



**SPRUCE  
STREET  
SCHOOL**

**SUMMER  
2023**

# DIRECTIONS NEWSLETTER



NEWS from School to Community





**EQUITY &  
INCLUSION**



**CONTINUOUS  
GROWTH**



**COMMUNITY**



**JOY**

# NEW CORE PRACTICES

By Briel Schmitz, Head of School



Over the past two years we have looked inward, inspired by our current strategic plan's institutional identity initiative. This was an opportunity to spend time reflecting and being curious about who we are as a school. Did our core values reflect our current work? What do we do that we might want to change, and what things do we want to make sure to keep?

To answer these questions, we worked with a consultant to consider who we are as a school and how to best express our institutional identity. This included reaching out to current and past board members, staff, families, and students, followed by a series of meetings with the board and staff. We used all of this feedback to highlight our non-negotiables and learning priorities.

A team of teachers took all of the data, feedback, and information gathered and realized that some of our past values were actually core practices. Our new core

practices are a guide for decision making and a reflection of how we work as a community. I am delighted to share our core practices here.

2023 Core Practices:

**Civic Engagement:** We teach students about their rights and responsibilities as citizens of their community and citizens of the world, challenging them to notice ways they can advocate and take action for what is right in their classroom, community and world.

**Community Connected Classroom:** We use the dynamic urban community around us as an extension of our classroom. Connecting with local businesses and organizations expands learning opportunities and enriches our community.

**Differentiated Integrated Instruction:** We create opportunities for students to immerse themselves in topics and ideas as a learning community, with joyful, shared experiences and different entry points and opportunities for each individual child.

**Intentionality:** We make every decision with thought and purpose, from customizing a learning task for a particular child's needs to updating a cherished community tradition. Our purpose with every decision is helping our students and families thrive.

**Learning Through the Arts:** We use visual and performing arts to explore the world, build opportunities for creative self-expression and growth, foster collaborative skills, and give each child a chance to shine.

**Multi-age Classes:** We design small, flexible groups in which students of different ages, skills and learning styles work and learn together.

**Social Emotional Learning:** We teach lessons in empathy, emotion management, and social problem solving, and we use conflicts and challenging moments purposefully as opportunities for reflection and growth.

I hope that these resonate with you as much as they do with us, and that you see your experience at Spruce Street School reflected in these words.



**SPRUCE  
STREET  
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.

# INFUSING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INTO PRACTICE

By Anne Szeto-Millstone, Board Chair



2022-2023 marks the second year of Spruce Street School's strategic plan. Our three-year strategic plan revolves around three pillars: Institutional Identity, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), and our Forever Home. These pillars are key to establishing the school's long-term vision and sustainable future. Each year, the board, school leadership, and staff work together to make progress on one of these critical pillars.

Last year, we focused on institutional identity and crystalized Spruce Street School's core values and practices. In a year-long process, the school and board articulated Spruce Street School's core values of community, continuous growth, equity and inclusion, and joy. For the first time in school history, we verbalized our core value of joy, which seemed obvious to so many members of our current and alumni community after the fact! Once we depicted who we are as a school, developing core practices became the natural next step to highlight how we act as an institution.

We then delved into the pillar of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The board and school leadership spent our March retreat and subsequent board meetings envisioning Spruce Street School's current and future diverse community and the equity and inclusion outcomes and dreams that we wanted to support. The board discovered and became proud of the many visible and invisible uniquenesses in our learning community. To ensure continuous momentum on furthering our diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture, we aligned on a DEI question framework to use as a tool for future board decisions and discussions.

As a team, the board and school leaders committed to evaluating long-term decisions through the lens of our multifaceted community and our core value of equity and inclusion: *"Spruce Street School is a diverse community of students, families, and staff. At the core of this community are radical respect and deep care for every member. We work thoughtfully and intentionally to create a culture that fosters positive self-image, understanding of other perspectives, and a sense of belonging for all. We model and teach respect for each individual: who they are, where they are from, and what they bring to both the classroom and the community."*

## STAFF

Briel Schmitz

Head of School

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Megan Schmidt

Development Director

Maddy Mele

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Desteni Amezcua

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## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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# FINDING JOY AT SPRUCE STREET SCHOOL

By Abbey Starling, Alum and Teacher



Where it starts: Spruce Street School 2002 on Yale Avenue. I joined Miss Carolyn's class as a kindergartener right after my older sister moved on. At that time, our playground was Cascade Park and we walked two blocks to play there twice every day. We even had an Open Space, a big open room with horrendously ugly and itchy brown carpet. Even though the building was a bit run down, it was full of joy.

