



MUSCOTA NEW SCHOOL
"Turn the World Around"
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Judith Menken, Principal

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Dear Families,

It has certainly been an eventful month so far! While in-school business has been nothing but positive, exciting and productive for everyone, public events around the life of Muscota have been somewhat unsettling. As was discussed in detail at our Special Parents Meeting on Oct. 10 and then again at the 2 PA meetings on Oct. 17, the upcoming Dept. of Education Progress Reports being issued to all schools have not been kind to Muscota. To very briefly recap the main points:

All public schools are now being rated in 3 different ways:

- **City-wide Quality Review**- 2 day intense visit to the school looking at learning environment, instructional procedures, assessment documentation, professional development, along with interviews with staff, parents and students. Muscota underwent this evaluation last February; we were well rated and complimented on many areas of strong work. This evaluation will be repeated next winter.
- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** is the federal law that rates all schools in the country according to test scores broken down by a variety of subgroups in each school. Muscota has always been "a school in good standing." There are also New York State evaluations that follow these guidelines; we have always rated well with the state as well.
- **NYC Progress Report** – first year of this initiative that is weighted mostly with test scores and progress of specific sub-groups of students in grades 3, 4 and 5. These numbers are compared against other public schools to produce a letter grade (A thru F). The parent surveys that went home to all families last Spring are also included in this grade.

Low scoring schools are expected to increase scores significantly over the next year or so. Every day that each staff member works at Muscota we are faced with the task of looking closely at each of our instructional practices to make sure that every teacher is reaching every student as well as possible. This newest challenge does not change that commitment. What has already happened however, is that parents and teachers are coming together to support the larger work of the school. We have been very reassured by the large turnout at the parent meetings over the past 2 weeks. You will hearing more from your Parents Association on the matter of school evaluations and the implications especially for progressive schools like Muscota. Staff is also planning more workshops and family outreach events to better communicate the work of the classroom. Towards that end I have much more to report on what is going on at school on your child's behalf ---

Design Your Own Assessments:

While your teacher is regularly assessing your child's learning informally, we are working with our Empowerment Network schools to better organize some of the material collected to show what each student has learned and help teachers plan future lessons. Since the work of documented this authentic work is guided by the "Design Your Own" program of the Dept. of Education that allows schools to personalize this to match the style of each school, it has come to be known as **DYO**. Muscota is involved in DYO committees in both Math and Literacy or ELA (English Language Arts). To help families better understand how teachers get to know your child well without regular testing, the PA and staff are presenting an Authentic Assessment Workshop on Saturday, Nov. 17 at school. More information will be coming home shortly. For now, please save the date. You will also see some of this work at Family Conferences in mid November.

Muscota Music Program comes to life!

First we were lucky enough to find Liany Farinas to boost our new music program. Then we moved into the space on the first floor that will be Muscota's alone. The custodial staff removed a dividing wall to open up the room further. Dept. of Education workmen will be removing a small kitchen unit in this room soon. I have ordered a TV and DVD unit so children will be able to see, as well as hear, different forms of music and dance. Liany has been decorating the room – it looks great and the sound of children clapping and singing is already drifting across the first floor. But that's not all – we were accepted by Music and the Brain- a music instruction program that offers piano keyboards for students along with a comprehensive instructional program that gets kids playing, starting the first days in kindergarten! Liany went for the orientation; we expect the units to be delivered the end of this week. Liany is an accomplished pianist herself. She says this is exactly the program she had hoped to build over time, and now the school will have it already developed and for free! There is increasing research being done on how the brain grows and learns, and one of the clearest pieces to be determined is the role that musical learning plays in strengthening intellectual capacity, ability to make connections between different big ideas and specific positive impact on math comprehension. A recent book on the effect of music on psychological development shows that the brains of musicians have been found to be larger than non musicians and that brain activity is increased after singing simple songs. Once the piano program is in full swing we will open it up for parent visits. This is SO exciting!

Healthy Hearts, Healthy Minds

Mighty Milers: All the K/1 classes, plus Vanessa and Lesia have become official members of this program supported by the NY Road Runners Club. Each of these classes are logging weekly exercise towards the goal of having run a marathon before the end of school year, that is a total of 26.2 miles! This will be made up of laps around the gym or the school yard, trips to Inwood Park, trips around the block, even walks up the 4 flights at school.

