



Spuyten Duyvil

P R E S C H O O L

3041 KINGSBRIDGE AVENUE BRONX, NY 10463 TEL. 718 549 1525 FAX 718 884 0667
director.spuytenduyvil@gmail.com

IMPORTANT COVID INFORMATION BELOW- TESTING REQUIREMENTS EXPLAINED

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- Return to school..... Monday, Feb. 22, 2021
- Start of 2nd POPCORN FUNDRAISER Friday, Feb. 26, 2021
- Half Day School for Staff Development -
noon dismissal/ no PM Nursery Tues. March 16**
- Spring Break NO SCHOOL Monday March 29 - Friday April 2
- Spring Arts Vacation Camp Week of March 29

February 18, 2021

Dear Families,

Once again- what a week! About a third of our students are in Science Discovery Camp now- and having the best time. No surprise there- Alda is aky great planner and teacher. I am still deep in school “stuff” but from the warmth and more flexible hours of being home (so much for a week off!). I know she will posting pictures on Bloomz and Dojo but that is still just outside my tech edges; I will send some next month – volcanoes and batteries & bulbs, goop and bugs! We are already planning the Spring Arts Vacation Camp for March 29. The general plan so far is Dance and Movement with our own Gina Powell and incredible movement therapist Mary Cartales, more fine arts activiries (hoping for ceramics too) and working on puppetry and dramatic storytelling. I was calling this week Mixed Arts but then had to explain that kids were not going hand-to-hand. If there are families who want hours past 4 or need early drop-off we can offer that; this week the ask was only for 9-4.

WINTER WONDERLAND

Thank you all for sending snow clothes with your kids. We may grumble at the shoveling and ice blockades, but the continuing snowfall is such a gift for them! Our backyard stayed clean and very accessible. Even with ice mounds it was safe and fun. Kids used those large arm muscles to break loose chunks and then heave them against the fence or slides or to the ground. All fine as long as not thrown at another person and everyone was able to keep within those boundaries- another teachable moment in directing behaviors safely. There are no that



many opportunities for little kids to engage so physically. But my favorite was the soft snow and heavily dressed kids that would fall over like weebles into the drifts. Not nice to laugh at wiggling arms and legs, but



REMINDER – please return school clothes used when your child needs to be changed in school. We could also use hand-me-down snowboots, pants and snowpants – for size 4 and up.

FUNDRAISING CONTINUES-

There have been several questions about how to get **Double Good Popcorn** refills- well, happy news. Another sale round starts next Friday. I will send home paper brochures again plus you can set up your own Pop-up stores. Many families did very well with those. They last for 4 days. Last time I opened that up 4 times during the month. Will probably do that again but, as predicted on the company's website, the first round was the most effective. The school earned about \$8000 last time, then we paid \$17,000 for the new roof! Can we sell \$20,000 as a school? Remember, that donations sent directly to the school are just fine too- even better as we keep 100% of the donation. Take it as a loyal grandparent, no one turns down a person-to-person Zoom request for the very missed little one! Deadline will be Wed. March 24 so the popcorn can arrive as soon as we get back from break. If you order through a pop-up store the order is sent directly to the buyer.

School photos were another great surprise. I was leery of the online ordering after the photo date as the sole source of sales but, apparently, nothing to worry about. We are being sent about \$500 in our share, so thanks everyone. The pictures were beautiful taken outdoors. Irvin Simon Photographers has arranged class photos from each thumbnail. As soon as I get the final ones I will send them along to you.

Amazon Smile is still an easy, on-going source of money. All you have to do is make sure your purchase goes through Amazon Smile Foundation with Spuyten Duyvil Preschool marked as recipient. Tell all those far-flung family and friends too.



SCHOLASTIC BOOK CLUBS – you can put in orders anytime. The books come directly to you if you want, we get the bonus points, and your child gets a real treat at home!

COVID UPDATE –

As everyone should know, every child needs a negative covid test result taken this past week- it needs to be within 7 days of your return to school on Monday. Families were notified of this before the Winter Break testing. We will be asking you to do this again after Spring Break, returning on April 5. The entire staff is doing this as well. Just send me an email, scan or screenshot as you have it. There have been many emails about personal situations and conditions. Doing this several times a year is part of the agreement everyone made as part of joining our “extended pod” last September. This is in addition to the understanding that everyone is staying as close to home with as few people as possible for the duration of the pandemic, or at least this school year. Your cooperation is very appreciated by me, your teachers and fellow school families.

Several teachers have been fully vaccinated; it is my sincere hope that as appointments become more available I will soon be able to report that every person coming into our building has been protected in this way.

