotion to the Senior Executive Director for Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Learning, it is our sincere belief that the work of the district will continue to move towards our *Why* because of the structures he has helped to create. District 26 is in a strong place—and the city is better positioned to achieve its *Why*—because of him. Thank you, Lucius.

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 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: Twitter is *how* we know about *what* you're doing in service of your *Why*.

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 together—because #TogetherisBetter.

Sincerely, Danielle Giunta and the District 26 Team

