

## What? The End of Year? Already?

PS 261 has been involved in a year long study of Peter Johnston. Peter Johnston is a Professor of Education and Chair of the Reading Department at State University of New York at Albany. His position as an advocate for teachers and children developed from his early career teaching primary school in his native New Zealand.

Our staff has been participating in a book group on his latest book “Choice Words”. “Choice Words” helps us understand that creating emotionally and relationally healthy learning communities is crucial in the development of our students. Teachers create intellectual environments that produce not only technically competent students, but also caring, secure, actively literate human beings. This book shows how teachers accomplish this using their most powerful teaching tool: language. *Choice Words by Peter Johnston*

Our teachers have met in discussion groups throughout the year and on June 10th we are culminating with a special visit from Peter Johnston himself at Prospect Hall with the staff. During his visit we will get the chance to hear him discuss his book and his latest ideas on learning communities. This is a great way to end the year and begin to think about plans for next year.

It is hard to believe the year is coming to an end. We have had so many amazing performances, class celebrations and trips. Arts Connection, Construction Arts, Saturday Scholars along with New York Cares and Learning Leaders have been such winning programs this year amongst so many others. Our teachers have worked very hard with your children and we want to acknowledge the amount of effort that has gone into what has been a very successful year.

We look forward to working with some of the same staff developers and building the work we have begun with Dorothy Barnhouse in reading, Carl Anderson is writing, Stephanie Slabic in math and Renee Dinnerstein for Inquiry work. We look forward to making new relationships with Matt Glover next year.

Have a great summer! —*Zip and Jackie*

### *Teacher/Staff Appreciation Day - May 4*

As a token of our appreciation for all they do, the PTA sponsored teacher/staff appreciation day activities – kids wrote “heart” letters to their teachers and staff, there was a light breakfast for teacher/staff in Ms Mills office, they received sweet treats in their mailboxes,

Brooklyn Industries discount certificates, and could sign up for chair massages. A wonderful video was produced by parent Ash Meer – kids of all grades were interviewed and asked what they like about their teachers. Since the day coincided with National Nurse’s week, Nurse Mary was given a special card and gift.

## CALENDAR

### **Wednesday, June 2**

PTA Executive Board Mtg.  
6pm-7:30pm, Library

### **Thursday, June 3**

5th Grade Trip

Incoming K Orientation  
9am-10am, Auditorium

### **Friday, June 4**

5th Grade Trip Details TBD.

### **Monday, June 7**

Grade 4 Science Written Test

### **Tuesday, June 8**

HALF-DAY, Noon Dismissal for All Students Clerical Day.

### **Wednesday, June 9**

Family Math Games Night  
6:15pm-7:30pm, Cafeteria

### **Thursday, June 10**

NO SCHOOL Chancellor’s Conference Day / Anniversary Day.

### **Friday, June 11**

Grandparents Day  
9am-10:30am, Auditorium, then Classrooms.

### **Thursday, June 17**

5th Grade Dance  
5pm-8:30pm, PS261 Gym

HALF-DAY, Noon Dismissal for All Students Clerical Day.

### **Friday, June 18**

PS261 2nd Annual Wine Tasting

### **Monday, June 21**

School Leadership Team (SLT) Mtg.  
5:45pm-7pm, Library

### **Tuesday, June 22**

Pre-K Celebration

### **Wednesday, June 23**

Kindergarten Celebration  
Auditorium

PTA Grade Rep. Mtg.

8:50am-9:30am, Cafeteria

### **Thursday, June 24**

5th Grade Graduation  
9am-10:45am, Auditorium

### **Friday, June 25**

End of Year Celebration, Big Yard

### **Monday, June 28**

Last Day of School for All Students

# The PS 261 Jr./Sr. Talent Show

is one of the most anticipated events of the school year and as usual, this year's joint show did not disappoint. Both Jr. and Sr. shows were insanely entertaining and boasted a total of 119 singers,



dancers, comedians and scooterers who performed 86 separate acts. David Faitelson and Erica Mason emceed the well-attended event which raised over \$2000 for the PTA. Thanks go out to the scads of parent volunteers who helped at rehearsals and before, during and after the show. And a low-as-you-can-go bow down to the venerable and apparently tireless Rick Knutsen without whom the talent show would simply not exist.



## Volunteer Spotlight

your  
picture  
here!!

As this is the last issue of the newsletter for this year, we'd just like to give a big round of cheers and applause to ALL those parents who gave their time this year.

