



# Parent Handbook 2011-12



Primary School #314  
 4862 Broadway, New York, NY 10034  
 212 544 0614 fax: 212 544 2678

# PARENT HANDBOOK

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## WELCOME TO MUSCOTA!

Welcome to the Muscota New School! Muscota New School was founded by parents and teachers in 1993 to offer the same child-centered learning to Northern Manhattan that had been available elsewhere in New York City since 1974.

Despite changes that have come with time, the core founding beliefs about the goals of education have stayed the same. All instruction and procedures aim to build:

- Curiosity about the way the world works and initiative in pursuing that curiosity
- Alertness to seeing and making relationships, awareness of the way in which the world is put together
- Confidence to figure things out, to ask questions, to speak out, to take risks, and to see mistakes as essential to the learning process
- Responsiveness to others, and openness to different viewpoints

Use this guide to familiarize yourself with how we go about meeting these goals. Always feel free to speak to your child's teacher or any Muscota staff member whenever you have questions or concerns. Once again, welcome to the Muscota family!

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Muscota New School believes that all children come to school with a desire to make sense of the world. Our school provides a safe, nurturing, environment in which all children can experiment, reflect, develop understandings, make connections and become active participants in their own learning. They work to accomplish this on a daily basis, by engaging with their environment, by interacting with people and educational materials, through their own inquiry and by following their own innate curiosity towards the goal of becoming lifelong learners. The focus of Muscota is on the learner, both adult and child, as we encourage everyone to use their minds well. The adults of the community (educators and families) develop and celebrate each person's strengths and talents.

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The Muscota New School is committed to mirroring the diversity of the community within our classrooms, both in student population and teaching staff. We believe this combination of emphasis on the individual and responsibility to the families of Northern Manhattan brings together the most positive aspects of a community-based school of choice.



## INSTRUCTION AT MUSCOTA

Muscota New School is a progressive, student-centered educational community that believes in an emergent curriculum, allowing teachers to take student interests into account when planning for the classroom. Our holistic approach to teaching and learning takes into account each student's academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. Muscota attempts to engage and excite students so that their natural curiosity and creativity can blossom. We expect that our graduates will "Turn

*We expect that our graduates will "Turn the World Around."*

the World Around," a line from our school song that expresses our conviction that Muscota students will make a positive impact on their own lives, their community, country, and world. Community is a central theme at our school. Each family and staff member is important to our students' growth and achievement.

### The Progressive Approach at Muscota

The Progressive Movement in Education begun in the late 1800's by John Dewey promoted the idea that learning about the world was best achieved through active participation in the learning process; by students' own, first-hand experiences. Progressive educational practices provide opportunities and materials for students to engage in their educational experience.

The foundation of our educational philosophy is:

- Learning is a natural part of a child's development;
- Each student is important; individual feelings and ideas are considered and inquiries are given thoughtful response;
- Each student needs to experience success in order to prosper;
- Children learn best through discovery and inquiry rather than abstract experiences, standardized tests, and textbooks;
- It is the teacher's responsibility to encourage students to question, discuss, and investigate the world around them;
- Education should strive to maintain the uniqueness of learners and respect the differences between individuals;
- Students learn best in an academically diverse environment to reflect the multitude of learners;
- "Authentic assessment" tools, such as close examination of a child's performance and observing a child at work, are used to evaluate and follow the growth of each child;
- We are all citizens in a community that meets and works in groups and at least once a week as a whole at Town Meeting.

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### The Teacher's Role

We feel the teacher's role is that of guide and partner who possesses the skills necessary to set an appropriate learning environment, rather than as someone who knows all the answers; individuals must be allowed to work according to their own abilities and encouraged to work at their own pace. This approach requires thoughtfully planned activities, based upon teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, as well as the strengths and needs of each individual student. To insure their studies have personal meaning, content areas are addressed from the students' prior knowledge and experience and allow them to pursue their own questions. The teacher organizes the class work and activities to meet the

*The teacher's role is that of guide and partner.*



approved common core standards and age-appropriate learning expectations. S/he gathers information about the subjects and organizes materials and other resources such as technology and field trip experiences, that enrich student learning and helps them to attain the necessary basic skills, such as reading, writing, and math, as well as social skills like how to resolve problems calmly and how to get along with others.

## The Classroom

Our classrooms are organized to support this kind of hands-on learning, with many different materials and spaces to offer the most possibilities for everyone in the room. All Muscota

*Our classrooms are organized to support hands-on learning.*

classrooms, from Kindergarten through 5th grade, are laid out in areas: a meeting area, a work area with tables and chairs for individual or group project work, a science area sometimes with lots of creepy-crawlies in cages, comfortable places to sit and read, wall-space for charts, calendars, and word lists, plus shelves for books, math manipulatives, markers, scissors, rulers, building materials, journals, and the list goes on. During certain

times of the day, children are free to move about the room with independence, selecting an area to work that best suits their learning style. Muscota teachers work with each child to help him or her make these kinds of decisions about their work. The students are also learning how to negotiate and cooperate with each other within the contained structure of the class.

## The Parents' Role

Communication and collaboration is central to our work. Children often work in groups on projects or assignments, so that they may learn from and with each other. Parents are expected to collaborate in their child's education as well, both at home and at school:

- Two Family Conferences are held each year;
- Twice a year, teachers prepare narrative reports on each child;
- Teachers write Curriculum Letters for families;
- Families and teachers may also meet at other times;
- The principal writes informational letters to the community;
- The Muscota community gathers for school wide events several times throughout the year, such as Mad Hatter's Day, Candlelight Night, ice skating, and Field Day.

We believe that regular communication around a child's needs and progress plays a critical role in insuring that each child reaches his/her potential academically, socially and emotionally. We encourage parents to reach out to their child's teacher with any concerns or questions.

It is Muscota's policy to keep its doors open to parents; research has shown that parent involvement in the classroom and other school activities strengthens the home-school relationship and benefits children's achievement. Several times a year, parents and guardians are invited to attend community-building events at Muscota.

Read more about them in the School Culture section. Also Muscota deeply appreciates time parents can give to volunteer, both in the classroom and as part of the Parents' Association (the PA). In the Daily Procedures section, there are several paragraphs about ways parents and guardians can participate in the work of the school. See the end of this handbook for information about the Parents' Association.

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## CURRICULUM AND STUDENT LEARNING

### Literacy

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated into all aspects of student life at Muscota. Literacy is taught through a whole language approach, using authentic literature and texts, not textbooks. In grades K-2 reading is explicitly taught through a combination

of read-alouds, small group guided reading instruction, phonics, and word work. In grades 3-5 the focus turns from learning to read to reading to learn. Students are expected to read widely and deeply from a broad range of high quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts. Through extensive reading of stories, dramas, poems, and myths from diverse cultures and different time periods, students gain cultural knowledge as well as literary and vocabulary fluency. Book clubs, reading response journals, and teacher conferencing provide multiple opportunities for students to gain literary knowledge and familiarity with various text structures and elements.

*Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated into all aspects of student life at Muscota.*

Although reading looks a little different for different grade groups, all students are assessed on a regular basis and read “Just Right” books based on this assessment. Each student has a book bag with books at their level. Students have opportunities to read these books both during the school day and at home

In Writing, students work in many genres over the course of the school year. They learn the habits of good writers, including how to revise, edit, and publish their work. This year our writing will also focus on producing clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### Math

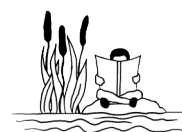
Muscota uses TERC Investigations as our main math curriculum. Widely used in both public and private schools, Investigations is a math curriculum developed in keeping with the National Council of the Teaching of Mathematics’ scope and sequence. It employs hands-on, tactile, and inquiry-based activities to give context and application to numbers and math problems. The curriculum is designed to support students to make sense of mathematics and learn that they can be mathematical thinkers. The program provides substantive work

*Muscota’s program teaches mathematical thinking and flexible problem-solving, as well as arithmetic skills.*

in all areas of mathematics identified in the core standards—rational numbers, geometry, measurement, data, and early algebra—and connections among them. Each strand of mathematics—for example, Geometry—is touched on every year, building sequentially on earlier knowledge. Muscota’s program teaches mathematical thinking and flexible problem-solving, as well as arithmetic skills.

