

MARCH 2016

PUBLIC SCHOOL PRESS

Latest News for Parents from the NYC Department of Education



Program will offer innovative and engaging STEM, math, social studies and literacy-based classes regardless of students' prior grades and test scores

DOE Revamps Summer School

This summer, New York City public school students across all five boroughs will be able to take classes in City schools, including students who are not required to attend summer school, thanks to the Department of Education's (DOE) new Summer in the City (SITC) initiative.

SITC is a brand-new approach to summer school for students in grades 2-12, as it combines new curricula, college-level and STEM-oriented

instruction, and educational visits to many of the City's cultural institutions. SITC will run from July 7 through August 11 at over 300 sites in all five boroughs and will serve more than 150,000 students.

The SITC program, which will include both mandated (students who must complete summer school for grade promotion) and non-mandated students, seeks to address the many of the shortcomings that affect conventional summer

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school instruction by focusing on learning instead of remediation.

SITC programming will include:

- ▶ **New curricula** for students in grades 3-8 who are required to attend summer school at the end of the school year. Curricula will be research-based and focused on literacy, math, and STEM in ways that encourage rigorous and hands-on learning.
- ▶ **Summer STEM enrichment** program for non-mandated students. Originally introduced in summer 2015, this program will expand from 1,200 students to 4,200 students in grades 2-10. Instruction will be hands-on and high-quality, and the curricula will revolve around problem-based learning and include real-world concepts, such as infrastructure, energy, transportation, computing, and robotics.
- ▶ **Enrichment programs for Renewal High School students** in grades 9-12 who are currently on track to graduate. These

NYC Department of Education
**SUMMER
IN THE CITY**

A NEW APPROACH TO SUMMER LEARNING

programs will prepare these students for college-level work.

- ▶ Visits to the City's cultural institutions for all SITC students. The DOE has partnered with institutions, such as the Brooklyn Historical Society, the Children's Museum of Manhattan, the Whitney Museum, and the Guggenheim Museum, to provide SITC students with chances to explore the lessons and ideas they learn in school in exciting and non-traditional settings.

"Students need ongoing opportunities to learn and practice essential skills – especially during the summer months," said Chancellor Carmen Fariña. "Summer in the City will expose thousands of students to hands-on learning, STEM opportunities, and the City's cultural institutions in accordance with our ongoing efforts to instill a love of learning and self-achievement among all our students."

For the latest developments concerning the DOE's SITC rollout for non-mandated students, please continue to check the DOE's official SITC website as we approach the end of the 2015-2016 school year: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/SpecialPrograms/SummerSchool/>

Parent-Teacher Conferences Are Here!

March 16 - 17: Middle Schools

Parent to Parent with Yolanda Torres

Executive Superintendent of the Division of Family and Community Engagement



Dear Parents:

It may be hard to believe, but parent-teacher conferences are once again upon us. You can prepare for your appointment with your child's teacher by going through his/her report card, reviewing your notes from the previous two conferences in September and November, and by visiting our official Parent Teacher Conference [website](http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/PTC) (<http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/PTC>) for suggested questions you may want to ask during your meeting. If your child is going off-track in any way, this is the time to get them back onto the right path. Your child will also get a boost from seeing their good work recognized. If your child has shown progress in homework or classwork, make sure this is acknowledged during your conference. Perhaps he or she was struggling with math at the beginning of the year, but has recently had a breakthrough. Celebrate that victory, and encourage even greater effort.

Now more than ever, all of us here at the DOE are focused on developing collaborative relationships with parents. Your teacher may be able to share aspects of your child's strengths and challenges that you were unaware of before your conference. In turn, you may share helpful insights about your child that enable his or her teachers to be of more assistance. Perhaps your child is more of a visual learner instead of an auditory learner. Make notes about what you would like their teacher to know before coming in for the meeting.

Communication is key. Find out what is going on in the classroom and ask how you can support learning at home. Parent-teacher conferences are brief, but much can be accomplished during

the time allotted. Explain where you think your child needs more support, and describe the best way for the teacher or school personnel to communicate with you (e.g., a note in your child's book bag, a voicemail, an email, etc.).

