

Chancellor's Letter

In the spring, our minds turn to planning and seeding our schools for September. As you engage in this process, please do not lose sight of the work at hand, which is the teaching and learning happening every day in our classrooms. Here are a few ways to ensure that your school community remains a productive and joyful academic environment.

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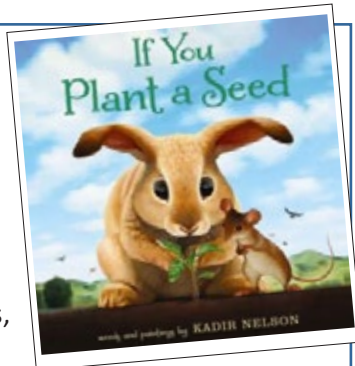
Resources to support your celebrations.

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Administrative Professionals Day

Celebrate these dedicated professionals.

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As we move into spring, it's a good time to harness our energies, renew our goals, and commit to making the next few months as productive and rewarding as possible. This month's book, **If You Plant a Seed**, is a perfect metaphor for the growth cycle we should be cultivating in our classrooms—moving our students through various stages of learning, observing their progress, and providing the conditions that will enable them to flourish.

[Read more](#)

Date to Remember

May 16: Chancellor's principals conference. [Read More](#)

Chancellor's Letter

Dear Colleagues,

In the spring, educators' minds turn to planning and seeding our schools for September. As you engage in this process, please do not lose sight of the work at hand, which is the teaching and learning happening every day in our classrooms. Here are a few ways to ensure that your school community remains a productive and joyful academic environment:

- ▶ Begin one-on-one conversations with important members of your team, including teachers. Let them know that you value their service and opinions. Ask them what has worked well and what still needs improvement. Task teachers, in particular, with coming up with creative solutions. Giving them specific responsibilities enables them to contribute to school culture and discourages them from going on the open market. Principals cannot possibly know it all; bringing other people into the conversation not only enlarges your leadership circle but promotes collaboration.
- ▶ Hold a celebratory luncheon for first-year staff members to acknowledge the difficult work they have done and honor this milestone. Encourage teachers to celebrate their best moments, most memorable students, or most challenging experiences. This lets them know that you are aware of their sacrifices and are invested in their success. This is an important job for every kindergarten to 12th grade principal.
- ▶ Take a careful look at your budget allocations. A good administrator always puts students before adults. If yours is a top heavy administration, one solution may be to hire two-day-a-week, F status retired teachers to deliver academic intervention services (AIS), which could both boost your bottom quartile of students and enhance your overall school achievement. The DOE offers a practice series that includes professional development in building a strong AIS program, including the use of assessment to guide instruction, and workshops in each of the five pillars of reading. We also offer [AIS Toolkit events](#) that provide teachers and other staff



with a starter kit of materials and training in specific research-based products, including Great Leaps, Really Great Reading, REWARDS Reading, Teaching Basic Writing Skills, and Collaborative Strategic Reading. Work collaboratively with your superintendent to review all your options.

- ▶ Consider running a three-day, early-start program for kindergarten, 6th and 9th grade students. Ask feeder schools to recommend students in need of extra care to start school before everyone else arrives; this is a great way to acclimate students into the building and promote a more positive atmosphere.
- ▶ Re-think your approach to parent-teacher conferences. I would like to see all schools schedule their conferences by appointment to avoid lines and rushing from classroom to classroom. Encouraging student-led conferences is a wonderful way to make students more accountable for their own learning. Create a month-long parent-teacher schedule.
- ▶ As you plan your class placements for next year, consider asking some of your teachers to loop with their students. The consistency this provides should improve student attendance and achievement.
- ▶ Make after-school or dinner appointments with a couple of principals you admire. Discuss what they have done this year that has made their job satisfying and successful. You're certain to come away with some gems that can inform and improve your own practice.

Chancellor's Letter (continued)

- ▶ Refocus your attention on your 2nd, 7th, and 10th grade teachers and curriculum. What summer plans are your teachers making for their students? How will they ensure that their students are on target when they return in September?
- ▶ Remind your staff that June is a teaching month. I always found it productive to do more project-based lessons in June to teach students how to work collaboratively. Have students develop games, oral presentations, and quizzes to test one another on curriculum goals. Help them plan an end-of-year event to celebrate what they have learned.

