



# From Communication to Coherence: Leading Change

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From Communication to Coherence:  
Leading Change

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)  
Capstone

Submitted by

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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education Leadership

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## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Dedication .....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Acknowledgements .....</b>   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Abstract.....</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>   | <b>8</b>  |
| Background .....  | 9         |
| The Challenge .....   | 14        |
| Preview of Findings .....   | 14        |
| <b>Research of Knowledge for Action .....</b>   | <b>15</b> |
| Coherence Making.....   | 19        |
| Leading Change.....   | 24        |
| <i>Leveraging Stories to Empower Change.....</i>  | <i>26</i> |
| <b>Theory of Action .....</b>   | <b>27</b> |
| <b>The Strategic Project .....</b>  | <b>28</b> |
| Description .....   | 29        |
| <i>Strand 1: Articulating the Vision.....</i>   | <i>29</i> |
| <i>Strand 2: Engaging Employees .....</i>   | <i>33</i> |
| <i>Strand 3: Integrating the Vision.....</i>  | <i>36</i> |
| <i>Strand 4: Defining the Good .....</i>  | <i>37</i> |
| <i>Strand 5: Responding to Crisis .....</i>   | <i>40</i> |
| <i>Strand 6: Pulling It All Together .....</i>  | <i>42</i> |
| Evidence to Date.....   | 43        |
| <i>Town Hall Survey .....</i>   | <i>44</i> |
| <i>Town Hall Attendance .....</i>   | <i>46</i> |
| <i>Beliefs in Action.....</i>   | <i>46</i> |
| <i>An Exercise in Coherence Making .....</i>  | <i>47</i> |
| Analysis .....  | 48        |
| <i>Challenge 1: Balancing Process and Progress in Creating Shared Direction .....</i>     | <i>51</i> |
| <i>Challenge 2: The Message, Messenger, Context, and Variability.....</i>                 | <i>52</i> |
| <i>Challenge 3: Articulating Beliefs and Crafting Meaning Together .....</i>              | <i>54</i> |
| <i>Challenge 4: Balancing quantity and quality engagement .....</i>                       | <i>54</i> |
| <i>Challenge 5: Coherence Making Happens in the Doing of the Work .....</i>               | <i>56</i> |
| <b>Implications.....</b>  | <b>57</b> |
| Implications for Self.....  | 58        |
| <i>Implication #1: A Leader Must Be Known .....</i>                                       | <i>58</i> |
| <i>Implication #2: Leadership Is a Relationship, Not a Transaction.....</i>               | <i>60</i> |
| Implications for Site.....  | 62        |
| <i>Implication #3: Continue Building Opportunities for Coherence Making .....</i>         | <i>62</i> |
| <i>Implication #4: Invest in Additional Messengers Who Can Carry the Vision .....</i>     | <i>64</i> |
| <i>Implication #5: Establish Formal Leadership to Advance Equity.....</i>                 | <i>65</i> |
| <i>Implication #6: Tailor Messages and Opportunities to the Local Context .....</i>       | <i>65</i> |
| <i>Implication #7: Cultivate the Choir.....</i>   | <i>66</i> |
| <i>Implication #8: Make Strategic Planning and Alignment Part of Routine Process.....</i> | <i>67</i> |
| Implications for Sector .....   | 68        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <i>Implication #9: Normalize Incoherence as a Natural Part of Any Change Process .....</i> | <i>68</i>  |
| <i>Implication #10: Give People Problems, Not Solutions .....</i>                          | <i>69</i>  |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>  | <b>71</b>  |
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>  | <b>75</b>  |
| <b>Appendices.....</b>   | <b>79</b>  |
| <i>Appendix A: McKinsey &amp; Company Influence Model Graphic .....</i>                    | <i>80</i>  |
| <i>Appendix B: Welcome back to school letter.....</i>                                      | <i>81</i>  |
| <i>Appendix C: Communicating the Vision Presentation.....</i>                              | <i>83</i>  |
| <i>Appendix D: Central Town Hall Format and Plan .....</i>                                 | <i>93</i>  |
| <i>Appendix E: The Framework for Great Schools .....</i>                                   | <i>96</i>  |
| <i>Appendix F: myDOE Welcome Session Revised Deck.....</i>                                 | <i>97</i>  |
| <i>Appendix G: Discipline Code Communication .....</i>                                     | <i>108</i> |
| <i>Appendix H: Diversity and Inclusion Letter from the Chancellor.....</i>                 | <i>110</i> |
| <i>Appendix I: Renewal School Program Sample Communications .....</i>                      | <i>113</i> |
| <i>Appendix J: Central Town Hall Survey Results .....</i>                                  | <i>115</i> |
| <i>Appendix K: District Self-Assessment .....</i>  | <i>120</i> |

## Dedication

To **Mom and Dad**. Some parents tell their children they can be anything they want to be. My parents never – not even once – batted an eyelash at any of my dreams, no matter how big, no matter how bold, no matter how outlandish. Student council? Why not! Student body president? Sounds fun! High school principal? Okay! Harvard? Go for it! And when I was on campus for interviews, full of my own self-doubt, I asked my dad what size sweatshirt he wanted from Harvard—his response said it all: “Don’t get me anything, I’ll pick out my own when I come next year to visit you.” That real, unconditional love and unending belief in my potential is at the core of who I am and the leader I have become. Thank you. I love you.

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## **Abstract**

This capstone chronicles the task of internal communication in service of coherence making as part of a comprehensive change underway within the New York City Department of Education. School district leaders everywhere face the difficult task of building and maintaining the focus and energy of their employees in spite of myriad external distractions. Inevitably, change means disrupting the existing status quo, necessitating the need to reach a new state of equilibrium, or coherence. This process is called coherence making. Working in the most complex school system in America, the author examines strategies for coherence making. The author explores ways in which a leader can create opportunities for employees to engage in coherence making.

Charged with advancing the vision summarized by the slogan “Equity and Excellence for All,” the author explores ways in which leaders might engage stakeholders in the sense-making necessary to achieve coherence. Within the framework of the capstone, equity means providing children in every part of the city with uniformly high expectations alongside the unique supports and resources necessary for each child to achieve those expectations. Under this definition, equity is not the same as equality, and access alone is insufficient.

To assist in the process of coherence making, valuable data about how employees perceive the organizational vision and how individual work aligns to the vision was obtained by conducting a series of employee town halls, targeted messaging, and additional engagement opportunities. The tactics employed during

the project put into practice communications strategies aimed at connecting employees to the vision at the emotional as well as the intellectual level.

The author outlines several leadership challenges and lessons learned. Leadership lessons include (1) building trust by becoming known, (2) viewing leadership as reciprocal, rather than transactional, (3) creating opportunities for stakeholders to create coherence, (4) investing in additional leaders, (5) dedicating time to leadership priorities, (6) tailoring messages to the local context, (7) developing champions for the work, (8) making strategic planning part of the work, (9) normalizing incoherence as a natural part of the change process, and (10) engaging people in cooperative problem solving, rather than solution execution.



## **Introduction**

Employees at the New York City Department of Education have experienced substantial change over the last two decades. The challenge before the present administration is that of guiding employees through the change process, and in doing so, crafting a new organizational coherence aligned with the Chancellor's vision and priorities. This task is particularly challenging because many still compare the present administration to the previous leadership, which had led the district for nearly twelve years.

One of every seven children in the United States is enrolled in a large urban district as identified by the Council of Great City Schools (Johnson, Marietta, Higgins, Mapp, & Grossman, 2015). Of these, 1.1 million are enrolled in the New York City public schools through the Department of Education ("NYC DOE"). The NYC DOE is the largest school district in the country, by orders of magnitude. The challenge of ensuring that all students have access to an excellent education is daunting in any system, especially so in a system as vast as the NYC DOE. The system is affected by great variability across geographic, demographic, and political divides.

Mayor Bill de Blasio took office January 1, 2014, the same day his appointee Carmen Fariña became Schools Chancellor. Fariña is now entering her third full school year at the helm of the system, which employs more than 145,000 to serve more than 1.1 million students. The hallmark of Mayor de Blasio's education platform was the expansion of Pre-K to the entire city. Over the course of his first two years in office, the NYC DOE fulfilled the promise, extending from approximately 20,000 full-day, free Pre-K seats to more than 80,000—enough to

ensure every 4-year-old in the city is enrolled somewhere. Alongside the successful rollout of this signature initiative, the administration has put forward a set of initiatives aimed at the broader vision now defined as *Equity and Excellence for All*. Simultaneously, the NYC DOE went through significant organizational restructuring: replacing a previous school support structure with a geographically aligned support structure and giving responsibility and authority for school supervision to community superintendents.

In the spring of 2016, a second leadership reorganization was also taking place within the NYC DOE. Chief of Staff Ursulina Ramirez became Chief Operating Officer in addition to her role as Chief of Staff. She then hired two deputies to assist her and folded a previously separate office of strategy and policy into the newly reorganized office of the chancellor. Simultaneously, a Director of Communications position was created and filled. The position I entered as a doctoral resident was that of Special Assistant to the Chancellor, focused on internal communications.

## **Background**

Before my entry, work had taken place to develop a communications framework that would encapsulate the work of this administration.

This work was, in part, in an effort to counter criticism of the administration's perceived lack of vision. Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña took control of the city's schools following twelve years with Mayor Michael Bloomberg and his appointees in charge. Joel Klein was the first, and most well-known, chancellor of the Bloomberg administration. Over the course of the

Bloomberg/Klein era, a clear brand (to use a marketing term) emerged. Known as “Children First,” the theory of change under Joel Klein’s leadership of the DOE relied on the consolidation of authority within the system, which had consisted of more than 30 individual districts with decision-making authority entrusted to more than 30 locally elected community boards. Under mayoral control, decision-making authority centered on the Schools Chancellor. The reform strategy also included providing parents with school choice through the aggressive closing of poorly performing schools and the rapid expansion of charter schools. Additionally, during the second half of the Klein administration, principal autonomy emerged as core to the theory of change. Principal autonomy delegated nearly all authority to the hands of the local school leader—from decisions about professional development and curriculum, to budget and staffing—provided that the school leader was able to meet benchmarks of performance (O’Day, Bitter, & Gomez, 2011). At the conclusion of Mayor Bloomberg’s three terms in office, “Children First” was an iconic brand known throughout the city and across the nation.

An important note for the reader to understand is that the strategies articulated so clearly by the end of the Bloomberg administration were much more opaque at the beginning. Indeed, at the beginning, the plan involved mayoral control as the central platform—abolishing the local school boards and aligning the system under a mayor-appointed schools Chancellor. The initiatives that emerged later came gradually and, as documented, evolved over time. When viewed only from the rear view mirror, the reforms seem much more coherent than they were. To compare the present administration during year three to the previous

administration during year twelve was commonplace. The enormous shadow of the previous administration loomed large and complicated de Blasio and Farina's task of articulating their vision for the future and catalyzing support.

Additionally, the transition from campaigning to governing came with the challenge of translating ideas into action. By the very nature of democratic republic forms of governance, change is constant—and cyclical.

Internal focus groups indicated that one of the primary ways people both inside and outside the organization described the work of the new administration was in contrast with the Klein era administration. As the work advanced over the summer months, the leadership team settled collectively on the phrase "Equity and Excellence for All" and "Every child has one shot at an excellent education, and it is up to us to make sure they get it." The message framework goes on to use language that helps articulate what the department does and why it does so. In addition to this pitch, the team developed three categories of work within the vision under which all work of the department can be described. These are: (1) academic excellence, (2) student and community support, and (3) innovation.

In many respects, this articulation of the vision, to use a term from leadership, is the act of making the implicit explicit. That is to say that the Chancellor and her assembled leadership team had a vision from day one that included key strategic levers for systemic change and district improvement. During an interview with the Chancellor about her vision and strategic priorities in October, she articulated three key levers for change (Fariña, 2016):

1. leadership,

2. professional development and curriculum, and
3. collaboration.

In part, the Chancellor defines the task of bringing equity and excellence to the city by bringing unified expectations, support, and accountability to the city's schools. She describes the system prior to mayoral control as dozens of separate systems, each with varying degrees of expectations, support, and accountability. Indeed, the role of the Chancellor changed dramatically to that of chief executive with enormous power to set direction for the entire system. In her view, the system had evolved through the use of these new powers under the previous mayoral administration but had not yet realized the promise of that arrangement in terms of setting uniform expectations, supports, and interventions across the city. In this respect, the Chancellor saw herself as the first with a mission to align comprehensively the city's education system—through equity and excellence.

The idea that NYC DOE cannot accept pockets of excellence across the city and, by inference, pockets of mediocrity or outright poor performance is an explicit belief in her theory of action. She believed that, to affect change citywide, she needed to invest in leadership at both the superintendent and principal levels, invest in teacher training and curriculum, and encourage and, in some cases, demand collaboration. These ideas took form in a dramatic restructuring of the role of the superintendent and a reorganization of the apparatus designed to provide school support. This reorganization included the creation of the borough field support centers, increased qualification requirements for superintendents and principals, a new collaboration program called Showcase Schools which creates

apparatus to support and overhaul the lowest performing schools—known as renewal schools—and reestablishing a robust curriculum development office at central. These moves are what Wagner and Kegan call “calculated political risks” or big bets “that a certain theory of change and set of aligned strategies will improve student achievement” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 15).

While there are a host of other practical and strategic policy initiatives underway, these were the initial signals that outlined the Chancellor’s theory of action. Fullan argues that these initial steps taken by the Chancellor are “unsettling processes [that] provide the best route to greater all-around coherence” (2014, p. 116). These moves can also be called a means of disturbing the equilibrium in service of positive change.

Of note, the concept of equity and excellence for all is apparent in the way the Chancellor was thinking about the need to create excellence across the city—not just in pockets. With this perspective, the task of communicating the vision is not the job of creating something anew, but rather the process of making the underlying implicit vision explicit. It is the means of illuminating the way forward.

Additionally, whereas Bloomberg and Klein resonated with stakeholders outside the traditional education system with their message of autonomy, choice, and accountability, de Blasio and Fariña resonate with stakeholders inside the system with their message of equity, excellence, and multiple measures of quality. An important aspect of the work of coherence making is to assist internal stakeholders, especially those at central offices, in making sense of the change from one administration to the next.

## **The Challenge**

Through interviews with current central employees, principals, superintendents, and former DOE employees in high-ranking positions, I affirmed previous insight that the present administration (de Blasio/Fariña) is often described in contrast with the prior administration (Bloomberg/Klein).

Moreover, for new and existing employees the task ahead was that of coherence making, a concept discussed more fully in the next section. How might we engage employees in a way that allows them to develop an understanding of the present administration's vision for the DOE? How might we encourage these same employees to understand and connect their daily work to the broader vision?

## **Preview of Findings**

Over the course of the strategic project, a number of lessons emerged. These include lessons for leaders about how to approach the task of leading, becoming known to stakeholders, and building trust. Discussion about the relationship between individual sense-making coherence and operational coherence leads to a new understanding of their interconnectedness. The implications section also provides a series of recommendations for next steps in the process. A key lesson learned is the benefit of normalizing the concept of incoherence as part of a change process. This serves to accelerate the process of creating coherence anew. Stakeholders are also assisted in their journey through the cognitive dissonance

created by the unsettling nature of change. Altogether, these lessons provide important insight for leaders charged with affecting change.

***“When large numbers of people have a deeply understood sense of what needs to be done—and see their part in achieving that purpose—coherence emerges and powerful things happen.”***

*–Coherence (Fullan & Quinn, 2016)*

## **Research of Knowledge for Action**

How might we use communication to enable coherence making? The task of changing human behavior is not new, yet it remains perplexing. Nearly 400 years ago, Pascal succinctly identified some of the complexities associated with creating a mindset change in another person:

When we wish to correct with advantage, and to show another that he errs, we must notice from what side he views the matter, for on that side it is usually true, and admit that truth to him, but reveal to him the side on which it is false. He is satisfied with that, for he sees that he was not mistaken, and that he only failed to see all sides. Now, no one is offended at not seeing everything; but one does not like to be mistaken, and that perhaps arises from the fact that man naturally cannot see everything, and that naturally he cannot err in the side he looks at, since the perceptions of our senses are always true. (Pascal, 1972, p. 5)



Pascal argues that in order to effect change, one must first acknowledge that the existing or old way was correct. After this acknowledgement, he contends, one must help individuals to see how a new way of being—the proposed change—is also correct, from a new point of view. At the core of his argument is the need to validate existing views and ways of being, rather than to criticize them outright or, worse, call them out as invalid.

The herculean task of mobilizing a system toward a vision is made ever more arduous given the sheer magnitude, scale and scope of the system in New York City, which is one of the most diverse in the world and vast in terms of geography, race, and class. I embarked on my work as a doctoral resident with this task central in my mind. How might the New York City Department of Education translate politics and policy into meaningful change for students in classrooms? Revisiting this initial question from the leverage point of internal communications, I reached a new question. How might leaders use communications strategies to build coherence within the central office?

I bound my strategic project focused on the central office staff, knowing that much of my work also has a dual focus on school staff. The NYC DOE employs more than 145,000 people, of which approximately 5,000 are central employees. I see the central employees as a key leverage point from which to begin because of their unique role in supporting the citywide change process and their potential role in the task of coherence making.

