

DECEMBER 2015

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education

PHOTOS BY: MAYORAL PHOTOGRAPHY OFFICE



Making the Arts Matter

Ever since she was appointed to lead New York City's public schools two years ago, Chancellor Carmen Fariña has championed using the arts as a means to improve the

overall level of instruction in our schools. The Chancellor has called on the City's vast cultural resources and institutions to help incorporate rigorous arts instruction into City schools, and thanks to

her efforts, many more City students now have access and exposure to arts programming than they did a decade ago. Between initiatives such as Teen Thursdays, which

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Key investments and partnerships have increased the total number of students receiving arts instruction in City public schools; City schools now have the highest number of licensed arts education teachers ever recorded in almost a decade.

provides middle school students with afterschool opportunities to visit local museums free of charge, and productive partnerships that enable high school students to see critically-acclaimed Broadway productions like [Hamilton](#) at minimal cost, the Chancellor and the DOE have made key strides in expanding the amount of arts instruction that our students receive in their schools.

This month, the DOE released its 2014-15 [Annual Arts in Schools Report](#), a comprehensive snapshot of the DOE's arts education efforts across all City schools. Among the highlights in this year's report include details regarding the Middle and High School Arts Matter initiative, a staffing and funding plan that has helped 113 middle and high schools across the City to hire new full-time arts teachers, affecting 22,000 students. This initiative, which partners nearby arts-needy schools with one another to share one or two full-time arts teachers along with material and



resource supports, is part of the City's \$23 million in additional funding for arts education in schools throughout the five boroughs. Thanks to the Arts Matter initiative, the number of licensed arts education teachers across all City schools (Pre-K – 12) increased to 2,568 during the 2014-15 school year, the highest total number of arts teachers the DOE has had in nine years. Additionally, 74 of the 113 Arts Matters schools did not have arts teachers prior to the 2014-15 school year, marking this initiative a true expansion of arts opportunities across City schools.

“Rigorous arts instruction is an integral part of a well-

rounded education, and it makes a real difference that we have the most arts teachers in our schools in a decade,” said Chancellor Fariña when the *Annual Arts in Schools Report* was released. “It is especially critical that we are getting the arts into more middle schools – this is a time when students are developing their academic and creative passions, and they should have exposure to the joy of arts. A great education has to prepare students for life and provide them with real-world, critical-thinking skills – and this just cannot be done without the arts.”

In addition to the news in this year's [Annual Arts in Schools](#)



and I am so happy that 10 new schools will be able to benefit from this opportunity," said Ernest Pysher, the supervisor of the SING program at Midwood H.S. "I look forward to working with educators and students at

these schools as they implement their own unique SING programs."

Through these initiatives, the DOE is committed to ensuring



that every student in the City, regardless of their zip code, has the opportunity to learn about the arts in meaningful ways. High-quality arts instruction teaches students important skills that help provide context to what they are learning in other subjects, and going forward, the DOE will continue to find ways of expanding arts instruction.

[Report](#), earlier this month, the [DOE announced](#) that 10 additional high schools across the City will be able to organize and host SING programs for their students. SING programs are school-based musical productions that students write, cast, rehearse, and perform for a chance to win bragging rights on behalf of their grade level (i.e. freshmen, sophomore, etc). SING, which began back in 1947 at Midwood High School in Brooklyn, was previously only held at 10

high schools. However, thanks to a partnership between the Fund for Public Schools and singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, 20 schools will now receive theatre production assistance, including lighting, set materials, costumes, props, and scriptwriting support for their SING events.

"SING has provided unparalleled arts enrichment for my students at Midwood,

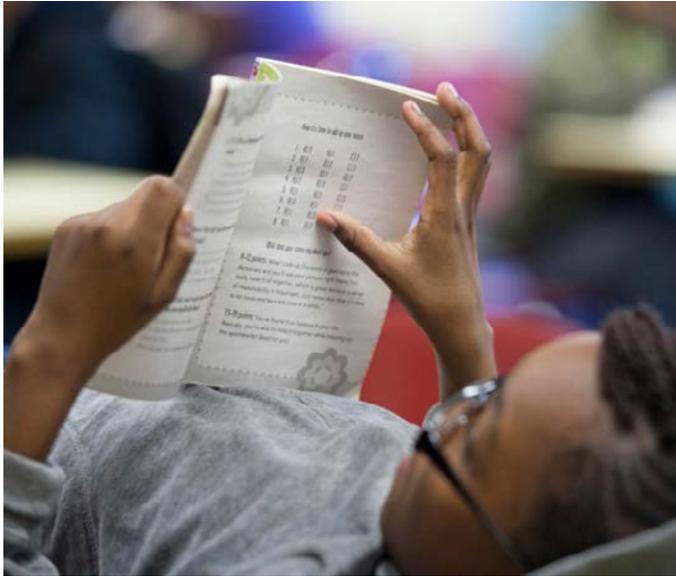
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PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS



Give Students the Gift of Literacy with NYC Reads 365



As all the excitement and buzz surrounding the holiday season reaches its peak, it is no secret that many students begin to lose focus on their studies in anticipation of gifts, family traditions, travel, and other holiday-related activities. However, learning opportunities should not be limited by our schools calendar, and with this year's Winter Recess fast approaching

(December 24, 2015 – January 3, 2016), now is the perfect time for families to help children maintain positive study habits by incorporating reading into their daily routines.

Thanks to [NYC Reads 365](#), City families now have easy access to reading lists that they can use to help provide their children with age-appropriate books to read this holiday season. This Winter Recess, families should give their students the gift of joyful reading by encouraging them to read books such as *A Long Way Away* by Frank Viva (Kindergarten), *Blizzard* by John Rocco (Grade 2), Neil Gaiman's *Fortunately, the Milk* (Grade 4), Kristin Levine's *The Lions of Little Rock* (Grade 7-8) and Jandy Nelson's *I'll Give You the Sun* (Grade 9-10).

For more book ideas, visit the [NYC Reads 365](#) website or stop by a City public library ([New York](#), [Brooklyn](#), or [Queens](#) Library Systems) near you.

College Awareness Day

We're excited to celebrate College Awareness Day on Wednesday, January 27. This day aims to strengthen the college-preparedness culture in all schools, and help students and families understand that their dream of college is attainable. On this day, please engage in conversations and activities with your child to inspire and promote college aspirations. Make college an expectation and connect your child's academic course work and interests in and out of class to success in college. Be part of your child's school's activities on College Awareness Day, and work with your child's teachers and counselors to encourage your child to begin his/her journey towards college.

Here are some resources you may find helpful:

- <http://www.mynextmove.org/>
- http://www.nacacnet.org/research/publicationsresources/marketplace/documents/sbs_all.pdf

Parent to Parent with Yolanda Torres

Executive Superintendent of the Division of Family and Community Engagement

Dear Parents:

As the end of the year approaches, it is natural to celebrate and reflect upon the past 12 months. At the Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE), we have reorganized our team and come together with a renewed energy and determination to improve the ways we engage families in schools across the City.



Looking back on our activities over this past fall, we have a lot to celebrate.

On the first day of classes, we released a reimagined version of [Achieve NYC](#) to provide you with a “one stop-shop” guide to your children’s education. Whenever you have concrete questions about grade-level expectations, deadlines, staff member responsibilities, and much more, please continue to consult [Achieve NYC](#).

Additionally, thanks to our parent conferences, we connected even more parents directly to the Chancellor, enabling many of you to engage more deeply with the important work going on in our schools. We also spent more time listening to grandparents, as they are often the hidden superpower behind our students’ overall success. Moreover, this year we offered many trainings for parent leaders, including new monthly professional development opportunities for parent coordinators to ensure they have the tools they need to support our families. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have worked closely with school communities to provide welcoming environments. We hope the warmer environment will inspire you to become active participants in your children’s education.

So far, the feedback from the parent community has been positive. Please know that we value your input, even when you hold our feet to the fire. If you have suggestions, we welcome your input at FACE@schools.nyc.gov.

With a productive first semester behind us, let us use the holidays as a time to cherish family and friends, rest, and count our blessings. The festivities of the season offer us a last chance before the old year turns new to come together at our kitchen tables, share meals and rich conversations, rejuvenate our spirits, and of course, celebrate long-held traditions.

Happy holidays, and let’s keep the conversation going.

Warmly,

Yolanda Torres

Admissions Pilot Seeks to Create Diverse Elementary Schools

As part of a new pilot program, Chancellor Carmen Fariña announced changes last month to the admissions policies of seven elementary schools to promote diversity. The pilot would give priority to students who qualify for free and reduced lunch (FRL), English Language Learners (ELLs), or students on public assistance. This new admissions policy will provide these groups of students with a certain percentage of seats at the selected schools.

