

IDEA Public Charter School Principal Messages from 2017-2018 School Year

June Message from the Principal

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed strength, stamina, and smarts from our scholars. We have watched scholars presenting their portfolios to demonstrate what they've learned and recognize where they still need to grow. We have worked with seniors in our first extended school year to provide a second chance to fulfill graduation requirements, so they might be able to walk with their class at graduation. We have held the final Saturday school session of the year, where scholars put in extra hours to ensure they mastered the concepts they needed to succeed. Our teachers and staff have also worked tirelessly to support scholars in every possible way, while also challenging themselves to grow professionally. I am proud of our entire learning community.

Our seniors have already finished their high school coursework and exams and are preparing for graduation on June 15. Even before graduation, however, they enjoyed celebrating the end of high school with friends and loved ones at our senior prom.

Our freshmen, sophomores, and juniors will be completing their final exams next week. Our summer programming at IDEA is just around the corner. Summer school and Summer Bridge begin June 25 and provides an important opportunity for any scholars who need to recover credits in order to transition successfully to the next grade or to graduate. Even current freshmen need to make sure they are on track to graduate on time. Our Summer Bridge program introduces incoming freshmen to the rigors and requirements of high school, prepares them for high school level work and culture, and enables them to make friends and get to know teachers before the new school year starts in the fall. We understand the importance of preparing scholars early for college, the military, or the workforce.

By practicing effort, reflection and refinement as a school community, we have showcased our ability to grow. As we prepare for the start of our 2018-2019 school year, we welcome your comments and suggestions to help us refine at IDEA. We invite you to take our quick survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FMV988F> to share your ideas.

Thank you again to our families, our partners, our supporters, and everyone in our community who has gone the extra mile this school year to challenge, encourage, and lift up our scholars.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

May Message from the Principal

We've been working so hard all school year, and the time is now upon us to show what we've learned! On May 15, 16, 17, and 18, IDEA freshmen and sophomores enrolled in Algebra 1, Geometry, English 1, and English 2 will take the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) tests during school. Scholars will be challenged with complex material that enables them to demonstrate their growth, showing how they can compare texts, site evidence, argue geometric proofs, and other fundamental skills.

While scholars are the ones taking the PARCC test, families play an important role in their scholars' success. PARCC encourages parents and grandparents to get involved in their scholars' preparation for the test with these five tips:

- **FIND OUT THE FACTS.** Scholars will take the tests on May 15-18. The assessments are broken down into three to four units in each subject. Scholars typically take one or two units each day. Depending on the grade level and subject, students will have up to 110 minutes to complete each unit, though many will finish in much less time. For more information about the PARCC test, visit <http://belearninghero.org/classroom/parcc> and talk to me or your child's teachers.
- **LOOK AT THE PRACTICE TEST.** Learn how the test relates to classwork and see the kinds of reading, math, and writing questions your child will be answering. Help your scholar get familiar with the test format and features. To see a practice test, visit <http://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests>.
- **KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILD SHOULD BE LEARNING IN ENGLISH AND MATH.** To find out the grade level standards, read the [PTA Parents' Guide to Success](#), which includes descriptions of the skills and knowledge your child is expected to gain each year.
- **USE YOUR CHILD'S TEST RESULTS FROM LAST YEAR TO IDENTIFY AREAS NEEDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT.** Talk with your child's teachers to see what types of supplemental activities you can do at home. Find activities that match your child's performance in both subjects in the [Be a Learning Hero Skill Builder](#).
- **PRACTICE! PRACTICE! PRACTICE!** For sample problems and questions along with solutions and answers, visit <http://www.greatschools.org/gk/common-core-test-guide/>.

Juniors and seniors will take this time to focus on credit recovery if necessary and will also be creating art that will make a lasting impression on our school. Led by art teacher Jennifer Sonkin, scholars will rotate through seven community art projects.

Our JROTC cadet leaders will be passing their commands to the next group of scholars on Saber Day, which will take place on May 14. This is a moving and impressive ceremony for our cadets and their families.

Seniors are preparing for their final exams and portfolio presentations to demonstrate that they are ready to graduate. Finals for seniors will May 21-23. Mark your calendar for our commencement ceremony on IDEA's own parade ground on June 15.

