



# Newsletter

30th Avenue School – Inclusion. Inquiry. Responsibility.

## Q300 PTA SPRING 2019 ISSUE

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Welcome to the last newsletter of the academic year! This issue reflects a busy Spring at Q300 and there's lots to catch up on. Read about our Steppin' into Summer Dance Party and our first ever Park Day. Find out what students say about their Math, Debate, and Chess Team experiences. Learn more about our fabulous Q300 community, like our new Social Worker, Rachel Weiss, teachers Katie Xie and Corey Marx, or some of our Paraprofessionals and Teacher's Assistants. "Meet the Parents" will introduce you to a couple more families in the lower and upper divisions. Read about some recent events, like the alumni panel, NASA visit, architecture celebration, and first ever basketball tournament.

The newsletter team hopes you enjoy the last days of school and wishes you a summer of fun!

## Words of Wisdom from Q300 Alumni

By Maura McDermott



Q300 Alumni visit Upper Division students in May.

A panel of Q300 graduates returned to the school last month to offer advice to current students. Their message: it's all about balance. Challenge yourself, but don't burn yourself out. Join lots of clubs, but be ready to drop those that are not a good fit. Be open to new friendships, but avoid bad influences.

A friendly, close-knit group of 17 alumni gathered on the stage in the Upper Division auditorium on May 16 to describe what high school has been like and to take questions.

The graduates said they felt well-prepared for the rigors of high school, thanks to the high standards and support offered by Q300 educators such as Mr. Elijah Cho, who teaches social studies. "I really felt ready," one graduate said. Another agreed, "Now it's a lot easier because we had that preparation...It was harder here which makes it easier once we're in high school."

High school does take some getting used to, the graduates said. One student said she has to brace herself for the crowded hallways: "You have to mentally prepare yourself, like, 'I'm not going to get shoved today.'" A few said high schools place more emphasis on tests, which one student said can account for 70 percent of final grades.

Students reported a wide range of workloads. Some have a light homework schedule, while others reported spending as much as two hours a night on homework. With all that work to do, don't waste time on procrastination, the high-schoolers advised. Get enough rest, and put away your phone at least an hour before bedtime so the light won't interfere with sleep, one graduate advised.

Be ready to try new things, the graduates counseled. Former Q300 students said new subjects such as Mandarin and geometry turned out to be surprisingly enjoyable, and Advanced Placement classes are not as daunting as they might sound. It's a good idea to align extracurricular activities with coursework – for instance, joining a coding club while taking AP computer science – in part to impress colleges, one graduate said. Another advised being judicious about how many challenging classes to take at once: “You don't want to over-stress yourself and get bad grades.”

Focus on your own efforts, and don't compare yourself with others, another said. “Don't think that you're better than anyone, because there's always going to be someone to upstage you,” the graduate said. “Just try to go with the flow of what you're doing.” Another advised, “don't get caught in the bad crowd, and don't get addicted to nicotine.”

The graduates had fond memories of the close relationships they had with Q300 teachers. “I felt a really strong bond to almost every single teacher when I went to middle school, and I still do,” one graduate said. It's harder to establish those bonds in high school, where teachers have more students, the graduates said. They advised current middle-school students to keep the high school application process in perspective and not fall prey to what one graduate called a “Stuy or die” mentality, focusing single-mindedly on admission to Stuyvesant High School. “If you didn't get into the school you wanted, you're still going to be successful,” one graduate said. “You have to remember that you're young.”

In interviews after the panel discussion, three graduates offered more words of advice to middle-schoolers and their families. Upama Hasan, 14, a ninth-grader at Brooklyn Technical High School, said middle-schoolers should consider what they want to focus on in high school, how big a school they would like to attend and how far they're willing to commute. Making good choices about friendships is important, too, she said, “You should be with people who are willing to help you out in times of need, and vice versa.” In the last year of middle school, “you should cherish what you have and you should cherish everyone who's around you,” said Kahlea Hsu, 14, a ninth-grader at LaGuardia High School.

Paying attention in classes – especially algebra, which will help with geometry in high school – also is important, she said. Julia Marshall, 15, also a ninth-grader at LaGuardia, said a consistent routine has helped her manage her workload. It's still possible to forge strong bonds with teachers, even at a large school, she said, “If you participate a lot and you work as hard as you can, and you seem energetic and passionate about the subject, that's a good way to get a good relationship with the teacher.”

All three Q300 alumni advised parents to be supportive of their children during what can be a stressful adjustment. “Make sure they know that you're going to be proud of them,” even if they tried their best on an exam but didn't do well, Julia Marshall said. “They're going through a hard transition, so just keep that in mind.”



Julia Marshall, Upama Hasan, and Kahlea Hsu reunite to advise current middle schoolers.



Q300 is proud of its alumni family!

## Expanding our Horizons: NASA Visits

By Wennie Chen



Dr. Austin addresses Q300's Middle Schoolers in April.

As part of Q300 2018-2019 STEAM Year celebration, we were fortunate to welcome Dr. Shermane Austin to speak to our middle school students on Monday, April 8th. Dr. Austin, Professor of CUNY Medgar Evers College Physical Environmental & Computer Science Department, is also an Affiliate Director of the New York State Space Grant. She is the prior recipient of significant grants from NASA and NSF, among others.

Dr. Austin is the leading scientist for the CUNY CubeSAT nanosatellite program. The CubeSAT Program is an international collaboration of over 40 universities, high schools and private firms developing small cube satellites that carry scientific, private and government payloads into the low Earth orbit. CUNYSAT-1, one of the CubeSATS in NASA ELaNa Mission-II, was launched on December 5, 2013. Dr. Austin plans to launch the second CubeSAT with the funding from NASA to recruit middle school students. It will be a challenging but rewarding experience for students at a younger age. We sincerely hope that our school will be a part of it!

During the speech Dr. Austin shared how she started her career as a little girl who was fascinated in video game productions to one who specializes in computer science and programming, and later moved onto

being a participant in NASA's space program. She shared her motto with our students "Never be afraid of not knowing, but welcome what you can learn," which dictates her determination and dedication in STEM education and research. Q300 will take this spirit and continue working with Dr. Austin and her students in the next school year.

## Meet Our Teaching Assistants and Paraprofessionals!

By Julissa McHugh



Lower Division Paraprofessionals and Teaching Assistants

Back row (left to right): Sandra Crescenzo, Linda Noreddin, Alexandra Skendrou, Carrie Batista, Heba Felobeis, Julio Zola  
Front row (left to right): Ziku Rani Kar, Amanda Vasquez, Jenny Domiguez, Abigail George, Jaslynn Bell



(from left to right): Upper Division Paras Maria Skouros, Afsana Chowdhury, and Teaching Assistant Mandy Chin

Some of you may be wondering, what exactly do our TAs and Paras do? Paraprofessionals provide supports for a child with an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). These supports can range from behavior management, instructional support under direct supervision of the Head Teacher, and task redirection. Teaching Assistants reinforce lessons by reviewing materials with students either in small groups or one on one, enforce class and school rules, supervise students during lunch, recess, and on field trips, and help teachers prepare for lessons by getting materials ready or setting up equipment.