The admissions pilot program is the result of proposals made to the DOE by principals in 2014. In addition to this program, the DOE is partnering with the City Council and other

organizations to implement an array of diversity initiatives in City schools.

"Students learn from the diverse experiences and cultures of their fellow students, and it's important that our schools match the diversity of our City," said Chancellor Fariña. "I'm pleased that by working with principals, superintendents and community members, we were able to create admissions policies that promote diversity and respect the needs of the community. I'm hopeful that these changes will help serve as a model for schools across the City."

Participating schools include

Neighborhood School, Earth School, and Castle Bridge School in Manhattan; Academy of Arts and Letters, P.S. 146 Brooklyn New School, The Children's School, and Brooklyn Arts and Science Elementary School in Brooklyn. To ensure the admissions pilot is implemented smoothly, the DOE is working closely with participating principals to determine how the program can best work in each of their schools. Changes will take effect during the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten admissions cycles.

To learn more about these schools, click [here](#) or call 718-935-2009.

Kindergarten Application Period Now Open



All New York City families with a child turning five in 2016 (born in 2011) may now apply to kindergarten for the 2016-17 school year. The application period is open through January 15, 2016, and your application may be updated until the deadline. The process is not first-come, first-served; all applications received by the January 15 deadline will be uniformly processed. Every child is guaranteed a kindergarten placement, but families must submit an application in order to receive an offer. For more information on the kindergarten application process, click [here](#).



Your Free Pass to NYC for the Holidays and Beyond

Last January, Mayor Bill de Blasio launched [IDNYC](#), a municipal identification card program that provides all City residents age 14 and older with the opportunity to apply for a secure, government-issued ID card that they can use to gain access to City services, buildings, and schools, regardless of their immigration status. Since January 2015, over 670,000 IDs have been issued to City residents free of charge, and now, thanks to an extension announced by the Mayor this month, even more residents will have the opportunity to obtain the IDNYC card free of charge through December 31, 2016.

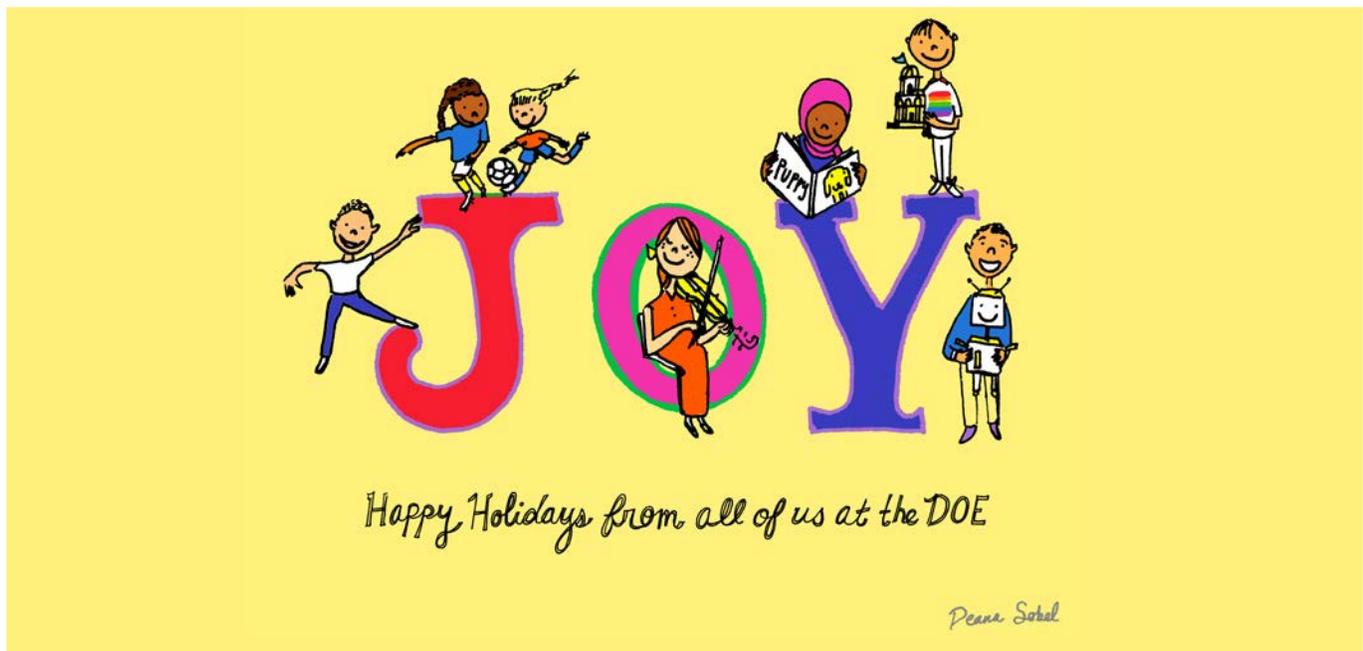
In addition to providing residents with a broadly accepted official form of ID, IDNYC cards also

