Pearl River School District

Every Child Can and Will Learn

From the Superintendent

Season's Greetings! As I write this message, we are in the last week before the holiday break. As usual, the holiday concerts at each of the schools have been terrific. Students at all levels have given excellent performances, entertaining families and guests with song and music that reflects the spirit of the holiday season, across cultures and from a variety of traditions. Our music teachers have worked hard in preparing our students for these events and their efforts are evident in the results.

As the school year began we were nearing the completion of the second phase of capital project construction on our athletic fields. Our sports teams, and whole school community, were able to enjoy viewing games from new bleachers, and a revitalized athletic complex that includes lavatory facilities and a concession stand. Capital project work will continue this year with the construction of a secure vestibule for visitor access at Pearl River High School. The Board of Education will award bids and a next phase of construction will be scheduled to address the upcoming series of projects at the Middle School and High School. As with past work, we will seek to minimize impact to student and school life as much as possible.

This year's work at all of our schools demonstrates a focus on critical areas in education today, as well as a renewed concentration in perennial areas of academic importance. Literacy, as well as an emphasis on social and emotional learning, are prominent on this year's priority agenda. This newsletter also gives ample coverage of our work in computer science. Professional development and the implementation of a unified approach to literacy instruction have been a key feature of our focus on reading and writing. The district's newly formed committee, #PRSELFIE, established in the summer of 2019, has been spearheading our professional development initiative in this area and raising our collective awareness as a learning community on the mental health issues.

I hope that you enjoy this newsletter and its coverage of the good work that is happening in the Pearl River School District. Wishing everyone the best of the holiday season and time to share with friends and family.

2019 Holiday Card

This year's holiday card was designed by **PRHS Sophomore, Sha'Mya Lynne Gray**. Sha'Mya was recognized at the December BOE meeting for her beautiful photo. On behalf of Pearl River School District, we would like to wish everyone a very happy holiday season!

Pearl River Schools will be closed December 23rd through January 1st

Metacognition in the Classroom

"*What did you learn in school today*?" This may be the most common question children in America are faced with as they sit down at the dinner table, each and every day. Not surprising that same question has been asked at millions of dinner tables over the years because school has always been considered the place where children access knowledge. While schools will continue as great institutes of knowledge, this mindset is changing. Today's schools aim to move beyond the traditional, and work toward engaging students in higher-order thinking in ways that require them to not just tell us what they know but what they can do with what they know, and to articulate how they were able to do it.

One important step in developing children as deep thinkers is to help them become more self-directed in their learning by explicitly teaching **metacognition**. Metacognition, in the most simplest of terms, is often described as *thinking about your thinking.* According to the authors of *The Boss of My Brain,* Donna Wilson and Marcus Conyers, "*Metacognition supports learning by enabling us to actively think about which cognitive strategies can help achieve learning, how we should apply those strategies, how we can review our progress, and whether we need to adjust our thinking"* (2014). Understanding of the value of explicitly teaching metacognition, Pearl

River teachers have begun to focus on this concept as an important instructional strategy.

During the November 5, 2019 Superintendent's Conference Day, all teachers from Evans Park, Franklin Avenue, and Lincoln Avenue participated in a half-day workshop, led by principals Katheenann Cool, Peggy Lynch, and Kristin Talleyrand on integrating metacognition into instruction. The day began with an introduction to the science and research behind how it influences learning in children. Later, teachers learned about the many practical applications of metacognition and were provided with a sampling of the many readymade lessons and activities. To end the session, teachers were given time to create math lessons with the metacognitive strategies presented during the workshop.

Basic examples of strategies from the workshop included various approaches to learning and problem solving in Math by having students consider metacognitive process questions

such as: "What is this problem asking?"; "How could I start this problem?"; "What could I draw to show my thinking?"; "Why is this important to the problem?". End of lesson reflective questions such as "I solved this problem by…"; Today, I understood and learned…" and "My learning stopped because…" were presented as valuable examples as well.

Also on November 5th, groups of teachers in both PRMS and PRHS created new or enhanced current lessons and activities with explicit metacognitive strategies. Examples included the addition of end of activity/lesson reflection statements that asked students to discuss their successes and challenges with activities. Rubrics in which students receive points for not only having a correct answer but to the extent at which they can explain that answer and the rationale for using a specific strategy or line of inquiry were also developed. In all, the opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning are on the rise.

