



# End of the Year Report 2016-2017

## COLUMBIA GREENHOUSE NURSERY SCHOOL

### Something To Do

*“Give the pupils something to do,  
not something to learn;  
and the doing is of such a nature  
to demand thinking;  
learning naturally results.”*

**John Dewey**

**Something to do!** Each page of this report is filled with details of what we have done together this year. Our shared plans and our shared work—whether it is planning the Spring Fair or working together to build a barn in the 2s classroom—our shared act of ‘doing’ gave us a focus, a goal. Our work together framed our opportunity for learning. In the classrooms, teachers watched your children’s play. They were looking for an interesting question or rich interaction that might spark some creative ‘doing.’ Our emergent curriculum is built on the idea that the act of doing, thinking and exploring provides the context for all learning. And it only becomes richer when we practice that act of doing with a friend—even better when it’s with a group of friends! With every interaction, problem or question, we learn to see another’s perspective or gain insights into another’s mind. With each act of doing, we become a more connected community of learners. While the products of our work are on display—a successful auction, a painting in the style of Pollock, or a tower of colorful blocks—the heart of our shared work is our continued commitment to protect and maintain the early childhood years as unique and special. And through our work together we get to experience, first-hand, Greenhouse’s strong and vibrant community. As I look ahead, it is with pride and excitement that I look forward to another year of shared doing!



Warmly,  
Renee

Dear Greenhouse Community,  
Our country experienced many changes in the 2016-2017 school year. There is a sense of instability in the country and world beyond. When I'm worried, I try to remember the things in my life that I am grateful for; one of the things I am grateful for is Greenhouse. It is has been a source of security, comfort, and hope for me.

I am grateful for our creative, loving and hardworking teachers whose commitment to their craft and our children make the world a better place. When you bring your children to school, you know that while they are with their teachers they will be valued, respected and nourished. What could be worth more than that?

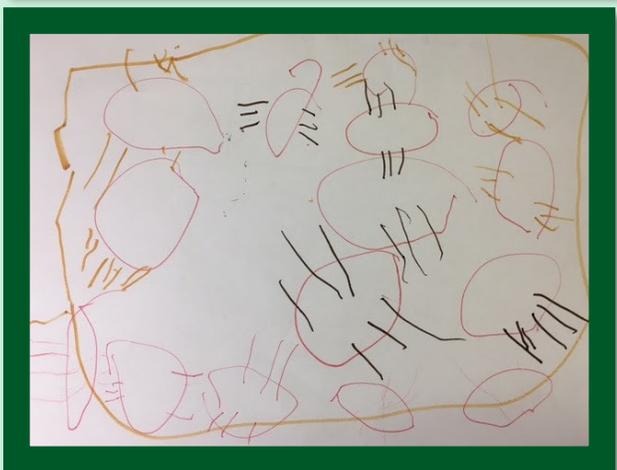
I am grateful for our Director whose leadership these last 5 years has enriched our school in countless ways. Renee is passionate about her vision for early childhood education. She brings her vision to

life by cultivating our practice, our curriculum, and our faculty. Renee also guides The Board and keeps us focused on supporting our faculty. And she does it all with a sense of humor that makes working with her a great pleasure.

Finally, I'm grateful for the Board of Trustees, a group of individuals with different life experiences and areas of expertise who share a commitment to Greenhouse born of our gratitude for the safe haven it provided for our own children lo these many years.

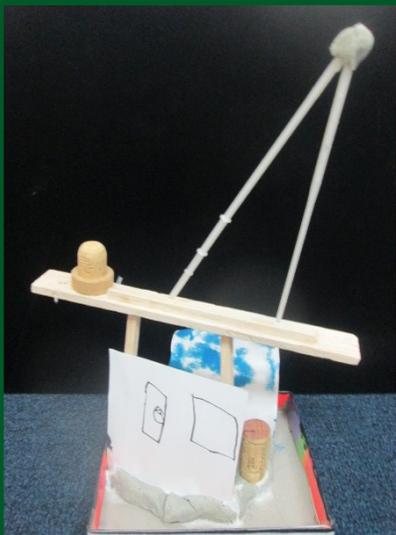
It is my hope that 2017-2018 will be a better year for our country, our world and our planet. But whatever happens, I know that Greenhouse will continue to be a place, not to escape from the world, but to work on repairing it.

