

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education



**Great
Expectations**
for the 2014-15
School Year

A Transformative Year

The new school year is here, with cooler days and the excitement of new beginnings. A host of changes are also underway in the New York City school system that promise to make the school year of 2014-15 a transformative year.

There is incredible potential in collaboration,” says Chancellor Fariña. “This is the time for us to work together to create communities where our students can thrive.” Accordingly, the Chancellor and her team have implemented a variety of innovative measures across City schools.

New education policies have increased communi-

cation between different schools, allowing them to share their methods for success.

As a result of a new contract with the United Federation of Teachers, teachers will receive more professional training and spend more time with parents. Increased contact with families is essential; at the start of 2014, the Chancellor called it her personal mission.

To raise student achievement—not just in testing but across multiple areas of performance—the Department has implemented universal pre-k and increased after-school programs for middle school



students.

The extra year of education that pre-k offers, teaching skills like sharing and interacting in a group environment, establishes tools for learning in kindergarten and onward.

For kids in middle school,

after-school programs offer academic, social, and physical activities that have been shown to have a positive effect. One study reported that students in after-school programs handled conflicts better, were more cooperative, and had better social skills.

With the whole of the school community receiving attention, this is sure to be a year of positive change. These contributions will enrich the classroom experience on every level, supporting students to perform to the best of their abilities, creating stronger connections to their future education and beyond.

Q&A WITH CARMEN

How do you feel going into the 2014-15 school year?

I always find this season energizing, and this year I am particularly excited. Families are looking forward to expanded parent conferences and more time to work collaboratively with their children's teachers. Thousands of educators participated in summer learning opportunities and can't wait to get back to school. This will be a transformative year; I can feel energy coming from all corners.

What are some of the exciting new things happening this year?

This year marks the beginning of our unprecedented program for high-quality, full-day pre-k for all. The earlier kids start learning, the better. We are also offering more after-school programs with arts, sports, mentoring, and tutoring to keep middle school students on track for high school. A new group of community



schools will offer an innovative way to support students and their families—education that combines academics with social services, such as vision testing, job training, family counseling, and more. We are doing more across the board. More for our children, their families, and our city, and I know we will all reap the benefits in the future.

What are other ways schools are working to improve student achievement?

With a growing number of opportunities, teachers can get on track for career growth. Effective teachers create the best possible learning experience for our kids, bringing joy back into the classroom. Joyful education allows for both creative teaching methods and rigorous instruction.

We continue to support high-quality Common Core-aligned curricula. In elementary school, teachers will focus on reading and vocabulary to prepare students for the upper grades. In middle schools, teachers will emphasize algebra and ad-

vanced programs to prepare students for more challenging high school courses. In high school, our kids will focus on college and career readiness. And all schools are encouraged and supported to develop innovative models to meet the needs of all our learners, from students with special needs to English Language Learners.

How can parents help their children have a productive school year?

Parents can make a big difference for their child (and the rest of the family) by getting involved at their child's school and maintaining a positive attitude. Our new Family Night is a great way to get started (see *Dates to Remember* at the end of this newsletter). Being available and creating open lines of communication with your child and their teachers will help your child understand that school and family life are linked and that you care about their learning experience. This is a terrific message to give your kids at the start of a new school year.



Have a question for the Chancellor? Send it to AskCarmen@schools.nyc.gov.

HELP IMPROVE



PSP Survey

Please complete this brief, confidential survey to provide feedback about Public School Press:

<https://survey.vovici.com/se.ashx?s=705E3ED072C52240>

The survey will be available until September 27th and should take you no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Participation is optional, but we'd love to hear from you.



Miss Rumphius

(Viking, 1982), Written and illustrated by Barbara Cooney

Dear Parents,

I am excited to share our Book of the Month, *Miss Rumphius*, written and illustrated by Barbara Cooney. Our heroine, Alice, longs to visit faraway places and live by the sea when she grows up, just like her grandfather. But her grandfather tells her about one more thing she must do. "You must do something to make the world more beautiful," he tells her.

Alice grows up to be the adult, Miss Rumphius. Her life is filled with exciting adventures, but as she grows older, none of it feels like enough to her. She recalls the advice her grandfather gave her to "do something to make the world more beautiful." But even as an old woman, she can't figure out what to do. One spring day, she is struck by the beauty of her fresh blooming flowers, especially the lupines. Miss Rumphius decides to share that joy with others by scattering lupine seeds everywhere she goes. She transforms the rocky coastline around her home, covering the

hillsides with blue and purple and rose-colored flowers for everyone to enjoy.

Our job in educating your children has always been about planting seeds. And you, as your child's first teacher, also have a powerful opportunity to help your child make the world a more beautiful place. As we begin a new school year, I imagine all the seeds we will plant, and all the paths that will become fertile ground as a result of your time, attention and devotion.

I'd like to pause to celebrate all the ways you help your children see potential in themselves. With our encouragement, they make a connection to their future, sow their own seeds in the world and watch them blossom into beautiful, important things.

Here's to the 2014-15 school year. Together let us strive to make the world a more beautiful place for our children.