As the year progresses, teachers will continue to add additional opportunities for metacognition in more and more lessons. By June, we hope that parents can ask their children not "**what** *did you learn today?",* but rather "**HOW** *did you learn today?…"* and receive a better answer than *"nothing*!"

Computer Science for Everyone

The New York State Education Department recently released a draft of the K-12 Computer Science and Digital Fluency Standards. These new standards are organized into the following domains: *Computational Thinking and Programming, Data and Artificial Intelligence, Networks and Systems Design, Cybersecurity, Impacts of Computing, and Digital Literacy.* The standards are currently under review and will be presented to the Commissioner of Education and the Board of Regents at the January 2020 Meeting of the Board of Regents.

In preparation for the changes proposed in the new standards, the Pearl River School District piloted a computer science curriculum for grades K-4 called Computer Science (CS) Fundamentals, and for grades 5-8, Computer Science (CS) Discoveries. These courses were developed by the non-profit Code.org. The CS Fundamentals and Discoveries courses were considered for the pilot because they received positive reviews from experts in the field and lead to the Advanced Placement Computer Science Principles course at Pearl River High School (also a Code.org curriculum). During the second half of the 2018-19 school year, teacher representatives from each grade level in grades Kindergarten through grade seven piloted the courses and gave positive feedback, and ultimately endorsed the program for the full implementation beginning in September 2019.

Grades K-4: Teachers in each of the elementary schools began the implementation of the new scope and sequence with the pacing of each grade level estimated for two to three lessons per month. For each elementary grade, students participate in a wide variety of age appropriate computer-based and "unplugged" experiences with computer science, as well as explicit instruction on Digital Citizenship.

Pearl River Middle School
In middle school, students experience technology through direct instruction but also as creative and fun tools for learning. The revised technology curriculum will continue the Code.org sequence with the CS Discoveries course. Additionally, students in all grades have experiences with innovative projects through PEP classes and general classroom instruction.

Grade 5: The CS Discoveries course begins in grade five with units on problem solving using computers and programming tools followed by app and website development. Fifth graders are using their storytelling skills to program *Finch* robots to take center stage. Students learn to program the robot using a coding language called *Snap!*. Then, students plan, write, create scenery, and use the iPads to record a story with the Finch as the main character.

Course A *Kindergarten*	Course B *1st Grade*	Course C *2nd Grade*	Course D *3rd Grade*	Course E *4th Grade*
12 lessons ~12 hours to complete	**12 lessons** ~12 hours to complete	***18 lessons*** *~18 hours to complete*	***18 lessons*** *~18 hours to complete*	***18 lessons*** *~18-20 hours to complete*
Concepts				
• *Digital Citizenship* • *Sequencing* • *Loops* • *Events*	• *Digital Citizenship* • *Sequencing* • *Loops* • *Impacts of Computing* • *Events*	• *Digital Citizenship* • *Sequencing* • *Binary* • *Loops* • *Events* • *Data*	• *Sequencing* • *Events* • *Loops* • *Conditionals* • *Binary* • *Digital Citizenship*	• *Sprites* • *Digital Citizenship* • *Impacts of Computing* • *Nested Loops* • *Functions*

Computer Science for Everyone

Grade 6: Sixth graders experience advanced coding to design interactive animations and games. During *Genius Hour,* students take ownership over their own learning by creating projects designed to answer big questions, help others, or fulfill a need in the school or community. Students select their topics and take part in research to gather the necessary information to then create products to demonstrate their learning. Sixth grade students also use *Makey Makeys,* an electronic invention tool, as part of their *Rube Goldberg* machines they are building in Science PEP.

Grade 7: In seventh grade students explore the elements of the *Design Process* with the *end user* as the focus of that process.The seventh grade CS course concludes with an exploration of the relationship between programming, software, and hardware in unit on *Physical Computing.* Seventh graders apply the Design Process as they build and program Lego Mindstorm robots as well as design and program projects for a "client" using Scratch programming. They have also been using a semester long *hyperdoc* in the form of a website to focus on their own social and emotional health. A hyperdoc is a teacher's lesson plan flipped so that the students can see the objective and the path to get there. After various self assessments, the students have chosen something about themselves they want to improve upon, are working toward those improvements, and will share out what they have learned at the end of the class via TED style speeches.

