



Spruce Street School – P.S./I.S. 397

12 Spruce Street

New York, NY 10038

www.sprucestreetnyc.org

212-266-4800 (p)

212-266-4805 (f)

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Dear Families,

This week marks the official transition into springtime at Spruce Street – a bustling, dynamic time of year. Several weeks ago, we reflected on **diversity** across our school. Our Student Government facilitated a Spruce Street Meeting and kicked off a survey to think about all the amazing places we each represent. Of course, with so much **diversity** comes so much in **common**.

This month, we welcome a new group of kindergarten families to register, and prepare to expand our school yet again. By September, we will have students in grades Pre-K through 7th...ages 3 through 13! This remarkable range of grades presents some interesting challenges as well as unique opportunities.

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

Mixed Grade Opportunities – Then and Now

We believe students learn best by doing and exploring the community around them. This is true for all Spruce children – ages 3-13. This is true when early childhood classrooms research their immediate neighborhood and older children take a more abstract, historical lens to the world around.

At Spruce Street, we create intentional opportunities for students to interact **across grades**. Here are some of the ways we currently do that:

~ Many classes engage in Book Buddies. These sessions allow for older and younger children to read together on a regular basis.

~ Electives classes are **mixed-grade**, allowing 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students a structured opportunity to interact around a common interest. We asked students to reflect on their first semester electives experience – many commented on how being with students from other grades allowed them to meet new faces and forge friendships.

~ Spruce Service is a mandated period for all middle school students to “intern” in classes across our school. Students are assigned to a particular class for at least half the year, allowing them to get to know one another.

~ Monthly Spruce Street meetings are assemblies that allow all children to come together with a common goal – whether it’s supporting our Spartan sports team, or discuss ways to make our bathrooms cleaner.

Many teachers also pilot interactions between grades on a smaller scale. They invite buddy classes to celebrations; allow older children to serve as teacher’s helpers, attend other grade’s performances, etc. As a staff, we know and believe *all* Spruce students are *our* students.

Mixed Grade Opportunities – Now and to Come

We know that, while so much happens across classrooms, we can be even more intentional about bringing children together.

~ We are focusing on our hallway transitions and improving behavior in this very shared space. In the coming weeks, all students and classes will be paired up for a new initiative. We will have all PK-2nd grade classes visit 3rd-6th grade classrooms, and pair up all PK-2nd grade children with a 3rd-6th grade buddy. It is our belief that knowing each other **across grades** will help us exist more peacefully in shared spaces.

~ Heading into 2016-17, we will engage in two **mixed-grade** research units. The first will be a Research Launch, where all classes will study an aspect of Spruce Street. The second will be about our community, either local or global. We believe so strongly in the power of research, we are devoting two **cross-grade** units to it next year. Stay tuned for more details as our Curriculum Committee and grade teams plan.

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

“Age is not important unless you’re a cheese.”

Helen Hayes

Of course age *is* important, and every grade *is* unique. By working **across grades**, we will find deeper commonalities, connections, and priorities than a number. Thank you, as always, for allowing me to lead our amazing school. Spruce Street rocks!

Sincerely,