

January 11, 2016

Dear PS 321 Families:

Happy New Year to all of you! As we begin 2016, I wanted to communicate with you about two areas we are focusing a lot of attention on this year: Digital Citizenship and Mathematics. In both of these areas, we have some exciting new initiatives.

## Digital Citizenship

As our children have increasing access to various digital devices (smart phones, gaming systems, tablets, and more) it is clear that we need to make sure that our children understand both the promise and the perils of using these devices. We have been made aware of a number of incidents—at PS 321, in homes, in other schools—that have raised some concerns. **You might be surprised to hear what some of our children are able to do.** Did you know that:

- ...when your child is playing a game such as Minecraft or playing games on Xbox or PlayStation, they can use chat or message features that allow them to share information with strangers from around the world?
- ...some children know how to erase their browsing history so that parents cannot know what sites they have been on?
- ...sometimes children send group texts and then hurtfully exclude selected friends from these texts?
- ...many PS 321 children have reported to seeing inappropriate content on You Tube?

Although many of our children spend a significant amount of time using technology, often for very productive purposes, they are not always aware of the potential dangers of some of their actions. For example, when asked to share her home address with someone on a game, a child did not see the danger in doing this because she did not consider this person, whom she was playing an online game with, to be a stranger. And, as we know, even adults forget that what they say/post on the internet is forever....certainly this is even more true for children.

Because of this, our School Leadership Team has made Digital Citizenship a top priority, and we are working on ways to educate students, teachers, and parents. Our technology teacher, Sara Silver, has developed new units for the third, fourth, and fifth graders. Each unit focuses on four main ideas: Netiquette; Digital Footprint; Cyber-Bullying; Safety Online. You will hear more about this, as one component of the unit is a homework assignment where each student has to talk to a parent about what he is learning. In addition, 5<sup>th</sup> graders will have two lessons on cyberbullying as part of their preadolescent curriculum. We are currently working on developing lessons appropriate for our lower grade students. We understand that there is a great deal of variety in terms of how much time our lower grade students—or any students—spend on line, and we want to be respectful of these differences as we also prepare students for interacting safely when they are online.

Our SLT is also preparing a survey for parents on technology. You will be getting an email about this and will be able to take the survey on line. We will use the results to develop some next steps. We have already scheduled the first parent workshop on Digital Safety for February 26 at 8:30am. This will be led by Jon Benson, the Director of Safety Operations for the NYC Department of Education.

## Mathematics

Another area of focus for the year is mathematics. This is the first year that we have a full time math coach, Alex Messer, and he is working in cycles in different grades to help teachers develop

additional differentiated math activities to meet the variety of learners in each classroom. This has been invaluable in helping us spend more time working with small groups of students during math time. In addition, we have Melanie McIver providing math support to some 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders, and Melissa DiPinto providing math support to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. For the first half of the year, Melissa worked in a pull-out model. Beginning this month, she will do some pull out groups but will spend most of her time pushing into math classrooms. And, this week we begin our multiplication club on Wednesdays at 8am for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders who need support learning their multiplication facts. We're also piloting some new, challenging units from Eureka Math, a common core aligned curriculum.

In addition to working with teachers and students, our math coach has developed an amazing **math website**. If you haven't yet seen it, we encourage you to go on line and see all the resources it offers to parents and teachers. There are math games with all the materials needed to play them, recommended math apps and websites, and articles about math. Go to [www.ps321math.com](http://www.ps321math.com) to access this remarkable website!

I also wanted to let you know about a few other things happening at PS 321 within the next month or two:

- As I'm sure you know, this is **Green and Healthy Month**, and all teachers are reading aloud and discussing a book (different books for each grade) on this theme. The science, physical education, and movement teachers are spending additional time on this focus. On Thursday, January 28, we will hold GREEN AND HEALTHY FAMILY NIGHT. Hope to see you there!
- We've re-instituted our **Book of the Month** program where every class in the school reads aloud a particular book that addresses an issue related to our Respect/Diversity initiatives. Our December/January Book of the Month is *Say Something* by Peggy Moss, a book that focuses on the role of the person who witnesses bullying, the "innocent bystander."
- This Wednesday, January 13, at 7pm is a **Neighborhood Classics concert** featuring pianist Lara Downes. Tickets are available on our website: [www.ps321.org](http://www.ps321.org)
- Do you want to recommend a nonprofit organization that would be a recipient of the funds we raise at our school wide **Walkathon** to be held in May? We will have a meeting for parents to make recommendations on Wednesday, January 20, at 8am.
- In honor of **Black History Month** (in February), children will have an opportunity to make a quilt square for our "Quilt of Heroes." You will be getting a flier from our Diversity Committee about this soon.

This is an exciting time of year as our students, now so comfortable in their classroom communities, work on rich new units of study and deepen their understanding across the curriculum. The new year is also a good time to remind your children about appropriate behavior at lunch and recess—whether they eat in school or, in the case of fourth and fifth graders, sometimes go out to lunch. Children should be respectful to each other and to the adults; no tackling or hitting games are permitted; there is no running on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue; and in the lunchroom/gym, it is important to clean up garbage so the tables are clean for the next group. We are reminding children about this in school, and we would appreciate you discussing this at home too. And, if you are a parent picking up a child in the minischool, please do not bang on the walls to get someone to open the door if there is no safety agent. Go to the main office, and we will call someone to open the door.

As always, thank you for the countless ways you support our school community! Looking forward to a wonderful second half of the school year.

Fondly,

Liz Phillips  
Principal