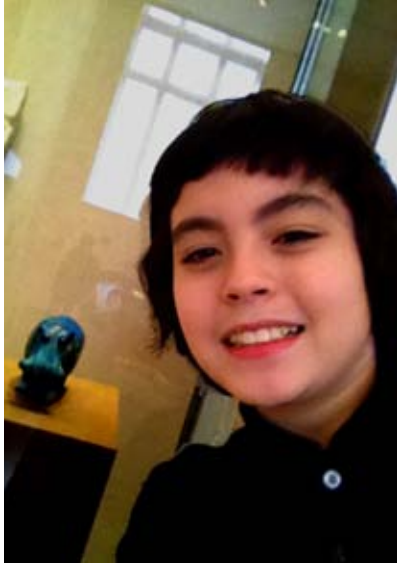




Newsletter

February 2015

30th Avenue School - Q300 Parent-Teacher Association



Upcoming News & Events

PTA Executive Board Meeting, March 5th
8:30am – 9:30am at Q300 in the Teachers’
Workroom

District 30 Community Education Council Meeting, March 5th 6:30pm – 9:30pm at PS
166, 33-09 35th Avenue, LIC

Parent-Teacher Conferences, March 19th
at Q300

DOE Panel for Educational Policy Meeting, March 25th 6pm – 8pm, Murry
Bergrum High School for Business
Careers, 411 Pearl St, New York

6th Grade Trip to the Met

By Evan and Chuck McMahon

CHUCK. January came with snow, freezing rain, a school closure, routine grey skies and the stark silhouettes of trees. Parents huddled in cars instead of gathering in the schoolyard to wait for the end of the school day. In the middle of all this blustery weather, the sixth grade took a trip via the subway to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After dropping three boys at the school (my day at the car pool), I spent some time circling around looking for a parking space, walking ten or so blocks back into a biting wind and grabbing a coffee at Dunkin’ Donuts. At 9:15, I walked up the stairs to the fourth floor. The class was lined up and ready to go. Fortunately, most of the students dressed more warmly than I.

EVAN. Taking the train with my class is cramped and noisy, but organized. People chatted in small groups that took over any extra space the minute it opened. The eyes of the chaperones bore into the back of our heads. Some people read or drew while others talked or pretended to take selfies. We huddled together as a group exiting the train at 59th Street and switched to the 6 train. One of the people on the train looked so relieved that she could finally find a seat. We’re only on the 6 for two stops. As we crossed the streets from the train, we counted down with the numbers on the Walk/Don’t Walk signs. When it got to “One,” we yelled “Happy New Year.”

CHUCK. As a parent, I was impressed with the variety of activities among the students: some reading, some drawing, others discussing school topics, many engaging Ms. *continued on page 3*

6th Grade Social



Kindergarteners Celebrate the 100th Day of School and Valentines Day

On February 13, parents joined the kindergarten classes to celebrate Valentine's Day and the first 100 days of Q300. Each student brought 100 candy hearts or other items, and used them to explore different ways they could count to 100. After counting exercise, there were lots of treats for all. Thanks to the parents who helped out, joined in and who brought treats to share with everyone.



Visit to the Met continued

Annette in dialogue. Ms. Betty's group was in the car ahead of us. I'd recently been to the museum for the first time in some years on the Mesopotamia trip. On that tour, Ms. Annette distributed forms with questions arranged like a scavenger hunt. The students had been intensely engaged in searching for information, answering questions. The groups in which they worked were fluid – people seeking the point of view of various peers, changing seats, looking again. This trip, the group was lead through the Egyptian exhibits by Maria, one of the museum's tour guides.

EVAN. The most impressive thing for me was how the Egyptians knew how to make and use colors. However, before that we saw the Temple of Ra that Augustus built, showing himself making offerings to the gods. We learned about papyrus, how it was delicate and made from a reed plant that grows in the river. We visited a room dedicated to Hatshepsut, a female pharaoh. We drew pictures of different carvings so it was easier to see that parts of the sculptures were missing. The last room we went to was filled with mini-figures from a secret passageway in a tomb. They showed the daily life of Egyptians in the Age of the Pharaohs.

I recall thinking after the Mesopotamia trip that every parent should take the opportunity to travel with Ms. Annette and Ms. Betty as they expose the students to the living materials that are discussed in the text books.

CHUCK. There were several exhibits that caught my eye. I was intrigued that the Temple of Ra had Italian phrases carved into the stone. Maria explained to us that the Temple had stood for a time, after it was recovered, in Rome. It was largely ignored and suffered there from graffiti. I was also surprised that so many of the sarcophagi were made of wood. Apparently the Egyptians knew how to preserve wood as well as corpses.

