

# Reflections



FALL 2015

Published for the residents of the Croton-Harmon School District

## A Forward PATH



**A FORWARD PATH:** *The Croton-Harmon School District is proud to be a leader in education. The district's leaders are constantly examining student data to refine the ways we work toward fulfilling the district's vision and mission. This issue of Reflections highlights some of the ways Croton-Harmon is continuing to move forward.*

## High School Earns Reward School Status, AGAIN

For the third consecutive year, the New York State Education Department has named Croton-Harmon High School a Reward School. Recognized for its commitment to academic excellence, CHHS was given this designation based on high performances on relevant standardized mathematics and English assessments, as well as a high graduation rate.

In a letter to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Edward R. Fuhrman Jr., NYSED Assistant Commissioner Ira Schwartz wrote, "We applaud your efforts and look forward to assisting your district in having all of its students achieve college and career-ready standards."

"I am proud of our students and teachers for continuing to work hard for academic success," said Principal Alan Capasso. "We look forward to another year of growth and learning at Croton-Harmon High School."

## TECH-SAVVY STUDENTS Delve Inside Computers

There's no doubt that Croton-Harmon High School students are extremely savvy computer users, but the new Computer Science I and II courses offered for the first time this year are allowing them to step back and examine the "hows" and "whys" when it comes to the technology they are used to using every day.

"I am really interested in the hardware and software of a computer," said sophomore Jacob Roth. "I think it's something really interesting to get into."

Computer Science I, which was introduced in the fall, familiarizes students with the physical makeup of a computer and the software associated with it, as well as delves into topics including systems architecture, social and ethical issues related to technology, security and privacy issues, algorithm development, interface

design and an introduction to code development.

"The students thought they knew a lot about computers, but they actually just know how to use them," said teacher Soyoung Lim. "They are learning that computers only understand binary numbers and what happens when they click 'send' on an email. They have had lots of 'aha' moments and were very amazed."

Computer Science II will expand on programming and emphasize efficient algorithm development using Java, which will prepare students to take AP Computer Science.

For more about the computer science courses, view the video on the district website, [www.chufsd.org](http://www.chufsd.org).



For more news about our schools, check out the district homepage at [www.croton-harmonschools.org](http://www.croton-harmonschools.org).

## Standards-Based Report Cards Provide Comprehensive Feedback

Effective this school year, all students at Pierre Van Cortlandt Middle School will now be evaluated using a standards-based grading system.

The grading change was implemented following the recommendations of a committee comprised of approximately 25 district educators last year.

“Our committee spent a great deal of time researching the existing practices and debating different grading methods,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Deborah

O’Connell. “We also took into consideration how our schools’ practices aligned with our district mission and educational philosophies.”

“It provides a comprehensive picture of a student’s strengths and growth areas.”

The new practice represents a change from the letter grade system used in grades seven and eight in the past (fifth- and sixth-grade students previously used a standards-based system).

Standards-based grading has also been in practice at Carrie E. Tompkins Elementary School for several years.

The system offers parents more feedback on their children’s education and progress and provides a more complete picture of how the child is progressing in various areas by breaking down each subject area or course into specific elements of learning.

“It provides a comprehensive picture of a student’s strengths and growth areas,” said Dr. O’Connell.

## Metacognition: Promoting Independent Learning

The district’s curriculum coordinators, representing grades K-12, spoke in depth over the summer about what the term “metacognition” will mean in our schools.

“The primary goal of metacognition is to encourage independent learners and to provide students with a chance to evaluate how they learn,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Deborah O’Connell.



Superintendent of Schools Dr. Edward Fuhrman holds up a road map that visually represents the district's definition of metacognition.

**Me-ta-cog-ni-tion**  
(noun)

The act of listening to the voice in your mind as you wonder, question and do. Respond to that voice by considering your emotions, making adjustments and connections, and evaluating where you are in your journey to a goal.

## Individualized Support Through FSP

The Flexible Support Program was introduced this year to provide individualized support to students, grades 7-12, experiencing social/emotional and/or attendance issues that interfere with school performance.