grant a variety of benefits to card holders, including free one-year membership packages at 40 of New York's leading cultural institutions, including museums, botanical gardens, zoos, performing arts centers, and concert halls in all five boroughs, as well as discounts at various businesses, sporting events, theme parks, movie theaters, and other City attractions.



This holiday season, apply for your IDNYC card by booking

an appointment on the City's [IDNYC website](#) or by calling 311. Likewise, current IDNYC cardholders should review their benefits and visit the many free attractions and discounted events taking place throughout the City this holiday season; for more information, visit [IDNYC's Benefits webpage](#).



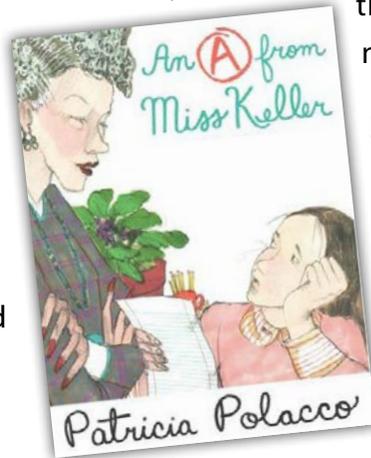


An A from Miss Keller

*Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco
(G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2015)*

An A from Miss Keller is a moving tribute to the real-life teacher who inspired the author to become a writer. The young Patricia is flattered to be chosen for Miss Keller's writing class, but petrified of her stern, critical teacher. Not only is "Killer Keller" impossible to please, she has never given a student an A. Although Patricia works hard on her assignments, her writing fails to impress her demanding teacher. Then, an encouraging, older neighbor and an unexpected loss help Patricia make an emotional connection through her writing.

In the book, we see Patricia in her bedroom, crafting what she considers some of her best writing, and eager to read her masterpiece out loud in class. But the next day, Miss Keller cannot abide her student's imprecise use of language. Determined to meet her teacher's high standards, Patricia writes "with oodles of heart and feeling" on her next paper, only to earn a C. "The reader needs to feel what you feel...but not in an ordinary way," Miss Keller says. "Be daring, unexpected, surprising... original!"



Patricia seeks solace from her neighbor, Pop, a pastry chef whose sons had been in Miss Keller's class. Pop not only listens and offers support, he shares a secret about Miss Keller that helps Patricia see the good in her teachers' methods. Patricia comes to realize that Miss Keller is hard on her because she believes she has talent.

Already upset as she works to select a topic for the term essay in Miss Keller's class, Patricia learns that Pop has died of a sudden heart attack. That night, overtaken with emotion and no longer concerned with what her teacher thinks, Patricia sits down and writes a moving tribute to her neighbor.

Miss Keller deems the paper a "crowning example of a personal narrative." In red across the top of the cover sheet, Miss Keller writes, "You've given your words wings. I am departing from my custom... here is your A."

This book is not only a love letter to a beloved teacher, it speaks to the power of concerned neighbors to change young people's lives and help them realize their potential. As parents, neighbors and educators alike, we must teach our children to accept the challenges presented to them, believe in themselves, and not back down under pressure—and celebrate them as they accomplish milestones along the road to mastery. Like Miss Keller, let us all commit to helping all of our children find their voice and give their words wings.

Do You Know an Exceptional Teacher?

There is still time to nominate hardworking teachers for 2016 Big Apple Awards! Students, families, educators, and community members may nominate teachers on the [Big Apple Awards website](#) between now and January 18, 2016, in recognition for their work, passion, and dedication to their students and their schools. Nominees must be current, full-time City public school teachers who have great teaching practices, improved their students' learning, and worked to make their schools better for students and their families. Teachers who work with students in grades 2, 7, and 10, as well as students with special needs and English Language Learners will be especially considered. Please visit our Big Apple Awards [website](#) to learn more and to submit your nominations.

