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# Newsletter

30th Avenue School – Inclusion. Inquiry. Responsibility.

## JUNE 2022 ISSUE

For many of us, it feels surreal that the school year has come to an end. Over the last couple of months, it became possible to safely bring back in-person events, and what joy it was to step back into Q300 and celebrate our students, teachers, and staff. From students performing and showing off their creations at the Art Showcase to the return of in-person field trips (and parent and family chaperones), Field Day, and graduation events, it was a Spring to remember.

Read our outgoing [PTA co-Presidents' letter to the community](#) and join us in thanking them for all their hard work and leadership during these stressful and uncertain times. See how [students spent their Spring Break](#), learn how [food scraps can be turned into compost](#), and get updates on our [Debate](#) and [Math Teams](#). [Congratulate our Global Kids 7th and 8th graders](#) on placing third in an art competition celebrating Black lives and check out [an endangered species workshop](#) held at the Upper Division. Finally, see photos from the second annual [Fun Run](#) and meet some [Q300 pets](#).

Have a great summer!

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## Co-Presidents' Letter to the Community

Dear Q300 Community,

We can't believe June has arrived and the last day of school has come and gone. As we

reflect on this academic year, we can say with certainty that the 2021-22 school year had its challenges as we have negotiated life and schooling in this new normal.

We continued to endure a global pandemic, amidst Delta, Omicron, and its variants, yet our school community has persevered. While we had to be flexible and continually shift gears, our school community remained committed to the mission of the school and its core values of inclusion, responsibility, and inquiry. We saw these commitments reflected in our school curriculum, through the Upper Division advisory program and the Lower Division morning meetings, and ensuring that every child had access to technology. These commitments were reflected through the continuation of the Debate, Math, and Chess Teams, our Community Helpers programs, the restoration of the Enrichment programs in the Lower Division, and the continuation of the Diversity Plan. We welcomed the return of Field Day across all the grades, which so many of our families attended, and the work of the Green Team and Wellness Committees. The school was able to put on an Arts Showcase for the Lower Division this Spring and in-person graduation, moving up and stepping up ceremonies as well. We owe so much to our incredible and dedicated teachers and staff who not only understand how to integrate socio-emotional support with academic pursuits, but who have created a supportive and rigorous environment in these times. We thank you!

It has been an honor to work alongside Principal Sonita Ramkishun, Assistant Principal Anna Milonakis, and the entire school team this past year to move forward together and to collaboratively create a positive culture and spirit as we were all back in-person. Our school leaders have responded thoughtfully, sensitively, and appropriately to situations that would challenge anyone, always keeping our children front and center in their decision-making. They have continued to consider our students' safety and well-being in these trying times. We would also like to acknowledge Jenny Lando for all of her help in connecting parents to our school and serving as this crucial liaison. We are so grateful for everyone's hard work.

The Q300 PTA itself has many highlights to share, as we joined together in many ways to celebrate our school and community and support the mission of the school. What a truly hard-working and passionate group. In this challenging year, we were not able to meet in-person, but were able to host virtual PTA meetings, fundraise for our local and broader communities through organizations such as The Connected Chef, conduct a safe and accessible Fun Run, hold our joint Q300 and P.S. 17 Zumba-Thon, put on a virtual auction with the support of so many local businesses, and continue with our spirit wear storefront - to name a few activities. While we could not have a Welcome Breakfast for new families this year, we were able to host a mixer in the spring for kindergarten and 1st grade families safely outdoors. We also held some new fundraising initiatives, including Flower Power,

Popcorn, Little Caesars, Aigner's Chocolate sales, and of course, the Vaccine Incentive Drive that enabled us to support the school in purchasing air purifiers and air conditioners for the safety of all. As it is looking safer to do so, we are working with the administration to restore teaching assistants in the Lower Division and Enrichment in the Upper Division in September. And of course, we still have our summer Read-a-Thon! It's a wonderful way to keep your child reading throughout July and August, plus support our fundraising efforts. Stay tuned for more!

As we close this year, we also acknowledge some key milestones. First and foremost, congratulations to all the 8th graders, the first group of Q300 students to rise up through the Lower Division, who graduated on June 22nd! We know they'll go on to do amazing things, not just in high school, but in all their future academic and personal pursuits. Ingrained in them since first grade, may they carry the core values of inclusion, inquiry, and responsibility with them always. We are also grateful to the 8th grade parents for their continued dedication to the school and the PTA. They were very creative in hard times - helping kids sell plants on the Open Street so they could have their usual fundraising. They will be missed!