These are just a few of things our hardworking TAs and Paras provide our students. Q300 has been so fortunate to have some wonderful individuals serve as Teaching Assistants and Paraprofessionals

throughout the years. I had the pleasure of getting to know some of them by asking them a few questions about themselves.

### **Alexandra Skendrou - Teaching Assistant, 2nd Grade**

I am native of Greece. I am a singer, actor, educator and producer. I'm a Soprano member of the Archdiocesan Cathedral Choir and Actor/Social Media coordinator of Eclipses Group Theater New York. I hold degrees from Atheneum Conservatory Athens-Greece, an MA from Mannes College of Music/ The New School and the Theatrical School for the Arts in Moscow- Russia. I completed internships at the Moscow Art Theater, named after Stanislavsky and the Bolshoi Theater. Selected performances include Carnegie Hall, Miller Theater, National Opera Greece, and the Bruno Walter Auditorium-Lincoln Center. I have been teaching music to private schools since 2001. Currently I am the music teacher, children's choir director and music school coordinator of the Academy of Hellenic Paideia, an after school language program in Astoria, Queens.

A dear friend, Dora, a Parent Coordinator here at that time, told me in March 2017 that there was an opening for a TA position at Q300 and I applied. The rest is history. Since then I have been a TA in Kindergarten with Ms. Brooke, continued in 1st Grade with Ms. Jackie, and now I am in 201 with Ms. Stephanie Extraordinaire. I am fortunate to be part of the Q300 community and see the students develop, grow and glow!

At Q300, "Aspire" inspires. Our core value of accountability stands out for me because one needs to be responsible when being amongst young people. Young students depend at some level on you. It is a humongous responsibility being a TA, and being a teacher.

My favorite thing here is the group of people that I interact and work with every day, a very talented and friendly staff ready to solve any issues and make things happen. My favorite book to read is all about theater. Since learning new roles needs a lot of studies regarding period, history, etc., I read a lot of different books regarding period study, fashion, and the like. I love Tolstoy and Steinbeck though.

### **Abigail George - Teaching Assistant, 101**

I reside in the Bronx and I sing soprano. I love reading mystery books because I like to figure out what happens next! I came to Q300 because I wanted to gain a better understanding of the classroom experience. Before entering Q300 my long-term goal was always to become a teacher, but after being here I've enjoyed working one on one with students, and my passion is to become a paraprofessional. Most importantly, I came to help children to succeed!

All of the core values here are important, but the most meaningful Q300 core value to me is inclusion. I think it is important to make everyone feel welcome and show them that you care. My favorite thing about working here is having conversations with the kids about little things like their day or their favorite movie. When I asked a friend how they would describe me, their response was: fun, caring, and a risk taker!

### **Jaslynn Bell - Teaching Assistant, K01**

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY. I am the middle child in my family. I received a BA in English from the first Historically Black College University, (HBCU) Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. My goal is to be an Elementary School Teacher and then opening my own non-profit.

I applied to Q300 after I finished my service year with the City of New York. I knew that I wanted to be in a classroom setting to learn more skills to impact my future career as an Early Childhood Teacher. Q300 offered a position where I would be in a class assisting students and a teacher which was a perfect description of what I wanted for a year. The Q300 core value that is most meaningful to me is Inclusion. Inclusion is impactful in a school because knowing what others like and believe in will lead you to know



the person as a whole. My favorite thing about working at Q300 is working with my lead teacher and the kindergarten class. I knew that kindergarten was walking into a new experience, and so was with a new job.

At a karaoke night I would sing "Weak" by SWV.

### **Amanda Vasquez - Teaching Assistant, K02**

I'm a career changer: I worked in advertising sales for over 8 years, I was a stay at home mom, and worked part time as a STEM instructor for an after school program for about 4 years.

I wanted to work for a school in my community. I love working in Queens because it has such diversity. I think Empathy is most meaningful core value to me. I think it's so important to have children think of others. I always ask them "How would you feel?" and always encourage them try to put themselves in someone else's shoes.

I love working with the kids. They always have great stories to share with me. I also love the staff here, everyone was very welcoming when I started.

For Karaoke? I'd probably choose some song from the 80's or 90's. Love the boy bands and hair bands from those decades!

### **Heba Felobeis - Paraprofessional**

I am from Egypt. I came to the USA in 2005 after I got married. I am a mother of two children. I have a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education and I worked as a Kindergarten Teacher from 2000-2005. Also, I have an Associates degree to be an Occupational Therapy Assistant, and I graduated from LaGuardia Community College in 2017. I like to work part time in early intervention with children with deficits.

I've worked as a substitute para in many public schools since 2014, including at Q300. I worked from October 2018 in the middle school until I became a full-time paraprofessional in the elementary school in April 2019. Q300 is my favorite place to be.

Responsibility is the most meaningful core value to me at Q300 because it is our responsibility as educational staff to provide children with good educational materials, provide a safe environment for them, and to be good role models to children.

My favorite thing about working in Q300 is that the whole staff work as a one team and we are all kind to each other. We are one family in Q300. My friends describe me as a friendly, kind, funny, lovely and ambitious person.

### **Sandra Crescenzo - Paraprofessional**

I have lived in Astoria, New York my whole life. I love the diversity of all the cultures living together in one city and the convenience of all markets and shops in the vicinity. I am an avid walker and I love having the comfort to walk anywhere I need. I am Italian. My parents are Italian immigrants who taught me the value of hard work, being respectful, and being kind. Most of my childhood summers were spent in Italy. These summers taught me so much about my culture and it began my love affair with travel and food.

My children brought me to Q300. I have a Bachelors of Science degree in Marketing from St. John's University. I have always worked in business. I have worked in the food industry, in fashion, and in finance as well. But once I had my children, the joy of seeing the world through their eyes was infectious. I then realized I wanted to work with children in a school setting, which led me to Q300.

At Q300, Responsibility is the core value that is most meaningful to me. Responsibility to me means to care for ourselves, for each other, to be kind, and act in good character. We must be accountable for our

choices and actions which will form our path to the future. We can only change our environment if we start with ourselves first.

My favorite thing about working at Q300 are the children. I learn so much from these beautiful children everyday. They are so inquisitive and I love the pride and effort they take in their work. Plus, they really make me laugh!

I had a wonderful Social Studies teacher in high school. She taught us what books could not. There was no textbook that could teach us what she knew and how she made us think about the world. We would debate and philosophize about what we thought was just or fair. She dug much deeper into history, the hidden messages and how history is so important to help form our future. She was interesting, funny, and stern at the same time.

