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# Newsletter

30th Avenue School – Inclusion. Inquiry. Responsibility.

## NOVEMBER 2020 ISSUE

On this Thanksgiving, we would like to take a moment to thank everyone in the Q300 community. While much about this Fall has been uncertain and unknown, the Q300 community has come together to teach, learn, and create special moments that will transcend the historic circumstances in which we are currently living.

This edition of the PTA newsletter offers examples of the many ways that families and staff are coming together to support each other and create a strong community. Read on to learn more about [Ms. Sonita's vision](#) for the school, what [students and families are thankful for this year](#), and how [Q300 alumni have found ways to stay connected](#). Meet the [latest member of Ms. Stephanie's family](#) and find out how [our Math Team](#), led by Mr. Woo, got started. Get an inside look on what [starting kindergarten in a pandemic](#) has looked like for two families. Finally, during this time of thanks and gratitude, we also want to [remember those in our community who have passed away this year](#).

Wishing everyone a happy, healthy, and safe Thanksgiving!

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## Thanks and Gratitude

*Thanksgiving is a time for all of us to give thanks and gratitude for the people and things that support us, give us joy, and build us up. See what Q300 students and families are thankful for this year.*



Above: The Clough Kramer family is thankful for food, health, a bed to sleep in, the outdoors, love from family and friends, and our Q300 teachers and staff for making it possible for us to learn! - Elias (3rd grade), *second from right*, and Josephine (7th grade), *right*



Above: Maya (8th grade), celebrating Diwali and showing off her homemade sweets.



I am grateful for:

- Music
- Food
- Gymnastics
- Video calls with friends
- Chapstick (I know it sounds weird, but it is very helpful)
- Plants
- Animals
- My home
- My life
- My teachers, friends, family, and anyone else who may have helped me become the person I am today

- Rose (5th grade)

I'm thankful for all of my family members, teachers, and friends. - Eric (5th grade)



Above, left: I am thankful for Mother Earth and all the wonderful life on it. – Sonia (1st grade)



Above, right: Thankful for indoor trick-or-treating! Emily, Eric, and Elliot went trick-or-treating in-house knocking on their bedroom doors (from which their parents emerged with candy acting as if they were perfect strangers). – Amy, parent of Emily (4th grade), left, Elliot (2nd grade), middle, and Eric (2nd grade), right



I'm having my remote class.

Olivia Zhang  
2nd Grade



*Top row, left:* I am thankful for my family and my new puppy. – Zosia (2nd grade)

*Top row, right:* Oliva (2nd grade) enjoying remote learning

*Bottom row, left:* We are thankful we are able to go hiking and enjoy the fall foliage with our family. – Scarlett (1st grade), *second from right*

*Bottom row, right:* I am thankful for food, mom, and dad. – Ethan (kindergarten)

I am thankful to my parents for helping me, and for my friends, my hamster Pepper, and all my fish. – Nicolas (4th grade)



We spent part of our Halloween helping out with a safe community event that we helped to organize at a local park, where prepackaged candy was handed out and kids were allowed to wear costumes and parade socially distanced. It was so nice to see families out and smiling. It also felt great to do something seemingly so simple yet so meaningful for folks. Community is so important and we are grateful for our smaller and larger communities that keep us mentally fit!! – Lynn, mom to Nicolas, *above*

I am thankful for all the teachers and people who help me learn. – Darius (3rd grade), *right*, with little brother Stefan (kindergarten)



I am thankful for being able to still have fun and play with my friends, and learning safely while socially distanced. I am also thankful for being able to still see new faces and sometimes learn in-person for school. I am finally thankful for the fact that healthcare workers have been risking their lives every day to save other people's lives and that there is finally a COVID-19 vaccine. – Tyler (6th grade)

Thankful for friends,  
supportive teachers, and  
family!! Thankful for  
health and togetherness  
during these difficult  
times! – Liam (2<sup>nd</sup> grade),  
*right*



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## **New Q300 Arrival**

Congratulations to Ms. Stephanie and Ryan for the birth of their baby daughter Hannah!





