

A Curriculum that Grows with Us

Dear Parents,

I wanted to take an opportunity to update you on the exciting work we have been doing on our curriculum and the benefits that we're already seeing from our approach.

One of the most important additions in recent weeks are math and science committees that include our teachers and myself, working to hone the curriculum that we developed early on to assure that each student is getting rigorous instruction delivered to engage and challenge him/her as an individual. Our goal is to go beyond basic rote memorization to content mastery and a deeper understanding of math and science concepts and applications.

With assistance from one of our Kindergarten parents, Suzanne Berliner Heyman, we have partnered with New Jersey Institute of Technology to expose our students to real-world science through in-class projects and experiments. Under this program, a graduate student from NJIT visits our school every Wednesday to work with our Kindergartners. We hope to roll this program out to other grades before long.

In math, as you will read below, we chose "Investigations" as the program to support our broader math curriculum, and the math committee will be constantly assessing its efficacy in each area, and supplementing with outside materials as needed. Here again, our goal is to have students obtain both a foundation in facts and mechanics, as well as a deep, comprehensive understanding of the bigger concepts and a set of skills that can be more broadly applied.

Finally, we can hardly wait for our third schoolwide theme,



Front row: Bertha Alfaro, Thiana Salvatierra, Rosita Crespo, Priscilla Monico, Jenna Lohwasser, Maria Acosta
Back row: Kelly Reina, Irene Nicolosi, Johanna Mendez, Nohely Lora, Trini García-Villén, Brigitte Garcia, Melina Jondee, Xochilt Rosas

"Nuestros Sueños," which will start in December. During this time, the children will study surrealism, including the work of Salvador Dalí and others. With the classroom teachers, the students will develop their aspirations and dreams for the school and the new year, 2011, while on Fridays, a visual arts residency with a teaching artist, Alan Nuñez, will explore the concepts developed by surrealists and learn how dreams can be translated into art in a variety of ways. Students will turn their own dreams and imaginings into original works of art, using a variety of media.

From all of us at HoLa, we wish you a very happy and peaceful Thanksgiving.

Maria Acosta, HoLa Director

Math Matters

Here at HoLa, we are constantly assessing what we're doing to make sure we have the absolute best curriculum to best serve our students. To that end, our director has set up a Math Committee, and joining her on this panel are three teachers. As the adviser, we have Dr. Anthony Petrosino, HoLa board member and professor of math and curriculum at the University of Texas at Austin.

(We also have a Science Committee—more on that in the next issue.)

To be sure, we selected all components

of our curriculum carefully and deliberately. But a curriculum, as we see it, is a living, breathing program that requires constant assessment, evaluation and fine-tuning to make it work best for students. We are relentless in this pursuit.

For HoLa, we selected the "TERC Investigations in Number, Data and Space" program by Pearson as our math program because of its strong reputation among schools that have successfully implemented it (Mustard Seed here in Hoboken, among many others), as well as a wide body of research that supports its effectiveness for children in grades K-5. The program was developed based on research

on how children learn mathematics, and extensive classroom-based field-testing.

One of the most important elements of "Investigations" for our purposes is that it's not a language-based program, but rather an experiential one, which incorporates a great deal of manipulatives-based activities, as well as opportunities for cooperative learning and self-directed problem solving. This is a good fit both with our approach to the curriculum in general, as well as with a dual-language setting, particularly in our first year of operation when most of our students are exposed to Spanish math vocabulary for the first time. *(continued on page 3)*

Classroom Stories

KINDERGARTEN

Kindergarten’s trip to see *ZooZoo* at the New Victory Theater in New York City inspired an interest in learning new animal songs—like “Pulgarcito y La Araña Pequeñita,” which we have been heard to sing in unison while walking down the street! Speaking of theater, we’ve been having bilingual theater class on Fridays, where the children have been acting out *El Patito Feo*, *La Caperucita Roja* and other fairy tales each week as we learn about character, storytelling and dialogue, as well as a new body of vocabulary.

In Language Arts, now that we’ve mastered the Spanish alphabet, we’ve been learning to read high frequency sight words, like “yo, gusta, una, me” and “un.” In December, we will add the articles “el/la,” and work on simple written constructions using “es un...” and “es una...”. We will continue creating words with the letters “a, e, i, o, u, m” and “p,” and writing stories during language arts. We have also started taking books home to practice reading to our parents, and writing in our journals every day to express our feelings and thoughts.

