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# Newsletter

30th Avenue School – Inclusion. Inquiry. Responsibility.

## MARCH 2021 ISSUE

We're coming up on the one year "anniversary" of the Spring 2020 lockdowns and school building closures, and we would be lying if we didn't admit to longing for the days of having the entire Q300 community together under one roof to learn, celebrate, and have fun. One glance at this newsletter, however, will show that the Q300 community is resilient, strong, supportive, and creative, and we will stop at nothing to bring our students, families, and staff together to have a good time and learn from and about each other, in-person or virtually.

See how our families enjoyed their [mid-winter recess](#), learn about the first [virtual PTA events](#) of the school year, and find out why the [Q300 Debate Team](#) calls themselves "The Cho-sen Ones." Meet PTA Board members [Susan Stewart](#) and [Soumaly King](#) and learn how the [Wellness Council](#) has been busy creating activities and events to support our students' physical, social and emotional well-being. Finally, read about the [third grade Kindness Challenge](#) and how one parent created a [virtual STEM Club](#) to build elementary school students' love of STEM and problem solving.

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## Snow Days, Birthdays, and Holidays, Oh My!

Winter came and brought with it lots of snow and frigid temperatures, but that didn't stop Q300 families from enjoying mid-winter recess, celebrating Lunar New Year, and bundling up to celebrate birthdays!



*Above, left: Oceana (3rd grade), right, celebrates Lunar New Year with her younger brother. Above, right: Caleb (kindergarten), left, shows off his Lunar New Year outfit with his brother, Evan.*



*Left: Scarlett (1st grade) and her brother are excited for their *hóngbāo* (red envelopes).*





*Top row:* Celine (6th grade) enjoying the snow.

*Middle row, left:* Stefan (kindergarten) and Darius (3rd grade) overwhelm their dad. *Middle row, right:* Emily (4th grade), Eric and Elliot (2nd grade) with dad snowshoeing in the Adirondacks.

*Bottom row:* Nicolas (4th grade) and his parents ice skating at Lake George.



Above: Chloe (2nd grade) celebrates her 8th birthday with her favorite foods, including a chocolate cake.



Above: Hudson (2nd grade), *left*, snow tubing in the Poconos, and Kate (3rd grade), *right*, making snow angels.

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## Virtual Events...Way More Fun Than They Sound!

*Written by Erica Soto Eng, Co-Vice President, PTA Membership*

On a Saturday in late January, over sixty Q300 families logged in to Family Game Night, the first virtual PTA event since the COVID-19 pandemic hit. With the pandemic putting extreme limitations on in-person events, our students and families were left longing for the annual PTA-hosted events that typically brought us together. We had to think outside the box to create events that would be completely safe, help build community, and most importantly, let us have fun! Family Game Night fit the bill, with dancing, trivia, scavenger hunts, some friendly competition, and a lot of laughs. After receiving rave reviews from families, we are hoping to host another Virtual Family Game Night in the Spring!

In February, we hosted two fun virtual cooking classes that not only offered families a fun way to spend their evening, but also raised funds for Q300 and The Connected Chef, a Queens-based organization that delivers nutritious groceries through their Lifeline Grocery Initiative to families in Western Queens who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Normally, the annual International Winter Potluck, an event where families celebrate the myriad cultures at Q300 through food and crafts, would have taken place in January. While we can't celebrate this year in-person, the PTA is coordinating a virtual Cultural Series to bring the celebration directly into your home. The series kicked off on February 27th with a fun Lunar New Year celebration, with families making Year of the Ox decorations, folding origami, and playing a themed Family Feud game.



*Above, left:* Kindergartner Ethan L. and his mom Evon lead a Q300 family event with crafts and games to celebrate the Year of the Ox. *Above, right:* Completed art by Caleb (kindergarten) after the event.

The Cultural Series is a great way for you to share your talents and culture with the Q300 community. We invite you to lead a cooking demonstration of a traditional dish, host a craft-making workshop, guide a folkloric dance lesson, lead a fun cultural game, play a traditional instrument, or showcase any other aspect of your culture with our families. If you are interested in participating in the Cultural Series, please reach out to us at [membership@q300pta.org](mailto:membership@q300pta.org).

Stay tuned for more exciting events, such as Zumba-Thon on March 19th (learn more details about the event at the bottom of the newsletter), a Salsa class, a traditional Indian mango lassi beverage-making class, and the Stepping into Summer Virtual Event and Auction in May!

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## There is No Debate - Mr. Cho is Great!