Best,
Carmen



The DOE Speaks Your Language

We provide free interpretation and translation services in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. If you speak one of these languages and need help, ask your school's principal or parent coordinator. In addition, there is a language access coordinator (LAC) in every school who can help provide assistance.

For general information in your language, visit schools.nyc.gov.

Back-to-School Tips for Limited-English-Proficient Parents:

- ▶ Fill out the Emergency Blue Card (made available to you at the start of the school year) and indicate your preferred language of communication.
- ▶ If no interpreter is available when you go to your child's school, request an "over-the-phone" interpreter from your principal, parent coordinator, or language access coordinator. This service is available via the DOE's Translation and Interpretation Unit, in over 200 languages.
- ▶ Many school documents are available in translation. Your school can make a request to the Translation and Interpretation Unit to translate documents at any time during the year.

Get informed about all of the latest school news, events and programs.

Visit schools.nyc.gov/subscribe to sign up to

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

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GUIDANCE COUNSELOR PROFILE

Debora Rocha is a guidance counselor at P.S. 7, an elementary school in Brooklyn. Born in Chile, as a teenager Ms. Rocha came to the U.S. and settled in Texas with her family. One year later, they moved to New York, where she has lived ever since. At P.S. 7, Ms. Rocha is the only guidance counselor for approximately 1100 students. While she doesn't deny the challenge of serving so many, she considers her work a privilege.

What is special about the role of a guidance counselor?

School counselors are one of the best sources of support for students and their families. We build a climate of collaboration between school and home. We make sure that students and families receive the emotional support they need.

Since my students are very young, as a counselor I can influence their self-esteem and creativity, and help them develop a love of learning. On the other hand, when they confront difficult issues, I can help them develop resilience so they can see challenges and setbacks as opportunities to grow and improve.

What kinds of issues do you help parents deal with?

Families deal with a wide range of concerns: mental health issues, temporary housing, substance abuse and many other challenging situations. It is my role to build a strong and positive relationship between school, home and community resources so parents can have access to these resources and get the assistance they need as soon as possible.

What are some ways a parent can help their child build social skills?

In order for students to develop their cognitive skills such as learning, transferring and integrating knowledge, they must first develop their non-cognitive skills. For social and academic success, they need to develop persistence, self-control, curiosity and self-confidence among others. (Psychologists call these skills personality traits, the rest of us think of them as social and emotional skills.)

Parents can support children by spending time reading, playing or participating in other activities. Providing encouragement in place of criticism improves the resilience and motivation that children need in difficult situations. After-school adult supervision of kids' activities is also a very important component in developing social skills. Children of proactive parents are more likely to succeed, in school and in life.

What are the best methods of intervention if my child encounters difficulties with class assignments or at school?

School difficulties can range from minor to severe and can show up as poor academic performance, lack of motivation or interest in schoolwork or poor relationships with peers or adults.

One of the best tools is a good relationship with your child's guidance counselor. Counselors can set-up Daily Progress Report forms for teachers to complete, providing parents with detailed information about school. Parents

can also meet weekly with the counselor to discuss feedback from teachers and to review progress and expectations.

As a counselor, I can recommend accommodations, adjustment or supplementation to the child's academic program. Social and emotional support are available through at-risk school counseling and if extra support is needed, I can reach out to the community for mental health services.

My hope for my students is that they feel supported, appreciated and encouraged to reach their goals in life. With that support, students can become effective learners and make a positive contribution to their community and society at large.

"School counselors are one of the best sources of support for students and their families."



FROM OUR READERS:

“ Dear Chancellor Fariña,

Thank you for the positive messages that you are sending about education in the city, especially about middle schools, the role of testing, and arts education. As a future teacher, I have been inspired by your leadership and your commitment to supporting educators

in their daily work. Thank you for your work and your example for aspiring leaders in education. ”

Matthew J. Kuna, B.S.Ed.
Secondary Education - Spanish/ESL Kutztown
University of Pennsylvania, Class of 2016

PARENT ACADEMY CORNER

Just the words “back to school” generate excitement – and anxiety. It’s easy to feel overwhelmed. To help make re-entry as smooth as possible we’ve provided some resources and tips below.

Parent Coordinators

Your key point of contact within the school community is the parent coordinator. Parent coordinators are charged with identifying issues of concern to families and working with school and community leaders to ensure that these issues are addressed in a timely manner. Call your school or use the school search at schools.nyc.gov/SchoolSearch to find the name and contact information of your parent coordinator.

School Meals

Our schools provide healthy, nutritious meals every day. All students are able to receive free breakfast in school. Many students are also eligible to receive lunch at no cost, which is based on household income. To find out if your child qualifies, complete the School Meals Application Form at ApplyForLunch.com. This form is also sent home at the beginning of the school year. Completing it helps secure State funding for your child’s school.

Transportation

General education students in grades K - 2, who live a half-mile or more from their school, and general education students in grades 3 - 6, who live a mile or more away, are eligible to receive either yellow bus service or a full-fare MetroCard. General



education students in grades 7 -12, who live a mile and a half or more from their school, are eligible to receive a full fare MetroCard. If your child has an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) mandating yellow bus transportation, you should receive a transportation information letter in early September from the Office of Pupil Transportation.