Sincerely,  
Sara Edlin, Chair  
Columbia Greenhouse Board of Trustees





TO CREATE



## 2Day 2s: “I wonder...”



From day one, the 2day 2s joined together the power of discovery and the power of play to create the perfect conditions for learning. They were bright-eyed and eager for all that school had to offer; they brought their curious minds and creative ideas into the room and set off to work. As the grown-ups in the classroom, we knew that it was our responsibility to fill the environment with rich, interesting materials to inspire the children’s lively minds. We partnered with them in those moments of discovery; we asked, “I wonder what will happen if you...” or “I wonder why that happened?” With the strategically placed question or suggestion, we supported each child’s inquiry into the materials of the classroom and helped support the formation of their very next idea! Whether they were exploring open-ended, natural materials like sticks, water or light or stacking tree blocks to create tall towers, the 2day 2s built a strong sense of competency and autonomy. With each easel painting they finished or play-dough ball they rolled, they were able to experience what it felt like to have an idea and see it through to fruition. With pride, they shared a discovery with us, “Look at what I did!” or “Watch this!” That sense of accomplishment built onto their sense of self-worth and fostered a burning desire to continue to do and learn. It is in those moments,

when they were deeply committed to their plans, that we saw them build their ability to focus on materials, initiate their ideas and engage with peers. Sometimes, an idea didn’t work out--a tower fell down or a ball was too big to fit down the tube. In those moments of frustration, we saw the children build their ability to persist through their disappointment, be flexible in their thinking and develop new and interesting ways to solve the problem in front of them. These skills—the ability to focus, plan, take risks, persist, solve problems—these are the skills that children develop, use and refine during their explorations and play. These are the skills children will need to become life-long learners.



### Faculty List 2016-2017

2Day 2s and 3Day 2s 2/3s Afternoon	Rachel Roth, Head Teacher Nexhmije Avoricani, Assistant Teacher Indiana Bervis, Assistant Teacher
Young 3s	Pam Butler, Head Teacher Kira Rutherford-Boese, Assistant Teacher
Older 3s	Angela Coulibaly, Head Teacher Nina Basescu, Assistant Teacher Theresa Swink, Assistant Teacher
3/4s	Paula Doerfel, Head Teacher Erica Maldonado, Assistant Teacher Tolisa Orr-Chambliss, Assistant Teacher
4/5s	Margaret Williams, Co-Teacher David Vining, Co-Teacher Heather Guerrier, Assistant Teacher
Administrative Staff	Renee Mease, Director Vera Elumn, Administrator Ashley Kuitunen, Admin Assistant
Support Staff	Lorraine Harner, Child Psychologist Marlowe Rinsler, Music and Movement

## 3Day 2s: Making

The 3day 2s came to us with lively minds that were filled with powerful ideas, thoughts and questions. Our environment provided them just the right blend of opportunity and materials! Whether they were painting at the easels, weaving on the weaving board or making ramps in the block area, they were engaged, thinking and solving problems. Our open environment provided the structure and foundation for us to observe the children at work and build onto their experiences. We know that project work provides an important opportunity for building community and shared thinking. The 3day 2s found their project work very quickly—barn building.

Early on, the children were building enclosed structures using the magna-tiles and the wooden unit blocks. They were also placing meaning onto their enclosures; they called them barns. They put animals inside their enclosures and shared their prior knowledge about barns with us. As a group, we decide to build a barn. Building a barn is serious work! Between painting the barn, cutting out doors and windows and making our hay loft, our children practiced articulating their ideas, contrib-



uting to a shared goal, investing in their plan and feeling proud of their combined efforts! Similarly, the children joined together to construct a sheep for their barn. In this process-oriented work (of making your very own sheep or barn), the children got to see their own ideas take form. Whether it was painting black sticks for the roof of the barn or voting to use the blue beads for our sheep, Charlie Hey-Hey's eyes, the children formed their own ideas and followed through to see their finished product. There is nothing like envisioning, planning and completing meaningful work to make a person feel competent and proud!