I divide my research of knowledge for action (RKA) into two sections. The first looks at what must be accomplished in terms of coherence making, or the

“what” of the matter. The second explores how I might go about accomplishing this utilizing strategy for leading change. Ultimately, both the “what” and the “how,” as I am defining them, are in service of amplifying and enacting the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All.”

Creating coherence is the focus of my project. Much literature exists about the importance of coherence in school district leadership and district improvement, including some research on what it takes to achieve coherence. Michael Fullan explains that coherence is “a shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work in the minds and actions individually and especially collectively.” He goes on to say coherence is not structure, alignment, or strategy (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, pp. 1-2). Refining the definition further, Andrés Alonso argues that there are at least two dimensions to coherence. The first, he posits, is about sense-making, while the second has to do with operational tasks. Sense-making as one dimension of coherence can be thought of as the ability of individual employees to understand, articulate, and connect with the organizational vision. Operational and task coherence is the extent to which the organization is organized to accomplish the vision. The first is concerned with individuals; the second is concerned with the system at large (Alonso, 2017).

I am approaching the task of coherence making through the lens of communications. How might we take the administration’s implicit theory of action and implicit set of strategies and make them explicit at the individual level? One of the assumptions that I have made is that we can achieve this explicit sense-making in a way that allows central employees to understand, own, align, and advance the

work of the Chancellor and the Mayor. Furthermore, if we can successfully assist employees in the process of individual coherence making, then we will empower employees at all levels in the department to make decisions that align with the vision. Using Dr. Alonso's two dimensions of coherence as the theoretical foundation of my argument, I suggest that individual coherence making can be leveraged later in the process of organizational coherence making. The choice to begin with a focus on the former and not the latter may be worth future consideration.

An important part of the task of educational leadership is honing in on key drivers and key actions. Another crucial component is assisting employees in understanding them in a way that builds individual coherence and ultimately leads to collective and organizational coherence. The organization must outline clearly its "what, why, and how": its set of strategies, priorities, policies, and the direction in which it intends to move the district. Last but not least, a core piece of coherence making is identifying the organization's intended outcomes for its strategic direction. What should the organization look for in terms of throughputs—also known as interim or implementation measures? What should it look for in terms of outputs, or evidence of success? To use Fullan's words, "There is only one way to achieve greater coherence, and that is through purposeful action and interaction, working on capacity, clarity, precision of practice, transparency, monitoring of progress, and continuous correction" (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 2).

The process of coherence making is necessary in any change process. Fullan acknowledges that disarray is to be expected as a normal part of any change process. He states: "Leadership is difficult in a culture of change because

disequilibrium is common (and valuable, provided that patterns of coherence can be fostered)” (Fullan & Ballew, 2004, p. 166).

Additional literature suggests this need for coherence making is common across the private sector as well. Carucci (2016) articulates the challenge as a function of strategic leadership: “Most executives mistakenly assume that repeated explanations through dense PowerPoint presentations are what increases understanding and ownership of strategy. To the contrary, people’s depth of commitment increases when they, not their leader, are talking. Flawed assumptions are surfaced and replaced with shared understanding, ideas are refined, and ownership for success spreads.”

### **Coherence Making**

A quote attributed to Nelson Mandela contends: "Action without vision is only passing time, vision without action is merely day dreaming, but vision with action can change the world." Applied within the context of education leadership, the vision is necessary to provide for alignment of the actions underway. Likewise, if the vision were not supported by demonstrable actions intended to realize the aspiration it would fall flat. Ensuring alignment between action and the values and aspirations articulated in the vision is essential. Helping employees make sense of this connection is one of the tasks of coherence making.

Leaders often use the term “buy in” to describe the process of gaining support for priorities. Yet buy in alone is insufficient, and may even be counter-

productive (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 68). Instead, scholars suggest replacing the aim of buy in with ongoing discussion and debate in service of coherence *making*. Failure to do so, they suggest, leads to compliance and cynicism rather than true ownership of the vision (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 69).

The term “coherence” is used to describe the way in which an organization is aligned. Fullan argues: “The only coherence that counts is not what is on paper nor what top management can articulate, but what is in the minds and hearts of members of the organization” (Fullan, 2014, p. 114). Others define coherence “as a process, which involves schools and school district central offices working together to craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools’ own goals and strategies” (Honig & Hatch, 2004, p. 16). This second definition points to what Alonso articulates as operational coherence. It is recognition that hearts and minds alone does not necessarily change systems and structures. Alonso argues that “the only coherence that matters is whether actions are in line with purpose and consistent with a vision” (Alonso, 2017).

Change processes inevitably require coherence making as a result of the inherent messiness of change. Fullan (2014) argues that leaders, in order to effect change, must intentionally upset the status quo, which leads to incoherence and disequilibrium. Leading such a process can be tenuous. According to Fullan, there are five key aspects of leadership that must be accounted for to successfully lead a positive change process (Fullan, 2014, p. 4). These aspects are:

1. moral purpose,
2. understanding change,

3. relationship building,
4. knowledge creation and sharing, and
5. coherence making.

Fullan puts coherence making fifth not because it is a tight linear process, but because any change brings with it the need for coherence making.

Coherence is not an end but, rather, a cyclical process in a healthy organization. Fullan argues that sustained coherence is the enemy of progress and the symptom of a dying organization. Tushman and O'Reilly (1997) posit the dual need for maximizing operational output—what they call *exploit*—while simultaneously, and separately, needing to innovate—what they call *explore*. They warn that sustained exploitation of a given operational strategy over time inevitably leads to decline. Therefore, coherence must not be seen as an end but as a necessary and recurring process in an organization evolving over time. Fullan (2014) points out “effective leaders tolerate enough ambiguity to keep the creative juices flowing, but along the way (once they and the group know enough), they seek coherence. Coherence making is a perennial pursuit.”

Ultimately, creating coherence is one of the fundamental tasks of leadership. Wagner and Kegan (2006) describe a concept similar to Fullan's coherence as a necessary component of leadership:

To fashion an organization that can generate the knowledge to teach all students new skills, leaders must confront and support individuals from all levels of the system in ways that enable deep understanding of the reasons for this challenge. Leaders must then find ways for these individuals to

construct solutions to their problems of practice. (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 15)

Some experts advocate for beginning with the individual sense making aspect of achieving coherence. Prior to becoming Chancellor, Carmen Fariña and her colleague Laura Kotch wrote about the role of vision and communication in creating coherence as a task of leadership. They argue:

Formulating a vision and communicating it clearly and understandably provides a framework for making commonsense decisions, large and small. While every member of the community may not always agree, everyone understands that there is a plan of action that is thoughtful, cohesive, and aligned with the schools needs and mission. (Fariña & Kotch, 2008, p. 3)

Within the frame of coherence making, it is the understanding, cohesion, and alignment that point to both individual sense making and operational alignment. Another way the authors describe the task of leadership is “to develop a shared language, a common vision, and the ability... [for staff] ... to make independent decisions that align with your vision and promote increased student achievement” (Fariña & Kotch, 2008, p. 3). These leadership tasks are about coherence making and require a unique set of leadership practices.

Still others argue that coherence must focus first on operational coherence. Moore (1995) lays out his argument for improving managerial performance in the public sector. He posits that “large institutional reform does not do away with managers; it simply redefines their positions and responsibilities. What the managers do with their new positions will often decisively affect how successful the

institutional reform turns out to be” (Moore, 1995, p. 4). Moore focuses almost entirely on operational coherence as the primary driver of public sector strategy.

The relationship between individual sense-making and operational coherence is worthy of further research and consideration. In one respect, it might be argued that individual sense-making is a necessary component in order to reach operational coherence. The argument that a certain number of individuals must have a clear grasp of the vision and strategy in order to execute the decisions necessary to generate operational coherence is logical, especially in large organizations. Another view is that operational coherence is necessary to achieve ultimate individual sense making coherence. In this frame, the organization must be organized in such a way that individuals can experience the vision and strategy, thus motivating themselves to engage in individual sense making. Both of these views may be true and even interrelated. In addition, in the intricacies of real-world situations, sense making is much more complex than a simple, linear path sketched out by theory. Therefore, leaders must make informed decisions in each case about where, when, and how to begin the change process. There may not be one best solution for every context.

One of the aspects of sustained coherence making is the ability of leaders to remain focused on their vision and strategy (Moore, 1995). In order to have ample time to engage in strategic work, leaders must be able to effectively delegate the tasks of responding to routine, but important, crises and critical surprises. Yet, in referring to delegation and planning, Moore argues, “these devices [delegation and planning] are rarely successful in themselves” (Moore, 1995, p. 90). Rather, “[t]o



stay focused on the important, then, managers need broad, consistent statements of purpose—a ready touchstone for examining their use of their own time and attention” (Moore, 1995, p. 90). Leaders, including mid-level managers, need a clear and compelling vision.

### **Leading Change**

In literature about large-scale organizational change in the private sector, the two forms of coherence making described previously are evident, albeit discussed in a different set of terms. McKinsey & Company codified their knowledge of change management in what is known as the influence model (Schaninger, 2016). The model calls for four key components or quadrants: role modeling, fostering understanding and conviction, developing talent and skills, and reinforcing with formal mechanisms (See Appendix A). At the most basic level, these principles are based on human psychology and sociology. They are grounded in what we know about raising children, affecting behavior, and aligning incentive systems—even at a Pavlovian level. The second quadrant, fostering understanding and conviction, might be thought of as individual sense-making coherence. The fourth quadrant, reinforcing with formal mechanisms, might be thought of as one component of operational coherence.

How might we use coherence making strategies in the context of employee engagement and internal communications? This is a function of the employee’s ongoing role in the relational, individual sense-making process, not of how they might produce a specific set of products or a one-time set of outcomes. The task is

one of curating processes, tactics, strategies, and messages that can fuel the fires of coherence making, now and in the future, in service of generating leadership momentum toward operational coherence.

A plethora of literature exists for school system leaders about how to approach the task of improvement. Thematically, many of these texts hone in on a similar set of recommendations. A recent synthesis of the literature articulates three key phases (Wagner and Kegan, 2006, p. xii):

1. preparing for change by answering the “Why change?” question,
2. including others and building the system’s capacity for improvement, and
3. improving instruction

Practitioners might refer to the first step as crafting a vision, the second step as collaboration, and the third step as action. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) make the distinction between adaptive and technical leadership challenges. Technical challenges are categorized as challenges that require skills and abilities that are already known, making the task of learning and honing the skills the primary solution. Adaptive challenges are those messier problems without clear solutions, and require new learning, often at the edge or frontier of existing knowledge and skills (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Wagner and Kegan put it this way: “Transforming America’s public schools to teach all students the new skills required for success in the twenty-first century is a monumental educational challenge. It’s also an adaptive problem, one for which the necessary knowledge to solve the problem must be created in the act of working on it” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 63). The task of the leadership is to create an organization capable of the

learning that will be necessary to discover and invent new solutions to perplexing problems.

It is important to revisit not just the process of coherence making, but the purpose as well. Wagner and Kegan describe the leadership imperative of overcoming the threats of reaction, compliance, and isolation—and replacing them with purpose, engagement, and collaboration (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 64). This approach illuminates a way in which we might understand coherence making as an integral part of a change leadership process. It is the process by which leaders engage their followers in overcoming the forces of inertia (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). Inertia is the term used to describe the tendency of organizations to resist change.

### **Leveraging Stories to Empower Change**

Fariña and Kotch contend “[l]isteners are hungry for the personal anecdote that provides insight into change and encourages a willingness to explore new approaches” (Fariña & Kotch, p. ix). Ganz argues that “In order to deal with fear, we have to mobilize hope” (Ganz, 2009, p. 2). Ganz goes on to outline a process whereby leaders use the practice of storytelling to evoke hope in the midst of change. Fariña and Kotch posit, “Leaders use what they’ve experienced along with their beliefs to create their vision and inspire others” (Fariña & Kotch, 2008, p. ix). They use a multitude of examples from their own careers to demonstrate how stories play an important role in communicating a leadership vision as well as in catalyzing staff toward action. They argue that personal stories “let the audience know you and

connect them to the vision” (Fariña & Kotch, 2008, p. 8). Yet there is danger in a single story (Adichie, 2009), simplifying complex perspectives, cultures, and ways of knowing is an integral task in the challenge of overcoming fear.

Ganz describes the leadership practice of storytelling in three parts (Ganz, 2009). In what he terms the “story of self”, the storyteller is the protagonist, facing a moral question involving a specific choice and course of action. The “story of us” details how the storyteller (the leader) and the audience share a common set of values, aspirations or commitments. The “story of now” describes the serious moral challenge that must now be collectively confronted. Together these three components, collectively called “self, us, now,” can catalyze an organization toward a moral purpose or vision. These tactics might be employed to overcome fear, including the fear of change, in service to coherence making.

## **Theory of Action**

My theory of action seeks to use (1) communications and (2) employee engagement to aid in the process of (3) coherence making. Explicitly, I recognize that the coherence making process for the purpose discussed here is aimed at individual sense making. While sense making-related coherence may lead to operational coherence, operational coherence is outside of the scope of this body of work.

If we engage central employees in the process of individual coherence making,

then they will better understand the vision of the NYC DOE, affording them the ability to make sense of the work of the NYC DOE, so that central employees can accomplish the priorities of the administration with a greater sense of clarity.

## **The Strategic Project**

I embarked on the challenge of coherence making within the central staff at the NYC DOE with the following considerations in mind:

1. situate operational outcomes within strategic processes,
2. align key leadership messages to the defined vision,
3. assist central employees in overcoming the fear of change,
4. create opportunities for central employees to engage in the act of coherence making through intentional dialogue, and
5. measure the impact of such efforts.

Central employees are in the midst of a substantial change process. As a natural part of that change process, significant disequilibrium exists. That is to say, employees have experienced a disruption from the way in which they understood both the work of the NYC DOE and their individual role within the work. As structures, policies, programs, and priorities shifted, employees experienced what might be called incoherence. As the revised systems and structures become settled, the need to assist employees in coherence making—individually and collectively—arises as a natural progression in the overarching change process.

How might leaders illuminate the connection between priorities and organizational outcomes in service of coherence making? Leaders are always communicating through their words, their actions, and their inaction. Whether intentional, or by accident, every move a leader makes conveys a message. The message can either uplift the desired organizational change, or it can undermine it. The task of codifying and edifying desired behavior, then, is paramount to successful change at scale.

### **Description**

The strands outlined below are the result of having engaged in the strategic project and the benefit of hindsight. At the onset of the project, these strands and steps along the way were not easily delineated or packaged. Looking back, there were six distinct proximal zones of the work represented below and explained in the following pages:

- Strand 1: Articulating the Vision
- Strand 2: Engaging Employees
- Strand 3: Integrating the Vision
- Strand 4: Defining the Good
- Strand 5: Responding to Crisis
- Strand 6: Pulling it all Together

### **Strand 1: Articulating the Vision**

Prior to the public launch, the decision was made to frame “Equity and Excellence for All” as the organizational vision, rather than using marketing jargon

such as “slogan” or “elevator pitch”. Because the employees and stakeholders within NYC DOE were not broadly included in the process of defining the vision, attempts to disseminate the vision, as well as garner support and ownership of the vision, had a layer of complexity. Within the task of coherence making as I am approaching it for this project, there are two primary questions I attempt to answer:

1. How might NYC DOE engage employees in coherence making around the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All”?
2. How might NYC DOE engage employees in making sense of the work of the NYC DOE in the context of the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All”?

If the scope of my project extended to the task of leveraging individual sense making coherence in service of generating operational coherence, I might also be concerned with the question: How might we engage employees in advancing the vision of *Equity and Excellence for All*? However, for the purpose of this capstone, I will not attempt to explore this question further.

In launching the vision, collaboration amongst the director of communications, the press secretary, the chief of staff, the senior editor, and the Chancellor occurred as one of the first steps intended to help build understanding. The task was to create a compelling way to articulate the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All.” Within this framework, the challenge was to create emotional streams through which we might communicate the rational vision in a way that is both compelling and practical. NYC DOE needed to reach both the hearts and the minds of its staff.

While the language outlined in the vision statement was compelling, the language alone would not be enough to accomplish the task ahead. The group believed that in order to catalyze the staff to internalize and truly develop an understanding of the vision they must humanize, emote, and personalize the message in a way that compels people toward action.

With these ideas in hand, the team collaborated on a plan. The team met first with the Chancellor to brainstorm various ideas for her back-to-school video as well as her back-to-school letter to all department staff. The process resulted in a video that opens with the Chancellor in her office reflecting on the start of her 51<sup>st</sup> year in education by looking at the three pictures she keeps on her desk (New York City Department of Education, 2016). She shares with the viewer that she keeps these photos to remind her why we do this work. The first is of the Chancellor and the very first class she taught, the second is of a student she worked with one-on-one last year, and the third is of her grandchildren. The team created thematic talking points for each of these intended to evoke the viewer's emotions. The Chancellor then talked about the progress that had been made over the last several years, noting that while it has been significant we still have a lot of work to do. This leads to a full articulation of the vision as the charge moving NYC DOE forward. The video was modeled after Marshall Ganz's signature framework "self, us, now" (Ganz, 2009).

In addition to the video message, a written letter was crafted as the back-to-school message from the Chancellor to the staff. A link to the video message, as well



as a robust description of the vision and organizing categories for our work were included in the letter. See Appendix B for the text of the welcome back letter.