### Social Studies/Science

Social Studies and Science curriculum aims to integrate our work in literacy and math and is based on the NYC core standards. Our curriculum is organized around thematic units and projects that allow students to engage in learning experiences involving complex, real-world activities. Through these real-world projects they develop and apply content skills and knowledge. Much of our project-based learning in Social Studies comes through our partnership with Salvadori. (See Salvadori under The Arts section.)



## The Arts

The arts at Muscota are not just additional subjects for the child “to learn” but rather important avenues of expression through which a child understands the larger world. Arts, at the service of other studies, can highlight and reinforce work in other subjects: the mural of the community for social studies integration, writing plays for literacy, and constructing a model house for math and measurement skills. Our full time arts teachers can provide classroom teacher a crucial additional perspective in how every child functions in school and group settings, thereby adding a more complete dimension to our assessments, evaluations and plans for each child.

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### Visual Arts

Throughout the year the art curriculum is closely tied in theme and content to the classroom disciplines and overarching themes. Maggie DiGrazia, the art teacher, begins with a brief investigation of a variety of works of art by artists from many cultures and time periods. These images provoke rich discussions as she and the children contemplate such questions as: What is art? What is the role of art in society? Why does art matter?

Students learn new techniques and hone their skills with a variety of materials including, collage, painting, observational drawing, building with clay, printmaking, altered books, building with recycled materials and paper maché. Classes take place in a dedicated art room to provide students with the studio experience or for younger children in the classroom. Through guided exploration of these materials the art curriculum strives to foster a dynamic environment in which children are encouraged to take risks, make discoveries and find multiple solutions. Art projects are designed to be developmentally appropriate and are open-ended in order to allow for experimentation and creative thinking. Such interdisciplinary connections reflect the complexities of the real world and promote deeper understandings and multiple perspectives.

### Drama

Dayna Beegun, Muscota’s drama teacher, balances both playwriting and performance in her drama classes to augment the literacy curriculum. Kindergartners learn the language, physical and vocal demands, and customs of the theater, as well as a beginning study of literary and theater genres, such as fairy tales and puppetry. Students in grades 1 through 5 are expected to write and perform in a play every year. Their work expands their imaginations and creativity, helps them formulate and execute goals, and widens their understanding of emotions and day-to-day struggles and problems.

Students' work culminates in the 4th and 5th grade, when they write and submit original 5-scene plays to the Young Playwright's Inc. NYC Write A Play! playwriting competition sponsored by Stephen Sondheim. Since 2002, Muscota students have been recognized as exceptional playwrights. The Bard Club is another opportunity for 5th graders to perform works of William Shakespeare for the school and the community at large. Selected scenes are also presented at The Lucile Lortel Theatre in Greenwich Village for the annual Creative Arts Team's NYC Student Shakespeare Festival. We have collaborated with several professional theatre companies including: The Women's Project, New Perspectives Theatre Company and the Atlantic Theatre.



### Dance, Movement, and Physical Education

Movement of the body is an important element to children's learning at Muscota. While there is no dedicated Physical Education teacher, Muscota teachers incorporate movement and physical exercise into the students' work and utilize the gym and the play yard once a week for organized games.

Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers and their students participate in The New York Roadrunners Club Mighty Milers program. Distance goals are discussed at the beginning of the year and children walk and run as a group over the course of the year while tracking their mileage.

Our partnership with the Joyce Theater provides opportunities for students to see dance performances by artists like Savion Glover, Merce Cunningham, and Ballet Hispanico. Participating classroom teachers from the 2/3 cohort are required to attend professional development provided by the Joyce Theater, to teach the history, meaning, and appreciation for this art form to the students. The teaching artist works with the children and teachers to help them prepare for the dance performance.

Upper grades conduct physical education in our gym or play yard every week, engaging the kids in basketball, relay races, and other physical activity.

### Music

While there is no formal Music program at Muscota, our community of staff and parents strive to include music in the daily life of our students. Children sing together regularly in their classrooms, with other classes on the yellow steps, and during Town Meeting. We come together in song to celebrate United States history (freedom and protest songs), milestones such as birthdays and graduation (Moving On Ceremony), and the uniqueness of Muscota (our school song).

### Salvadori

Through our work with engineers and architects at Salvadori Center, based at The City College of New York (CUNY), students explore ideas introduced in their literacy, social studies, science, and math curricula through the built environment, such as bridges, skyscrapers, the homes of early settlers and Native Americans, and even the houses of the three little pigs. Through projects that involve writing, drawing, mapping, and building, students can test science, engineering, and math concepts.

### Other Partnerships

Every year parents initiate partnerships with various arts and physical education organizations to bring various arts into the classrooms or as after-school or weekend programs. Because they tend to rely on funding from grants, the programs vary from year to year. In past years, we have had Wellness in the Schools send a coach during recess time to run "Lunch Break Sports" with our 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Fly By Night Dance Company ran a free after school dance program for Ks and 1st graders that used a modern approach to help students develop physical control and balance and fostered growth intellectually, artistically and physically. Academic Music Seminar brought a free, interdisciplinary music program into all classrooms to allow children to learn about rhythm, experiment with various instruments, and make their own. A weekend program taught basketball skills to our upper-grade children.



## **Looping and Multi-grade Grouping**

Muscota practices looping, which means teachers progress with a class through a two-year cycle. Therefore Muscota students are taught by the same teacher for two successive grades: K-1, 2-3, 4-5. In the second year of the loop, classes can begin working on curriculum right away, since expectations and rules have been established the previous year. Academic achievement is maximized by ensuring continuity of teaching/learning; teachers know their students skills, strengths, and challenges and can prepare over the summer for each child. Parent, student, teacher communication is enhanced.

Muscota implements multi-grade grouping in the middle primary years, second and third grades. This means Muscota second and third graders are in class together. Teachers are proficient in meeting academic needs of students in both grades and are experts in fostering community-building and social development. Citizenship and community are promoted. Common interests of 2nd and 3rd graders are examined. 3rd graders act as class elders and models of academic skills and learning strategies.

## **Student Teachers**

In keeping with the Muscota mission of creating a community of learners, many Muscota classrooms participate in the training of future teachers by hosting student teachers. These student teachers come from area undergraduate and graduate school programs and are preparing for the profession by working under the guidance of our master teachers. Student teachers bring enthusiasm and new ideas to the classroom. Their presence means children receive greater individual attention in the classroom. Muscota teachers refine their work by modeling innovative teaching practices, classroom expertise, and sound pedagogy. Muscota has hosted student teachers from: Bank Street Graduate School of Education, Brooklyn College, City College of New York, Queens College, and Sarah Lawrence.



## SCHOOL CULTURE

Muscota strives to create a school-wide community of learners that respect, help, and care for each other every day.

### Town Meetings

A time-honored tradition at Muscota are our weekly Town Meetings with our entire school community in attendance—children, teachers and staff, and parents. It is held in the gymnasium so that everyone sits in a circle, a symbol of equality. Each class is represented by one student who holds his or her class' rainstick in the middle of the circle. Teachers lead the audience in songs, dance, discussions of issues, and celebration of birthdays. Children may present projects they have been working on in their classrooms and make announcements both school-related and personal. This weekly ritual is critical to building citizenship, voicing opinions, empowering individuals and individuality within a community, getting to know each other, and living what a community can and should be. Plus, it's a time all students, teachers, staff and parents look forward to.

*At Muscota...*

***We care for ourselves,  
We care for each other,  
We care for our community.***

### Community Meetings

Regularly-scheduled as well as those scheduled as issues arise, Classroom Community Meetings provide opportunities for students to communicate their ideas and to bring up issues that affect them and their classroom or school community. The rich, descriptive language, sharing things of personal importance, listening skills, and coming to understand that one may disagree respectfully are among the benefits we have found this time provides to our children. While teachers serve as elders at these meetings, facilitating conversation when it is necessary, in some classes community meetings are largely student run.

### Eldership

Eldership, and its role in the community, is very important at our school. As veteran staff members are expected to mentor and support new teachers, older students are expected to care for each other, and to assist the younger students. Second through fifth grade Muscota classes often form partnerships with kindergarten and first grade classes, becoming reading buddies, math buddies, or helpers on field trips.

### Muscota New School Student Council

In September 2008, the Muscota New School Student Council was born. In an effort to maintain collaboration with all the members of the MNS community, Emmy Matias-Leonard felt it was necessary to include student voices in the decision-making process. She made a presentation to staff, which was wholly accepted through consensus.