CHUCK. I recall thinking after the Mesopotamia trip that every parent should take the opportunity to travel with Ms. Annette and Ms. Betty as they expose the students to the living materials that are discussed in the text books. New York City offers more resources of this kind than just about any other place I can think of in the U.S. It is a fertile occasion to observe how our children learn, how they interact with one another and an opportunity to observe their teachers in action. Ms. Betty and Ms. Annette are not only bright and caring teachers; they also possess tremendous patience, horse sense, diligence and compassion. The museum trips also reinforce the idea that we're all still learning. 🍷

Movie Night: Despicable Me 2

Friday, February 6 was the second installment of Q300 movie night featuring Despicable Me 2. A spontaneous dance party that erupted in the front row.

The volunteers went out their way to arrange some special fun stuff.

In addition to a major blockbuster animated film and the expected popcorn, juice boxes and pizza, there was a Valentine card craft table and a Valentine cookie decorating table. It's not a small effort to pull this together and the kids loved it. The cookies were delicious.

This is a great tradition we have going. It's an opportunity for kids and parents to mingle together outside of the daily grind of drop-off and pick-up. The turnout this time wasn't as big as for the first movie night, which featured Frozen. It's worth making a special effort to attend movie nights in the future. It is good time spent. You won't regret making the effort!



Meet the First Grade Teachers



Cristina

Cristina is originally from Sunnyside, Queens. She grew up there in the house her parents bought in the 1970s after emigrating from Cuba. Cristina's family spoke Spanish at home and she went on to learn English in school, attending St. Teresa's in Woodside and St. Vincent Ferrer in Manhattan. Cristina now lives with her own family in Franklin Square. She has two children -- Max (3) and his younger sister Sofia (2)—who keep her busy when she is not with our Q300 kids.

Cristina has over ten years of experience in education, most recently as an instructional coach at a Brooklyn charter school. She was looking to get back into the classroom and seized the opportunity to join Q300 because of how the school's mission and values align with her educational principles. She believes in progressive education and strives to facilitate learning among her students rather than just telling them what the answer is.

Cristina strives to instill in her students a sense of ownership over their own learning and encourages them to value

Cristina describes her first grade students as curious about everything! One of the things that she loves about her class is that they are always questioning things. They do not assume that just because they read something in a book or she tells them something that it is true.

listening to each other to build their own understanding. She uses a variety of teaching modalities, including independent work (a lot with writing), and partnership or triads (often in science). Cristina sends optional enrichment activities home weekly across disciplines. If children complete

these activities, she gives feedback on their work.

Cristina describes her first grade students as curious about everything! One of the things that she loves about her class is that they are always questioning things. They do not assume that just because they read something in a book or she tells them something that it is true. They want to construct it themselves – to them, the classroom is a place where they can learn through fun activities and games and make meaning of things with the teacher there to guide them and share their thinking.

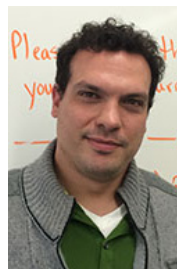
A great example of Cristina's approach is how she worked with her students to come up with the class rules during the first few weeks of school. The students would offer their thoughts on what rules would make sense for the

class – something like 'don't say mean things' – and Cristina would help them to generalize it, to something like 'Take care of other people's feelings'. They jointly formulated both the rules and the consequences – a letter of apology, or even two students building something together in explorations to repair their relationship after having had a dispute. For Cristina, what stood out in this process was how willing the kids were to engage in the conversation and talk to each other about what they thought and believed.

Cristina appreciates how involved Q300 families have been in the school and how invested parents have been in their children's education. Cristina has parent volunteers in her classroom, and there has been great turnout at the writing celebrations at the end of each unit. Community events help students see the importance of the work that they are doing and how much it is valued; they know ahead of time they will be sharing and it is highly motivating for them.

Cristina has always taught first grade, although she has some experience teaching second grade during the summer. She finds it to be very rewarding because of how much growth she gets to see in her students in a short amount of time. First graders already have had at least a year of school already and have the logistics down – from unpacking to knowing how to complete an assignment. With their enthusiasm to learn and figure new things out they make a lot of visible progress during the first grade year.

When Cristina was growing up, becoming a teacher was not yet part of her plans for her own future. In fact, when Cristina graduated from Franklin & Marshall College, where she majored in Spanish and Government, she had visions of becoming a lawyer. She earned her JD from Columbus School of Law. During this time in her life, she worked with a non-profit organization that exposed her to youth and she also spent a lot of time with her nephew and came to realize how meaningful it could be to work with children. It clicked for her that teaching was the best profession for someone who always like to learn. She became a NYC teaching fellow and got her degree at City College, focusing on early childhood education. And the rest is history!



Alex

Alex has been teaching since 2002 and has taught a variety of grades and subjects throughout his career including third grade science, computers, and second grade (including seven years at a public school in Brooklyn). He also spent time running an afterschool program in Buffalo with enrichments like sports, music, arts, and drama before he returned to NYC.