Alongside the message from the Chancellor, the team also produced a short video intended to spark excitement for back-to-school activities, featuring students and incorporating the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All” (New York City Department of Education, 2016).

These messages from the Chancellor were for the broader audience beyond central employees to include school-based staff, parents, and the community at large. In this respect, the messages served as an effort to articulate the vision to central employees, within the context of the aim of the work of central. While the videos and initial messages served the broad purpose of articulating the vision, they did not provide the nuance or detail that might be necessary to spur the deeper process of coherence making within central employees.

Following the initial introduction of the vision from the Chancellor, the team crafted a 10-minute vision presentation for deputy chancellors, chiefs of staff, and other senior leaders. These presentation slides were designed to go deeper into the vision and categories of work, as well as to model tactics for incorporating the language into various aspects of the work at central. The team presented the content at a number of venues using the frameworks outlined above. This presentation started by calling out the vision, followed by stepping back to answer the question, “Why is this important to me?” The answering of this question came in the form of a personal story that illustrates why equity and excellence are important to the

presenter, opening the emotional door through which the rest of the presentation might follow.

The presentation went on to articulate the pitch, the categories, and some specific messaging tactics that might be employed to communicate the vision. Additionally, each presentation concluded by asking audience members to think about their own stories, to rehearse, and to share the message using the same presentation deck. See Appendix C for a copy of the vision presentation.

## **Strand 2: Engaging Employees**

In addition to these high-level tactics, aimed at building an understanding of the vision, there was the work of creating structured opportunities for central employees to engage in intentional sense making around the vision. A key part of the emerging strategy was a series of town hall events with central employees, conducted in October and November 2016. Planning for the town halls actually began in early July with the stated purpose of engaging central employees in the results of the latest employee engagement survey and developing next steps. After just a few meetings, a second purpose for disseminating the new vision was quickly added. The response to specific survey questions seemed to suggest that central employees might benefit from further opportunities to understand the vision and direction of the organization and how their work aligns to the vision. Combining these two conceptions of what the town hall might be, allowed the team to use them in service of coherence making. The Chancellor was enthusiastic in her response to

the idea of using the series of town halls to communicate the vision and to build understanding.

Yet as the work progressed it became clear that the team needed to push beyond understanding the written vision. We needed to get to the deeper level of coherence making and put the work of the DOE central staff within the context of the vision. Situating that work within the vision would add depth and meaning. The actions taken by the administration needed the context of the vision. Likewise, the vision needed to be situated within the actions.

From this initial brainstorm session, we collaborated with a team from the Organizational Development Unit (ODU) to outline clear purpose statements, a format, message, style, talking points, and measures of success for the town halls. Formal authorization to move forward was received in late August and the first town hall was held on October 6, 2016. The format again applied Ganz's framework by starting with a welcome and introduction by the Chief of Staff, who articulated her own story of "self, us, now" before introducing the Executive Director of the ODU. The Executive Director reviewed the highs and lows from the last engagement survey. Then the Chancellor articulated the vision describe how the work at central office empowers schools to achieve the vision.

The second half of the town halls were used in a turn-and-talk / question-and-answer format to engage participants in their own sense making. See Appendix D for the town hall format and plan, invitation, turn-and-talk questions and other artifacts from the process.

Another aspect of the central employee engagement strategy was to think about the new employee orientation and on-boarding process. A once-a-month, optional event known as the “myDOE Week Welcome Session” is the primary vehicle for communicating what the department is about. In the past, these events included an introduction and overview of the department by the Chief of Staff. The overview included a key part of the NYC DOE school improvement process called the “Framework for Great Schools,” based on the work of Tony Bryk in Chicago. The “Framework” placed student achievement at the center, surrounded by rigorous instructions, collaborative teachers, and supportive environment. The next layer includes effective school leadership and strong family-community ties. These six elements are wrapped in the seventh: trust. See Appendix E for the “Framework for Great Schools.”

The “Framework” was referenced in communication materials as the vision of the NYC DOE, further complicating the present work to articulate the vision “Equity and Excellence for All.” As part of the welcome session, participants were asked to think about how the work they do might connect to the Framework for Great Schools. For participants with a school-facing or pedagogical-focused role in the organization, this was generally fairly easy. For the employees who work in information technology, human resources, operations, or other non-school-facing divisions, it was more difficult.

As part of the November rollout, the Chief of Staff introduced a new set of welcome session slides that grounded all of the work in the new vision. The new slides situate the “Framework” within the broader vision. See Appendix F for the

revised slides and talking points. Additionally, the three categories of work that support the vision were introduced. Following the introduction using the revised format, new employees discussed how their work fits into the vision, and then share with the full group. Employees were able to articulate how their work fits within the vision.

A key as-yet-unanswered question is how to sustain that connection to the vision over time. In addition, while this effort was directed at new employees, the question of how to convey the same message to existing employees remains.

### **Strand 3: Integrating the Vision**

To aid the process of coherence making, one of the tactics that the NYC DOE implemented while I was in residence was finding ways to integrate the vision into every aspect of the agency. One specific area of focus comprised new policy announcements and priority rollouts to the field. While the intended audience of the rollout plan tends to be staff outside of central employees, the process of integrating the vision into the policy rollout itself is an act of coherence making—one that occurs at central and is conducted by central employees.

An important part of the work is to provide senior leaders with structures, processes, and support. In the vision presentation and training, senior leaders are encouraged to incorporate the vision and language from the accompanying pitch into every piece of communication that goes out to our internal or external audiences. As part of the strategic project, I have consulted with leaders from across

the central agency as a thought partner, ghostwriter, editor, collaborator, and critic when necessary. To these ends, in late August the director of communications convened a cross-department group of communications directors and liaisons that have now begun to meet bi-monthly to collaborate and strategize about how to align communications with the vision and amplify messages across the agency. These meetings have provided the time and space for the sharing of messaging ideas and tactics, as well as the opportunity to provide feedback and support across traditional bureaucratic silos.

Additionally, work is underway to create protocols for high-level rollouts to include identification of key stakeholders, unique messages for stakeholder groups, and the alignment of message to the vision. To flesh out these conceptual ideas further, work began with a team tasked with revising the discipline code to ban or minimize the suspension of students in grades K, 1, and 2.

A larger group was then convened to strategize about how a more comprehensive communications plan might be crafted and aimed not only at the external publics, formal authorizers, and what is referred to as the chattering class—but also at the vast internal audiences. Messages were developed that situate the discipline code revisions within the context of “Equity and Excellence for All.” See Appendix G for sample documents included as part of the discipline code communications plan.

#### **Strand 4: Defining the Good**

A recurrent theme throughout the previous strands of the project was the need for additional substance underpinning the vision, what Alonso describes as *Defining the Good* (2017). One town hall survey respondent commented on this need as follows:

I worry about equity being able to course through our organizational veins, above and beyond the initiatives, when it has not been defined. Absent a working definition, we can't have a conversation about how we are promoting or stifling equity, or even a debate about what equity encompasses. Put something on paper for teams to interrogate, and then perhaps it can become a part of our ethos." (Survey Response, October 2016)

Some early conversations about the vision made it clear that some employees were conflating equity with equality, while others were confusing equity with fairness, and still others defined equity as equal opportunity, as contrasted with equal outcomes. It is imperative that education leaders define what they mean by "good teaching" (Wagner and Kegan, 2006, p. 37); similarly, it became clear to me that the NYC DOE must also define what it means by equity and excellence. Both are words that imply judgment, provide meaning, and define valuation of the public good. Providing language that could articulate equity distinct from equality and that could describe excellence in relation to outcomes became essential to the work.

This concern was brought to a team that had been meeting weekly on an informal basis since early July. The team crafted draft belief statements about equity and excellence using the Chancellor's opening day remarks as a basis for inspiration. Initially, these draft statements were presented to the Chief of Staff as well as the

Chancellor with the potential opportunity to unveil them at an upcoming event for central employees called “Carmen’s Classroom.” The Chancellor expressed her concern about putting forward definitions before asking central employees first to engage in their own meaning making. She made the decision to use the forum as another opportunity for coherence making. This led to asking central employees to write and share what they believed equity and excellence mean in the work. This process is similar to how an organization might generally develop a vision, yet in this instance it occurred with a pre-defined vision.

In mid-October the Chancellor’s annual notice of the diversity and inclusion policy provided another opportunity to unveil the working belief statements. The letter that had been used in the past was sent to me for edits and approval. I worked with the team to draft a revised version of the letter that would incorporate the emerging belief statements and integrate the legal requirements for diversity and inclusion within the broader aspirational vision. It was an opportunity for the Chancellor to add clarity about the work and send a message that might allow people throughout the organization to engage in deeper sense making around the vision. The letter was delivered to all DOE employees on October 25 2016. See Appendix H for a copy of the letter.

The vision was further clarified with the dissemination of the belief statements and hopefully, people inside and outside of the DOE are able to begin the process of contextualizing their work.



## **Strand 5: Responding to Crisis**

In the best-laid plans, surprises are inevitable. Unexpected challenges present the opportunity to test the vision. They also serve as fertile ground for coherence making. In late January 2017, the DOE press office received notification that a newspaper in the city was planning to run negative stories on the Renewal School program, a signature policy of the administration aimed at turning around 86 of the city's struggling schools.

With two days to prepare for the stories, the communications team convened with senior leaders to develop a response strategy. This included communicating success stories, completing the production of a video showcasing a specific school's success, engaging elected officials, communicating directly with parents of children in these schools, and engaging the staff at the schools through a live webinar with the Chancellor.

At the heart of the message was the need to frame the very existence of our Renewal School program within the context of the vision. The commitment to "Equity and Excellence for All" meant that the NYC DOE could not overlook failing schools. It also meant that NYC DOE could not simply close schools without first attempting to improve them. This framing came through aggressively in the form of an opinion editorial from the Chancellor, a personal letter from the Chancellor to parents, news stories, a video, social media, and the Chancellor's webinar with Renewal School staff.

Surprisingly, the news stories did not run in the timeframe immediately expected. In one respect, it seemed the efforts were unnecessary. However, the crisis and the DOE response to it provided a constructive experience with many lessons to learn.

The communications apparatus, alongside the newly adopted vision and coherence-making strategy, had operated in near-total alignment. Because the news did not run as planned, the effect of the experience was a simulation of what an aligned, entirely proactive execution of strategy and vision might be able to accomplish.

In many ways, this scenario, faced unexpectedly, is indicative of what school system leaders face every day. Outside forces in the press, the parent community, or the community at large shape conversations about school systems. These outside forces make the task of internal communication and coherence making ever more important, and may also serve as fertile ground for reaching operational coherence. See Appendix I for sample communications related to this event.

Eventually, more than a month later, the media outlet did run the negative stories about the Renewal School program. The series included much of what was originally anticipated, and additionally included new stories that countered the narrative crafted by NYC DOE. An example is the story of P.S. 154, a school that has made significant progress as part of the Renewal School program. The NYC DOE team put together a package that included a video highlighting the changes and successes happening at P.S. 154 (New York City Department of Education, 2017).

The media outlet countered with a story about a parent who chose to pull her child out of the school and enroll in a nearby charter school.

As a result of the crisis, the NYC DOE had staked its position firmly in the ground. This provided ample opportunity for critique and condemnation by the media outlet. It also provided the NYC DOE with renewed urgency to examine strategy and policy, inching closer to operational coherence. In many respects this exercise is a demonstrable example of how sensemaking coherence and operational coherence are interconnected and constantly influence each other.

#### **Strand 6: Pulling It All Together**

In late February, a new project emerged as an opportunity to articulate the comprehensive vision of “Equity and Excellence for All” along with the strategies intended to actualize it. I took on the role of editor-in-chief of what has come to be affectionately called the *Equity and Excellence Book*. Through the book, NYC DOE sought to articulate the significant initiatives of the NYC DOE and contextualize them amongst one another through the lens of a clear theory of action, resulting in increased equity and excellence. The task has provided fertile ground for both forms of coherence making: individual as well as operational sense making.

The first order of business was to identify the key components of the administration’s policy and where each piece fits accordingly. We examined the original vision statement, pitch, and three categories of work: academic excellence, student and community support, and innovation. We asked various divisions and departments within the NYC DOE to provide written text describing each initiative,

using this initial organizing structure. Contributors were asked to begin by articulating the problem the initiative was intended to solve. In stating the problem, authors were encouraged to make the problem simple to understand from the vantage point of a single student, parent, teacher or other protagonist. Two tendencies were observed regularly in the early stages of the project: 1) describing the initiative from the vantage point of the program, and 2) describing the problem as the lack of this particular solution. Through coaching and conversation, I made attempts to bring the varied program staff 'back in time' to a point before the solutions existed, at least locally, to articulate the problem in a way that is agnostic to solutions. Once the problem was framed effectively, the local solution, in the form of a program or policy, was presented under the banner of equity and excellence.

In brief conclusion, the exercise of clarifying the exact problem to be solved, the theory of action for proposed solutions, and the NYC DOE's specific programmatic solution constituted coherence making at the individual and operational levels.

### **Evidence to Date**

Given the 10-month scope of this strategic project, I am unable to measure the long-term intended impact of these efforts in a conclusive manner. Rather, what I have attempted to do is to provide a series of qualitative and quantitative data points from which one might be able to triangulate analysis about the impact of the project. These include surveys of town hall attendees, individual anecdotes, feedback from presentations, and responses to individual communications. If I were

provided with additional time and resources, it would be useful to develop the means by which each individual tactic, message, and means might be weighed for effectiveness. In addition, because the ultimate goal of the school system is to produce equitable and excellent outcomes, time and attention should be given to drawing a connection between measured levels of coherence and student outcomes. For the purpose of this report, I will present evidence only as it exists.

### **Town Hall Survey**

A key task guiding the planning and execution of the town halls was crafting a mechanism to gauge the extent to which central employees feel they understand the vision and how their work connects to the vision as components of coherence making. A follow-up survey was crafted for town hall participants. The survey was announced at the conclusion of each town hall, and delivered to participants via email within 24 hours. **See Appendix J** for a full summary of the town hall data set.

Response themes include an appreciation of the time to be in conversation with senior leadership and emerging understanding of the vision as well as how various kinds of work connect to the vision. A summary of the relevant major outcomes by borough is below:

Question 1: The Town Hall helped me to further understand the work of Central Office and how it supports schools. Using a scale of 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree).

|           |        |          |       |               |                  |
|-----------|--------|----------|-------|---------------|------------------|
| Manhattan | Queens | Brooklyn | Bronx | Staten Island | Citywide Average |
|-----------|--------|----------|-------|---------------|------------------|

|     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 3.3 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.8 | 4.0 | 3.6 |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Question 2: The Town Hall helped me to understand the Chancellor's vision of Equity and Excellence for All. Using a scale of 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree).

| Manhattan | Queens | Brooklyn | Bronx | Staten Island | Citywide Average |
|-----------|--------|----------|-------|---------------|------------------|
| 3.7       | 4.3    | 4.0      | 3.9   | 4.2           | 4.0              |

Question 6: I had an opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives. Using a scale of 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree).

| Manhattan | Queens | Brooklyn | Bronx | Staten Island | Citywide Average |
|-----------|--------|----------|-------|---------------|------------------|
| 3.7       | 4.3    | 3.8      | 4.0   | 4.0           | 3.8              |

While the data is informative overall, looking at the results disaggregated by event is instructive in terms of how each event took on its own unique personality and how the extent to which we executed on the plan played a role in how each participant experienced it. For some participants, there was a gap between their expectations and the actual town hall they attended. While the event was billed as an “opportunity to hear directly from Chancellor Fariña and senior leaders about the vision of equity and excellence for all,” the depth at which the vision was discussed varied by event, based on a number of factors. There is also some feedback indicating that by calling the event a town hall some participants carried with them certain predispositions and assumptions about the format and structure. For some, that meant the event did not necessarily meet their expectations.

The themes related specifically to coherence making are perhaps most important in terms of the strategic project. Those themes include understanding the work of central office and how it supports schools (3.6), understanding the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All” (4.0), and the opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives (4.0).

### **Town Hall Attendance**

Of nearly 5,000 employees who received email invitations to the town halls, 544, or approximately 10%, chose to attend. There was variation between boroughs, and employees were invited to attend whichever session was most convenient to them—meaning some employees whose work location may have been in Manhattan attended the session in Staten Island where they live. The full breakdown of registrations and attendance numbers by borough is below.

| Borough       | Registered | Attended   |
|---------------|------------|------------|
| Manhattan     | 177        | 188        |
| Queens        | 36         | 57         |
| Brooklyn      | 188        | 125        |
| Bronx         | 68         | 53         |
| Staten Island | 65         | 121        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>534</b> | <b>544</b> |

### **Beliefs in Action**

The letter from the Chancellor articulating beliefs about equity and excellence has been observed in use within the organization. Just days after the letter was distributed, a senior leader used the belief statements to frame training for staff aimed at understanding implicit biases. The senior leader who gave the

introduction used the language verbatim to remind participants about the importance of the topic.