Fast forward 20 years and I have returned to Spruce Street School. Yes, I have spent the last 3 years teaching at my former elementary school! My first few days working in Extended Day were overwhelming. It was November 2020, in

the midst of the first few waves of Covid, and a hard time for many of us. I was nervous to be trying something so new and different. It was my first teaching job. I asked questions, observed, talked through ideas, listened, and did my best to not repeat a mistake from the day before.

People have said to me countless times, "Oh isn't that weird to be at your old school?" Truthfully no, it has not been weird at all. The staff at Spruce Street School are amazing teachers and they are even better people. Those who were my teachers 20 years ago continue to teach and advise me with respect and understanding. We support each other in the same way we support our students.

Spending time away and coming back to see Spruce Street School as an adult allows me to appreciate it more because I know how truly rare and valuable this community is. Since returning, joy has been brought back to my life. Being around all the people, the staff, kids, and community, has reminded me how impactful positivity can be. I have fun every day. I find fun in the small things. I find the positive angle. I felt this as a student and now I experience it as an adult.

The joy I have rediscovered has changed my life. Of all the things I had hoped to gain by returning to Spruce Street School, regaining joy far exceeded any ideas I had imagined. As I move on for a second time, I know that I will take all that I have learned as a student and a teacher into my next adventure. Most importantly, I will look for joy, create joy, and bring joy wherever I find myself next.





# LEGO WeDo: EXPLORING GENDER ROLES IN STEM

By Deborah Wexler, Teacher



The Lego WeDo elective is a favorite. Students across all levels work in trios to build programmable Lego models, capable of movement once the hubs are connected to the computer. In each one-hour session there is creativity, teamwork and experimentation. Each project models a robot created to solve real world problems. Students animatedly build vehicles and code programs. The hour always passes too quickly.

Lego WeDo has been offered several times over the years. It fills up quickly. Though teachers change up the order in which students pick electives, a pattern formed: one or two girls chose Lego WeDo a couple of times, yet girls were always outnumbered and never came close to making up half of the group. This did not represent their percentage at school. We started to wonder. We were familiar with the current workplace statistics, showing

women make up only 28% of the workforce in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), and men vastly outnumber women majoring in most STEM fields in college. Could we get more girls to choose the Lego WeDo elective?

After discussion at several staff meetings, we decided to try something new to make a difference. The next round of Lego WeDo would be open only to students who identify as girls. The initial feeling of this being exclusive, was outweighed by our desire to create a space that could give girls a chance to see themselves as capable mathematicians and scientists. Teachers brought the situation to their classes for discussion. In the oldest level students shared ideas behind the trend. "Adults still think men are better at science than women, and some younger boys and girls believe it, so they don't try." They expressed empathy. "How would it feel to be one of the only girls in the job? You might get bullied. You might leave."

On day one, the eleven girls built the introductory project and then excitedly began figuring out how to go further. They talked and created stories for their satellites and coded programs for lights, sounds and movement. The girls asked each other questions, becoming more confident by taking time away from their own builds to help problem solve. After three weeks students built the final project, a robot named Milo, much like scientists and engineers build rovers to explore places where humans cannot go. The girls used extra bricks as story props, such as big Mars rocks for Milo to push and Mars craters around which Milo could use its motion detector system to navigate possible hazards.

We noted interesting differences: the boys worked quickly, yet they wanted to get on to the next project. The boys listened to others explanations for only a brief time, rushing back to their own builds to figure out the rest. The girls determinedly dove deep with enormous amounts of patience. The boys moved through projects with speed and used enormous amounts of experience. What a good team they could make with girls participating in STEM opportunities. We hope we offered an experience that inspired girls—and the boys who supported this experience—to see girls as capable and important parts of scientific and mathematical teams. We are already thinking about how to keep the momentum growing.