Classroom teachers hold elections so that representatives from each class can be elected by their constituents. These representatives agree to be present at meetings twice per month; once with each other, and once with a follow-up with administration so that students' concerns and suggestions are heard by the adult MNS community at least once a month. The term of representation lasts for a period of one year.

Student council representatives are expected to relay information from adults to student body, and vice versa. General responsibilities include (but are not limited to) reminders about recess and lunch rules, representation at various school-wide safety and/or lunch meetings, support of adults in recess and lunchroom, assistance with signals and play equipment, etc.



## Work Time

Work Time, Choice Time, or Project Time, as it is variously called, occurs several times per week. It is a crucial time for children to open up what they have been taught that day or week through their own choices. Children may paint, dance, sew, or cook. They may build with blocks, Lego, peutominoes, or cardboard and masking tape, going back to these constructions over time to make them taller and stronger; they may combine concepts they have learned with Salvadori (see The Arts section) with what they have just learned in science, adding lights and an elevator to their building. They can work alone or in small groups. Parents with special skills or to celebrate a special occasion can run a work station in the classroom, such as cooking potato pancakes during Hanukkah or sewing dolls in preparation for Mini-Mall (see Community Building events later in this section). Muscota teachers have focused many hours of professional development to study and maximize the intellectual and creative advantages of Choice Time. It is a time for exploration inspired by class work, for making connections to outside interests, and for discovering the possibilities of the materials presented, and it is one of the favorite times of the week.

## Field Trips

Field trips form a core part of Muscota's effort to provide students opportunities to learn by hands-on experience. Trips often come in the form of neighborhood excursions that highlight for students how learning and observation can arise during every day life and in familiar settings outside the classroom. Longer journeys via school bus heighten the import of the subject at hand in the minds of our students, make use of education professionals at the field trip venue to rephrase and reinforce salient ideas, and provide access to materials and contexts unavailable inside the school building.

## Community-building at Muscota

Muscota gathers as a wider community throughout the school year for what have come to be cherished traditions. Parents and guardians, siblings, and grandparents are invited to accompany the children on these events.

- On Mad Hatter's Day, usually as close to Halloween as possible, the school parades through the neighborhood wearing hats created by students based on a subject of classroom study.
- Family Breakfasts: At least once a year families gather in the classrooms to get to know each other and to share favorite breakfast dishes. Children perform songs, dances, and other special things they have learned together.
- We mark the coming of winter and celebrate the accomplishments of our students on Candlelight Night, a pot-luck dinner that brings together families, faculty, and staff.
- The entire school decamps to an ice skating rink in January and March for a day of physical activity together. Elders help youngers, and well before fifth grade, Muscota students know how to ice skate.
- Pi Day, held every March 14th (3/14) celebrates the math concept Pi, or 3.14, the numerical relationship of a circle's circumference and diameter. Muscota's school number is 314, so we are also celebrating our school.
- Mini Mall, in late may, turns the school into a d-I-y street fair with children making their own goods, often curriculum-based, and selling them. In addition to fabrication, children track inventory, make change, and budget their money to make sure they can still afford the disco room cover charge.
- As the school year comes to a close and the outdoors beckons, the school spends one day exploring a still-mostly-deserted Orchard Beach and another day in all kinds of games and activities at a Field Day in nearby Inwood Hill Park.



## **ASSESSING YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS**

Conscientious and effective teaching depends on regular assessment. Assessing student progress is integral to teachers' methods at Muscota and is at the heart of every lesson, every plan, and every interaction throughout Muscota. We use a variety of formal and informal assessments to support out teaching and learning. Our assessments can include daily note-taking, inventories, book logs, student journals, and conferences. We look at this data to find patterns, concerns, strengths, areas of avoidance, areas of interest, and areas that may need further follow-up or intervention.

### **Reporting Student Progress**

MNS is committed to ensuring that parents are informed of their child's progress toward grade level expectation, state standards, and city promotional requirements. The NYC Department of Education (DoE) requires that schools report student progress toward the standards to parents five (5) times a year. Families will receive a progress report five times, two of which will be our narrative reports given to parents during the family conference in March and at the end of the year. A goal sheet will be created during the family conference in November.

### **Progress Reports**

Three progress reports will be backpacked home on October 6th, November 9th and December 21. The progress reports will summarize the interim assessment data we have collected from our Design-Your-Own Assessments (DYO). All progress reports will reflect your child's current reading level and reading habits. Three progress reports will reflect your child's progress toward grade level writing standards and your child's automaticity of basic math concepts, meaning how much are they becoming an automatic or habitual response.

### **Narrative Reports**

Two each year, you will receive a narrative report to provide an in-depth description of how your child is progressing or has progressed during the year. It includes information on what the expectations for your child's grade level are. In addition, teachers observe each child closely throughout the year so that they can write a highly personalized assessment of your child. They often include a description of how your child learns as well as what your child has learned, how your child readies him or herself when entering the classroom, or how your child relates to the other members of his or her school community. These narrative reports do not rely on a single number or letter to communicate your child's progress and are given in lieu of a report card. The goal is for parents to "see" what their child looks like in the school environment.

### **Family Conferences and Parent/Teacher Conferences**

Students, teachers, and parents/guardians work collaboratively to develop student goals and expectations, and to reflect on student progress throughout the school year. There are 2 annual scheduled family conferences to support this collaboration, in addition to conferences as needed for each student.



The collaboration process proceeds as follows:

1. The first scheduled family conference is in November. Each student is asked to complete a goal sheet on which they individually reflect on their learning, what their strengths are and where they want to progress. On the goal sheet, classroom teachers also list goals for each student, based on their own evaluations and on standardized assessments, such as Developmental Reading Assessments. Parents/guardians are expected to add goals to the goal sheets, as well.
2. In March, Muscota holds its 2nd family conferences whereby each classroom teacher meets with each student and her/his guardian to reflect on the progress made on each goal in the goal sheet set in November. In addition, Muscota classroom teachers, Muscota collaborating teachers (including the drama and art teachers) prepare a mid-term narrative for each student. These narratives are reviewed during the March family conference and discussed as a group. Collaborating teachers and mandated service providers also make time to meet with students and their guardians. Family Conferences are usually reserved as a time to celebrate the child. If there are serious concerns about your child's progress, those should be addressed between parents and teachers at another time.
3. Students and teachers meet on an as-needed basis, as requested by the parent/guardian, student, and/or teacher. In particular, teachers and parents meet numerous times when students have special needs.
4. If you are concerned about your child's progress, the first step is to contact your child's teacher and arrange a time to discuss your concerns. You can put a note in your child's backpack or use the contact information your teacher has provided, such as email or phone number.

The NYC Department of Education (DoE) has recognized Muscota's Best Practice of capturing and reporting students' progress through our narratives, which serves in lieu of report cards. Muscota is the inventor school that shares best practices with two of our sister schools, Central Park East 2 and Ampark.

## **Interim Testing**

New York City's DoE requires interim testing. The purpose is to provide parents, teachers, and principals an opportunity to examine the development of skills and understandings across the whole curriculum. Interim assessments help identify strengths and weaknesses in individual children, groups of children and curriculum. Unlike an end-of-year or summative assessment, interim assessments give insight into the learning needs at a point where action can be taken to address those needs. In this way interim assessments help to personalize future planning and ensure that students are appropriately challenged. Muscota has chosen the Design Your Own (DYO) option offered by the DoE. We collaborate with like-minded schools and experts to create assessments that match our school philosophy. From kindergarten through fifth grade our students are assessed using the Developmental Reading Inventory that monitors literacy skills.

## **Standardized Testing**

Students in grades three through five take all standardized tests mandated by New York State and New York City Department of Education. (See attached testing dates). Although we subscribe to a holistic view and assessment of the child that is not currently addressed in state standardized tests, we understand the need to prepare the child for a variety of academic situations. To that end, we insure that all students receive adequate preparation for these assessments. Sample tests, parent workshops and test-taking skill instruction are made available for students and parents.



## Portfolios/Authentic Assessment

As part of the reflective nature of instruction, teachers create a collection of selected pieces of work for each student during the school year. The focus for this collection is on the child's favorite or most meaningful work in all areas of study. It reflects the curriculum goals and shows mastery of the Common Core Standards. The student work is used to inform narrative reports, which are also filed in

the portfolio, along with all five Progress Reports. For student's who do not receive a level two (or reach proficiency) on standardized tests, the DoE promotional assessments are also included in the performance portfolio. The portfolio is continued for each student across all grades and kept in a large archive folder in Room 119. Upon graduation each child receives his or her archive/portfolio, a compilation of all years spent at Muscota.

