Dear families,

Over the past couple of months I’ve been thinking a lot about the purpose of school, and about how I would answer the question, “What is a quality education?”

I believe education historian Diane Ravitch was correct when she pointed out that “the single biggest problem in education is that no one agrees on why we educate. Faced with this lack of consensus, policy makers define good education as higher test scores.” I know all sides agree that education and schools are much more than standardized tests, so a more complex definition and narrative of what comprises exceptional educational practices needs to become more public and take up much more space in our policy and discourse.

At Arts & Letters we believe that the purpose of public education is to work in partnership with parents and communities to raise our young people. In the spirit of this partnership I am giving you a short task designed to help us think about what defines a quality education and about the purpose of schooling in our society. I’d like you to get a piece of paper and a pen and put the following question at the center of the sheet: “What do you want our children to be like as adults?” Take 7 to 10 minutes to think about and document answers to this prompt, filling the sheet with as many ideas as come to you. Please note that I have written “our children” so your answers should be for all our young ones, not just yours. This is an important distinction. As citizens of New York City and the world, we all have a stake in our children and the outcome of their upbringing.

Please take a photo of your filled-out sheet and send it to your child’s teacher/advisor or me (joreill@schools.nyc.gov). I am curious to see what you come up with. Having read a couple of international research studies about responses to this exercise I have a feeling that there will be a lot of common themes that emerge. There may also be some outliers. I am hopeful that this exchange will strengthen our partnership, and give us topics and language to take this discussion beyond the standardized test/teacher evaluation dominated quagmire that we are in.

The week before school, Arts & Letters’ teachers came back early for professional learning and Meg Crouch, Pia Micoli, and Kristen Shuart led everyone through this same assignment. At the back of this Parent Blast is the list that the faculty created in response to the same prompt. Please don’t look at it until you have completed your own. The list from the Arts & Letters faculty is incredibly optimistic, and if together we are able to raise our children to be the adults we imagine, our democracy will be strong and filled with powerful and intelligent people.

I hope to see you tomorrow at Curriculum Night from 6:00 to 7:30.

- John
CELEBRATIONS

8th: Lhakyi Ballantine- Compassion
7th: Scarlet Potts- Compassion
6th: Ashley Lalman- SHoW
5th: Kamar Carter- Confidence
Staff: Mr. DePasquale- Confidence

A&L HAPPENINGS

August A&L Staff Professional Development Institute
5th Grade Launches Advisory

Recess on the First Few Days