### **Ziku Kar Roy - Paraprofessional**

I finished my Bachelor's degree from my home country of Bangladesh. I majored in Physics and had a minor in Math and Statistics. I have been with Q300 since 2018 as a paraprofessional.

I have special love for science and technology and Q300 strongly focuses on engineering and technology which brings me here.

Among the three core values of Q300, inquiry is most meaningful to me because I think Q300 offers the opportunity of learning practically and it doesn't believe in biased learning. There is a wonderful relationship between the parents, administrators and the staff. The entire school community is my favorite thing.

I had a teacher at my college named Mr. Riaz who had a good personality and he made the lessons easier to understand. That's why he was my favorite teacher.

## **Meet Katie Xie: 4th Grade ELA & Social Studies Teacher**

*Interview by Neerja Vasishtha*



### **Can you tell us a little about your teaching background and what you teach at Q300?**

This is my first year of teaching as the head classroom teacher in a DOE school. Previously, I have student taught 3rd grade at P.S. 452 and 1st grade at P.S. 321. I received my teacher training from Teachers College, Columbia University. Now I'm certified to teach grades 1 through 6 in all subject areas. I currently teach ELA and Social Studies to our wonderful group of 4th graders.

### **How would you describe your teaching philosophy?**

No classroom is homogenous! I believe that every student synthesizes information and shares their understandings differently. Therefore, I prioritize differentiation and having multiple modalities for students to present their learning in my classroom. I like to use a lot of project-based learning to make learning fun and engaging.

### **Is there a specific topic or lesson that you are passionate about teaching?**

I absolutely love all of my subjects. In high school, Social Studies was my favorite. While in college, I took enough English classes (out of interest) that I could have minored in it!

### **Who was your favorite teacher growing up? What made them stand out for you?**

My favorite teacher was my Chinese language teacher, Mrs. Hsu, in high school. She was special to me as I could really feel how much she cared for us as individuals rather than being seen as just another student in the room.

**How did you decide to become a teacher?**

I began working as a teacher's assistant at summer camps when I was in high school. I was part of this organization called National Honor Society. It required us to complete a large amount of volunteer hours. Naturally, I found myself signing up to volunteer my hours towards something that I found meaningful - education. My interest in education began then. However, it took many more experiences and a career change before I knew for certain that teaching was the one job that I wanted to pursue.

**What do you like to do in your free time? Do you want to tell us anything about your family and where you are from?**

I love having new experiences (particularly ones involving food). One of my favorite aspects of being in NYC is that there is always something new to experience! On the weekends, I find myself enjoying the city like a tourist.

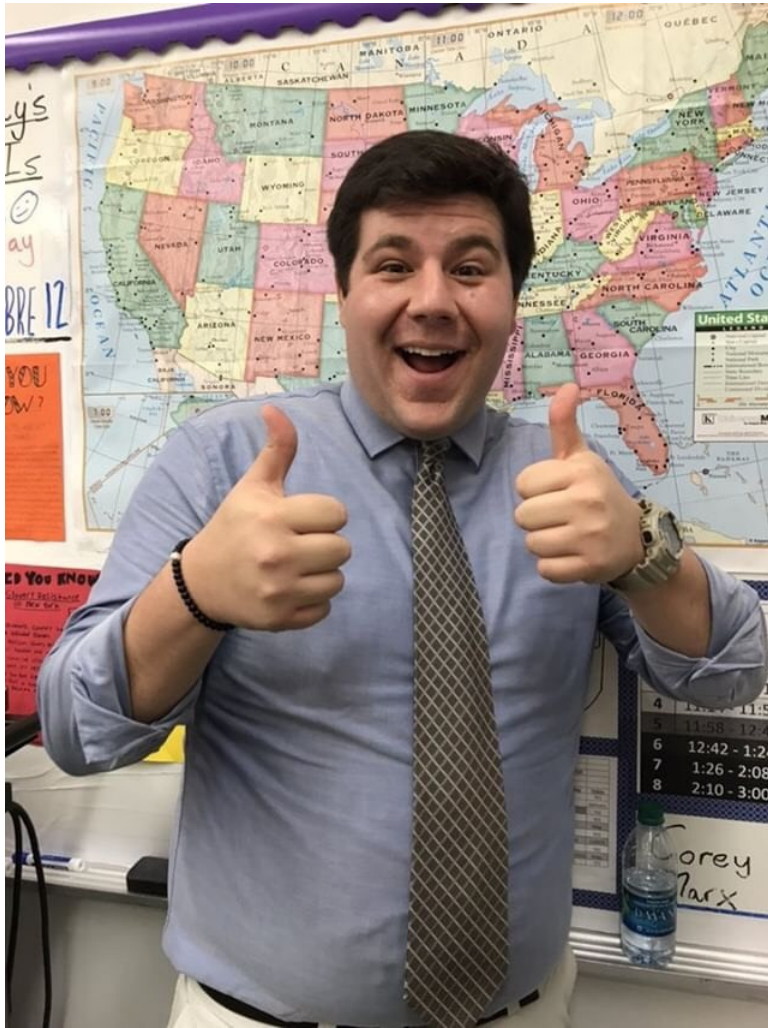
I grew up in Brooklyn, but my family and I moved to Houston, Texas when I was in high school. In my family, we only speak Cantonese Chinese to each other. It is a variety of Chinese spoken in parts of southeastern China and Hong Kong. We take great joy in preserving our family's cultural traditions. Now that we reside in different states, I plan my holiday breaks strategically to see family.

**What's a little known fact about you?**

I have a Bachelor of Science in Accounting. I was on the way to becoming a CPA when I left my job to attend graduate school for education.

## Meet Corey Marx: Upper Division Social Studies Teacher

Interview by Neerja Vasishtha



### **Can you tell us a little about your teaching background and what you teach at Q300?**

I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Delaware. My major was History Education, and I also earned a minor concentration in Spanish language. I completed my Masters degree in History at Queens College (CUNY). While working towards my graduate degree, I began substitute teaching and tutoring at various public and private schools on Long Island. After a couple of years, I began working at Roslyn High School, in Roslyn Heights, New York. In my years as a teacher at Roslyn, I taught various Social Studies courses to students in Grades 10, 11, and 12. This year, I have been teaching Social Studies to Grades 6 and 7 here at Q300. I am also the faculty advisor for the National Geographic Bee. This is my second year teaching at Q300.

### **How would you (or others) describe your teaching philosophy and style?**

My goal as a teacher is to help students create connections between history and world news. It is my hope that this endeavor will build the critical thinking skills, as well as social skills of my students. I think that it is important for my students to grow academically, as well also socially, so that they are able to become more well-rounded citizens of New York City, and also our world. As much as I can, I strive to create lessons that allow for students to draw conclusions and answer their own questions about course

material. I enjoy conducting role plays, debates, and Socratic Seminars, so that all students may authentically participate as much as possible.