Of course, our scholars' achievements would not be possible without the steadfast dedication of our teachers and staff. We will celebrate our wonderful teachers with treats and surprises throughout Teacher Appreciation Week May 7-11.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with any concerns about your scholar.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

April Message from the Principal

Just as we see the daffodils bloom and the cherry trees blossom, in the springtime at IDEA we witness our students' remarkable growth. On April 23, we begin the fourth quarter of the school year, when both scholars and staff focus on demonstrating our growth and showing what we've learned.

This week we've completed our senior audits, where we sit down with each senior to make sure they're on track to meet the academic, attendance, and community service requirements to graduate in June. If scholars are missing any necessary elements, we work with them to create an action plan to get them up to speed by June 8. Families of scholars who are at risk of not graduating on time have already received notifications about what their scholars need to do, and we value family support in helping our scholars succeed.

Understanding that on-time graduation begins long before senior year, we're also working with ninth graders to ensure they're on track to graduate in June 2021. Our freshmen took the PSAT this week to create a growth measure from year to year. The test results will not count toward college admissions, but rather will serve as a launching pad for a motivational conversation with freshmen about their college aspirations and how IDEA can help them achieve their goals. Scholars are busy preparing their end-of-year portfolio presentations to show how they've grown academically this year. Families are encouraged to ask their scholars what they've learned, what skills they've improved on, and what artifacts they've collected to illustrate their growth. Meanwhile, our teachers and administrators are going through the same exercise, preparing their own portfolios to indicate their development as educators and their mastery of the [Five Guiding Principles for Faculty](#). All of us in the IDEA family hold each other accountable to the same standards of excellence.

Next week scholars will take third quarter exams. Remember that at IDEA we always celebrate success, balancing hard work in the classroom with service to others and fun. After exams are over each day, scholars will engage in community service cleanups at Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens and throughout the Deanwood community and enjoy field trips to play games at Dave & Buster's and see the movie A Wrinkle in Time.

We are proud of the hard work that our scholars and staff have done so far this year and are confident that their growth will be evident in the coming weeks and we will all celebrate together.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

March Message from the Principal

When you're working day in and day out with scholars--leading a physics lab on kinetic energy, helping a struggling scholar to pass a tough class, or simply trying to get distracted kids back on track, it's easy to forget the big picture. That's one of the many reasons that we at IDEA are committed to collecting and analyzing data to see how we are performing as a school and how we can best serve our scholars and families.

We wanted to share with you that the numbers we're seeing now--and the scholars behind those numbers--are making us proud.

- More than 70% of families engaged with our teachers in discussions of how scholars are performing and how we can work together to support our scholars.
- 98% of our seniors--that's 52 out of the 53 members of the Class of 2018--have been accepted to college. Our seniors have received offers of admission from more than 40 schools. (Check out the list of colleges and universities [here](#))
- 64% of our seniors have already completed more than 100 hours of community service.
- Nearly 70% of our seniors are on track to graduate in June--almost twice the rate of seniors in DCPS high schools, where only 42% are on track to graduate on time.

To further increase the number of seniors who receive their diplomas this year and are ready for the next step toward their future, IDEA is offering an extended school year from May 30 to June 8 for seniors who need just a little more time to achieve success, without having to go to summer school. We will still, however, offer summer school for credit recovery for all scholars.

Of course, it's more than just numbers that motivates our staff every day--it's the scholars. Seeing the determination of scholars with learning challenges who decided to spend their spring break obtaining job readiness skills through DC3C. Feeling the pride and respect of our US Army JROTC officers and cadets as they demonstrated outstanding etiquette and social skills at the Military Ball. Admiring the handiwork of our Academy of Construction and Design interns as they take on their first real world construction job. I am encouraged by the successes, large and small, of all of our scholars, and I appreciate the support from our families that remind our scholars who and what they can become.

My door is always open if you have questions or concerns.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

February Message from the Principal

As we reach the end of Black History Month, all of us at IDEA are proud to see how our own scholars are making history every day. Four of our Academy of Construction and Design scholars helped build a new school in Clarks Towne, Jamaica in two days. Another IDEA scholar was selected as a community ambassador for the United States Holocaust Museum. Additionally, several students are creating art, serving their community, and empowering their peers through their positive actions. College acceptance letters--and scholarship offers--are pouring in from all over the country for our hardworking seniors.

Our scholars achieve these successes in part because of the dedication of our teachers, who never stop learning and growing. A team of staff members participated in a two-day training at [Boys Town](#) to become more effective at teaching essential social skills to our scholars. Another team spent the day shadowing staff members at Washington Latin Public Charter School, a DC Public Charter School Board Tier I school, to observe best practices that we can adopt at IDEA toward our goal of obtaining Tier I status. Our staff continues to tutor after school, teach Saturday school, coach sports, and lead clubs to ensure that our scholars have every opportunity to thrive.

