

Renewal in **ACTION**

A Letter from the Chancellor

Thank you so much for your work this summer in preparation for the first day of the 2015-16 school year, and your first full year as a Renewal School. Throughout the past few months, I know you have been busy hiring the best teachers, arranging schedules for your staff and students, and making arrangements to accommodate new policies such as Expanded Learning Time.

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Message from Aimee Horowitz

Executive Superintendent, School Renewal Program



I hope you had an opportunity to take some time off with your families and loved ones as you recharged for the upcoming school year. As you begin to return to your schools, it is of utmost importance that you organize for success, particularly around implementing key Renewal initiatives, including operationalizing Expanded Learning Time based on the unique needs of your students.

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A Letter from the Chancellor

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you so much for your work this summer in preparation for the first day of the 2015-16 school year, and your first full year as a Renewal School. Throughout the past few months, I know you have been busy hiring the best teachers, arranging schedules for your staff and students, and making arrangements to accommodate new policies such as Expanded Learning Time. I am pleased to say that all of you have hired community-based organizations, with whom you are working in seamless fashion to provide a foundation for your eventual transition into Community Schools.

Renewal Schools are already making steps in the right direction. Earlier this month, State test scores were announced and, as a testament to the work you have accomplished thus far, many Renewal Schools made significant gains with their students. Further, many of you have seen an increase in enrollment for the coming school year—a result of your diligent efforts to reach out to the community.

In my time as a principal and school administrator, I observed that the most successful schools had a few things in common. Strong schools hire the best teachers, paying attention to subject areas where students are underperforming and making staffing decisions accordingly. They utilize every moment of professional development to learn and grow as educators, constantly finding ways to improve. Successful schools assess students for targeted intervention, keeping a focused eye on student attendance and creating communicative networks through which teachers can discuss struggling students. Finally, great schools make intentional overtures to the school community for support and collaboration.

None of the above are easy tasks; all require extensive planning, time, and commitment. However, only hard work moves us in the right direction. You will not do this alone. You and your staff, students, and their families have the support of your Directors of School Renewal, superintendents, Principal Leadership Facilitators, Executive Superintendent Aimee Horowitz and the Office of School Renewal. Of course, you also will have the support of me and my leadership team. My deputy chancellors and I are constantly working together to ensure your schools' continued growth and development. This year you will see us in your hallways as we plan to visit all Renewal Schools to see the work you are doing and to determine how we can best assist you in working toward your Renewal School Comprehensive Educational Plan goals.

Please know that we are all invested in your success. Your schools are serving as models for all of New York City and the country. I believe in your progress, your professionalism, and your dedication to improvement, and together we will advance the course of public education in this City.

Warmly,

Carmen



Message from Aimee Horowitz

Executive Superintendent, School Renewal Program

Dear Renewal School Principals:

I hope you had an opportunity to take some time off with your families and loved ones as you recharged for the upcoming school year. As you begin to return to your schools, it is of utmost importance that you organize for success, particularly around implementing key Renewal initiatives, including operationalizing Expanded Learning Time based on the unique needs of your students. To ensure you are successful with this, we have enlisted programming consultants and Borough Field Support Center (BFSC) supports, coupled with the support you receive from your superintendents and Directors of School Renewal (DSRs). It is critical that every student in your school has five hours of mandated extended instructional learning time every week, beginning on the first day of school. It is also essential that you communicate to your staff and families the changes to your instructional day and time so that everyone has clear expectations for the first day of school.



As you are aware, your Renewal School Comprehensive Educational Plans (RSCEP) are living documents that are intended to memorialize your strategic actions as you turn your school around. Your DSRs will be working with you and your teams during the start of school to review your RSCEP goals and Renewal benchmarks to assist you in aligning needed supports from our team and from your BFSC. This support will inform and frame the frequent progress-monitoring visits that will be conducted by your respective DSRs.

Additionally, given the tight timing of the selection cycle, we are pleased to share that the DOE and UFT will offer a fall selection cycle to allow for additional interested teachers to be considered for the Model and Peer Collaborative positions. The fall selection cycle will be school-based and open to teachers on staff at the Renewal Schools who have not previously applied for the 2015-16 school year teacher-leader central pool. Similar to the process this spring, there will be a screening by the UFT-DOE committee and then final selections by school leaders by mid-October. In terms of next steps, you will receive more detailed information about the fall selection and school-based postings the week of August 31 from your DSR. Please feel free to share the information about the opportunity with teachers in your school who may wish to take part in a fall selection cycle, and consider stand-out teachers who you may want to personally encourage to apply.

In addition to the fall selection cycle, Renewal Schools will have the chance to extend growth and development opportunities to a set of teachers who show interest and potential for teacher-leader roles. You will receive further details on this program for emerging teacher-leaders in September.

I wish you a successful school opening and a year that brings renewal to your school community.

Best,

Aimee

Partner CBO Prepares Students for Success

Christopher Caruso, Executive Director of the Office of Community Schools, writes about the Center for Supportive Schools, a CBO providing post-secondary readiness support services to schools throughout the City.