**Is there a specific topic or lesson that you passionate about teaching? Why?**

When it comes to the 6th Grade curriculum, I truly enjoy our unit on the religions of the Eastern Hemisphere. During this unit, we explore the histories and cultures of many different religions and belief systems. For many students, this is their favorite unit, as many of the topics are very new to them. In the 7th Grade curriculum, I truly enjoy our unit on the American Revolution, which covers the causes for the revolution, as well as the direct aftermath of the Revolutionary War. Students get very excited about this topic, and I am able to make many comparisons between America's Revolution, and other historical developments, as well as social situations.

**What are your hopes for your students as a whole this year?**

This school year, it is my hope that my students grow both academically and socially. By June, it is my goal for my students to become more analytical thinkers, stronger readers and writers, and to gain confidence in their abilities as learners and citizens of the world. I also hope that each of my students finds at least one topic in our course of study which they become passionate about, as this may spark future research and wonderings.

**Who was your favorite teacher growing up and why?**

My favorite teacher was a Spanish teacher that I had in high school – Mr. Elena. He was my Spanish teacher in Grades 9, 11 and 12. He always went above and beyond to build a classroom community, and make sure that his students felt welcome each and every day. In addition, every one of his students knew that he was passionate about what he taught, and that made his students eager to learn. He didn't just teach us grammar and how to speak the language, but also taught us about culture, and what to expect if we were to visit a Spanish-speaking country.

**How did you decide to become a teacher?**

Originally, at the University of Delaware, I was enrolled in the Sport-Management program. However, I realized that the business world was not for me, and that I wanted a career in which I could truly make an impact on people's daily lives, and do something I was passionate about. When I was a student, I always enjoyed going to school, participating in class, spending time with my peers, as well as the structure of the school day. In addition, many teachers that I had in high school, like Mr. Elena (mentioned above), among others, had a large impact on me and my outlook on life. My favorite subjects in school were Social Studies and Spanish.

**What Q300 policy or approach resonates with you the most**

When preparing for my interview at Q300, I thought a lot about our school's core values – Inclusion, Inquiry and Responsibility. In particular, the concept of "inquiry," and the idea of bringing that into my classroom on a routine basis was something that is important to me. My favorite lessons and courses as a student in middle school and high school were those that challenged me to think outside of the box and allowed us students to pursue topics and ask questions that interested us.

**What do you like to do in your free time? Do you want to tell us anything about your family and where you are from?**

I spent the first few years of my life living in Queens, but spent most of my childhood living in Suffolk and Nassau counties on Long Island. For the most part, I enjoyed going to school, and even more so, enjoyed attending summer camp each July and August. Almost every summer since high school, it has been my pleasure to work as a camp counselor on Long Island. I love to travel, as well as read, learn about, and

experience the history, culture and cuisine of others. One of my life goals is to visit all fifty states in America. In my free time, I enjoy playing golf, reading, cooking, and spending time with family and friends. During the spring and summer months, I play on a softball team with my friends.

**What's a little known fact about you?**

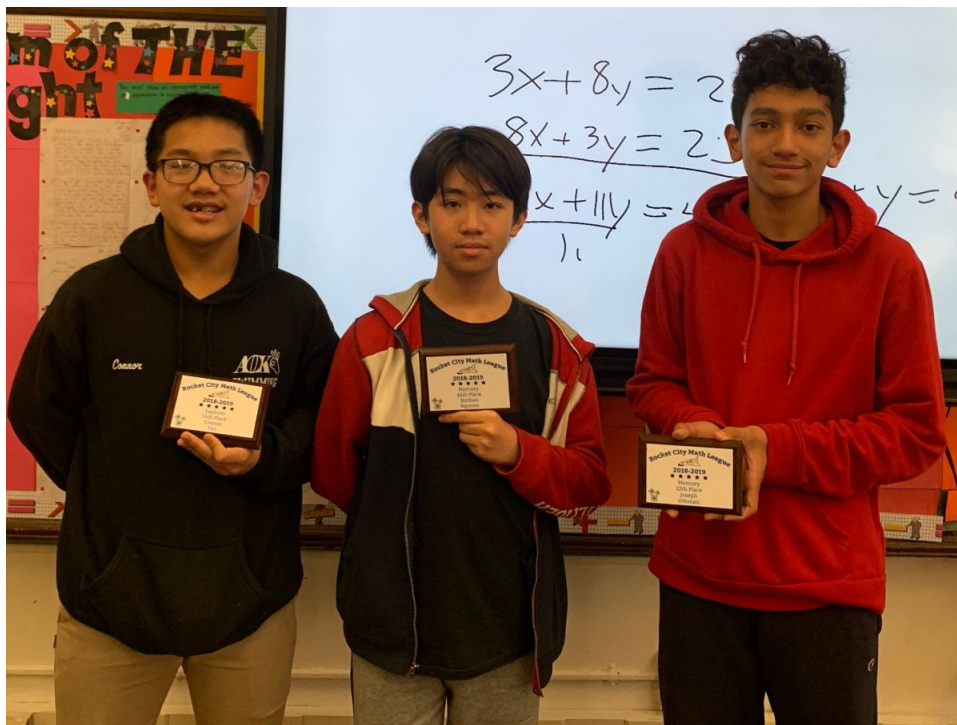
I really enjoy spending time outdoors. I enjoy playing sports, going to the beach, fishing, hiking, visiting national parks, and white-water rafting. Every summer as a Teen Travel Counselor, I am able to go rafting, and it is something that I really look forward to. This summer, I would like to hike some parts of the Appalachian Trail.

**Anything else you'd like the Q300 community know about you?**

I truly appreciate all of the opportunities that are given to us teachers by the parent community. I feel very fortunate to work at a school where parents care so much about their students, and the school community as a whole.

## A Product of Success: Q300's Math Team

By Nathan Nguyen, Joseph Othman, Richie Delgado, and Mr. Woo



Proud teammates Connor Yau, Nathan Nguyen, and Joseph Othman with their Rocket City Math League awards.

You may have seen several announcements about Q300's Math Team's recent successes. Mr. Woo and students on the team share some of their impressions with us here. Congrats!

### Can you tell us a bit about the Math Team, Mr. Woo?

During math team, students work on and practice for various competitions at school and outside of school. Some of the competitions include MathCounts, AMC 8, Pi5NY and other math enrichment opportunities. We have been extremely successful, especially since this is only our second year doing math team at Q300.

### What were some of the memorable things of math team?

**Nathan Nguyen (702)** says, "Some of the memorable things of math team were going to MathCounts, Pi5NY, MoMathlon and the New York City Mathematics Project. Alongside, taking competitions at school were really fun. One of my favorite moments was practicing for the Countdown Round, which was in a tournament format and the students had to compete against each other within a certain time. The overall community of math team and coming up during lunch time to practice for math competitions were the highlights of being a part of math team for 2 years."