As State exams are underway, I would also like to

thank you for your hard work and preparation. I believe that these exams bring important value for students, families, school staff, and the City as a whole. Please encourage parents to consider the value of next week's math test for our school system and City as we work to hold all students to high standards and equip them with the skills they need to succeed in the face of all types of life challenges.

I hope you had a restful Spring Recess. As always, do not hesitate to share your concerns, or suggestions with [me](#).

Warmly,

Carmen

Pre-K Showcase

The Spring 2015 Pre-K Showcase Initiative is designed to recognize, share, and celebrate promising practices across New York City's free, full-day, high-quality Pre-K for All programs. There will be four pre-K programs featured this spring, with each of these Showcase sites hosting a half-day visit to share promising practices in pre-K. These visits will provide educators from other pre-K programs as well as interested Early Childhood field staff the opportunity to learn about strategies, structures, and systems to strengthen pre-K practices and spread success across the City. **Registration is very limited, so we strongly encourage you to register as soon as possible.** Please [view our flyer](#) for visit dates, the registration links, and more information.

Principal Conference

Please join me on May 16 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the annual Chancellor's Principal Conference, which will take place at Brooklyn Technical High School at 29 Fort Greene Place. The morning program will feature a student performance, remarks by me and Deputy Chancellor Phil Weinberg, as well as a keynote address from Louis Gomez, co-author with Anthony Bryk of *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools Can Get Better at Getting Better*. Breakout sessions will focus on the [Framework for Great Schools](#) and the guidance document to support you as you apply the *Framework* next year and embed it into regular cycles of learning. Attendance at this event is optional. However, you will receive one compensatory day for attending. Please [register](#) for the conference by May 8. The DOE will offer childcare for a limited number of children on a first come, first-served basis. Please note that you must request childcare on the registration form. For questions, email prodev@schools.nyc.gov.

Employee Discounts

I am delighted to announce that that we have revamped our Employee Incentives and Discounts webpage. Click [here](#) from home or work for information regarding special discounts, incentives, and offers exclusively for DOE staff. Start enjoying incredible savings today!

May Parent Conferences

The first-ever May parent conferences are around the corner. While the evening's programming is at your discretion, I hope you will use some of the time to introduce next year's teachers

and curriculum. You may also want to review students' promotion forecasts and academic portfolios, and discuss ways parents can take advantage of summer learning opportunities, including trips and age-appropriate

reading for their children.

Parent Conferences

▶ **May 6:** Middle School

▶ **May 7:** High School

▶ **May 13:** Elementary School

On My Mind

Celebrating Assistant Principals

On Wednesday, in honor of National Assistant Principals Week, I emailed our assistant principals to express my appreciation for all that they do. Assistant principals truly are the wings beneath our principals, coming in early, staying late, and working behind the scenes to support teaching and learning in schools. Here are just a few of the countless things they do:

- ▶ **Support struggling students** to ensure they stay on track for college and beyond.
- ▶ **Mentor teachers** who are not where they need to be, and create networks of teacher leaders to move instruction to high standards.
- ▶ **Engage parents** in great things going on in your school, host workshops to help parents better support their child's education, and promote your school as a welcoming place for families.
- ▶ **Connect your school to community partners** that provide many vital programs and resources for our students, including arts and after-school programs.
- ▶ **Model your own learning** by attending professional development sessions with teachers and trying new strategies in the classroom.
- ▶ **Add energy to your building** by noticing and affirming small steps of progress and giving shout-outs to teachers who take risks to improve their practice.
- ▶ **Work collaboratively** with the entire school community to ensure that your school is a joyful place of learning.

Please make sure your APs know that we have created an Assistant Principal Advisory Team to hear their concerns and suggestions, and support those who aspire to one day lead their own schools. We have also created the [Assistant Principal Institute](#) (API), a year-long leadership program designed to build their capacity and prepare them for the transition to a principal role. Please direct interested APs to [apply](#) for API before May 8 at 5 p.m. Lastly, I encourage you to take some time this week or next to celebrate your

assistant principals and thank them for all their hard work on behalf of your school community.