*Written by Sue Sekar*

Meet Elijah Cho. On the surface, Mr. Cho is a mild-mannered Q300 middle school social studies teacher who enjoys photography, journaling, socializing with friends, and interacting with his students. Dig deeper, though, and you will find an incredibly zealous public speaker with a passion for redefining the art of debate and a devotion for developing the next generation of debaters. I sat down with our Q300 Debate Team coach to find out just what makes him tick.



**You have coached the Q300 Debate Team for a number of years, with a great deal of success. What inspires you to lead the Debate Team at Q300?**

That's an easy one - it's fun seeing the students get excited and use their talent and their wit, put ideas together, and have a good time! I was first introduced to debate in college – I joined the Debate Team at Brandeis University, and it's there that I gained a deeper appreciation for the art and skill of public speaking and where I really honed my skills in debate and clear communication. It's so rewarding to see the students develop the ability to use all of their intellectual talent and wit to speak confidently and present their case under pressure. It's also very exciting - your brain is constantly in overdrive.

**Are all your Debate Team members experienced with public speaking?**

Many come to the team without experience – you have to start somewhere. Some students may be very shy and quiet initially, but they are capable and they have a desire to achieve. Last year, one of my students really impressed me with their closing reflections in a social studies paper they wrote, demonstrating deep critical thinking and analytical skills. I couldn't let this talent go untapped, so I approached the student to see if they would be interested in joining the Debate Team. Another time I did the same thing with a student

who presented really well in class. I saw them speak and thought, that's some raw debate talent right there!

**What skills do you see developing in the students participating in debate?**

There are the obvious ones, like thinking through problems, clearly communicating a viewpoint with confidence, and, of course, public speaking. There are also ancillary skills that come with debating. There is a big emotional aspect to competition – dealing with a fear of making a mistake or fear of failure, especially with our G&T students who have a lot of internal and external pressure to succeed. We take that pressure and focus on the things we can control: how to do your best, how to work hard and prepare in advance, and how to be responsible to your teammates by putting in the effort. Perhaps more importantly, we learn how to deal with things if they don't go well. It can be overwhelming at times and learning how to support your teammates through those difficult moments is incredibly important.

**These sound like skills they will use in the future, even outside the world of debate.**

That's absolutely true. One of the great things they will learn is how to consider multiple perspectives. Many times, both during debate and in life generally, they may feel strongly about a topic, but need to defend the other side. In our super-politicized society, being able to consider another person's perspective is a powerful tool.

**The individuals and teams you have coached over the years usually do well in the competitions. What's your secret?**

We have a very diverse team each year – ranging from incredibly shy students to off-the-wall excitable students. They all bring a different expertise or skill set to the team. We also have wonderful support from our alumni, who attend our competitions to provide support in virtual breakout rooms, act as judges, and support the team. Finally, we have a lot of fun together as a team! Fostering good team chemistry and encouraging everyone to try and understand each other can really soften the edges on some pretty grueling competitions.

**Speaking of getting silly, I hear the students over the years have adopted some awesome team names?**

Yes, there are a few funny ones that play on my name, like "The Cho-sen Ones" and "Cho-vengers". I don't know how they think of these things, but I think it's great that they feel comfortable with me to have some fun!

**Thanks for sharing your insights on debate with us, Mr. Cho!**

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**Supporting Social and Emotional Well-being  
through the Wellness Council**

*Written by Rachel Weiss, Social Worker, Lower Division*

The DOE Wellness Policy encourages all schools to have a School Wellness Council. The goal of the Wellness Council is to promote student-led initiatives and other programs to support the social and emotional well-being of our students. Founded two years ago, the Q300's Wellness Council has been busy working to grow and promote a healthy school community. During this school year, it has been my pleasure to lead our Wellness Council with the crucial support of Ms. ToniAnne, Ms. Anna, Ms. Christine, Ms. Jenny, and our parent members Lynn Kennedy and Kim Alexandrescu.

**What events and activities has the Q300 Wellness Council hosted?**

Over the last two years, the Wellness Council organized and hosted a Turkey Trot; Volleyball (for grades 5th - 8th); Movie Night (with healthy snacks); School Skate Night; Family Cooking Workshop with the Connected Chef; Yoga Night; and a Remote End-of-Year Dance Party. We have also hosted over a dozen parent workshops and supportive check-ins on topics ranging from helping students manage perfectionism and stress and supporting students during COVID-19.