Dates to Remember

**December 24 –
January 3**

Winter Recess – Schools closed

January 4

Schools reopen

January 15

Last day to apply for kindergarten
for 2016-17 school year

January 18

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Schools closed
Last day to nominate teachers for
Big Apple Awards



Great teachers change lives

The *Big Apple Awards* celebrate exceptional New York City teachers who inspire students, model great teaching, and enrich their school community.

Nominate a teacher today at
schools.nyc.gov/BigAppleAwards

 /nycschools  /nycschools



Parent Leader Corner

Parent Association (PA)/Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA)

Are you looking for additional resources to help your PA/PTA function at its best?

PTAlink is an independent website that supports parent organizations across City public schools. The website, www.ptalink.org is designed to facilitate the growth and success of parent organizations while building collaborative communities across public schools. To achieve this, PTAlink provides parent leaders with information, tools, support, and the opportunity to share details about their experiences and best practices.

PTAlink is currently developing their Partner Program through which experienced PTA officers will be matched with those seeking assistance about general or specific issues. Ultimately, PTAlink seeks to pair officers from different PTAs to allow them to benefit from each other's knowledge, efforts, and experience, while fostering a sense of community between participating public school parents.

Presidents' Council Presidents

What are the most pressing needs from your PA/PTAs?

The Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) is creating better support for PAs and PTAs in New York City. Please complete this survey and help us determine your most pressing needs by listing the most common questions, issues, or concerns you receive from PAs and PTAs in your district. [Click here to access the survey.](#) We will use the results of this survey as the basis of our work

going forward. Thank you very much for your time and support.

Community/Citywide Education Councils (CCECs)

Have you attended a training session yet? FACE provides these important opportunities in order to help you gain knowledge designed not only to help you and your councils, but to give you a chance to meet and network with other Community or Citywide Education Council members from different parts of the city.

On November 23, FACE held its fifth monthly CCEC training, "Financial Training: Member Reimbursements and Council Budgets," and following the session, many of attendees reported that they learned valuable information that they were not aware of before. For example, did you know:

- When approving a budget, you do not need a resolution - a motion is sufficient. After the motion is passed, send an email to the Senior Grants Officer (SGO) that includes the wording of the motion and the vote count, as well as an attached budget plan.
- Student members are entitled to reimbursement on the same basis as other council members since the law does not distinguish between voting and non-voting members.

If you are a member of a CCEC and would like a copy of the presentation given on November 23, please email CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov.

The next training is on December 21 at the Tweed Courthouse. "Mapping Our Future:

Parent Leader Corner (continued)

District Planning, Zoning and Engagement” is a follow-up presentation by the District Planning team. See the [Council Training Schedule](#) for upcoming sessions.

CCEC Website Survey

Please don't forget to take the [CCEC Website Survey](#) to let us know about your council's web presence or needs for creating a website.

CCEC Resources

Are you looking for CCEC meeting templates, the CCEC Orientation Guide or translated meeting notices? Please visit the [2015 CCEC Resource Materials](#) page to find everything you need.

CCEC Meetings

To learn when your district's Community or Citywide Education Council meets, call (212) 374-4118 or email CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov.

Ideas Needed

Are you a member of a PA/PTA, SLT, or CCEC who has a content idea for future Parent Leader Corner segments? We'd like to hear from you. Please send an email to CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov detailing your content idea.

GET INVOLVED!

Want to get involved in your school community as a parent leader? Have suggestions for Parent Leader Corner? Contact FACE at (212) 374-4118 or CCECinfo@schools.nyc.gov.

Chancellor Names 15 Model Dual Language Programs

This month, Chancellor Carmen Fariña announced that 15 schools with existing dual language programs will be designated as Model Dual Language Programs for the 2015-16 school year. Each school, all selected for their commitment to providing exemplary and rigorous dual language programming to their students, will receive \$10,000 towards the provision of professional development and the purchase of multilingual instructional materials. All 15 schools will host visitors from other schools in order to share details about their best practices and experiences.

The 15 Model Dual Language Programs are elementary, middle, and high schools from all five boroughs, and include Chinese, French, Russian, Hebrew, and Spanish-speaking students. For a list of these programs, please [visit our website](#).