



CALENDAR

JANUARY

- 7, 14, 21, 28** Test prep for selected 3rd, 4th & 5th graders, 9:00 A.M.
- 4** Class Parents Meeting
- 5** PTA Executive Board meeting, 6:15 P.M.
- 7** ELA test prep for selected students, grades 3, 4 & 5
- 10** PTA General meeting
- 10-11** The NYS English Language Arts test for grades 3 & 5
- 10, 11 & 12** The NYS English Language Arts test for grade 4
- 16** NO SCHOOL, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 21** Dance-A-Thon, 2:00 P.M.
- 27** Families as Learning Partners, 8:30 A.M.

FEBRUARY

- 4, 11** Test prep for selected 3rd, 4th & 5th graders, 9:00 A.M.
- 6** PTA Executive Board meeting, 6:15 P.M.
- 17** Pajama Day/Read-A-Thon kick-off (ends 3/3)
- 17** Families as Learning Partners, 8:30 A.M.
- 20-24** NO SCHOOL midwinter recess
- 27** School reopens

للشريعة بالغة
العربية ارضي
بدرام كذا
في المدرسة

Si necesita
ayuda con
traduccion,
llame a
Carmen Perez

Report From the Principal by Zipporah Mills

The new teachers' contract, construction, afterschool... What a way to start off a new school year, but through it all we have maintained a sense of peace and community in our building. Every day I come in smiling, because I am a member of the most amazing group of teachers, parents, and above all, children. We are extremely proud of the start of our school year:

- Our parent grade meetings were so successful that we have created a series of grade focused workshops for parents based on our discussions.
- Ruth Stanislaus, our math coach, and Karen Kaz, our literacy coach, are doing a tremendous job of supporting children as they develop the math and literacy skills needed to meet standards.
- Observing instruction in our building is a joy. Our children are becoming such reflective readers and we are now forming both staff and parent study groups in math so that we all have a deeper understanding of the development of math skills in children.
- This year our newly formed Waterworks Robotics team won the coveted teamwork award in a borough-wide robotics competition.
- In our annual tradition, our Allegro Choir sang at the tree-lighting ceremony on Atlantic Avenue.
- Also a tradition, as I write this, the Second Grade Post Office study is underway. I received 25 letters today. One read, "Dear Ms. Mills please put a pool in the schoolyard it gets hot... also some trees."

Did I mention I love this place? Until next month.

The New Robotics Team Wins the Teamwork Trophy

Water Works, our robotics team, took home the coveted teamwork trophy in the December regional Brooklyn LEGO Robotics tournament. The other three awards went to middle or high school students.

The team did twice as well as they'd planned for, scoring 75 and 74 points in two consecutive rounds by releasing the dolphin, repairing a pipeline, taking a sample of an underwater species and raising a flag. Once, when the robot would not operate despite numerous tries, the team was awarded 16 points for keeping cool under pressure, being supportive of one another and maintaining perseverance against all odds. Every team member displayed consistent sportsmanship, support for one another, graceful problem solving under pressure and respect for their competitors and referees.

A very special thank you goes to the amazing coaches, Maureen Reilly and Jook Leung. Thanks also to PS 261 for the fabulous pep rally, and to all the parents and students who cheered the team on at the competition. Please congratulate the team members: Charlotte Herzog, Emilie Richards, Emily Carpenter, Gabe Zimmerman, Isaiah O'Kane, Lily Rosenthal Williams, Maja Flodin-Ali, Max Gertler, Nicholas Moore, Sasha Bakal-Schlomann and Virginia Moogan, and wish them luck in the citywide tournament on January 28th.



Gabe Zimmerman, 5-414, troubleshoots the robot when it won't roll straight.

Around the Halls

THE AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM COMMITTEE

has been meeting regularly and planning for next year's afterschool program. Recently we put together a survey for current participants in the YMCA Afterschool Program. We will also be sending out a survey later on, school-wide, for participants in other afterschool programs. Once we receive input from all interested parties, we will be evaluating the responses and using them to produce a program next year that we hope will satisfy the needs of more parents and kids at PS 261. We encourage all parents who receive the surveys to fill them out and return them promptly, to insure that a wide array of voices are heard in planning for next year. For more information please contact parent Ismene Speliotis at ahcny@acorn.org.

AIKIDO IN P.E. Teachers from Brooklyn Aikiai taught Aikido basics to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders in early December. The kids were thrilled to learn the stretches, animal movements and falls. The lesson also included a brief history of Aikido and some Japanese, and they watched demonstrations from the teachers, Kalei, Kai, Reiko and Terri.