Finally, I would also highly recommend talking to your teacher about bringing your child with you to the conference so that you may have a three-way conversation regarding your child's progress and next steps. Your child can articulate their experience at school, and take responsibilities for jobs well done as well as areas where he or she may have missed the mark. Perhaps the most important goal of the meeting should be to leave with a plan—and make sure you all understand it. Going forward, your child can take concrete steps based on this collective plan, and you will be able to monitor progress and offer guidance. This enables your child to feel ownership over his or her education.

For parents of elementary school and District 75 children who have already had your conferences, you face your own challenges. Now that you have had your meetings, see if you can do a weekly check in with your child, marking down progress and obstacles in accordance with the content of your meeting. Just letting your child know that a certain day of the week, at a certain time is "your time" to discuss school, may open the doors for better communication about academics, as well as social and emotional issues.

Let's keep the conversation going.

Best,

Yolanda Torres



Susan B. Anthony



Eleanor Roosevelt

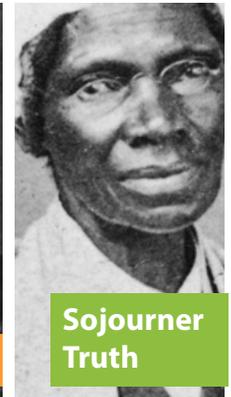
Celebrating
WOMEN'S
History Month



Hermanas Mirabal



Jane Addams



Sojourner Truth

March is Women’s History Month! Throughout the month, schools, museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions across the City and around the country will highlight and commemorate the diverse historical and societal accomplishments that women have made while recognizing and raising awareness of the barriers that have yet to fall.

Take time this month to consider some of the following books, websites, and places of interest as you work to integrate women’s history into your children’s education. For a more complete listing, please visit the DOE’s official Women’s History Month [webpage](http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/womenshistory) (<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/womenshistory>).

Books

Elementary Grades (K-5)

▶ **Chasing Freedom: The Life Journeys of Harriet Tubman and Susan B. Anthony, Inspired** by Historical Facts by Nikki Grimes,

illustrated by Michele Wood

- ▶ **Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl’s Courage Changed Music** by Margarita Engle, illustrated by Rafael López
- ▶ **The House That Jane Built: A Story About Jane Addams** by Tanya Lee Stone, illustrated by Kathryn Brown
- ▶ **I Like Me** by Nancy Carlson
- ▶ **Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker** by Patricia Hruby Powell illustrated by Christian Robinson
- ▶ **Me...Jane** by Patrick McDonnell
- ▶ **Wangari Maathai: The Woman Who Planted Millions of Trees** by Franck Prévot, illustrated by Aurélia Fronty
- ▶ **Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family’s Fight for Desegregation** by Duncan Tonatiuh



Middle Grades (6-8)

- ▶ **Fish in a Tree** by Lynda Mullaly Hunt
- ▶ **Full Cicada Moon** by Marilyn Hilton
- ▶ **The Green Bicycle** by Haifaa Al Mansour
- ▶ **The Lightning Dreamer: Cuba's Greatest Abolitionist** by Margarita Engle
- ▶ **One Crazy Summer** by Rita Williams-Garcia
- ▶ **Rad American Women A-Z: Rebels, Trailblazers, and Visionaries who Shaped Our History...and Our Future!** by Kate Schatz, illustrated by Miriam Klein Stahl
- ▶ **Sally Ride: A Photobiography of America's Pioneering Woman in Space** by Tam O'Shaughnessy

High School & Beyond (Grades 9+)

- ▶ **Audacity** by Melanie Crowder
- ▶ **Alone Atop the Hill: The Autobiography of Alice Dunnigan** edited by Carol Booker
- ▶ **Mericanah** by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- ▶ **Code Name Verity** by Elizabeth Wein
- ▶ **Enchanted Air: Two Cultures, Two Wings: A Memoir** by Margarita Engle, illustrated by Edel Rodriguez
- ▶ **Notorious RBG: The Life and Times of Ruth Bader Ginsberg** by Irin Carmon and Shana Knizhnik
- ▶ **The Secret History of Wonder Woman** by Jill Lepore
- ▶ **Under a Painted Sky** by Stacey Lee
- ▶ **Wild From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail** by Cheryl Strayed

Websites

[The History Channel's Women's History Month](http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/womens-history-month) page (<http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/womens-history-month>): This website provides a basic overview of the history behind Women's History Month, and contains links to videos, articles, and infographics concerning various milestones in women's history.