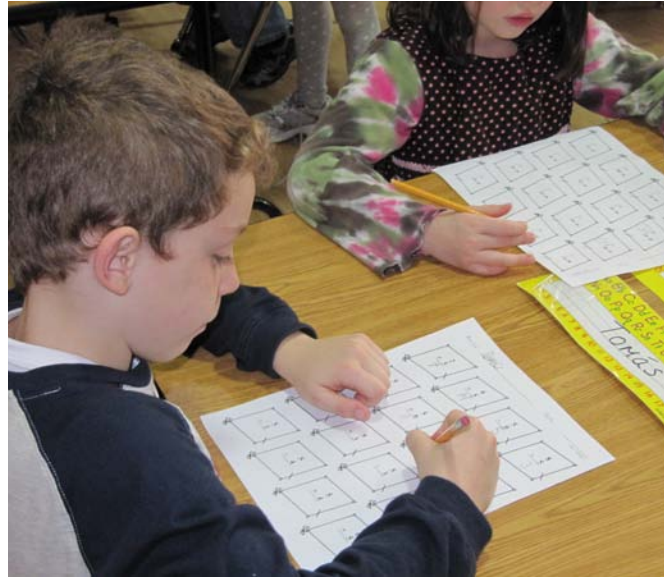
In math, we’ve been recognizing and adding sets of ten, and counting and keeping track of quantities up to 40. At home, you can test how we use our counting skills to compare two sets of objects by quizzing us on which group has mas (more), menos (fewer) or the same number. We are learning that when we count, we are adding one number at a time, providing a foundation for our upcoming addition unit.

In science, we’ve been focusing on the weather and learning what thermometers can tell us. Soon, we will begin to learn basic facts about the solar system and integrate them into math and other subjects (number of planets, relative size ...). We will also be talking about the abundance and importance of water on our planet.

We are using the approaching Thanksgiving holiday as an opportunity to discuss family, togetherness, sharing, and the many things we are thankful for. In our classroom centers, we are focusing on working cooperatively, taking turns, sharing materials, and collaborating on group projects.



FIRST GRADE



First graders are mastering the letters and sounds that are not present in the English language, such as “ñ” and “ll,” and studying the difference between masculine and feminine articles. Establishing this foundation will help create not only competent Spanish readers, but also great writers.

We have been writing about our feelings and what we like—the things that make us unique! We will soon begin the First Grade Writer’s Workshop, where students will be creating their own books and then publishing them. We also love taking books home to start building our own Spanish libraries.

In math, we have mastered counting by 2’s up to 100 and addition and subtraction with the number 2, and are now practicing adding and counting by 3’s, as well as working on addition problems with three addends. We are continuing work with word problems and studying the number line. In December, we will start collecting data, and using graphs and charts.

In science, we are exploring the sun and the solar system, and learning about the characteristics of the various planets. In social studies, we’ve been discussing theater and voice technique and acting out emotions. We’ve delved into Mexican culture and the Day of the Dead and we were able to compare Mexican traditions with those of Halloween using a Venn diagram. This month, we discussed the history of Thanksgiving and talked about what we are thankful for.

First graders have been particularly interested in the garden, and have helped both care for the worms in our worm composter, who are busy creating rich soil for our springtime plantings, and harvest the lettuce we grew this fall, which we proudly served to our friends to sample in the lunchroom.

We are excited for our upcoming field trip to the New Victory Theater, where we’ll get to see *Momentum*, an interactive fusion of physical feats and rhythm that explores concepts of time and space.

SECOND GRADE

Second graders are traveling the country—at least our letters are! We are sending our “Flat Stanley” via the mail to places outside of New Jersey and we’ll be marking the locations that he comes back from on our map as we learn about other communities through Stanley’s adventures. We are excited about this geography project!



We have now completed our second publication piece for Writer’s Workshop—personal narrative plays—which incorporated the drama theme of “Palabras Luminosas” into our language arts curriculum. At our publication party, parents read our work and asked about character, setting, dialogue and conflict, all of the elements we have been exploring through this theme.

In math, we are completing a place value unit developed by Ms. Lohwasser. This unit focuses on place value through the

hundreds place and will act as a foundation for our next unit covering multi-digit addition and subtraction. The unit uses a variety of modalities and activities, including integrating literacy into math, using manipulatives and math games, and development of a work portfolio.

In Science, we are learning facts about the Earth, moon, sun and other stars, and how they

form systems. We created mobiles to learn about orbits.

In Srta. Monico’s class, all students have learned the “La Tierra” song, which has an important message: that all people are world citizens and that together we are “brothers and sisters.” The second grade classes were excited to share “La Tierra” during our morning meeting with the entire school. We are now learning “Decir lo Contrario,” a song about opposites. We are very excited to start preparing for the holiday concert in music class!

How HoLa’s Charter Works for Kids

HoLa has only been open for two months, but we’ve been hearing that there’s a really positive buzz in Hoboken about us. And no wonder, we have fabulous teachers, a world-class curriculum developed by our strong school leader, and a group of phenomenally committed parents, board members and supporters.

We can’t help but think that part of our success is due to our structure as a charter school and the flexibility that has given us to innovate, adopt great ideas quickly and drop things that don’t work seamlessly.

