



MUSCOTA NEW SCHOOL

"Turn the World Around"

4862 Broadway NYC 10034

ph (212) 544 0614 fax (212) 544-2678

Judith Menken, Principal Howard Matza, Ass't. Principal

October 10, 2006

Dear Families,

Can you believe the gorgeous weather this past weekend? It almost seemed like delightful June weather, with summer just around the corner? But, alas, that is not so. The weather will get colder, and our calendars will get busier. School is in full swing, and here is what we have been up to lately...

STAFF BUSINESS:

Valerie Rochon has joined our staff as full time dance educator. She was introduced to families at the Open House last month, even before she officially was working with us. She has been working with our kids for 3 weeks now, getting to know the classes, her colleagues, and her schedule. The challenge continues to be finding appropriate space to hold dance class. Valerie shuttles between the auditorium, the gym, the cafeteria, outdoor yard and the classroom. It isn't easy, but Valerie is an experienced teacher and a complete professional. If anyone can make this work, she's the one. Valerie and I first worked together 20 years ago at the East Harlem Block School. She was, of course, the dance teacher. I had K/1. It was wonderful working with her then; I am completely thrilled that our paths have crossed once again. She is already working with the 2/3 teachers in hooking up with the Joyce Dance Theatre again, and has contacted the Salvatori Center for Engineering and Architecture at CCNY to also possibly work in our classrooms. We have had several bumpy starts to building a dance program at Muscota. Valerie is definitely the one to get us going strong.

The second piece of news is equally exciting. Lailany gave birth to her second little boy on October 5. She sounded happy and strong when I spoke to her Friday night; no agreement on the little guy's name that first day. I know the entire Muscota community wishes her and her husband Gardell and son Lorenzo all the best with their new addition. Lailany plans to return to her class in January.

FROM THE PARENTS ASSOCIATION:

The Innisbruck Gift Wrap sale is under way. Envelopes with catalogues and ordering information went home recently. This is the major fundraiser for the PA; please make every effort to bring in sales from friends, neighbors, co-workers, family members. If we make \$5000 for the school, all classes will receive a pizza party!! If you have not received your sales packet, or need any further information, send a note in to the PA or get in touch with Denise. Orders are due at the end of the month.

REMINDER: PA Meeting at the school this Wednesday, Oct. 11 at 8:45 am and 7 pm. The PA is continuing to hold 2 meetings each month so that parents have a choice of times depending on their work schedule. We say that Muscota is a parent involved school. Make that statement true by supporting your PA Board and attending the meetings.

CURRICULUM:

Book Club: Toby has begun his weekly Book Club for grades 4 and 5. A group of about 10 students meet on Wednesdays and Fridays after school. Toby serves a generous snack to accompany the light conversation that transitions the group from the daytime school work to this focused literature discussion. I love overhearing them at work. The children participating have all volunteered to be in this group; it cuts across all reading levels as the kids support each other in a novel chosen by the group. The group switches about every 2 months. If you haven't gotten notice about this program and are interested, ask your 4/5 teacher or send Toby a note.

Extended Day: Beginning last February, 150 minutes were added to the teacher's official work week to be used in small group instruction. We started this year's extended day program last Tuesday. Our extended days will be Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 2:50-3:40. Children who could benefit from this extra instructional time were contacted directly (no Kindergarten children). If you have any questions about why your child was, or wasn't included, get in touch with me or call Denise.

English Language Arts Test Scores: Children in grades 3, 4 and 5 took this state-wide standardized exam last January. The scores for the city were announced by the Chancellor 2 weeks ago. Several days later the scores were sent to the schools, but without any details for each child. We are still waiting for the printout information for families. If you would like to know your child's score now, drop me a line. It is a very strange message coming from the people who run the Dept of Ed – first they insist that these scores are essential to hold schools accountable for standards-level education, that teachers and administrators need this information to appropriately plan further grouping and instruction. Children's lives are held in the balance as they are told if they are mandated holdovers, if they must attend summer school. And then no results for 9 months! And yet school goes on without the scores. Strange, huh?