**Joseph Othman (803)** added, "All of the competitions were memorable. To start, the first competition, which was the AMC 8, was extremely awkward in the beginning, because we didn't know each other. Everyone was competing against each other. Then we go to MathCounts, because I was competing against Nathan, a fellow Q300 Math Team member. Purple Comet was interesting because the problems were abstract and we got to use computers to communicate with our teammates. The problems were challenging, but fun because it provided a learning experience in regards to getting the solutions to the questions I was not able to answer. MoMathlon was memorable, because a lot of my math team friends



placed in the top 5 and the B team placed higher than the A team (even though I was in the A team, I was happy for the B team and we didn't stop talking about it for a month). Practicing for the math competitions helped me to solidify my mathematical understanding and it helped me with the SHSAT, providing a higher learning experience. I recommend all students to try math team."

**Richie Delgado (601)** said, "Going to competitions in general. When we went to MoMathlon, NYCMP, the experience was great, because it wasn't much pressure due to the amount of work we prepared for the competition. Mr. Woo didn't pressure me to get everything right, but he told the math team and myself to do our best to make sure that we did well and enjoy the moment. It motivated me, because I wanted to get top scores. In addition, even if we didn't win, the fact that I received individual awards made me realize that the hard work and practice led to the success of our math team."



Queens MoMathalon

Back Row, left to right: Annie Wang, Talia Cheng, Brandon Huang, Akiva Joseph, Conner Yau, Richie Delgado, Chenkai Shen, Mr. Woo

Front Row, left to right: Daniel Chang, Joseph Othman, Nathan Nguyen



NYC Math Project

Left to Right: Chenkai Shen, Nathan Nguyen, Joseph Othman, Connor Yau, Richie Delgado, Mr. Woo



Pi5NY

Left to Right: Mr. Woo, Richie Delgado, Mason Chung, Jack Murdock, Jade Li

## Meet the Parents, Lower Division David O’Hanlon and Pooja Joshi O’Hanlon

*Interviewed by Neerja Vasishtha*



Do you know a lower division family we should interview? Please email suggestions to [newsletter@q300pta.org](mailto:newsletter@q300pta.org).

We have two children at Q300. Anjali was in Q300’s inaugural K class and now a 4th grader in Kiera’s class, soon to move onto the middle school campus. Arjun is in Kindergarten at Q300 in Julia’s class and soon to be in the first grade. We still remember the day we received the placement letters for both kids. Q300 was our top choice even though the reasons were slightly different for each kid.

### **Where do you live?**

We live in Jackson Heights, Queens. We moved here from Brooklyn after our older child got a spot in the inaugural K class at Q300. Now that both our kids are at Q300 it makes the commute to school so much easier.

### **Tell us about yourselves—what do you do professionally?**

Pooja is the Executive Director of a local philanthropic organization focused on educational achievement through a racial equity lens. David is a Senior Art Director for a design agency SJI Associates that provides a range of graphic design services for media and entertainment companies as well as nonprofit organizations.

### **Why did you choose Q300 for your children?**

We clearly recall when we went to the open house presentation about Q300 - The 30th Avenue School by former Principal Matt Willard. There was no actual school, therefore no tour (only the presentation), but we so deeply connected with the school's vision and values of Inquiry, Inclusion and Responsibility. The school had a strong emphasis on rigor but also was interested in the development of the whole child through aspects like social worker, no homework in the early grades, explorations and recess. We also liked practices such as differentiated learning in reading, project based and small group learning in classrooms. On the administration side there was also a focus on building a great staff/teaching team. Through my (Pooja's) work I see a lot of different models and ideas in school design, Q300 at least in that early presentation came through as a convergence of the best ideas of what was possible in the public school setting. There are a few schools scattered around Brooklyn and Manhattan that are similar, it was amazing to see one open up in District 30, Queens.

### **What are your favorite family activities to do together at home? Away from home?**

At home we play board games as a family, especially Uno and Picwits. We also like cooking, baking and hanging out in our communal backyard in our hammock. Outside of the home we go to museums, hiking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, camping, and playing in the ocean or sitting on a beach when the weather is nice. We also like eating out as a family and trying new foods. Our fondest memories are made when we travel as a family to new places and far off destinations- when we share adventures together.

### **Thinking about your and your child's experience at Q300, what would you say is a "glow" for the school? Any "grows"?**

Anjali has had amazing teachers through her time at Q300 so far. They have all been caring adults that have held concern for her growth and well being. They push her to achieve her maximum potential while keeping learning fun. Arjun is also having a great year with an amazing teacher in K. We can really see his growth and development - he was a shy kid when he started at Q300 but we see him coming into his own right now. When we mention teachers, we are also speaking about the cluster teachers and social worker. The school's ability to hire amazing teachers has been a real glow. The teachers are holding the school's values together and that's incredible for my children to experience. So my grow is also in this area, especially retaining these amazing teachers, and having more cohesion among administration and those in the instructional role with collegiality and camaraderie. School culture comes through very clearly when parents visit the school.

### **Is there anything else you'd like to share with Q300 parents?**

We've been very happy with Q300. The parent body via the PTA is a huge asset of the school, it is so actively engaged and is just the kind of school community we want to be part of.

While the experience is slightly different than when we first started, both our children are thriving in a rigorous learning environment. We wish there was more emphasis on visual art and humanities, not just STEM, but hopefully that will happen over time -- come to think of it the school is only five years old and therefore a relatively young school when it comes to institutionalizing values, practices and culture.

## **Meet the Parents, Upper Division: Ana Vasileva and Visham Jowata**

*Interviewed by Neerja Vasishtha*



Do you know an upper division family we should interview? Please email suggestions to [newsletter@q300pta.org](mailto:newsletter@q300pta.org).

Our child is Maya Jowata, 11 years old, currently in class 602. She started at Q300 in September 2018 in 6th grade.

### **Where do you live?**

We live in Astoria, not far from Q300.

### **Tell us about yourselves—what do you do professionally?**

I am a PhD scientist with expertise in cell biology, molecular biology and genetics, and currently lead the operations at a biotechnology company, which designs and produces animal and cell models of disease.

My husband is a systems engineer charged primarily with design of data storage networks and signal optimization.

**How did you both meet?**

While both of us were studying abroad, we attended a lot of events organized by the Foreign Students Associations of our respective universities. I recall first meeting at the International food festival at my university where I was the sole representative of Bulgaria and my table was opposite that of Mauritius. His compatriot approached me and introduced himself and Visham. They needed some water to cook the delicious noodle soup they had planned and I was happy to help. A few months later, we met again at a Director's dinner this time at his university. We slowly got to know each other, became friends and discovered we had a lot to share. We've been sharing our lives for 20 years now.