*As part of the reflective nature of instruction, teachers create a collection of selected pieces of work for each student during the school year.*

## Guidelines for Bringing Family Concerns to the School Staff

Sometimes families have concerns about their child or child's classroom. Whether the concerns are academic, social, emotional, or physical, it is important to our school community that these concerns be attended to. It is most important that parents arrange a time with their child's teacher to discuss the issue. Based on decisions made at this initial meeting, another staff member, such as parent coordinator, SETSS teacher, counselor, or principal, may become involved in addressing the issue. Parents may also contact the class parent to see if a similar problem has come up with other families.

These steps may be repeated as often as necessary until the situation is resolved. The principal is always available to any parent to discuss any topic.

## WHEN A STUDENT NEEDS EXTRA SUPPORT

Every child is unique; every student has individual needs and strengths particular to that child's make-up and life experience. It is the mission of our school to identify and respond to those characteristics in each child. Much of this can be addressed through our flexible

*Our goal is to address the needs of each child.*

curriculum, class groupings, and targeted instruction. However, there are also situations where a child's particular need requires more focused, specialized attention. Our goal is to address the needs of each child and provide appropriate services within the context of the

child's class. Our services are based on children's needs and are not premised on a particular label, program or place.

### What to expect if your child is in need of extra support:

After a teacher has worked with a student for some time and there are concerns about any part of his/her development, the steps for addressing these needs are:



**Step 1:** The teacher will set up a meeting with the parent to discuss a modified plan or additional support that will be provided in the classroom.

**Step 2:** If there is not significant improvement or anticipated progress the child's learning profile will be discussed at a cohort meeting. Here teachers and collaborating teachers use a structured problem-solving process to identify a student learning need, analyze the problem, hypothesize why it is occurring, develop a plan to address the problem and evaluate the student's response to the intervention. The services provided to the child are flexible and fluid.

**Step 3:** If the child does not respond to the interventions the SAT (student assessment team) will schedule a meeting with the parent and principal. The SAT includes the school psychologist, social worker as well as teachers who have worked with the child. The child's learning profile, the interventions and the child's response to the interventions will be discussed. Based on a conscientious review the team may recommend a referral to the committee on special education for an educational evaluation.

**Step 4:** If a referral is recommended and agreed upon by the parent, the assessment team begins the evaluation. Upon completion of the testing the SAT meets again with the parent for an EPC (Educational Planning Conference). The results of the evaluation are shared and discussed. If a child is eligible for special education services, the team develops an IEP (Individualized Educational Plan).

Parents may also initiate an evaluation process directly with CSE if they so choose.

### **ICT (Integrated Co-Teaching)**

In order to support our students with special needs without compromising our fundamental beliefs about how children learn and our commitment to recognizing and valuing the unique needs and varying ability of our students, we embrace an integrated co-teaching model.

ICT (also referred to as CTT) is a program where a general education and a special education teacher jointly develop and provide instruction to a heterogeneous mix of general education students of mixed abilities and classified special education student. The model maximizes the thinking and talent of teachers to provide each child an opportunity to reach their potential.



## DAILY PROCEDURES

To maintain a safe, pleasant, and welcoming school environment, we have outlined basic information about the average school day at Muscota. Muscota's routines are geared toward helping students feel comfortable and confident that they can manage their school day and allowing them to focus on learning.

*Muscota's routines are geared toward helping students feel comfortable and confident that they can manage their school day and allowing them to focus on learning.*

### Arrival

School day begins at 8:30 am. All kindergarten and first grade children should enter with their guardian through the main entrance. Kindergarten and first grade children will walk from the security agent's desk to the hallway outside their classrooms where they will be greeted by a school aide. Students in second grade through fifth grade should also enter through the main doors and proceed to the cafeteria. A school aide and the parent coordinator will be waiting to line students up and bring them into their classrooms.

We do not have a morning program or supervision for children dropped off early. If your child is not participating in the breakfast program, please do not send them to school early. Drop-off is between 8:20 and 8:30 am.

### Breakfast

Eating a good breakfast is an important part of having a great day in school. All students are eligible to eat breakfast for free. Breakfast is served from 8:00-8:20, at which time the kitchen doors will close. Any student wishing to have breakfast in school should enter the cafeteria through the schoolyard door. If a parent has a meeting scheduled with a teacher or staff member, please do not use the schoolyard gate. You need to enter through the front door where our security agent is.

### Dismissal

School ends at 2:50. Children who do not take a bus or an after-school program will be dismissed by their teachers in the schoolyard. Teachers will only dismiss students to adults listed on the emergency card. Children taking the school bus will wait in the cafeteria to be escorted to the bus by the parent coordinator or an aide.

On Monday and Tuesday there is extended day for children in need of additional tutoring or intervention. Extended day will also include clubs and enrichment to ensure all children receive sufficient instructional time during the day. Children participating in extended day will not come down for the 2:50 dismissal time on Monday and Tuesday. Please be aware that not all teachers will dismiss students at 2:50 on Monday and Tuesday. Some teachers will remain in the building with the extended day program.

Students participating in after-school programs will be dismissed from the cafeteria to the after-school program liaison.



## Transportation

Depending on your home address, your child may be eligible for school bus service. New York City Department of Pupil Transportation defines this eligibility as follows:

- Children in kindergarten and first grade must live 1/2 a mile, from the school.
- Children in grades 2-5 must live 1 mile away from the school.

Our primary concern is your child's safety. Students should always keep an Emergency contact card in their backpack. General Education buses do NOT have a matron. The only adult on the bus is the driver. It is crucial that you talk to your child about appropriate and safe behavior. Children should fasten their seat belts when they get on the bus and MUST remain seated for the entire ride until the bus stops to let them off. There is no fighting, teasing or throwing of objects allowed on the bus. Students who do not follow these rules will be suspended from the bus. Children who consistently behave in a manner that creates an unsafe situation on the bus will have their bus riding privileges revoked.

Bus children will be met by a school aide and walked to the cafeteria for breakfast in the morning. At the end of the school day, students should be met at the bus stop unless a OPT release form has been completed.

## Attendance

Regular attendance is critical to successful achievement in school. Conversely, poor attendance is one of the most significant indicators of potential risk. Every absence represents a loss of instructional time and is recorded in the ATS (Automate the Schools) system of the Department of Education (DoE). Your child's attendance becomes part of your child's permanent record and is one of the main criteria middle schools use to assess incoming students. A Form 407 Attendance Follow-up and Outreach Referral is automatically generated for excessive absence. Your child's attendance also affects our school report card grade. School attendance is a significant part of the DoE assessment of our school.

*Regular attendance is critical to successful achievement in school.*

Students should not miss school except in the case of illness. Please send in a note for each absence. A doctor's note is required after two (2) days. Please do not schedule vacations during school days. Please make every effort to schedule doctor's appointments after school hours. If this is not possible, please have your child attend for part of the day. If a child is scheduled for an afternoon appointment, an adult must pick the child up from school. Please make sure that all adults with permission to pick your child up are listed on the emergency form. If a child wakes up late, it is better for them to arrive late than miss the entire day.

## Lateness

Our teachers work to support your child in many ways. We have found that using the Responsive Classroom structure for Morning Meeting provides our students with a "welcome," involves them in community-building, and gives them the support they need to have a happy, productive day. When your child arrives late, s/he misses this important part of the day.

Morning Meeting is generally followed by a major academic period, which may be math, reading or writing workshop. Since our workshop structure begins with a mini lesson, your



child's lateness prevents him/her from receiving this information, leaving him/her lost for the duration of the workshop. When a child arrives late teachers must offer them information on what they need to do. Thus the teacher must interrupt all other children's learning to do this.

Finally, we want to remind you that each lateness, along with each absence, is recorded in the ATS system and thus becomes part of your child's permanent record. This becomes particularly important when children apply to Middle School because absence and lateness are scrutinized by many Middle Schools.

If your child arrives late, you must accompany him or her to our main office, where he or she will receive a late pass. Do not take your child directly to class. We recognize this is an added inconvenience to families who are running late especially when the child's class is on the first floor; however it is imperative that we monitor student lateness and absences.