Our Kindergarteners also "stepped up" on June 21st, officially joining the ranks of elementary schoolers! Our Fourth graders "moved up" on June 23rd and will start next year in a whole new building. Congratulations to all!

While we may not have been able to have all of the in-person events we usually do, such as our PTA events and the Talent Shows, our school has found meaningful and creative ways to honor our children, all of whom have gotten through a year with such resilience, patience, and strength.

Finally, we also welcome and congratulate the incoming board members, particularly new members Janet Perez-Garcia and Christine Serdjenian Yearwood. Thank you for stepping in! Of course, we are indebted for the hard work and dedication put in by THIS year's Executive Board. We had an amazing bunch this year, with many new members offering so much. We thank all of our board members, old and new, for their enthusiasm and commitment, especially during a highly unusual year - Yvette Choy, David Wang, Amy Wong, Takila Oku, Xin Li, Dana Holmes, Sonia Martins, Susie Stewart, Lisa Christopher, Nick Skolnick, Marco Newbury, Hayoung Kim, Suni Caraballo, Ellie Rabinovich, Erica Soto Eng, Rachana Shah, and Meghan Cirrito. While many members are staying on for another year, we want to acknowledge our outgoing members for all that they have done to contribute to the success of the PTA. Thank you Rachana Shah, Xin Li, Susie Stewart, Meghan Cirrito, Suni Caraballo, and Marco Newbury. We will miss you, and thank you for all that you have done. We (Maria and Lynn) also cycle off, but will support the board in

ways we can.

Looking ahead, we plan to gather in-person again, with our Welcome Breakfast and our Summer Picnic happening in the late summer and early fall. We are planning to host our Costume party, our International Potluck, our Gallery Night, and our Stepping into Summer Party, provided it is safe to do so.

Thank you parents and caregivers for your continued support. Remember, this is your PTA and we cannot do any of this without you. Whether you volunteer in a classroom, help out at an event, help organize the chess team, distribute Thanksgiving pies, participate on or launch a new committee, we cannot do this work alone and our kids depend on your support. As we write this letter, we encourage you to find a way to contribute and participate that makes sense for you and your family.

We have lots of achievements for which to be proud, and once again, thanks for a wonderful year! Wishing everyone a relaxing, restorative, and restful summer.

With gratitude,

Maria Hantzopoulos and Lynn Kennedy  
*PTA Co-Presidents*

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## **Q300 Students Exploring the World and Their Talents**





*Top row, left:* Nedelya (4th grade) entertaining wild horses on Assateague Island; *top row, right:* Rose (6th grade) in Northern California on a goat farm.

*Middle row:* Emily (5th grade), Eric (3rd grade), and Elliot (3rd grade) navigating treacherous hikes in New Paltz.

*Bottom row, left:* Jackson (1st grade) with his family in Sarasota, Florida; *bottom, right:* Seventh grader Liam, *right,* and Lila (3rd grade) explore a recreated reed-covered Paspahegh Native American home at the Jamestown Settlement in Virginia.



*Top, left:* Justin (4th grade) visits an iconic Boston landmark; *top, right:* Kate (4th grade) at Nassau County Museum of Art's Sculpture Garden.

*Bottom, left:* Ani (2nd grade), *middle,* learning about dinosaurs at the American Museum of Natural History; *bottom, right:* Nicolas (5th grade) along the Savannah coastline.



Above, left: Fifth graders Freya, left, and Violet after performing in the Jackson Heights cast of Unity Stage's production of Shrek the Musical, Jr.; above, right: Hannah (5th grade), left, showing some of the prop signs she helped to make. Willa (2nd grade, and not pictured) was also in the production.





*Above: Scarlett (2nd grade) and her little brother enjoying the beach in Mexico.*

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## **Giving Food Scraps New Life**

*Written by Susie Stewart, co-VP of Fundraising*



*Q300 students getting in on the action to aerate and mix different types of food scraps.*

What's a great thing to do with food items that are going into the trash instead of sending them to the landfill to release greenhouse gases? Compost them!

This spring, the P.S. 17 Wellness Committee and the Q300 PTA Green Team family volunteers collaborated with Queens Botanical Garden to bring a [Food Scrap Drop Off](#) site to the community through the Lower Division campus.