[The New York Times Learning Network: Celebrating Women's History Month](http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/teaching-topics/celebrate-womens-history-month/?r=0) webpage (<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/teaching-topics/celebrate-womens-history-month/?r=0>): Review the New York Times' collection of lesson plans, news articles, multimedia, and archival materials concerning women's history and contributions in one convenient website.

[The New York Public Library's Women's History Month](http://www.nypl.org/voices/blogs/blog-channels/womens-history) site (<http://www.nypl.org/voices/blogs/blog-channels/womens-history>): Every March, NYPL librarians highlight many of the amazing women they have discovered throughout their years combing through the vast resources held by the NYPL. The resources found on this page include databases, speeches, lists of favorite female characters and historical figures, book suggestions, and biographies.

Other City Events

Various City agencies and cultural institutions have organized special events, exhibitions, and tours to commemorate Women's History Month, including:

[NYC Department of Parks and Recreation](#)

[The New York Public Library](#)

[The Brooklyn Museum](#)

Dates to Remember

March 16 (Evening) – **17** (Afternoon)
Parent-Teacher Conferences
(Middle Schools)

March 25 Good Friday
(All Schools Are Closed)

April 5- 7
NY State English Language Arts (ELA) Exams

April 13-15
NY State Mathematics Exams

NYSED Shortens 2016 Math/ELA Exams; Eliminates Time Limits

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) recently announced that beginning in 2016, all State Mathematics and ELA standardized examinations for students in grades 3 – 8 will be shortened in length in an effort to reduce testing fatigue. Starting with the ELA exams that will be distributed in April, NYSED has cut one reading passage with five or six-related questions, as well as a short essay known as a “constructed response”, from each ELA exam. Likewise, NYSED will cut four multiple-choice questions from each Math exam.

Additionally, NYSED announced that the new State exams will no longer be timed. Beginning in April, students will be able to work on their State



exams at their own pace, as they will no longer be required to complete their exams within a designated time limit. This change will provide students with greater opportunities to demonstrate what they know while potentially reducing the pressures that some students experience as a result of taking timed assessments.

For more information about these changes, please speak with your child’s teachers directly.

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

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SIGN UP!

Keeping Your Children Stress-Free During State Exams

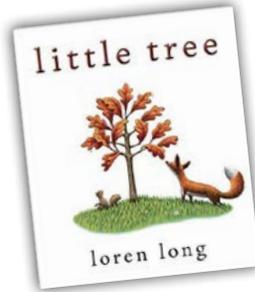


With New York State's Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) exams coming up in April for all City students in grades 3 – 8, understandably, some children may feel increased stress as the calendar inches closer to their testing dates. Thankfully, parents and educators can be key role models to help children learn effective coping and self-care strategies that will turn their test-taking experiences into positive ones:

- ▶ Depending on your child's age, ask him/her if they know what stress is. Explain that everyone feels stressed at times, and that some stress can be helpful to complete tasks.
- ▶ If your children tend to feel anxious before exams, talk to them about stress reduction strategies that include breathing exercises. Have them focus on taking deep and slow breaths, as these exercises can help instill a sense of inner calm.
- ▶ Ask your parent coordinator and teachers about any strategies to support your children's test preparation (e.g., reviewing homework each evening) in the weeks prior to the exam. Homework resources are available at the [DOE webpage](#).
- ▶ Praise and reward your children for good school work and homework to build their confidence.
- ▶ On the day before a State exam, help your children have an enjoyable evening. Have your children get a good night's sleep, as rest is important for their health and overall performance.
- ▶ On the morning of the test, encourage your children to have breakfast either at home or in school. Breakfast can help your children to stay energized throughout their exam day.
- ▶ Finally, remind them that "it's just a test." Even though State tests can be a valuable way to measure student performance and progress, understand that City public school students are assessed by multiple measures, including classwork, course grades, projects, and homework assignments.
- ▶ Congratulate your children when their test is over, and consider celebrating the occasion.

We would like to wish all of our students success on their upcoming State exams!

If your children or family ever experience chronic or excessive stress, contact 1-800-LIFENET for referrals that are based on need, home zip code, and medical insurance status.



