



**SPRUCE
STREET
SCHOOL**

**SUMMER
2021**

DIRECTIONS NEWSLETTER



NEWS from School to Community





URBAN LEARNING



DIVERSITY



MULTI-AGE

WINS AND LOSSES: A 2020–2021 MEMOIR

Briel Schmitz, Head of School



Wins:

- In-person learning all year!
- Camp day!
- No Covid transmission!
- School plays in person!
- Arts week projects!
- PE at the park!
- Buddy connections!

Losses:

- All school park Fridays.
- Electives in person.
- Buddy walks to the park.
- Playing with friends in other pods and levels.
- Families inside the school.
- Seeing smiles on faces.

When I look back on this year, I am incredibly proud of what we accomplished (all the wins!). I know that for our students, this gave them the best year possible for learning and growing emotionally. For teachers, it was a continuum of worry, reinvention and, ultimately, success. We know

that we provided something unique and exceptional by working together.

It all started last summer when we upgraded our HVAC system. With a closed building we knew we had to do something to provide the cleanest indoor air possible. Next, we educated ourselves: Shannon became our pandemic coordinator and we both spent every Monday on a Zoom call learning everything possible about how to mitigate Covid risk in a school. We measured every inch of the school, and divided the students between the three floors, creating two classrooms in the gym.

Once we had a plan, we asked faculty to come in and see summer camp in session: what did it look like to socially distance and wear masks with students? Our summer camp was the perfect training ground. Admin practiced drop-off and pick-up protocols and teachers helped the students to have fun in the new arrangement.

Then, the faculty and staff gathered together (socially distanced) and I set out the plan for returning to school in person. Each and every adult took that leap of faith together. We agreed to protocols and put our trust in one another. We believed that together we could do this and together we would succeed. It was an extraordinary decision and one that was the beginning of every win listed above.

While we mourned each of the losses, we worked to mitigate the impact of them, and found creative solutions. With each decision, we stood on our shared trust and pushed forward. The adults in this community—faculty, staff and families—banded together to do everything possible to make this a wonderful year.

And, it was a wonderful year. A difficult year, a complicated year, an unexpected year, and a wonderful year.



**SPRUCE
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SCHOOL**

MISSION STATEMENT

Spruce Street School is a nurturing educational community that instills in a broad range of children the social, emotional, and intellectual skills for lifelong participation in a diverse society.

LEADING THROUGH TIMES OF GREAT CHANGE

Alexa Carver, Board Chair



I am so proud of this community. Spruce Street School truly embodies a learning institution—adapting, learning and thriving. Throughout the pandemic the school continually returned to its values as it made critical decisions. The staff would ask: What is the value of this activity and why do we do it? These questions guided the leadership and staff as they designed and implemented a new school model and made strategic decisions for the school's future.

The board also worked to embody a continuous learning model via three main bodies of work—supporting the administrative team as they adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic, engaging in meaningful ongoing DEI work to help guide the school, and completing a strategic planning process to guide the school's next three years.

The school began its strategic planning process in the fall of 2019, and was forced to put it on hold due to the pandemic. The board was able to complete the work in May, 2021. The school's new strategic plan (<https://bit.ly/3pKWbjV>) represents the thoughtful work and intentional decisions by the board and staff. The three initiatives: **Institutional Identity, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, and Forever Home Campaign** reflect the board's long-term commitment to the school's 2035 vision as well as learnings from the past two school years. These initiatives will provide the school with a strong foundation to begin to imagine and plan for our new Forever Home during our next strategic planning cycle in 2024.

As I think of this year at the school, the story that comes to mind for me is *The Little Engine That Could*. Though the engine had obstacles, with determination and resilience it moved continually forward to meet its obligations. Whether it was opening in person in the fall, offering after-school care throughout, launching a capital campaign, or completing a strategic plan—the school continued to chug along. What I feel most proud of is the fact that our community and culture remained the welcoming, supportive, positive one that we have all come to cherish. In our year of hardship this community came together. This is why our families are devoted, we have long-tenured committed staff, and extremely low student attrition. We have built something at Spruce Street School that we are all grateful to belong to because we think we can, and we do.