## A Moment with Ms. Sonita

*Sonita Ramkishun joined Q300 in 2017, and in just a few short years, she has held several positions at the school. She started as a Lower Division teacher, became an interim acting assistant principal a year later, and then interim acting principal. This year, we are excited to have Sonita back as our new Principal. We found some time in Sonita's busy schedule to learn more about her, her plan and vision for Q300, and what she is thankful and grateful for this school year.*



**For those who are new to the school, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

I was born and raised in New York City, living in Queens my entire life. I am a product of the NYC public school system and was an honor student all the way through college. I was the first in my family to graduate college, and I believed early on that the place where I could make the greatest impact, influence, and change was as a leader in our educational system.

Throughout my educational career, my parents, who are natives of Guyana, have been my biggest supporters. They allowed me to take chances and risks. I am proud that I have been able to become the leader that they worked so hard to help me develop into all these years.

I began my journey at Q300 as a math and science teacher, with inquiry-based learning at the center of all my lessons. In my first year, I worked alongside the leadership team to develop the Comprehensive Educational Plan and learn about Q300's mission and goals. The following year, I was named interim acting assistant principal, where I supported Q300 through a focus on instruction and enrichment leadership. This role gave me the opportunity to collaborate with different groups of teachers and parents to implement plans across grades K-8. All these experiences at Q300 have developed me into the leader and principal I am today. I feel connected to our Q300 students, staff, and families and I look forward to building new memories and experiences as we continue to grow as a community.

**What is your plan and vision for the school?**

My vision for Q300 is to graduate students who are advocates for their community and leaders of our future. I want to encourage students to use their gifts and talents to give back to the world and to stand up for what they believe in.

During my time as principal, I want to explore the question: "What does giftedness mean?" I want to implement programming components into our school that allows us to develop each child to their fullest potential. Learning about the gifted child is important for me to better plan and educate our students at Q300. My plan is to continue to lead with my heart and always make every decision with my students in mind.

**What aspects of the Q300 community are you grateful for?**

I am grateful to our community for coming together and working collaboratively to support our students as we continue to teach and learn through this unique time. I am especially thankful for:

- My administrative teammate, Anna Milonakis, who works alongside me to ensure Q300 is the best that it can be. Collaboratively, we plan for instruction, enrichments, and social-emotional learning, working to ensure Q300's values of Inclusion, Inquiry, and

Responsibility are a part of every classroom, hallway, and building.

- Our parent coordinator, Jenny Lando, who ensures our families get the most up-to-date and accurate information in a timely manner, and who is always available to answer parent questions.
- My support staff members - Gina, Kanneh, Alexandra, Irene, Pam, Rachel, Christine, and Khary - who work in so many different ways to help our families and students every day, from social-emotional development and support to student arrivals, lunch, and busing.
- All of our paraprofessionals and teachers at Q300, who go above and beyond to ensure our students are engaged in learning, regardless of where students are learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their dedication and hard work are most admirable.
- All of my Q300 students who continue to persevere through the challenges of blended learning. They are the true leaders of our future.
- Our Q300 parents, guardians, and families for their continuous support and patience as we navigate the processes of this school year.

### **What insights and discoveries personally have you gained that you're thankful for?**

As a new principal leading during a pandemic, I have learned that patience and understanding are key. Being patient and understanding, especially with the continuous changes of this school year, has allowed me to prioritize the needs of our students and to ensure that the needs of every staff, child, and family are being met to the best of our abilities. As much as I love being proactive in addressing challenges, I have learned that it is not always possible or the best course of action as events and policies continuously shift. Instead, I have learned that clear communication and a consistency in how Q300 will work to support and grow students have been invaluable for families, and this is what will keep our community strong and together.

**#Q300Strong**

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## **Fostering a Love of Math, Problem Solving, and Friendship One Competition at a Time**

*Written by James Woo*

When I arrived in 2017, Q300 did not have a Math Team and students were not participating in math competitions. As a former math teacher and Math Team coordinator at The Anderson School, a citywide Gifted & Talented public school in the Upper West Side, I decided to start a program to get students ready and excited about learning higher level math and enhance their problem-solving skills. I ran two Math Team programs: one through NYChessKids, an afterschool program at Q300, and another for students who couldn't afford to participate through NYChessKids. Initially, we had 30 students enrolled and participation grew to 45 students, then 75, and now, 85 students. With so many students participating, I was able to create a Junior Varsity Math Team for 5th & 6th graders and a Varsity Math Team for 7th & 8th graders.