To alter your child’s transportation arrangements, contact your school’s transportation coordinator. If your child is eligible for any of these programs but you do not receive a notice please call the Office of Pupil Transportation at 718-392-8855. For the DOE’s fully detailed transportation eligibility guidelines, please click here: schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Transportation/ServicesandEligibility.

For more information, visit: schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/BacktoSchool.

PARENT TO PARENT

Dear Parent:

Welcome to the new school year!

This past summer the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, in collaboration with the White House, held a symposium on Family Engagement at the White House. I was honored to be invited and to attend on behalf of the NYC Department of Education (DOE). This was the first symposium of its kind, where a cross-section of researchers, non-profit representatives, and government employees came together to discuss all aspects of parent engagement in education, and reinforce the topic as something that should be a national priority.

The White House Symposium on Transformative Family Engagement brought together a small, distinguished group of administration officials, along with philanthropic and research experts and others from the field, for a solutions-oriented discussion on how to achieve educational equity for children — particularly those from low-income families — through transformative family engagement.

Family engagement, especially during the early years, has been proven to have a profound impact on students' success in school and in life; however, it is not always seen as an essential component in education reform efforts. More needs to be done to ensure that parents and families are part of the decision making process when it comes to their children's education. This requires a well-rounded approach that prioritizes wellness as a foundation of engagement and includes communities as a critical component of meeting parents' and students' needs in a way that is welcoming and understanding. This means parents are provided with practical tools and services, as well as the opportunity to participate in activities in their neighborhoods that promote social, emotional, and academic growth.

Chancellor Fariña has made family engagement a top priority, and the DOE was praised at the symposium for its current work in prioritizing family engage-

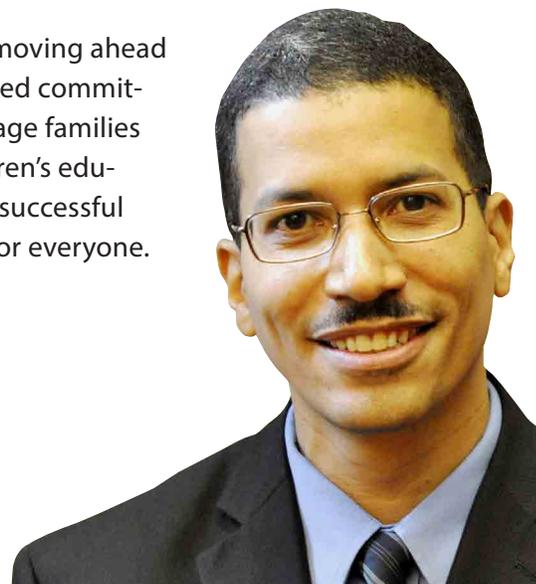
ment as a key component of education. Initiatives such as Pre-k for All are being watched from around the country. Due to its scope and diversity, New York City is seen as a model for new programs, and people were impressed with the way that new projects can take hold — even in such a big city. Participants were supportive and eager to hear about our holistic focus on parent wellness and communities. All participants were encouraged to keep the conversation going and continue to share ideas for moving forward. We plan to share what we know about parent engagement with other education departments across the U.S., and to learn from their practices what is working for them.

In addition, discussions on family engagement lead to the relevant topic of language access initiatives, something we are actively promoting at the DOE. We want you to be an active participant in your child's education regardless of how well you speak English. Did you know that the DOE has a Translation and Interpretation Unit? This division helps NYC public schools and DOE offices communicate with families that don't speak English. Remember, you have THE RIGHT to free translation and interpretation services. Do not think of this service as a "special request." You are entitled to access to relevant school information in your own language. I encourage you to take advantage (for more information, see 'The DOE Speaks Your Language' within this newsletter).

Here's to moving ahead with a renewed commitment to engage families in their children's education and a successful school year for everyone.

Sincerely,

Jesse Mojica





One-Stop Shop for

Back to School NYC

Visit the DOE's webpage—**One-Stop Shop for Back to School NYC**— for all the information you need for the start of school, including confirming your child's school-day start and end times.

For transportation help, visit the webpage of the **Office of Pupil Transportation**.



DATES TO REMEMBER

Sept. 4

First Day of School

Sept. 5

Early Dismissal for Non-District 75 kindergarten students and partial time for pre-k

Sept. 8

First Full Day for Non-District 75 kindergarten students and pre-k public school students

Sept. 16

Elementary School – Family Night

Sept. 17

High School - Family Night

Sept. 18

Middle School - Family Night

Sept. 25 & 26

Rosh Hashanah (Schools Closed)

YOU'RE INVITED...

The annual Dad's Take Your Child to School Day is right around the corner —Sept. 16!

All fathers and adult male caregivers are invited to kick off the school year by attending their school sponsored event and their school's Open School Night.

To find out if your school is participating, contact your school's parent coordinator. For information about the event, visit the Dad's Take Your Child to School website or e-mail inforequest@dadstakeyourchildtoschoolday.com.

This event is cosponsored by the Mayor's Young Men's Initiative, Department of Youth and Community Engagement (DYCD), the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the NYC Department of Education.