



September 2018

Dear Families,

On behalf of the PS 29 staff, I welcome you to the 2018-2019 school year that begins tomorrow on Wednesday, September 5th at 8:30 AM. I hope that you and your children have experienced a wonderful summer filled with exploration and relaxation. There's nothing like the promise of a new school year. We are looking forward to reconnecting tomorrow and meeting all those students and families who are new to our community. And, we are excited to hear about all of the milestones and adventures from the summer.

Our staff has been working hard in the school building to prepare for this moment. Our custodial team has been painting our walls and polishing our floors all summer long. Our new water fountains (with bottle fillers) are finally up and running. Our beautiful garden is thriving - thanks to the dedication and commitment of our science teacher, Tina Reres, and a small group of staff and families who have been watering and caring for our plants and vegetables all summer long. Our teachers have been arranging and decorating their classrooms to welcome your children into a beautiful space to grow, learn, take risks, and develop friendships.

One of our greatest assets at PS 29 is our extraordinary community. I'd like to welcome our newest staff members who come to us with experience and talent: We have hired Kathleen DeLeon who will join our third grade team. Kathleen has been teaching 3rd grade at NEST+M in downtown Manhattan for the past couple of years. She knows our community well as she has collaborated with our school in a STEM-focused after school program with Curious Jane and has continued to work with the organization in Brooklyn during the summers. We also welcome our new occupational therapist, Tamar Youseflaleh. She has a range of experience working in schools and therapeutic environments. Please join me in giving Tamar a warm welcome.

We have thoughtfully made some strategic decisions providing us with additional administrative support in our main office and around the building after our beloved Marianne Buzzetta retired in June. Dion Miller will be joining our staff and comes with expertise from Lower Lab School in Manhattan as well as 92nd Street Y. Likewise, we welcome Asphalt Green, a recess enhancement organization, that will provide us with an in-house coach for four days per week to support our lunch and recess program. The coach will provide our recess staff with professional development throughout the school year as well as lift the level of sports, games and activities that our students can access during this time of day.

As some of you might know, our very own District 15 is about to launch a notable middle school admissions process overhaul that has been in the works for years now. Pending DOE approval, our current 5th graders

may be the first to apply to middle school this fall without any screens for admissions, meaning that students will apply to schools and get in based on their selections through a lottery system; admissions are no longer based on 4th grade report cards, test scores, attendance, etc. Further, there will be a set-aside of over 50% of applicants for all middle schools that will go to applicants of lower-income families, English Language Learners and/or temporary housing. All of these changes were instituted to increase the diversity of our middle schools.

## **Goals and Initiatives at 29**

Of course summer gives us time to reflect and renew our goals for the coming year. There's so much that we already do at 29 that deserves deepened focus.

You might remember that last year we talked a lot about our math instruction including visual representations and tools. These discussions underpinned the notion that our students have greater conceptual understanding when they can anchor their thinking in tools and flexibly use a variety of strategies to find solutions with greater efficiency. This year, we would like to build on these ideas. We're thinking about how to deepen the level of student discourse in math (as well as across all content areas). We would like our students to begin asking deeper questions as a strategy for broadening their conceptual understanding. We want our students to use their thoughts, words and visual representations as tools to support a broader, intellectual process. As a school, we continue to value growth mindset, perseverance through challenge, and mistakes as learning opportunities in math instruction and beyond. This year, we plan again with the facilitation of our math coach, Kim Van Duzer, to host a series of workshops to introduce math concepts and pedagogy to our families. Please note our PS 29 Math website that Kim has created for the purpose of sharing knowledge and skills about the math curriculum as well as parent-friendly tips and tools to support your children at home:

We will continue to prioritize diversity initiatives and service learning. As the rest of the city (including our own district's aforementioned middle school process) can be seen revamping its programs to increase diversity, we are considering our own steps this year in improving our curriculum to be more culturally relevant and inclusive. We plan to apply the pilot work in 4th grade last year of revising our historical fiction unit with the facilitation of Border Crossers to the 5th grade this year by closely examining our social studies content for the voices with power and those that have been silenced. We are asking ourselves, too, how we can build on last year's work with Raising Race Conscious Children - the strategies and tools for supporting explicit conversation with children about race - and continue to do this work even better this year. We will continue the work that we've done as a community to support our transgender and gender expansive students for which we've been noted as an example for other schools, and whether it is through art, music, social studies, or the language we model for our students, it is my hope that we continue to be the kind of community that ensures that each and every child at PS 29 has the opportunity to be successful and thrive.

As we build on our work with respect to learning differences at 29, we welcome GoldMansour and Rutherford back to 29 for a fourth year of partnership and hope to build on the neurodiversity work that we began last year. This year we will continue to support our ICT partnerships and engage in an

inter-visitation program with a cohort of other like-minded NYC DOE schools throughout the city. This inter-visitation will give our teacher teams an opportunity to interact with teachers and observe classrooms outside of 29, something that our staff has valued. Together, with a broader support network and consistent with our priorities for issues of equity and access, we'll continue to develop our co-teacher model and structures and remove the instructional barriers that impede the learning for many of our strugglers.

These partnerships provide resources that increase the tools in our professional toolkit and ultimately make us better teachers. We continue to treasure our partnership with Teachers College Reading Writing Project (TCRWP) that guides our literacy instruction and find tremendous professional value in the work that we do with our TCRWP staff developers.

We continue to be committed to opportunities to support and encourage student voice and agency inside and out of the classroom. We will never forget the sweet sound of nearly one thousand of our student voices singing "Agents of Change" in our school yard last year in an effort to honor those students who lost their lives in Florida, and in recognition of student voices collaborating across the country. We have been thinking a lot about the importance of voice and agency for our students anchored by what our staff came together to develop last June and over the summer as our Code for Living: respect, integrity, responsibility and empathy. You'll notice that the PS 29 Code for Living will be posted throughout our building, inside classrooms and our cafeteria and beyond. These are the ideals for which we will hold our students accountable across our school. These principles reinforce our campaign for kindness that we are ultimately looking to launch at PS 29. We want to impart to our students the importance of empathy not only in an educational environment but in all of their interactions with other students and teachers. We're hoping that these guiding principles will have a lasting impact on our students as they grow and develop into responsible young adults.

Last school year, we scrambled to support the victims of Hurricane Harvey, challenged with the question of how to play a role as a school community in assisting other schools in need. This question is at the crux of our service learning goals and why we've insisted for a couple of years now upon each grade having 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 became part of a cohort of 50 public and private schools across New York City that will work together to support communities across the globe that are tragically impacted by natural disasters and/or civil wars and the like. Through the Star Initiative, 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 that leveraged the clothing collected at our Spring Rummage Sale to fill over 30 boxes that were shipped out of a loading site in Brooklyn last month (in July) to Syrian refugees in Jordan. We will be sharing images of the refugees in this camp as they received the boxes that we had shipped earlier this summer. Some members of this 50-school cohort traveled together to support the refugee community on the grounds in Jordan. Our students and larger community were part of this extraordinary mission and will continue to do this work for years to come.

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. We continue to hold near and dear the opportunities that support student voice and agency: our Green Team, newspaper, peer mediation, Cool Clusters, musical production, and service learning projects as well as the infinite examples embedded in the teaching and learning within the classroom. Our staff is also committed to growing our own media literacy lab and maker space to increase opportunities for STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math). 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.

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

You will hear me say this often and I mean it from the bottom of my heart – the strength and fortitude of our community, the collective talent and skills, compassion and drive, are what make our school so exceptional. I am so proud to be the principal of P.S. 29.

Thanks to all of you for your commitment.

I look forward to this 2018-2019 school year together,

Rebecca