**How is the Wellness Council funded?**

Last year, our Council, led by Ms. Anna with staff and parent participation, won an initial Wellness Grant of \$2,500. This year, we received a continuation grant of \$1,500 and an additional \$1,500 from newly-available funds. Our goal is to use these funds in ways that will support and impact the greatest number of students, particularly as students return to our school building.

### **What are the Wellness Council's current initiatives?**

This year, our kindergarten through 4th grade students participated in the first Lower Division Kids Heart Challenge. While learning the basics of jump rope in PE, our students also raised close to \$6,000 for the American Heart Association to help children with heart defects. In addition, the top three fundraising students won an opportunity to slime Ms. ToniAnne!

We have a student-led health initiative that is focused on wellness, with Ms. ToniAnne teaching students about healthy eating and the benefits of exercise and wellness practices, and students in every grade creating posters during our recent Wellness

Day. These beautiful posters will be shared in school and at the upcoming Q300 Strong and Healthy Family Night on March 12th. During the virtual event, student volunteers will lead a family workout and a Kahoot quiz and share their favorite wellness tips and practices.

Ms. ToniAnne has also worked with 3rd and 4th graders on a socially distanced version of our popular Community Helpers program. Students completed a cardio drumming unit in PE and student volunteers created original cardio drumming videos. These will be shared with K - 2nd grade teachers for use as classroom movement breaks. We hope to do another round of student-created videos focused on another PE topic soon. We will also be working with students from April through June on a series of fun wellness challenges, such as drinking enough water, taking movement breaks, and eating healthy snacks.

### **What future initiatives is the Wellness Council considering?**

Ms. ToniAnne, Ms. Christine, and I are planning to create spaces in each building that students can use for safe and beneficial self-regulation activities, including sensory paths in our hallways and calming spaces both in our classrooms and other settings.

I am also planning to use grant funding to complete the [Mindfulness in the Classroom training](#) with Mindful Schools. I'm excited to gain skills that make mindfulness practices more effective for students. In addition, the course includes a focus on implicit bias, inclusive and trauma-sensitive practices, and our relationship with technology, all of which seems especially timely this year.



We look forward to continuing to grow and develop our Wellness Council and to increase health and wellness in our Q300 community. Stay safe, and I hope we get to practice wellness together soon!

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## Getting to Know Your PTA Board

*This is an occasional series featuring members of the PTA Board. While much of the work of the PTA happens behind the scenes, we want to recognize members of our community that give their time so willingly to the PTA.*

### Meet Susan Stewart, Co-VP of Communications

*Interview by Alvin Yoo*



Susan Stewart, *second from right*, and her family.

#### **Could you give a short introduction about you and your family?**

I grew up in Queens and attended schools in District 30, so it's awesome to be raising my kids here now. I work in the performing arts and my spouse works in film restoration. Our son Hudson is a second grader at Q300 and our other child is in PS 17's dual language program.

**How have you and your family adjusted to a new school community in the midst of**

**this unprecedented time?**

In a way, being able to meet classmates online before in-person school began was a very helpful way for Hudson to meet his class. Even after the pandemic is behind us, online meetups should be a part of the orientation process for all students.

**Being new to the school community, what prompted you to seek out a PTA leadership role?**

The Q300 PTA Board really amazes me. Everyone is so dedicated to what they're doing for the school. At first, I wasn't sure which Board position would be a good fit, but when I heard there was a communications opportunity, I thought my background in publicity and marketing could help. Much of my PTA role is coordinating with the Board to send out timely bulletins and information to the Q300 community (and I've learned a lot about MailChimp in the process!).

I feel like it runs in my family to serve. My dad was on the board for the PTA at my elementary school and middle school and I was in leadership positions in high school and college.

**What about the position will be a challenge for you?**

We're definitely juggling our schedules here at home, especially when school closes abruptly. With the communications emails, my co-VP Dana Holmes and I send them out weekdays and weekends as needed. We also check in with the PTA Board throughout the week as new ideas are brainstormed and discussed. I work in real estate and am busy with my clients, so I often need to carve out the time to volunteer for my kids' schools. However, it's an honor to be part of this community and to get to know other parents and caregivers.

**Meet Soumaly King, Co-VP, Community Affairs**

*Interview by Alvin Yoo*



Soumaly King, *second from right*, and her family.

**Could you give a short introduction about yourself and your family?**

Our family are longtime residents of Forest Hills, Queens. We are a mixed Asian family. I am Lao-American and grew up in southern Idaho. Mike, my husband, is Chinese-American and was born and raised in Queens. We have three daughters. Our oldest is a freshman in college and our middle one is a sophomore in high school. Kameryn, our youngest and an 8th grader, has been at Q300 since 6th grade.