## Lunch

Muscota lunch period is from 12:25-1:10. The period is divided between lunch and recess, so that all children have a supervised recess either before or after lunch. Therefore, children have about 20 minutes in the cafeteria to eat. In collaboration with Wellness in the Schools, Muscota tries to maintain a nutritious lunch menu. If you pack a lunch for your child, we ask that you support Muscota's effort to teach our children about health and nutrition and avoid sending sugary or fatty foods, such as candy, chips, cookies, or soft drinks. We are a NUT FREE SCHOOL.

### Lunch Forms

At the beginning of the year, all students will receive a federally required lunch form. These forms are essential because they determine not only the type of payment system for each child, but also the kind of funding the school will receive. Even if you feel that you do not qualify for free or reduced lunch, if you intend to pay in full, or send in a packed lunch from home, this form must be filled out for each of your children attending Muscota.

*Lunch Forms must list your TAXABLE family income.*

Lunch Forms must list your TAXABLE family income. The food services decision determines the type of food plan your child will be on based on your income. The three possible categories are: free, reduced, or paid. (Remember, breakfast is free regardless of your lunch status.)

We request that you pay these fees on a monthly or per semester basis. You will receive a specific pay schedule directly from the school secretary once the forms are collected.

We cannot stress the importance of sending in the federally required Lunch Forms as soon as you receive them. These forms determine Title 1 funding.

## Snacks

Because lunch is late in the day, students will have a morning snack in the classroom. The snack is healthy and donated by families. Snacks served during the school day or in after-school or enrichment programs should make a positive contribution to children's diets and health. We will serve only nutritious snack to students. We ask that parents support our focus on healthy eating and do not send high-fat, high-sugar junk foods such as candy, chips, pudding and cookies, or sugary drinks. Gum chewing is not allowed. We are a NUT FREE SCHOOL. Please see our list of healthy snacks on page 30.



## Recess

Every class receives a supervised recess period of 22 minutes in the outside play yard either before or after lunch. Children of all ages enjoy and benefit from playing outdoors in all except the most extreme weather, such as heavy rain or extreme cold, and staff and children alike feel refreshed when fresh air is part of the daily routine. Daily outdoor play is healthy and burns energy, and research has shown that exercise can improve cognitive functioning. It gives children an opportunity for a change of environment, a balance in play and routine, and large muscle activities. Taking children outdoors daily, even in winter, is part of a healthy academic schedule and is safe when clothing is appropriate. Daily, active outdoor play is also an important part of obesity prevention and helps to establish life-long patterns of healthy physical exercise.

*Taking children outdoors daily, even in winter, is part of a healthy academic schedule and is safe when clothing is appropriate.*

## Winter Outdoor Play Policy

During the winter, teachers will continue to use the outdoor classroom and provide additional physical activity outside of recess. Studies have shown that, contrary to the common belief that "exposure to cold air causes a cold," fresh air is good and healthy! Even children who are mildly ill but active should go outside if the weather is not severe. In addition to physical education classroom time, our children will continue to have 22 minutes a day of supervised recess. Outdoor play is permitted regardless of temperature so long as weather conditions are appropriate. Appropriate weather conditions can include a temperature of 20° F, if the wind is not more than 5mph.

Children must be dressed appropriately to play outside during cold weather. Hats, mittens, and winter coats will be required if the temperature is below 32 degrees F. Please make sure your child comes to school with appropriate outerwear, and label their clothing with their name so it can be returned if lost.

If a child does not want to play outside during recess, an alternative will be offered. However we will encourage all children to go outside. If your child suffers from asthma and you are concerned about winter play triggering your child's asthma, please call the Parent Coordinator so we can create an individualized plan for your child.

## Notification of School Closings and Delayed openings

Muscota follows the procedures and regulations of the New York City Department of Education. The Chancellor will make an announcement by 6:00am if school opening is delayed or if schools are closed. Please listen to the news. TV channels include 2,4,5,7,9,11, New York 1 and WNYE-TV. Radio Stations include: WINS (1010 AM), WCBS (880 AM) WLIB (1190 AM), WBLS (107.5 FM) WADO (1280 AM), WKDM (1380 AM), WNYE (91.5 FM) WSKQ ( 97.9 FM) and WXLX (620 AM). Muscota will open at 10:20 when a delayed opening is declared. Dismissal time will remain the same. Busses will come to your stop 2 hours later.

## School or City-wide Emergencies

There are several fire drills scheduled each school year. Children and staff are well prepared on how to leave the building safely, quickly and quietly. All families are asked to complete an emergency form every year. It is extremely important that the school has current addresses and telephone numbers for several friends and family so that you can be reached in case we need you.



In case of a school or city emergency Muscota follows the procedures and regulations of the New York City Department of Education. Parents and guardians will be informed as quickly as possible by school personnel and/or your child's class parent. School personnel will call numbers listed on the emergency form. Class Parents will set up a phone tree and put the calling sequence in motion. If it is necessary to evacuate the building we have two evacuation sights that we could be directed to: I.S. 52 located at 650 Academy St (212-567-9162) or I.S. 98 Shorac Kappok located at 512 W 212th St (212-927-7870). If we must dismiss from the evacuation sight, families will be informed by school personnel and/or the class parent as detailed above.

### **Home/School Communication**

Muscota encourages and expects parents to be vital supporters of their children's school experiences and to communicate with teachers about issues affecting their children. Open, honest communication is in everyone's best interest as we all have the same goal: the positive growth and learning of our children. If you have a concern about your child's experience at school, please approach your child's teacher first. Parent-teacher conferences may be scheduled at any time during the year, by the parent or the teacher. If you then feel the issue is not resolved, please inform the parent coordinator of your concerns.

*Muscota encourages and expects parents to be vital supporters of their children's school experiences and to communicate with teachers about issues affecting their children.*

Individual teachers will notify you of their preferred method of communication. Some prefer a phone call to the school to schedule an appointment. Some are happy to correspond by email. The beginning and end of the day are not the best time to expect an in-depth discussion of your child. Sending a note to your child's teacher is also a good way to communicate a concern or ask for a meeting.

Please plan ahead regarding changes in your pick up procedure. Children cannot be released to anyone who is not designated on the blue card. We cannot release children without written consent from the guardian, even when we know the family you are asking to pick up your child.

If there is an emergency the parent must call our parent coordinator. The office staff and teachers cannot be counted on to communicate after school plans or changes to a child's pick up schedule. Children need to know their dismissal plans when they leave home in the morning. Not only are changes disruptive to the class and school, regular changes are very unsettling to your child's sense of well being, so plan ahead.

*Parents are an integral part of everyday life at Muscota.*

### **Volunteering at Muscota**

Parents are an integral part of everyday life at Muscota. Parents who want to volunteer to work with children in the classroom, help in the library, or monitor lunch and recess on a regular basis are expected to participate in a volunteer training led by school staff.

Volunteers are trained to assist in areas such as breakfast/morning greeting, lunch and recess, library, and central office support. Wherever parents choose to volunteer, the



ultimate goal is to maintain a safe, child-centered, and joyous learning environment for all of our children.

In addition, parents can talk with the class parent or their child's teacher about what help he or she may need in the classroom. Volunteering one morning to do tasks such as filing papers, preparing snack, sharpening pencils, or cutting paper towels in half can offer tremendous help, free up the teacher's time for other work, and can be done without training or special skills.

## Class Parents

Class Parents are not only a long-standing tradition at Muscota, but also a vital part of parent involvement at our school. The purpose of the class parent position is to provide more structured support to our teachers and to provide opportunities for parents to be involved with their children's learning. Class Parents can also provide important feedback to the Parent Association about class needs. While the specific responsibilities of a class parent will reflect the teacher's individual needs, there are three areas where every Class Parent can help: communication, volunteer coordination, and representation. For a more detailed description of these responsibilities, see Class Parent Responsibilities at the end of this Handbook.

## Classroom Visits

There are many times throughout the year when we welcome families into the classrooms and at special school-wide community-building events (See Community-Building at Muscota in the School Culture Section). Every week families are invited to attend Town Meeting with the whole school. Sometimes there are special, all-class events to which all families are invited, such as Family Breakfast. Other times, individual parents can chaperone field trips or lead special activities. If you would like to help your child's teacher in the classroom, please contact the class parent or the teacher to find out what will work best. Most of the time, parent assistance in the classroom is warmly welcomed. However, for some children, having a parent in the classroom is too distracting. If so, it may be better to assist the teacher outside of the classroom or during times when children are not there.

