



# On The Line

Garden City Public Schools  
Fall 2019, Vol. 21, No.1

Dear Community Members,

As we progress in the 2019-20 school year, I'd like to provide you with an update on a few of our major priorities for enhancing our learning environment for students.

We are implementing the Readers Workshop through Teachers College Reading Project in all of our K-5 classrooms. Early feedback from faculty, administrators and students has been extremely positive. And in alignment with our goals to implement computational thinking across grade levels, we have introduced Project Lead the Way to our middle school through a new App Creator course, which has been well received. We also continue to explore and implement programs to address the mental health and social-emotional needs of our students.

Security continues to be a major focus. We have added security vestibules at our schools, implemented a one-button lockdown system and upgraded camera software. In the next few weeks, we will be installing security kiosks as part of our new visitor management system.

Cybersecurity has also been a major focus, and we continue to take measures and utilize available resources to guard our information and provide a safer online community for our schools.

Thank you for your ongoing support. I look forward to seeing you around our schools and in the community.

Sincerely,

Kusum

Kusum Sinha, Ed.D.



*Students engaged in independent reading time, the heart and soul of the Readers Workshop.*

## Cultivating Thoughtful Readers

This fall, Garden City became a Teachers College Reading Project partner school district, opening the doors to ongoing professional development and a variety of tools to help all K-5 students become avid and skilled readers, writers and inquirers. This addition dovetails well with the district's reading philosophy and complements our work with the Foundations program.

Garden City takes a Balanced Literacy approach to reading instruction. Our program is always evolving due to ongoing research, curriculum development and collaboration between students, teachers and school leaders.

Faculty at each primary and elementary school have been engaged in

professional development with a Teachers College Reading Project staff developer who works regularly with them.

The multifaceted Readers Workshop is the day-to-day instructional model of the program. One component is independent reading time, the "heart and soul" of the Readers Workshop, which teaches students how to connect ideas and extended thoughts in books and engage in accountable discussions about them in a community-like environment.

Grade K-2 students participate in shared reading opportunities that usually begin by warming up – rereading a familiar poem, chart or other text, sharing what they read and rereading certain focus texts over the course of five days.

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## Cultivating Thoughtful Readers

Teachers model mastery-level reading behaviors during this time and students read along and participate, turn and talk, or engage in extension activities revolving around the texts.

“The Teachers College Readers Workshop provides explicit, tailored instruction for teachers that adapts to the individual learner’s ability and style,” Stratford School Principal Eileen Vota said. “It engages students, sparks meaningful conversations about the content, and gives the students and the teacher more power than ever before. And it’s always being revised based on the latest research while meeting the needs of different levels of readers.”

Word Study, which implements the district’s Foundations program, provides systematic instruction on foundational skills for reading and spelling. Skills are explicitly taught taking a multisensory approach. The Readers Workshop and Foundations complement each other well in strengthening phonemic awareness while decoding words and writing them. Once students learn to read, they begin reading to learn, building comprehension.

Independent reading time is integral to allow students to build stamina in their reading, staying focused for long periods of time. Students explore a variety of genres and write about what they have read.

“Teachers have been teaching with this philosophy for a long time,” Vota added. “Utilizing the Readers Workshop enables them to deliver it more systematically, more thoroughly and more thoughtfully.”

### Why Readers Workshop?

- Cultivates independent, sophisticated readers.
- Rich, engaging, accessible texts.
- Supportive of all types of learners.
- Students read more, read more strategically and read with more enjoyment and sophistication!



Inside the Readers Workshop.



Building apps through the Project Lead the Way method, in Jeffrey Augi’s class at GCMS.

## PLTW Expansion Bridges Innovation at All Levels

This fall, the Project Lead the Way curriculum was introduced at the middle school to bridge the computational thinking skills taught at the elementary level and provide a sequence leading to the high school computer science courses. This meets the district priority of providing seamless instruction in computational thinking across grade levels.

Through the new App Creator course, sixth and seventh graders are learning basic computer science concepts and coding language. Utilizing a program developed by MIT, titled MIT App Inventor, App Creator teaches students to use block-style coding to map out the development of an application. They are experimenting, working with different algorithms or rules to overcome obstacles, and solving problems to ultimately program their app to carry out its intended function. Navigation, fitness, environment and games are some of the themes of the apps students are working on. Every sixth and seventh grader at the middle school will participate in the App Creator course.

“Some kids who were not very interested in this type of work have found a lot of enjoyment in this course and are keeping a more open mind to this for the future,” said Jeff Augi, who teaches the App Creator course at the middle school and underwent extensive training along with fellow PLTW teachers Rich Bury and Fred Caputo. “Students are collaborating together to create and write code in order to create useful computer apps. This is similar to coding teams that create the apps that we use on a daily basis.”

# A Comprehensive Approach to Counseling

Garden City High School's Counseling department is focusing on improving student independence and self-reliance and modifying programs to ensure their social-emotional readiness.

It starts when students arrive in ninth grade, as all counselors meet individually with freshman to build relationships. Grade-level assemblies are held to provide a general overview of expectations, followed by small group meetings with counselors. By sophomore year student workshops and classroom presentations begin, initially focusing on decision-making, college and career planning, and transcript review. They then delve into junior-year mock interviews and finally Naviance and the Common Application in senior year. The counseling department implemented a Common Application workshop this year, which assisted seniors with last-minute tips.