ENRICHMENT STARTS IN LATE JANUARY

The School-wide Enrichment Model for grades 3, 4 and 5 will begin on January 20. This program, now in its fourth year, gives all students an opportunity for a meaningful, unique learning experience. Teachers will facilitate this student-driven adventure, which helps our students foster individual creativity, as well as a sense of responsibility for the community. Enrichment clusters make use of all areas of intelligence—auditory, visual, tactical, kinesthetic—as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. This year's cluster topics include yearbook, computer animation and robotics, and more will be announced soon. Parents with ideas and/or time to volunteer can contact the enrichment coordinator, Mary Showers, at 646-541-2731. We welcome your input!

MUSIC TEACHER BECKY PONKA has been selected as MetLife Fellow in the Teachers Network Leadership Institute. Joining hundreds of exemplary public school teachers nationwide, Miss Becky's tasks include research, advocacy work and meeting with policy makers as part of the national discourse on education reform. Congratulations!

We turned to the most organized among us and got a variety of ideas to fit every abode, family and life-style. But some themes were universal. Here they are, with specific tips listed below each):

GET THE RIGHT TOOLS

- Baskets, bins and boxes can contain everything from scarves (by the door, of course) to magazines (bathrooms and bedsides) to mail (in one home it's gathered daily and sorted through once a week when bills are paid).
- Use clear trash bags (used for recycling) for out-of-season clothes or comforters because you can see what's in them when they're tucked away in a closet or under a bed.
- Big, canvas, laundry-style bags hold sports gear and can hang on hooks.
- Speaking of hooks, you can never have enough of them for jewelry, belts, towels, robes, jackets, you name it.
- Designate one organizing center—a series of baskets, a baker's rack, a bench, an armoire, a dresser—near the front door. Backpacks, gloves, envelopes to be mailed—all live here until they exit. Near headquarters, add magnets (if door is metal) or a bulletin board for notes, a calendar and reminders.
- A wastebasket and clock in every room.

UNLOAD EXCESS

- Designate the first day of each new season as throw-out day. Give away, throw out, recycle or sell what you don't use, doesn't fit and doesn't work.
- Pare down on a room-by-room basis. Do you really need more than six mugs? If not, get rid of the extras.
- Recruit a friend (who is not a pack rat) to go through stuff with you and you can do the same for him or her.
- Consider a "donate" hamper. When the shirt no longer fits, in it goes. When the hamper is full, take it to Goodwill.

ROUTINES ARE ESSENTIAL

- Laundry day is Sunday, recycling goes out Friday, food shopping is Thursday—whatever the day, whatever the chore, organized families build structure and expectation into their schedule.
- Everything has a place and everything in its place. For instance, homework is done at the kitchen table, kid's desk, living room floor, fill in the blank, and the tools for the homework (pencils, calculator, paper) are kept in or near that space.
- Organized families clean up after themselves. Regularly.

GOOD IDEAS
GET ORGANIZED
by Kim C. Flodin



TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL

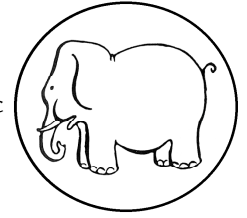
- Let them splurge on some inexpensive, but cool containers (think Target, Ikea) for their room or desk.
- One mom swears that a cordless vacuum, spray wash and sponge should be located no more than 10 steps from every child's room.
- Take it away for a week if it's consistently spotted out of place.
- Lead kids through a deeper clean-up yearly. Take them to Goodwill, their little cousins, the hospital's pediatric floor—wherever you donate outgrown clothes and toys.
- Encourage 5th graders and up to keep their own planners and use them. Lots of kids this age have access to and love email; exploit that. Even if you keep a master calendar, email them their schedule changes (doctor's appointments, cancelled swim class) and encourage them to make notes.
- Finally, the best lesson is to lead by example. Make being organized a priority and your kids will pick up a lot by osmosis.

Please remember to have your children bring sneakers to school on gym days. All children must wear sneakers in the gym, not rubber-soled shoes or boots. Thanks!

Don't Forget

DANCE-A-THON • Jan. 21, 2:00 - 4:00 P.M. in the school cafeteria

A professional dance instructor will lead the kids (and their family members!) through a variety of dances to a wide range of music styles. Funds raised go towards student enrichment projects. Look for info in backpacks. Contact: Brenda Williams (*see p. 4*).