In Math Team, we practice problem solving skills and prepare for various math competitions. The

students learn concepts that they might not see during their math class. My goal is to create a community where students who enjoy math and problem solving can collaborate with each other cordially and respectfully, and students from different grades can meet and make friends with others who share a love of math.

The Math Team participates in numerous competitions throughout the year - Math Olympiad, Sigma, Continental Math League, New York Math League, AMC 8, MathCounts, MathCON, the MoMathlon (sponsored by the Museum of Mathematics), Rocket City Math League, Pi5NY, the Noetic Learning Math Contest, and Purple Comet - and has won various awards and received recognition across New York City. Our success is the culmination of the tremendous work and effort of our students, who push themselves to be the best that they can be. I couldn't be more proud to lead our Math Team and continue encouraging our students to excel in mathematics!

Ms. Anna Hauser, our 7th & 8th grade Upper Division math teacher, has also been a major contributor to the Math Team's success. She has attended some of our math competitions, helped with proctoring, and given moral and emotional support. Without her, I definitely wouldn't have been able to run the program!

I also want to give a huge thank you to the PTA for contributing to and helping to fund the Math Team! Without the PTA, we would not be able to make this happen!

I look forward to continuing our success and making Math Team enjoyable, fun, and inclusive!

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## Tales from Kindergarten

*Learning during the pandemic has been a challenge for everyone. Beginning public school as a kindergarten family in the midst of a pandemic has been especially fraught. We spoke to the families of kindergarteners Reyna Strong and Hanna Swenstein to learn more about their experience with beginning kindergarten as blended learners.*

### **Meeting Blended Learning with Flexibility, Resilience, and Appreciation**

*Written by Alisha Arthur*



Above: Reyna Strong, excited to begin her day in-person at Q300.

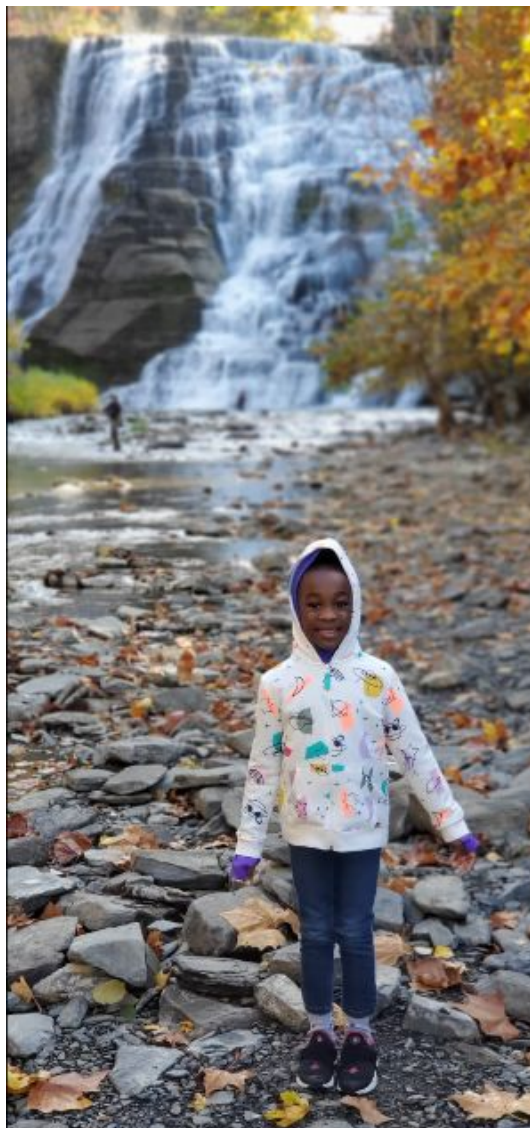
**Tell us a little bit about your family and your kindergartner, Reyna.**