**Why did you choose Q300 for your child?**

We have always prioritized a balance between school environment, academics and convenience. My goal was for Maya do become more independent in middle school, which worked great given the proximity of Q300 upper division to where we live. However, the primary decision was based on the presentations and personality of the teachers we saw at open house as well as the promise for Spanish 3x/week. The project-based approach as opposed to rote learning combined with opportunities for advanced curriculum were a main draw.

**What are your favorite family activities to do together at home? Away from home?**

We all like to play with our cat, play Monopoly, or just share experiences in a conversation. Having friends over is a lot of fun too.

We like to explore Astoria's restaurants and have a taste of the multiple options available in the neighborhood. Weather permitting, we hit the trails in Harriman State park or the Hudson Highlands for a day. A couple of times a year, we also do some camping and fishing with friends. With our immediate families being across an ocean or two, trips abroad are a must as well.

**Thinking about your and your child's experience at Q300, would you like to share a glow and/or grow?**

I credit the teachers with the smooth adjustment to middle school and with the love Maya has developed for subjects she didn't appreciate as much in the past. She loves her classmates and tells me that her school inspires her. I find that the active parent body contributes greatly to the functioning of such young school where resources can be quite limiting at times. It is amazing how much enrichment and how many electives can be offered in a relatively small school.

While I am aware that there is a great emphasis on academics and that many students live far from school, I would love to see an opportunity for the children to participate in team sports. As far as adjustments go, it is my personal view and it may not be shared by others, that a 9am start of school is late enough and that students should utilize the morning hours for learning a subject instead of having advisory as a first period three times a week. Most schools I have inquired with have only one advisory period, which happens right after lunch. Maybe if there were just two advisory periods, Spanish can be taught three times a week as promised. If not, the period can be used for a second elective of the so many wonderful options to choose (students do not always get their first, second or even third choice).

**Is there anything else you'd like to share with Q300 parents?**

Over the course of the year, as co-class parent of 602 I was surprised that compared to other classes, the 6th-grader parents barely participated in Q300 PTA fundraising and other school-wide activities. I truly hope we can do better next time around.

## **A Little Argument Never Hurt Anyone: Q300's Debate Team**

*By: Kenisha Mahajan, Bon Lau, Kikyo Makino-Siller, Gabriella Fusco, and Mr. Cho*



Preparing for Debate: Bon Lau, Gabriella Fusco, Kenisha Mahajan, Kikyo Makino-Siller, Sean Berman, Lyla Black, Kento Gerra, Anthony Wright, Evan Li

Debate.

When many people hear the word, they envision people in a room yelling at each other over a certain issue trying to defend their sides.

The dictionary defines debate as, “a formal discussion on a particular topic in a public meeting or legislative assembly, in which opposing arguments are put forward,” but, in reality, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. - Kenisha Mahajan

### **How did you get involved in Debate Team? Is this a club? When do you meet?**

I got involved in debate because Mr.Cho asked me to join. I thought that it would be fun to learn and compete. This is more of a team than a club because we focus more on debate competitively. We usually meet every Wednesdays from 3:10-5:00. Half the time our coach wants us to stay on Thursdays as well to help prepare us for big tournaments (city champs and state champs). At the end of the season near state champs, we stay up for lunch and do practice rounds. - Bon Lau

### **How did you prepare?**

We all prepare in different ways. My preparation takes a lot of time and consideration. Every Tuesday before practice I start a new topic. Each topic will typically take 4 hours each. To put that to scale, there was 15 topics this season. Each topic has proposition and opposition side that we have to prepare arguments and blocks for. We also create POI’s, burdens, and definitions. Mr. Cho also helps us by giving us sources to get research from and creating videos to give us context on the situations. Sometimes the team would create concept maps to flow all of our ideas around. On certain Thursdays we would meet

with our teams to streamline research. Overall, we did a lot of preparing to learn about our topics. It was very ultimately very useful. - Gabriella Fusco

### **What are some examples of the topics you had to debate?**

We have new topics every month, including:

- This House believes video games do more harm than good.
- This House supports Bill De Blasio's SHSAT admissions proposal.
- This House would grant adolescents the right to their own medical decisions.
- This House would increase funding for space exploration.
- This House would close the Rikers Island Jail.
- This House would ban animal testing.
- This House supports military intervention in Venezuela.

- Kikyo Makino-Siller

### **What is the most challenging part of participating in a debate? What did you learn about yourself?**

The most challenging part of debate is different for everyone, but something we all face is maintaining composure and consistency. As debaters, we are constantly practicing, researching, and preparing, which can lead us to become discouraged and overwhelmed. As the season goes on we can start feeling burnt out and keeping up quality and consistency becomes challenging, but our coach often gives us pep talks and teaches us how to overcome these obstacles. Even though these obstacles may seem negative, they help us learn to be more resilient, disciplined, and driven. - Kenisha Mahajan

### **Do you have any tips for crafting a strong argument?**

The first thing that comes to mind is evidence. Every argument needs to be supported by research, otherwise it's only an opinion. But if we were to go a bit deeper, I would emphasize a clear flow of ideas from your claim to the supporting evidence to the impact. This way I know what you're saying, why it's true, and what it all means. - Mr. Cho



City Championship: Elijah Cho, Bon Lau, Sally Lau, Kenisha Mahajan, Gabriella Fusco, Evan Li, Nylise Hines, Chenkai Shen, Lyla Black, Amrisha Roy, Sean Berman, Amanda Louie, Kikyo Makino-Siller, Anthony Wright, Kento Gerra



## Getting to Know Ms. Rachel

By Amy Ho



Q300's Social Worker, Rachel Weiss hanging out with her son, Franklin.

A big welcome to Ms. Rachel Weiss as Q300's new social worker. She's just completed her first semester here and the students have felt her enormous impact with dedicated time in class focused on kindness and emotional wellbeing.

Ms. Rachel's path to social work wasn't a straight one though. She graduated college with a degree in English literature and worked in publishing for a number of years. She loves reading, believing that one can learn a lot about human nature from a great novel. But her desire to actively engage in working with people directly eventually led her down a different career path.

As a child, Ms. Rachel was very close to her maternal grandparents who were Jewish activists in Europe. They believed in building an enriching life for themselves and those of the Jewish faith no matter the location. Rather than segregating their faith from their community, they believed in building their Jewish community hand-in-hand with their neighbors. In essence, they believed, as Ms. Rachel puts it, in "flourishing where you plant." When her parents immigrated to the U.S. from Poland, they took those beliefs with them and instilled them in Ms. Rachel. Her upbringing was steeped in a strong sense of social justice.

