



Message from the Superintendent

Marco Pochintesta

As we make our way through December and into the winter season, I want to take this opportunity to not only wish you all the very best for the holidays, but also share some of the highlights of the District's work this year and what we can expect in the months ahead.

We started our school year with a conscious decision to maintain a focus on critical thinking and creative problem solving while not losing sight of collaboration and communication, the other two, yet not lesser, of the 4C's. The focus on critical thinking and creative problem solving is not limited to a teaching and learning focus. Its applicability and portability to other aspects of our work provides a dual benefit to us. Keeping 21st Century skills at the forefront strengthens our work practices and serves as a valuable reminder that modeling and teaching the skills we want students to learn is critically important. Teachers have worked hard to incorporate opportunities for critical thinking and creative problem solving into lessons through challenging questions tied to real world issues and in support of curricular objectives. Teachers and administrators together have reflected on the nature of critical thinking and creative problem solving and what it "looks and sounds like" in a lesson.

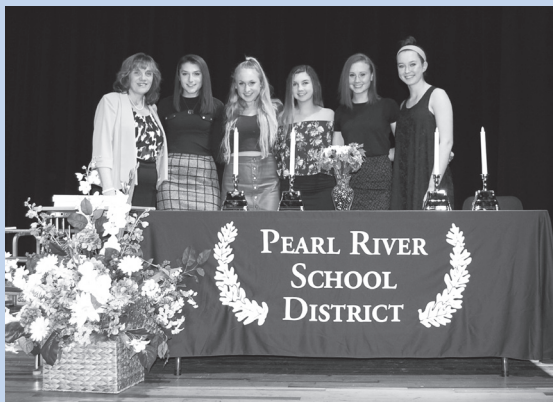
As this newsletter is being prepared, each of the schools is engaged in the presentations of their winter and holiday concerts. These are sure to be joyous celebrations of the season expressed through music and song. The Pearl River Middle School Concert has led the way with a beautiful program that reflected a variety of cultures.

Since last spring the District has sustained its efforts behind an initiative to identify and begin developing plans for capital projects that would address the work needed to improve our buildings and grounds. This major undertaking began in earnest with the completion of a NYS mandated building conditions survey last year. The survey completed by a contracted professional engineering company examines the conditions of the District's facilities and grounds. The complete report is available on our website under the "Facilities" link.

The capital projects initiative has been supported by a volunteer committee representative of parents, staff and community members. This committee has taken the project through its initial phases of discussion and exploration. There are many more steps to take in this critical process that has the potential to bring many enhancements and upgrades to learning environments while also addressing infrastructure needs that are essential to the efficient operation of our buildings. On the last page of this newsletter, you will find more information on the work of the Capital Improvement Committee.

I hope that the holiday season offers you many chances to enjoy time with family and friends. Additionally, I hope that this newsletter, through its information and images, gives you a sense of the good work that is happening in the classrooms, as well as our planning for the future.

National Honor Society



A total of 64 PRHS students were inducted into the National Honor Society this year. In addition to academic excellence, students must also demonstrate exemplary standards of character and leadership, and perform outstanding service to their school and community.

Pictured above are PRHS National Honor Society Advisor, Mrs. Marie Maher, and the 2016 NHS Officers.

DECEMBER 2016

INSIDE...

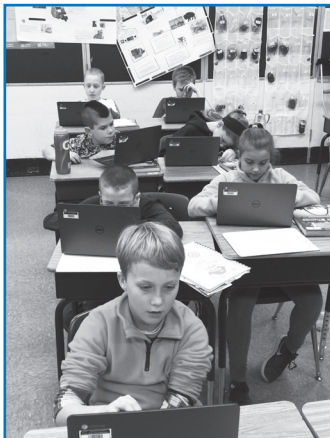
<i>Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction</i>	<i>page 2</i>
<i>College and Career Ready</i>	<i>page 3</i>
<i>High School New Entrance</i>	<i>page 3</i>
<i>Capital Improvement Committee</i>	<i>page 4</i>
<i>Facebook</i>	<i>page 4</i>

Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

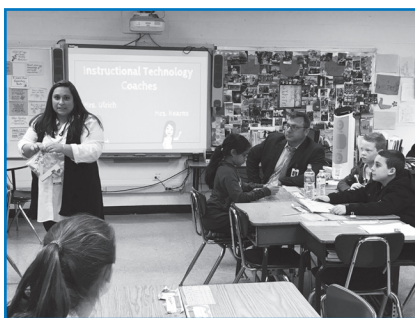
Instructional Technology Coaches Off to a Running Start

Thanks to the support of school administrators, Board of Education and the community, the District added two instructional technology coaches to support faculty in expanded technology integration. Jessica Kearns, formerly a PR Middle School ELA teacher, and Kim Ulrich, formerly a PR High School science teacher, have taken on these exciting roles. Working as a team, each has been integral in moving learning forward with both students and faculty.

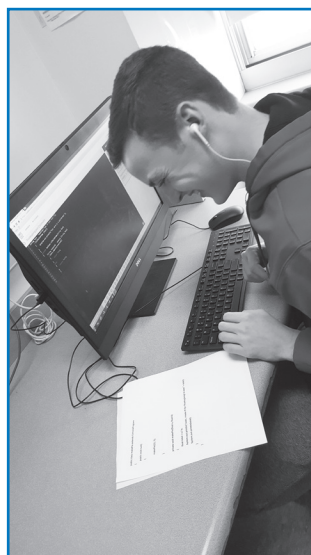
Coding begins in the primary grades with “unplugged coding” designed to build an understanding of coding logic. Students then transition to learning with Scratch Jr. and Scratch.



Teachers across the District are using Google Classroom as a collaborative tool for student work and teacher feedback. Students can access learning activities at school and home.



Recently, a Student Portal has been opened for grades 7-12. Students can now access schedules, grades, and attendance electronically through eSchool Data in the same manner as their parents.



PR High School -new STEM electives

During the 2016-17 school year, high school students are participating in two new electives. These include Introduction to Coding and Introduction to Computer Science.

Maker Space Opens at Evans Park Elementary

December 1st marked the grand opening of the Evans Park Maker Space. A joint effort of the Evans Park PTA and faculty, the space provides a variety of options for student exploration and innovation, including a green screen for video productions, woodworking, beginning robotics, a Lego wall, sewing, crafts and 3-D printing. Teaching assistant, Karen Kormusis, has taken on the role of facilitating student explorations and keeping the space organized.



Pearl River Continues Focus on 4 Cs

Beginning with opening remarks on Superintendent's Conference Day in September, faculty and staff were charged with making “critical thinking and creative problem solving overt” in both instruction and district work. This is part of a continuing focus on the 4 Cs - critical thinking, creative problem solving, communication and collaboration.

Critical thinking involves a process of defining a problem, investigation or challenge; research and investigation; reasoning, analysis and interpretation; generating solutions, testing, redesign; constructing an argument, communication of results; and reflection on the process and product.

In generating solutions, students, faculty and staff are encouraged to ‘think outside the box’. This includes using creative and divergent thinking, considering multiple perspectives, utilizing multiple resources, and generating multiple designs and/or solutions.

NYS and PRSD Focus on Preparing Grads to Be College and Career Ready

The work of transitioning to NYS Common Core Standards for Learning continues as we meet the expectations and challenges of new assessments at both the 3-8 and Regents levels. In most cases, we saw an increase in performance on the 2016 ELA and Math assessments.

