



# MUSCOTA NEW SCHOOL

"Turn the World Around"

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## UPCOMING DATES:

**Monday, March 5**    lottery held for Sept. 2007 kindergarten admission  
**Tues. March 6 – Thurs. March 8**    NY State Math Exam for grades 3, 4 and 5  
**Monday, March 12**    mid-year Narrative reports sent home  
**Wed. March 14**        *Pi Day* (more info to follow)  
**Tues. March 20**        \_ school for Family Conferences  
**Wed. March 21**        Evening hours for Family Conferences  
**Wed. March 28**        Early Dismissal for Professional Development  
**Friday, March 30**     All School Ice Skating Trip

March 5, 2007

Dear Families,

### Quality Review:

I started this letter a week ago; I do try to write once a month. But it took the first week back from break just to process all that went on the week *before* we left. It was a very busy, intense time. The entire Quality Review process turned out to be somewhat more and different than what we had expected. The entire staff really had to be "on" for the week. First everyone updated bulletin boards and classroom displays. Having company always gives us a push to freshen things up- and that is a good thing. The man assigned to our school had only been in NYC for 3 weeks. He is part of the British company who has been hired by DOE for this work. His expertise is working with District 75 schools, which are the schools for the more severely disabled students, whether academically, physically or emotionally. He therefore was not well matched to our population or educational program, nor was he at all familiar with DOE procedures or Empowerment Schools. This made for very difficult conversations. The focus of these reviews is to assess how a school establishes goals for its students and then measures achievement towards those goals. There is an enormous emphasis on "data," which generally means test scores. But it can also mean observation, narratives, descriptive reviews, collections of student work – all the processes that schools like Muscota are expert at. Through careful preparation of the documents our school has developed over the past 14 years I was able to help our reviewer see the work we do, but I was not always sure he could appreciate what it really means for our students.

Nearly every staff member had to be directly involved with the questioning, either by being part of the Case Study presentation or the staff group interview. They also found it frustrating to have prepared so carefully to only have the work reduced to a few numbers. While we are receiving a good grade, so to speak, with much acknowledgment to the strong school community we have built, the arts program and the personalized nature of our curriculum and instruction, the process as designed by the DOE left us feeling less than well represented and respected. This was the same impression from other schools in our Empowerment Schools network. Our network team has already presented our feelings to the DOE people overseeing Quality Review and some adjustments to the questioning categories have already been made.

We are waiting for our written report. Once finalized it will be posted online as part of the public information on Muscota. This was supposed to be repeated every year, but given how intensive it was .....

### Narrative Reports/Family Conferences:

It is that time of year again. Teachers have written the first draft of your child's report. Revisions are being made and the different parts collated. The goal is to send the finished packet home to families next Monday. This will give everyone plenty of time to process the information before meeting with the teachers the following week. You will be getting information about setting up appointments for your family conferences this week. While the DOE dates are Tuesday, March 20 and Wed., March 21, many teachers are spreading the times out over the entire week. It is critical that every child's family makes the time for a meeting. A core value of the school is that parents and school work closely together for the benefit of the child. We need you to make the time to come in with your child for this conversation to take place. If you are having any difficulty connecting with your child's teacher please let me know. Teachers are extending themselves earlier in the morning and later in the afternoon for many days, but there is a limit to how much time they can spend in school also. Employers are expected to release parents for these conferences. The office can give you a letter if your boss is not allowing you time off to come to school. We want this to work for every family and will help in any way we can.

### New York State Math Tests:

Grades 3, 4 and 5 are being tested this week. All students take this test. If your child is ill, please do not send him/her in. We will be giving make-up exams as needed. Teachers have been practicing the format of the

tests for the past few weeks, and the content has been part of daily instruction for years. Your job is to make sure that your child is well rested, well fed, calm and in school on time. Last year test results did not come back to the school until the following October. Hopefully, we will not have to wait so long this year. However, the real results are visible to teachers every day they work with your child in many, many ways in each classroom. You will get a very full picture of your child as a learner in the reports and family conferences.