Additional anecdotal feedback indicates central employees are using the belief statements. One member of the strategy group wrote:

Hey! Not sure who wrote this, but the first and second paragraph get at what we mean by Equity and Excellence. Perhaps I'll incorporate into my slides! 😊

One nit-picky thing if we have the ability to suggest changes to things like this: when she calls it “my vision” as opposed to “our vision,” that does not help our cause with regard to driving ownership of the vision throughout the organization.” (Anonymous Respondent, 2016)

### **An Exercise in Coherence Making**

The process of writing the equity and excellence book brought up evidence worthy of further consideration. First, the level of excitement and enthusiasm for the task was palpable at nearly every venue—even when participants knew they were faced with an ambitious timeline for deliverables. Second, there was never a shortage of employees throughout the organization willing to articulate how their particular initiative empowers equity and excellence. Third, the exercise made visible a set of misconceptions about alignment and new challenges for consideration in the task of coherence making.

As I worked on the book project with colleagues throughout the NYC DOE, I had the opportunity to engage with them in the act of coherence making. Attempting to answer questions such as “How do these programs add up to the vision of Equity



and Excellence for All?” gave us the opportunity to explore both our own understanding and the operational reality of the organization. A communications director from one division in particular remarked, “I’m so glad we are actually trying to answer these questions.” Another participant added, “I’ve never tried to articulate how everything fits together before.”

## **Analysis**

While the message of “Excellence and Equity for All” was articulated in a clear manner, the diversity and size of NYC DOE presented the leadership with a number of challenges for conveying a compelling message. To make a broad statement, we could have benefitted from a better understanding of how employees in various areas of the city experienced the system and how best to communicate with these different kinds of stakeholders. Additionally, while employees reported increased understanding of the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All,” emerging evidence suggests that a more precise barometer of understanding came through the act of doing.

Balancing process and progress proved to be a delicate task. In one respect, the Chancellor’s personal mission to bring cohesion to the vast city education system required forceful and articulate leadership from the top. In another respect, the task of generating momentum required building broad consensus for change and creating a shared understanding of priorities. The tension between the competing necessity of a clear central directive and a diffuse engaged stakeholder group adds to the complexity of leading this vast system.

One mitigating factor that enabled the NYC DOE to navigate the complex balance between central alignment and diffuse support appears to be the Chancellor herself. As a known commodity, held in high regard, she has been afforded greater deference and trust than an outside candidate might have otherwise.

The more immediate the work became, the easier the task of coherence making. When employees inside the NYC DOE engaged in crucial tasks such as responding to a media crisis or authoring a book, clarity emerged much more quickly. This suggests that part of reaching deep understanding occurs in the doing.

Context matters. As the town hall attendance and survey responses indicate, there is great variability across the city by borough, function within the NYC DOE, and a number of other factors. The Chancellor understood this, and accordingly tailored her remarks and interaction in each location. Reflecting after one of the town halls, she said: “People think I just work the room to work the room, but I’m actually getting a pulse on who is here, what is on their minds, and why they came—it helps me calibrate what I need to say.” In this respect, her inclination to tailor the message to the audience is a significant component of why the results have emerged as they have.

Does quality or quantity matter most? Almost by accident, my focus during the task of planning and executing our town halls became focused primarily on increasing the number of participants. Not until reflecting on the process did I realize that I had ignored the quality aspect of the spectrum. Focusing on quantity as the defining measure of success means that other factors such as depth of understanding take a backseat to sheer size. The focus on numbers of attendees

resulted in revised communication strategies to bolster crowds at future events, yet there was little attention given to how we would continue to engage attendees following the town halls.

In order to make meaning of the emerging evidence to date, I will begin my analysis by using a tool developed by Fullan and Quinn (2015) as part of their workshop *Leadership to Maximize District Coherence*. See Appendix K for the District Self-Assessment tool. Within this tool, Fullan and Quinn ask districts to look for evidence in the following categories:

- fostering direction,
- collaborative cultures,
- deepening learning, and
- securing accountability.

The focus of the strategic project has been primarily on the first aspect: fostering direction. Within this category, Fullan and Quinn (2015) outline four components of the work for district self-assessment, which I will use as one lens to analyze the results of the strategic project:

1. Shared purpose drives the work.
2. A small number of goals tied to student learning drive decisions.
3. A clear strategy for achieving the goals is known by all.
4. Change knowledge is used to move the district forward.

Throughout the course of the strategic project many challenges were illuminated. Below I will attempt to articulate briefly the most relevant challenges worthy of future consideration.

**Challenge 1: Balancing Process and Progress in Creating Shared Direction**

The task of defining a vision centrally is in contradiction with much of the literature that exists on how to build organizational mission, vision, and values (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Most literature calls for highly inclusive processes that engage front line staff, customers, executives, and broad cross section of the entire organization in the process. Gabriel and Farmer argue that “[a]lthough school leadership must have a vision for the future, it should be used as a way to open up a dialogue rather than be handed down from on high.” Research generally suggests that more than developing a compelling vision, the process of developing the vision produces dividends in the form of deeper engagement, commitment, and urgency (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009).

What might such a process have looked like within NYC DOE? Is it possible to conduct an inclusive vision-setting process in such a vast organization? How might such a process have produced different outcomes? What if the staff and stakeholders had been more intimately involved in the creation of the vision? These questions will remain unanswered, but should be considered carefully by anyone seeking to replicate or learn from the NYC DOE experience. A better use of change knowledge (Component #4) might have begun with a visioning process intended to build shared purpose for the work in the task of defining the vision. Yet in the absence of an inclusive vision-setting process, the NYC DOE has engaged in an ongoing dialogue about the meaning of the vision. This instinct of the Chancellor is

enabling swaths of employees who, while not involved in crafting the four-word vision, are involved in making the vision real.

Similarly, as I asked individuals unfamiliar with the Bloomberg/Klein era reforms what “Children First” meant, the answers varied widely. Yet, to employees who worked under that administration—especially those there near the end of that administration—the answers are much more clear and compelling. Ongoing dialogue about the vision is a significant aspect of what produces coherence. Doing the work and making sense of the work lead to greater coherence, both individually and operationally.

### **Challenge 2: The Message, Messenger, Context, and Variability**

The vision of “Equity and Excellence for All” seems to have the ability to resonate with the employees of the NYC DOE. Based on survey data, response to individual communications, and informal feedback, employees report being able to understand the vision. Furthermore, while not a strategy by itself, the vision becomes a lens through which employees are better able to understand all of the priorities of the DOE. Some aspects of the messaging that resonated most with respondents included personal anecdotes from the Chancellor and connections to their everyday work. An important consideration in interpreting these results is to understand the work persona, reputation, and revered nature of the current Chancellor. Her decades-long experience in the system and deep connections across all five boroughs undoubtedly impact the extent to which her voice is heard, the message is received, and the invitation to employees to follow her lead is received.

The work of continuing to be known, building trust, and gaining support is an ongoing effort. While her reputation preceded her, it is ever evolving and must be constantly built upon through efforts such as the welcome back-to-school video, and other means by which the leader crafts a narrative of self, us, and now.

It is also worth noting that the highest participation during the series of town halls was in Brooklyn and Manhattan—the places where the Chancellor has lived and worked. The third highest participation rate was in Staten Island, where, given the lessons already learned, the team was able to deploy localized outreach strategies. These included sending personal invitations from the employees' direct supervisors as compared to the Manhattan and Queens events. In each instance, the more personal a connection a recipient had to the person sending the invitation, the higher the response.

Understanding how employees throughout the city experience the system and its leadership is critical to crafting a strategy that will effectively engage them. The central employee town halls were designed in a one-size-fits-all manner. While the town halls took place in each of the five boroughs, the extent to which employees attended and participated in each depended upon planning factors. These factors included the extent to which the invitation, location, and message took into account the context of the staff in that particular part of the city. For example, we might compare the number of attendees in the Bronx and Queens to the number in Staten Island—a comparably much smaller borough. In the Bronx and Queens, the town hall was held at a school site that was not central to that borough but easy to access from Manhattan via public transportation. In Staten Island, by contrast, the

town hall was held at a site that is both a school and the central office of the superintendent for that borough.

### **Challenge 3: Articulating Beliefs and Crafting Meaning Together**

The belief statements deployed in October articulated an organizational task, not simply an aspiration. Primarily through informal feedback, including the email referenced above, it seems clear that the belief statements about equity and excellence provided some measure of support toward shared purpose (Component #1), clarifying a small number of goals tied to student learning (Component #2) and an emerging strategy for achieving the goals is known by all (Component #3). These statements made the work to achieve the vision tangible and actionable in the day-to-day work of the organization.

The Chancellor's deference to central employees at the onset also appears to have played an important role. Senior leaders and central employees were given time to converse and develop their own understanding of why defining beliefs about equity and excellence was important for making decisions about priority and focus. This extended process allowed the ground to become more fertile for the seeds of equity and excellence to be planted.

Once presented, as belief statements, the definitions have provided a touchstone for deeper conversations, especially about the word equity.

### **Challenge 4: Balancing quantity and quality engagement.**

At the onset of the strategic project, the team discussed what impact might occur if we engage 10% of the central employees deeply in the process of coherence making. We never discussed the concept of reaching 100%. Yet once we were caught up in the act of leadership, we became distracted by the attraction of 100%. When we achieved attendance of over 500 employees at central town halls, we asked, “What about the other 4,500?” When we met to debrief the feedback from the town halls, we asked, “What else could we do to reach even more people?” What we missed in the process was the opportunity to engage those who had already opted in to the conversation on a deeper level.

The team’s natural inclination to look to quantity, as a measure of success, took over the process and guided much of our decision-making. After the disappointing turnout at the Queens town hall, we reconvened and developed new outreach strategies that included personal invitations from area superintendents and field support center directors in addition to the invitations coming out of central office. We also reached out to the principals at the host school to invite their participation. These steps had the effect of increasing the number of people in the room, as well as the side effect of broadening the perspectives in the room. As we continued the series, the headline continued to be the number of people who attended rather than the quality of the conversation, the follow-up efforts, or the plan to sustain the work beyond the town halls. This focus on quantity took our attention away from quality, which might have actually proved a better barometer for determining overall success of the initiative.



## **Challenge 5: Coherence Making Happens in the Doing of the Work**

The all-hands-on-deck nature of our response to the news exposé that materialized much later had the effect of demonstrating what was possible. The perception of a crisis forced collaboration, rapid use of our sense making, and ultimately coherence about this aspect of the work. The crisis took a process that had been stalled for months on and off the back burner and, in just days, created a consistent message that helped to illuminate and clarify the actual strategy. Which begs the question: in the absence of a crisis, what other leadership moves might have been employed to get this off the back burner?

Why did the crisis prove to be such fertile ground for coherence making? Why did writing a book about the NYC DOE provide so much urgency for reaching coherence? The simple, intuitive answer here may be correct: both opportunities grounded the work in real, public-facing deliverables. In contrast with abstract thought exercises, these two events leveraged the high-stakes nature of the public eye to garner attention, urgency, and deep engagement in the work of coherence making.

Is an army that studies war only from a classroom prepared for actual combat? No: in order to truly understand, refine, and better articulate a particular strategy, organizations must sit in the work. The conversations that emerged from the crisis of the news cycle spurred cross-divisional collaboration and renewed clarity about the Renewal School program strategy. The conversations that took place in the process of writing a book, with an intentionally wide public audience,

demanded both a mental and an operational alignment—which resulted in greater coherence.

## **Implications**

The NYC DOE under the leadership of Chancellor Fariña proved to be a very rich, stimulating learning environment. While the lessons are many, I will focus this section on just a handful of key implications for leadership.

Because I am a system-level leader, the primary lessons I focus on are the importance of and process by which a leader becomes known to a community, as well as the view that leadership ought to be approached as a symbiotic relationship, rather than a transaction.

For the NYC DOE, I focus this section on recommendations for the future. They include building additional opportunities for coherence making; developing distributive leadership capacity; tailoring messages to local context; more deeply engaging employees who choose to lead the work; and prioritizing strategic planning in spite of ongoing crises.

For leaders across the sector, implications include normalizing incoherence as part of a change process and giving people problems, rather than solutions.

More generally, the ten implications that follow are relevant to any leader, anywhere. They are located at the intersection of leadership, communication, mobilization, efficiency, and effectiveness. They point toward both ways of being and ways of doing. While they are personal to me and contextual to New York City,

they involve universal tensions, acknowledgements, and lessons that could as easily be put to use in small town Wisconsin as they might in the Big Apple.

## **Implications for Self**

### **Implication #1: A Leader Must Be Known**

As I reflect on the leadership of the Chancellor, I return to her deep understanding of this system and context, as well as the broad and deep relationship she has with individuals across the system. The Chancellor is a known commodity, and more importantly—she is known. The community, both internal and external, already knew of her personal mission for public education as well as her professional expertise in leading the system. This afforded her the ability to lead aggressively from her very first day on the job. This same dynamic, combined with her support from her authorizing environment, the Mayor, has allowed her to continue to lead decisively. Her reputation has produced a level of trust in the Chancellor and her leadership.

As a systems level leader, my question is: without a long relationship, how might I become known to a community that I serve? From this vantage point, it behooves me to think deeply about what kind of entry plan or first steps, leadership moves, and relationships might be necessary for a new leader to become known to a community as a step in building trust. Furthermore, I believe it is important to think about the process of becoming known at both the personal level, answering the question, “Why does this leader care about education?” and the professional level, addressing the question, “What qualifies this leader to carry out the job?” Every new

leader faces the challenge of how to demonstrate answers to these questions within a given community context.

Some of the strategies and tactics described in this capstone can be used in the task of becoming known. Ganz's "self, us, now" framework is pertinent for consideration in becoming known. From my own experience, I can point to moments during residency where, unintentionally, I was effective in becoming known to those with whom I worked. I can also point to specific moments where I was not effective—including specific offices and colleagues with whom I did not yet have a working relationship. The varied degree of being "known" was demonstrated in the level of trust in my relationships and our joint ability to engage in frank dialogue about process, strategy, and outcomes.

A pertinent example occurred after I made a vision presentation to the Special Education leadership team and then had a debriefing with one of the executive directors who attended. She first mentioned the storytelling technique that I had shared with her, stating that she had used it with a group of parents, and that after her talk she had a line of parents waiting to speak with her. The parents were there to thank her for sharing her personal story of her brother who has special needs and to tell her how much it meant to them to have someone in a leadership role who truly understood what the work was about. While that was validating to me on several levels, I also felt inclined to let the executive director know that I wish I had chosen a story that had a student as the protagonist, rather than myself. Her response surprised me. She said that she was so glad my story included me as the protagonist because in many ways it was my introduction to the

group, and it framed me in the work as a school principal leading special education reform.

This moment stayed with me and served as a helpful touchstone as I had the ongoing opportunity to introduce and reintroduce myself to people throughout the NYC DOE. This experience contrasts starkly with other opportunities where either because of time pressure or formalities, I simply introduced myself by title or position. In these instances, rather than building trust, I may actually be building doubt.

### **Implication #2: Leadership Is a Relationship, Not a Transaction**

What separates the act of leadership from the act of simply accomplishing a given task? While the line between the two is not always well defined, I have been struck by some of the distinctive features of each. Leadership is about influence, where task is about delivering a discrete work product. And while leaders must also produce outcomes, the real measure of leadership is the ability to assist others. Moreover, it seems important for me as a leader to view the task of leadership as more than a transaction wherein the prime directive is simply to accomplish a pre-identified task. Rather, I seek to interact with the organization and its people in such a fashion as to generate something greater than the original implicit contract for goods or services. That is to say, leadership is about adding value—not simply exercising skill.

To be a highly effective leader, I must examine constantly what I bring to the work. While this sounds simple, it is an odyssey of self-discovery. On the surface, it

might be qualifications, experience, skill, or expertise. Under the surface, it might be less quantifiable: we might think of concepts such as “perspective,” “influence,” “credibility,” and “relational capital.” It becomes even messier when I begin to think that it might not be a specific skill set I bring but that my curiosity, penchant for questioning the status quo, or simply my way of interpreting the world may be what matters. It is more than *being an agent* that might impact or influence the organization. My *presence* is required, not only to change the organization but also to change myself. It is not only the technique that matters, but the intention, the asking of questions, and the reasoning behind the actions.

How do I recognize the totality of my lived and learned experience and bring that value to the table? In my reflection, how might I recognize the totality of the organization in terms of complexity and variability and bring that value to my own learning? By asking these separate but interrelated questions, a leader moves below the surface of what is said to what is implied, transcends what is known to the organization and confronts what is not yet apparent. Leadership within this context becomes a mutually invested relationship, rather than simply a transaction.

The contrast between a transactional and a transformed view of leadership is illustrated by the graphic below:

|          | Leader  | Interplay    | Organization                          |
|----------|---|--------------|---------------------------------------|
| Old View | Knowledge & Experience,<br>Skills & Abilities | Transaction  | Identified Needs<br>Defined Direction |
| New View | Perspective, Value,                           | Relationship | Unrealized potential                  |

|  |                         |  |                      |
|--|-------------------------|--|----------------------|
|  | Inspiration, Dedication |  | Unknown capabilities |
|--|-------------------------|--|----------------------|

## Implications for Site

### Implication #3: Continue Building Opportunities for Coherence Making

The DOE should view the central employee town halls and other strategies as the beginning of an ongoing conversation, rather than a completed mission. Additional opportunities for employees to engage in coherence making at the department and work team level may be beneficial. This added effort requires additional work on behalf of senior leaders to model ongoing conversations and ensure that they cascade throughout the organization.