Thank you to all those parents who volunteered: those of you who have been doing so tirelessly for many years; those of you who volunteered for the first time this year; those who worked on an event from start to finish; and to those who heard our last minute pleas for extra help and stepped up.

This year we had so many successful events – including the Fall Fest, Scholastic book sales, Penny Harvest, Picture Day, Black History Month, Teacher Appreciation Day, candy and magazine sale, open house tours, the afterschool show, Martin Luther King day events, the Spring auction, the talent show, the science fair – none of these events and activities could have happened without your time and efforts – both behind the scenes and out front. In addition, thanks to the parents who produced our fabulous newsletter, photographed events, made videos, and more.

In addition to events – there have been SO many parents who have worked at school, during the school day helping our kids in their classrooms to enrich the school day – our corps of Learning Leaders, our wonderfully talented Construction Arts parents, Band helpers – a big thank you to you all!

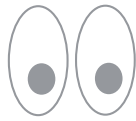
And then there are the class parents, SLT volunteers and our PTA executive board members, committee chairs, and grade reps.

So to all parents who gave their time this year – the spotlight is on YOU!!!! Thank You!!

Wish you could help out more? We need volunteers for our End of School Celebration on Friday, June 25.

And **next year**. Please start thinking of how you can lend a hand. We need you! Interested in organizing and/or helping with the planning of the **Fall Fest** next year? Please contact Elisa Wallman Jacques [ewallman@institute2000.org](mailto:ewallman@institute2000.org) or Yvette Torres Schwartz [yummy098@aol.com](mailto:yummy098@aol.com).

# A Peek In Our Classrooms



**Our Pre-K children** are busy working on their Fairy Tale presentation of Threes. After reading several fairy tales we discussed what we liked or disliked about each story. The talk was rich very opinionated and sometimes very persuasive! These discussions helped us create our art and writing activities which will be displayed as part of our information gallery to be shared with all who will attend our show. The children are so excited! With a lot of help from some very dedicated parents, they are creating their own costumes and their dance routine is choreographed by our fabulous teaching Artist/Parent. We can't wait to share this incredible production on May 27th with our families, our Reading Buddies, administrators and invited guests.

**K-115** has been visiting and collecting information about nearby playgrounds. We are wondering who takes care of the playgrounds and keeps them safe as well as what are all the different kinds of slides, monkey bars etc. We are excited about our visit to see the Imagination Playground exhibit at the Southstreet Seaport Museum.

It's that time of year in **first grade** where we are going to take a closer look at Non-Fiction All About writing. This time we'll focus on the features of writing found in these texts and will try them in our own books. Also, their chosen topics will be about something they are interested in, as opposed to something they are experts at, and they will do research to gather facts on that topic... very sophisticated! Interests in animals have been sparked by some recent field trips, so all children will be researching an animal to write about. Here, science merges with writing in our classrooms!

**2nd grade** is working on our New Plants science study (growing brassica plants from seed, and starting new plants from cuttings and bulbs). Some of us are writing All About New York City books for our final non-fiction unit while others are getting ready for the culmination of our City Study - BOX CITY! In math, we're all beginning an early multiplication unit.

The **fourth grade** is thrilled to be finished with ELA & Math testing and we celebrated at an awesome WNBA game at Madison Sq. Garden! We're continuing our fraction work with a fair shares investigation using sub sandwiches as the context. Our curriculum is very integrated now as we launch book clubs with Historical Fiction books about Colonial America & the Revolutionary War. We are busy studying this time period in Social Studies and we are also stepping into the shoes of characters of that time period as we embark on a journey to write historical journals and diaries in Writing Workshop. Lots of trips are of course in the works, especially since the Revolutionary War took place in part right here in Brooklyn!

The state tests are finally over and **class 5-409** did a fantastic job! Now we are busy writing Memoirs and reading Realistic Fiction books in book clubs. In math, we are investigating ratios and proportional reasoning. We are excited for the end of the year festivities, including Culture Day, 5th Grade Spirit Fridays, the Philadelphia trip, the dance and, of course, graduation.

We are relieved that the tests are over and our creativity is flowing on the fourth floor! We are beginning our memoir unit, which is sadly wrapping up our year and time at 261. Thinking about memories and the importance of them, helps us to explore all the good times we had in elementary school. We also can't wait for our trip to Philadelphia!