### **Busing:**

Things seem to have settled in after the unannounced changes DOE made to existing bus routes in January. As you have probably heard on the news, parents all over the city were up in arms over the disruption. Denise has worked very hard over the past weeks to reinstate children who were pushed off of bus service for reasons we still can't figure out. We do have less bus stops but now that everyone knows the schedule it doesn't seem to be a problem. Hopefully we will have an updated bus stop schedule ready to go home this week.

Bus supervision is still going through changes. As you know, there are no school aides on the morning runs. Ana Veras, one of our paraprofessionals, meets both buses at the gate at 8:00 each morning and escorts the children into either the gym or the schoolyard. This is working out very well. Leandra is no longer riding with the bus # \_\_\_\_\_ in the afternoon. It was not working out in the best interests of the children to have her supervising. Tony, the driver, has been well able to oversee the kids. Maria Herrera will continue on bus # \_\_\_\_\_. Diana will return over spring vacation and we will review who rides which bus then. It continues to be very important that all children understand the safety rules on the bus. We are absolutely enforcing these rules. Children must remain seat belted, facing front and calm. Any reports to the contrary may well lead to be removed from bus service. This is true whether we are able to provide an additional bus aide or not. Being clear on behavioral expectations has greatly helped improve the environment on the buses for everyone.

### **Attendance:**

Many families will be receiving letters in the mail this week around excessive absences and latenesses. At the point of the year that we are looking at academic achievement, we also have to look at conditions that enable children to their best. And the first thing on the list is that the child is present and ready to learn every day. 90% attendance is a condition for promotion; that means that there cannot be more than 18 absences throughout the whole school year. Too many families have already exceeded that number and we still have 4 months to go.

A bigger problem for us has been latenesses. As many as 10 children in most of our classes have more than 20 latenesses this year. That means as much as 200 times over the past months the children who come to school on time may have had their morning routines disturbed by children entering the room late, interacting with the teacher, opening the clothes closet, finding their place in the meeting area. Not only does the child who is late lose valuable instructional time, but every child in that class loses out. We will be following up on the families with continual lateness. In extreme cases we will contact Child Services for additional support. These numbers will also be documented in your child's narratives.

### **Special Events:**

#### **Pi Day – March 14**

Muscota's other name is PS 314, so March 14 or 3/14 is a special day for us. This is also the important mathematical number used in measuring the dimensions of a circle, also known as Pi or 3.14. There are activities held in schools in many, many countries on this day. We began honoring this connection for Muscota last year with a range of math activities focused around the circle, pie baking, circle games, and, of course, eating pies. The PA is planning a pizza event next week and will assist in group games in the afternoon. Look for a notice with more information later this week. You may also hear more from your class teacher. Let him/her know if you are available to assist in class on March 14.

#### **T-shirt sales:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> graders will be signing their Senior Shirts this week, and an order form will be going home shortly for everyone else. This year we are selling T-shirts, sweatshirts, large tote bags, key lanyards and nylon school bags, all with the school logo on the front. Profits from these sales go towards the Senior Trip to Clearpool this June. In the past this has been a very successful fundraiser for us, so please look for the order form and buy, buy, buy!!

**This month's article** is again on testing- or the limited way in which standardized tests measure achievement, but the broad way that they are negatively affecting the ability of many schools to best serve their students. I know this is a much repeated stance, but the dangers of increased testing around the country is so large, it cannot be emphasized enough.

I hope to see many families during conferences the week of March 19, and then again for All School Ice Skating at the end of the month. We have had such bad luck with trips this year. Either the buses get cancelled or the temperature takes a nose dive. Hopefully by March 30 our biggest worry will be that it is too warm out to go skating!! In the meantime, bundle up; we have plenty of winter days to go yet this year.

Sincerely,