When articulating underlying assumptions in our theory of action, it may have been more productive to focus on those employees who voluntarily attended the central employee town halls with the explicit purpose of learning more about the vision of “Equity and Excellence for All.” Rather than spending our debriefing time focused on those not in the room, we ought to have focused on those who were. We could have gained far more leverage viewing our work through the lens of community organizers building a movement than through the traditional lens of bureaucracy. Indeed, this lens might prove necessary in an organization as vast as the NYC DOE, but also desirable in far smaller organizations. We missed the opportunity to cultivate our “choir” and turn these leading edge employees into “evangelists” for the work.

Thinking of the organization simplistically, as a set of concentric circles, a logical next step would be meeting with community superintendents and local

support office directors to share the vision presentation that includes components of each previous phase. This includes the vision, pitch, categories of work, storytelling as a communications tactic, the beliefs about equity and excellence, and ways to integrate DOE work within the vision.

This evolved coherence making process can be used to empower these dispersed leaders to carry the message beyond central office to principals, teachers, and school-based staff. Utilizing the *Equity and Excellence For All* book, this strand would build on the synthesized narrative that succinctly describes why, how, and what the present administration is doing. It would be useful to distinguish the present administration from the previous administration—with a bridge between the two. This would allow acknowledgment of the good work in the past as well as the unique work of the present. A clear and specific narrative articulates the way in which the NYC DOE believes they are making a difference and helps spread the compelling vision, as well as the strategy to achieve it. Ongoing efforts should clearly articulate the Chancellor’s theory of action and the strategic levers for change she is using to improve our schools, systems, and structures.

The DOE may consider creating a future avenue for coherence making, whereby school level leaders and central leaders regularly engage in conversation about the vision and key priorities of the administration. Because coherence making is a collaborative process, prioritizing time for conversations about the work of the NYC DOE is imperative. Presently, the Chancellor has monthly one-on-one conversations with every superintendent. A new series of opportunities to engage around the work might flow from these conversations to a broader constituency



within the NYC DOE. Understanding the reality of the gap between what a policy is intended to accomplish and what is actualized on the ground is key to shifting from individual coherence to operational coherence. A new coherence may emerge, informed and shaped by individuals from all layers in the organization.

**Implication #4: Invest in Additional Messengers Who Can Carry the Vision**

While some progress has been made in equipping senior leaders with the language of the vision, the Chancellor is still the only public messenger and the leader with the most internal and external resonance. This is partially because of her aforementioned renown and partially because she is, in fact, the standard bearer of the vision. A single standard bearer is not sufficient to reach an organization as vast as the DOE. The Chancellor and the Chief of Staff should consider opportunities to hone the skills of effective leadership practices within the senior leadership team. Beyond operational expertise, the need to develop followers is a necessary leadership practice. This includes the ability to orient employees toward a common vision and engage in coherence making.

Specific efforts to build the capacity of senior leadership, including deputy chancellors, division leaders, executive directors, superintendents, and others should be undertaken. Additionally, the NYC DOE should make it a priority to engage with employees who have a direct influence over and impact on students in schools. It is crucial to generate a deep understanding of the work and develop coherence among the leaders who make daily decisions about deploying resources and empowering staff to affect change closest to students. Developing a prioritized

set of internal constituencies and an accompanying plan for ongoing coherence making activities could accelerate this work and lead to greater impact from the change efforts underway.

**Implication #5: Establish Formal Leadership to Advance Equity.**

The articulation of a belief statement about equity served as a first step toward empowering employees throughout the organization to enact policies in service of the vision. However, to fully realize this potential, some part of the organization must take responsibility for continuing to focus effort and attention. The DOE should consider establishing a high-level task force charged with advancing equity throughout the organization. Such a task force, which might include a cross-section of leaders at various levels and divisions within the DOE, could move in a focused way to further engage in both individual coherence making and operational coherence. By inventorying the systems and structures that either advance or inhibit equity, the DOE can prioritize work to align its various structures.

**Implication #6: Tailor Messages and Opportunities to the Local Context**

Future town halls and additional coherence-making opportunities should be further tailored to the local context. As evidenced by the attendance rates from Queens to Staten Island, when the DOE is able to produce a message that resonates with the unique context of a particular sector of the organization, it is better able to engage that sector in coherence making. This should be a key consideration in future efforts to further engage teachers, principals, and other field-based staff.

Recognizing the complexity and variability of the system is important for both individual and operational coherence.

By viewing coherence making as a reciprocal relationship, senior leaders can focus their energy not only on tailoring a message but also on deeply listening to, and working with, the widely diverse populations they serve. These tailored opportunities for engagement could build local momentum and organizational coherence around challenges that are unique or important to particular constituencies.

#### **Implication #7: Cultivate the Choir**

As someone who grew up in a Baptist church, the son of the pastor, I am drawn to the image of the choir as a helpful way to understand the need to develop evangelists within an organization. The DOE should consider leveraging the resources of the Organizational Development Unit of the Human Resources office. This might provide a means by which the DOE can continue to engage those employees who opted in to the town halls and other opportunities. The mechanism should move beyond one-way reception of information and, like choir practice, should include regular opportunities for employees to practice their skills in relation to the vision. This might take the form of organizing workshops, leadership development, or less formal structures such as regular coffee or lunch with senior leaders to discuss a pertinent question or offer advice on strategic priorities. Such an effort could expand the reach of leadership as well as improve leadership's ability to create and sustain momentum.

**Implication #8: Make Strategic Planning and Alignment Part of Routine Process**

Organizations are required to be focused in order to create positive momentum. As the reactive versus proactive work around the Renewal Schools program illustrates, there is enormous potential for the central leadership at the DOE to focus time, attention, and resources on key priorities in ways that can enhance agency within the organization and the community. Yet this example is an exception and not the rule. To maximize its potential, the DOE must prioritize this proactive stream of work. Where external threats or political calculations become calls to reaction, unrealized potentials must become calls to proactive work.

The DOE should consider creating a calendar of strategic communications priorities. Along with this calendar, the DOE should create structures to engage all communications staff in the process of coherence making around these priorities. The structure model that was used in response to the perceived threat above could be employed more broadly and include more strata of employees, as a routine part of DOE operation. Additionally, by engaging key communications staff in coherence making, the DOE will be able to cascade the message out to the organization more broadly, including those directed to the public. It will increase its ability to maintain focus over time and align strategic messaging, making it likelier that key messages will break through the noise and be received and acted upon.

These suggested improvements require discipline, perspective, patience, and urgency. Just as a principal charged with turning around a failing school must have

the discipline to hone and focus relentlessly on instruction, so, too, must the DOE muster the ability to dedicate the time and resources necessary for pro-action. As the Chancellor said recently, “If you respond to every critic, you’ll never achieve your priorities” (C. G. Fariña, personal communication, March 15, 2017).

## **Implications for Sector**

### **Implication #9: Normalize Incoherence as a Natural Part of Any Change Process**

At the onset of my work with the NYC DOE, I viewed the need for coherence as a deficit within the organization. For several weeks in my daily reflection log, I used the word “dysfunction” to describe the gap between articulated priorities and the perception of some individuals on the ground doing the work. From that vantage point, the deficit could have easily been misdiagnosed as an individual fault on the part of a leader or those entrusted with the task of communication.

However, when I delved further into the literature of change leadership (Fullan, 2015), the concepts of intentionally disrupting the status quo and the inevitable need to reconstruct coherence allowed me to see the NYC DOE in a way that did not involve judgment. Leaders across the sector must continually find ways to articulate the need for change and the consequences of change in way that allows those involved to understand the complexity of the change process and to see the struggles along the way as expected and natural—even as signs of progress. Previewing the messiness of the change process can help stakeholders navigate toward coherence faster.

By re-framing in our own minds as leaders to view the tasks of disruption and coherence making as necessary to achieving organizational change, we can approach the work with optimism. Additionally, since making the realization myself, I have actively engaged in normalizing disequilibrium or incoherence as something to be expected during a massive change process. This has proved to be a valuable mindset change for me and for the colleagues I work with at NYC DOE.

**Implication #10: Give People Problems, Not Solutions**

Emerging from the articulation of belief statements about equity and excellence is the concept of empowering people throughout the organization to solve defined problems without the need for pre-defined solutions. As management experts might advocate, those closest to the work are often most apt to solve problems. Yet, far too often, leaders fall into the trap of needing to be seen as the source of solutions. Our work in NYC DOE demonstrates that what employees in organizations need is a clear articulation of the problem, from which they can begin to craft solutions.

Simon Sinek terms the principle of offering problems and questions “Start with Why” (Sinek, 2013). Heifetz (2009) refers to it as an “adaptive” challenge. President John F. Kennedy said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” (Clarke, 2011). Ultimately, it is my belief that all of these leaders make essentially the same statement: we must give people problems, not solutions. Inherent in human behavior is the desire to be problem solvers, to take on new responsibility, to achieve at new levels, and to be a part of something

bigger than oneself. When President Kennedy asked us to think about what we would do for our country, it was within the context of the Cold War—a problem articulated so well, every citizen of the country could relate to some aspect of it.

From the vantage point of Sinek’s “Start with Why,” we would be wise to curb our innate instinct as leaders to be seen as the people with all the solutions, the problem solvers. Heifetz (2009) argues that the true task of a leader is to help diagnose a problem and build the container within which the organization might solve its own way out of the problem. Both Sinek and Heifetz rely on a somewhat counter-intuitive model of leadership that envisions enlisting people in the work of problem solving, rather than the mere execution of a pre-determined solution from on high.

At the intersection of public policy and politics the tension between catalyzing a constituency around a problem versus delivering solutions plays out in layers, cascading out from the moment a candidate enters a race to the moment when the leader is elected and, finally, to the day when a policy impacts a citizen. That is not to say that politicians, once elected, should not be expected to perform their duties. Rather, one of their essential tasks as elected leaders is to continue building a narrative within the ranks of public servants and the public writ-large, such that the agenda of the administration is accomplishable, as well as practically constructed to meet the problems at hand. Even when effective policy is constructed through a well-intentioned process, if attention is not taken to continue to engage the broader public in remembering why the problem exists, and why it is important

for the greater “us” to continue working to solve it, officials lose traction and may even lose the next election.

Within the context of New York City, this implication operates in a series of layers, beginning with the Mayor and cascading through staff at City Hall, the Chancellor, senior leaders, central staff, field support staff, superintendents, principals, teachers, school staff, students, parents, advocates, and the public. This cycle could perhaps become a virtuous cycle wherein the problems are always articulated in such a fashion as to engender the support for solving them. Further, with the right levels of support and catalyzed momentum, there ought to be a greater chance that policies developed by a broader base might have the efficacy necessary to create sustained and dramatic change for the better.

## **Conclusion**

The findings and implications presented above shed new light on several polarities of leadership. That is to say, when examining options, a leader might be drawn to either a solutions-based approach or an approach that catalyzes employees in the task of problem solving, wherein a leader’s instinct might be to choose one or the other. However, the complicating factor is that leadership rarely involves the luxury of either/or decision-making, nor is it as simple as a single definitive solution. Rather, it is complex, and requires leaders who can see the value and truth of each polarity. Each of the challenges identified above includes polarities for leaders to consider.



Challenge 1 articulates the tension between the need to exert central control to realign the system, while simultaneously understanding the necessity of building shared ownership to reach maximum impact.

Challenge 2 requires careful attention to the message and messenger as well as the context and audience. Focusing on one without the other creates leadership blind spots.

Challenge 3 articulates the polarities of defining beliefs or crafting definitions together. That is to say, a leader either articulates her beliefs, or allows the organization to develop its own. The reality is a combination of the two, wherein a leader must both articulate her beliefs, and develop a set of shared values within the organization.

Challenge 4 requires leaders to be concerned with both the quantity and quality of engaging employees in coherence making.

Challenge 5 re-examines the concept of coherence making as either a thought exercise preceding the work or an output of the work. In place of these limiting approaches, I argue that coherence making and the work happen simultaneously.

The more generalized lessons that can be drawn from this body of work include the following:

- Implication #1: A leader must be known.
- Implication #2: Leadership is a relationship, not a transaction.
- Implication #3: Continue building opportunities for coherence making.
- Implication #4: Invest in additional messengers who can carry the vision.
- Implication #5: Establish formal leadership to advance equity.

- Implication #6: Tailor messages and opportunities to the local context.
- Implication #7: Preach to the choir.
- Implication #8: Make strategic planning and alignment part of routine process.
- Implication #9: Normalize incoherence as a natural part of any change process.
- Implication #10: Give people problems, not solutions.

Each of these implications relies on the leadership practice of focus. Without determined focus on a clear set of priorities it is easy for any leader to become distracted. The implications, taken together, might also serve as a valuable protocol for new leaders entering a community or organization. This is particularly the case when a leader is brought in with the explicit purpose of affecting deep change. Becoming known to a community and developing trust and respect is important work for a leader. So, too, is the new leader's ability to preview the messiness of change early in the process, and to assist stakeholders in crafting a new coherence, aligned to revised priorities, in service of a shared vision. The challenge of change is the new constant. How leaders adapt themselves and those whom they lead to the constancy of change is the primary challenge for our field.

One of the core assumptions behind the work of the NYC DOE is the belief that a single person can affect wide-scale change across system. This is an assumption behind the argument for mayoral control and the (re)centralization of power in the Chancellor. While there is certainly some evidence to support this position, it is important to consider counterarguments as well. In a fully centralized

system, the leader has the authority to set an agenda for the city. The upside includes the ability to ensure a base level of expectations throughout the system. The downside is the inability to differentiate expectations or respond with agility to the complexity and variability of the system.

The reality of the centralized system means that a leader's task is complicated by the necessity of delegation, distributed leadership, and the diffusion of accountability and support. Each of these areas must be carefully attended to in order to assure some level of fidelity between the leader's intention, the organization's production, and the ultimate outcomes. A leader must not only make the best decision they can, but must be ever mindful about how the decision is led, interpreted, implemented, and experienced throughout the system.

Given the view of leadership as a relationship rather than as a transaction, a leader must come equipped not only with a set of tools and strategies that might be applied to the local challenges, but also with an open mind ready to be challenged. This frame of mind might have the added benefit of accelerating the process by which the leader becomes known and comes to know the community. This reputation building, in turn, better calibrates the leader to the varied contexts and enables them to better respond to hopes and dreams, concerns and fears.

Adapting these lessons of leadership might serve to well equip those who seek to affect change. Staying attuned to the technical and developmental aspects of change will allow leaders to accelerate the process of coherence making.

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## **Appendices**



## Appendix A: McKinsey & Company Influence Model Graphic

The influence model, with its four building blocks of change, still works.



## **Appendix B: Welcome back to school letter**

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you had a wonderful summer and are returning to school energized and ready for the important work that lies ahead. During my 51 years as an educator, September has always been my favorite month. For me, September is a time of possibilities, a time to start fresh, a time to renew our commitment to reaching every student, supporting every teacher, and engaging every parent in their child's education.

Thanks to the hard work of our educators, students, and families, we are beginning this school year on a celebratory note. New York City students made substantial gains on State exams, with scores improving in every borough and district. Our graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and college readiness rates are at record highs. In addition, the number of schools designated as persistently dangerous is at a historic low. These achievements should put more of our students on the path to success after high school.

We are also coming off an especially productive summer, in which we provided our teachers with unprecedented opportunities to learn and grow. During July and August, thousands of educators attended professional development (PD) sessions in social studies, math, and computer science. You can read more about our summer PD sessions on page 4.

While these are steps in the right direction, we know that we have more work to do. Mayor de Blasio and I have a vision [[schools.nyc.gov/eeforall](https://schools.nyc.gov/eeforall)] of Equity and Excellence for All. We believe that every child—from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade—should be on a path to college and a meaningful career. The work of school improvement is difficult, but we are proving that it is not impossible.

We have set ambitious and attainable goals for New York City: By 2026, 80 percent of our students will graduate high school on time, and two-thirds will be college ready. We will not rest until all of our students are able to graduate ready for college and a career. To achieve these goals, we have started early, providing a strong foundation for every student through our Pre-K for All and Universal Second Grade Literacy programs.

These and the other initiatives that are at the core of Equity and Excellence for All are laser-focused on three critical areas:

- academic excellence, ensuring every student is college- and career-ready and all educators have opportunities for professional development and collaboration;
- unprecedented student and community support; and
- innovation, allowing us to experiment with new programming and initiatives.

Students and families will see the impact of this work in our classrooms this school year.

I know that you are already thinking about priorities for your school community. In this month's Principal Notes, I offer a few recommendations to inform your decision-making around family engagement, school environment, and teacher and student support. Please let me know how these suggestions work for you.

Please also email me your opening week success stories. You can share photos of you and your staff preparing for the new school year via email, or by tweeting #backtoschoolNYC.

As you roll out Equity and Excellence for All initiatives in your school, remember that our mission is to meet students and communities where they are, and provide the tools and opportunities they need to succeed. Every child has one shot at an excellent education. It is up to us to make sure they get it. Together, we can help all of our students realize their dreams.

I appreciate the hard work you have done to make September 8 a joyful and seamless first day of school.

Warmly,

Carmen

## Appendix C: Communicating the Vision Presentation



**Communicating  
the Vision**

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**



Thank you for your time today. I appreciate a few minutes of your time to be able to talk about our vision of Equity and Excellence for All and how we might better equip ourselves to communicate the vision throughout the DOE, and throughout the city.