Every week, families dropped off their food scraps - banana peels, orange rinds, broccoli stalks, rice, egg shells, and more - and Queens Botanical Garden picked up the scraps to turn them into useful compost for the Earth. Family volunteers were at the Food Scrap Drop Off post every week, collecting scraps in the bin, breaking them up with a shovel, mixing the *greens* with the *browns* (a.k.a. mulch or other balancing organic material). They also offered brochures for people who stopped by with questions and explained the work of the Food Scrap Drop Off to help curb climate change by composting leftover food items.

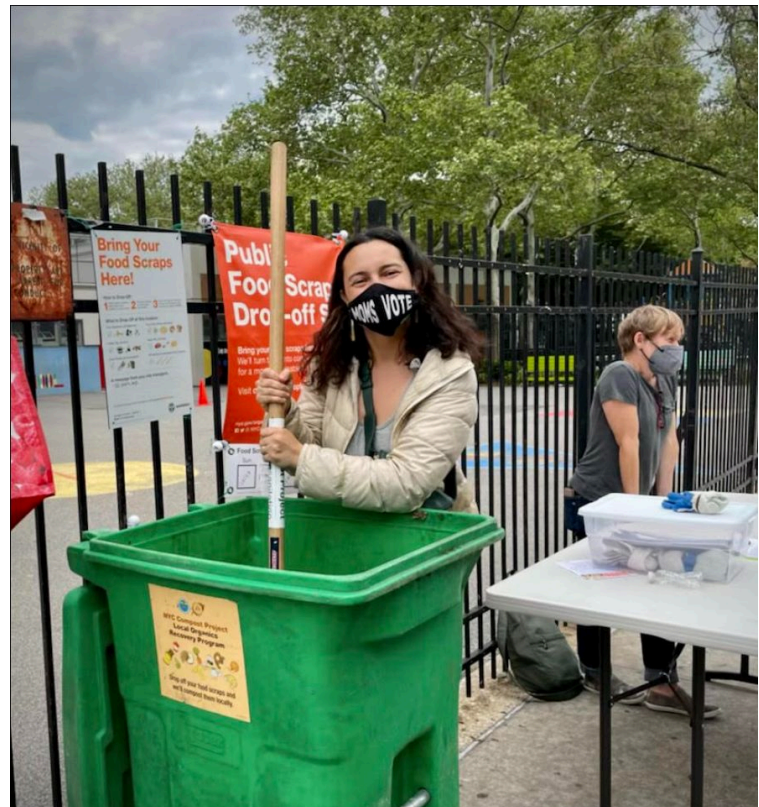
When asked about the Food Scrap Drop Off, PTA President-Elect for 2022-23 (and this year's

Executive Vice President) Yvette Choy said, “The Food Scrap Drop Off is a great opportunity to collaborate with P.S. 17 and the broader Astoria community. Truly an inspiration for students to witness families working together for a healthier planet.”

PTA co-President Lynn Kennedy commented, “I love compost and composting, and am so pleased to see such a collaborative effort to build sustainability in our school and larger community. I enjoy sharing my knowledge about composting with others and getting folks engaged and excited about it too. Volunteering with our co-located school was rewarding and double the fun. I look forward to seeing these efforts grow.”

Rachana Shah, PTA co-VP of Community Affairs also added her enthusiasm for the program. “I am so inspired that this initiative was self-organized by amazing community members that get the double win that is organic waste recycling - less methane-causing food waste in the landfill AND more finished, non-synthetic compost to fertilize our local trees and plants!! Very proud of our forward-thinking community taking steps to curb climate change!”

Thank you to Green Team parent volunteers Lynn Kennedy, Yvette Choy, Rachana Shah, and Susan Stewart, plus P.S. 17 for all of their work and follow up on this endeavor!



While the Food Scrap Drop Off site will not be active over the summer, it will return on September 12th, so save your end of summer food scraps (no meat products) and bring them in at the start of school!