PAJAMA PARTY/READ-A-THON • Feb. 17

The annual Read-A-Thon will kick off with a pajama party in each class on Friday, February 17 and run through March 3. During the Read-A-Thon, children read books and are sponsored by the book or page read during the event. Sponsors may cap their contribution levels. The event raises money for the school and, more importantly, encourages kids to read outside of school. Look for info in backpacks. Contact: Nancy Melissas (*see p. 4*).

Construction Update

The playground construction project is beginning to take shape. Delays have occurred due to incomplete or incorrect work permit filings with the Department of Buildings, but these have now been submitted or will be by December 23, 2005. The homes adjacent to the big yard on Dean and Pacific Streets reached a settlement with the SCA to have structural work done on the wall between the playground and their properties. The Dean Street work has begun and needs to be completed prior to beginning on the Pacific Street side. We hope that the School Construction Administration's (SCA) project officer, who oversees the construction, will know the start date on this project in January, when the administration and PTA meets again with the SCA.

As was announced in November's PTA newsletter, Lowe's has donated \$5,000 to help fix up the little yard. This project won't happen, however, if parents of pre-K, kindergarten and 1st graders don't organize it. Those parents should please contact the Construction Committee for how to get involved (*see p. 4*).

In other news, the project officer has promised access to the school sign at the front entrance area, which is currently blocked by fencing. Additionally, a lack of school security is a serious concern that the project officer will address with the general contractor.—*parent Rory Dineen*

DIRECT APPEAL THANK YOUS

Thanks to everyone for these most recent donations to the PTA's direct appeal. This brings our totals to 61 families giving \$14,000! Remember, it's never too late to give. Contributions are tax-deductible and many businesses will match your gift.

Jo Bakal & Walter Schlomann

Kim Flodin & Farhan Ali

Sharon Moregrass

Shari & Jonathan Pascaros

Michelle Relyea & John Suarez

Jackie Straus & Alfred Kahn

MORE WISH LISTS!

ALLI HARMAN (K-124): a working computer and printer; a listening center with tapes and CDs & at least 4 headsets; Raffi and Kids Bop CDs; age-appropriate puzzles; age-appropriate book-cassette sets with at least 4 copies of each book (Scholastic); Colorforms playsets or felt board with shapes.

CHRISTINE GIBSON (K-119): age-appropriate toys; digital camera; 25 plastic magazine files.

LUCY LOPEZ (K/1/2): microwave; area carpet; vacuum cleaner; ink cartridges for C84 Epson Printer (black to 441; magenta to 443; cyan to 442; yellow to 444).

ARYN LONGARINO (1-221): bean bags in tropical colors; business card magnets (Staples).

DIANA HOLLIDAY (1-213): vacuum cleaner.

KATY WELLS (2-224): black and color ink for Epson Styles color 740 printer; disposable plastic tablecloths; 8.5x11 color card stock & color copy paper; calculators; long-arm stapler; ink pads & P.O.-themed stamps; dust pan & broom; heavy-duty electric sharpener; felt; Clorox wipes.

MARCY MATTERA (2-313): a computer printer (and someone to hook it up!).

KWANZA ADAMS/ROBYN TARAGAN (2-319-CTT): sofa; boom box with CD & cassette player.

JENNIFER LINDAUER-THOMPSON/ MANDY BECKERMAN (3-314-CTT): digital camera (used is fine); paper cutter; speakers for our computers (eMac); educational games, such as checkers, chess, Uno, Connect 4, 24;

clear packing tape; mini-fridge; 3-hole punch; printer paper & ink cartridges for HP 3820; plastic forks, knives & spoons; napkins.

ANNE FARMER (4-413): benches; computer & copy paper; a listening center with cassette tapes & CDs & at least 4 headsets; 30 clipboards.

DANIELLE TAYLOR/BECCA SACRA (4-415-CTT): broom; 2 Connect 4 games; paper towels; electric pencil sharpener; ink cartridges-HP 8727, HP8728; microwave; mini-fridge.

EVELYN ALEMAN/AMY ZEMSER (ESL, ROOM 416): digital camera & photo printer.

MARY ELLEN BONTEMPO-SINGER (NURSE, ROOM 111B): paper shredder; 2 small blankets (airline size).

Parent coordinator Carmen Perez can be reached by calling 347-563-5376.

PS 261's next open houses are Thursday, Jan. 5 @ 9:00 a.m. & Thursday, Jan. 12 @ 7:00 p.m.