LOOKING TO SEPT-

Not wanting to rush our time together, but those weeks are moving fast. Public School Kg applications have been put in. Remember that Charter schools have a separate application process and are still open. Contact the schools directly for that information. Schools we have shared with you:

Bronx Community Charter School – Webster Ave
Amber – on Corlear Ave and new opening in Inwood
Dos Amigos – in Inwood
Zeta – Washington Hgts and South Bronx
WHIN – Washington Hgts



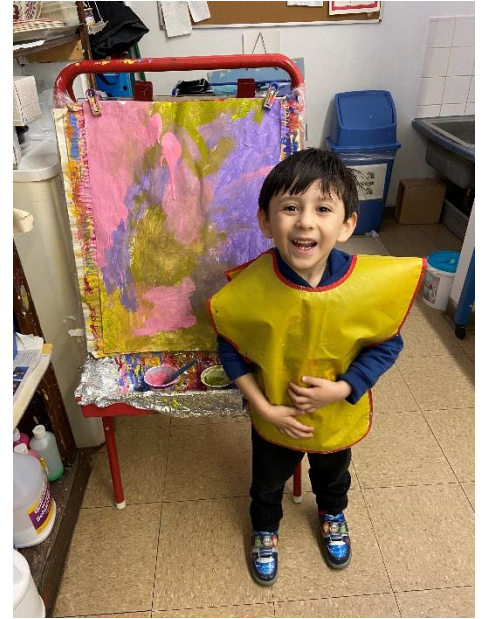
UPK LOTTERY - Beginning Feb. 24, current Nursery families just go to myschools.nyc/en/ and enter your information. Be sure to indicate that your child is a current student. At a later point I will be asked to verify this. That will bring your child onto our acceptance list. Deadline for this is April 7.

If you are planning to NOT return to SDP next fall, please let me know that now so I can be clear on how many opening we will have for outside families. The demands for our seats is high (How nice!)

NURSERY LOTTERY – I am doing our in-house admission lottery for our Nursery on March 1. If you have a child born in 2018 that you expect to enroll in our Nursery, I MUST know that by March 1 or that seat will be given away. Tell your friends and family thinking about joining us that this deadline is firm. Our last virtual tour will be Sat. Feb. 27 at 4pm.

GIFTED & TALENTED –

I can hear the “Oh, no! She’s going to preach to us again!” from some of you veteran families. I will try not to, but I do have very strong feelings on this topic. I am simply copying and pasting the announcement from DOE emailed out to programs today about how they are handling testing this year. They don’t call it testing, but any screening and subsequent determination that certain children are more talented, skilled, knowledgeable, able, adept, or scholastically recognizable and therefore need to be separated from their less prepared, educable, ready, advantaged, English dominant, verbally proficient peers qualifies as a test in my opinion. It is my belief and shared throughout progressive communities that it is the school’s job to be prepared for the child, not the other way around. It is a worn out line that there are many ways that children show their “gifts” . That is the thinking beyond the range of activities we try to offer our kids- gardening, dance, arts, chess, music, literacy, dramatic play, construction -not only is this the only way teachers can get to know your child’s strengths, but how your child gets to know his/her own passions. It is not the format currently in place to assess G&T placement, it is the premise of such classes themselves.



In a previous lifetime I worked in East Harlem with what by conventional standards really was at at risk population in a verifiable high need area during historically low expectation times. My husband had the opportunity to attend conferences on Renzoulli education- instructional approaches for high achieving students. Sound approaches for stimulating activities which I dutifully read and adopted as my own in my first/second grade classroom. To no surprise my kids did incredibly well, were suitably motivated and engaged and productive. That really solidified my feelings on this subject. The short article I am sending this month highlights a NYC program set up on that kind of thinking – gifted education for everyone.

Nevertheless, I totally understand, and accept, that parents all want the best option for their child and everyone has to make those decisions within choices available. So here is the info as currently set up by DOE:

We’re writing with an update on kindergarten Gifted & Talented programs for the 2021-22 school year, and how we plan to work closely with early childhood educators to help children and families through this process.

Earlier this year, the DOE announced an equitable and long-term path for Gifted & Talented programs starting next school year. Our intention was to administer the yearly Gifted & Talented test one last time, with the goal of maintaining stability for families during the pandemic. However, following the Panel for Educational Policy vote not to approve the testing contract, we are now moving forward with a different admissions process for Gifted & Talented programs this school year, while also beginning the community engagement process that will lead to a more permanent plan to reform the system.

Our process this year does not include administering a test to our pre-K students, and instead will involve families and early childhood educators identifying students for accelerated learning.

- Starting Monday, March 8, families will have the opportunity to formally express interest in enrolling their child in a kindergarten Gifted & Talented program.
- If that child attends your DOE early childhood program, an educator at your program will then complete a questionnaire to determine if the child is eligible to enter a randomized lottery for a Gifted & Talented seat. The questionnaire will support educators in reflecting on and highlighting children's strengths.
- Families whose children are not enrolled in a DOE early childhood program will be encouraged to enroll in any open seats, and, if they enroll, their new program will complete the questionnaire based on a short remote interview with the child. (Families who do not enroll in a DOE program will instead complete this remote interview with a member of the DOE's Division of Early Childhood Education team.)
- All eligible families will receive notification in May and enter the randomized lottery, and offers will be made this summer; siblings of students in schools with Gifted & Talented programs will have priority for admission, consistent with previous policies.