*Photo, right: Susie Stewart (left) and Lynn Kennedy volunteer at the Food Scrap Drop Off site.*

## Meet Our Extended Family: Q300 Pets

*This new series, Q300 Pets, gives us a chance to meet the furry (and not so furry) members of your*

*family. Want to share stories and pictures of your pets with us? Email us at [newsletter@q300pta.org](mailto:newsletter@q300pta.org) for an upcoming PTA newsletter feature.*



"Our dog, Toby, has been with our family since he was 9 weeks old and he's now 10. When Gali, our cat, was seen running around Forest Hills, the community came together to rescue him and we fostered him (foster fail!). We adopted him 3 years ago and think he's 6 years old. Toby is the most calm dog you will meet. He just wants to sit with you and be your best friend. Gali makes funny noises and loves to hang out by the window and sunbathe with Toby." - Aiden (1st grade) and family

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"Here is a photo of our pandemic pets: gerbils named Basil and Oregano, whom we got in January 2021 after much research comparing gerbils, hamsters, and guinea pigs (there were charts!). We love how cute and fuzzy they are. One of

our favorite things about them is that they sleep snuggled up with each other, and take turns being the one more alert or the one more deeply asleep. They really take care of each other!" - Violet (5th grade) and Willa (2nd grade) and family



"Cocoa Elizabeth Hantzopoulos-Farraj is 5 years in August. She came to us through a friend who was looking for a home for her. She brings us so much joy, especially during the pandemic. She is interactive, attention-seeking (in a good way), slightly mischievous and playful, but we probably love her cuddles the most." - Dalia (8th grade) and Ziyad (5th grade) and family



"I've had Juniper for 4 years. She is a Bahuaahua Terrier. She is cuddly and friendly. She is a real lapdog!" - Nedelya (4th grade)

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"Pepper came to live with us in August of 2016 when he was 4 months old. We like him because he is a mix of both playful and cuddly." - Timothy (8th grade) and family



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## Building Resilience Through Debate

*Written by Elijah Cho, Upper Division Social Studies Teacher and Debate Coach*

We started our debate team in the 2017-2018 school year, and for the last five years we have taken part in the Urban Debate League — NYC's largest debate league. Each month, we compete in a

tournament involving over 20 schools across the city, including worthy rivals such as Salk School of Science, The Anderson School, East Side Community School, The Center School, Columbia Secondary School, Hunter College, Lab School for Collaborative Studies, and many others. For students who have done a year or more of debate, they are placed in the varsity division to compete against other experienced debaters and students who are just beginning are placed in the novice division. As the year progresses, the league divides the students who have shown competitive success in the novice division and moves them up to the intermediate division, where they can have competitive matches that are more at their level.

The Q300 Debate Team meets one to two times a week to practice and prepare for these competitions. We usually have a check-in question, personal reflection, lesson for the day, and a practice round of debate. I have found that the fastest way to learn things is often to try it or do it first. This way, we can form a framework of what the activity actually is and what it looks like, and then we can ask more meaningful questions to see how it all works together. Our novices this year did an exceptional job of building the plane as we flew (or were thrown) into the first tournament of the year. And they haven't looked back since.

We debate a variety of topics, with some notable ones from this year including bringing extinct creatures back to life, paying college athletes, expanding the Supreme Court, mirroring the European Union's combustion engine ban, ethics of eating meat, and abolishing the Olympics.

Each practice session, our lesson segment typically focuses on topic analysis, skill-building, or character-building. Our alumni have even joined us over Zoom and led lessons for our team – a big contributing factor to our success. Some of the most meaningful lessons for our students are the ones that give them a sense of what's to come or a mission for the month, including values to strive for or things we must stop doing. For example, many of us want to win and be great, but have we considered when winning can become harmful? Have our past results reinforced positive habits or has it allowed us to get by with "just enough"? Did we communicate and consider our teammates' views and feelings or did we force our own way? And how can we handle anxiety and work through all the problems we face? These moments of reflection are vital for the health of the team and each member within it.

Our 2021-2022 season was the most successful one yet. Our team won many awards, including a 1st place finish in The Championship Tournament (formerly named the State Championship) for both the intermediate and varsity divisions. However, the thing that has been most special about our team is the resilience of our children. Our students have had to bear the weight of expectation all year, both from within and without. They work hard, and pour so much of themselves to give their very best. There were several moments throughout the season when we lost for reasons that didn't make sense to us. It was a tough pill to swallow, especially for those who gave their absolute best, but these moments taught us humility in accepting that there are things we can't control while

recognizing the responsibility in doing the things we can. We have the choice and the chance to find the confidence to get back up and fight again. And perhaps that's what makes it all so meaningful. Our kids have overcome.

