



Columbia Secondary School Parent-Teacher Association 2011-2012 Welcome Letter

"We Build CSS Together"

Dear CSS Families,

We have a great year ahead of us and are excited to welcome our newly appointed principal, Miriam Nightengale. We hope you can join us on **September 21st at 6:00 p.m.**, at the first scheduled PTA meeting of the year, to welcome Principal Nightengale to the CSS community, get to know her, and hear about the plans for moving CSS forward.

We will also introduce this year's elected PTA board members as well as other CSS parents who have worked hard over the past years as we all "build CSS together!" As you already know, CSS has the key ingredients for a successful school in place – we have the most dedicated and energetic teachers working with our kids; we have an administration that supports an ambitious goal for all of our children; and, of course, we have a truly amazing student body! What can be done to improve upon this? The answer is simple – **we, the parents and guardians**, have to pitch in to support the school's mission. *Your efforts, large and small, will benefit the entire CSS community.*

You are all members of the CSS Parent-Teacher Association, regardless of whether you attend meetings, or contribute the suggested PTA membership dues. You can support the work of the PTA with your time and your skills as well. As a growing school (we are starting our fifth year!), there is plenty of opportunity for each of us to be part of building on the diverse, dedicated, and caring community here at CSS.

We will share more with you about how you can take part in the CSS community at upcoming PTA meetings and in future emails. For now, we simply wish to welcome you and share some useful information with you to get the year started.

Following this letter, you will find:

- PTA meeting schedule for the year and the DOE school calendar
- Important communication and contact information
- An envelope for you to return with your annual PTA donation
- Basics about the school's PTA, SLT, and Foundation
- Instructions for joining the CSS parents email group

Sincerely,

Maria Herrera and Boyana Konforti
CSS PTA Co-Presidents
CSS PTA / 425 W. 123rd Street, New York, NY 10027

PTA MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2011-2012

**** Meetings are held from 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

September 21, 2011	Auditorium
October 12, 2011	Room 404
November 9, 2011	Room 404
December 14, 2011	Room 404
January 11, 2012	Room 404
February 8, 2012	Room 404
March 14, 2012	Room 404
April 18, 2012	Room 404
May 9, 2012	Room 404
June 13, 2012	Gym(Election/Potluck)

SCHOOL CALENDAR 2011 - 2012

Thursday & Friday	September 29 & 30, 2011	Rosh Hashanah	No School	
Monday	October 10, 2011	Columbus Day	No School	
Tuesday	November 8, 2011	Election Day	No Students	Staff Development Day
Friday	November 11, 2011	Veteran's Day	No School	
Thursday & Friday	November 24 & 25, 2011	Thanksgiving Break	No School	
Wednesday	December 26, 2011 thru Monday, January 2, 2012	Winter Break	No School	Return to School Tuesday, January 3, 2012
Monday	January 16, 2012	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	No School	
Monday	February 20, 2012 thru Friday, Feb. 24 2012	Mid-winter Break	No School	Return to School Monday, February 27, 2012
Beginning Monday	April 6, 2012 thru April 13, 2012	Spring Break	No School	Return to School Monday, April 16, 2012
Monday	May 28, 2012	Memorial Day	No School	
Thursday	June 7, 2012	Staff Development	No Students	
Wednesday	June 27, 2012	Last Day of School		

COMMUNICATION AND CONTACT INFORMATION

School Website - The CSS website is a good resource for basic information. Please be patient this year, since we are undergoing a number of changes in administration and staff, as well as policy and curriculum changes. Despite the fact that some information is not up-to-date, the school calendar on the home page is updated frequently.

The website is <http://columbiasecondary.org>. You will be given your own username and password (different from the username and password which each student is given) which will give you access to the Parent Home Page. From this page, you can:

- access the CSS student / parent directory
- edit your family's contact information
- log in to your own CSS email account (you can also set up email forwarding to ensure you get all emails that are sent to you)
- read all of the posted PTA and SLT meeting minutes
- check your child's homework assignments

School Phone Number – The CSS Main Office phone is **212-666-1278**

School Email – Each family gets their own CSS email address (all addresses use the “columbiasecondary.org” domain through the CSS Google-based platform). The school sends a lot of information to you by email and you will receive a letter from the school giving you your new CSS email address and instructions on how to get your messages in a way that is easiest for you.

