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PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education

Teaming Up to Turn Around Schools

300
AmeriCorps Members to Help Improve Communty Schools Work

Hundreds of determined and energetic young public servants will soon join the movement to turn around the City's historically struggling schools.

Over the next two years, 300 AmeriCorps members will devote their time, energy, and expertise to New York City's 128 new Community Schools, including all 94 Renewal Schools. The support from AmeriCorps, a major federal community-service program, will be funded through a $5.8 million federal grant.

It's the latest reinforcement to the City's Renewal School Program, a strategic plan to assist schools that need the most help. As part of the program, each Renewal School will be transformed into a Community School, with academic, social, and emotional services; expanded learning; after-school programs; and extra, targeted training for teachers. Just last month, Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña announced the appointment of Amiee Horowitz as Executive Superintendent for the School Renewal Program.

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AmeriCorps members will strengthen the Renewal School Program by partnering with school administrators to reduce student absences, strengthen parent involvement, and increase the number of students on track to graduate. By working with Community School directors, AmeriCorps members will coordinate mentoring programs for students and work directly with parents to increase their involvement at school.

"There is challenging work ahead of us, but with such an ambitious and passionate AmeriCorps team on the ground, in our schools, I'm confident in what we will accomplish together," said Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña. "These members will provide schools with critical support in attendance, parent engagement, and mentorship."

AmeriCorps staff will also support the Department of Education's central Office of Community Schools, and other members will work on creating more attractive and appealing Community School facilities by leading efforts like painting murals.

Recruitment for these new AmeriCorps positions will begin this summer so that all the members can be ready to join schools for the start of the 2015-16 school year.

Get Ready for Kindergarten

In May, families with children in pre-K can attend events to learn how to help their child get ready for kindergarten. Attend an event to learn about summer programs, getting your child prepared for the next grade, and becoming involved in your child's elementary school. Learn more here.

Golden Apple Awards

The NYC Department of Sanitation is hosting the annual Golden Apple Awards, which rewards public schools for creating unique and useful recycling, waste prevention, and cleanup and beautification projects. Schools in grades K-12 can apply for three types of contests, and can win cash prizes.

Parents or students should speak to a teacher or administrator at their school if they are interested in entering the Golden Apple Awards contest. Visit nyc.gov/goldenapple to learn more,

Contest deadline:
12:00PM, Friday, May 1

Dates to Remember

Wednesday, May 6
Middle School Parent–Teacher Conference

Thursday, May 7
High School Parent–Teacher Conference

Wednesday, May 13
Elementary School Parent–Teacher Conference

Monday, May 25
Memorial Day (schools closed)

CARMEN Q&A:

The last parent-teacher conference is approaching in May. What should I expect at this meeting?

The brand-new May conferences are right around the corner, and are an excellent way to check in with your child's teacher before the end of the school year. Teachers may have different ideas on how to best use your time together, but it may include reviewing your child's academic portfolio – including grades, classwork, and tests – discussing ways to learn over the summer, or even introducing you to next year's teachers and curriculum.

Conferences will be held on May 6 for middle school families, May 7 for high school families, and May 13 for elementary school families. You can view the calendar here.

One more reason to go: Teacher Appreciation Week is May 4-8!

How do you plan to celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week? How should I thank my child's teacher?

From May 4 to 8, I will be joining you in celebrating our 75,000 teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week. We are planning a variety of ways to acknowledge the hard work our teachers do every day—I encourage you to follow along on social media, checking Twitter and Facebook.

Show your appreciation by giving a shout-out to your child's teacher on Twitter with the hashtag #thankateacher. If you're looking for a more traditional celebration, keep it simple: a handwritten note can go a long way. From my many years teaching, I can say that the feeling of receiving a message of thanks never gets old.

What other events are going on this month?

This past Saturday, I celebrated the kickoff event for NYC GREAT! – Girls Reaching Every Apex Together. This program in the Bronx builds young women's self-esteem and confidence through mentorships, workshops, and conferences. The program lasts from freshman to senior year of high school, and offers young women opportunities for learning, college and career exploration, and personal growth. Incredible!

Earlier this month, we held a three-day training institute for hundreds of New York City teachers and administrators in science, technology, engineering, and math instruction, or STEM. STEM has been a priority of mine because it will help prepare our students for 21st-century careers.

You might not have known, but today is World Book Day. I cannot stress enough the importance of reading, and how much it will benefit your child's learning in the long run. If you have a younger child, read together! Set aside time for older children to read, and limit your child's time in front of the TV or computer to allow for more reading. Here's a great resource for book ideas: worldbookday.com/ideas/parents.

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

PRE-K FOR ALL

Do you have a child who turns 4 this year?
Then your child is eligible to attend free, high-quality pre-K this September. **The application deadline is Friday, April 24**. The DOE offers both district school and NYC Early Education Center pre-K programs. New this year, families can apply to all programs using a single application.