No surprise then that Ms. Rachel eventually found her passion in social work. After finishing her graduate work in sociology, she spent time in Guatemala for an intensive Spanish program, in the process discovering her penchant for working with immigrant and first generation families as their stories are very much like her own family's. After returning from Guatemala, she worked at several

different institutions, landing ultimately at the Child and Family Institute at St. Luke's which focused on children and their families. There she decided to dedicate her work to children, believing in the value of early intervention in bringing about positive change. Plus, it's a lot of fun working with kids! She enjoys the variety of different and interesting ways to work with children and reinforced her decision to work with kids with a 3-year post-graduate training program focused on children and adolescents.

In addition to her Q300 kids, Ms. Rachel is mom to Franklin, a second grader in love with Little League and soccer. She says raising Franklin has made her a lot more empathetic to the trials and tribulations of being a parent. In her spare time, she loves to travel, cook, and exercise. In her life and her work, she's living her family's mantra – here to do the right thing and make things better.

## Park Day Takes Root at Q300

By Siobhan Watson



Q300 gives Athens Square Park some TLC.

On May 31, Q300's Lower Division showed its appreciation for our neighboring Athens Square Park and the street trees surrounding the school by devoting the day to caring for them.

Each grade took on a different task, coming out one after another and together making a big impact. First up, third-graders repainted the fading green benches in Athens Square Park; next, kindergarteners cleaned up litter; second-graders pulled up weeds, and first-graders mulched. Fourth-graders worked on a number of projects, including building tree guards—and some fourth grade members of the school's



“green team” had the chance to come help throughout the day, assisting younger students in their tasks. In addition to the work they did in the park and street tree beds, students had the chance to see composting demonstrations and make “seed balls” to take with them—if you’ve recently caught your child tossing a muddy-looking ball onto a patch of bare soil as you travel the city, keep an eye on that spot for new growth.

Although the school has participated in street tree care and park projects before, this was its first ever devoted Park Day, and the sense of accomplishment at seeing the results from a full day’s work from every class in the lower division was clear.

Representatives from Trees New York and the New York City Parks Department made sure that students learned about why each task was important and how it helped our urban environment, teachers and teacher’s assistants dug in to the work alongside the students, and parent volunteers helped things go smoothly throughout the day. We even had local political representatives stop by to pitch in, including State Senator Michael Gianaris and City Council Member Costa Constantinides.

The whole Q300 community came together to make Park Day possible, but special thanks for making this day of learning-in-action possible go to Lynn Kennedy and Gina Reis, the PTA Community Affairs representatives for coordinating the projects, as well as to Bill, Sonita, Jenny & Kiera for supporting the effort and making it possible for each lower division class to participate.

## Party Report!

By Joanna Holzman



The Q300 community celebrated FIVE years of Q300 and FIVE years of the Stepping Into Summer Party and Auction on May 5th this year. Over 250 parents, kids, teachers, and staff enjoyed the afternoon at Central Bar and Lounge in Astoria – building our community while also raising money to support the PTA! It was a lovely afternoon of mingling, dancing, eating, drinking, and of course bidding! It is always a special day in the Q300 year to get so many members of our community together, away from school, to relax and hang out – to see the kids spending time together while the parents get to better know each other and the faculty and staff who attend. If you've missed the party in the past, do put it on your calendar for next year (and we always offer subsidized tickets for those facing financial hardship): it's an invaluable chance to connect with our school community!

New this year were the class baskets: it was wonderful to see how lots of families contributed to these themed baskets and the bidding on some of them was fierce. Shout out to all the class parents who organized them, but particularly to Barbara Monroe for spearheading the entire project while also managing all the teacher experiences and raffles. Some of the highlights of this year's party included the return of the DIY Electric Disco Fingers (thanks to Stella and Nadia Wert and their father, Chris), glow sticks and tattoos (special thanks to the Upper Division kids who rocked selling them!), and the always super popular photo booth (thanks to Kevin and Nicole Gallagher). As in past years, we had wonderful teacher and staff experiences available to win by raffle, as well an array of prizes up for auction or raffle solicited and donated by you – the parent community.

Part of what makes this event so fantastic is that so many folks at the school contribute, in small or large ways. If you missed the array of prizes, make sure to check out the gorgeous journal (available here: <https://www.q300pta.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Q300PTAAuctionJournal2019.pdf>), produced by parents Jason Engdahl and Siobhan Watson – the kids this year particularly enjoyed not only finding their shout-outs, but also the page of jokes.

The party kicked off another successful online auction, again with prizes and parent experiences donated and solicited by the whole parent community (and special thanks to Claire Lui and Paula Marisi for all they did to support the online auction). Thanks to all who not only got prizes, but also got into the fun of bidding and who shared it widely. Lots of prizes were won this year by bidders outside our community, so it's wonderful to see a wider network enjoying this event.

We raised about \$22,000 this year through the raffle, the auctions, and the activities at the party to support all that the PTA funds. In the past, this has included: lower division enrichment programs such as visual arts, music, architecture, dance; teaching assistants; funds for K stepping up ceremony and fourth grade graduation; upper division enrichment programs such as musical theater, chorus, animation; equipment such as chrome-books, calculators, storage/charging carts, library books, gym equipment, microscopes, LEGO Robotics Kits; subsidies for all upper division clubs (Debate, Math, Brain Games, Storytelling, Spelling bee, etc.); funds for 8th grade graduation; school wide reimbursement of up to \$500 per teacher for wish list items for classroom supplies and activities; funds for professional development; supplies like printers, laminators, air conditioners, and scanners; and family need-based financial aid (based on availability) for trips and other activities.

As co-chair of the auction this year, I'd like to thank the entire auction committee for the many hours of cheerful and collaborative work: Amina Kulshmanova, Barbara Monroe, Claire Lui, Gina Reis, Jason Engdahl, Jenn Eliasi, Karen Van Wart, Paula Marisi, Siobhan Watson, Hong Van Tieu, Sue Sekar, Janet Perez, and above all, my co-chair Maria Hantzopoulos, as well as everyone who helped out at the event and before or after to make another successful year! Join us next year!!

## **Teamwork Takes to the Court**

*By Lynn Kennedy*



Students get geared up for Q300's basketball tournament.

On March 22, Q300 hosted its first Upper Division basketball tournament. PTA members Gina Reis and Lynn Kennedy of Community Affairs worked together with Toni Anne Campuzano, Q300's physical education teacher, to create the event and to promote its benefits, including building team work skills, self esteem, and increased knowledge and confidence in playing the game. The tournament was optional for students. Parent volunteers assisted with coaching, refereeing, time keeping and donating snacks. Some 8th graders also assisted to refereeing the games, highlighting their leadership skills. The games were an all day affair with students permitted to leave class for their matches as scheduled. Please see my interview with Toni Anne to learn more!

### **How many kids in total participated?**

Ninety-nine students participated in all. Seventy-two 5th and 6th graders and twenty-seven 7th and 8th graders.

### **How many teams participated?**

We had 13 teams participate.

Team 7 won for the 5th and 6th graders. This team included: Edoardo Berti-Laragione, Sascha Gordon-Zolov, Zoe Guida, Sarah Kumar, Iphigenia Petra, Abid Rahman, Jack Samet, and Savanna Tam.