As students transition to Pearl River High School, they complete the CS Discoveries sequence with a five week course exploring the use of data systems and the application of those systems on society. Once in ninth grade, students have a range of opportunities including advanced coding, computer graphics, technical design, computer aided drawing (CAD), engineering, architecture, and the Code.org Advanced Placement Computer Science Principles.

As Pearl River students progress through the newly designed K-8 technology program, we anticipate that more and more students will be prepared for and confident in taking more advanced coursework in Technology. Even if students do not choose to take those courses, they will be that much more prepared for the highly technical workforce of the near future.

In Athletics

This fall season saw many of the Pirate teams excel both in the arena and in the classroom. Highlights from the season include:

- All nine of our varsity teams received Scholar Athlete recognition from New York State;
- The girls soccer team was League, Section, and Regional Champions and made it to the State Final Four for Class A;
- The girls cross-country team was League and Sectional Champions and placed 2nd in the State in Class B. 8th grader Maddy Moroney was the Class B Sectional Champion and placed 2nd in the State for Class B;
- The boys cross country team was League and Sectional Champions. Junior Oisin Selby was the Class B Sectional Champion;
- The boys soccer team was League Champion. Junior Brian Coughlan was named the Lohud Rockland Boys Soccer Player of the Year and Senior Billy Gunn was a Rockland Scholar Athlete of the Week;
- The volleyball and field hockey teams each advanced to Sectional play winning one game in the sectional tournament;
- The Pirates football team won both the Tom Collins Bowl and the Orange Bowl, as well as winning a Class B Sectional playoff game; and
- Diana Gillule was named girls Soccer League and Conference Coach of the Year.

#PRSELFIE
Social Emotional Learning for Individual Empowerment

Social-emotional learning, or SEL has become an ever-present concept in the vernacular of educators in today's world of teaching and learning. Recognizing the value of SEL for the social, emotional and intellectual development and growth in the learning process is the cornerstone and foundation of any well-rounded educational approach. Recently, the New York State Education Department mandated that schools provide "Mental Health Education Literacy in Schools: Linking to a Continuum of Well-Being". In response to this initiative, the Pearl River Social Emotional Learning for Individual Empowerment (PRSELFIE) Committee was formed, comprised of representatives from district staff, parents and students. The committee, which meets monthly, met in the spring of last year, during the summer and in the fall of this school year.

According to Director of Special Services, Carolyn Moffa, "With the expansion of mental health education in schools, it is our goal that school personnel, students, families and communities will be more openly discussing mental health well-being and mental health challenges, which, in turn, will positively influence change in our childrens' awareness of mental health prevention, treatment and stigma".

The New York State Education Department expects schools to utilize a Comprehensive Guide to develop or adopt their own curriculum aligned with the New York State Learning Standards, and tailored to the needs identified at the local level.

During the first half of this year, the Committee organized several different events and speakers in an effort to raise awareness for the need for SEL and reduce the stigma of mental illness. So far this year, the Committee recognized Suicide Prevention Month and Day by having a guest speaker from NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) address staff. Faculty, staff, students and their families participated in a 5K Walk & Run at Rockland State Park to support NAMI. On October 10, 2019, Pearl River School District recognized World Mental Health Day by wearing green. T-shirts designed and sold by the Committee, raised money to support this illness. In addition to the Committee initiatives above, below are school-based examples of this work throughout the District:

Evans Park

The school social worker and psychologist created social skills groups for children designed to focus on positive behaviors to promote learning and to help students develop social skills geared towards establishing friendships.

On Unity Day, the school social worker and school psychologist pushed into each class and conducted a lesson on kindness and on including others. On Fridays, the school psychologist pushes into the primary instruction classes to conduct lessons on various social-emotional topics (i.e. friendship, sharing, feelings, coping skills, etc.). Further, these concepts are being worked on and reinforced within both building level and special education counseling groups. The staff wore green on Mental Health Awareness Day and were provided with strategies to facilitate and maintain a healthy mind. In addition, during Mental Health Awareness week, strategies for students to maintain a healthy mind were shared over the announcements.

#PRSELFIE cont.