---

Our vision:

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**



**[INSERT YOUR OWN STORY HERE]**

*The presenter should rehearse for and be ready to tell a 1-2 minutes personal story that illustrates why the vision of Equity and Excellence for All is important to her/him/them. This story should include a clear protagonist who faced inequity. The protagonist can be the story teller, or someone the story teller knows personally.*

## From Initiatives to Unifying Vision

### Equity + Excellence Initiatives

- Fall 2015 Announcement
- Builds on Pre-K for All
- Initiatives:

### Equity and Excellence for All

- Summer 2016 Alignment
- Communications Alignment
- Strategic Vision for all DOE activities



In 2015, Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina announced the Equity + Excellence Initiatives. These 8 initiatives built on the success of our Pre-K for All, and outlined more clearly our strategy for achieving excellent education for students throughout the city. For the 2016-2017 school year we want to move to a consistent, sustained messaging approach designed to help us organize all of the work of the DOE under the banner of Equity and Excellence for All. Beyond our 8 core initiatives, the vision of Equity and Excellence for All is really about ensuring that in everything that we do we are answering the question how does this advance the equity and excellence?

## Equity and Excellence for All

**Every child deserves to graduate ready for the future.**

It's up to us to make sure they do.

Let's shape the next generation of New York's voices and minds. Let's transform dreams into reality.

Let's empower students in every neighborhood on their path to success.

**We believe in every child's future.**

**GOALS:** By 2026:

- 80% graduation rate
- 2/3 college ready

**EQUITY & EXCELLENCE FOR ALL**

**NYC** Department of Education  
Bill de Blasio Mayor  
Carmen Fariña Chancellor

4

To accompany the vision of Equity and Excellence for all, we have adopted what we are calling, an elevator pitch, which includes some simple language that we can use . An elevator pitch gives the “why” a “what” and the “who.” It provides a succinct explanation of what we do and who we serve. It’s a clarion call. Why staff comes to work every day. You’ll also see a very distinctive tone: it’s optimistic, urgent, student-centered.

## Narrative Framework - Categories

### Academic Excellence

means striving to ensure every student is college- and career ready. We work to meet students' diverse needs with a variety of in-school and afterschool programs and support front-line educators and leadership with opportunities for professional development and collaboration.

#### Examples:

Universal Literacy  
Pre-K for All  
Computers Science for All  
AP for All

### Student & Community Support

celebrates supporting the whole child, as well as their family, on their social and emotional journey inside and outside of the classroom. We collaborate with community partners—from elected officials to public advocates—and engage parents and families to reflect the needs of local communities.

#### Examples:

Single Shepherd  
Breakfast in the Classroom  
College Access for All  
K-2 Suspension Ban

### Innovation

allows us to experiment with new programming and initiatives. We aim to provide schools and educators the flexibility and resources they need to meet students and families where they are.

#### Examples:

Community Schools  
PROSE  
District-Charter partnerships  
Renewal Schools

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

We will focus on three themes. Every initiative fits within these themes, and some programs fit across several. The key is that this gives us a way to talk about how all of the work we are doing adds up to Equity and Excellence for All Students.

- Academic Excellence means striving to ensure every student is college and career ready.
- Student & Community Support celebrates and supports the whole child.
- Innovation allows us to experiment with new ways of doing business to advance the vision.



## Action Steps

- Hone your personal message  
(Why does equity and excellence for all matter to you?)
- Communicate the vision
- Ask people to join you
- Infuse equity and excellence for all into all aspects of your work and communications
- Challenge teams to align their work advance equity and excellence for all

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

read slide

## Messaging Tactics: **Equations**



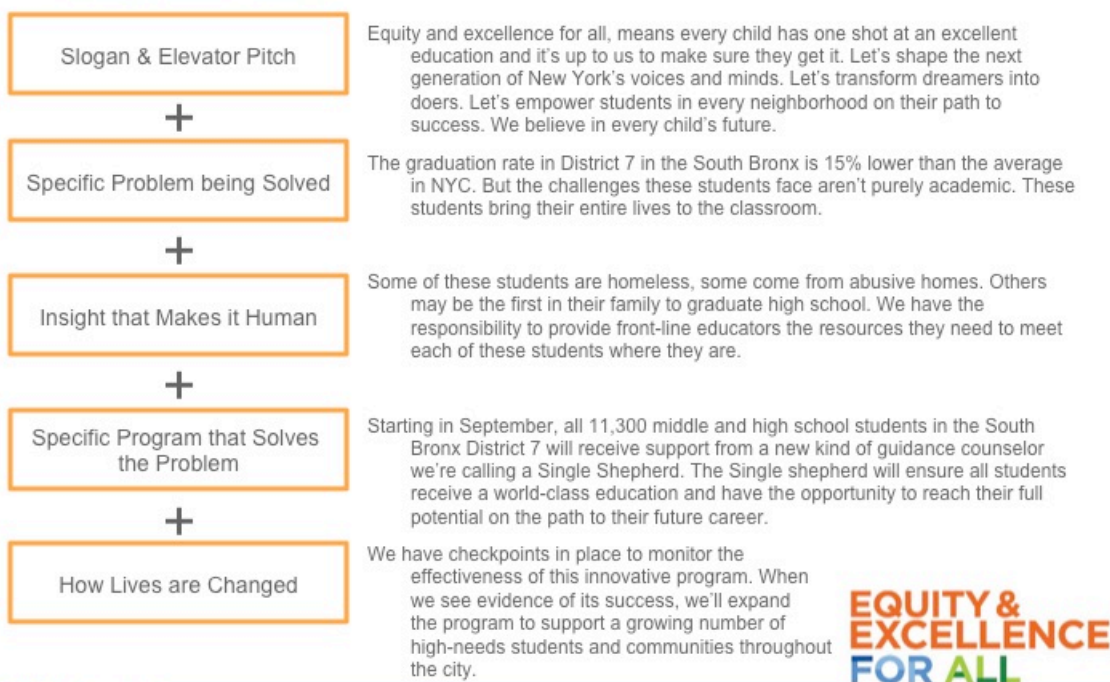
Concrete messages that highlight the solution-driven approach across the Mayor's Equity & Excellence plan and DOE initiatives. Using the slogan and elevator pitch as the entry point, these equations illustrate how a specific initiative or program aims to solve a specific human problem that creates long-term positive impact.

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

Included in this presentation are 2 methods that you can use to help incorporate the vision of equity and excellence for all into everything that we do (and say). The first is called “Equations”. In this method, we start with the elevator pitch, move to describe the specific problem we are trying to solve, add insight that makes the problem human, indicate the program that solves the problem, and conclude with talking about how lives are changed. The next two slides provide an example of this method in use.

## Messaging Tactics: **Equations**

### Long-form format



**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

This slide illustrates how the Equity and Excellence for All language can be used to talk about the Single Shepherd program. Note how the formula has been followed to produce something that could be used in a letter or long-form communication.

## Messaging Tactics: **Equations**

### Short-form format



In order to achieve equity and excellence for all, we're committed to making sure every kid gets their shot at an excellent education. This September, we're setting up 1,300 students in South Bronx District 7 with Single Shepherds, a new kind of counselor who will offer specialized support to ensure their receive world-class education.

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

This slide also illustrates how the Equity and Excellence for All language can be used to talk about the Single Shepherd program.

Note how the formula has been followed to produce something that could be used on Facebook or in a short-form communication

## Messaging Tactics: **Impact Storytelling**



Storytelling brings a human lens to faceless systemic challenges and can be a particularly effective way to motivate people to action. But it's not enough to tell a good story. Ultimately, every story shared should illustrate how the Mayor's Equity & Excellence plan or DOE initiative effectively solve problems. This tactic provides a helpful filter for determining which stories to tell and a structure for how to tell them.

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

The second strategy we want to look at is called impact storytelling. I modeled impact storytelling for you today by beginning with a personal story that illustrates how the concept of Equity and Excellence for All matters to me personally.

Ideally, the story begins by using some language from the slogan or pitch, then introduces a specific protagonist who is facing a problem. Ultimately we try to connect the problem the protagonist is facing with the solution – the program we are communicating about. We close these stories with a call to action. This can be as simple as a “join us in this work” or as specific as “please sign up to volunteer..”

## Appendix D: Central Town Hall Format and Plan

### Ursulina Ramirez Central Employee Town Halls Talking Points

#### INTRODUCTION

- Thank you all for coming out today.
- Special thanks to Tomas Hanna, Yvonne Soto and the Organizational Development Unit at 65 Court Street for their work to make today possible.
- We're here today to pause and take a moment to look backwards, a moment to reflect on where we are now, and a moment to look ahead to our path forward.
- We have made significant progress over the last few years – because of your hard work. That work continues.
- Today our Organizational Development Unit will take us through the results of our latest central employee survey, then we will hear from the Chancellor about our vision of Equity and Excellence for All, and our shared path forward.
- Following the chancellor's remarks, we will have some time for everyone here in the room to participate in small groups, followed by time for large group Questions and Answers.
- We want to be sure to get through these slides, so please jot down any questions that come up using the cards at your table – if we answer your question, cross it out, if we don't, please hold them, we have reserved time for Q&A at the end or you can hand them in to our team at any point in the meeting
- Last month, the Chancellor sent a message out to all of our DOE employees titled "Embracing a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace at the DOE"
- We believe that in order to truly achieve Equity and Excellence for All of our students, we must model inclusion in our workplace.
- We believe that equity is achieved when each student receives the tailored support needed to graduate prepared for college and careers.
- We believe excellence is achieved when students are supported—through academic rigor, cultural responsiveness, socioemotional learning, and community development—to fulfill their highest potential.
- As the Chancellor said: "To best support this vision, we must model that approach when creating a positive work environment that enables all DOE employees to thrive."
- To talk more about the results of our latest employee engagement survey, please welcome Tomas Hanna, Executive Director of the Office of Organizational Services.

#### REVIEW SURVEY RESULTS

- *[NOTE: Tomas and his team will present this portion. Ursulina should plan to "jump in" **one or two times** to highlight key points and provide context.*

#### INTRODUCE CHANCELLOR

- **[Slide 11] We started using the term Equity and Excellence more than a year ago when we announced 8 initiatives aimed at closing the achievement gap, without sacrificing quality, in our city.**
- **Those 8 initiatives are core to our efforts.**
- **By adopting the vision of Equity and Excellence for All agency wide, we are signaling that we must continue the work in everything that we do.**
- **When we design a new system, or draft a new policy, we must begin by asking ourselves how this advances equity and excellence.**
- **For more about our vision of Equity and Excellence for All, please welcome Chancellor Carmen Fariña**

### **TURN AND TALK**

- [Slide 12] We'd now like to take some time for everyone in the room to engage with one another at your seats. As you engage, senior leaders from central will be circulating throughout the room to join in the conversation.

### **REPORT OUT**

- *[As the turn and talk is happening, senior leaders should circulate the room and listen for key comments or ideas that can be lifted up for the whole room.]*
- *[Lift up ideas from senior leaders listening during the turn and talk]*

### **QUESTION AND ANSWER**

- We'll start by answering some of the questions that have come in on comment cards so far today, and if time allows we will open it up for Q&A using the microphones.
  - Comment Card Q&A
- At this time we would like to open the floor for any burning questions you might have, or comments you think would be helpful for the whole group. We want to know what's on your mind.
- Please look for a microphone, and for the purpose of time, please try to keep your comment or question concise.
- We won't be able to hear every question or comment today, so again we encourage you to use the comment cards at your table, and the survey you'll receive following our meeting today via email.
  - LIVE Q&A

### **WRAP UP**

- [Slide 13] How do we continue the conversation?
- [Slide 14] Encourage participants to complete exit survey. Two options- either now via the bit.ly link or via online survey received within 24 hours.
- When I came to the DOE three years ago I couldn't have imagined....
- Together we are making the vision of equity and excellence for all more real for more students, every single day.
- No matter what role or title you hold, we are all here to help make sure every child gets their shot at an excellent education.

- "On a visit to the NASA space center, President Kennedy spoke to a man sweeping up in one of the buildings.
  - 'What's your job here?' asked Kennedy.
  - 'Well Mr. President'" the janitor replied,
  - 'I'm helping to put a man on the moon.'" — Unknown
- I know that everyone in this room believes in the potential of our students. We know that equity and excellence for all is more than a slogan, it is our promise to the next generation of New Yorkers. Every child has one shot at an excellent education, and it is up to us to make sure they get it.

### **Fall 2016**

#### **Purposes:**

- Communicate vision: Equity and Excellence for All
- Review employee engagement survey data
- Demonstrate leadership responsiveness to survey data
- Engage central employees in next steps
- Energize central staff through listening
- Help central staff contextualize their work in terms of the vision

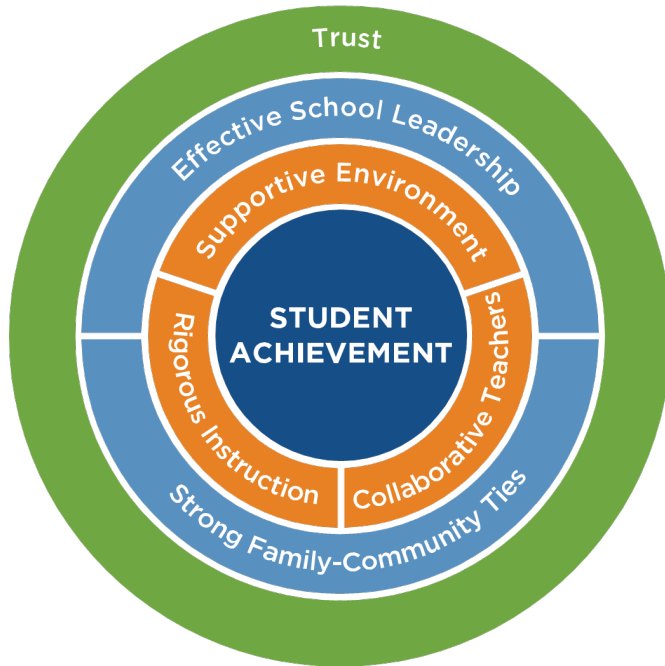
#### **Tentative Format (60 minutes):**

|            |   |                                |
|------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 5 minutes  | Welcome / Introductions                   | Ursulina                       |
| 10 minutes | Review Survey Results + Response          | Tomas + Team                   |
| 10 minutes | Our Vision: Equity and Excellence for All | Chancellor / Senior Leadership |
| 20 minutes | Turn-and-talk / discussion                |                                |
| 5 minutes  | Report out on discussion                  | Senior Leadership              |
| 5 minutes  | Burning questions                         | Senior Leadership              |
| 5 minutes  | Wrap up                                   | Ursulina                       |



## Appendix E: The Framework for Great Schools

### The Framework for Great Schools



**The Framework for Great Schools** is a fundamental change to the way the Department of Education will partner with our schools.

The Framework for Great Schools will –

- Allow the district to develop a holistic, research-based approach to school support and accountability that recognizes and celebrates what schools do every day. Our approach will honor the fact that students are more than just a test score.
- Provide tailored support to schools and foster professional learning communities.
- Hold schools and the school system accountable for the shared goal of building capacity to drive student achievement.
- Replace the spirit of competition with one of collaboration and establish a common language for improvement.
- Bring together the strengths of schools and their communities to support students throughout the school day and beyond.

## THE SIX ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR GREAT

### Rigorous Instruction

Instruction is customized, inclusive, motivating, and aligned to the Common Core. High standards are set in every classroom. Students are actively engaged in ambitious intellectual activity and developing critical thinking skills.

### Supportive Environment

The school establishes a classroom and school culture where students feel safe, supported, and challenged by their teachers and peers.

### Collaborative Teachers

Teachers are committed to the success and improvement of their classrooms and schools. They have the opportunity to participate in professional development.

### Effective School Leadership

Principals lead by example and nurture the professional growth of teachers and staff, developing and delivering the instructional and social-emotional support that drives student achievement.

### Strong Family-Community Ties

School leadership brings resources from the community into the school building by welcoming, encouraging, and developing partnerships with families, businesses, and

### Trust

Everyone works toward the shared goal of improving student outcomes, preparing students for success in school and beyond. Across the school community, there is respect. School staff, parents, students and administrators value each other.

- Advance educational attainment by preparing every New York City public school graduate to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace.