Through their “making” experiences, the children began to see themselves as active, competent learners with worthwhile ideas and interests. They learned to focus, delay gratification and seek the help of others in their pursuit of their own intellectual, self-generated goals. We know that the children of the 3day 2s will bring this self-confidence and eagerness to their new learning situations. Most importantly, they will also carry a disposition as active thinkers and contributing group members as they continue to grow into life-long learners.



*Through their “making” experiences, the children began to see themselves as active, competent learners with worthwhile ideas and interests.*



## 2/3s Afternoon: Pieces of Home

We did a lot of learning and growing this year! In the beginning of the year, we slowly said good-bye to our grown-ups and found our way in the class. We discovered that not only are there fun and interesting things to explore at school like paint, ramps and play-dough, there are also fun and interesting people with whom we could explore these things. We learned to do new 'school' things like sitting at meetings, hanging up our coat in our cubby, and lining up to go to the yard! We learned the schedule of the day and when to expect our grown-ups to come back. The 2/3s Afternoon class set out on a journey to become "school kids". As is often the case when one begins a journey, it is comforting to carry with you some pieces of home, family and the past. The children connected their home life and their family with their new school life through their play, investigations and explorations.

Their conversation and play often centered on the topic of babies. Someone was always taking care of the little babies in our dramatic play area; they were their most mature self when they were swaddling a baby doll or lovingly giving a bottle to a baby. During our meetings we had lots of interesting conversations about babies. Whether they were talking about their baby siblings or sharing baby pictures of themselves, it was easy to see how much our kids knew about babies! As they built their own crib and high chair for our babies, they also built their own feeling of competency and agency. Not only were they no longer a baby, but now they were big school kids that could share an idea with a friend and work together to see it through. As the inquiry expanded to include other family members and a deeper exploration of the family unit, our kids continued to feel like competent and capable learners. And most importantly, they felt at home in this place called school and they became a valued, integral part of the 2/3s Afternoon family.





## Young 3s: Passionately Curious

Einstein once said of himself, “I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious.” Similarly, we discovered this year that our Young 3s class was also “passionately curious!” Their curiosity was the seed for a rich inquiry that provided them the opportunity to practice important approaches to learning and build significant skills. And it all began with an ant!

As is often the case, curiosity gave way to questions. After observing ants both in the yard and in our class, the children asked interesting questions like, “Why are they so small?” or “Do they bite?”. They also made a connection from the ants to our class stick bugs. We decided to introduce the idea of study groups; each child decided if they wanted to be in the stick bug study group or the ant study group. We used this structure to find out more about each insect and to find the answers to our questions.

The children began by looking closely at our insects. The simple act of looking deeply provides children the time and opportunity to notice details and process information. The more one looks, the more there is to see and the more one sees, the more there is to question! The children used many of the same skills and processes that scientists use when they are faced with a question. They collected data about the insects. (How many legs does it have? Why do they have antenna?) They found data in their observations, reading books and talking to other experts. They made guesses or hypothesized answers to their questions. They investigated, compared, and identified. Some even took a risk and handled the bugs. They began as researchers and ended as ant or stick bug experts!

In addition to the science learning, they were able to represent their knowledge and understanding using lots of different types of materials. Their numerous observations of their insects informed much of this process. They had already formed many ideas about the size and shape of their insects. They used interesting loose parts including wooden shapes, sticks, beads and clay to recreate their understanding of the parts of their insect. They used graphic materials to draw their understanding. When children are constructing a model or drawing a sketch, they are showing us what they know about the insect. They are also showing us how they organize information and if they can retrieve and share the information that they have.

The insect study also had interesting opportunities for the children to build and practice skills. They practiced how to organize their thoughts and tell a story by writing group stories about their insects. They had endless opportunity to count legs, bugs and body parts. They wrote signs and labels. They made comparisons and drew conclusions. Most notably, they practiced working with each other in order to gain insights and information. They collaborated on their story telling and play. They shared their understanding with each other. Their shared passionate curiosity led them down the path of inquiry, collaboration and skill-building and aptly prepared them for their journey of life-long love of learning.