All classroom visits are designed to promote our school values and the learning of all children. Discuss all classroom visits with your child's teacher ahead of time. All classroom visits are scheduled ahead of time and approved by the principal.

## Homework Policy

All children should read each evening. If your child is not reading on his/her own a family member should read to him/her. The amount and type of work sent home will vary depending on the grade of your child and the topics being covered. Kindergartners will not receive traditional homework on a regular basis, although Kindergarten families are expected to read together at home every night, and they do receive a weekly reading log to fill in. As they get older the work will increase as well. Expectations grow from occasional suggested literacy or math activities, to weekly packets, to long-term research projects in the upper grades.

*All children should read each evening.*

Your child's teacher will send home a letter outlining how and when homework and other notices will be sent home and returned as well as his/her complete homework policy.



## Trips

Learning by doing is at the heart of all curriculum planning and instruction. Meaningful work is authentic, has real purpose and place in the world. That is why there are so many materials available in the classrooms. But there is just so much that can be brought inside.

*Forests, museums, live performances, even the streets of NYC are the world that we want the children to learn about and prepare for.*

Forests, museums, live performances, even the streets of NYC are the world that we want the children to learn about and prepare for. Therefore all classes leave the school regularly to participate in these other experiences.

All families are asked to sign a Neighborhood Permission slip at the beginning of each school year. That covers the times that your child goes on a neighborhood walk, to Inwood or Ft. Tryon Park, to work with the Urban Ranger Program or New York Restoration Project, to use area playgrounds. There is no transportation involved on these outings; you will not get special notice when the class leaves the building for a neighborhood walk. These trips are generally an hour or so. Class trips out of the neighborhood require a separate permission slip signed by the parent. You will get advance notice of these trips, where the class is going, whether by subway or school bus, if there is a fee and whether lunch is needed. A few things to keep in mind:

- No child will ever be left behind if the family cannot pay the admission fee.
- School bag lunches are always taken along so that it is not necessary for the family to send lunch in order for the child to participate.
- Chaperones are usually needed, but speak to your teacher in advance. Although you may be interested in going and are available, it may not be appropriate.
- Siblings are never allowed on trips. A chaperone must be 18 or older.
- All trips are part of the required class work for each student. In-class lessons and activities before and after the trip, as well as homework follow-up, are part of the planning. Children who do not take part in the trips miss instruction.



## HEALTH AND SAFETY AT MUSCOTA

### School as a Safe Place

We ask our children to become contributing members of a cooperative, collaborative community where children and adults value empathy and non-violence. We know that only when children are physically and emotionally safe can they be free to learn. Please see our Student-Parent-Staff Compact on page 31.

*We ask our children to become contributing members of a cooperative, collaborative community where children and adults value empathy and non-violence.*

There is absolutely NO HITTING and NO HITTING BACK tolerated at Muscota. Teasing, name-calling and other forms of bullying are also not tolerated. The staff of Muscota works to support students in finding ways

to express their anger and solve problems without hitting or name-calling. Students and adults are all expected to speak respectfully to each other, to use kind words and avoid unkind words, and to work out any disagreements or struggles through conversation, debate, and consensus. Parents can support this process by reminding their children of these rules. Please speak to your child about their school day on a regular basis. If a child reports that these rules are being broken, parents should alert the classroom teacher immediately.

### Student Discipline

Our expectation is that students will be happily engaged in learning and doing, and that there will therefore be few discipline issues. If a student is having difficulty putting his or her best foot forward, the school will determine, on a case by case basis, the best manner of re-engaging the student and relieving any associated problems.

Students are expected to participate in all classroom activities. School wide norms will be clarified and class rules will be developed based on our shared norms. If a rule is broken, students may be asked to separate from the group. Each classroom has a time out area. Each class has a buddy class where students who need support beyond the class time-out area may be asked to go to. Any violent or abusive action necessitates an immediate call to the parent or guardian. Muscota students are subject to the Disciplinary Code of the NYC DoE. A copy of this code will be sent by the DoE to every home.

### Ensuring a Safe Learning Environment

All visitors must enter the building through the main entrance where the security agent is present. Everyone is asked to present a photo id each time they enter the building. The security agent will give you a pass to proceed to your destination.

All visits to the classrooms must be approved prior to your visit. The security agent will be informed of scheduled visits, allowing you to bypass the main office on the third floor. If you do not have a scheduled visit, you must go to the main office.

If you are picking up your child early you must go to the main office. Under no circumstances can a parent/guardian pick up a child from the classroom. All students being picked up early must be signed out in the main office by school personnel. A gentle reminder that children cannot be picked up by anyone other than the adults authorized on the emergency card without written permission.



## **Dressing for Success**

Part of our mission is promoting the social and emotional development of students. It is important that we give our students the skills to interact and fully participate in all aspects of the community and society at large. Muscota encourages students to dress in clothing that is comfortable. School activities often require sitting on the rug or floor. Students are likely to paint and use markers and glue several times a week. Daily recess is safest and best enjoyed in sneakers or other sturdy footwear. Please avoid fancy clothing that students "cannot get dirty." Some kinds of clothing can also become a safety concern. Sandals, platform shoes, and clothing that is too tight or too baggy limit a child's ability to run and climb. For those who like it baggy, be sure that the waist fits. Girls should not wear tube tops, halters, or spaghetti strap tank tops in any grade. All pants and shorts should cover a child's underwear. Hats should not be worn in the classroom, except for religious reasons. If a child is dressed inappropriately we will offer a t-shirt or pants.

Our building has central air-conditioning that makes it difficult to regulate the temperature in individual classrooms. Even when it is very hot outside a child may need a sweater. Or conversely, in winter children may need to be able to remove their sweaters in an over-heated classroom. Dressing in layers, with a shirt and a sweater or sweatshirt, allows your child to ensure they are comfortable in the classroom.

If you have any questions about appropriate school clothing, feel free to ask your child's teacher or call the office.

## **Toys, Expensive Jewelry, and Electronic Devices**

All of these things distract from student learning. They are often lost, stolen or given away. They can't be shared, and cause needless problems in the classroom, cafeteria, and play yard. Needless to say they are way more trouble than they are worth. Please keep them at home. Talk to your child about not bringing things from home unless it is requested by the teacher.

## **Cell Phones**

We know that some children travel long distances to school. If parents feel it is appropriate for children to carry a cell phone they must be kept off and out of site during the school day. Cell phones cannot be used in school. The school is not responsible for lost or stolen phones. Phones will be confiscated if taken out or used. Parents will then have to pick them up from the principal. Please make sure your children comply with this rule.

## **Sleep**

Elementary aged children need 10 to 12 hours of sleep at night in order to function at their best during the day. Even mild sleep deprivation can have a significant toll on a young child during the day. In addition, it is often the case that behavioral problems are related to sleep deprivation. Please set up a regular evening routine (a time to start getting ready, a book or two, etc.) to make sure your child gets adequate sleep.

## **Illness**

If your child contracts a communicable illness, please inform us so that we may inform other parents of their child's exposure. If your child has a fever, nausea or diarrhea or other adverse symptoms, please keep your child at home to recover. If these symptoms



develop at school, you will be asked to take your child home. Before sending your child to school, be sure your child feels well enough to have a positive, productive day and be considerate of the health of others around your child.

If your child gets sick or hurt at school, we will take the immediate action necessary (first aid, the nurse, the hospital) and we will call you. Please make sure that we have up-to-date phone numbers and addresses for your family and emergency contact people. We must be able to reach every family.

Please be aware that unless your child is seriously ill, he or she will remain in our office until you arrive. The school nurse's office is not available to us for children to rest or lie down.

#### Incident Report

Any serious accidents that occur at the Muscota will be documented in an on-line occurrence report by the responsible adult present at the time of injury. The usual bumps and scrapes requiring a band aid and/or a bit of sympathy do not generate such reports. However, we will make every effort to inform you of any incident no matter how minor.

#### School Nurse

Muscota shares a full time school nurse with Amistad. Her office is located on the first floor. If your child hurts him or herself in school, the nurse is available to help. It is important that you accurately fill in the yellow emergency sheet in the beginning of each year. A copy of the emergency sheet is kept in our office and another is kept in the nurse's office. If your child needs to take medication on a regular basis, you must have a medical form (504) on file. 504 forms are available in the nurse's office. Under no circumstances can a teacher or other staff member distribute medication to your child. If your child has a short term need for medication please, speak to the nurse, and we will accommodate your child on an individual basis in consultation with your child's doctor.



## PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

Founded in 2004, the Muscota Parent's Association (PA) is a vital partner in the school community. Its mission is to support the educational goals of the school, facilitate communication between families and staff, and provide an inviting and warm social environment between and among parents, teachers, administration and students.

All parents are automatically members of the Association and are encouraged to attend the monthly meetings. In order to accommodate all of our families needs, we alternate the time of PA meetings, hosting them in the evening one month and the morning the following month. Occasionally additional meetings are called to discuss urgent matters. Children are welcome at evening meetings but are asked to bring a quiet activity like a game or book. Parents will always receive advance notices reminding them of the PA meetings and the topics scheduled to be covered.

At the beginning of every year, parents are asked to fill out a Parent Questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to inform the PA and our committee chairs of special abilities and resources that parents may be able to offer our school. A second survey is sent to parents in November to get input from parents about when meetings should be held, how parents can be supported, and how the PA should spend its funds.

The Muscota PA welcomes and needs parent support in all aspects of its operations ranging from volunteering at special events to fund raising activities. Volunteering is a wonderful way to become more connected with other parents, understand the school and the people who form it, and observe and participate in the activities and experiences that form your child's school days. Parents who are interested in becoming more actively involved can contact the PA President or Vice President.

We understand that not every parent can be in the school on a daily basis but many of our events and committee work can happen from work or home. Below are descriptions of the various PA committees:

*Volunteering is a wonderful way to become more connected with other parents, understand the school and the people who form it, and observe and participate in the activities and experiences that form your child's school days.*

### Health & Safety Committee

Our main areas of concern are healthy food, proper exercise and hygiene, the elimination of toxic chemicals in our cleaning supplies, and safe air and water quality in our building. In recent years, we have worked closely with Wellness in the Schools (WITS), a non-profit organization to bring improvements to our school food menu. Volunteers in this committee might volunteer during lunch/recess, come to monthly Food Partnership meetings with School Food, create wellness newsletters, and work together with parents, teachers and students on common wellness and safety issues that affect our school community. Parents with an interest in nutrition, exercise, and environmental health would be a great addition to this committee.

### Fund Raising Committee

Help raise funds for Muscota to help pay for special programs, classroom and cluster needs and activities not included in the school budget. This committee focuses on creating and organizing annual fundraisers such as Innisbrook, Mad Hatter's Ball,



and Skraptaacular, as well as reaching out to community businesses for in-kind donations. Volunteers in this committee might help sell school merchandise at school events, canvas area restaurants for food donations for events, and help generate ideas for new events.

Grant Writing Committee

Research public and private grant opportunities. Work with Principal, teachers, and staff to write and submit appropriate grant requests. This committee is most appropriate for parent volunteers with grant writing experience.

Public Relations Committee

Promote Muscota events and success stories by preparing and distributing press releases to the local media outlets. Volunteers in this committee might write copy for the PA newsletter, keep PA bulletin board up to date with timely news about our school, and assist in the writing and editing of school publications such as our school brochure and the Senior Memory Book.

Political Action Committee

Advocate for the interests of Muscota and its students by forming and maintaining relationships with local elected officials and state representatives. Activities may include engaging in letter writing campaigns to local elected or NYC DoE officials to advocate for resources and funding for our school and district; attending District 6 Community Education Council Meetings (CEC) to stay abreast of issues such as middle school choice.

A strong Parents Association help make Muscota a great place to learn and grow while we form a supportive community and travel on our journey of lifelong learning.

## **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)**

School Leadership Teams are charged by New York State with making policy decisions for their school and supporting implementation of these policies. Every public school in the state has a team made up of equal numbers of staff and family representatives. Muscota's SLT comprises six staff representatives and six family representatives. These representatives are elected for two-year terms.

The SLT meets at least once every month. Family members and staff not on the SLT are free to attend meetings but are not able to join the discussion or vote on issues. Families and staff can contact the SLT chairperson at [slt@muscota.org](mailto:slt@muscota.org) to raise questions and concerns, voice opinions, suggest ideas, and request to be recognized to speak at a meeting. You can find out about what issues are being discussed and what policies are decided from SLT minutes posted on our website at <http://muscota.org/wp/mns-slt/> or through Parents Association meetings and staff meetings.



## MUSCOTA PARENT VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES

**We care about ourselves.  
We care about others.  
We care about our community.**

Parents are an integral part to everyday life at Muscota. While there are many opportunities to be involved at Muscota, we want to ensure that all parents who volunteer understand some basic guidelines that should be followed to maintain a safe, child-centered, and joyous learning environment for all of our children.

### General Volunteer Guidelines

- Encourage children to share and play cooperatively.
- Encourage children to speak to each other respectfully.
- Please use child-friendly, affirmative vocabulary when speaking to children, i.e., talk about making good or safe choices, rather than being negative about the child.
- Be a pro-active member of the community. If you witness inappropriate behavior, guide and encourage positive behavior, but always allow the teacher or staff member to follow-up with disciplinary action, if needed. If you do not feel comfortable intervening, speak to a staff member and ask for help.
- No personal toys are allowed in the school. Personal toys often lead to conflicts between children. You can ask children to put their personal toys away. If a toy needs to be taken away, please ask a staff member to remove and hold the toy.
- Violent, aggressive, or bullying behavior is never allowed. Please seek a staff member if you witness this type of behavior.
- Remember that you are volunteering for the benefit of all the children, not just your own.

### Volunteering in the Lunchroom

- After signing in at the Security Desk, check in with Denise or Camille before taking your post.
- Help children to remember and follow the lunchroom rules:
  - Children must remain with their class throughout the lunch period.
  - Children raise their hand when they need to get more food, water, to wash their hands, or use the bathroom.
  - Children should respect you, each other and their environment.
  - Children should use their "indoor voices".
  - Children must walk in the lunchroom.
  - Children should clean up after themselves at the end of their lunch period.
  - Children with school lunch should empty their milk cartons in the bucket, recycle their milk carton, and stack their tray.
- Always greet the kitchen staff with a smile and thank them! :)
- Keep moving around the cafeteria, offering help as needed to all the children. Try not to engage in long conversations with one child.
- Help children sit down at their designated class table.
- All children must be given a school lunch if they did not bring lunch to school. Direct children to the lunch line when their class is called.
- Help children open milk containers and packaged food, if needed.
- Hand out milk cartons to children who receive school lunch, encourage children to take food from each food group, especially fruit, vegetables and salad.
- Encourage children to eat their lunch in the allotted time.
- If any problems arise with the kitchen staff or an Aide, seek immediate help from Denise.



## **Volunteering in the Yard (or Gym) at Recess**

- Help children to remember and follow the recess rules:
  - Kicking wild balls, dodge ball, or ball tag are not allowed to be played in the yard because other children may get hit by a ball. Any unsafe behavior that persists should be reported directly to a staff member.
  - Jump ropes are for jumping only.
  - Slide down the slide only. Do not climb up the slide.
  - Children must inform an adult when going inside to get a drink of water or to use the bathroom.
  - Is the flag system in use??
- Keep your eyes moving around the playground to observe all that is taking place. Pro-active intervention before an activity gets out of control is often the most successful.
- Adults should be stationed around the playground, monitoring the play and the safety of all children.
- You are encouraged to organize and monitor games with the children. Jump rope songs and utilizing painted line games are always popular. The starting line of the relay race can always use an official.

PLEASE ACCOMPANY A CHILD THAT NEEDS TO GO TO THE NURSE OR SEND A PARTNER YOU THINK IS DEPENDABLE.



## CLASS PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Thank you for volunteering to be a Class Parent! Class Parents are not only a longstanding tradition at Muscota, but also a vital part of parent involvement at our school. While the specific responsibilities will reflect the teacher's individual needs, there are three areas where every Class Parent can help: Communication, Volunteer Coordination, and Representation.