STAFF

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GROWING OUR ACCESSIBILITY

Capri Arias, Admission & Communications Director



As the first day of school approached this year, it became clear that life inside and outside of school would not be returning to "before times" any time soon. The continued necessity to rethink and retool what everyday life looked like meant that our admission process would need to be rethought as well. Fortunately, we had already successfully navigated remote school earlier in the spring, so developing a new admissions plan that captured the secret sauce of Spruce Street School was far less overwhelming.

In any given admission season, it is critical we weigh the barriers to entry for prospective families. More specifically, because diversity, equity and inclusion are cornerstones of our mission, there is always a need for us to make intentional efforts to remove possible roadblocks for families not represented in the majority population in our school. To strive to enroll a truly diverse population means that our admission process needs to be inclusive and reflective in the variety of ways families can get to know Spruce Street School.

We offered an even wider range of opportunities in different formats in order to acknowledge that independent school admissions is not one size fits all. We offered monthly virtual school tours during the lunch hour for families for whom morning and evenings were filled with work and virtual school; we offered one-on-one in-person tours on Fridays for families who needed to see our school in person to fully comprehend our program; we hosted virtual Q+A sessions to capture the value of group think. Open houses were reformatted as webinars on Saturday mornings to take the pressure off of prospective families to have their lives on display and to enable them to carry on with their morning routines; applicant families could choose to have their children visit the school in person, virtually, or both!

It was essential that we honored the safety concerns of our applicant families, and that we acknowledged the socio-economic challenges imposed by requiring in-person or virtual attendance. Initially, this dynamic, choose-your-own-adventure-style admission process seemed paralyzing, exhausting and, frankly, a little scary. Because of the steadfast support from this community—from the teachers, from the families, from the students, from the staff and from our board of trustees—we took on admissions as a community and did it in a way that was innovative, inclusive and, most importantly, in a way that felt authentic to the Spruce Street School spirit.

Our work to make our admissions process more diverse, inclusive and equitable is ever-evolving and never-ending. Thanks to our community's solidarity and stability this work is made massively more achievable.



MULTI-AGE TEACHING DURING COVID

Shawna Wilson, Teacher



Spruce Street School has been a multi-age learning community since its founding. Multi-age teaching and learning are essential to our values as an institution. Although this year was different in myriad ways—adhering to necessary precautions wholly counterintuitive to multi-age educators, such as individual tables and teaching from the front of the classroom—we carried on, teaching and embracing our core values.

Each of our multi-age classes (or pods, this year!) learns through the lens of a theme, which then drives our integrated studies.

This year was no different. For example, at the youngest level, students learned how to write *pourquoi* tales while preparing for their *pourquoi*-tale play, *Anansi and the Sky God*, while also learning about spiders. Teachers tied everything together through the theme of Cause and Effect.

Being separated into distinct pods created challenges in maintaining our school-wide multi-age program. With the help of Zoom, we continued to learn together during our remote-school Fridays. Students met with their buddies in elective groups, virtually sharing ideas and learning together. Later in the year buddies shared favorites with one another via a stairwell photo wall. As students walked up and down from the roof, they could see their buddy's favorite game, treat or book (a different question was answered each week). We continued our weekly All School Meetings and the oldest level students became pros at using crafted banter, jokes, and announcements as they emceed the weekly meetings.

Finally, we were able to hold our treasured play performances in pod and classroom groups this spring. The youngest level worked together for their first-ever play in person, a huge leap from their Zoom-based shorts last year. Both the youngest and mid-levels were able to perform live for families (in small groups, socially distanced, of course!). The oldest level inspired the youngest and mid-level students who were able to watch, in awe, as the magic of Shakespeare was once again brought to life. The performances were filmed and enjoyed by the Spruce Street School community later that evening over a live stream.