Alex originally pursued a career in education because he was concerned about the achievement gap in schools and



First Grade field trip to the theater

he wanted to get involved in inner-city education to bridge that gap. As his career has evolved, his focus has shifted to making sure that the highest achieving children are getting the challenges they need. Each of his experiences is consistent with his vision that all children have a great experience in school that challenges them and creates a love of learning. The Q300 community is different than what he has worked with in the past and Alex has found it very rewarding so far. He is impressed by community's closeness and the way it is organized, and by how supportive parents have been of their children's education—helping them get where they need to go.

Alex's class is built around inquiry and discovery learning. His role is to set up situations and questions for the children to explore and answer on their own. For example, in explorations he will give the children a problem or a task like moving a ball from one side of the room to the other into a goal without physically rolling it. During this exercise in particular, students worked in groups of six trying to solve the problem while he walked around the room observing, asking questions, and helping clarify or support their thinking. The first graders spoke amongst themselves about what they needed to do mechanically to get the ball to the goal using blocks, understanding that the ball would need to be guided and would need a ramp to allow for momentum to gather. Each group solved the problem in a different way—for example choosing to use two planks so that the divide between them would serve as a guide for the ball, or using blocks shaped in a square around the ramp.

As [Alex's] career evolved, his focus has shifted to making sure that the highest achieving children are getting the challenges they need. Each of his experiences is consistent with his vision that all children have a great experience in school that challenges them and creates a love of learning.

can pick and choose what to work on, if any. He encourages high quality work and gives specific feedback with additional questions to further the student's thinking and encourage additional growth.

Students play a lot of games in math to gain fluency. Writing is typically done in a workshop format. For any given writing unit (Alex's class recently finished a unit on opinion writing), students have a number of workshops (or lessons). Alex begins each workshop teaching a strategy

relevant to that unit – such as how to be convincing through using a quotation or a comparison. After ten minutes of the lesson with Alex modeling the strategy, the children go to work independently executing the new strategy for the next half hour, with Alex witting individually with students in turn. As the workshops continue within the unit, the students work on more than one piece of writing and get a chance to apply the new strategies they are learning. Students also have the opportunity to give feedback to each other and get feedback from parents at the writing celebrations.

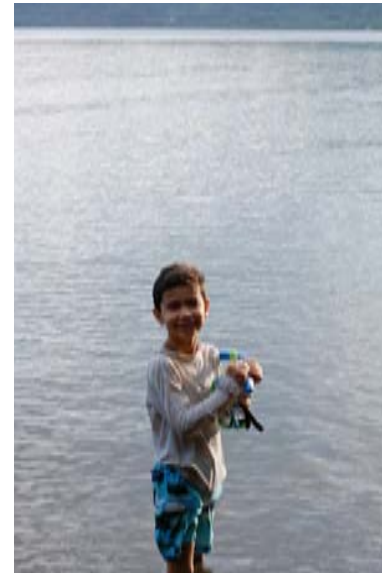
Alex not only works but also lives in Astoria and loves that it is a place with a great family feel with lots of things to do and places to go. He enjoys the park and accessibility to Manhattan, and of course nothing beats walking to work. In his spare time, Alex writes literary fiction, especially short stories about people and their struggles and successes. He grew up on Long Island in Shirley, attending William Floyd Elementary School and William Floyd High School before earning his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Buffalo. 📍

Alex's eighteen first graders think of the class as a place to explore and learn. They all have roles in their own triads for each individual activity (each triad has a student numbered one, two and three that will have set roles in each lesson) and classroom jobs that change every six to eight weeks – including meteorologist, communications, librarians, door holders, trash managers. Alex assigns optional homework weekly with the goal of having students work on their homework with an adult to create a high quality product. He might send home math options, writing, and reading options. The children



Q300 Kids on Mid-Winter Break

LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM
Stephanie, First Grade, piano recital.
Aiden and Cassie, Kindergarten, skiing.
Akari, Kindergarten, sledding.
Nathalie, Kindergarten, learning how to ski.
Tristan, First Grade, snorkling.
Hunter Kindergarten, bodysurfing.
Ryan, First Grade, sledding.



Kindergarten Update

In science, the students are learning about wood and paper. Recently, they experimented with buoyancy of wood, as they determined how much weight it takes to sink certain types of wood.

In math, the students are learning measuring and addition through story problems. They are exploring different ways in which to analyze and solve these problems, as well as learning underlying concepts.

Kindergartener father James is wrapping up his introduction to music instruction in late February. Before mid-winter break, students brought in various household items, like paper towel rolls, round toothpicks, empty coffee cans or oatmeal containers, and rubber bands to make their own musical instruments. After mid-winter break, students brought a CD with a song or songs that have meaning to them and their family. Thanks James for sharing your time, dedication and love of music with the kindergarteners.