### Communication

1. Create a family e-mail list so that you can alert parents to classroom needs and blast quick reminders about class happenings, field trips and weekly snack reminders. (Set up a phone tree for any families who do not rely on e-mail.)
2. E-mail your class contact list (preferably in Excel) to [pres@muscota.org](mailto:pres@muscota.org).
3. Meet with your classroom teacher once a month to discuss upcoming events, trips, and activities that may require or benefit from parent support.
4. While the Parent Coordinator and the PA are responsible for publicizing our annual traditions such as Mad Hatters Parade, Pi Day, Candlelight Night, Ice Skating Trip, Mini Mall, etc., please ask your teachers how parents can help and encourage your parents to participate in these events.

### Volunteer Coordination

1. Enlist the regular support of other parents to volunteer in the classroom as needed. Examples include: chaperoning field trips, filing student work, copying worksheets, stuffing children's mailboxes, snack preparation and clean up, reading aloud, etc.
2. Provide Parent Coordinator Denise Rodriguez ([DRodriguez15@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:DRodriguez15@schools.nyc.gov)) with a list of any parents you anticipate volunteering on a regular basis.

### Representation

1. Bring classroom concerns or needs to PA meetings or e-mail them to the PA.
2. Participate in the planning of Teacher Appreciation Day in the spring. In addition to honoring our teachers with gifts for the classroom, we ask parents to write "love letters" to our teachers that are read aloud at Town Meeting.

Some additional responsibilities include:

- a. Expedite Scholastic Book orders for your teacher. Promote online ordering through [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com) so kids don't have to send cash to school and teachers get a free book with every online order.
- b. Organize a community-building event for families such as a potluck picnic.
- c. Coordinate an end of the year gift for your teacher.
- d. In consultation with your teacher, organize a class fundraiser for specific items for the classroom. Organizations such as Donors Choose [www.donorschoose.org](http://www.donorschoose.org) or Adopt a Classroom [www.adoptaclassroom.org](http://www.adoptaclassroom.org) are great resources.

Delegate, Delegate, Delegate! Remember that any of the above tasks can be done by a fellow parent. It never hurts to ask.



## **HEALTHY SNACK GUIDELINES**

### **Best choices, with suggestions:**

- Whole Fruits: apples, bananas, grapes, oranges, pears, avocados
- Chopped fruit in a Ziploc bag: melon, pineapple, berries, mango
- Whole grain breads & crackers: at least 3 grams of fiber per serving is best
- Dry cereal: Look for 6 grams of sugar or less, and at least 3 grams of fiber per serving
- Raw vegetables: cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, sliced peppers, cucumbers, celery, broccoli, green beans
- Seeds, unsalted: pumpkin, sunflower, sesame (contain healthy fats)
- Cheese
- Hummus
- Guacamole
- Plain yogurt: flavor it with fresh fruit
- Water or Seltzer Water
- Milk: plain is best

### **Good choices, with guidelines:**

- Trail mix: mix together dried fruits, cereals, and seeds
- Lean protein: roasted turkey, ham or tofu
- Popcorn: low fat or air popped popcorn, no added butter
- Plain or multigrain pretzels
- Graham crackers and animal crackers (with no trans-fats/hydrogenated oils)
- Granola bars: 10 grams of sugar or less and 2 grams of fiber or more are best
- Brown Rice cakes
- Dried fruits: unsweetened is best
- Natural applesauce, unsweetened

### **Not recommended for school snack:**

WE ARE A NUT-FREE SCHOOL! Please do not send any snack that contains nuts.

These foods have lots of added sugars and fats and do not provide lasting energy or nutrients for best performance at school! (Based on guidelines from Healthy Schools, Healthy Families" project)

- Pre-packaged Cookies (only home/classroom made allowed)
- Candy and gum
- Chips
- Chocolate
- Donuts and honey buns
- Soda and quarter waters
- Gatorade and Vitamin or Life Water
- Sweetened Iced Teas
- Fruit drinks: Hawaiian Punch, Capri Sun, lemonade, Sunny D



## MUSCOTA STUDENT-PARENT-STAFF COMPACT

### This is the student section.

#### What is a **COMPACT** anyway?

...a signed written **agreement** between two or more parties

#### What exactly are you **AGREEING** to?

...your **rights** and **responsibilities** here at MUSCOTA NEW SCHOOL

#### **Rights.**

I have the right  
to be happy  
and to be treated with compassion.

I have the right to be myself  
and be respected as an individual.

I have the right to be treated fairly.

I have the right to be safe  
and be made safe by others.

#### **Responsibilities.**

I have the responsibility  
to treat others  
with compassion.

I have the responsibility to respect others  
and treat them like individuals.

I have the responsibility to treat others fairly.

I have the responsibility to make my school safe  
and always look out for others' safety.

#### **Furthermore,**

I promise to be at school on time (with the assistance of my parents, of course) and to commit one hundred percent to my work and play.

I promise to fully participate in the Muscota community during class time, town meetings, field trips and any time and any place I am representing my school.

I promise to tell my parents about my experience in school each day and encourage them to be part of the Muscota community too.

I promise to resolve conflicts peacefully and express my feelings in words.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**This is the parent and guardian section.**

*"Whoever teaches **learns** in the act of teaching, and whoever learns **teaches** in the act of learning" ~Paulo Freire*

In progressive education we're all teachers and learners.

**First,**

I promise to participate fully in my child's education including but not limited to attending parent conferences, volunteering at the school, providing a quiet place to do homework, reading to her or him, listening to her or him and, most importantly, encouraging her or him to blossom and grow as an individual.

**Furthermore,**

I promise to encourage my child to be a respectful and peaceful member of the Muscota community.

I promise to do my best to make sure my child arrives at school on time.

I promise to make sure my child eats a nutritious and healthy breakfast.

I promise to make sure my child gets a good night's sleep.

I promise to communicate fully with the school regarding my child's well being.

I promise to engage respectfully with the staff at Muscota.

I promise to provide any and all information to the school that is necessary and/or mandatory.

**Last but not least,**

I have received a copy of The Discipline Code and Bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities and have read it thoroughly.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**This is the school staff section.**

The entire Muscota New School staff – principal, teachers, aides, para-professionals and everyone else – hereby share responsibility and are deeply committed to supporting each student toward reaching her or his academic, social and emotional growth potential.

**Our commitment**

We will work collaboratively to develop and meet student goals and expectations.

We will hold parent-teacher conferences twice a year in November and March. In November the primary focus will be the goals of the child. In March we will revisit these goals and provide a comprehensive narrative for each child.

In addition to the two conferences, we will be available to meet with parents and students on an as needed basis.

We will listen to parents and address their concerns in a timely fashion, providing them with reasonable access to staff.

We will provide assessments of every student’s progress throughout the year.

We will provide students with a high quality progressive curriculum and strive to meet the state’s academic standards.

We will challenge each student in accordance with her or his individual needs.

We will provide parents ample opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child’s education in and out of the classroom.

We will involve parents in the planning, review and improvement of school policies and procedures as well as in the development of any school wide program plan.

We will strive to provide all communication in English and Spanish and, if necessary, use alternative formats upon the request of parents with disabilities.

We will provide information, in a timely manner, about Title I programs.

**Lastly,**

We are committed to our professional growth as well as the development of our craft as educators. Through on-going professional development we strive for consistent improvement, reflective practices and collaboration, representing the value of life-long learning. We therefore promise to do all we can to turn the world around!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION

**Main office:** 212.544.0614

**Principal,** Camille Wallin:  
[cwallin@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:cwallin@schools.nyc.gov)

**Parent Coordinator,** Denise Rodriguez:  
212-544-0614 (then press 4)  
cell: 917.751.8346  
[drodriguez15@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:drodriguez15@schools.nyc.gov) or [mns@muscota.org](mailto:mns@muscota.org)

**School Secretary,** Christilene Carter:  
212.544.0614 (then press 0)

**School Nurse,** Nan Berlind:  
212.569.1168

**Admissions information:** [admissions@muscota.org](mailto:admissions@muscota.org)

## PARENTS' ASSOCIATION CONTACT INFORMATION

**PA President,** Margaret Peeler: [pres@muscota.org](mailto:pres@muscota.org)

**PA Vice President,** Ginnette Quesada-Kunkel: [veep@muscota.org](mailto:veep@muscota.org)

**PA Corresponding Secretary,** Cathy Cabrera-Figueroa: [info@muscota.org](mailto:info@muscota.org)

**PA Recording Secretary,** Katie Soares

**PA Treasurer,** Guy Johnson

**School Leadership Team Chair,** Kari Steeves: [slt@muscota.org](mailto:slt@muscota.org)

