

PS 261

NEWSLETTER

MAY 2009



We voted YES to title one!

On Friday morning April 24, Principal Mills called an emergency meeting regarding recent developments for Title I status and P.S. 261. Due to President Obama's new guidelines for Title I federal funding, the minimum requirement for eligibility for public schools has been changed. In previous years, any public school in Brooklyn needed to have 60% of its student body enrolled in the free lunch program. That minimum requirement is now 60% to 40%.

In the past 6 years P.S. 261 has averaged between 50-55% for free lunch program eligibility. The lowering of the minimum requirement makes P.S. 261 eligible for Title I status. However, there are many steps involved in making all this legal. For one, the parent body needs to vote on the change. Vincent Tarsio, Title 1 Executive Director at the Regional School Support Center, addressed the parent body to provide historical background and information to those present.

At least 150 parents unanimously approved P.S. 261 to be a Title I school. Quite simply, if our status as a Title 1 school is confirmed, PS261 could possibly benefit greatly from federal funds!

CALENDAR

Wednesday, May 6

Executive PTA Meeting

6:15pm-7:30pm, Library (Room 214)

Thursday, May 7

Science Fair

6:00pm-8:00pm

Monday, May 11

Talent Show Meeting

8:45am-9:30am, Cafeteria

Wednesday, May 13

PS261 Kid's Art Show

5:00pm-8:00pm, Cafeteria

General PTA Meeting

6:00pm-7:00pm, Auditorium

Saturday, May 16

Talent Show

(more information to follow)

Monday, May 18

SLT Meeting

5:30pm-7:00pm, Library (Room 214)

All are welcome!

Wednesday, May 20-

Friday May 22

5th Grade Trip

Monday, May 26

NO SCHOOL

P.S. 261 MEETS The Challenge

In March of this year, the Independence Community Foundation awarded P.S. 261 with a challenge grant award. If we could raise \$5,000 from our parents before the end of school, they would kick in an additional \$2,500 to support our Arts Programs which include everything from field trips to the Brooklyn Museum, partnerships with the Metropolitan Opera Education Guild, Construction Arts, our very own dance, chorus and band groups, family weekend sing-a-longs, Poemagination, our literary journal and much, much, more.

With the strong leadership and great effort of Heather Weston, our Annual Fund Chair, and her team, P.S. 261 Parents MET the Independence Community Foundation Challenge raising over \$5,600 (and counting) in JUST A COUPLE OF DAYS.

Stuart Post, ICF Program Officer proudly awarded the \$2,500 to the school last week saying "Independence Community Foundation is thrilled that the P.S. 261 Parents Association so enthusiastically embraced our challenge. We feel very strongly all Brooklynites, regardless of income or giving ability, can be philanthropists and financially support their immediate communities. P.S. 261 beautifully proves the point!"

PTA NEWSLETTER STAFF Editor: Melanie Hoopes Design: Duane Stapp

May's Contributors: Janine Taylor, Rick Knutsen, Jerry Piper, Rachel Godsil, Heather Weston, Leslie Brauman, George Sanchez

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT ON

Rick Knutsen

What was the first thing you volunteered for at PS 261?

Since I'm a musician, I approached the chorus teacher at my first curriculum night in 2004 (when my older daughter was in Pre-K) and offered to accompany the chorus. The first PTA function I can remember helping out with was the Fall Fest, which I had not volunteered for, but when I got there and saw a need, I just kind of jumped in.

What are some of the ways you help out at 261?

I chair the Community Sing-a-long and the Talent Show. I also ran a used media sale to raise funds for the PTA at the Fall Fest last October.

Have you always been a volunteer or did you start when you became a 261 Parent?

I definitely volunteer more now than I used to, but I've done a lot of work in theater over the years, which is pretty darn close to volunteering a lot of the time.

What do you say to those parents who'd like to volunteer but for one reason or another, don't?

I think for a school community to thrive, parents have to play a big role. Some parents have time, some parents have money, some parents have useful areas of expertise. Of course everyone is busy in this city, but I hope every single parent at PS 261 finds some significant way, any way, to contribute. If you have something to give but haven't given yet, what are you waiting for? These years simply fly by. I swear my third grader was in Pre-K last year.