The program is intended to be a resource to students who require a supportive and nurturing environment as they work to transition back to school from a therapeutic placement, deal with anxiety related to personal or family issues, return to school after an absence due to medical needs, and/or grapple with specific stressors related to the school setting.

Students spend as much time as needed in the program on any given day with the goal of following their academic schedule to the greatest extent possible.

Staffed by special education teachers, a psychologist and an aide, the program is available to both classified and non-

classified students. Each student in the program has a specific support plan that is developed and monitored regularly.

“Since the program opened its doors in September, the feedback from parents, students and staff has been very positive,” said Director of Pupil Personnel Karen Gatto. While there is a referral process for the program, there have actually been occasions when students have sought the support independently. The Flexible Support Program is housed in the same location as the Traditional and Alternative Program (TAP).

TAP has been in place for 18 years to assist students with completing Regents-level courses in a special class format that promotes academic success and the meeting of graduation requirements. It currently provides services to more than 20 students.

“All of the courses within the TAP



program have a small class setting in order to provide direct instruction to students in specific academic areas,” said teacher Sam Occhipinti. “The teacher/student relationship in TAP classes is unique and a cornerstone of the program.”

Added Dr. Deborah O’Connell, “We are grateful that our Board of Education remains committed to the continuum of services available at Croton and has supported the addition of the Flexible Support Program to that continuum.”

## WRITING PILOT AT CET OFFERS INCREASED RIGOR

Students in grades 2-4 at Carrie E. Tompkins Elementary School are piloting two new writing units this year, provided by the program WriteSteps.

“The writing curriculum has always been left up to the teacher and has always been vague,” said Principal Kelly Maloney. “We were looking for something of substance.”

After reviewing the WriteSteps program through a free trial last year, second- through fourth-grade teachers decided to implement two of the units,

also provided free of charge, this year.

“It’s really teaching a prescribed way of writing; for example, how one uses transitional words,” said Maloney.

The program has specific guides, all aligned with the Common Core, and provides more rigor in guiding a student through the writing process. In addition, WriteSteps offers additional grammar support, which had only been taught in the context of read-alouds or through writing in the past.



“WriteSteps also provides samples of student work, so a teacher can show the samples and have students provide critical feedback,” said Maloney. “This change really came from the teachers. They have been feeling for years that we need something consistent, something explicit.”

Dr. Edward R. Fuhrman, Jr., Superintendent

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# NEW STAFFERS Embrace DISTRICT VISION

Six new educators were welcomed into the district this year, each bringing enthusiasm and a shared vision for their careers in Croton-Harmon: eighth- and 11th-grade social studies teacher John Bohuniek, MS/HS student assistance counselor Kayla Martin, school psychologist Victoria McGuire, high school guidance counselor Kirby Mosenthal, fifth-grade art teacher and high school photography teacher Chase Stevens, and special education teacher David Xavier.

“They are reflective and have a great grasp of looking at the whole child and the importance of social-emotional learning,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Deborah O’Connell.

Looking forward, the district has six educators who are eligible for tenure this year: special education teacher Ryan Callahan, school psychologist Lauren Fitzgerald, science teacher Noah Gallagher, English teacher Jacquiline Johnson, school psychologist Glenn Klugherz and English teacher Maryann Zabbia.



## EDUCATIONAL LEADERS REVIEW ASSESSMENTS, RUBRICS

The district’s administrators met with several department leaders from each grade level over the summer to discuss aligning assessments and rubrics with student learning.

Pierre Van Cortlandt Middle School English Department Coordinator Maryann Zabbia said faculty members have been working on aligning their curricula to the Common Core standards.

“We’re assessing and grading students on these standards [and] we’re creating rubrics for children so they can see what it means to be proficient,” Zabbia said. “Now that we have the new standards-based report card, we have to align our assessments and tests to it.”

Kelly Ingraham-Friedman, support services curriculum coordinator for grades 9-12, said working with the administration and other curriculum coordinators throughout the district has been fulfilling.

“My work focuses on adapting the Common Core standards and the district’s mission and vision to meet our students’ needs and the needs of teachers,” she said.