The department also coordinates mini college fairs and college visits, as well as family evening programs to assist with college planning (College Major Night, Financial Aid

Night, PTA Parent University support). Grade-level programs for parents and students are offered, covering topics such as balance, independence, decision-making, and social-emotional and college and career readiness.

Support services available include extracurricular clubs and activities regarding goal setting, planning, friendship, decision-making and coping skills. Classroom presentations are given regarding substance use, sexual health, mental health and suicide prevention, with many programs supported by the PTA.

"We are continually adding programs or modifying existing programs to meet students' needs,"

said Assistant Principal for Guidance and PPS, Mandi Stefankiewicz. "Our goal is to provide students with the tools necessary to problem solve and advocate for themselves. We encourage students to disconnect self-worth and esteem from academic achievement or college acceptance. We want to assist students and their families in finding the right fit for postsecondary success."

Resources are continuously shared with students and parents and posted on the guidance webpage of the district site: [www.gardencity.k12.ny.us](http://www.gardencity.k12.ny.us).

Students are encouraged to make appointments with their counselors to address any questions or concerns.



## Expanding on the 'Foundations' of Reading

This fall, the district expanded use of the Foundations program to grade 2, having experienced great success with the program during the 2018-19 school year, when it was introduced to the primary grades.

Foundations is a multisensory and systematic phonics, spelling and handwriting program. The expansion builds on the foundational skills taught at the primary buildings, establishing stronger phonemic awareness as students build up their comprehension. It also provides a structure for teachers to scaffold or break up text, discuss vocabulary and, if necessary, shorten and modify texts for different learners so that every student can experience success.

"Foundations lessons provide students with multiple opportunities to meaningfully practice concepts, skills and strategies," Homestead Principal Dr. Suzanne Viscovich said. "The purpose of instruction is to both read and write for meaning, understanding and joy."

### Foundations emphasizes:

Phonemic awareness	Vocabulary
Phonics/word study	Comprehension strategies
High-frequency word study	Handwriting
Reading fluency	Spelling



A student at Homestead School leads the class in a Foundations exercise.

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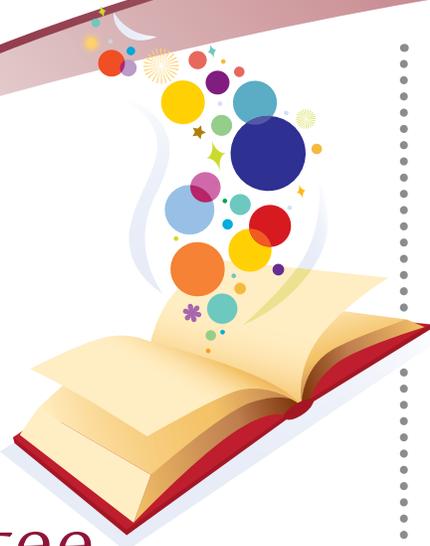
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# Literacy Committee Established



The district has established a K-12 Literacy Committee with a focus on creating and ensuring a seamless K-12 literacy continuum. The committee is comprised of approximately 15 members and is represented by teachers, administrators and parents.

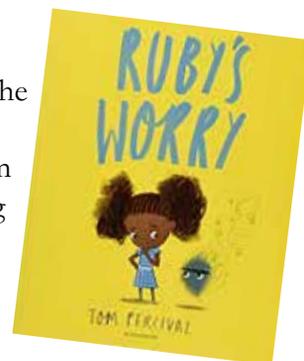
“The charge of the Literacy Committee will be to ensure that our practices are consistent and that we maintain a common K-12 philosophy,” Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kusum Sinha said. “The immediate focus will be on K-5 alignment and to ensure that primary and elementary students enter middle school as stronger readers.”

Other important responsibilities for the committee will be to review, evaluate and refine existing practices and assessments including the district’s Academic Intervention Services and Response to Intervention. The committee’s work also ensures a deep understanding and alignment of practices with the New York State ELA standards.

## Teaching Youngsters Not to Worry

As part of the district’s ongoing priority on mental health, the book “Ruby’s Worry” was introduced to the K-3 curriculum.

“Ruby’s Worry,” authored by Tom Percival, is a sensitive and reassuring story about what to do when a worry won’t leave you alone. Ruby, the main character of the book, is a happy, curious, imaginative girl who one day is confronted with an unexpected worry that grows a little bigger with each day until she learns to shrink it away. In conjunction with the Garden City PTA, the book is being introduced to teach young students strategies for coping with stress, including communicating any concerns with their parents. The book also promotes self-awareness, self-management and self-esteem.



## Remind App Available to All

The district has fully subscribed to the Remind app to enable parents to communicate directly with teachers. The Remind app is available to Garden City parents for use on phones and other personal devices free of charge.



Information about enrolling in Remind will be provided to parents and students. Parents are encouraged to use the Remind app in lieu of emailing teachers directly, as the subscription offers the ability for two-way communication.

In addition to the ease of utilizing texting for direct communication, the Remind app also prevents the need for parents to use their personal emails to communicate with teachers to ask questions.