Healthy Snacks: Parents attending the October "Java with Judi" spoke about what our children eat every day. They asked me to remind everyone to send non sugared snacks for the classroom – fruit, crackers, cheese – and to carefully consider what you pack for your child's lunch. I cover lunch every day now so I see what kids eat. They do not have very long to eat, and I am constantly reminding kids to leave the cookies or brownie or roll-up until after eating the sandwich or yogurt. Also, please do not send soda or sweet drinks. All children are able to take plain or chocolate milk. Water is probably the best drink you can send from home.

Girl Scouts:

This year we have a group of Brownies and Juniors. They meet every other Friday at school. Marilyn Salas oversees the program, but it must be noted that while the school is sponsoring the troop, it is not a program of the school. The troop leaders are school parents, Marilyn included. Several parents have asked about a group for the younger girls, Daisies. We do not have such a group this year because there are not parent volunteers to run it. Troop leaders must go through extensive training by the Girl Scouts of America. This is a wonderful program for our girls, and we would love to increase the number of kids who can participate. If any parent would like to know more about how she can help you can speak to Marilyn directly in room 106, or let me know and I will connect you.

Why No Halloween?

Muscota is a community unto itself. We are an inclusive community - many different races and ethnicities, different religions and belief systems. All are honored and respected. The most important value we hope to share with your child is that every person has equal value regardless of what those beliefs are. One way of building common understandings is to build a shared community of traditions and routines that cuts across all personal backgrounds. The Muscota traditions belong to every member of the Muscota community. That is part of the basis for Town Meeting, as one example. Mad Hatter's Day is another important tradition that we can all share in without any religious or commercial overtones.

Everyone- child, parent, friend – is invited to take part in the Mad Hatter's parade around the block and share in dance and snack afterwards as long as you are wearing a hat that represents you that you made yourself. We have had some amazing original creations over the years. Please make the time to join your child's class- it is always so much fun! (Reminder- no masks or costumes or candy in school on Oct. 31- leave the trick or treating for after school with your family- calmer and safer for everyone this way).

Also happening.....

Innisbruck Sales: The PA's main fundraiser is coming to a close. Send in your orders and payments this week. Remember, half the sales go back to the PA to support important school activities.

Dayna's Work: Dayna is becoming very well known within the Drama department of the Dept. of Education. She will be leading workshops for drama teachers across the city this Election Day on playwriting with young children. For 10 years now Dayna has been guiding your children in this craft. Many original plays have been won first prizes in playwriting competitions; she has several binders of plays collected. In going through them recently to pull out samples to use for her workshops, she was saying how much she would like to be able to publish these plays. If there is any parent who works as an editor or in publishing, Dayna would love to speak to you on this project.

Upcoming Dates:

- * **Wednesday, October 31** **Early Dismissal day**
- * **Friday, November 2 - Mad Hatter's Day – 1-3 pm**
- * **Thursday, November 8** **Photo Day**
- * **Tuesday, November 6** **Election Day** **NO SCHOOL for kids**
- * **Monday, November 12** **Veteran's Day** **NO SCHOOL**
- * **Tuesday, November 13** **_ day for Family Conferences**
- * **Saturday, November 17** **Authentic Assessment Workshop**
- * **Wednesday, November 14** **evening Family Conferences**
- * **Thursday, Friday, November 22-23** **Thanksgiving** **NO SCHOOL**

It has been a challenging few weeks – something that Muscota staff and families have not have to face for several years. The early years of the school were fraught with conflict with the local district over testing, child-centered instruction, collaborative work between school and families. Perhaps we all got a little too comfortable lately. Recent events have reminded us of what we hold dear in our school, and also that what you take for granted, you can lose. There is nothing to take for granted about your children or the care with which every teacher and staff member works with each child, in the classroom, in the lunchroom, on learning to read or play chess, on learning multiplication facts or editing a poem, on being a friend or learning to be an artist. I look forward to working even closer with families in the months ahead to deepen our communication with you on the ways in which the school provides effective instruction for your children and building bridges to the public community that celebrate that work.

Sincerely,