Our family resides in Cambria Heights, NY. My husband is originally from Trinidad and Tobago, and my family originates from Cabo Verde, although I am from Connecticut! Our neighborhood is amazing, because it reminds me of how I was raised growing up – it’s very family-centered and our neighbors are more like family, looking out for one another (one of our neighbors keeps extra keys to our house) all of the time. It’s a great feeling to live amongst people like that, because I think that that safety and familiarity is what we’re missing nowadays. Besides being Reyna’s mom, I am also a director and adjunct professor in higher education and my husband works with the United Nations. Reyna is our one and only, but she has a younger god-sister whom she often claims as her “sister.”

**What has blended learning looked like for your family this fall?**

Blended learning has presented its challenges, of course. However, I’d be remiss if I didn’t also mention how much of a great job Reyna’s immediate teachers, Ms. Jessica and Ms. Kristen, have done with trying to keep everything together as they’re maneuvering this new way of instruction as well. For our household, because both of our schedules have changed, navigating the strain of a blended schedule has been a little easier. I have been working remotely since about mid-March, so I have been lucky in that I am able to be as flexible as this blended learning

schedule demands. That being said, I am still working from home. So those interruptions in the middle of my day when I need to drop off or pick up can often be very unwelcomed. To add to that, we live around 45 minutes away from Q300, so on the in-person days when she's dropped off by 9 a.m. and picked up at 1:50 p.m., it's hard to do much of anything because as soon as she's dropped off, she has to be picked up. So, we have definitely had our challenges and I could have easily chosen fully remote, but Reyna is an extrovert, and my husband and I saw the changes in her mood and demeanor the longer she went without social interaction. The joy she has being around her peers lets me know that we made the right decision, and it makes the sacrifices well worth it. Especially now that COVID-19 rates are ticking back up, and the fate of NYC schools staying open is unknown, I am happy she's been able to connect with other children in whatever capacity she's been given.



**What are the biggest challenges you have faced since the start of school?**

Definitely balancing my work schedule and teaching in the evenings while figuring out Reyna's back-and-forth schedule. Initially, because everyone was kind of figuring out how things worked and what we were going to be able to do so far as being in or out of school, getting into a groove and keeping up with Google Classrooms was also a mess.

**What has surprised you or what has made you feel grateful over the last two months of school?**

What has surprised me the most is how resilient Reyna has been throughout this entire ordeal. She's been super flexible and accepting of all of the changes that she's gone through. With that, the time that I've been able to reclaim and re-prioritize by not commuting into the city and working from home is something I am extremely thankful for. We've been able to spend more time doing things we love, like driving to new places to explore new hiking trails and parks as a family. And I'm definitely grateful for the teachers and administration who have worked tirelessly to try and bring some semblance of normalcy to the lives of these students, even when they're charged with taking care of themselves and their families. It isn't a small task, and it definitely does not go unnoticed or unappreciated by my family.

**Learning Pod Life: A Community Within a Community**



Above: Hanna Swenstein with her mom and dad.

**Tell us a little bit about Hanna and your family.**

We live on the Ditmars side of Astoria. We love it here. I have lived in Astoria since 2008. My husband, Kurt, has lived here since 2004. We love the food and the people we have met here. I am originally from Manhattan; Kurt is from Toronto. We are both big city people who love the diversity of Queens. Kurt works for Sesame Workshop in Production and I am a public defender at The Legal Aid Society. Hanna is in K01. We have two cats and a puppy arriving December 10th! We have fallen into the COVID-19 puppy trend. Together, our family runs a now defunct Airbnb business in our basement, which we hope to revive in a post-COVID-19 world.

**What has blended learning looked like for your family this fall?**

This summer, my best friend, a school psychologist in Chicago, texted me, “Start a pod, you will be glad you did.” Seeing as we have an empty Airbnb, I took that as marching orders and reached out to Shasta Molnar, who owns Sky Village, an Astoria art-based play space. Hanna has gone to Sky Village to create since she was a baby, so it seemed like a logical choice. Also, Sky Village has been successfully running a camp during the pandemic, so they have experience. Thanks to the Q300 Facebook group, the Google listserv, and some digging, we emailed all kindergarten parents on the listserv. We quickly found five families who were interested and emailed Jenny Lando to request the same blended schedules. Thanks to Jenny’s assistance, our schedules all matched. Sky Village hired two fantastic facilitators who make sure

the kids have fun and their work gets done.