[Center for Supportive Schools \(CSS\)](#) partners with over 50 schools in all five boroughs and is the lead community school partner to eight community schools in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens:

- ▶ Flushing High School
- ▶ Foreign Language Academy of Global Studies
- ▶ Frederick Douglass Secondary School Academy IV
- ▶ J.H.S. 145 Arturo Toscanini
- ▶ New Millennium Business Academy Middle School
- ▶ Morris Academy for Collaborative Studies
- ▶ M.S. 596 Peace Academy
- ▶ Urban Science Academy

CSS is driven by the vision that one day all children will thrive in schools that graduate them prepared for the rigors of college and lives filled with meaningful work, active citizenship, and personal fulfillment. Their strategy is to partner with schools to develop students into leaders, helping to transform their schools into more supportive and exciting places of learning for their peers.

CSS's community school strategy focuses on building the capacity of schools to create sustainable safe, supportive, engaging, and inspiring environments for teaching and learning. For each community school partner, CSS is supporting:

- ▶ Enhanced student leadership opportunities
- ▶ Faculty and staff professional development to engage professionals as leaders in the community school strategy
- ▶ Parent Leadership training and new parent engagement structures
- ▶ Targeted mentoring for chronically absent

students and other high-need student populations

- ▶ Comprehensive literacy programs
- ▶ Strategic partnerships for providing additional academic and enrichment opportunities for students
- ▶ Strong mental health partnerships and services

One of the student leadership strategies is Peer Group Connection (PGC), an evidence-based program that supports and eases students' transition into middle and high school. The program taps into the power of older students, called peer leaders, to create a nurturing environment for incoming students. Peer leaders meet with small groups of their younger peers in regular sessions designed to strengthen relationships among students across grades and help students develop social and emotional skills, and positive academic and personal behaviors.

A four-year longitudinal, randomized-controlled study conducted by Rutgers University and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that PGC improved the graduation rates of student participants by nine percentage points and cut by half the number of male students who would otherwise drop out.

Just a single example of the phenomenal partnerships represented throughout Community Schools, the Center For Supportive Schools is one of many community based organizations providing critical services to New York City public school students. We look forward to seeing the progress of its eight partner schools' students as they prepare to become productive adults after graduation.

Shout-Outs

Directors of School Renewal Share Observations from Renewal School Visits

Renewal Schools in **District 12** have already gotten a head start on their school year, meeting weekly with principals to fine tune plans for attaining RSCEP benchmarks, and identifying how all key stakeholders can contribute to accomplishing these goals. To assist in their preparatory process, principals read *Focus: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning* by Mike Schmoker, that focuses on ways to create more effective classrooms through curriculum improvement, focused lessons, and intentional reading and writing skills. Afterward, they discussed lessons learned from the text, aligning their findings to the [Framework for Great Schools](#), and sharing best practices to address one another's concerns and progress in their planning.

Cristina Melendez, District 12

P.S. 194 Countee Cullen School in Harlem's District 5 is organizing a major back-to-school block party event for September 1. The school administration, teacher leaders, custodial team, and CBO partners are working diligently this summer to ensure that the school has a successful opening. This event will celebrate the positive changes being made at the school on all levels, and will include a ribbon cutting ceremony, registration drive, live music, face painting, food tasting, and information booths. This event marks our efforts to kick the school year off on an exciting note; the school has also hired a Community School Director, completed a five-week, teacher-led curriculum development collaborative, and drafted plans for a redesigned school entrance. The school is hoping to bring new meaning to the term "Harlem Renaissance."

Debra Spivak, District 5

Principals of **I.S. 217** and **Entrada Academy** have made purposeful efforts toward rebranding their campus to attract new families to their schools. The principals relocated their entrance and purchased new banners and carpets to signify the rebirth of the campus. A beautiful garden, maintained by students and teachers, has been planted near the entrance, and a seating area has been added. The schools are excited to display their efforts when their campus hosts the new Teacher Center Mentoring program in the district. This program will support the development of all new teachers in District 12 as they continue to improve teacher practice.

Cristina Melendez, District 12

Principals Jeanette Vargas, Sean Licata, and Steve Cobb at the **Richard R. Green campus** in the Bronx have been excitedly working toward laying a strong foundation for their Community School. By building relationships with one another and finding ways to work collaboratively across their schools, they have worked seamlessly with their partner CBO to develop supportive programming for all of their schools' needs, including that of the non-Renewal School also located on their campus. All of the principals agree that streamlining communication around programming and resources is critical to the success of the Community School model.

Juanita Rodriguez, District 11

PD Opportunity

All Grade Levels

Introduction to Project-Based Inquiry Science for Educators of 6th and 7th Grade (It's About Time Project Schools Only)

September 1-2; 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m., American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of the research-based instructional practices of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and project-based learning. The workshop setting will allow and encourage exploration of science concepts and instructional practices consistent with the [NYC STEM Framework](#), engineering design, and the [Framework for K-12 Science Education](#). Participants will explore several shifts in classroom instruction and collaborate through discussion to identify effective ways to integrate STEM as well as the Common Core State Standards into instructional practices. Each session will address the philosophy, implementation, and evaluation of Project-Based Inquiry Science. Please register for the event [here](#).