Over winter break, K1 students participated in a voluntary writing exercise where they write a daily journal about their experiences during the break. They will soon begin learning how to write "how to" writing where they explain step-by-step how to do a certain task. ☺



No Sleep 'til Brooklyn

By Ingrid Bromberg Kennedy

Kids at 30th Avenue School live all over the city, living up to its designation as a citywide school. We live in Brooklyn, and many people ask me how we get our kindergartener, Lila, to school every day, and how long it takes. The bottom line is 3 subway lines and 45 minutes. During the summer I tried every angle to figure out how to make our trip less cumbersome. I must have googled directions from home to 28-37 29th Street, Queens at least 30 times; shortest route, driving in a car, less walking, busses, no busses, all results around the same – a combination of 3 trains or busses and 45 minutes. We drove the first two days of school, and the third I tried what would become our regular route, G to the 7 to the N/Q.

To my surprise it wasn't bad. All the kids living in Brooklyn basically take the same route. On the very first day we met up with one of Lila's classmates (immediately recognizable in her black and tan uniform). She was reading a chapter book, and Lila was very curious to find someone her age could read aloud to her. On the transfer platform from the 7 to the N/Q we ran into more kids wearing black polo shirts. Q300 kids from all over the city make the same transfer as we do. They are excited to see one other. They often play games, read together, laugh, or share snacks. They look out the window at the landscape; you can see the 59th Street Bridge and the Manhattan skyline on one side, and the expanse of Queens on the other. They then walk down the street usually holding hands laughing and playing various train or improvised role-playing games all the way to school where they are greeted by Matt and get swallowed into the school. I have a chance to catch up with parents, and have a little down time before the start of the work day. The 45 minutes goes by very quickly. After school the process is repeated, usually with more of an emphasis on snacks!

The commute to school is one of the highlights of my day. Our route is opposite of the flow of most people's morning commute, so the trains are somewhat empty. I get to spend quality time with my daughter and her friends, talking about what they do in school, what they did on the week end, or what kind of toys or movies they are all interested in at the moment. I've come to look forward to the commute, and in the afternoon we land in our Brooklyn home happy and a little tired at the end of the day. ☺



Parent-Teacher Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled for Thursday, March 19th, with meetings expected to occur between 1 pm and 3 pm and between 4:30 pm and 7:30 pm. Parents will be able to schedule 10-minute slots with your child’s teachers through an online survey that Matt will circulate. Note that Spanish and Technology meetings with Edwin and Scott will be ten minutes this time rather than five. Matt and the teachers will work to stay on schedule as much as possible.

Prior to the conferences, you will receive your child’s report card. The report cards are tailored for Q300 students by Matt and the teachers and include select standards from the common core for math and English language arts and state standards for science and social studies.

Prior to the conferences, you will receive your child’s report card. The report cards are tailored for Q300 students by Matt and the teachers and include select standards from the common core for math and English language arts and state standards for science and social studies. They also have elements that measure work habits and teamwork, how students are presenting in the classroom with regard to being able to accomplish their work, focus, and peer interaction. The report

cards are issued three times during the academic year – the final one will be in June.

For all grades, Matt suggests reviewing the report card, making note of anything that stands out or needs clarification. Come prepared with specific and direct questions. Teachers will be able to provide insight into how a particular element is measured, how your child is doing in specific areas, or answer other questions you may have.

For sixth grade parents, Matt recommends that in addition to reviewing your child’s report card, you should log onto Jupiter grades and review your child’s school assignments and grades. Please note anything that stands out or needs clarification. As you know, the Jupi-

ter grades website permits you to have real-time access to your child’s assignments and grades over the course of the year.

For additional resources to help you prepare for the conference, including a list of suggested questions to consider asking your child’s teacher during the meeting, please go to: (<http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/PTC/default.htm>). The website recommends that you be prepared to share your thoughts and feelings about your children with their teachers, including what you see as your child’s strengths and areas for growth. It is also a great opportunity to share important information that might help your child’s teacher better understand them, how they approach learning or where they need more support.

As many parents have already experienced, the Q300 teachers are available to speak to parents about their questions and concerns at any time, not just at parent-teacher conferences. You can reach teachers through email, communications folders, or you can set up a meeting in person or on the phone at a mutually convenient time. ☺

Editors Note: We received several photos of Q300 students participating in field trips, classroom activities, and engaging with their friends on the playground and at school that we are unable to print because we have not received photo releases for all children. Please consider signing the PTA photo release sent home by your child’s teacher so we can add more great pictures to upcoming newsletter editions! If you need another copy, please email communications@q300.org.

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We welcome your contributions, if you have article ideas or photos for the next newsletter contact Jamie Trish at Q300ptanewsletter@gmail.com.