Transition to Kindergarten

The four-year-olds who participated in the first year of our historic Pre-K for All program will be moving to kindergarten in the fall. Now is a good time to start preparing them for the transition to the big kids' classrooms. Here are a few tips for a smooth transition:

- ▶ **Welcome families and current pre-k programs** to visit kindergarten classrooms. Cheerful classrooms with enthusiastic teachers and actively engaged students will show families that you are committed to their child's academic success and wellbeing, easing the transition to the big school. By opening your doors, you are laying the foundation for families to be active partners in their child's education.
- ▶ **Plan an orientation** for incoming students and their families to encourage them to explore your school and meet staff and current students. Identify families who may be willing to act as "welcome ambassadors." Events such as these make families feel a connection to your school community, increasing their likelihood of becoming actively involved. Have a parent coordinator or native speaker on hand.
- ▶ In addition to your efforts to **engage Pre-K** families and children ahead of their transition, the Division of Early Childhood is hosting "Get Ready for Kindergarten" Family Forums. At the Forums, families learn about how they can support their child's transition to kindergarten and how to get involved in their child's elementary school. Family Forums will also provide information on how to extend learning over the summer, highlighting summer and library programs. Please share the [Family Forum Flyer](#) with families inquiring about kindergarten, and if you have pre-K classrooms, encourage your current pre-K families to attend.

Middle School Quality Initiative

On Saturday, March 28, the [Middle School Quality Initiative](#) (MSQI) partnered with the [New York](#)

On My Mind (continued)

[City Urban Debate League](#) to host its third debate tournament of the 2014-15 school year. The topic, or resolution, once again was drawn from [Word Generation](#), a research-based program designed to help middle school students acquire academic vocabulary in language arts, math, science, and social studies classes. More than 250 middle school students from 25 MSQI schools participated in the most recent tournament, and over 50 high school debaters from the Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Technical High School, and ACORN Community High School volunteered as debate mentors, facilitating workshops on debate strategy and on navigating the high school admissions process.

MSQI Debate League is led by its founder Ben Honoroff, one of the MSQI coaches. Matthew Doran, coach of the host school, M.S. 45, presented me with a team t-shirt sporting their team motto, "We Have Issues." Hunters Point Community Middle School, M.S. 45, and North Star Academy took home the highest honors, but all participants were winners for dedicating their Saturday to engaging in a text-based, Common Core-aligned, academic activity. MSQI will hold its annual Debate Championships on June 12 where students will be discussing whether the federal government should provide amnesty to undocumented immigrants.

Shout-Outs

The classrooms I visited at **Professor Juan Bosch Public School** in Manhattan were awe-inspiring. I was particularly impressed by the way that [Principal Deirdre Budd](#) leads her school in developing inclusive practices that best meet the needs of all learners, including students with and without disabilities. These students I observed were engaged in high levels of oral and written discourse; corridors were alive with student work and a joy to walk through. I was pleased to learn that teachers have embraced professional development and collaborative practices, as consistency promotes continued student growth. I am gratified that the principal has decided to fully expand into a K-5 school, giving students the opportunity to complete their elementary education under one roof.

P.S. 123 in Manhattan is a Renewal School that under [Principal Melitina Hernandez](#)' leadership has done a tremendous job of raising student attendance rates, increasing parent involvement, immersing teachers in meaningful professional development, and communicating clear teaching and learning expectations to the entire school community. I was delighted to observe evidence of instruction shifting from teacher-directed to student-centered; the 5th grade students I visited were fully engaged in their collaborative learning projects. I was also thrilled to hear

about the new programs the principal and staff have established, including chess and STEM clubs, after-school and Saturday programs, as well as partnerships with organizations such as NBA Fit and Studio in a School. I am impressed by this principal's passion, courage, and ability to clearly articulate her goals for her school.

[Michele Luard](#), the principal of **Ronald Edmonds Learning Center II** in Brooklyn, has created a nurturing academic environment that encourages and supports student success. The school features small class sizes, evidence of student writing across all content areas, excellent use of technology, and increased time on task, with students in every classroom focused and actively engaged in learning. It is clear why this school was selected to participate in the Learning Partners program. To increase applicants to this wonderful school, I suggested that the principal reach out to local elementary schools, particularly Parent-Teacher Association presidents and parent coordinators. This will help spread the word that this small school is a large miracle.