I am incredibly proud of our team and I appreciate all the support the parents have given us, designing and distributing team hoodies, judging at tournaments, processing tough moments with their children, encouraging them to keep on going, and giving me their vote of confidence. It has been a team effort and we were able to do this with the help of each other.

Thank you.

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## Endangered Species Workshop at Upper Division

*Written by Maria Hantzopoulos, PTA co-President*

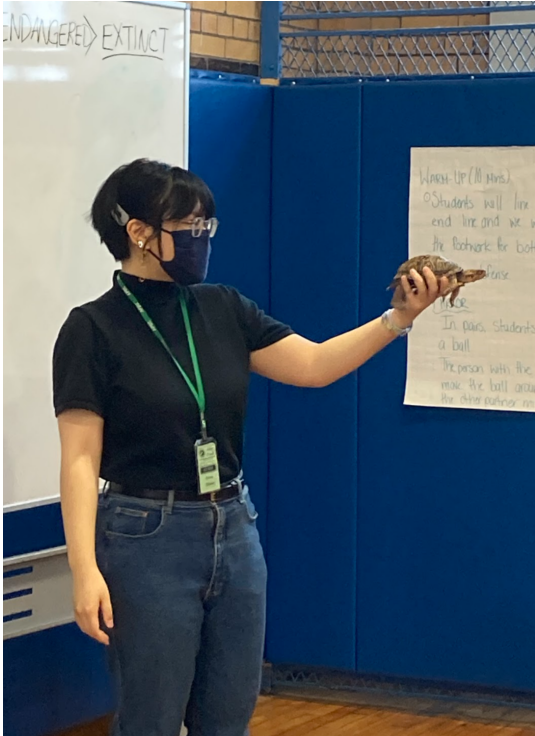


*Students getting a chance to pet a chinchilla.*

Since Q300 opened as a school, the 7th grade typically goes on either a special overnight trip to the Taconic Environmental Center upstate or a local day trip to another environmental center. The PTA kicks in some money and families kick in the rest, and our amazing teachers guide the students on scientific inquiry. Over the last few years, the trip did not happen due to COVID-19, and we were



unsure if the DOE would permit trips this year, but the PTA approved funds for this school year's 7th and 8th graders in the hopes that they would get this experience.



When news broke that the DOE was allowing day trips again, we were excited about finding possibilities to modify the trip for our 7th and 8th graders. After calling many sites, we learned that it was too late - all trips were already booked! While the Queens-based Alley Pond Environmental Center was all booked for visitors, they let us know that if we acted quickly, they had one day open where they could come to us! At the end of March, 7th and 8th graders were treated to an interactive lesson and workshop on endangered species and were able to make friends with a chinchilla, turtle, and salamander. It was both fun and informative, and a great way to begin bringing back in-person experiences for our Upper Division students.

## There's Always a First to Everything

*Written by James Woo, Upper Division Math Teacher and Math Team Coach*



*Mr. Woo with 8th graders Andy Jiang, Annie Li, and Benjamin Luo at the MathCounts competition.*

The 2022 Q300 Math Team has had a roller coaster of a season. To start, due to the pandemic, students that were in both the Math Team and Debate Team in prior years had to choose one or the other. Although I lost a few students to the Debate Team, I gained a lot this year. We had a large group of students in the 5th grade that were interested in joining. Ms. Jessica Huang, the 5th grade math teacher, also joined the math team and coached the 5th grade, which was a huge benefit since it was impossible to have taught 50 students all at once. To this day, I am eternally grateful that Ms. Jessica was able to step up.

When I found out that Ms. Jessica had to go on maternity leave, I was scrambling along with other teachers to find her replacement. Luckily, Mr. Edwin Mora was able to cover for some time, but due to other engagements, Mr. Edwin could not take on the responsibilities of the 5th grade math team any further; as a result, this ended the 5th grade math team season.

As usual, we've competed in many different competitions regionally and nationally. To start, we had three students (Andy Jiang, Annie Li, and Benjamin Luo) compete at the 2022 MathCounts States Competition in Saratoga Springs, NY. Although we had two students compete last year remotely, it was the first time that we had students take the States competition in-person. We had a wonderful time getting to know each other, spending time talking about problems, grabbing meals together, and scrambling to look for calculators at a near-by Target and Staples. With that being said, seeing Andy finish top 12 in New York State and be the only student in the Queens Chapter to finish in the top 12 was definitely a first!