The biggest reason why we came to Q300 was because we found out Mr. Woo was teaching middle school math. Mr. Woo taught our oldest daughter at The Anderson School and she often told us the math foundation she had in middle school set her up for handling the challenging math classes in high school. Mr. Woo, along with all the amazing middle school teachers and administration, have really prepared Kameryn and the entire 8th grade class to be academically successful in high school.

**What prompted you to serve on the PTA Board and what has been the most rewarding part of the experience for you?**

I am currently serving my second year as co-VP of Community Affairs with Marisa Nagano. Before coming to Q300, I was an active parent leader at P.S. 101. I served as PA President, SLT member, and a CEC28 Borough President appointee. I am on Community Board 6 and have been involved with District 29 Participatory Budgeting for a few years.

The Community Affairs position was a natural fit and allowed me to stay engaged and connected with the school.

It has been a privilege to have this opportunity to work with the PTA Board. There has been extreme thoughtfulness and respect in addressing difficult school and community issues, and everyone has a strong commitment to the development of the school to benefit all of our students. The best part is that even while Board members work hard, we maintain a good sense of humor and have fun too!

**What are your thoughts as Kameryn moves towards post-Q300 life?**

Q300 was the perfect fit for Kameryn and we hope her next school will allow her to thrive and excel as she has done at Q300. We hope Kameryn can develop deep friendships much like she has with her Q300 classmates and will find the same type of diverse and tight-knit community in high school.

**What will you miss the most about being at Q300?**

It is bittersweet to be graduating out of Q300. A part of me wishes we had come to Q300 in elementary school because three years is not enough! Kameryn has made life-long friendships, and although many of her friends will be going to different schools next year, they will never forget their shared experience of going through middle school during a pandemic.

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## **STEM Club: A Place to Solve Real-World Problems, Learn Teamwork, and Have Fun**

*Written by Herman Chen*

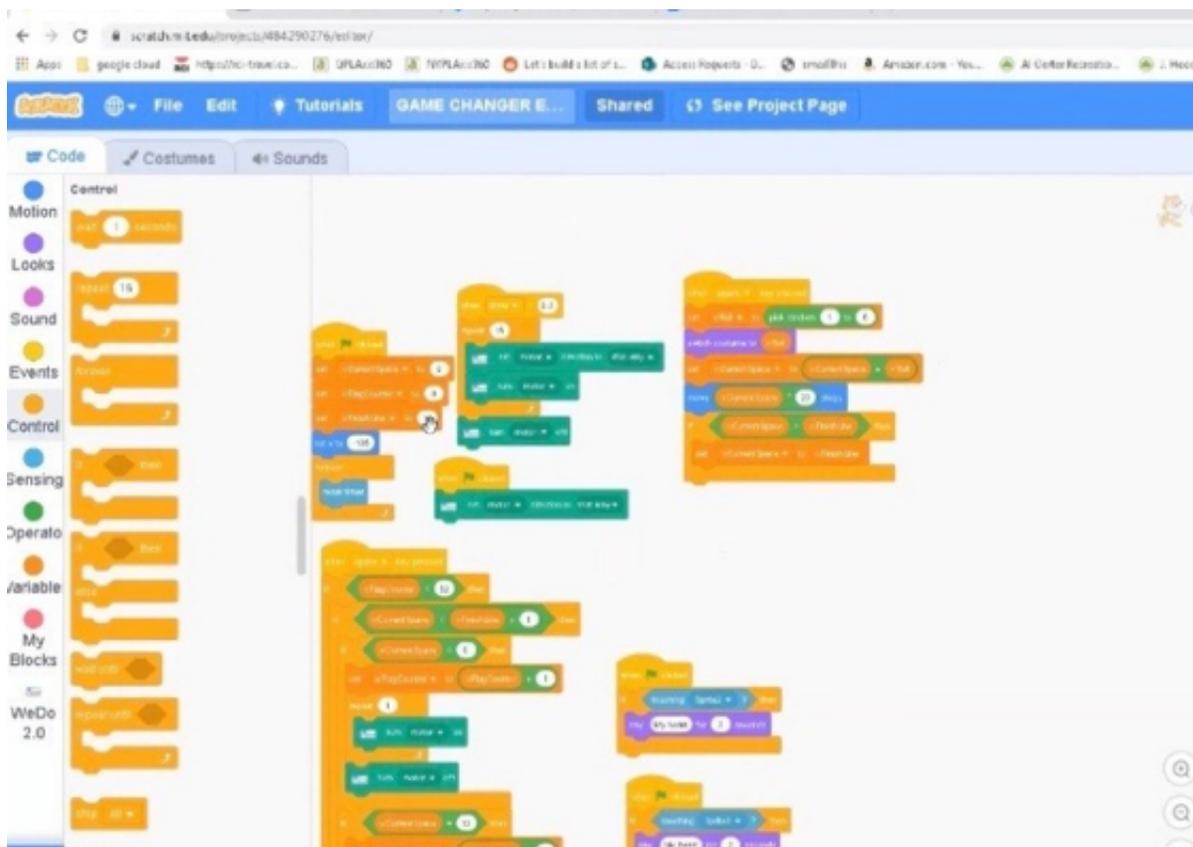
**Tell us a little about the Q300 STEM Club.**