At **P.S. 75** in Brooklyn, I was pleased to see [Principal Yolanda Williams](#)' tremendous efforts to improve the quality of instruction across all content areas, from encouraging senior staff to move toward more engaging,

Shout-Outs (continued)

interactive classrooms to facilitating student talk, which motivates them to come to school and actively participate. I discussed with Ms. Williams the possibility of expanding her arts program, especially as an enhancement for the school's large English Language Learner (ELL) population. I also suggested that she visit P.S. 150 in Queens to see how [Principal Carmen Parache](#) has made arts the focus of her school's ELLs programs. Visiting other schools can inspire us to try new and innovative ways to achieve our shared goal of student success.

As soon as I entered **The School of Integrated Learning** in Brooklyn and saw well-written, engaging student work beautifully displayed in hallways, I knew my visit would be a treat. [Principal Monique Campbell](#) has created real collegiality between teachers and students. Student-to-student interactions were respectful, thoughtful, and achievement driven, with students regularly self-assessing and assisting each other. The students I observed were also poised, confident, and enthusiastic about their learning. All of these positive behaviors are reflective of strong middle school instruction. I was particularly impressed by the binders that follow students from year to year, a perfect example of practice-based assessment. I encouraged Principal Campbell to share these best practices with the other schools co-located in her building.

Under [Principal Moses Ojeda's](#) leadership, **Thomas A. Edison Career and Technical Education High School** in Queens has become one of the City's premiere CTE schools, offering academic and career and technical education programs that prepare students for college and careers. As an alumnus of the school, Principal Ojeda can give students a first-hand account of the value of a high-quality CTE education. At Edison, students are provided the opportunity to obtain a State recognized industry certification in one of 12 CTE courses of study. While they must fulfill all the academic requirements for a Regents diploma, they are encouraged to attain an Advanced Regents upon graduation. Kathryn Wylde, the president of the Partnership for New York City, accompanied me on my visit and was equally impressed by what she observed and by the principal's vision to provide students with the skills they need to meet

the high academic, technical, civic, and workforce challenges for the world of tomorrow. It was also clear that Assistant Principals [Edward Alvarez](#), [Adam Boxer](#), [Kleanthis Korkotas](#), and [John Rullan](#) understand Mr. Ojeda's vision for the school; I hope that one day they will helm schools of their own.

Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School is a transfer school in Brooklyn where [Principal Meri Yallowitz](#) is doing wonderful work with some of the City's highest-need students. I was immediately struck by the building's print-rich environment. Everywhere I looked I observed high-quality, grade-appropriate student work demonstrating both voice and opinion, and utilizing strong word choices and active verbs. The math work I saw was of equally high quality. By involving teachers in curriculum development and writing units of study, Ms. Yallowitz is providing them with valuable professional development and vesting them further in their students' success. One of this school's strongest advantages is its Learning to Work program, which in collaboration with a community-based organization, helps over-age, under-credited students progress toward earning a high school diploma. I commend Principal Yallowitz for making this a model of what a transfer school should be.

Brooklyn Bridge Academy is a Brooklyn transfer school that is facing some steep challenges, including consistently low attendance and an increasingly younger student population. Nonetheless, I was impressed by [Principal Max Jean Paul's](#) efforts to incorporate vigorous academics, including a commitment to literacy and independent reading. I encouraged the principal to visit Metropolitan Diploma Plus High School (mentioned above) to learn how that school is fostering resilience through work-study and other programs.

At **J.H.S. 80** in the Bronx, teachers are carefully planning differentiated instruction. [Principal Emmanuel Polanco](#) is aware that no leader can facilitate change alone; we all need a team to stand behind us. I encouraged him to begin one-on-one conversations with all his staff members to both engage them and retain the good new teachers who are eligible to apply for other jobs in the Open Market Hiring System.