Lincoln Avenue

The psychologist and social worker conducted lessons with a focus on mental health in each classroom, including how to identify feelings, whole body listening, coping strategies and when and who to ask for help at school and at home.

Students explored the topic of *mindset* through specific guided lessons that focused on the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviors. In kindergarten, students were part of a discussion on personal space. Lastly, the psychologist and social worker discussed kindness; how to develop supportive and positive relationships with others, exploring other's perspectives in challenging situations and using self-management during social interactions.

Franklin Avenue

Similar to Lincoln, the school psychologist presented lessons within the classes on Growth Mindset. She also conducted lessons on *Zones of Regulations* and family diversity. The kindergarten classes participated in a series of lessons which focused on *Whole Body Listening*. Prior to Unity Day, Franklin Avenue had a school wide assembly to explain the purpose of the day, and students unanimously agreed to wear orange and sign an anti-bullying pledge. Then on Unity Day, the student body gathered in the hall and joined hands as Dr. Talleyrand, students and staff read the pledge together.

For Mental Health Awareness Day the school psychologist visited classes in grades 3-4 to discuss the meaning of Mental Health. Students were also guided in an age appropriate conversation about the topic which concluded with the identification of people in the school who were available to assist students should they ever need help.

On World Kindness Day, everyone wore Orange T-Shirts and encouraged students to perform *random acts of kindness* and *posts of kindness* on bulletin boards in the school hall. There was a *Kindness Jar* with positive affirmations for students to take and share for the month of November. Donation boxes were made available in classrooms if students and families wanted to donate to those in-need.

Pearl River Middle School

School psychologists and counselors formulated two after-school clubs for students. The 8-Bit club provides students with the chance to spend time with their fellow peers and to bring connectivity among all grade levels in a supervised unstructured environment where pragmatic skills are reinforced. The Mindfulness Club affords students in our fast-paced society the opportunity to practice paying attention to *the moment* with kindness and curiosity. Furthermore, students learn how to regulate emotions, reduce stress levels, as well as enhance overall focus within their environment and classroom settings.

The Middle School advisory program reaches every student and enables him or her to connect among grade levels to discuss various topics that affect mental health and awareness. Support staff push into classrooms to provide additional social and emotional support to all students within the building.

Pearl River High School

The school psychologists and social worker are actively involved with the new, eighth graders by introducing themselves and being a visible presence throughout the day. They push into Physical Education classes to discuss a variety of important topics including student wellness, self-regulation, stress management and awareness when to seek help for one's self and/or others.

Innovative Music Instruction

The Pearl River Music Teachers have been busy working with MusicFirst software this school year. MusicFirst Classroom is a comprehensive learning management system for K-12 music education. The integrated software can be used by students to compose, practice, write notation, sight-read, and much more! Since the MusicFirst Classroom software is cloud-based, students only need a device with Wifi to access this powerful music software right at their fingertips, whether in or outside of the classroom.

In the middle and high school, instrumental and vocal students are using MusicFirst software called PracticeFirst to practice their instruments at home and submit playing assessments to their teachers. The software is able to hear their performance and give students instant feedback on rhythmic accuracy, pitch accuracy, and intonation. This gives students important insights into the quality of their own practice. This powerful software alone has made MusicFirst a worthwhile investment for our performing ensembles.

In the elementary school, teachers are using MusicFirst Junior in the classroom to help supplement their curriculum with interactive, kid-friendly technology. MusicFirst Junior helps make learning music and creating music more hands on and fun.

The Music Department is excited to continue to roll out the use of MusicFirst throughout the year to help make music learning fun and successful for all of our students in Pearl River! For more information on the MusicFirst suite visit: https://www.musicfirst.com/

Pearl River School District

135 West Crooked Hill Road
Pearl River, NY 10965
845-620-3900
www.pearlriver.org

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Marco Pochintesta

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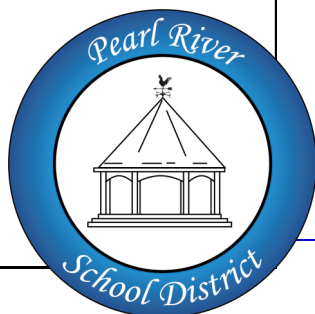Robert Davis, Vice President
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