***“The more one looks,  
the more there is to  
see and the more one  
sees, the more there is  
to question!”***



## Older 3s: Our Emotional Life



Developmentally, three year olds are moving away from the “me” of toddlerhood and into the “us” of preschooler (Epstein, 2014). Having strong skills that foster healthy relationships with their peers will have a lasting effect on their school success. As social development supports and touches all other areas of learning, a significant part of our curriculum this year centered on the emotional life of the children. We worked on exploring the children’s emotions so that they could identify and express their own emotions in a way that matched their growing competency, in addition to supporting their ability to recognize and value other people’s emotional lives as well.

While they are all learning how to identify, express, and regulate their emotions, they experience the social and emotional world in an individual way. Some might need help finding their voice and mustering up their confidence to be vulnerable and express their deep emotions. Others might need help finding ways to manage and regulate the expression of their emotions. We started our journey with an exploration of ways to identify emotions. We explored the idea that our face can provide clues to how we are feeling. Whether we were playing our “Feelings and Faces” matching game, making a collage of faces cut out from a magazine or practicing drawing self-portraits, we looked closely at people’s faces for clues about their feelings. We also found ways to connect the idea that our emotions result from experiences and ideas.

We explored the connection between music and mood, discovering how music can often elicit strong feelings. We also explored the connection between emotions and art; the children chose colors that evoked a feeling of happiness and made “happy” paintings. We even found “happy” feelings when we made our chocolate, chocolate chip muffins. Being able to identify their deepest emotions is paramount to healthy development and foundational to learning.

We spent time helping them find ways to successfully regulate their emotions. Sometimes, because of the intensity of their feelings, children can become overwhelmed by the big emotions that they are experiencing. During our group meetings we talked about some big emotions that our children experience at school, and identified techniques they could use to regain a sense of calm. While we support children’s social and emotional learning in the context of their daily interactions and life, we found this direct, explicit instruction of calming techniques to be very meaningful to the children. They transferred their knowledge into their daily interactions—retreating to the quiet area when they needed a break, taking deep breathes (pretending to blow up a balloon) or giving themselves a big, giant hug—all in an effort to regulate their own emotions and bring back a feeling of calm to their body. A very important element of our work with the children was acknowledging and accepting all of their feelings. All feelings are ok; sadness, anger, frustration are all valid and appropriate feelings. Once the children felt that they had been “heard”, that we understood and valued their feelings, then we were able to help them find appropriate ways to express their emotions, and coach them on some self-soothing practices.

The children were deeply engaged with the exploration of emotions as it had a strong connection to their own lives and held deep personal meaning. It is a telling sign that the children thought about, and practiced their calming strategies at home, as well as in school. This really highlighted the importance of this learning! When children are able to integrate their school experience with their life outside school, it clearly demonstrates that they own these ideas. As the children grow, and their ability to identify and regulate their emotions also continues to grow, they will feel even more competent. This is such important, life-long learning that will serve them well in every interaction to come!



## Moving Our Bodies

At Greenhouse, we know that young developing bodies—and brains—need physical activity! Young children’s bodies need plenty of opportunity to run, jump, climb, swing and tumble. The physical benefits of movement are widely held. Most current research is supporting that movement is not just good for the physical body; it is also imperative for healthy brain development. As children ride a tricycle, climb up a ladder or jump on a trampoline, their brain and sensory systems are fully active and engaged. When a child’s full body, brain and senses are active one can see their deep, unbridled attention, focus and joy. One researcher referred to physical activity as “cognitive candy” (Medina, 2016) for young children. The brain enjoys full body play as much as a sweet tooth enjoys candy! We are fortunate that our children are able to use both the big yard and the small yard to get physical exercise every day. We are also lucky to have green, open spaces on campus and in the near-by parks for exploring and fast games of chase. Outdoor, physical play is not frivolous; movement and cognition are powerfully connected. The joyful glee and abandon that comes with vigorous, physical play is the biggest payoff of all!



