

Dear Primary School Families,

We hope that your summer days have been happy, healthy, and filled with summer fun! Our Primary School faculty have been hard at work preparing for the new school year. The purpose of this letter is to (1) inform you of personnel updates at the Primary School, (2) share adjustments to grade-level teaching teams, and (3) introduce you to the warm, talented newly-hired teachers who will work with your children this fall.

For a quick list of PS faculty and staff, please see mka.org/parents/back2school, then click Primary School, Forms & Information All Grades, Primary School Faculty & Staff List.

Pre-Kindergarten

We are happy to welcome Suzanne Giarrusso to the Pre-K teaching team, where she will join Breanna Conley in Pre-K Blue. John Odell and Caylie Marden will teach Pre-K Green as they have in years past. (Suzanne will fill the position previously held by Erica DeTrollo, who is moving to the Kindergarten team.) Suzanne has been a member of the MKA community for several years as a maternity leave teacher. Her warmth and experience in early childhood make her a phenomenal addition to our Pre-K team. Before working at MKA, Suzanne taught kindergarten at The Pingry School and in the young 3's classroom at The Children's House in Verona and the 3-6 year-olds' classes at Montessori schools in California. Suzanne holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Bucknell University, where she majored in elementary education with a concentration in history. In addition to her early childhood teaching skills, Suzanne will coach field hockey and lacrosse at MKA this year. Her husband Dave is the co-head coach of the Varsity Boys' Lacrosse team at MKA. Suzanne and Dave are parents of three boys (Will, Colin, and Trevor), and they have a dog named Baker. Suzanne loves going to the beach, running, reading books, and watching and playing lots of sports, especially lacrosse.

Kindergarten

Erica DeTrollo will be moving from Pre-K to rejoin the Kindergarten team. A former Brookside Kindergarten teacher, Erica's extensive experience in early childhood settings and her love of early learners makes her a natural fit for Kindergarten. Erica will be an incredible asset to the team as she brings her knowledge of the Reggio Emilia approach and experience with developmentally appropriate, hands-on learning to our kindergarten students. Erica will join Alex Langbein in Green K, and Spencer Pyke and Jessica Sarfati will teach Blue K.

We joyfully await the arrival of Jessica Sarfati's baby in August. Jessica Sarfati remains grade level team leader, although during her maternity leave, Spencer Pyke will fill the role of grade-level team leader. Jessica's maternity-leave replacement through Thanksgiving will be Kathy Crane. She was previously a third-grade teacher at MKA and has served several leave replacements here in the past and has been much valued daily substitute. Kathy holds a B.S. in Elementary Education with a minor in Psychology from Bucknell. She and her husband Jim have lived in Montclair for 23 years, and they've been married for 22 of them. They have three

daughters (Madeline, 19, Emily, almost 17, and Meghan, 15), and two four-legged boys, Oliver, a four-year-old corgi, and Finnegan, an 18-month golden retriever. Kathy is a beach lover who has enjoyed spending most of the pandemic at her shore home in LBI. She enjoys an indoor women's tennis league and can't get enough of pickleball. She also loves catching up with friends while walking around Montclair.

First Grade

In first grade, we recently celebrated Pat Parke's retirement after 45 incredible and memorable years at MKA. Pat's sense of humor and ability to understand and celebrate children have been true gifts that she has shared with the hundreds of children she has taught. We will miss her, but she promises to come back and substitute! To fill the role in the first-grade team, Gretchen levers will be moving up to first grade from Kindergarten. A truly versatile educator, Gretchen has experience teaching upper elementary school children as well as Kindergarten students. Her first-grade students will benefit from her breadth of knowledge and enthusiasm. Continuing to teach first grade will be Kathy Sasena and Jennifer MacQuarrie, with Jennifer MacQuarrie serving as the grade-level team leader.

Second and Third Grade

The second grade team will remain the same as last year. Meg Arcadia, Erin McMenamin, and Sheila Smith will teach second grade, with Erin McMenamin remaining in the grade level team leader role. Kate Caro, Dana Rose, and Daniela Vespucci will remain as the third grade team. Kate Caro will step into the role of grade level team leader.