Find out more about Pre-K for All at nyc.gov/prek.

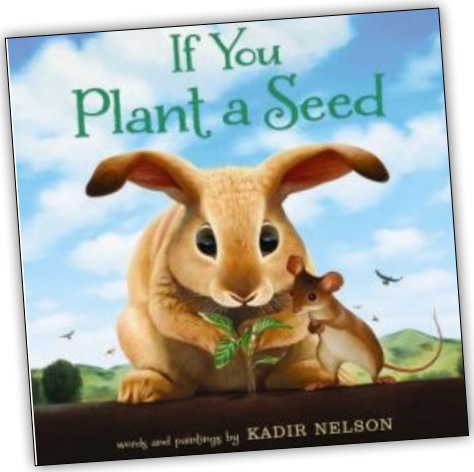
Children born in 2011 are eligible to apply for free, full-day, high-quality pre-K.
▸ Call 311 ▸ Text "prek" to 877-877 ▸ /nycschools

Book of the Month

If You Plant a Seed
(Balzar + Bray, 2015)

Written and illustrated by Kadir Nelson

In this month's book, **If You Plant a Seed**, a rabbit and a mouse plant tomato, carrot, and cabbage seeds, nurture them into healthy plants, and enjoy their harvest. The author treats the seeds as opportunities, showing us that we have a choice to sow seeds of selfishness—or kindness. When the rabbit and mouse refuse to share their food with a group of birds, a struggle ensues and almost everything is destroyed. But when the mouse offers up a single surviving tomato, the birds repay the kindness by spreading seeds all over the land. Soon, the area is bursting with enough food and flowers for all to enjoy.



This beautifully illustrated picture book shows students the power of choice and what can follow, for the good or the bad. With the last parent-teacher conference of the school year coming up in May, now is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the seeds that you and your child planted at the beginning of the school year, and how they have grown. These seeds may be relationships with classmates and teachers, academic work, participation in a club or activity, or efforts to become more mature and responsible.

Share your thoughts and concerns about your child's "seeds" with your child's teacher. Ask: how might my child need redirection? What kinds of ingredients my child need to ensure that, like plants, he or she will grow stronger over time? Engaging in honest one-on-one conversations with your child and your child's teachers is a great way to look at how your child has grown and where he or she needs help.

Although this book has sparse, simple text, its message is profound. Use it to sow seeds of kindness and productivity with your child.

Warmly,

Carmen

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PARENT TO PARENT

Dear Parent,

April is National Autism Awareness month, and like so many of you, autism is a part of my family's reality. Yet it doesn't define us.

In our case, Adam developed typically until about 18 months. He had said a few words, smiled, made eye contact. But around that time my wife Ana and I noticed a change in him: the few words he knew he'd now lost completely, he stopped smiling and making eye contact, and most notably, retreated into himself. We went to a doctor initially who said, "Don't' worry." But we didn't feel reassured, and decided to change doctors and get an evaluation through early intervention. Strangers came into our house to test Adam; all we knew was that he was doing very poorly.

Adam was two years old when he was diagnosed with autism. Your first response as a parent of course is to protect your child—yet in that moment I was heartbroken and thought, "But I don't know how."

It was my wife Ana who said, "We have to get involved in the education system."

She knew we had to find out everything we could and become active participants in Adam's learning. We attended a Department of Education Town Hall meeting. I'm glad we did, because isolation is one of the greatest challenges of being a parent of an autistic child. While we felt alone, we quickly found out we were not.

Through other parents we learned about the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and how best to advocate for our son. Adam's IEP was a specific plan for him that contained services to help him learn and meet his educational needs. It's important as parents to understand that the IEP is a collaborative document. The school needs information about how a child is doing at home to help him or her in school; parents need information from the school so they can help their child at home. It's a team effort.

For me, the IEP became an extraordinary opportunity to do something to help my son, and lend my voice to the experts. I could not call myself an expert on autism, but I could be an expert on my child.

Even so, the process was full of ups and downs, like autism itself. IEP meetings were emotionally difficult. We had to talk about all these things Adam could do before, and now could not. Ana and I would take turns talking. She'd see me well up and then she would jump in and talk; she would start to well up and I would jump in.

And yet the relationships we built with our son's teachers and therapists were so meaningful. We relied on them to give us a window into his world, and they relied on us for the same reason.

Ultimately, the words of an old boss—who witnessed my struggle to understand and support Adam—have stayed with me. "He's always going to be your son. Autism doesn't change that," he said. I believe for all parents of children with disabilities, this holds true.

My son has made me a better person, and taught me what is truly important in life, which is to love unconditionally. I will be forever grateful to him for that and so much more.

Best,

Jesse Mojica, Executive Director
Division of Family and Community Engagement