Our community is also a key factor in helping our scholars make history. Peace Fellowship Church rents space for its activities at IDEA, but it's more than just a tenant. Peace Fellowship Church led a peace rally this month, with the hashtag #loveisgoodIDEA to promote positive social interaction and increase the peace. The church has also contracted with IDEA's Academy of Construction and Design to complete renovations to its office space, which enables our scholars to demonstrate their learning through the real world experience.

Our families are crucial to the history IDEA is making. We are excited to be meeting with parents this week for parent-teacher conferences, where our scholars will be playing a key role in communicating their successes and their challenges with their parents and teachers, and all parties will work together to plan for the future.

On February 9, we celebrated the 100th day of the school year by sharing 100 reasons why we love IDEA. Here's why I love IDEA: Our scholars get the opportunity to grow into stronger intellectuals, collaborative leaders, and productive citizens each and every day. [Please click here to let us know why you love IDEA!](#)

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

January Message from the Principal

Welcome to the third quarter! It's hard to believe we are already halfway through the school year. This quarter our theme is productive effort. Everyone is putting in the work and we are performing! We are assessing student progress, preparing seniors to graduate, and making a renewed emphasis on attendance. Students need to come to school every day to make the most of their learning opportunities!

Our scholars have just finished their second quarter exams, and many scholars started new elective classes in art, music, construction and design, JROTC, and driver's education. Several of our first semester driver's ed students have already earned their learner's permits or driver's licenses! We are excited to have yet another avenue to prepare our students for life after high school.

As the weather this winter has proven to be erratic, please note that we have a new system for sending alerts to families via text message. We can now text all families with notices of delays and cancellations due to inclement weather or any other emergencies that arise. If the IDEA office does not have your cell phone number, please provide it so we can make sure we can contact you if needed.

Our next workforce lunch will be January 26, and we are looking for professionals and partners in the community who are willing to join us for an hour or two during students' lunch hours to share their businesses, careers, and other post-secondary education and work opportunities with our scholars. Please let us know if you'd like to participate in this popular program.

This Thursday, January 18 at our parent volunteer program meeting, families will hear from the new youth advocate from Hillside, one of our support services partners. We will also discuss upcoming events on PARCC assessment readiness and college and career planning opportunities.

Last weekend we had our first successful open house of 2018 and invite prospective students and families to visit IDEA at any of our upcoming open houses at 9am on Saturday, February 10, Saturday, March 10, or Saturday, April 14. Remember that current students are eligible to receive a cash referral bonus when they recruit new students to IDEA!

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

December Message from the Principal

Happy holidays from our IDEA family to yours! While we are decking the halls in a friendly competition, preparing musical numbers for our WinterFest concert, and looking out the window for snow, IDEA scholars and staff are still hard at work. Our second quarter theme is REFINE—one element of our growth equation (EFFORT + REFLECT + REFINE = GROWTH)—and we are continually seeking ways to strengthen our teaching, learning, and school culture.

One way we're refining the whole school environment that our scholars experience is by giving scholars the opportunity to participate in a schoolwide survey to give feedback to their teachers and their school. We asked scholars to reflect thoughtfully about their experiences at IDEA and we will take their input seriously as a staff to find ways we can better meet the needs of all of our scholars.

I invited several juniors and seniors to my inaugural principal's lunch bunch this week to hear more in-depth insights from them. At the session, we asked scholars to select images that described their feelings about IDEA as it is now and how they'd like IDEA to be. The collective response seemed to be that scholars are stressed by the constant focus on academics and grades, and would like more opportunities for fun to help relieve the pressure.

We are also seeking more participation from parents, and we are excited about the success so far of our new Parent Volunteer Program. Parents have attended two meetings so far and have already started volunteering at Saturday school and helping sell tickets and concessions at basketball games. We look forward to hearing more from our families and seeing them become a more visible part of our school community.

The MySchoolDC lottery opened on December 11! IDEA administrators, teachers, staff, and students welcomed prospective students and their families to our booth at EdFest on December 9 and answered questions about the excellent programs IDEA offers. Now is a great time to tell your friends, families, and neighbors about IDEA and encourage them to apply. If you refer someone to IDEA and he or she enrolls and starts school at IDEA, you will receive a cash referral bonus!