## Parenting: Rain or Shine

*While parenting brings numerous moments of pure, unfiltered sunshine, there are also those moments of rain! In an effort to further support parents in those rain or shine moments, I established and led a parenting discussion group. Our group met for six 1 hour sessions in the fall and six 1 hour sessions in the spring. Each session, we shared the deep emotional work that is required in parenting. We learned insights into child development. Most importantly, we connected with other parents around our shared experiences. I think the importance of what we were doing hit me the hardest on one morning when the weather just wasn't cooperating with our plan. Typically, we held our sessions in an empty classroom while the children were in the play yard. This morning, in the middle of our conversation, it started to rain and the children needed their room back. I do not remember the specifics of our conversation; we could have been talking about the struggles of bed time or strategies for meal times. But I clearly remember the look of panic on the faces of the parents; they were not ready to have our conversation end simply because of some rain. I jokingly suggested we go sit outside in the rain to talk and they unanimously agreed! We took our conversation to the play yard, sat on tricycles and continued on—rain or shine! I consistently heard participants say that our sessions were the highlight of their week. And I have to agree. I looked forward to these conversations of mutual learning and support.*

Renee



### Our Parent Group By Lauren Taggart Wasson, mom of Margaux and Cecily

The inspiration for our new parenting group stemmed from a moment of vulnerability. A parent in the audience of a Greenhouse event expressed to the guest speaker how challenging (terrible! exhausting! overwhelming! defeating!) it feels to coax a toddler through bedtime. That parent voiced vulnerability and nearly every other parent in the room, including me, seemed to share it as they nodded in understanding and listened with rapt attention to the speaker's response.

This moment revealed that many of us experienced parenting challenges and welcomed, if not craved, support and advice. It also showed that some of us were prepared to share our vulnerabilities in a group setting to set the stage for growth.

Renee responded by creating a parenting group with an ethos and method that, to me, epitomizes Greenhouse: it is a supportive community with a researched, informed curriculum for social and emotional growth. Now targeting parents.

Every Wednesday morning, we settle ourselves into toddler chairs arranged in a circle and balance our coffee and morning treats on our laps. Renee grounds the beginning of every meeting with a fascinating and poignant article, book chapter or podcast by a childhood development expert. Then the conversation begins, though it often shifts depending on the concerns, questions and interests that arise and it sometimes covers topics none of us anticipated. Renee steers us with her own expert input, inevitably leading to a glorious "aha!" moment. Again, this is classic Greenhouse in my mind: a purposeful framework for learning with lots of room in the middle for guided exploration according to students' interests.

Our group discussion topics have ranged widely. We have parsed different parenting philosophies; we have delved into the nitty-gritty of how to best execute daily routines, including "getting kids out the door" and the recurrent favorite "seriously, go to bed!!" The conversations have been thought-provoking exchanges of ideas and practical advice during which everyone listens and everyone contributes. We share anecdotes that sometimes evoke laughter and sometimes prompt sympathetic nods or hugs.

The topic that stands out in my mind as the most meaningful for our group – the greatest exposure of our vulnerabilities and fears and our desires to do the best we can for our children and our community – was how to talk to our children about race. Our conversations had led to this topic, and Renee expertly guided us. She provided published literature about when in children's cognitive development they begin to categorize and how we as parents can shape and reconstruct that process. She helped us explore our experiences by validating our emotions and ideas, celebrating our successes and reflecting on our fumbles. We strategized and suggested approaches. We were able to speak openly without judgment, remembering we started by bringing our vulnerabilities to the group to share, support and grow.

Greenhouse's parenting group has been a highlight for me – I have so enjoyed this new community within the school, with its friendships and insights. We welcome more parents to join us!

## Parent Association: A Look Back

Dear Greenhouse Parents,

As we say goodbye to another school year, we are filled with appreciation for the teachers, administrators and families at Greenhouse. It is truly an honor to be a part of this community and to serve in the Columbia Greenhouse Parent Association. We will cherish the many wonderful experiences we have shared with you. This year we set out to provide even more opportunities to build and strengthen our community, and we are grateful to the volunteers who came together to support this effort. **Highlights of the year include:**

A new event, a **Caregivers Coffee Hour**. We wanted to provide our caregivers an opportunity to become acquainted with each other early in the year. On a sunny fall morning we held refreshments for the caregivers in the small yard. Quickly, there was laughter and connection. As a result, the children also benefited, as caregivers exchanged contact information and began arranging play dates. We appreciate the support that the caregivers bring to our community and we look forward to repeating this event next fall.

