



Spruce Street School – P.S./I.S. 397

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Dear Families,

Well, it seems winter has finally arrived! As we approach this midpoint of the school year, it is the perfect opportunity to reflect and move thoughtfully forward. At the end of 2015, I asked us all to consider December a month of **gratitude** and **giving**. Together, we extended thanks to each other, gathered and donated many items to those in need, and embodied those important qualities at Spruce.

This weekend, I am heading out of town to spend some time with my father. We have experienced our share of challenges in the past year, making me value our time together even more. My father has many hobbies, among them being a genealogy buff. Together, we work on our family tree, tracing our distant and long ago relatives as much as possible. We look at marriage records, military certificates, and immigration details.

Growing up in the suburbs, the world did not seem so diverse. It seemed that most people I knew had similar backgrounds to me. My family's story seemed interchangeable and generic. It is only now as an adult that I am learning to value the power in that common struggle, as well as the beauty and uniqueness. Having lived and worked in New York City for nearly two decades, I now appreciate that each individual has their own, intricate tapestry of history.

We are in a city of millions – many with similar backgrounds – *and* we are each unique and diverse. Heading into January and February, it is important to value our **diversity**, while honoring what we have in **common**. We are all members of the Spruce Street community, *and* we each have our own story.

As a reminder, our main priority this year is to maintain a sense of ONE SCHOOL. This includes preserving instructional coherence across all grades, so all Spruce Street students engage in rich, engaging curricula. This also includes preserving a positive, cohesive school culture where we both support students with social emotional development and hold them to high expectations.

As we head forward into 2016, it is a perfect opportunity to reflect on who we are as a community, with the shared goal of moving forward.

Diversity in our Curriculum

Across our grades, we explicitly research cultural **diversity**. Our lower grades research studies include Families and Bread. Together, classes explore traditions and rituals, and how those reflect in our community. It is not an accident that we study bread in 1st grade. Every culture has a type of bread, many recipes rooted in valued traditions and beliefs.

In 3rd grade, classes explore folk tales and Cinderella stories, another common element across diverse cultures. They analyze what makes these stories similar, and what makes them unique. By 6th grade, our students research the foundation of ancient civilizations, tracing back common ancestry and population migrations. We expose students in all grades to a range of picture books and literature representing a range of authors and backgrounds.

These are some explicit ways we ask students to explore ideas in diversity in our classrooms. As always, we look for families to be our partners in this work. Thank you in advance for sharing your ideas as apart of your child's learning.

Diversity across our School and Community

We know that, while so much is planned for within the classroom, there is plenty of value in the work beyond the classroom. Here are some ways we will honor our diversity and explore our common ground at Spruce Street.

~ Our February Spruce Street meeting will focus on learning more about who we are as a school, including all the different countries and languages we represent. Families will be asked to complete a brief survey to help our students share their **diverse** backgrounds.

~ February also marks Respect for All Week. This will launch opportunities for students to focus on what we have **in common**. As an inclusive environment Spruce is a place where all students and adults should feel welcome. We will use the upcoming weeks to solidify that notion.

I sometimes look to quotes to help encapsulate what I am thinking. Here is one my favorites I came across this month.

"I know there is strength in the differences between us. I know there is comfort, where we overlap."

Ani DiFranco

As we head into this midpoint of the year, thank you for pausing to appreciate that we are on this **common** journey together. We are one community made up of a diverse group of individuals. While the **diversity** is enriching, it is the shared path that unites us. Thank you, as always, for allowing me to lead our amazing school. Spruce Street rocks!

Sincerely,