What do you want 261 parents to know that they might not?

If you want to volunteer, but are unsure how to navigate the structure of the PTA, the first 90% of working that out is in just showing up. Once you show up, the details work themselves out. And the rewards are plentiful.



THANK YOU to Rick and ALL the parents that have helped so much already this year!



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT ON

Carmen Cruz Para Educator K-124

Q: *What is a Para? And how long have you been at 261?*

A: It's an assistant teacher. This is my 23rd year at this school.

Q: *How'd you end up here?*

A: I used to be in the business world but when my youngest went to school I became a parent volunteer. The administration liked how I was with children and I was hired. To be a para you have to go to school and be certified which I did, but mostly I learned from hands-on experience.

Q: *Is your hair naturally red?*

A: No, it's brown.

Q: *What's the hardest part of your job?*

A: Mediating between the children on the playground. Making sure that everyone is safe and remains friends. That's the hardest part.

Q: *What's the best part of your job?*

A: The children. I love the children. They stick to me like honey. I teach Spanish Cooking in the afterschool program and I love that too.

Q: *What do you like to do when you're not at school?*

A: I love being at home, relaxing with my family. Being with my grandchildren. Sometimes my husband and I will go away for the weekend.

WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO...

Science Fair

Thursday, May 7, 6:00 – 8:00pm, Cafeteria

Carmelo says get there at 5:45 if you want a good place to set up. All are invited to come and support our PS261 scientists.

Talent Show

Saturday May 16, 2-6ish pm, Auditorium

Not to be missed. See details on the next page.

NOTES AND NEWS FROM PS261

Wondering how to get involved and make the PS261 experience even bolder and brighter? Read about some upcoming activities and fundraisers that need your help.

➔ **TALENT SHOW** On the afternoon of Saturday, May 16th, PS 261's most-popular, most-attended PTA event hits the stage. Yes, it's the annual Talent Show, or should we say Talent Shows, since so many students have signed up to strut their stuff on stage that the organizers have decided to split the show into 2 performances just to be able to fit the audience into the auditorium. The Junior Show (kindergarten through 2nd grade) kicks off at 2 PM, while the Senior Show (3rd-5th grades) starts at 4 PM. Tickets, on sale the day of the performances at the door, are \$3/person for one show, or \$5 will get you tickets to both shows. Come see PS 261's student singers, actors, dancers, magicians, and comedians channel their creative urges and produce acts that will amaze, surprise, and (at times) mystify you. Be there or be square!

If you want to help out on the day of the performances, please contact the organizers at talentshow261@yahoo.com, or leave a note in the "Talent Show" folder in the PTA mailbox in the main office.

➔ **WINE TASTING** On June 4, the PTA will present a Wine Tasting and Raffle. We're currently in the planning stage and could use volunteers, especially the evening of the event. We're looking for musicians who are available to play between the hours of 7:00 and 10:00 p.m. In addition, we'll need help managing the wine tasting. Help us make this an evening to remember and raise money for our school. If you'd like to volunteer, please contact Myra Howard at mod_howard@hotmail.com.

➔ **JOIN OUR TRANSLATION TEAM** In order for us to continue to improve our communication with the entire PS261 Community, we'd like to extend an invitation to any & all PS261 Community members who can translate and/or interpret to join the PS261 Translation Team. This is an informal group of parents & friends who can provide written translation from English to other languages, and possibly provide interpretation during school events. If you'd like to help, please contact Parent Coordinator Jerry Piper at (718) 330-9275 or email gpiper2@schools.nyc.gov.

➔ **THE CONSTRUCTION ARTS PROGRAM** Celebrating our First Grade Artists – and the Teachers who Guide Them!

This winter, thanks to the Construction Arts Program, our first graders worked with wonderful teaching artists (also PS 261 parents!) to create new art works – some classes improvised dances and plays, others made puppets or music!