While we cannot say that this year was like any other, we can certainly say we learned a lot. We started with our values, got creative, and then shared our successes and challenges every week. We found that working together will always lift us up, and no matter where we are, we know we can keep learning together even when we are apart.





Class of 2014 **Top L-R:** Amy Pottharst, Oscar Morrison, Walter Barger, **Bottom L-R:** Finley Bennett and Sam Klem.

ALUMNI NEWS

Shannon Orton, Assistant Head of School



Congratulations to the Moving On class of 2021! This group of students has persevered through challenges of all kinds and has embraced the *Possibilities* (the theme in the oldest level this year) of in-person school during the pandemic. They have adapted, shown creativity and tenacity, and have supported one another throughout this one-of-a-kind school year. I imagine they will always remember the year they used a gym for their classroom, and had a professional production company record their Shakespeare play!

In their Moving On speeches each student shared their challenges, successes, and favorite parts from their time at Spruce Street School. They will be attending a range of middle schools this fall, including Billings Middle School, The Bush School, Explorer West Middle School, Hamilton Middle School, Hamlin Robinson School, Lake Washington Girls Middle School, Morningside Academy, Robert Eagle Staff Middle School, Seattle Academy, and Seattle School for Boys. We are so very proud of them, and can't wait to hear about their future adventures.

In lieu of our annual Alumni Dinner we hosted virtual reunions for the classes of 2018 and 2014, who are graduating from middle and high school this spring. Alumni students, their families, and current staff enjoyed reuniting and sharing plans for the future. Like this year's fifth graders, alumni from the class of 2014 will be attending a variety of schools this fall, including Bates College, Claremont McKenna College, The Evergreen State College, Lewis and Clark College, Loyola Marymount University, and Tufts University. Others are choosing gap years and world travel. We wish them all the best in their next journeys!

If you are an alumni student please visit us on our fan page on Facebook or contact us at alum@sprucestreetschool.org. You may also update us with your current contact information by taking our Alumni Survey, found as a link on our website on our Alumni page under Our Community. We look forward to hearing from you!

Class of 2018 **Front Row L-R:** Eneko Gerard, Lyan Ngo and Mason Hoffman, **Second Row L-R:** Leila Lakhal, Denali Jenkins and Stella Harman and Zack Simonsen **Third row L-R:** Daniel Moynihan, Iris Kaufman, Asher Merenda and Tessabell Sheldon



SPRUCE STREET SCHOOL MOVING ON CLASS OF 2021



Top to Bottom L-R: Evan Calder, Max Senstra, Neil Nagpal, Lucas Furia, Severn Bogert-Key, Jaxon McCready, James Montagner, Ellie Levin-Davis, Camille Bernau, Cecilia Garzon-May, Uma Moussavi-Bock, Bella Barclay, Asher Lloyd, David Rauser, Audrey Baeten-Ruffo, Oliver Bryan and Mia Pianko.

FROM THEIR MOVING ON SPEECHES:

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A success I have had at Spruce Street School is writing. I have always loved to write, and I especially like writing poems. It is so satisfying to make them rhyme. I like to write about nature and describe different colors and textures. Writing is a way for me to express myself, and I hope I can continue doing it throughout middle school.

Cecilia Garzon-May

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One of my successes at school has been the plays. It is always exciting to have a part on or off stage, and I like to figure out what my character is feeling in each scene. This year I had two different parts. Both parts were thrilling to perform, and even if this year's play wasn't quite normal, we all did our best to make the play awesome.

Mia Pianko

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

The Ancient China Research Conference

- Virtual Parent Readers • Electives • Singing songs at All School Meeting • Zoom dance parties • PE at Cascade Park • All of the plays: *The Magic Paintbrush*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Anansi* • Arts Week • Safety Patrol • The Winter Murals • Connecting with friends all over the world at Elders' Tea • Creating the Community Connector • The Moving On Ceremony • Oldest Level Marimba Performance