We operate independently of the local school district—in fact, under state law, we function as our very own school district. So our board of trustees has one job, and one job only: ensuring the success of HoLa now and well into the future.

Like all charter schools, we are bound by the New Jersey core curriculum standards, state teacher certification requirements and most other

New Jersey school laws and regulations. We also take all state tests that are required of public schools.

Our charter is basically a road-map of our unique mission and objectives, and a commitment of accountability to the state and to the students for high expectations and defined goals that put the best interests of students first.

Some say charter schools are more accountable than most schools. There are numerous checks and balances from the state education department that assures that we are performing well—both academically and financially—on an annual basis. And of course we are accountable to our own school community: parents, students and staff.

In case you’re wondering what motivates us, there’s nothing like having a vested interest. In the case of HoLa, all of our founders and nearly all of our current board members have kids in the school. Talk about having skin in the game!

MATH MATTERS

(continued from page 1)

“Investigations” approach is consistent with current trends in math instruction, which are moving toward a concept paradigm, as opposed to rote memorization of facts. When students master concepts, they can apply them in a variety of settings beyond the specific examples they have worked on in class, and gain a deeper understanding of mathematical functions and relationships.

And yet—we are still not satisfied! “Investigations” is a great program, but based on the Math Committee’s recommendations, our teachers have been supplementing with additional practice sheets to support the curriculum with mastery of quick math facts and calculations. The most recent research indicates that this manner of implementation yields the best results in terms of student achievement and comprehension.

Finally, our teachers are working to assess each child’s baseline level in mathematics so that they can be challenged accordingly, and so that all students can be caught up to our level of expectations for their respective grade level. Currently, there is an extremely wide range of mastery, since students all have different academic backgrounds and experiences at this point, but parents and teachers can work together toward the common goal of rigor, excellence and engagement.

Gracias! Gracias! Gracias!

The HoLa Fiesta was a huge success! But we could not have done it without the help of local businesses.

We would like to thank the following restaurants for their generous and delicious food donations:

- The Taco Truck
- La Isla
- East LA
- Ultramarinos
- Zafra
- Argentina Bakery

A great big huge thanks goes to Joe Epstein (J Loren Photography) who donated his time, talent and resources to help make this event most memorable. The photo-op was awesome!

Thank you also goes to Every Little Movement Dance Academy who offered us a glimpse into the beauty and grace of



flamenco dance.

A special thanks goes to Music In Live Productions, because without them it just wouldn't have been a Fiesta.

Last but not least, we are so grateful to all the parents who contributed to this special event—you know who you are!

Looking forward to the next HoLa Fiesta!

Peta, Melissa, Maureen,
Shan and Suzanne



PTO UPDATE

This has been a busy month for the HoLa PTO with the launch of our first major event on November 13th, hosted by Senorita Alfaro's Kindergarten class. Over 80 HoLa families and close to 300 attendees came to the **HoLa Fiesta** to celebrate Hispanic Heritage month, raising approximately \$1,500 for future student activities. Many thanks to the students of HoLa for decorating with their art work, to the many parents who contributed financially and by volunteering their time, and to our class parents, Peta Moran and Melissa Romo, for their leadership on our first Annual HoLa Fiesta!

All of the classes have now hosted their **Friday Class Coffee**. Thanks to all of our Class Parents and teachers for organizing so that we can get to know each other better, chat with our Director, and then participate in our students' morning meeting. Some of the classes got creative too! The

1st grade Garcia class parents organized a collection of unused household items to donate to their classroom. While the 2nd grade class parents hosted a bake sale and raised \$145 to purchase Spanish books for Senorita Monico's class. We'll be taking a coffee break over the holidays and will resume in 2011 for another round.

Second grade parent, Alexandra Black, has organized a fun contest for everybody who participates in the **igive.com** online holiday shopping campaign. A percentage of each igive purchase goes directly to HoLa and new registrants that purchase within the first 45 days will see a \$5 bonus go to their favorite cause! For anyone who is registered and has made their first purchase by 12/31/10, you will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win four movie tickets. All proceeds from the holiday igive.com campaign will go towards the purchase of new sporting

equipment, games, and puzzles for indoor recess and/or gym time at HoLa. So far we have earned over \$225—so log on to igive.com and start shopping at your favorite online stores today!

Finally, beginning December 1st, the HoLa PTO will launch a **coat drive** to help provide warm coats to members of our community. Please set aside any coats that are clean and in good condition. Throughout the coat drive, HoLa students will learn about the importance of helping others in our community through various classroom activities.

A special thanks to all of our parents and teachers for their enthusiasm over the past couple of months. We look forward to many more exciting events for our families and hope you will join us!

With warm regards,

Andrea Mayendia & Norma Ramos
HoLa PTO Co-Presidents