

# DIRECTIONS NEWSLETTER



**SPRUCE  
STREET  
SCHOOL**

**SUMMER  
2020**



NEWS from School to Community





URBAN LEARNING



DIVERSITY



MULTI-AGE

# MOVING OUR COMMUNITY ONLINE

Briel Schmitz, Head of School



When I first came to Spruce Street School in 2002, staff did not have school email addresses. Much of our work was still on paper, even in the front office. We did have a simple (and effective) website and computers in the office. I loved the intentionally low-tech approach.

Fast forward to 2020. Technology is much more integrated into the school and every teacher has a laptop. In fact, teachers now have NEW laptops, thanks to the generosity of our community at this year's auction. And, our teaching and learning program is still intentionally low-tech.

When we were faced with moving to a remote, online teaching model this spring there was some concern that this low-tech approach would be a barrier. Instead, teachers were ready to flex their technology muscles and families stepped up to help guide their children (and let's be honest, some children were the guides!).

Once the initial hurdles were passed, we all focused on the most important things at Spruce Street School: our mission and core values. We found ways to build on our **multi-age** community (see Laura's article). We fostered **community** in new ways (check out the Zoom-based photo). Teachers created remarkable, **integrated studies** (the mid-level Rube Goldberg machines were a big hit—even when they flopped). And, **diversity, equity and inclusion** were guiding forces. We met with families to be sure that all students had devices at home and access to the internet. We matched some of our extended day teachers with essential workers to provide child care and we worked with individual families on how to help children be most successful learning at home.

One of the hardest parts of remote learning was **differentiation**: a key value and the heart of our program. Some children were most successful with live Zoom classes. Others struggled seeing themselves or so many people on the screen at one time. Some students thrived within the independent structure of Google Classroom, while others opened and felt anxiety and stress as they saw a list of tasks. Some students needed to do less and some did more. For many young readers, there was extra time to focus on learning to read, and they made huge strides. For other students who could not yet read, the constant language requirement was a barrier. The one common thread was that every child and family needed some sort of **differentiation**. Once we had our plan underway we built in differentiation wherever possible, and this will be a focus of any future model we create.

Yes, the technology was new. Yes, remote learning was challenging. What did not change was that we are a community of learners who honor the differences amongst us while challenging ourselves to build an inclusive community. High-tech or low-tech, our values keep the spirit of Spruce Street School alive and well.



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.

# LEADING THROUGH TIMES OF GREAT CHANGE

By Alexa Carver, Board Chair



What a year it has been. It is hard to believe that it was just this fall that the board decided to move forward with the purchase of our forever home—and we thought that would be the big event of the year!

I think we are all profoundly changed by this year, and in the face of so much change I know that I am extremely grateful for this community that remains constant in its support of one another. While it is the people, the connections and the relationships that make Spruce Street School such a special place to be, I know that the school's values are what tie us all together. These values guide the school's decision making and help the board imagine our future, regardless of the landscape we find ourselves in.

At the April board meeting, trustees shared their hopes and fears for the school, both for the present moment and for the fall. Thoughtfully digging into all of the possibilities and making room for this kind of connection is what happens at Spruce Street School, from the youngest level up to the board. And while each trustee shared both hopes and fears during this time of profound uncertainty, we all also shared a foundational confidence in the school leadership, and more importantly our committed community, to carry us through these turbulent times.

While May brought even greater upheaval in our nation with the Movement for Black Lives and protests just outside the school doors, my confidence in this community is unwavering. Spruce Street School continues to provide a nurturing educational community for children—a place where children of all backgrounds thrive, and a diverse group of families can find belonging. This is a commitment the school and the board take seriously, and we continue to evaluate our practices, policies, and interactions on our journey to be an anti-racist community every day. This is work that will continue both this summer and in the fall at the board, staff, administrative, and family level, led by the school's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee.

We as school leadership have much to consider for the fall. From the technical—how to do health screenings and can we use the roof climber, to the complex—what does a high quality, equitable blended learning model look like? This will be a busy summer, and I hope also a transformative one. The 2019–2020 school year has left us all forever changed, but I am determined, and hopeful, that it will change Spruce Street School for the better.

## STAFF

**Briel Schmitz**

Head of School

**Shannon Orton**

Assistant Head of School

**Jane Davis-Ward**

Business Manager

**Megan Schmidt**

Development Director

**Capri Arias**

Admissions and Communications  
Director

**Karina Cooper**

Administrative Assistant

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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# VISITING OUR NEW HOME

By Megan Schmidt, Development Director



In February, we opened the doors of our future *Forever Home* to our current and past community members. The result was three joyful gatherings of school students and supporters who have witnessed Spruce Street School's magic in one or more locations.

First, all current Spruce Street School students traveled to the Madison building for a visit. They played a PE game with Clint, added art to a mural and toured the building. Then we hosted two adult open house events. Briel led tours through the empty building as we shared our vision. We enjoyed time with current families, alumni parents and students, past teachers, current teachers and school friends all with fond connections to our school's history and a palpable excitement for its future.

The Spruce Street School Board of Trustees has been diligently planning and saving for this day. What started as a modest \$1,000 building reserve in 2006 grew to a multi-million dollar down payment on a space that we own and the community can enjoy forever. This opportunity was made possible by hundreds of families and years of board perseverance.