AFTERSCHOOL PLANS:

In addition to Toby's Book Club and Extended Day, this is the year that we realize a vision I have had as long as I have been in education. For me, school, or more accurately, an effective learning environment, should not only be available 6 hours 2 minutes each day. Public schooling holds the promise of offering a stimulating, enriching, safe haven for a broad section of our city's children across a wide range of interests and subjects. The 8:30-3 chunk of the child's day only begins to address all we want him/her to know about our world. That is why so many of our kids attend karate, swim, gymnastics, violin, drumming, chorus, and many more choice activities after school hours and on weekends. But taking part in such "extracurricular" activities demands time and funds that many of our families do not have. Public schools carry the mandate to provide quality education to *all* children, all the time, in all areas. Or at least it is my belief that they should, and this year Muscota will take a big step forward in fulfilling that promise.

Alena and Valerie were hired to work "flex time" on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That means that they will start their school day at 10:45 and work until 5:45. This will allow 3 hours after normal school hours to offer dance and music specialties to interested students. Now that so much else has settled into routines, and our staff is complete, the 3 of us are going to focus on setting up this program to start in the next week or so. Participating children will be able to stay with a Muscota staff member until 5:45 on those days so that parents can pick up after school, since bus service will not be available at the end of the day. This schedule follows the routine of the Project Kids Afterschool that services both Amistad and Muscota in the building. You will receive further notice when we are ready to announce classes and how families can sign up.

EARLY DISMISSAL WEDNESDAYS:

Two weeks ago a second parents meeting was held on how these early dismissal days will be organized and why this meeting time is so important for your child's teachers. At that time I said that children who already attend the Project Kids afterschool and the Y on those Wednesdays will be supervised at Muscota until normal dismissal time of 2:50. I have met with Helen Barahal, who is the Project Kids director, and we have set up the cost to the school and what the program will be. Families who do not use either of these existing afterschool programs, but cannot arrange other childcare for the early dismissal day each month, can register for the Project Kids program that afternoon for \$20. The Dept. of Education has already contacted Food Services to arrange for early bag lunch for all our kids on these days, so plans are shaping up nicely. The first early dismissal day will be Wed., Oct. 25. A longer letter explaining this plan is being translated now and should come to all families by the end of this week as promised.

EMPOWERMENT SCHOOLS UPDATE:

I have attended several meetings in the past few weeks with my Empowerment Network co-principals. The network's proposal to DOE to design our own periodic assessments (ways in which student progress is monitored throughout the school year) in both ELA and Math has been accepted. Design Teams are being formed from each participating schools, including Muscota, to work on the specifics of these assessments. Toby and Christopher will join me on the ELA

Design Team, and Emmy and I will represent Muscota on the Math group. This is the first time the DOE has allowed schools to take such direct responsibility for their own planning and instruction. While I have to admit I am always considerably skeptical about how the DOE operates and the political agenda that tends to direct educational initiatives, we have to move forward in good faith. Many, many thanks to these 3 teachers for offering their expertise on this important work and committing the additional afterschool and weekend hours to collaborate with our colleagues. It will be very exciting to see what our schools are able to put together. The bulk of the work already exists – it is a matter of organizing the assessing and reporting systems our schools already use in a way that is clear to a more public audience that our teachers do know their students and are able to appropriately prepare and deliver effective instruction.

LUNCH FORMS:

Howard and Denise have been busy organizing these important documents and contacting families as needed when they are not complete. It is absolutely critical that we receive a signed lunch form from every single Muscota family. You do not need to give any information you are not comfortable giving. It is only required that every family member be listed and the form signed. If we can get 100% of the forms this year we may be allowed to skip the next 3 years of form collecting. We also need to have at least 60% free lunch families in order to qualify for the much-needed Title I federal funding. This money is how we pay for our additional arts teachers, much of the professional development work available to teachers and the additional curriculum programs like Clearpool and Tiorati.

UPCOMING:

October 11	PA Meetings
October 25	Early Dismissal
October 27	Mad Hatter's
November 7	NO SCHOOL Election Day
November 9	Photo Day
November 13	_ day school Family Conferences
November 15	Evening Family Conferences

Enjoy the beautiful autumn weather. Hope to see many of you around school – Town Meeting is now on Wednesday mornings. Join us in the gym.

Sincerely,

Reminder: I can be reached by email at jmenken@schools.nyc.gov. That is the most reliable way to get any question answered.