Class of 2016 **Front Row L-R:** Sadie Ward, Abby Marschell, Ursula Tarrant, Bronwen Pritchard, Marlena Sheldon, Asher Porad, Dao Ming Chau, **Back Row L-R:** Roman Stromberg, Katharina Stromberg, Logan Pierce, Jackson Forebaugh, Owen Tarrant, Julia Cappio, Gray Carver, Eli Poll, Theo Murray, Adam Botha

## ALUMNI NEWS

By Shannon Orton, Assistant Head of School



Congratulations to the Moving On class of 2023! Our graduating class consisted of 20 students this year, and in their Moving On speeches each one shared their challenges, successes, and favorite parts from their time at Spruce Street School. We are so very proud of them! They will be attending 12 different middle schools this fall, including Billings Middle School, Bridges Academy, Explorer West, Hamlin Robinson School, Morningside Academy, The Northwest School, Seattle Academy, and University Prep. We look forward to hearing all about their adventures at their new schools.

In May we held one of our favorite events, our annual Alumni Dinner. Students from the classes of 2020 and 2016, who are graduating from middle and high school this spring, enjoyed dinner with current faculty while reminiscing about the past and sharing plans for the future. Like this year's fifth graders, alumni from the class of 2016 will be attending a variety of schools this fall, including Bowdoin College, Colorado College, Dartmouth University, Loyola Marymount University, Macalaster College, Seattle Central College, St. Olaf College, University of Aberdeen (Scotland), University of Washington, Vassar College, Wesleyan University, and Whitman College. Others are choosing gap years, travel, or work. We wish them all the best in their next journeys!

If you are an alumni student and would like to connect with the school, you can contact us at [alum@sprucestreetschool.org](mailto: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*. And don't forget to follow us on Facebook or Instagram! We look forward to hearing from you.



Class of 2019 **Front Row L-R:** Sylvie Kaufman, Ruby Harman, Maggie Hurtado, Elektra Sheldon, Violet Hebb, Amelia Haley, Boone Gorey, **Back Row L-R:** Liam Metcalfe, Ellen Walsh, Elina Hall, Jonas Borgida, Luca Avalone, James Berlin, Nicolas Gronlund, Reina Harris

# SPRUCE STREET SCHOOL MOVING ON CLASS OF 2023



**Front Row L-R:** Henry Marcella, Hugh Szeto-Millstone, Maya Hanna,

Ten Callaghan, Silas Landry Billings, Owen Kent, Dolly Barclay

**Middle Row L-R:** Ian Keljo, Alex Harriott, Simon Danko

**Back Row L-R:** Magnus Isdal, Aleya Gopalan, Iris Pierce, Oona Szwajkos, Rowan Evinger, Charlotte Harrington, Eva Malkin, Jack Alexander-Cullen, Will Hintz, Tristan Becker

## FROM THEIR MOVING ON SPEECHES:



Music has been one of my successes at Spruce Street School. One of the reasons I liked it was because you have to trust the people around you, so it was like a giant trust-building exercise but it sounded nice and everybody enjoyed it. Music class was one of the times that everybody came together as one big group and all put work into one project. I have grown as a musician and as a listener, and I am proud of that!

**Rowan**



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

Family Readers • Electives • Camp • Singing songs at All School Meeting • Winter Walk to the Seattle Center • PE at Cascade Park • All of the plays: *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* & *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* • Arts Week • Safety Patrol • Elders' Tea • Creating the Community Connector • Oldest Level Marimba Performance • Fall Festival • Math Jamborees and Publishing Parties • Pool Day • The Moving On Ceremony



One of my favorite activities is reading. In the youngest level, I did not enjoy reading as much as I do now because I thought of it more as something I had to do, instead of something I get to do. Now, when I start reading, I get sucked into the book and focus on nothing else that is going on around me. I can go for hours without stopping and enjoy reading challenging books.

**Tristan**

