Dear families,

My name is Eileen Marks DiFabio and I am a LEAP intern (Leadership in Education Apprenticeship Program) with Arts and Letters for the 2017-2018 school year. Principal O’Reilly is mentoring me and supporting my growth as a school leader. Throughout the year, I have spent my days getting a sense of the culture of Arts & Letters, mentoring teachers, and most importantly, getting to know the beautiful students in this community.

Recently, I have been working with the middle grades math team. The teachers are committed to helping students become powerful, creative and flexible math thinkers. They love problem solving and doing math. Through a partnership with Algebra for All, this team is working to ensure that all of our students are prepared to take the Algebra Regents exam by the time they finish 8th grade. Historically and currently, most elementary and middle schools that serve high percentages of Latino and African-American students in our segregated school system do not offer enough rigorous and rich math experiences. This has and continues to put these students at a huge disadvantage for getting into the high schools of their choice and for being college ready once they graduate from high school. We believe that being a part of this program will help us bring more equity to this problem here at Arts & Letters.
Through classroom visits, looking at data, and attending team meetings, it is clear that our students would benefit from more and more personalized learning in math. Some ways in which our math department already does this is through individual conferencing and small group instruction. However, there is only so much time and space within a school day. To make the learning personalized we need to go beyond the four walls of Arts & Letters and expand the time, place, path and space in which our children do math independently, specifically on the algebra skills with which they need to more practice. Online programs, where students can access content anywhere and at anytime, and can develop skills at their own pace is one way that we intend to expand the learning day.

Algebra for All has provided Arts and Letters with access to two researched based math platforms, First in Math and Algebra Nation. In the next few weeks and through June, teachers in 5th, 6th and 7th grade will be using the First in Math program to differentiate independent practice through assigning students personalized homework. Our 8th grade students will be introduced to Algebra Nation in the coming months to help them prepare for the Algebra Regents and deepen their understanding of algebra. We hope that you will encourage your young ones to engage with these platforms at home or anywhere else they can access the program. The coming month is a great time to have your child login and show you how the program works and the progress they’ve made. If you would like to know more about either of these online resources, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I am available to provide program overviews for families and to answer any questions or concerns that you may have. I am onsite most Wednesdays and Thursdays. You can also email me at emarks@schools.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,

Eileen Marks DiFabio

Urgent: Gather Votes for Our Participatory Budgeting Project

Right now the NYC Participatory Budgeting program is open for voting. https://pbnyc2018.d21.me/ There is $1,000,000 up for grabs in our district (35, Laurie Cumbo) and the community gets to vote on how that money gets spent!

We are encouraging you all to participate personally if you reside in Laurie Cumbo’s district and to please spread the word to your neighbors, friends and families residing in D35 as well. The proposed items if chosen will impact many neighborhood schools and spaces all over this community, including our very own PS20/Arts & Letters which has an option on the ballot for much needed building repairs (it’s item #6, “Building Safety for P.S. 20”). You may read about the NYCPB program and all of D35 open projects here: https://council.nyc.gov/laurie-cumbo/pb/7/

You can vote at many local schools and libraries (see https://tinyurl.com/D35pollsitesPBNYC) at various times during the week - ending April 15 or online anytime until the 15th. Two important things: ANYONE can vote, ages 11 and up, as long as they live in the district. What a great opportunity to teach our kids about exercising their right to vote and have their voice heard! The other thing is you get to vote for FIVE projects. While the one labeled PS20 will be an obvious choice, please read the other proposals and vote for up to 4 of the others as well if you’d like. Voting online takes about two minutes at most. EVERYONE, PLEASE VOTE! We have a real chance at winning this but we need a lot of votes so please do your part and spread the WORD!

Here is the link for the online ballot: https://pbnyc2018.d21.me/
Before break, 4G wrapped up their Iroquois study by inviting community members and families to an Iroquois Exhibition. After learning about Iroquois culture, government, and way of life through reciprocal teaching research clubs, students reflected on what stood out to them from the unit and decided how they wanted to share their learning with the community. They had a choice to work independently or as a team with friends who had similar interests. We are so proud of the thoughtfulness, creativity, and teamwork that went into these projects! We are also proud of the great conversations they had with the community as they articulated their learning with others.

Students showcased their learning in the following ways:
- Docent introduction of the Haudenosaunee
- Plays and short films of Iroquois culture and way of life
- Models of longhouse villages and Iroquois council meetings
- Animation of The Great Law of Peace
- Sculpture of the 5 arrows, symbol of the The Great Law of Peace
- Woven wampum belts telling stories of Iroquois history and culture
- Replicas of Longnose masks
- Sculptures of The Three Sisters
- Corn husk dolls
- Sketches and hand-stitched replicas of Iroquois clothing
- Mural depicting the daily work of the Iroquois
- Large scale "look-in" of the inside of a longhouse
- Traditional Iroquois food
- Replicas of Iroquois weapons and tools
- Salt dough topographical map of Iroquois territory
- Comic and diorama of a young Iroquois boy's spiritual journey
- Historical fiction vignettes

In addition to celebrating with family members, 4G was thrilled to share what they learned with K-3 friends who visited our gallery throughout the morning! Our young historians are moving onto a study of colonization in America and the causes of the American Revolution. They will explore persuasive writing and engage in lively debates, both with issues they care about and historical content.
The First Grade showed off all they learned in their States of Matter and Weather units in a science share for family and friends. During the share, first graders performed science experiments or cooking demonstrations that exhibited some aspect of their gained knowledge of states of matter. Some demonstrations were ice cream making, chocolate melting, crayon melting, “magic potion”, pancake making, painting by blowing bubbles, and using vinegar and baking soda to blow up balloons. In addition, they shared research books that were collections of their work over the unit, such as recipes, predictions, and observational notes. The first graders also studied the various formats that science books use to convey information to the reader. The students then chose the formats that they preferred to write their own science book about states of matter and/or weather. The students charged a small admission fee to their shares as a fundraiser and voted as to where to donate the money. Dekalb donated to the Malala Fund and Willoughby donated to a fund for the homeless.
The second graders just had their Fairy Princes and Frog Tales share. Throughout the Fairy Princes and Frog Tales unit, the second graders researched frogs in nonfiction books and articles. They also read fairy tales and fables including frogs. In addition to frogs, students worked in small collaborative groups and became experts on different animals, including turtles, foxes, and snakes. While becoming an expert on their animal, each group researched their animal using nonfiction texts. They read fables and fairy tales and identified character traits for their animal. After gathering all of this research, the students analyzed the nonfiction findings and decided if the facts match the character traits typically used to describe their animal. In preparation for the share, the students designed roles within their group, including animal, interviewer, costume designer, and scribe. The groups drafted interview questions and answers. At the share, the students revealed a video they recorded highlighting each group’s work. The video included a student interviewer asking the animal about their feelings about the misrepresentation of themselves in fables. The animals were often feeling very upset by this and during the interview they were able to express who they really are by supporting their response with facts from the nonfiction texts.
A&L HAPPENINGS

In the Recess Yard