Then came the AMC 8. Andy Jiang finished in the top 1% in the nation, Annie Li finished in the top 5% and Leon Wong and Ethan Wang finished in 3rd place for the school, attaining the team score of 63 out of 75, giving the Q300 Math Team the School Merit Roll, a certificate given to schools whose total score was above a 50. This score, to this day, is the highest score ever received from the Q300 Math Team. In addition, Benjamin Luo was the only 6th grader to have received at least a 15 out of 25 in this contest.

It was also the first time that our math team participated in the AMC 10A, a high school math competition. Though the problems were really challenging and we did not do well in this competition, it gave the math team a snippet of what a high school math competition would look like.

Then came the New York Math League, where the 6th and 8th grade finished 2nd place in New York State! Benjamin Luo placed 2nd place individually in the state, while Michelle Truong and Andy Jiang finished 1st place individually in the state. Although we have received plaques for being regional winners as a school, this is the first time that any of the grades have finished top 2 in this competition and will receive state plaques in this competition.

For the first time, we even got Math Team T-Shirts! With the help of Sae Makino-Siller, Li Lin, Li Wong and Kazumi Naimoli, the Q300 Math Team was able to get T-Shirts and our students have been wearing them proudly! The design looks tremendous!

The accomplishments this year goes on and on. George Mazing was a regional winner and Younus Sultan was a national winner in the Continental Math League. We sent 11 students out to Chicago, IL for the 2022 MathCON Finals Competition, a national competition where 616 students from the US and Canada competed and we had 5 students receive awards (Kyle Chen, Charlie Ding, Benjamin Luo, George Mazing, and Leon Wong). This was the first time that our school went to Chicago or even out of the New York Tri-State area to compete at a national math competition.

We even got a snack sponsorship from David Wang, Maura McDermott and Li Wong. Thank you for the wonderful snacks that you've provided for the Math Team. Without them, our students would not have been able to sustain themselves after a long day of school!

There was a first to everything this year. We've had a lot of ups and downs, but we came up stronger and better. We've had some losses, but the wins overcome the losses. We've had many new students join and as a result, their math and problem solving skills have gotten better. In our 5th year, the math team has excelled tremendously and we value one of our core values in inclusion. Many of our students have been encouraging one another to be better and that has been so critical to our math team success. With all that's said and done, I look forward to many more successes in the coming years and it has been such an honor being the Q300 Math Team coach!

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## Celebrating Black Lives Through Art

*Written by Maria Hantzopoulos, PTA co-President*

Congrats to Q300 Global Kids 7th and 8th graders! For Black History Month, Global Kids entered an art competition where students had to create an original artwork that centered on uplifting and celebrating Black lives - past, present, and future. Our Global Kids 7th and 8th graders placed in the top three with this stunning and powerful collective piece!



## Running, Raising Funds, and Having Fun

*Written by Marco Newbury, co-VP of Lower Division*

For the second year in a row, the Q300 PTA Fun Run put a smile on plenty of kids' faces. One hundred and twelve Fun Run t-shirts were gifted across the community to those who registered (for a nominal fee) and kids can now wear their shirts proudly at school. The Fun Run raised approximately \$2,000 for the PTA and included sponsorships from ArtHouse Astoria, Jackson Heights Orthodontics, and NYChessKids.

This year, many families showed enthusiasm for grade band level Fun Run events, which took place at various parks in Queens in May and June. Each of grades from kindergarten through fourth held a meetup with 15 to 25 families. Activities included egg-and-spoon races, potato sack races, human wheelbarrows, three-legged races, distanced runs and tug o' war. Parents are already scheming plans to hold another Fun Run next school year. Thanks to those who contributed and participated this year - we shall rely upon your support for the Fun Run to be a success again next school year.

The effort took a village! We are very grateful to Kazumi Naimoli and family, who did the vinyl for all the t-shirts, and to Tomonori Nagano who designed a webpage for efficient collection of fees (which our Treasurers then processed). Many Lower Division class parents, Lower Division and Upper Division PTA co-Vice Presidents, a small committee of parents enthusiastic about sports, and the PTA Board all chimed in, with several parents leading in-person activities with students at parks across Queens.







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We welcome your contributions. If you have article ideas or photos for the next newsletter, contact us at [newsletter@q300pta.org](mailto:newsletter@q300pta.org).

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