



September 2019

Dear Families,

On behalf of the P.S. 29 staff, I welcome you to the 2019-2020 school year that begins tomorrow, Thursday, September 5th at 8:30 AM.

While it's always bittersweet saying goodbye to the summer months, we look forward to reconnecting with all of you and meeting those students and families who are new to the P.S. 29 community. We are eagerly awaiting those bright smiles and fun-filled stories that we know our extraordinary students will share with us over the first few days of school.

Carlos Hosking and his custodial team do a tremendous job with painting, moving furniture, cleaning and waxing floors, and so much more – all summer long. Our teachers have been putting the finishing touches on their classrooms to welcome your children into a beautiful space for developing new friendships and exploring new horizons. Thanks to Tina Reres and her leadership over a small community of family gardeners as well as loads of rain this summer, our vibrant garden has yielded delicious vegetables and herbs such as tomatoes, basil, Swiss chard, strawberries and much more that we look forward to serving in our cafeteria. We believe in incorporating our garden into our curriculum across grades and see tremendous educational value in farm-to-table experiences. Susannah Sperry, our media literacy teacher, has ensured that our website (PS29brooklyn.org) is up to date with all the events, initiatives and information that capture the life of our thriving school.

One of our greatest assets at P.S. 29 is our extraordinary community. I'd like to welcome our newest staff members who come to us with experience and talent. In second grade, we hired Lauren Ricke and Melissa Pereira. Lauren has taught for several years at La Cima Elementary Charter School in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Lauren's work in developing and delivering a culturally conscious curriculum will help to deepen the work that we're doing at 29. Prior to teaching at Community Partnership Charter School,

Melissa taught in North Carolina where she earned her Masters in English as a Second Language. Her experience will contribute to our goal of deepening our impact on our English Language Learners (ELLs) and beyond.

We have also hired two fourth grade teachers, Ji Hyun Son and Lindsay Williamson, who are new to P.S. 29 but not new to NYC schools. Ji is going into her eleventh year of teaching. She has most recently worked at P.S. 80 in Jamaica, Queens and was teaching in a charter school in East New York, Brooklyn prior to that. Ji comes to us with a particular focus on math instruction having attended Algebra 4 All and participated in the city's Elementary Math Curricula Team. Lindsay has been teaching special education since 2011 at P.S. 503 in Sunset Park. She has helped to write curriculum in social studies as a Civics for All Curriculum Writer, and she served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa prior to teaching elementary school and after teaching high school history for a few years.

We have hired two additional special education service providers who will work part-time: a third speech teacher, Roni Shani and a second occupational therapist, Cara Kantrowitz. And, we welcome two new paraprofessionals to our school community this year: Veronique Peterson and Kathryn Russo.

Finally, we hope that our entire school community will join us in welcoming our new school nurse, Pamela Hamlin-Cook who is looking forward to getting to know our students and families.

Summer provides precious time to reflect and renew our goals for the upcoming year. There's so much that we already do at 29 that deserves deepened focus. Ensuring that each and every student, family, and staff member feels welcomed and supported at 29 is at the core of every goal, program and initiative.

While we've been working on honing our inclusive practices for a number of years now, our hope in 2019-2020 is to engage in a year-long theme and focus on issues of equity and social justice that will be threaded through our curriculum and events. We will continue to work with Raising Race Conscious Children to not only support race-conscious conversations in our classrooms and at home (by implementing proactive and reactive strategies), but to also closely examine and revise our curriculum to ensure that it is culturally relevant and inclusive. Further, we have been developing restorative practices to ensure that we support the individual needs of our students and sharpen our tools to teach responsively.

As we apply ideas of equity to our work with respect to neurodiverse learners at 29, we welcome back GoldMansour and Rutherford (G&R) for a fifth year of partnership. We will continue to develop our co-teacher model and structures; identify barriers using the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and inclusive lesson planning; and make connections between our whole class and individual goals.

Last year was our first year to launch the P.S. 29 Code for Living, a set of ideals - integrity, respect, empathy, and responsibility - for which we hold our students accountable across our school (e.g., cleaning up after themselves in the cafeteria; holding the door for others; interacting with classmates in the classroom, etc.) We would like to continue to partner these ideals with those of the “learning stances” laid out so eloquently in “A Mindset for Learning” (Mraz & Hertz): optimism, persistence, flexibility, resilience, and empathy. That empathy lives both in our educational environment as well as our interactions with one another in the real world underscores its critical value in making our world a better place, and we recognize its integral quality in our year long focus on issues of equity around us.

Further, empathy is at the core of our service learning program and why we’ve insisted for several years now that each grade has a specific service learning project in which our students have the opportunity to internalize doing good for someone or something else outside of themselves. As you might remember, last spring we participated for a second year in a cohort of 50 public and private schools across New York City, STAR (Students Taking Action for Relief) to support communities across the globe that are tragically impacted by natural disasters and/or civil wars and the like. Through the Star Project, these 50 schools are charged with coordinating efforts to support communities based on targeted needs. Our 4th graders last May and June led the collections efforts to fill over 50 boxes of clothing that were shipped over the summer to refugees in Yemen and Somalia. We hope to find meaningful ways for all grades to be engaged in community service that serves to transform our students and the communities they impact.

This notion that we have the power to effect positive change in the world is consistent with the Code for Living. Empathy is at the heart of our social emotional learning curriculum (4R’s and Social Thinking), and it is also emblematic of our diversity initiatives and service learning. This school year, we are implementing an evidence-based approach to emotional intelligence called RULER (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating emotion). And, while the social emotional skills are foundational to our philosophy at P.S. 29, we also continue to hold near and dear the opportunities that support student voice and agency: our Green Team, newspaper, peer mediation, Cool Clusters, musical production, as well as the infinite examples embedded in the teaching

and learning within the classroom. Our collaborations with outside organizations include ballroom dance and African drumming, chess and musical instruments, yoga and mindfulness, and so much more. All of the above serves to enlighten our students about the world.

In our third year under the leadership of our math coach, Kim Van Duzer, we will continue to improve our practice around facilitating student discourse in our classrooms. We want our students to be both skeptics and convincers and to use their thoughts, words and visual representations as tools to support a broader, intellectual process. One area that we've been thinking a lot about over the past two years is fluency - what does it mean for students to be fluent with math facts? How can we work toward fluency as a community? This year we'll be investigating these questions together, with the guidance of research-based practices and Kim's facilitation and direction. As always, we will have family workshops around math topics this fall and enrichment and STE(A)M cycles for our students. We hope that you will use our PS 29 Math website, bit.ly/ps29math as a tool to become more familiar with the math content and strategies.

We continue to treasure our partnership with Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) that guides our literacy instruction and find tremendous professional value in the work that we do with our TCRWP staff developers. More than anything else, we want our students to see themselves as readers and writers and feel a sense of joy in their work. We will work with our staff developers to continue to apply a culturally conscious approach to the reading and writing units of study.

We wouldn't be able to do all of the above without our extraordinary administrative team. I'm thankful for our parent coordinator, Monica Gutierrez-Kirwan, who is in constant communication with our families. I feel infinitely fortunate for the support of our assistant principals, Halee and Dawn who are indispensable and so dedicated to PS 29. Finally, we have an invaluable partnership with you, our families.

Thank you for supporting your children and our school community every day.

I look forward to this 2019-2020 school year together,

Rebecca