## Appendix F: myDOE Welcome Session Revised Deck



# myDOE Week: WELCOME SESSION for Central employees



# OVERVIEW OF THE NYCDOE



## THE NYCDOE IS THE LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE UNITED STATES

- 1.1 million students
- 1,818 schools in school year 2015-16
- 135,000 employees, of which 75,000 are teachers
- \$28 billion budget

*For perspective, Los Angeles Unified, the next largest school district in the country, serves 660,000 students across 1,000 schools*



3

Add content to slide or give additional context verbally:

- Largest school system in the nation
- Broad Prize Winner
- Equivalent to 10<sup>th</sup> largest city in US
- 184 languages spoken by students
- 800k meals served each day

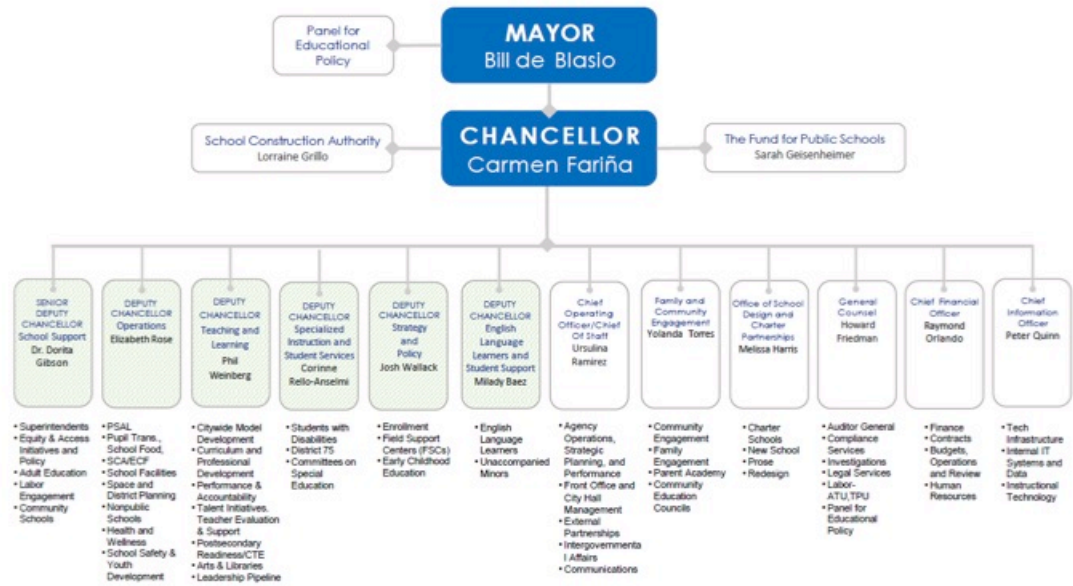
## CHANCELLOR CARMEN FARIÑA



A former teacher and school leader, Chancellor Carmen Fariña is using her experience in the classroom to bring commonsense solutions to schools such as establishing programs to strengthen the ties between schools and communities and giving teachers and students the support they need to reach higher standards.

To do this, she is using her over 50 years of expertise to lead the Department of Education in strengthening the partnership among parents, teachers, students, school leaders, and communities to help all students succeed.

## New York City Department of Education Organizational Chart



## Ambitious Goals

All students deserve to graduate high school  
ready for college and career

By 2026:

- 80% of students will graduate high school on time; and,
- at least 2/3 will be college ready



6

**Over a year ago Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina a set of ambitious goals for the Department of Education.**

- Within a decade, we will ensure that at least 80% of students graduate, and that at least 2/3rds will graduate college ready.
- We know that our work will continue until every student graduates and every student is prepared for college and career.



## Bold Vision

Our vision for what our school system should look like in order to reach our goals is built on the vision of **Equity and Excellence for All**

- **Equity** is achieved when each student receives the tailored support needed to graduate prepared for college and careers
- **Excellence** is achieved when students are supported to reach a high bar for academic and personal success

**EQUITY &  
EXCELLENCE  
FOR ALL**

Every new policy and program we launch and the ways in which we support schools, educators, students, and families is driven by this vision of Equity and Excellence for All



7

### Our vision is **Equity and Excellence for All**.

- This vision has been embodied in everything that we do, from Pre-K for All, to the 8 Equity and Excellence Initiatives that you'll hear more about.
- By setting this as our vision, we are working to ensure that every thing that we do as an agency is to support and advance the vision of equity and excellence.

*We believe **equity** is achieved when each student receives the tailored support needed to graduate prepared for college and careers.*

*We believe **excellence** is achieved when students are supported to reach a high bar for academic and personal success.*

- Ultimately we believe that every child in the city deserves to reach their fullest potential, and that it is up to us to make sure they do.



# Schools Are Making Progress, But Inequities Persist

While tremendous gains have been made in student achievement...

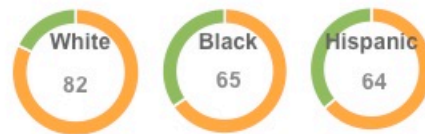


- Four-year graduation rates are at an all-time high of 70.5%

- Nearly half of high school graduates are college ready
- Math and ELA proficiency in grades 3-8 has risen over each of the last years, with significant gains in ELA

...persistent gaps remain between students and the schools that serve them

Four-year graduation rates by race:



- Students with disabilities and English Language Learners continue to lag their peers in academic performance
- Across the city's five boroughs, there are wide disparities in student achievement

A differentiated approach is required to ensure a high bar of quality and capacity across New York City's 1800 schools



\*2014-2015 School Year Graduation Rates

8

## So why does Equity and Excellence for All matter?

- Because there is still significant work to be done.
- While we have made tremendous gains over the last several years, gaps still exist.
- We must address persistent opportunity gaps of every kind, and we must implement a differentiated approach to ensure every child receives the support they need.

## Our Approach to School Improvement

The **Framework for Great Schools** is a proven research-based approach that **enables the DOE to partner with schools to improve student achievement**

Schools will drive student achievement by building capacity across the six elements:

- **Rigorous Instruction:** Instruction is customized, inclusive, motivating, and aligned to the Common Core, and high standards are set in every classroom
- **Supportive Environment:** The school establishes a culture where students feel safe, supported, and challenged by their teachers and peers.
- **Collaborative Teachers:** Teachers are committed to the success and improvement of their classrooms and schools and participate in professional development within a culture of respect and continuous improvement.
- **Effective School Leadership:** Principals lead by example and nurture the professional growth of teachers and staff, developing and delivering the instructional and social-emotional support that drives student achievement.
- **Strong Family-Community Ties:** School leadership welcomes, encourages, and develops partnerships with families, businesses, and community organizations.
- **Trust:** Everyone works toward the shared goals of improving outcomes, preparing students for success in school and beyond, and creating a community of respect.



**8x** more likely to substantially improve student achievement

**It works.**







9

### So how do we accomplish our goals?

- Our approach to school improvement is grounded in proven research that we have articulated as the Framework for Great Schools.
- At the heart of our approach is the idea that the role of Central staff is to partner with schools to help strengthen their work in six key areas.
- Emerging evidence demonstrates that school who do well in these six areas are eight times more likely to dramatically improve student achievement.
  - **The Framework for Great Schools allows us to partner with schools to ensure:**
    - Rigorous Instruction
    - Supportive Environment
    - Collaborative Teachers
    - Effective School Leadership
    - Strong Family-Community Ties
    - Trust

You will see elements of the Framework for Great Schools throughout the DOE.

## Bold Action

|   |   |
|---|---|
|  | <p>The <b>eight Equity and Excellence initiatives</b> directly address the system-wide goals of ensuring all students graduate high school ready for college and career by developing foundational academic skills, providing the skills and resources to ensure college readiness, and creating social-emotional supports for students</p> |
|  | <p><b>Pre-K for All</b> provides every four-year-old in New York City with free full-day, high-quality pre-k, building stronger math and reading skills in elementary school and a better chance at success in life</p>   |
|  | <p><b>Community Schools</b> are neighborhood hubs where students receive high-quality academic instruction, families can access social services, and communities congregate to share resources and address their common challenges.</p>   |
|  | <p>The DOE is partnering with school leaders, staff, families, and community partners across the city to transform low-performing schools through the <b>Renewal Schools</b> program.</p>   |

### Our Bold Vision require Bold Action.

**Beyond the Framework for Great Schools, we also have a number of signature priorities enacted to aggressively work to advance Equity and Excellence for All.**

- The eight **Equity and Excellence initiatives** were announced in 2015 and are aimed at critical moments across a child's journey in our system.
  - From Universal Literacy to Algebra, to College Access we are working to ensure students receive the support needed to achieve a high bar of excellence from start to finish.
- Our expansion of **Pre-K for All** to the entire city marked the most aggressive initiative in the nation's history.
  - We know that for student to succeed, we must start early.
- Our **community schools** are now the largest contingent of community schools in the nation.
  - They are an embodiment of our belief that change best happens when we collaborate with the communities we serve.
  - We currently have more than 130 community schools across the city.
- **Renewal Schools** is our signature strategy to help our most troubled schools.

- Rather than close struggling schools and disrupt communities, we are working to partner with school leaders and community partners to dramatically improve our schools.
- We are already seeing early signs of success in these schools, but we have a long road ahead to ensure they are the beacons of Equity and Excellence for All that we know they can be.

## ICEBREAKER ACTIVITY

Let's Talk About Equity and Excellence for All and Get to Know One Another

1. Learn about the Equity and Excellence for All agenda and take a look at the three key areas of our work to advance Equity and Excellence for All.
2. Find someone in the room and exchange the following information:
  - a) Your name
  - b) Your office/division
  - c) What area of the Equity and Excellence for All agenda resonates with you and why?
  - d) What can you do in your current/ new role at the DOE to support Equity and Excellence for All?



### *The Three Key Areas of Equity and Excellence for All*

1. Academic Excellence
2. Student & Community Support
3. Innovation

## **Appendix G: Discipline Code Communication**

### **Discipline Code Email to Teachers from Chancellor:**

Dear Teachers,

Providing students with a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment is our top priority. We have made tremendous strides in improving school climate because of your dedication and leadership, and are continuing to expand these critical supports. Part of this ongoing work includes focusing on age-appropriate interventions to effectively address behavioral concerns, expanding restorative practices, mental health programs and social-emotional supports, and making significant updates to the DOE's Discipline Code. To support these changes, we're investing in more resources and expanding trainings for schools.

The changes to the Discipline Code include limiting the use of suspensions for students in grades K-2 to extremely rare cases, when a student repeatedly displays behavior that is violent or could cause serious harm, or a student violates the Gun Free Schools Act.

As a teacher, I learned quickly that every child is unique, and that I needed to tailor my response to meet their individual needs. I learned that in order to hold every child to a high standard of behavior, I had to support each child along their journey. As principal, one of the most important responsibilities I had was providing coaching and support to my teachers as they honed their ability to meet the needs of the children in their classrooms. As superintendent, my job was to support principals along their journey. And as a parent and part of a family, I learned flexibility, unconditional love, support, and accountability.

I had the opportunity to connect with a student who attended Pre-K in the same building as my office. This student was less developed than her peers in terms of social and emotional skills. When she needed a cool down, she came to visit me in my office. We worked on behavior management skills, how to handle frustration and anger, and better ways to communicate. As the year progressed, her behavior improved and the number of times she came to my office decreased.

Would her behavior have changed if our intervention consisted only of sending her out of her classroom? No. If anything, [research](#) tells us that punitive consequences such as suspensions from school increases the likelihood of future instances of inappropriate behavior, and that exclusionary punishment doesn't benefit the rest of the students either.

We must get to the root of a child's behavior. What is causing a child to act out? Is it a lack of social and emotional skills? Is it something in the classroom environment that can be adjusted or changed such as a seating arrangement? We know that

sending a child out of the classroom isn't a long term solution, it is a short term fix. Especially for children in the youngest grades, we must work to implement better methods of addressing behavior disruptions.

As you reflect on your own practice and collaborate with others in your school and throughout the City, I would love to hear directly from you about what practices have worked for you. What breakthroughs have you had? When we share our successes, we empower others to follow us and learn with us. Email me and share your strong practices in this area.

Excellent teachers constantly work to improve their expertise in teaching content and teaching children, and improvement is critical to achieving our vision of *Equity and Excellence for All*. Thank you for your dedication to and guidance of our 1.1 million students every day.

Warmly,

Carmen



## **Appendix H: Diversity and Inclusion Letter from the Chancellor**

Sent via email to all DOE employees on 10/25/2016

Dear Colleagues,

My vision for New York City's public schools is to empower every student, regardless of neighborhood, to thrive along their path toward success. This mission is embodied in our vision of [Equity & Excellence for All](#), which strives for academic achievement while recognizing the diverse needs of the students and local communities we serve, equipping educators and leadership with professional development and innovative initiatives that enable the DOE to meet students and their families where they are.

We believe **equity** is achieved when each student receives the tailored support needed to graduate prepared for college and careers. **Excellence** is achieved when students are supported--through academic rigor, cultural responsiveness, socioemotional learning, and community development--to fulfill their highest potential. To best support this vision, we must model that approach when creating a positive work environment that enables all DOE employees to thrive.

Although we are a big system in numbers, we aim to be personal in service for adults and students. As we work on behalf of New York City's students, I am focused on creating a workplace where you feel valued, supported by your managers and colleagues, and empowered to collaborate and innovate. I am committed to providing you with broader professional learning opportunities, more ways to share and connect with your colleagues, a range of options for advancing your career at the DOE, and a continuing culture that values diversity and works to advance equity—whether you work in a school, a field or central office, or in another role.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

As Chancellor, I am proud to reaffirm the DOE's continued commitment to diversity, inclusion, equal employment opportunities for employees, equal educational opportunities and real equity for students, and equal procurement opportunities for vendors. We need a diverse and inclusive workforce and workplace in order to achieve the vision of Equity & Excellence for All for the 1.1 million students we serve.

In a city and school system as vast and wonderfully diverse as ours, it is particularly important that we embrace and leverage our diversity as a core strength. We must continue expanding our outreach efforts to ensure that we are attracting applicants who are representative of the full diversity of New York City.

With that in mind, I want to emphasize the following points:

- I invite you to review the DOE's [Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#), which describes our commitment to diversity and inclusion in hiring, employee retention, and vendor procurement. For more information, please review

the [diversity and inclusion resources](#) available on the DOE Intranet.

- The [DOE's Non-Discrimination Policy and Chancellor's Regulation A-830](#) reinforce our commitment to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive and that every employee has the opportunity to work in an environment that values his or her individual contributions. Please refer to Chancellor's Regulation A-830 for additional information about the procedures for filing a complaint of unlawful discrimination or harassment.
- I am committed to ensuring that all businesses, including minority and women-owned business enterprises, have an equal opportunity to compete for DOE contracts. The DOE will continue to cast a wide net for qualified suppliers.
- Consider forming an [Employee Resource Group \(ERG\)](#) or joining one of our three current ERGs—ABLE (Admins Building to Lead Effectively), NYC Schools Pride, or Women in Facilities Management. Launched earlier this year, ERGs are voluntary, employee-led groups that form around a common set of interests and foster a diverse and inclusive workplace. Proposals are currently being accepted for new ERGs. For additional information, please visit the [ERG Page](#) on the Central Employees' Portal. Please send questions to [ERG@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:ERG@schools.nyc.gov).
- If you have questions about the DOE's diversity and inclusion policies, I encourage you to contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Management at (718) 935-3320, or find them online at [schools.nyc.gov/oeo](https://schools.nyc.gov/oeo).

### **Resources and Support**

As an organization, the DOE remains committed to engage in forward-looking reforms and initiatives designed to promote the engagement and development of our diverse workforce. I want to share with you some specifics about the expanded opportunities for professional growth and engagement for those who work in the DOE's Central offices, Field Support Centers, and Superintendent's offices. This year's **Employee Engagement and Development Initiative** will build upon last year and will provide:

- An expanded professional learning and engagement calendar of activities throughout the school year
- A continued focus on training, coaching and programming for new and existing leaders and managers to support them on managing, leading and supporting employees in their growth
- Ongoing opportunities to engage with colleagues from your division and other divisions in formal and informal settings, and to learn more about the work of the DOE
- A renewed commitment to providing additional training and tools to ensure both employees and managers integrate *feedback as practice* within the DOE.
- Greater access to professional development focused explicitly on the issues of race and equity, provided across the DOE.
- You will be able to find more information about all of these opportunities,



resources and tools, as well as a calendar of coming events, via the Central Employees' Portal at [schools.nyc.gov/centralemployees](https://schools.nyc.gov/centralemployees).

### **Looking Ahead**

Later this school year, you will be invited to take part in the DOE's Annual Employee Survey. The survey will help us to ensure that the professional development and employee engagement opportunities we provide truly meet your needs. The survey is an important opportunity for you to weigh in about your experiences as a DOE employee and provide feedback about our workplace culture.

Just as we strive to create welcoming and diverse environments for our students, we must develop these same environments for our staff at all levels. Thank you for promoting workplace and academic environments that value the diverse experiences, perspectives, and contributions of our employees, students, families, and communities—and thank you, as always, for your wonderful work on behalf of New York City's students.

Sincerely,

Carmen Fariña  
Chancellor

## **Appendix I: Renewal School Program Sample Communications**

Making Public Education Work: New York City's Schools Chancellor on the National Climate and Local progress

Printed in the *New York Daily News*

Wednesday, February 1, 2017

Over the last several months, we've seen public education come under attack like never before. We've been told that "inner city" schools have been left to rot, that they are violent, dysfunctional and that their students leave school without any knowledge.

We've been told that the way to improve schools is by privatizing them, and that this work should be led by non-educators — fundraisers and executives who've never stepped foot in a classroom.

This rhetoric isn't about what's best for children. It's offensive and flat-out false, and its only purpose is to undermine public education — which is the foundation of our democracy.

Educators and leaders can't afford to remain silent while those without skin in the game make false attacks on our schools and public education.

That's why I pledge to always stand up for public education. I've spent more than 50 years in education, and I've seen too much of the incredible work of teachers and principals — and the incredible results for students and families — not to fight for it.

It's time for a reality check. First and foremost, nothing succeeds like success, and that's what we're seeing more and more in public schools across the country. Here in New York City, by every measure, schools are the most successful they have ever been. We have a record-high graduation rate and the lowest-ever dropout rate, the highest number of students ready for and going to college, a record number of students taking and passing AP exams and test scores continuing to rise.