Diversity and Inclusion

To continue to support our ongoing efforts in this important area, we are happy to share that we will have two Primary School Diversity and Inclusion Coordinators this year: Meg Arcadia, who is continuing in this role, and Breanna Conley, who is new to the role. We are grateful for Meg and Breanna's leadership as they support the Primary School in continuing to actualize MKA's diversity and inclusion statement of purpose, integrate a multicultural curriculum, and foster an inclusive environment.

Reading Specialist

Marie Ihnen, our reading specialist, moves on from MKA after many years of service to our developing readers. We are grateful for all she has contributed to our students and our MKA community. We are excited to welcome our new reading specialist, Jill Wimmer, to the Primary School. We are especially happy to announce that she is joining us in a five day, full-time position to provide even more support to students. For four years, Jill was a reading specialist in the Lower Division of Avenues: The World School and the Lower School Learning Specialist at Trevor Day School, both in Manhattan. She also served as a first-grade teacher at Avenues and is a certified Reading Recovery teacher. Jill holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brown University in education studies with a focus in history and Policy, a Master's in Education from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Master's in Education with Advanced Literacy Specialization from Bank Street College of Education. Jill loves summer vacations at the beach,

and she especially enjoys eating fresh seafood and ice cream with her children. She is an avid reader and is newly addicted to the New York Times Crossword puzzle, although getting past Wednesday without some (many) Google searches is still out of reach.

Spanish

Ann Banegas is off to her official (real) retirement after so kindly and generously helping to fill-in last year. We are delighted to welcome Pablo Rincón as our new Primary School Spanish teacher. Pablo holds a Bachelor of Arts in psychology and early childhood education from Jersey City University, and he has valuable experience working with early childhood students, as he has taught pre-kindergarten and second grade in Jersey City public schools. He is working toward a Master of Arts in educational technology at New Jersey City University. When he's not in school, Pablo spends his time at home with his wife, three sons, and three chickens. Over the years, Pablo has had salt-water fish and bearded dragons, and he is looking to add more chickens to his coop. One day he would love to move somewhere with more land and add a goat to his farm, but his family is not completely sold on that! His passion for animals stems from his summers in Puerto Rico working on his uncle's dairy farm. He also loves working on cars in his garage and is currently teaching his 17-year-old how to do simple repairs before he gets his license. When he's not tending to his chickens or working on cars, Pablo enjoys training at a local CrossFit gym, building Legos with his 8-year-old, and reading Spanish bedtime stories to his youngest.

Student Services Support

A much beloved coach, recess aide, and substitute teacher these past few years at MKA, Mike Sasso joins the team as a full-time Student Life Associate. Mike's responsibilities include providing in-class support to students as needed by classroom advisors and coaching students on how to grow, practice, and maintain healthy friendships. Mike grew up in Newark and eventually settled in West Orange. One of four boys, his family is Italian, Irish, and Bermudan, as his mom is from Bermuda. In fact, his mom's family's last name, Tribley, is widely known around the island of Bermuda for the chain of clothing stores that his great-grandfather owned there that became popular in the 1980's. While the chain is no longer in existence, the name still lives strong on the island. On his dad's side, Mike's dad has one hundred first cousins. Each year they enjoy a family reunion of about 400 Sassos!

Recess Aides

Katie Parke, co-director of Extended Day and recess aide, finished her master's degree from Lesley University this spring and has taken a wonderful opportunity to teach Pre-K at Stevens Cooperative School in Hoboken. While we are sad that Katie will not be with us this fall, we are excited for her opportunity to begin her classroom teaching career in earnest and wish her all the best as she embarks on this new endeavor. We are in the process of hiring two new recess aides and will share information with you as this becomes available.

With excellent teachers (including a few new faces) poised to welcome your children back to school in September and strong grade level teams in place, we look forward to a great start to the school year.

Sincerely,
Margaret Gonzales and Maureen Bates
Co-Directors, Primary School