As the year comes to a close, we are thankful for all of the gifts that our scholars, families, and staff share with our community. We wish you happy holidays and a safe winter break.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

November Message from the Principal

We are thankful for our entire IDEA community—scholars and families, staff and supporters. We appreciated the opportunity to express our gratitude at Monday’s Harvest Dinner, where we served a fall feast to hundreds of students and families.

As we are now well into the second quarter, our emphasis is on the second element of our growth equation—refine! We are making meaningful changes when necessary based on what we learned during the first quarter. Refinement is only possible through collaboration—working together, accepting challenges, and resolving them collectively. We encourage scholars, parents, and staff members to communicate their concerns, so we can problem solve for our community.

We encourage parents to communicate with their scholars about IDEA’s Five Guiding Principles, which articulate the culture we are building within our school. To reinforce these principles, we discuss positive social skills every morning at IDEA. The topics covered in our social skills curriculum include basic standards of respect and civility in our society, such as how to ask permission or ask for help, how to disagree politely, and how to accept criticism or compliments. Please let me know if you have any questions about our social skills emphasis. We know that we can accomplish more as a team of teachers and parents than we can alone.

You may have noticed on your students’ first quarter report cards that we are including data from every test that scholars take so parents and students can have more and clearer information about student progress. We’ve seen some great results recently from students taking practice PSAT and SAT tests with our partner Transcend, and look forward to seeing improved final scores in December.

Happy Thanksgiving from everyone at IDEA!

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

October Message from the Principal

One part of our growth equation involves reflection. We have said goodbye to quarter 1, which ended in interim exams, grade-level cultural field trips to Temple Hills Skating Palace, and of course recovery sessions to enhance student performance. Quarter 1 also included a phenomenal student-led anti-bullying rally that was developed by our JROTC cadet staff. They challenged their peers to respond and react differently to negativity. Students were energized by performances by our drumline and dance team and heard some thought-provoking messages to help promote positive behavior and eliminate bullying.

Next week we will present first quarter awards to students who demonstrated outstanding achievement, significant improvement, and embodiment of our five guiding principles for school culture and behavior. We are proud of our students for their hard work and know these awards will motivate scholars to step up their game in the second quarter! Our entry into quarter 2 is focused on refinement to improve student achievement and personal growth.

Friday, November 3 we invite all IDEA parents to meet with their children's teachers so we can better work together as a team to ensure scholars' success. Parents please review the invitation from your children's teachers. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal

September Message from the Principal

I would like to send a special thanks to all IDEA families for attending Back to School Night. Parents and guests had the opportunity to learn more about our new courses offered this year, our school-wide initiatives focusing on career and college readiness with SAT prep, PARCC readiness, and even social skills development. Families met and learned more about some of our partners that support IDEA scholars and families, including

[Upward Bound](#), which supports scholars' efforts to apply to, enroll in, succeed in, and graduate from college.

[United States Postal Service Credit Union](#), which sponsors a \$12,000 Credit Union College Scholarship Program.

[Wilderness Leadership & Learning Program \(WILL\)](#) has been working with scholars from IDEA and other DC schools for years to teach critical leadership skills in an outdoors setting that challenges participants and helps them grow.

[Macedonia Community Church](#), located adjacent to IDEA, supplied more than 25 school supply bags to our families, provides community service opportunities to scholars, and adopts an IDEA family during the holiday season.

[Hillside Work Scholarship Connection](#) serves more than 800 at-risk youth at nine middle and high schools, interweaving academics, social services, and employment training.

So many exciting new things are happening at IDEA this fall! From beekeeping to yoga, we have dozens of new clubs that meet each Wednesday where our staff members can share their talents and interests with scholars and scholars can work together to learn and create something new. We are offering new classes this semester that IDEA scholars have never had the opportunity to take before, including American Sign Language and Driver's Education, Visual Arts, New Orleans & Back, and ACAD Builds Internship. Our student government officers are opening a new school store where they can apply their financial literacy skills while allowing scholars to where students can buy school supplies and IDEA swag.

All of us at IDEA are enjoying working with our scholars and look forward to getting to know their families as well. I encourage families and friend to continue to support IDEA by volunteering one hour per quarter through in our Parent Volunteer Program. If you are interested, please contact us at 202-300-4750 or email me directly at nmccrae@ideapcs.org

Again I thank you for all of your support and I look forward to continued growth with your scholar. Please know my door is always open if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours,
Nicole McCrae
Principal