The Q300 STEM Club is a WhatsApp group I created to share STEM information with 2nd to 4th grade parents interested in having their kids participate in the FIRST LEGO LEAGUE robotics program. This annual program engages students in grades 2 to 12 in hands-on learning to apply Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics skills to solve real world problems. Students also participate in citywide, regional, national, and worldwide events to solve challenges presented by the STEM experts at FIRST, a non-for-profit organization founded by Dean Kamen, the inventor of Segway.

**Why did you become involved in STEM Club?**

Prior to school building closures in Spring 2020, my first grader would get enrichment classes like Explorations and music at least two times a week, and Q300 parents would also share information about afterschool STEM classes such as coding. When the Fall 2020 school year started, parents were left with no options for in-person afterschool

programs. However, a plethora of online, at-home Zoom classes emerged, from Scratch coding to YouTube videos. FIRST was one of those programs, offering a free online curriculum for 2nd to 4th graders that took the challenges of school building closures and turned them into an enrichment project where students could apply their STEM skills to create innovative solutions using Scratch and Lego Education. Through this, I became a FIRST LEGO LEAGUE coach and an advocate for the new Q300 STEM Club for at-home enrichment. Credit for making this happen goes to FIRST, NYChessKids, and Ms. Ali for providing LEGO WeDo 2.0 sets!



Above: Innovative solution for Challenge 2021 developed by Q300 students.

### **Tell us about a rewarding/inspiring/cool moment for you and/or the kids in STEM Club.**

There were many rewarding moments, especially when we celebrated the students' project achievements. We celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Lunar New Year, and we learned the FIRST core values of inclusion, discovery, innovation, impact, teamwork, and fun. Most importantly, we always keep it fun in our online meets. The cool moments happen during the warm up activities, when students play Six-Brick LEGO builds, mini-challenges that develop students' working memory and perceptual, speaking, and listening skills. Students have to build their imaginative creations in less than 5 minutes - that's some cool inspiration!

While the FIRST LEGO LEAGUE program just ended, you can still access the free program lessons on [seesaw.com](https://seesaw.com). To access the project on Seesaw, please email Herman Chen at [ywhc2006@gmail.com](mailto:ywhc2006@gmail.com) for the class code.

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## Third Grade Kindness Challenge

*Written by Vivian Sicherman and Barbara Monroe*

In honor of Random Acts of Kindness Day on February 17th, the Q300 PTA invited all students and their families to participate in the Kindness Challenge. Students were inspired to commit acts of kindness, record their activities on an Acts of Kindness bingo card, and share with the Q300 community through a designated Padlet.

To tie in with Q300's Kindness Challenge, class parents Barbara Monroe and Vivian Sicherman invited the entire 3rd grade class to a Zoom session over mid-winter break. During the Zoom, students made their own greeting cards, which were sent to hospitalized children and homebound, elderly New Yorkers who receive Meals on Wheels. Several students took part in the activity, which not only brought joy to the recipients of the cards, but gave third graders a chance to socialize and have fun with their classmates, unmuted, on Zoom!



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### **Annual Zumba-Thon with P.S. 17** **March 19th, 5:30 p.m. via Zoom**

Come join us for our annual Zumba-Thon! Instructor Alejandra will conduct a one-hour class to which we all can Zumba. The class is geared towards adults, but if you think your child can join and handle it, they are more than welcome! While in the past we raised money for the schools, this year we are making this more of a community event and raising money for the Astoria Food Pantry and Astoria Mutual Aid.

[Click here to learn more!](#)

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