Leadership Development

One of the six elements of the [Framework for Great Schools](#) is effective school leadership. Anthony Bryk, whose research forms the basis for the Framework, refers to school leadership as “the driver for change” in our schools. It is therefore critically important that you not only attend to your own ongoing growth and development, but also cultivate the leadership of others in order to secure a future of strong leadership in your school. In an environment where every day brings countless urgent demands on your time and attention, it can be difficult to slow down to think about your school’s future and the legacy you will leave behind.

Many of you are not planning to leave your school anytime soon, and I applaud your commitment to stay long enough to see your plans through and build a culture of excellence that is truly made to last. At the same time, we must remember that none of us will hold our current position forever. The mark of an extraordinary leader is that the good work you set in motion is sustained and further developed long after you have left.

Therefore, I encourage you to take stock of your staff and ask yourself who among your teachers holds promise as future assistant principals, and who among your assistant principals has what it takes to become a principal one day. The members of your staff with the most leadership potential do not always see it in themselves; they are often the ones who are exceptionally skilled in their current position, love what they do, and therefore haven’t considered the next step. With encouragement and support from you, however, they may be willing to explore a leadership opportunity, and they will no doubt feel honored to have been identified by you as someone with potential. You can provide the inspiration to lead by sharing your experiences; opening your doors and offering exposure to your work and thinking; and by giving your staff opportunities to lead while staying in their current role. For example, you could give a teacher the responsibility of mentoring a new colleague; ask a teacher to sit on the School Leadership Team or another committee that makes key decisions in your school; or give a teacher the chance to lead a team, program, or initiative.

To support your staff members’ growth as leaders, I also encourage you to learn about, and nominate candidates for, the range of leadership development programs offered by our Office of Leadership. This office manages the **Teacher Leadership Program**, designed to build the capacity of your strongest teachers to lead teams of their peers; the **Leaders in Education Apprenticeship Program**, which offers pedagogues an opportunity to earn their School Building License and begin the journey toward school leadership; and the **Assistant Principal Institute**, which prepares strong APs to make the transition to being principals. The Office of Leadership also manages partnerships with several university-based education leadership programs across the city. If members of your staff are enrolled in a partner university-based leadership program, your school can apply to receive funding to support their participation. You can learn about all of these opportunities on our [Leadership Pathways website](#) or by reaching out to LeadershipPathways@schools.nyc.gov.

Building the leadership capacity of members of your school community will benefit your school not only in the long term, but also immediately. Research shows that schools with strong distributed leadership structures have greater success in improving student outcomes. Giving your teachers opportunities to develop and assume additional responsibilities as leaders in your school will also increase their satisfaction on the job and will increase your staff retention, which further supports your efforts to sustain long-term improvement.

Finally, your investment in your staff members’ leadership development gives you a unique opportunity to expand your impact beyond your school. When it comes time for some of your strong teacher leaders and assistant principals to leave your school community to serve as leaders of other schools, they will take the effective practices they’ve learned from you with them. Over time, our strongest principals touch communities and students far beyond their own school buildings. By investing time to recruit, inspire, develop, and support emerging leaders, you contribute not only to the ongoing improvement of your own school, but all of our schools across the City.





If You Plant a Seed

(Balzar + Bray, 2015)

Written and illustrated by Kadir Nelson

As we move into spring, it's a good time to harness our energies, renew our goals, and commit to making the next few months as productive and rewarding as possible. This month's book, **If You Plant a Seed**, is a perfect metaphor for the growth cycle we should be cultivating in our classrooms—moving our students through various stages of learning, observing their progress, and providing the conditions that will enable them to flourish.

In this beautifully illustrated picture book, a rabbit and a mouse plant tomato, carrot, and cabbage seeds, nurture them into healthy plants, and enjoy their bounty. The author treats the seeds as opportunities, showing us that we have a choice to sow seeds of selfishness—or kindness. When the rabbit and mouse refuse to share their food with a coterie of birds, a struggle ensues and almost everything is destroyed. But when the mouse offers up a single surviving tomato, the birds repay the kindness by spreading seeds all over the land. Soon, the area is bursting with enough food and flowers for all to enjoy.