An evening of fun and good conversation at the **Parent Association Cocktail Party**. Parents and teachers enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere in the beautiful Harlem home of Greenhouse board member and alum parents, CC and Julien Clauss-Ehlers. Special thanks to the Clauss-Ehlers for helping to make the evening such a success for the second year in a row!

The **Book Fair** held at Book Culture is a children's community event. This lively Saturday event included readings by our Class Parent Reps. We were touched to witness kids taking books off the shelves and handing them to our parent volunteers, who graciously continued reading aloud long after story time had ended.

The classroom teachers were pleased to receive so many books from their wish lists, and parents discovered new titles to satisfy their eager little readers.

This winter we hosted **Dr. Laura Markham**, renowned author and editor of AhaParenting.com. Her riveting talk was open to all current and incoming parents. Dr. Laura also devoted plenty of time for Q&A. The feedback we received from the event was extremely positive, and we look forward to inviting parenting experts to Greenhouse each year.

**Apple Day Bake Sale, the Winter Benefit and Spring Fair** are all family favorites. These events rely heavily on the efforts of our parent volunteers. The Benefit is a wonderful event spent with current and past families, and our faculty and administrators. The class donations were especially creative and highly popular bidding items. The Bake Sale and the Fair are beloved by all the children of Greenhouse.

We would like to recognize the dedication of our Class Reps. Their efforts have been essential to building the Greenhouse community as they helped with several PA events, hosted playdates, class excursions, and parents' nights out, and organized class-wide efforts throughout the year. You were all wonderful to work with, and we appreciate all you do to strengthen our community.

We look forward to another year serving the parents and the community at Greenhouse and to watching our children grow together. Have a safe and happy summer!

Warmly,

Lydia Barker & Sharmilee Ramudit



***Our deepest appreciation and gratitude to the many parent volunteers who took on leadership roles in this year's activities. Your willingness to serve reflects the generosity, spirit and commitment of the Greenhouse community.***

### PA LEADERSHIP

Lydia Barker, Co-Chair  
Sharmilee Ramudit, Incoming Chair  
Lauren Lee, Class Rep  
Kari Strong, Class Rep  
Danielle Alden, Class Rep  
Lauren Weigel, Class Rep  
Amanda Gallo, Class Rep  
Siew Mei Au Yeong, Class Rep  
Lisa Bruno, Class Rep

### Spring Fair Committee

Lindsay and Mike Pitzer, Co-Chair  
Whitney Frick and Andrew Bernstein, Co-Chair  
Christina Weyl, Food Co-Chair  
Tessa Scripps, Food Co-Chair  
Monica Shaw, Rummage Co-Chair  
Evi Vakiani, Rummage Co-Chair  
Jessica Kimpell, Games Co-Chair

Seulgey Suh, Games Co-Chair  
Bernard Kirk, Set-up/Clean-up Chair  
Flori Pressman, Central Booth Chair

### Auction Committee

Vera Elumn, Greenhouse Coordinator  
Rachel Maniatis, Chair  
Erin McHale & Oren Ahoobim  
Kathleen Brennan & Jeff Kearney  
Katherine & John Cooper  
Jeseca & Chris Cunneen  
Ebony Brown-Emdin & Chris Emdin  
Randi Hirshberg & Keith Haller  
Chad Hughes & Sara Zaudi  
Stephanie Hodor & Ted Lasala  
Judith Margolin  
Lara Kostakidis-Lianos & Alistair McKibbin  
Lisa Elias-Mittler & Jordan Mittler  
Nancy Ramsey & Steve Brand

Cindy Huang-Vissering & Dustin Vissering  
Lauren Taggart Wasson & Baxter Wasson  
Maren Westphal & Omar Gutierrez  
Alison & Jonathan Willner  
Ashley Zwick & David Lavinsky  
**Auctioneer**  
John Schnatterly