Team 3 won for the 7th and 8th graders. This team included: A.J. Banas, Aditya Chanani, Daniel Chang, Samit Chowdhury, Adnan Jeina, and Evan Li.

### **What were the highlights of the tournament for you?**

My favorite thing that came from the tournament was seeing all the smiles, laughter and sweat coming off of the court before, during and after each game. For many of our students this was their first full court game ever played and to see them apply the skills we've worked on in class and be able to move the ball up and down the court, take different shots and play a good defense was great! Also, seeing the students work with others they wouldn't typically work with was also one of my highlights. They were all so supportive of each other no matter the outcome!

**What are some of the challenges of organizing a tournament?**

All of our volunteers made it so much easier for me. The hardest part of setting up the tournament was matching up the teams and assessing the students' skills in order to make the teams of equal strength for some good competition.

**What do you think the kids walked away from having done the tournament?**

The students walked away realizing what it means to really be a team and I think many of them realized they can actually play! So I hope it gave them a sense of confidence when it comes to sports.

**What kind of sporting events would you like to see at Q300 in the future?**

They're already asking for a volleyball tournament now! I am definitely open to anything the students take an interest in. My goal is to help out students find a sport/activity they enjoy and hopefully make it a lifelong activity for them.

**Why are sports/physical education/tournaments, good for kids to have, in your opinion?**

Sports and physical education teaches students a lot they can't learn from a book. It teaches them the importance of being able to work together and being able to depend on others in order to accomplish a goal. It teaches them the importance of commitment and dedication in order to nurture an interest of theirs. It teaches them time management. In order to be successful on the field/court they first need to find success in the classroom and balancing their studies and practices/games takes a lot of practice.



## **Chess Team in the Music City**

*By Sergey Shchukin and Carol Varikos*



Over the weekend of May 10-12, the Q300 Chess team traveled to Nashville, TN to participate in the 2019 K-6 Nationals. More than 2,000 players from almost every state in the US came together for the annual festival. It was a weekend filled with team bonding, southern hospitality, barbecue, being blown away by the beauty of Opryland Hotel, and of course lots and lots of chess. Many rooks were blundered, but even more queens were won!

It was the first trip to the Nationals for most of us; however, everybody performed beyond expectations. Two of our players brought home trophies - Jeremy Li (5.5 out of 7 in the K-5 Under 900 section, tied for 17th out of 347 players), and Galina Shchukin (5 out of 7 in the K-1 Under 500 section, tied for 12th out of 141 players). All other players (Wailea Schroffner, Zoe Marketan, Tyler Li, Sasha Gordon-Zolov) scored at least 50%, and the team finished in a flourish - everybody won their last game! This truly speaks for the kids' endurance and the bonding team spirit. It was a happy trip home for all.

Special thanks to the parents, and coach Saudin Robovic of NYChessKids, who traveled with us, and provided priceless coaching and emotional support. This year has been a major stepping stone for our team, and we will be back next year in numbers, and return with both individual and team awards

### **NEST+m Tournament**

The chess team took some momentum with it to the last major tournament of the year at NEST+m, on June 2, 2019. We fielded the 4th largest group, with 14 players. This time, we not only scored individual and team trophies, but brought home a 1st place team trophy - a first ever for Q300! This was accomplished by our team of 7 in the Primary section (Elizabeth Li, Westley Chung, Tyler Li, August Prasertsom, Evan Schaefer, Galina Shchukin, Lexie Qin). Individual trophies were won by Elizabeth Li, Westley Chung, and Tyler Li (all tied for 3rd place in Primary), and Wailea Schroffner (tied for 3rd place in the Reserve section). Congrats to the entire team - this is a major milestone!

### **NY State Girls Chess Championship and Girls Nationals 2019**

Q300 girls were in full effect at the NYS Girls Chess Championship Tournament on April 6-7, 2019. This is the largest girls state tournament with 300 plus participants; and Q300 was 4th in number of players with 14 girls registered. Q300 had a great showing at the tournament and the girls did us proud! As a team, we collected 8 trophies. Details are as follows:

Elizabeth Li, Sarah Poon, Galina Shchukin, and Nedelya Simeonova comprised our K-1 team, with individual trophies to Sarah (2nd place unrated) and Nedelya (3rd place unrated). Honorable mention: the team just missed a trophy spot, landing in 5th place but still a great accomplishment for this rising group of players.

Gabriela Ghile, Josephine Jackowska, Lucy Loor, and Zoe Marketan comprised our K-3 U600 team, with an individual trophy to Gabriela (10th place) and a 2nd place team trophy.

Abigail Chung, Alexandra Ghile, Julia Leopando, Anjali Ohanlon, and Wailea Schroffner comprised our K-6 U900 team, with individual trophies to Wailea (3rd place) and Alexandra (1st place unrated) and a 4th place team trophy.

Joyce Lukose competed in the 2 day K-6 Championship earning a 6th place individual trophy. The following week, Joyce played in the All Girls National Championship in Chicago (April 12-14, 2019). She defeated the U.S. #10-ranked player in her age group, while scoring a strong 3 points out of 6 rounds.

#### **Shout outs:**

- To our NYChessKids coaches, Saudin and Chris for always supporting our team and being present on both days of the tournament.
- To Parent Coordinator and #1 fan Jenny Lando, for coming out to support the girls on Sunday.
- To our Q300 parent community, for their tireless efforts and to our Q300 school leadership for supporting chess in our school!

#### **About the Chess Team**

Q300 Chess is in its second year, and is a fun, interactive, culture-first group with a positive, energetic, and transparently competitive edge at 'Away' Tournaments. We want YOU to join - there are no obligations! Beginners and inexperienced players are absolutely welcome. Starting this summer, the chess team is going online - we will have tournaments, simultaneous games vs. top players (including Grandmasters), as well as free online group lessons, all hosted on lichess.org, where many of our students already play and study. See <https://www.nychesskids.com/play-chess> for more details about upcoming events, and <https://tiny.cc/hs3z7y> for LiChess instructions.

If you would like to join, or have any questions, please email us at [q300chessteam@gmail.com](mailto:q300chessteam@gmail.com).



Chess Team families enjoying time together in Nashville.

## Second Grade Architecture Celebration



On June 13, second grade parents were invited to celebrate both the hard work and fun the students had during their residency with the Center for Architecture. Starting with a neighborhood walk, the second graders observed the buildings in the area surrounding Q300 and then, in teams, created scale models of those buildings. Collaboration, problem-solving, and creative thinking were all on display, and it was a treat to hear each team present their building to the audience of parents, peers, and teachers.

**SAVE THE DATES!**

June 26: Last Day of School! (half day)

August 25: Welcome Back Picnic, 3-6 PM, Rainey Park