I encourage you to read this book aloud during your next Monday professional development session and ask teachers to make a list of the seeds they planted this year that may need redirection. Lesson and curriculum mapping unit plans are critically important, but are they meeting the specific needs of each child? Could extra attention and individualized instruction prevent certain students from slipping through the cracks? What ingredients does the teacher need to supply to ensure that, like plants, students grow stronger over time?

I have done this kind of self-assessment throughout my career, with great results. Re-engaging in honest one-on-one conversations with teachers, parents, and principals I might have neglected or misunderstood is a great way to achieve a meeting of the minds, re-inspire staff, and bring parents back into classrooms and schools. This is a critical time of year to rethink our approach and do the kind of targeted mulching that will enable everyone in our community to thrive.

Although this book has sparse, simple text, its message is profound. I encourage you to use it to drive conversation about the best ways to move your staff over the final months of the school year—and sow seeds of kindness and productivity.

Warmly,
Carmen

Kindergarten Admissions

Nearly 85 percent of students received an offer to one of their top three kindergarten choices. Please remind families who want to accept their kindergarten offer that they must contact the school directly and make an appointment to pre-register by May 6. Encourage families who have not yet applied to kindergarten to visit schools they are interested in and apply in person. Families may call 718-935-2009 or visit www.nyc.gov/schools/kindergarten to learn more.

Teacher Appreciation Week



From May 4 to 8, I will be joining you in celebrating our 75,000 teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week. We are planning a variety of ways to acknowledge the hard work and dedication teachers do every day.



40minutes@schools.nyc.gov

There are so many innovative ways to spend the 40 Minutes of parent engagement time each week. Here are five ideas that I hope will inspire you and your school community. Take them and make them your own.

Reading Strategies for Successful Learners

Principal Javier Muñiz, P.S.200, Brooklyn

At P.S.200, Principal Muñiz and his staff organize an event to engage families around reading strategies that parents can use in their native language. Parents are invited into the auditorium where staff share techniques families can use at home—no matter their language—to help their children become successful learners.

Hands on, Minds on: Science at Brooklyn School of Inquiry

Principal Donna Taylor, Brooklyn School of Inquiry, Brooklyn

At the Brooklyn School of Inquiry teachers use their 40 Minutes to create presentations to give to families at their monthly Parent-Teacher Organization meetings. This month, science teachers presented on scientific inquiry, gave curriculum overviews by grade, reviewed expectations of students, and gave snapshots of students' progress in the upper and lower grades. Presentations are filmed and uploaded to YouTube and the school website so that families unable to attend can still receive this valuable information and training.

Family Study Halls

Principal Lamson T. Lam, P.S./I.S. 184, Brooklyn

Teachers at P.S./I.S. 184 noticed that parents struggled

with how to help their children at home, so they created Family Study Halls on Tuesdays. An English Language Arts and math teacher per grade is present, enabling parents to learn more about what their children are learning and how teachers work through problems with their children. Families are invited to attend with their children so that they can actively work through tasks together. The parent coordinator is present at all of these sessions and the guidance counselor, English as a New Language teacher and special education teachers are all made available for appointments with families. Topics have included math, organizational habits, and literacy routines.

Family Resource Day

Parent Coordinator Lynette Bradshaw, P.S. 245, Brooklyn

To ensure that the school's large international population had access to direct services, P.S. 245 collaborated with the New York Immigration Coalition to host a Family Resource Day. The more than 500 attendees were offered legal advice and were invited to apply for free IDNYC identification cards, passports, and more. Some two dozen public and private organizations offered support.

Middle School Portfolio Viewing

Math Teacher Melanie Shuldiner, The Young Women's Leadership School of Queens

At the Young Women's Leadership School of Queens, the Middle School Math Team held a portfolio viewing during the 40 Minutes, inviting parents in to celebrate their child's achievements over the first half of the year. The event attracted all the families of the middle school and students were able to present on their goals and benchmarks. Families also got to meet with teachers in an unrushed environment to discuss accomplishments and progress.

Email your innovative ideas to 40minutes@schools.nyc.gov

April is National Poetry Month

Please click [here](#) for resources to support your celebrations of poetry and the spoken word.

Administrative Professionals

✓ **April 22** is Administrative Professionals Day. Please take time to celebrate these dedicated professionals for all they do throughout the school year to make our lives easier and help our schools run smoothly.