Parenting 261 SHOULD KINDERGARTNERS REALLY GET HOMEWORK?

When I received the homework packet for my kindergartner last year, I was tickled. Could my five-year-old really be ready to take on this Big Kid task? But after the excitement faded for all of us and the tasks seemed to take up precious time, I began to wonder how beneficial homework really is.

On the plus side, we establish work habits. My daughter feels responsible for getting her work done and is proud to get it back with a sticker or star. I get the opportunity to be a partner in her schoolwork. This is no small thing, since parental involvement is key to helping children succeed.

On the minus side, she has lost time to develop interests on her own, or just relax. Homework often takes longer than it is supposed to and I find myself nudging her to finish. Our time after school has become centered on getting her assignments done.

I hear many parents complain about the homework issues that arise between them and their kindergartners and first graders. How independent can the work be, when most of the kids are struggling to read the instructions? And while good habits may develop, so might bad ones, such as power struggles and parental over-involvement. Does it make the struggling kids frustrated and turned off by school?

With these questions in mind, I did a little homework and found conflicting evidence. The American Psychological Association published a study that showed there's no proof homework helps young children perform better. Researchers found that homework policies for this age tend not to follow standards, but rather a belief that homework is good for supporting a child's success. They suggested that the strategies that make work in the classroom effective need to be extended to homework assignments. Two teacher friends of mine agreed. Both teach at schools

that do not give regular, if any, homework until second or third grade.

I know that PS 261 is a wonderful school whose goal is to help students reach their potential. I am impressed with the work the first graders do during the school day. In that vein it may seem foolhardy to suggest putting off homework—or at least lessening it—until the kids are older. Wouldn't this hold our kids back? The truth is, we don't know. Maybe it would be better for them to come to school totally refreshed, having run around more, and learned home routines, such as helping to set the table. On the other hand, I do think my daughter's homework reinforces her schoolwork. I am even starting to appreciate the Mathlinks assignments. I don't want nostalgia to color my views; just because I didn't do it until second or third grade doesn't mean homework won't help our small children.

In the end, I want to know that my daughter's homework supports her schoolwork without edging out the time she needs to explore her own interests. We shouldn't take homework for granted. Raising questions and partnering with the school teaches us what is best for our kids.

PAMELA POTISCHMAN, whose daughter is in the first grade, is a social worker running her own business called *Childcare Solutions*.

Parents interested in writing a column should contact parent Alice Peck at AlicePeck@alicepeck.com. Responses to past columns can be sent to the newsletter editor and may be printed in future issues, space permitting.

OPINION by Pamela Potischman

2005-2006 PTA OFFICERS

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3RD GRADE: Cynthia Simmons

4TH GRADE: Monica Christensen

5TH GRADE: Jo Bakal

SPECIAL ED: David Gorin

GET INVOLVED

MAJOR PTA EVENTS & EFFORTS

1/21 DANCE-A-THON Brenda Williams
blynwil@aol.com & 718-287-8142

2/17 PAJAMA DAY/READ-A-THON KICK-OFF
Nancy Melissas Nancy.Melissas@parks.nyc.gov

**4/5 INVENTION CONVENTION
(SCIENCE FAIR)** Barbara Schweizer
barbaraanschweizer@hotmail.com

4/10 PTA ELECTION NOMINATIONS BEGIN
Monica Christensen
mmc189@columbia.edu & 718-783-3089

4/26 POETRY NIGHT AT BARNES & NOBLE
Carole Kelly hopeorjames@yahoo.com

5/2-12 SPRING BOOK FAIR
Rose Beau & Sharon Moregrass Rose:
718-875-5070 & rbrbeau@aol.com

5/6 SPRING AUCTION
Marci Rosa marcirosa@aol.com

5/13 FAMILY TEA PARTY Janine Taylor
JJ4599@peoplepc.com & 718-735-4241

5/19 TALENT SHOW
Chair needed. Assistant Chair: Rory Dineen
Rory.Dineen@verizon.net

ONGOING COMMITTEES

AFTERSCHOOL Open

CULTURAL ARTS Open

FIFTH GRADE COMMITTEE Beth Herzog
efhh@yahoo.com & 718-622-1559

LISTSERVS Sasha Nyary (see below)

LUNCH CLUBS Open

CONSTRUCTION Caroline O'Hara &
Rory Dineen Caroline: atuadesign@aol.com
& 718-230-3530 & 347-236-6594
Rory: Rory.Dineen@verizon.net

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THE
PTA
NEWS

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