On school days, Hanna is off to Q300. We are happy she is there, but she does complain about the lack of free time and the required distancing.

**What are the biggest challenges you have faced since the start of school?**

It's been hard for Hanna to get to know kids outside of the pod, and it has been hard for us to get to know other parents. It's been a hard adjustment for Hanna because kindergarten is much more academic than pre-K, especially remote pre-K. She misses all the enrichments, like art.



**What has surprised you or what has made you feel grateful over the last two months of school?**

We feel really grateful for Q300. Blended learning really seemed to be working until this week when we got the news that school had to close for a bit. Frankly, we were surprised how well in-person learning was going. Things felt very safe and we were relieved and happy. Our fingers are crossed that Hanna can return again soon. She was starting to warm up to other kids and Ms. Jessica, who has been doing an excellent job of making blended feel seamless. Many thanks to both kindergarten teachers, Ms. Jessica and Ms. Kristen.

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## Virtual Alumni Meetup Brings Inside Jokes, Laughter, and Memories

*Written by Julia Marshall, Class of 2018*



I had the idea to do a virtual alumni meetup around the end of the 2019-2020 school year, and worked hard to make it happen and find a date that worked for everyone over the summer. The idea came when I realized we would likely be having at least one alumni event if quarantine had not happened, and therefore we were missing out! I also realized I had no idea (and very few ways of knowing) how all of my middle school friends and teachers were doing through quarantine, and I had missed hearing from them, so I figured a way to catch up would be nice for everyone!

I emailed Ms. Anna, Laura, and a few others in charge of the alumni committee to make it happen. I was so happy about how many people responded, and was filled with even more



joy when I realized a fair number of teachers could come too! The reunion itself was wonderful. To begin with, so many teachers who had left before some of us had graduated attended the reunion, and therefore, we were able to see the smiles of all of those who had impacted our lives and who we had not seen in a long time.

While not many of the students spoke at first, we showed off photos and videos, and then the teachers started telling stories. Once the teachers started, everyone really got into it, and we were laughing and thinking of the awesome and hysterical moments we had at Q300! We remembered friends who left the school along the way (teachers and students alike), field trips, "Cho-isms," and everything that had made our years at Q300 memorable. Overall, for me at least (and hopefully for others too), it was a fantastic way to relax and de-stress before the current school year, and it was extremely nice to be able to see and hear from all of the people I had missed! Thank you so much to Ms. Anna, Laura, and everyone else who made it happen, and to all of the incredible people who came to the Zoom itself!

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## In Memoriam

For this Thanksgiving edition of the PTA newsletter, we wanted to take the time to thank those who have meant so much to us over the course of this year and, sadly, honor those in the PTA community who we have lost since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Jennifer Beakes (parent to 4th grader Helen Lorme and her sister, Elizabeth, and partner to Kevin Lorme)
- Rudolfo "Rudy" Torres (parent to 7th grader Eva Nelson-Torres and partner to Cassandra Nelson-Torres)
- Luchiya Vavouliotis (parent to 7th grader Katherine Vavouliotis and partner to Angelo Vavouliotis)

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### **Direct Appeal Update**

The PTA has launched our annual Direct Appeal campaign! **Please become a Direct Appeal donor** and give or raise funds to help pay for crucial enrichment programs, services, and resources that deepen your child's learning experience at Q300. These include Chromebooks, teacher wish lists, and so much more. We continue to work with the administration on the start of enrichment programs and services and will keep you posted.

We are mindful that, due to the pandemic, these are financially challenging times.

**For those who are able, please give or raise an amount that makes sense to your family and your budget.** For more info and ways to give, please check out <https://q300pta.org/fundraising/da/>. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to [directappeal@q300pta.org](mailto:directappeal@q300pta.org).

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