Now in its fourth year, the beloved Construction Arts program invites parents who are also professional artists, to work with each of the six first -grade classes, teaching creative movement, choreography, theater games, playwriting and musical theater, music/drumming, and singing. The teaching-artists work closely with the first grade teachers to integrate their particular artistic discipline to the classroom curriculum. The program began in January and each class had a final project day for parents to have a chance to see their children's terrific work. This year, the teaching/artist/parents included: choreographers Niles Ford, improviser Kelly Donovan, visual artist Paul Gordon, musician Bill McClellan, singer/songwriter Gina Breedlove, playwright Stephanie Jones, and performance artist George Sanchez.

Patricia Hoffbauer, also a parent/teacher/artist, created the program when our playground was under construction several years ago and has coordinated it ever since. The program is also supported by a generous grant from the Independence Community Foundation and contributions from the school community.



THE FOLLOWING UPCOMING EVENTS NEED YOU:

May 7th – Science Fair, 6-8pm

June 20 – year end school wide BBQ

The PTA also needs someone to coordinate nominations for PTA positions for the 2009/10 school year.

For any and all of the above, please contact Yvette Schwartz or Elisa Wallman Jacques ewallman@institute200.org.

WE'RE LOOKING BACK ON...

The Family Tea



From the magical tea setting from the island of Madagascar to the delectable lemon chicken of Senegal, thanks to everyone who helped made the fourth Tea an unforgettable, savory mélange of cultures from the African continent and ours. Next year will be even better!

The Art of the Matter

Art changes lives. And a few months ago, first grader Talia Goldstein and her professional-artist dad, Josh Goldstein, found a way for art to change lives at PS 261. With the help of art teachers Tanya and Haya, the New York artist's collective ARTSMITH visited our school and worked with our students to create art based on each artist's professional work. And the result was astonishing. In fact, so compelling was the work that on April 23rd the art was exhibited at the Galapagos Art Space in DUMBO and auctioned to the highest bidders. A great night—where the kids had a blast—the auction also raised nearly \$6,000 for PS 261. So, thank you to Talia, Josh, Tanya, Haya and all of the students and parents who participated and proved that art does change lives at PS 261.



From Jerry Piper, Parent Coordinator

Parents —First, let me remind everyone - you are always welcome to stop by my office (inside the Main Office) and say hello, cheer, complain, etc. - I'm here for you, to hear from you! Secondly, we all know both how open our school is to visitors, such as during Families As Learning Partners, for in-class celebrations, shows in the Auditorium, etc., and how hard our Safety Officer works to maintain a secure yet friendly environment at PS261. With that in mind, please remember that, no matter who you are, or how often you visit the school, PLEASE carry some sort of identification with you. It's very important for security, and sets the proper example for all of our visitors — families, friends & colleagues alike. Thanks, and enjoy this great Spring!

The PS 261 Trivia Quiz Answers

By Rick Knutsen

B. As it is in the rest of the country, the most common boy's name at PS 261 is Jacob. There are currently nine Jacobs at PS 261.

A. Kayla is the most common girl's name, followed closely by Sophia.

C. Algozy is tops in last names at PS 261, followed by Garcia.

B. PS 261 kids like to use a lot of red in their drawings, so the red markers run dry first in the Art room.

D. PS 261 generates about 100 bags a day of trash, requiring 2 separate pickups.

B. In June there are close to 200 bags of trash a day—must be all the classrooms getting cleaned out.

A. There are currently 335 kids in AfterSchool, roughly 40% of the school population.

D. For whatever reason, there are a lot more girls in AfterSchool than boys.

A. Theater for You was the most requested AfterSchool class. 60 children auditioned for the 16 roles in Alice in Wonderland.

C. 550-600 lunches are served every day in the PS 261 cafeteria.

B. Pizza goes the fastest in the lunch line, a little faster than cheeseburgers. Oddly, both of those go faster than steamed broccoli.

D. 115 people are employed by PS 261.

C. The construction of PS 261 was completed in 1957, per the plaque in the lobby.

D. Ms. Mills has no middle name! According to her it's because her mother thought "Zipporah was a plenty of name for one child."

Honorable mention goes to Eliya Ahmad of 2-319, who had 7 out of 14 correct. And the winners are.....

Gregory and Timothy Joblove of Pre-K B, with 8 correct. Good job Gregory and Timothy!