## Report from PS 261's School Leadership Team

Last year at this time PS 261 learned that as part of President Obama's economic recovery efforts, schools like PS 261 which had not been eligible for the Title I program would now gain eligibility, for one to two years. At that time the School Leadership Team lead the community in an effort to identify our priorities for spending these additional funds. At that time, we selected technology and technology support, arts programming and teacher professional development as three areas in need of investment.

Unfortunately, when city and state budget cuts were announced over the following summer, Principal Mills realized her first priority had to be to cushion the blow from the potentially devastating effects these might have had to our current programs. Thus, the majority of our \$540,000 Title I fund allocation went to pay the salaries of six of our teachers specialists, our intervention teachers, our school's curriculum coaches and our guidance counselor. Some funds were used to pay portions of other teacher salaries, and, due to the rules of the Title I program which demand that Title I funds be used to "improve teacher quality," 1% of the funds was used to expand one teacher's license to qualify her for all the areas PS 261 needed her to teach.

Yet, the efforts of our community were not in vain. After basic expenses were met, Ms. Mills prioritized what remaining funds she had to the areas we indicated needed investment. \$5000 was made in procuring an Arts Connection drama program for the 3, 4 and 5th grade CTT classes this year, in the hopes of expanding it to all of the upper grades next year. Drama was chosen because it is an art form less featured at PS 261 and because of its potential to support the interpretation element of literacy. Ms. Mills used her existing staff development funds in new ways this year, and was able to add a little bit of funds to those efforts. A primary focus this year was on teaching mathematics. Finally, Ms. Mills was able to turn to our fabulous PTA for the needed investment in laptops for the 4th floor classrooms. Our faculty is hopeful that the effort will be expanded to the lower floors next year. Although more investment needs to be made in maintaining our computers and helping teachers use them more effectively, Ms. Mills was at least able to pay two staff members to take on the job of supporting the Smartboard program.

Ms. Mills warned the School Leadership Team that she never can fully predict her budget from year to year and must simply respond to what is allocated to her. With that said, her best guess is that next year will be similar to this year.

# RUNNING THE NUMBERS

It's been quite a year at PS261. Here's are some of the numbers behind the events our community has experienced this year.

**1** inspiring march to salute the life of MLK Jr.

**1** new Assistant Principal

**1** beautiful new PS 261 logo

**1** re-located PTA office

**2** snow days

**2nd** Annual Character Parade

**3** babies born to staff members

**6** new gerbils in the pre-K trailers

**20** new laptops

**132** science fair projects

Over **30** Learning Leaders in the Classroom

**119** performers showed their talents

**120** fifth graders off to Philly

**140** bridges built in 2nd Grade

**335** students in our AfterSchool Program

**547** pounds of pennies harvested

Over **600** pairs of shoes collected

Over **16,000** dollars raised at the Spring Auction

*And we salute our 120 fifth graders who will be moving on. Keep in touch!*

## From Jerry Piper, Parent Coordinator

Hey all you parents! By now, many of you should be receiving occasional messages on your mobile phones regarding PS261 events. This is a new and exciting way for us to continue to improve our communication with the PS261 community. We'll keep the messages brief and to the point. If you are not yet receiving PS261 Text messages on your phone, and you would like to, please be sure to stop into the Main Office and speak with Janet Pappas, who will confirm that we've got your mobile phone number on file.

As you may have noticed, May and June are incredibly busy months at PS261, for students, staff and parents! Please make sure to keep your eyes on the PS261.org Calendar for last-minute updates and changes. Also, please check the big Outer Lobby Wall Calendar for updates. Even though we send calendars home in backpacks, event dates and times can and do change - the PS261.org Calendar is the best place to look.

Don't forget about the End Of Year Celebration, which will take place on Friday, June 25th—details about the event will be posted shortly. Please mark your calendar, and join us as we celebrate all the hard work of our PS261 students and help them kick off their summer with a blast!

Our dedicated PS261 Learning Leaders, who are parent volunteers in and around the classrooms, were honored at a special presentation at Brooklyn Borough Hall, where our Liaison and PTA Parent Joan Leung spoke with great enthusiasm and humor about the Learning Leaders program at PS261. If you are interested in becoming a Learning Leader, we'll be posting information about upcoming training sessions when school resumes in September.

To all the PS261 Community members who have suffered my phone calls, answered my requests, and worked with me to keep our community informed and updated, my sincerest thanks and well wishes for a great summer!

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