### Apple Day Bake Sale

Kerry Ann Evans-Thompson and  
Bradford Thompson  
Lynn Biderman

### Event Photographer

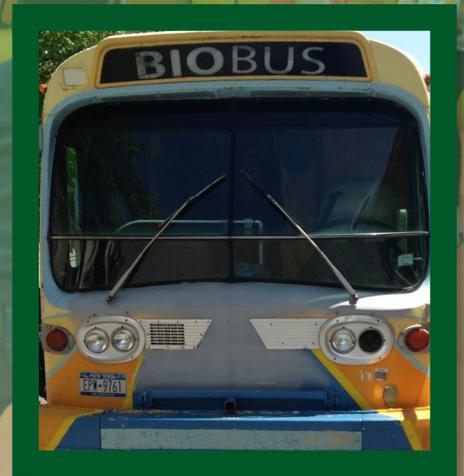
Marco Pirone

### Have Tools Will Travel

Jared Fox

# THE VIBRANT AND GENEROUS GREENHOUSE COMMUNITY

A long-time family favorite—the **Spring Fair** was as magical as ever. We transformed the street with bouncy rides, fishing ponds, and ponies. This year Center Stage became a lively focal point with Mario the Magician and Music with Marlowe. There was a steady stream of students, alumni and neighborhood families visiting the BioBus or playing a trumpet with Bloomingdale School of Music. The food table was stocked with a wide range of delicious food choices (many made and donated by Greenhouse families). There is nothing better than watching the kids run and laugh with such joyful abandon.



The **Annual Winter Benefit**, held at Union Theological Seminary, is a night for the grown-ups of Greenhouse to get dressed up, laugh and support the work of the school. Huge thanks to everyone for their deep generosity, good spirits, enthusiastic participation and kindness; the evening was both a great fundraiser and great fun! We also introduced the newly formed, Columbia Greenhouse Chorus. The Chorus members include current parents, alumni, parents of alumni and faculty. Their rendition of "This Land Is Your Land" and "Put a Little Love in Your Heart" entertained us all!





Apple Day Bake Sale



Parenting Workshop:  
An evening with Dr. Laura Markham



PA Cocktail Party



Getting Acquainted  
New-Families Cocktail Party



2/3s class get-together at the  
fire station



Caregiver's Coffee Hour



### 3/4s: Inspiring Materials



It was clear right from the beginning that we had a class filled with curious minds, lively thinkers, and creative problem solvers. How could we further provoke their imagination, foster their creativity and engage their minds? We know that four year olds learn best through direct interaction with real-life experiences and interesting materials. We know that four year olds need to move, manipulate and handle materials to actually change the way they think about a problem. We know that mastery of skills happens most seamlessly when the skills are in service of making meaning. A sure way to spark engagement, learning and collaboration is to intentionally provide provocative materials to draw the children in and then uncover their thinking. This year, we used a wide range of materials—including tools, masks and Three Bears—to do just that.

Young children use materials in lots of different ways to tell and show us what they know and what they are thinking. We gave the children a variety of materials and opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. Whether we were using real carpentry tools to dismantle small appliances or comparing different versions of The Three Bears, the children used their critical thinking skills to analyze. Should I use the hammer or the screw driver? How are these two versions of the same story different and the same? Then, they showed us what



they knew in their work and in their words. Similarly, they used their executive functioning skills to process and organize their thoughts and ideas. How do you collaborate with your peers and use loose parts to create a unique cleaning machine or a sculpture of refurbished parts from the dismantled small appliances? When they used simple, hardware to create faces and masks, they were organizing their knowledge and showing us what they know about compositions, size, comparisons and so much more! Our children were literally bathed in language and opportunities to practice and use language. From expanding vocabulary (like crank, Allen wrench, and inclined plane) to storytelling, the children used language to express their ideas and knowledge. They also were participating in the give and take of the exchange of ideas with their peers. During our collaborative writing of the animal masks story or their oral partner-presentations of their Three Bears book, the children were not only sharing their own ideas but they were listening to the contributions of others. Ultimately, our shared experiences—building toolboxes, painting scenery for our play, acting out the story, writing a shared story or building a machine together—ultimately, these experiences give children a chance to share a goal with their peers and make deep, contextual, integrated meaning with content and skills. As our friend, Goldilocks likes to say, it was “just right!”



