



August 2017

As I sit to write this note to our wonderful school community, I am struck by how much we have grown over the course of the past five years as well as by how much lies ahead as we continue to honor our commitments to growth, reflection, refinement, and being the best that we can be.

I am happy to report that the portions of initial MCAS data we have reviewed look promising, which reinforces that we made some good decisions in regard to the development of our plans to address the previous year's PARCC data. I am looking forward to the state releasing all of our data this fall so that we have a full sense of how our amazing young scholars have performed. At the same time, in critically reviewing our data--not just last year's, but all of it--we have discovered that, similar to trends across the district and country, our students of color, our students on individual education plans, and our economically disadvantaged students are performing at lower levels and slower rates than their peers.

This is a dilemma that we will be tackling head on this school year by implementing the "**Going Beyond Access**" framework, which means that--as a staff--we will commit to:

- Valuing impact on students over adult intentions,
- Ensuring that all of our students see themselves represented in our work and school, and
- Providing authentically relevant content and tasks for our students.

This framework comes from work that I presented as an opening keynote speaker for this past summer's International Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for Social Justice Symposium at University of Massachusetts, Boston. It is grounded in and inspired by the scholarship and research of Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum (president emerita of Spelman College and visiting scholar at Stanford), Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (Harvard University), and Dr. Christopher Emdin (Teachers College, Columbia University). It will also be featured in a book that I am co-authoring with Dr. Katie Novak on a UDL for Social Justice Handbook for Educators. We will also be working closely with CAST this year to provide more learning opportunities for our faculty in regard to implementing UDL frameworks specifically in Math and English, as well as with our Special Educators.

"Going Beyond Access" is the driving force and guiding principle for all of our work in the building this year:

- Our entire staff will be engaged in a year-long exploration of Glenn Singleton's second edition of *Courageous Conversations about Race* as a means of examining and confronting our unconscious, implicit biases.
- We are also instituting a new school-wide organizational system to address executive function in order to ensure that there is one universal system that will be utilized in all classes. You and our young scholars will only have to learn and keep track of one system rather than several.
- We have reframed our electives program as an "Intensives" program, meaning that these choice courses will now provide the opportunity for students to dive deeper into core academic content as well as visual and performing arts and physical education. The Intensives will be based on need as well as choice so that we can embed additional



supports and challenges within our schedule. We are also now providing one, 100-minute long block of core academic instruction in each core content area (Math, English, Social Studies, and Science) weekly in addition to the typical 50-minute offerings.

- The advisory program this year will revolve around a whole-school exploration of the core value of pride. Students and staff will explore their individual and collective identities as well as the impact that we have on each other. We will do this through utilizing Marshall Ganz's framework, which emphasizes: the story of self, the story of us, and the story of now. This exploration will be community-wide (families, students, and staff), and we will have three whole-school events to celebrate and share our work.
- We will also roll out a 6th and 7th grade Core Values Portfolio that supports students in thinking critically about themselves and the core values, as well as begins the journey of preparing them for the 8th grade portfolio. This will be a major focus for advisory in addition to incorporating more restorative practices during this time.
- As we continue to emphasize the importance of literacy and the love of reading, English teachers will spend the month of September establishing an independent reading program with our scholars. Students will be expected to read nightly for homework and will be provided time to read within the school day, including in advisory. We want all of our scholars to spend more time reading and have set 20 books per student per year as a minimum goal.
- Due to the success of our *Community Conversations on Identity and Diversity*, we will continue to partner with the Morse, Kennedy Longfellow, and Martin Luther King Jr. Schools to continue this work.
- I am proud of the work that we have done--and continue to do--to ensure that Putnam Ave. has a faculty that is more than 50% people of color and that we have always been a school that has been a welcoming environment that attracts an incredibly diverse workforce.

I also want you to hold us accountable and encourage your children to hold us accountable by regularly asking: Are we authentically going beyond access? Are we valuing impact over intentions? Are we ensuring that students see themselves in the work, and is the work authentically relevant for students? That said, be patient with us; these shifts are emblematic of the beginning of a journey and will take time to complete.

As usual, the teacher leaders, Ms. Chu-Sheriff, Dr. Farese, and I spent time with Dr. Larry Myatt as part of our annual summer leadership institute to support and ground our work as leaders this year. Dr. Myatt is a co-founder of Boston's Center for Collaborative Education, the founder of the Greater Boston Principal Residency Network, the founder of Fenway High School, and an education scholar and activist who has served as a consultant to Putnam Ave. since the first year of the school. Our entire building-based math department also spent some time this past month with Dr. Bob Moses, the founder of the nationally renowned Algebra Project, which was actually launched on the property on which our beautiful new school building was built.

I have realized that although our students upon arriving at our campus quickly develop a new identity as Putnam Ave. students that is not always the case for our parents and caregivers. So



in the spirit of addressing this, we will be hosting a few parent/caregiver networking events at off-site locations in the community, the purpose being to give parents and caregivers the opportunity to mix, mingle, get to know each other, and have some fun. More details to follow. Additionally, I want you to help hold us accountable by requesting a rolling conference so that you can meet and chat with your child's teaching team.

This year I am hoping that our Putnam Ave. Family Association will shift its focus to include finding and developing institutional partnerships and sponsorships for us. By this I mean reaching out to organizations in the community in the hopes that some of them will open their doors so that our students can visit and see their work as well as asking some of them to sponsor and support field trips for our students. It is my dream that we will be able to find institutional sponsors who can potentially defray the cost of the end of the year overnight trips.

Now, for a quick update about me: I completed the revision process with my editors on the book I wrote last summer. I will update you once I have a clearer sense of when it will be released. It is entitled, *Our Little Secret*, and documents my experience growing up as the son of a Roman Catholic priest. I also released a new hip-hop album entitled the "Grey Album," which is currently available via all digital music stores and all online streaming services. Below is a link to a press release about the album that can be found on LinkedIn as well as a link to the the music video for the first single, "Mom," which is also being utilized to promote mental health awareness.

Best regards,

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Press Release: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/grey-album-mirko-chardin>
Music/Mental Health Awareness Video: <https://youtu.be/62XqX4W94o0>

P.S. I look forward to seeing you at our annual Back to School Night/Community Cookout on Thursday, Sept. 14th from 5pm-7pm. We had over 400 folks in attendance last year, and we are hoping that this year's will be even bigger and better!