And the promise of public schools is that we serve all children, not just some. We are addressing a number of struggling schools — schools that have faced long-standing and systemic challenges for decades — head-on. Through the Renewal School program, we're providing 86 schools with five hours of extra learning each week, targeted training, wraparound services to get at underlying issues and the support and guidance they need to get better.

Our investment in Renewal Schools demonstrates our belief in the power of public education and in the potential of every student to succeed — that's the message we

send when we invest in our kids and our schools, and have educators overseeing this work.

If you put time and effort into public education, you get results. It's no surprise that Renewal Schools are seeing real progress: graduation rates and state test scores have increased, chronic absenteeism and suspensions have decreased, and more parents are involved in their children's education than ever before.

Those who think public education is a lost cause should look no further than M.S. 50 in Williamsburg. There, Principal Ben Honoroff has leveraged his school's Renewal resources, including additional learning time, to create a championship debate team. The debate program has not only won city-wide tournaments, but it has sharpened students' critical thinking skills and helped them perform better on State ELA and math exams.

And those who think struggling schools can't improve should visit Leaders of Tomorrow Middle School in the Bronx where Principal Sean Licata helped create one of the city's only aviation-oriented STEM programs using real flight simulators. The program combines physics, math, geography and meteorology, all while giving students their first taste of what it's like to fly an aircraft.

Students at this school aren't just developing a new interest in their STEM classes, they're dreaming about becoming pilots and engineers.

We're not turning around every school overnight, and the truth is, it won't work every time. When schools don't make the improvements their students need, we will continue to hold them accountable — including consolidating and closing schools. But when you believe in something, you fight for it.

We believe in our kids, and we're fighting for them. We believe in public education. That's why we're going to keep investing in our Renewal Schools, and working harder than ever to improve them.

There is a lot more work to do, and we are ready.

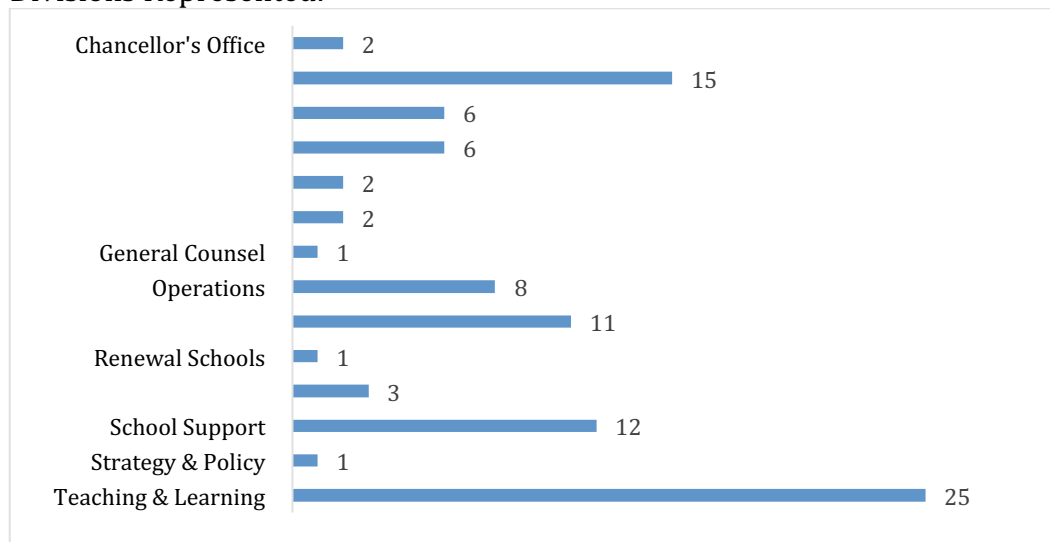
## Appendix J: Central Town Hall Survey Results

### MANHATTAN TOWN HALL SURVEY REPORT

| Date Registered Attended Survey Responses |
|---|
| 10/6/16 177 188 (106%) 97 (51%)           |

| Survey Item   | N  | Question Score | Overall Survey Score |
|---|----|----------------|----------------------|
| The Town Hall helped me to further understand the work of Central Office and how it supports schools.           | 95 | 3.3            | 3.7                  |
| The Town Hall helped me to understand the Chancellor's vision of Equity and Excellence for All.                 | 95 | 3.7            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided information about how senior leadership is addressing the concerns of Central employees. | 95 | 3.7            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided new information about growth and development opportunities for Central employees.        | 95 | 3.3            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to connect with colleagues.  | 95 | 4.0            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives.  | 95 | 3.7            |                      |
| I was able to ask important questions about my work or the work of the DOE.                                     | 95 | 3.5            |                      |
| How would you rate the overall quality of the Town Hall?  | 95 | 3.8            |                      |
| Would you like there to be more events like this one?   | 95 | 4.1            |                      |

#### Divisions Represented:

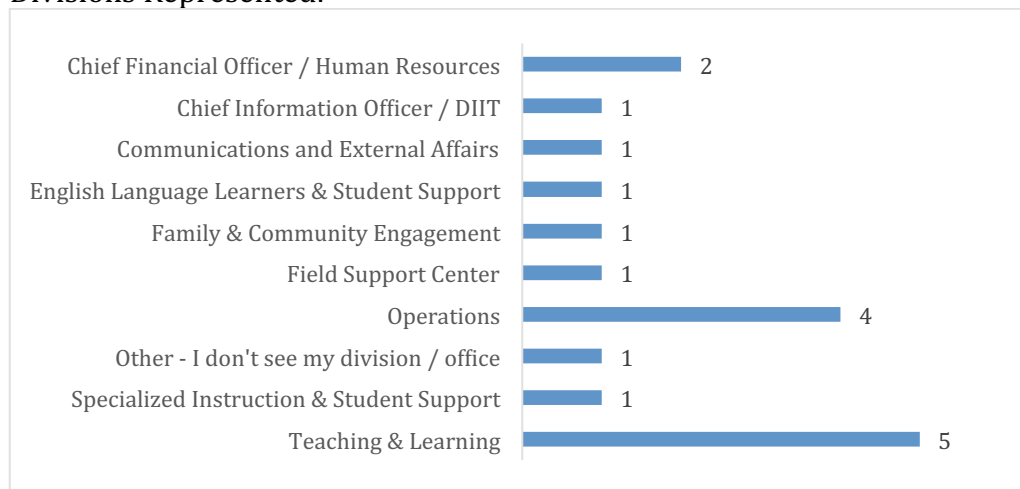


## QUEENS TOWN HALL SURVEY REPORT

| Date Registered Attended Survey Responses |
|---|
| 10/17/16 36 57 (158%) 23 (40%)            |

| Survey Item   | N  | Question Score | Overall Survey Score |
|---|----|----------------|----------------------|
| The Town Hall helped me to further understand the work of Central Office and how it supports schools.           | 18 | 3.7            | 3.9                  |
| The Town Hall helped me to understand the Chancellor's vision of Equity and Excellence for All.                 | 18 | 4.3            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided information about how senior leadership is addressing the concerns of Central employees. | 18 | 3.8            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided new information about growth and development opportunities for Central employees.        | 18 | 3.1            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to connect with colleagues.  | 18 | 4.2            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives.  | 18 | 4.3            |                      |
| I was able to ask important questions about my work or the work of the DOE.                                     | 18 | 3.6            |                      |
| How would you rate the overall quality of the Town Hall?  | 18 | 3.9            |                      |
| Would you like there to be more events like this one?   | 18 | 4.2            |                      |

### Divisions Represented:

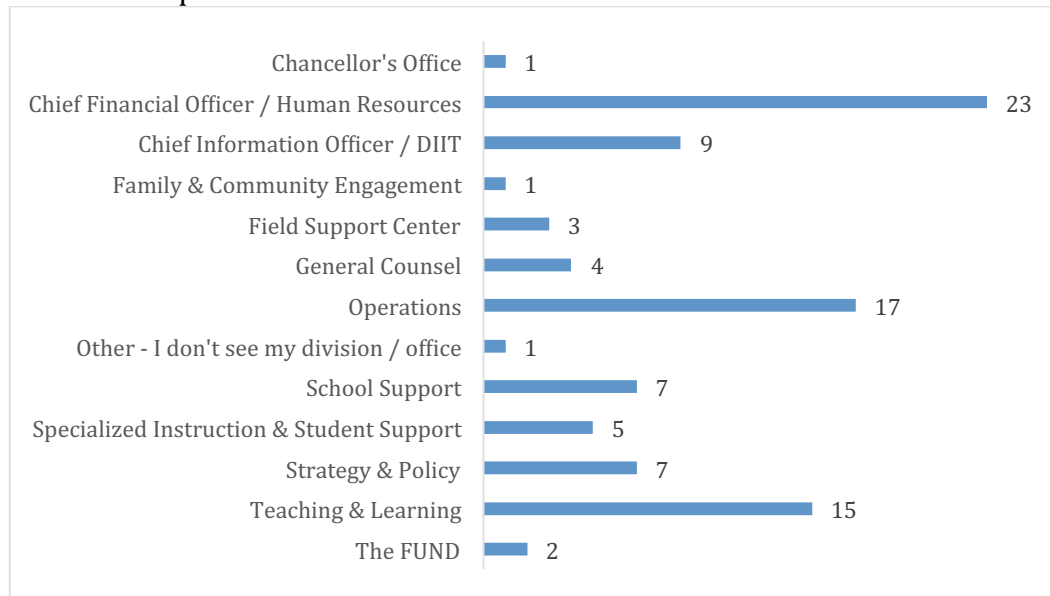


## BROOKLYN TOWN HALL SURVEY REPORT

| Date    | Registered | Attended  | Survey Responses |
|---------|------------|-----------|------------------|
| 11/1/16 | 188        | 125 (66%) | 114 (91%)        |

| Survey Item   | N  | Question Score | Overall Survey Score |
|---|----|----------------|----------------------|
| The Town Hall helped me to further understand the work of Central Office and how it supports schools.           | 95 | 3.6            | 3.9                  |
| The Town Hall helped me to understand the Chancellor's vision of Equity and Excellence for All.                 | 95 | 4.0            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided information about how senior leadership is addressing the concerns of Central employees. | 95 | 3.7            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided new information about growth and development opportunities for Central employees.        | 95 | 3.3            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to connect with colleagues.  | 95 | 4.2            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives.  | 95 | 3.8            |                      |
| I was able to ask important questions about my work or the work of the DOE.                                     | 95 | 3.8            |                      |
| How would you rate the overall quality of the Town Hall?  | 95 | 4.1            |                      |
| Would you like there to be more events like this one?   | 94 | 4.4            |                      |

### Divisions Represented:



## BRONX TOWN HALL SURVEY REPORT

Date  
11/14/16

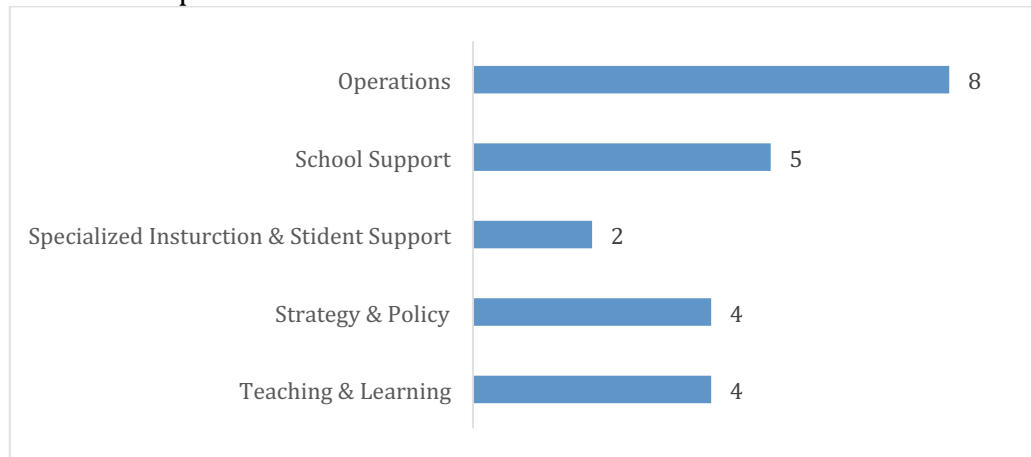
Registered  
68

Attended  
53 (78%)

Survey Responses  
26 (49%)

| Survey Item   | N  | Question Score | Overall Survey Score |
|---|----|----------------|----------------------|
| The Town Hall helped me to further understand the work of Central Office and how it supports schools.           | 22 | 3.8            | 3.8                  |
| The Town Hall helped me to understand the Chancellor's vision of Equity and Excellence for All.                 | 22 | 3.9            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided information about how senior leadership is addressing the concerns of Central employees. | 22 | 3.8            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided new information about growth and development opportunities for Central employees.        | 22 | 3.5            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to connect with colleagues.  | 22 | 4.0            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives.  | 22 | 4.0            |                      |
| I was able to ask important questions about my work or the work of the DOE.                                     | 22 | 3.4            |                      |
| How would you rate the overall quality of the Town Hall?  | 21 | 4.0            |                      |
| Would you like there to be more events like this one?   | 21 | 4.2            |                      |

### Divisions Represented:



## STATEN ISLAND TOWN HALL SURVEY REPORT

**Date**  
11/30/16

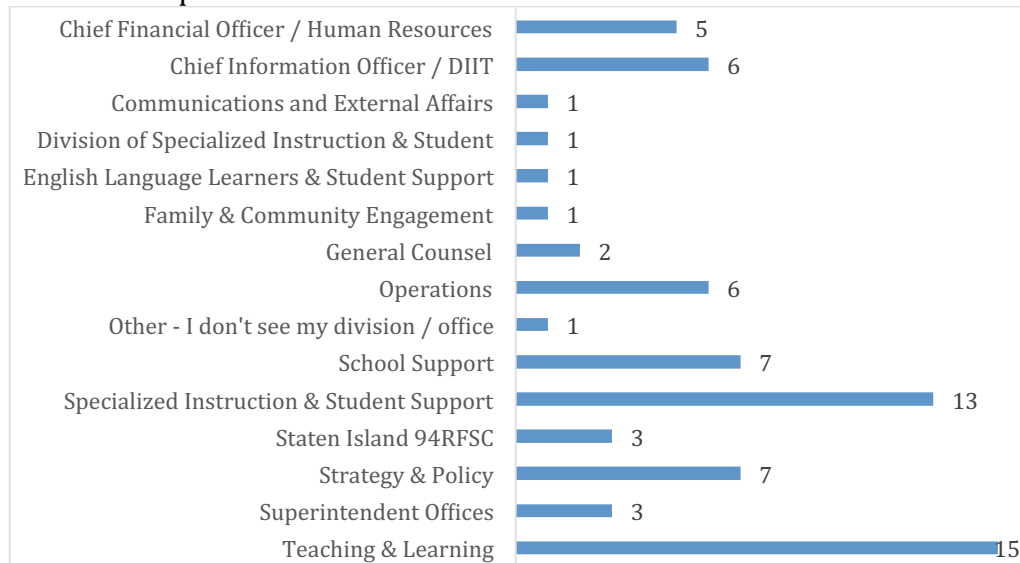
**Registered**  
65

**Attended**  
121 (186%)

**Survey Responses**  
79 (65%)

| Survey Item   | N  | Question Score | Overall Survey Score |
|---|----|----------------|----------------------|
| The Town Hall helped me to further understand the work of Central Office and how it supports schools.           | 72 | 4.0            | 4.1                  |
| The Town Hall helped me to understand the Chancellor's vision of Equity and Excellence for All.                 | 72 | 4.2            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided information about how senior leadership is addressing the concerns of Central employees. | 72 | 4.0            |                      |
| The Town Hall provided new information about growth and development opportunities for Central employees.        | 72 | 3.9            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to connect with colleagues.  | 72 | 4.3            |                      |
| I had an opportunity to discuss DOE initiatives.  | 72 | 4.0            |                      |
| I was able to ask important questions about my work or the work of the DOE.                                     | 72 | 3.9            |                      |
| How would you rate the overall quality of the Town Hall?  | 71 | 4.2            |                      |
| Would you like there to be more events like this one?   | 71 | 4.4            |                      |

### Divisions Represented:





## Appendix K: District Self-Assessment

| District Self Assessment       |  |          |
|--------------------------------|--|----------|
| Component                      |  | Evidence |
| <b>Fostering Direction</b>     | • Shared purpose drives action   |          |
|                                | • A small number of goals tied to student learning drive decisions                                       |          |
|                                | • A clear strategy for achieving the goals is known by all   |          |
|                                | • Change knowledge is used to move the district forward  |          |
| <b>Collaborative Cultures</b>  | • A growth mindset underlies the culture   |          |
|                                | • Leaders model learning themselves and shape a culture of learning                                      |          |
|                                | • Collective capacity building is fostered above individual development                                  |          |
|                                | • Structures and processes support intentional collaborative work  |          |
| <b>Deepening Learning</b>      | • Learning goals are clear to everyone and drive instruction   |          |
|                                | • A set of effective pedagogical practices are known and used by all educators                           |          |
|                                | • Robust processes (collaborative inquiry and examining student work) used regularly to improve practice |          |
| <b>Securing Accountability</b> | • Continuously improving results   |          |
|                                | • Underperformance is an opportunity for growth not blame  |          |
|                                | • External accountability is used transparently to benchmark progress                                    |          |

Fullan & Quinn, 2015

(Fullan & Quinn, 2015)