## 4/5s: Art and Artists



**What is art? Why do people make art? Where can you find art? What do people use to make art? Where do ideas for making art come from? What do you see when you look at art?**

Thinking, wondering and talking about what they see are the fundamental ways in which young children make meaning of the world. Called visual literacy or visual inquiry, it is an important cognitive skill which involves the ability to make meaning from information that is presented in images rather than in text. Children constantly take in new visual stimuli and connect it to their prior information and experiences. This helps children to solidify what they already know and to move their thinking forward. By engaging in this type of thinking children are creating pathways in their brains on which to build future learning.

It all started at the Family Welcome Picnic in the fall of 2016. There were three huge sculptures entitled *Who's Afraid to Listen to Red, Black and Green* by Kevin Beasley which is installed near the area in Morningside Park where the school picnic is held each year. The incoming 4/5s and their families were excited and intrigued by the sculptures. We teachers also saw the potential of the art installation as the inspiration for having a rich, engaging exploration of art and our neighborhood. Little did we know that the exploration would last the entire school year – a year that involved all of us, children, teachers and parents, in wondering about, thinking about, experiencing, interacting with, and producing ART.

At the beginning of our study, we introduced the children to the process of visual inquiry. We showed them photographs of Beasley's work and asked them to describe what they noticed. The lively discussion that followed demonstrated the children's ability to make keen observations and to verbalize their ideas clearly. As each child described what s/he noticed others joined the discussion adding ideas, speculating about what it was and asking more questions. We knew that we had to visit the sculptures together!

We began a series of trips to the park as a school group to gather data and details about the sculptures that we had seen in the photographs. After carefully and thoughtfully examining the artworks up close and in detail, the children sat on the grass and were asked to draw what they observed using colored pencils. Converting visual input into another medium is one way that young children develop their ability to process and represent information, all the while practicing their fine motor and drawing skills in a new and stimulating context. We used the Beasley sculptures as a springboard from which many exciting art projects were born focused on the shapes, colors and textures that he used in his work. In subsequent discussions we wondered, "How big are the sculptures? How far apart are they?" First we estimated the size of the sculptures and then we set about to gather numerical data adding a math inquiry to the visual inquiry, measuring, counting and comparing our findings.

When we walked to the park as a school group we realized that there were lots of things all around waiting to be quantified. We set out to create a map from Greenhouse to the park that would represent our findings. In small groups we counted all the trees, park benches, sidewalk squares and stripes in the crosswalk along the route to the park. We tallied our results and together decided how to add them to the map along with some other notable features, most notably the "fountain". It was important collaborative work and the children learned how to work together toward a common goal.

The questions remained – why do people make art; what inspires people to make art; what are the different artistic points of view? We decided to look at four artists to see if we could answer these questions. Again using the visual inquiry process we examined the works of Henri Matisse, Frida Kahlo, Jackson Pollock and Grandma Moses. We noticed each artist's unique style and learned how each became inspired to create art. We experimented with creating art "in the style" of each artist. Then we asked the children to think about their own artistic point of view. The resulting art pieces were displayed in the 4/5s Art Showcase on the big yard. Parents, Grandparents, siblings and friends were all invited to see the results of the year's work. While the 4/5s had set out on a journey to explore the world of visual art, they ended up also discovering a deep sense of their own competency as artists and learners.



## 2016-2017 Annual Fund Contributors

The generosity of Greenhouse parents, alumni families, and friends allows us to continue to provide exceptional programs and quality experiences for our children. Their contributions to Greenhouse serve as the catalyst for change and growth, which enables us to continue to refine and enhance the experience that is Greenhouse. Contributions throughout the year to our Annual Fund are the cornerstone of giving to Greenhouse and support the ongoing operational expenses of the school. *Greenhouse Nursery School thanks and acknowledges the generous contributions of the following individuals and companies:*

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