Our plan is to move into the building in 2030. Prior to that we will design and build the space to suit the school's needs. This includes building out a massive roof: students will have at least twice as much outdoor space as in our current building, and our famous roof playground will still be a part of our identity.

Thank you for helping to make this happen. Your dedication to Spruce Street School helped us reach this dream of a permanent home. We will continue to reach for our North Star goal of offering increased financial aid and accessibility. Our mission stands strong while we plan for the future. And, it all comes back to *you*. Each one of you has played your part through your unwavering support. We thank you and look forward to sending you updates as work progresses!



# PLAYing WHILE REMOTE LEARNING

Laura Montagner, Teacher



Teaching in the time of a pandemic has been a journey with many twists and turns. While teaching remotely was challenging, there were many sparks of light and levity along the way.

One of the highlights of our remote learning this spring was Arts Week. Each year teachers and students across the school put aside our typical academic routines and schedules and spend a week focused on art. Teachers choose a new theme every year to connect a variety of art projects and endeavors. Although we were in the midst of a quarantine, we did not want to miss the great rewards, learning and multi-aged connections that occur

during our annual Arts Week. *Play*, this year's theme, felt like the perfect focus while in the trenches of remote learning. A child's work is to *play* and we wanted to give our students opportunities to tinker with new materials, experiment with new concepts, and explore new ideas with flexible space and time.

Arts Week is an incredible time for the students to work and learn with children from around the school in multi-aged groupings. Multi-aged collaboration is a key ingredient of the school's philosophy, yet it was challenging to implement during remote learning. We soon realized that Arts Weeks was the perfect way to make this important value and tradition come to life in a new way. Each morning students worked with their multi-aged group, participating in creative art projects with a different set of teachers each day. Students constructed robots from found objects, transformed objects from nature into art inspired by Andy Goldsworthy, created collages and wrote *play* inspired poetry. They built forts and obstacle courses inside their homes and shared them with others via Zoom.

In the afternoons the school community gathered on Zoom to watch each level's *plays*. Every day provided a whirlwind of inspired and *playful* drama, including folktales from around the world from the youngest level, Ancient Egyptian-theme stories from the mid-level, and Shakespearian vignettes and monologues from the oldest level. On Friday, Butterscotch, a world champion beat-boxer, used suggested words from the students to *playfully* create original songs, ending this amazing week full of creativity, connection, fun and laughter as a whole school.





Class of 2013 **Top to Bottom L-R:** Colman Bashore, Issac Rose, Cassidy Wilson, Hannah Richey, Ari Porad, Alex Jursek

# ALUMNI NEWS

**Shannon Orton, Communications Director**



Congratulations to the Moving On class of 2020! All of these 19 students handled the mid-year switch to remote learning with creativity, resilience, and perseverance. Although they missed out on some Moving On traditions, they also had many special experiences unique to their cohort, including the creation of an amazing collection of recorded performances of Shakespearian monologues and scenes, all shared with families via Zoom. It was a show to remember!

In their Moving On speeches (presented live online), 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, Lake Washington Girls Middle School, Meany Middle School, The Northwest School, Seattle Academy, Seattle School for Boys, and TOPS. 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 2017 and 2013, who graduated 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 2013 will be attending a variety of schools this Fall, including Gonzaga, Middlebury, Olin School of Engineering, St. Olaf, Sarah Lawrence and South Seattle College. 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](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*. We look forward to hearing from you!

Class of 2017 **Top to Bottom L-R:** Kelsey Hamilton, Leo Carlin, Sophie Yang, Adelaide Darling, Jay Senstra, Daniel Moynihan, Maximo Avalone, Danny Pottharst, Cooper Hollands



# SPRUCE STREET SCHOOL MOVING ON CLASS OF 2020



**Top to Bottom L-R:** Grace Hintz, Jasper Lytle, Elina Hall, Sylvie Kaufman, Sophia Cao, Liam Leslie, Jonas Borgida, Nicolas Gronlund, Elektra Sheldon, Reina Harris, Ellen Walsh, Luca Avalone, Amelia Haley, Liam Metcalfe, Maggie Hurtado, Ruby Harman, Boone Gorey, James Berlin, Violet Hebb

## FROM THEIR MOVING ON SPEECHES:

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As long as I have been at Spruce Street School, Elders' Tea has always been my favorite activity. I found it really fun because it was a day where people were able to have high tea with their special elder and play the marimbas for them. It was always fun to see their responses to the performances.

**James Berlin**

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I feel like one of my successes is trying to be kind and empathetic towards others. I try to be an inclusive friend to everyone even when it's challenging. I don't like to see anyone feeling left out or mistreated. I try to put myself in other people's positions. This helps me think about ways to do the right thing and be as kind as I can.

**Luca Avalone**

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## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

**Camp Kirby and NatureBridge • The Fall Festival • The Ancient Egypt Research Conference • Reading Buddies • Electives • Publishing Parties • Singing songs at All School Meeting • Zoom dance parties • Visiting Mirabella • Cascade Park • All of the plays: *The Tomb Thief, A Different Sort of Pharaoh, Anansi and the Talking Watermelon, The Tortoise and the Hare, Tiger, Brahman and the Jackal, Tanuki's Gift, Henny Penny*, and many Shakespeare scenes and monologues • Beatboxing with Butterscotch during Arts Week • Safety Patrol • The Winter Walk • Sharing special tea settings at Elders' Tea • Creating the Community Connector • The Moving On students sharing their speeches on Zoom • The Moving On parade!**