NYS 3-8 Student Performance Snapshot Spring 2016	ELA - % of students at Levels 3 & 4	Math - % of students at Levels 3 & 4
Grade 3	70%	75%
Grade 4	73%	71%
Grade 5	54%	66%
Grade 6	49%	74%
Grade 7	59%	74%
Grade 8	63%	23%*

*non-accelerated students only

Student passing performance rates on Regents exams remain strong, as does the district graduation rate, with 97% of students graduating with a Regents diploma. 76% of those students graduated with an Advanced Regents diploma. 99% of the class of 2016 are pursuing secondary education.

In recent years, New York State has begun looking at a new college and career readiness measure based on the percent of students graduating with a score of 80% or better on a math Regents exam and 75% or better on the English Regents exam. This standard is based on research that indicates that students who do not meet this benchmark are more likely to require remediation at the college level. Again, Pearl River students exceeded the state average with 84% of our graduates meeting this benchmark.

PRHS Senior selected for All-Eastern Music Festival

Congratulations to PRHS Senior, Julia O'Sullivan, for being selected to perform at the prestigious All Eastern Music Festival. This is a significant achievement, as this is a highly competitive and very selective ensemble. According to Mrs. Shereen Way, PRHS teacher and choral director, "She's the star of Pearl River this year. It honestly couldn't have happened to a student more deserving. She works so hard, and she's so passionate about music."

Julia will be traveling to Atlantic City in April to perform with other top vocalists from 11 states. "This is quite an honor for the district. Congratulations to Julia and her family. I'd also like to thank Mrs. Way for her guidance and support," remarked Mr. Pochintesta, Superintendent of Schools.

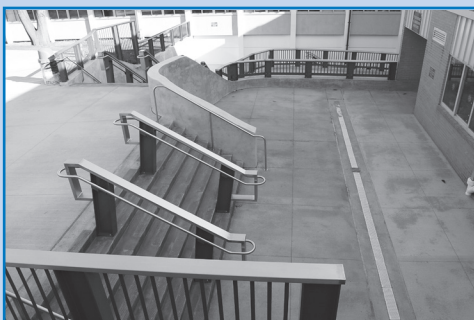


Pictured l-r: Julia O'Sullivan and PRHS music teacher, Mrs. Shereen Way

Pearl River High School New Entrance

Crumbling stairs at the flagpole entrance to the high school were replaced by a new façade for the front of the building.

Funded through the Capital Reserve, both the stair project and a new building level generator were installed during the summer, just in time for the start of school in September. The total cost of both projects was funded through the existing Capital Reserve.



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Capital Improvement Committee

Last spring, the Board of Education authorized the formation of a Capital Improvement Committee. This committee, made up of 16 administrators, staff, parents, and members of the public has worked over the past six months to develop a long-term, bond funded, upgrade proposal to the district's infrastructure for Board of Education consideration. The proposal includes new construction, renovations and repairs that would be evident at every level:

Elementary – new boilers and air handling systems, as well as some asphalt work and building security upgrades.

Middle School – expansion of the current gym and the construction of a three room music wing to add to the footprint of the building; renovation of existing music rooms to create new learning environments; additional building security is also included in the proposal.

High School – renovations to the existing music wing and auditorium, an upgraded science wing, and new locker rooms for both boys and girls are all included in the current proposal; new internal stairway to eliminate congestion between classes; library/media center renovation.

Districtwide – the installation of a new synthetic turf field on the current football field including a new press box, concession area, bathroom and lights; renovation of the current track and the tennis courts.

There will be much more information in the coming weeks regarding a capital improvement bond proposal as the Board of Education reviews the information.



Pearl River School District has a new Facebook page to share good news from throughout the district. Look for our gazebo logo and like our page!

Due to a lack of participation in previous years, PRSD is seeking an exemption from the Federal Breakfast Program. Please call 845-620-3833 with any questions or concerns.

Coding in Physical Education

Evans Park physical education teacher, Chris Woolgar, took on the challenge of an 'Hour of Code' and designed a logic of coding learning activity for students in physical education classes. Students had to figure out how to move across a grid to a target using directional cue cards. Part of the challenge - figuring it out without stepping on the grid.