On My Mind

Supporting Newly Hired Teachers

Leading into the 2015-16 school year, one of the most important decisions for consideration is staffing. Even more critical is how you utilize these new staff members to support the needs of your school. In order to ensure that newly hired teachers are able to start the school year on the right foot and make a positive impact on our students, here are a few guiding questions for you to consider.

How can you, your returning faculty, and your administration support your newly hired teachers?

Think about whether there are structures you can create to welcome teachers and effectively integrate them into your school community.

How will you ensure newly hired teachers receive feedback? Discuss with teacher-leaders how they might formally or informally support them during their first

year, and how often conversations should be held to review their teaching practices. Consider whether a mentorship program is right for your school, with more experienced teachers supporting those new to the profession, or who may need additional support.

How might newly hired teachers inform your professional development sessions? New faculty present an opportunity for a fresh perspective on your school and its support systems for staff. Ask newly hired teachers for their observations, ideas, and questions, and explore ways to address this feedback in Monday PD throughout the school year.

How can you empower and encourage newly hired teachers? If you have three or more newly hired teachers in your building, consider scheduling inter-visitations with other teachers during the beginning of the school year. You can also encourage this cohort to support one another by organizing brown bag lunches.

Q&A with Jasmin Varela

Jasmin Varela is the Director of School Renewal (DSR) for District 9, having worked as a talent coach in the Office of Teacher Effectiveness at the network and district levels. She shares her thoughts on the School Renewal Program, its impact on schools, and how she plans to help schools in her district achieve success.

How is the Office of School Renewal (OSR) supporting you?

The OSR supports every aspect of my work as DSR. Last year, as our schools prepared to interview community-based organizations, the Office provided thorough guidance on the required action steps and designed a pool of questions to draw from during the interview process. These resources ensured that principals, in conjunction with the School Leadership Teams, made informed decisions as they navigated the contracting phase of the partnership.

Additionally, OSR provides extensive opportunities for collaborative review and professional development. In June, we held several working sessions to revise the Renewal School Comprehensive Educational Plans (RSCEPs), and the OSR team assisted by providing feedback on the drafts.

Professional development opportunities offered to the DSRs are high quality and anchored to the instructional needs of the schools we support. For instance, this summer, principals, teachers, and DSRs attended a Teachers College Institute, which has helped us plan for the implementation of the Writing Units of Study for the upcoming school year.

What most excites you about the School Renewal Program?

In District 9, which is located in the Bronx, we welcome the opportunity to receive the additional wrap-around services and essential resources to close the achievement gap for our eight Renewal middle schools. The School Renewal Program positively impacts every aspect of teaching and learning: school culture, instruction, resources, and operations. In less than a year, the schools have transformed into vibrant learning hubs, ready to serve our students' unique needs, and this is really exciting. Renewal Schools are transitioning into academies focused on the arts, STEAM (STEAM+Arts), and social justice, specializations which have allowed us to brand our schools and stimulate enrollment.

I am also excited about our partnerships with community-based organizations, which will feed into the Community Schools model, and demonstrates a real commitment to developing the whole child. Expanded Learning Time also provides additional instructional time

for core content areas and other forms of enrichment, which schools are programming in collaboration with their partner organizations.

What do you consider to be the most important indicators of success for schools you support?

Our schools align improvement efforts to the *Framework for Great Schools*, which emphasizes the elements of rigorous instruction, supportive environment, collaborative teachers, effective school leadership, strong family-community ties, and trust. These elements are research-based and centered on supporting schools to improve student achievement, and I consider them critical indicators for schools' success as they inform the RSCEPs. RSCEPs directly influence the schools' organizing principles, annual goals, needs assessments, summative vision, and action steps. Consequently, in District 9, all of our instructional agendas and meetings align to the six elements of the *Framework*.

Why is developing strong school leadership important to you?

Strong school leadership is crucial because stakeholders need to clearly understand expectations and instructional goals. If a school leader communicates a clear vision and instructional focus, the students, teachers, staff, parents, and community partners can make concerted efforts toward the school's goals. I find it especially important that a principal fosters a culture of excellence, mutual trust, and respect.

What do you hope to accomplish in the 2015-16 school year?

Building on progress made last year, Superintendent Leticia Rodriguez-Rosario and I will continue to collaborate with principals and other members of our district's school communities on four key areas: teacher teams and instructional rounds, inter-visitations, providing and receiving high-quality feedback, and organizing for year-long success.

We are also initiating an exciting new program in our Renewal Schools. In partnership with the Office of School Wellness Programs, we will focus on physical education and health.

My general philosophy is that we all have a shared responsibility in creating school cultures in which every student, in every school, can reach his or her potential. I believe that this dual-focus on instructional improvement and whole child development will support this philosophy, and I look forward to seeing the strides we make throughout the school year.