Little Tree, By Loren Long
(Philomel Books, 2015)

Little Tree lives in a forest surrounded by other little trees, with little leaves that keep him cool during the hot summer days. Squirrels scamper up his branches to play, and the mourning dove settles on a branch to sing her “flutey song.” From where Little Tree stands, life is fine just the way it is. But his future is threatened when autumn arrives and he refuses to drop his leaves.

Little Tree clings to his leaves through the winter. In the spring, the other trees grow new, green leaves while Little Tree’s are brown and withered. Season after season, he hugs his leaves tight, his growth stunted, while the former saplings grow tall and strong. In time, Little Tree learns an

important lesson: that, sometimes, we have to let go of what we know in order to grow.

This enchanting fable will speak to children as well as adults and is especially appropriate this time of year, as many of our students prepare to transition to the next grade and phase of their academic careers. As parents, we must remember that parents as well as students fear the unknown. Change can be hard, even with encouragement and support.

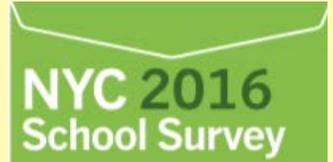
Parents can also remind children that change is part of growing up and moving on. We must teach children that even if they are content with the way things are, they must have faith that good things will happen if they step out of their comfort zones.

These are difficult, but critical, lessons for all of us. We often must decide whether to hold onto an idea or situation, or take a chance on change—and grow. As Little Tree learned, with courage and support, we can drop our brown, withered leaves, and soar to majestic heights.

NYC School Survey Now Available

The 2015-2016 version of the NYC School Survey is now available to parents and students. Now in its ninth year, the NYC School Survey is one of the nation’s largest surveys of any kind, and it is distributed to every teacher, guardian/parent, and student in grades 6-12. The Survey helps school leaders understand what their school communities are saying about their respective learning environments, and nearly 1 million people complete it every year. Schools welcome the data they receive from the Surveys, as the information helps school staff members improve their schools.

Make sure your voice is heard! This year’s Survey will close on Friday, April 1. For more information about the Survey, please visit our website: <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/tools/survey/default.htm>.



Parent Leader Corner

Spotlight on School Leadership Team

Did you know? The School Leadership Team (SLT) in each school is composed of an equal number of staff and parents who are elected to serve. The election of parent members to the SLT may take place directly following the PA/PTA election. All parents, who are not employees of the school, are eligible to vote for and serve as parent members of the SLT.

What does the SLT do? The SLT provides a structure for school-based decision making and fosters a collaborative school culture. The SLT members develop educational policies for their school and ensure resources are properly aligned with these policies.

As discussed in last month's column, PA/PTAs must conduct annual elections by the last day of the school year. However, planning ahead is essential in order to avoid a last minute frenzy.

Some PTA Election Tips: Bring a copy of your PA/PTA bylaws and [Chancellor's Regulation A-660 to your elections](#). You will also want to have election materials – such as ballots, attendance sheets, a ballot box and tally sheets – and, don't forget a blank [Election Certification Form](#).

Give your candidates time to address the membership about why they would like to serve as a member of the Executive Board.

If the positions (or offices) for the Executive Board are uncontested (in other words, only

one person is running for the office) the election can be conducted by a voice vote. If there is more than one person running for an office, the vote should be by written ballot.

Make sure to certify the election when it's complete. The principal or a designee (other than a Parent Coordinator) must sign the Election Certification Form, which must include the Executive Board contact information before the meeting is adjourned.

To learn more about the PA/PTA elections cycle, please visit the Chancellor's Regulations at [schools.nyc.gov](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/EBEFFD82-30D5-4B91-9F9A-6A07B0D0F2D6/0/A660.pdf#page=13). (<http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/EBEFFD82-30D5-4B91-9F9A-6A07B0D0F2D6/0/A660.pdf#page=13>)

New, Multilanguage Election Templates

You now have access to PA/PTA election notification templates in all nine languages covered in Chancellor's Regulation A-663. [The PA/PTA Resource Page](#) includes printable translated templates for the following documents, along with other useful resources.

- ▶ PA/PTA Meeting Notice
- ▶ PA/PTA Meeting Sign
- ▶ Request for Nominations
- ▶ Election Meeting Notice
- ▶ Expedited Election Meeting Notice
- ▶ Election Meeting Sign
- ▶ Ballots