Enjoy the fresh snow – see you all Monday.

Sincerely,

Judi

The City's Gifted Education System Needs to Shift, One School at a Time

BY HALLEY POTTER -

JULY 14, 2014

I visited BELL Academy M.S. 294 in Queens on a Wednesday morning in May to see a special breed of education in action. In one room, I watched a group of three students photograph a miniature scene made up of Legos and paper cutouts—then make a slight adjustment to the scene—and photograph again. Several thousand frames later, they will have completed a stop-motion animation video. Across the hall, a student showed off a painting she made to raise awareness about bullying, inspired by the social commentary in the work of artists such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. In the hallway, students walked by with a tablet taking pictures for the school newspaper.

As an education policy researcher at The Century Foundation, I study the academic and social benefits of school integration. I examine research, conduct interviews, and visit schools to identify promising practices that promote diversity and inclusion in schools. I came to BELL in search of a more equitable approach to gifted education, and found a model I think other city schools should examine closely.

New York City’s gifted and talented programs have a long history of creating socioeconomic and racial segregation within schools. But BELL Academy offers a promising alternative: extending enrichment opportunities to all students.

Under the city’s current G&T system, screening happens at a young age—typically preschool—when children’s educational opportunities are largely a product of their socioeconomic status. Students are admitted based on scores from a standardized test, giving a leg up to families that can afford test prep and push for re-testing. And G&T programs typically serve students in self-contained classrooms, separating them from their peers.

According to a recent report from New York Appleseed, about 70 percent of kindergartners citywide in 2011 were black or Latino, while more than 70 percent of kindergartners in gifted and talented programs were white or Asian. Wealthier community school districts consistently have the most G&T placements. Schools with G&T programs may look racially and socioeconomically diverse while classrooms are highly segregated.

BELL Academy takes a different approach.

BELL was founded seven years ago by a team led by Cheryl Quatrano and Melinda Spataro, energetic veteran educators who worked in the city’s G&T programs for a number of years—and fought to make them more diverse. Quatrano and Spataro started BELL Academy based on an approach of “gifted education for all,” using the Schoolwide Enrichment Model developed by University of Connecticut professors Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis.

BELL is not a school for “gifted” students, and there are no screening criteria for admission. But all students at BELL receive tailored instruction designed around the core principles of gifted education: identifying students’ talents, enhancing curricula, differentiating assignments to ability, and providing enrichment opportunities. The film, art, and journalism projects I saw unfolding were part of the school’s “enrichment clusters,” elective classes that give all students the chance to engage in in-depth projects outside of the regular curriculum that fit their interests and learning styles. In other schools, this style of education might be reserved for only the “best and brightest,” but the premise of SEM—backed by years of research—is that it is possible to expand enrichment programs to all students without sacrificing quality of instruction.

BELL teachers also use SEM as a way of modifying the regular classroom instruction to meet the individual needs of a wide range of students. All BELL students start the year by taking a survey of interests and talents that, when combined with academic data, gives teachers a good idea of how to engage and challenge each student. An online platform allows teachers to provide students with enrichment materials on engaging subjects at just the right reading level to challenge them, whether they’re reading six levels above their grade or three levels below.

The SEM approach also means that teachers are constantly looking for opportunities to extend students’ knowledge beyond the classroom. Principal David Abbot explained how a visit from Chancellor Carmen Fariña earlier this year turned into an opportunity for two students interested in animal rights to write persuasive essays on the proposed ban on horse-drawn carriages, which Fariña delivered to Mayor de Blasio. Fariña is no stranger to SEM. Back when she was principal of P.S. 6 in the Upper East Side, she ended the school’s popular G&T track in favor of a schoolwide approach. During her tenure as schools chancellor, she has expressed skepticism about the current G&T model and said she favors “neighborhood schools that provide gifted practices to all students.”

But implementing SEM in today’s education climate is challenging. An effective SEM program requires teacher training, resources for enrichment supplies and opportunities, and small class sizes. And with schools under immense pressure to improve test scores, adopting a school model that takes time away from the core curriculum to nurture talents and promote inquiry can be a hard sell—particularly when all students, not just top scorers, participate in enrichment.

Making any changes to G&T programs is also a politically tricky proposition that requires going up against a vocal group of largely middle-class parents who support the status quo. Despite her support for SEM, Fariña said in a recent interview that she has no plans to change the current system.

In the meantime, the best chance for changing gifted education and expanding SEM in the city is one school at a time. During the seven years that it's been open, BELL has shown consistent academic success and booming popularity. Quatrano and Spataro have gone on to start Veritas Academy, the first high school in the world to use SEM, which opened in Flushing, Queens, last fall. And over in Park Slope, Brooklyn, two schools recently ended their G&T programs over concerns of segregation.

So far, these experiments are succeeding. Maybe more will follow.