CSS Principal Miriam Nightengale miriamnightengale@columbiasecondary.org

CSS Parent Coordinator Maria Eder mariaeder@columbiasecondary.org

CSS Guidance Counselor Elsa Cordoba elsacordoba@columbiasecondary.org

CSS Teachers give the students their email addresses and phone numbers; if you ever need to reach a teacher by email, all CSS email addresses are the person's full name, followed by “@columbiasecondary.org”

CSS Parents Google Group – This is a parent-created listserve; this means that once you sign up to join this email group, you can send and receive emails to/from the full list of parents on the group. This is very useful for simple questions, sharing information, and organizing school events and activities when we can't meet in person. Detailed instructions on how to join are on the last page of this packet.

Communicating In Person – PTA meetings are a good place for you to ask questions or share concerns with other parents. You can raise an issue about the school in general or seek help with a problem your child is experiencing if you don't feel comfortable approaching the parent coordinator or a teacher.

THE PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION (PTA)

What does the PTA do?

- The PTA provides a forum where teachers and parents/guardians can join to work together to improve the academic and extra-curricular life at CSS
- The PTA helps to raise money for the school. In 2010-2011, the PTA funded fitness, cultural, and academic needs based on faculty requests for support that was not included in the school's general budget.
- The PTA helps to host school-wide events and community-building activities, giving parents and teachers opportunities to get to know one another.
- The PTA works with the administration to make sure that parents are informed about important issues and events happening at the school through PTA meetings, e-mails, and newsletters.

Who Runs the PTA?

At the end of every school year, we elect a president or co-presidents, a treasurer, two secretaries, two Vice-Presidents and other officers, as needed, to serve as volunteer members on the executive board of the PTA.

2011 – 2012 PTA Officers:

Co-President	Maria Herrera	mariaherrera@columbiasecondary.org 917-653-9974
Co-President	Boyana Konforti	bkonforti@gmail.com 917-992-3848
Vice-President	Judith Pena-Rosario	judithmpr@hotmail.com 646-765-5666
Vice-President	Candy Gulko	candygulko@gmail.com 212-864-1815
Treasurer	Sean Stanton	seanjayeva@aol.com 212-987-9058
Comm. Sec'y	John Feldman	johnfeldman@hotmail.com 646-370-5320
Recording Sec'y	Cintra Supesad	cintra64@gmail.com 917-856-0681
Title I Rep	Barbara Jones	barbajones@yahoo.com 917-584-8711

PTA COMMITTEES

FUNDRAISING

One of our goals for this year is to better develop our fundraising efforts. Our fundraising activities include: picture day; Walk-a-Thon; bake sales throughout the year; the used uniform sale; book fairs, and more. We could really use more people to organize activities that will help us bring in money from outside of our own parent community. We are also looking to hold a **fundraising party / auction** and need a few people to take this on!

Grant writing skills are also needed. We can apply for grants or request in-kind donations for our Community Garden; our annual school musical; science and technology equipment; and more.

EVENTS COMMITTEES

CSS Hispanic Week Committee: Run by the Spanish Language department, this is an amazing week of academic and cultural events. This is a great committee to join; tasks include working on the family potluck dinner, putting together thank you gifts for the invited performers and speakers, and other general help. To join this committee, please write to marisolweiner@columbiasecondary.org

CSS Garden Committee: We have a truly beautiful garden on 119th and Amsterdam Avenue. Our own students worked very hard to pull it together and it holds special meaning for them as part of it is dedicated to the memory of one of our students, Nicole Suriel. Tasks include being at the garden for open hours, finding and applying for grants and free materials, helping to maintain garden supplies, and other garden-type things! To join the committee, please write to meredithhill@columbiasecondary.org

High School Events Committee: The high school students have school dances, movie nights and more. Parents are needed to help them organize and run the events, which are always lots of fun! To join, please write to co-chairs sbworkman@gmail.com and joeybrenneman@mac.com

Sales Committee: We host a concession table at the school play and other annual events. People are always needed to set up, clean up, and work the tables. To join the committee, please write to mariaherrera@columbiasecondary.org

OTHER COMMITTEES

Health & Wellness Committee: This committee could use a chair or co-chairs to keep track of all the good work that several parents started last year. We have had parents working on school safety; adolescent mental health; and we are even hoping to get our cafeteria moving in a fresher direction! Please write to mariaherrera@columbiasecondary.org to find out more.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES: Every parent who sees a need, or a place where you think you have a good idea for improving the school culture, please let us know. Every one of the great events and activities we've had started as an idea!

THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM (SLT)

The core responsibility of each SLT is to develop the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) that is aligned with the school-based budget. Functioning in a collaborative manner, SLTs also help to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's educational programs and their impact on student achievement. The SLT is composed of the principal, parents, teachers, and students.

The SLT meets twice monthly. Please check the calendar on the school's website (<http://columbiasecondary.org>) for dates and times. All members of the CSS community are welcome to attend SLT meetings for observation. Parents who are not SLT members are encouraged to bring issues of concern to an SLT parent representative on the team prior to team meetings. Requests for topics of discussion should be submitted in writing at least one week in advance of the meeting date. Members of the school community who are not team members may request speaking time at meetings to discuss specific topics, but shall limit their comments to no more than three (3) minutes.

The chairperson of the 2011-2012 SLT is Janet Miller, a parent representative. You may contact her at janmilmar@yahoo.com. You may also bring an SLT matter to the principal.

THE FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The Foundation for Excellence in Education (FFEIE) is CSS's supporting charitable organization. This non-profit corporation was established to enhance the educational experiences of the students, teachers, and staff of CSS. It is separate and independent from both the PTA and from the DOE, although the leadership of the foundation and the PTA regularly consult to coordinate efforts where appropriate.

The majority of the foundation's income currently comes from Columbia University's annual contribution to CSS, but a significant amount also comes from CSS parents' and families' voluntary charitable gifts. In the future the foundation will engage in outside fundraising (in the form of grant writing and corporate match gifts, etc).

One of the main Foundation expenditures is the J-Term Fund; J-Term is part of what makes CSS special. For three terrific weeks in June, students use the skills they have learned all year long to explore topics like farming, civil engineering, immigration, art, and ecology. All students in good academic standing will participate in J-Term, regardless of ability to pay – however, this unique, real-world, experiential course is very costly and families are asked to contribute as much as they can toward the cost of the trips.

Many parents find it helpful to set up a recurring monthly payment through the Foundation's Paypal option to contribute to their children's J-Term expenses. You can make payments through Paypal at http://www.columbiasecondary.org/general_fund, or by sending a check payable to "The Foundation for Excellence in Education" to the school. More details will be sent to you by the Foundation early in the school year.

All contributions to the Foundation for Excellence in Education are **tax deductible**.

HOW & WHY TO JOIN THE CSS PARENTS GOOGLE GROUP

The CSS Parents Google Group was established in order to provide a way for CSS families to communicate with each other outside of official school channels, on topics of general interest to the entire community. We urge all families to join this email list.

Official announcements from school administration, the DOE, or the PTA will not appear on this group; those messages will be sent to “parents@columbiasecondary.org” and individual parents and guardians cannot send messages to these official school mailing lists. But you can send messages to this Google Group instead.

Here are detailed instructions on how to join the group:

1. To join the group, you must have a Google account. If you already have a Google account, skip to step 3.
2. To obtain a Google account, follow these steps:
 - a. Point your browser to **<https://www.google.com/accounts/NewAccount>**
 - b. Fill out the account creation form, and click on the button that reads “Create an account” at the bottom of the page. This will send an e-mail to your registered e-mail address to verify that your request was authentic.
 - c. To activate your account, go to your usual mailbox using your usual e-mail program, open up the verification e-mail and click on the verification link.
 - d. Congratulations; your account is activated. You will be invited to join Gmail or other Google services, but it is not necessary to do that in order to use the group.
3. Once you have your Google account, follow these steps in order to join the group:
 - a. Point your browser to **groups.google.com/group/columbia-secondary-school-parents/subscribe**.
 - b. Sign in to your Google account, if you are not already signed in.
 - c. Choose your group settings: how you want to receive e-mail, a nickname you want to use on the group. Some people prefer “Daily Digest” to keep emails to 1 per day.
 - d. Identify your name and your child’s affiliation with CSS.
 - e. Click on the button at the bottom of the page labeled “Apply to this group.”
 - f. You will soon receive an e-mail confirming your membership.
4. You can access the group through the web portal, which provides an archive of all past posts, or through your regular e-mail.
 - a. To access the web portal, point your browser to **groups.google.com/group/columbia-secondary-school-parents**
 - b. You can now e-mail the group at columbia-secondary-school-parents@googlegroups.com. Be sure to send from the e-mail address under which you are registered. If you try to e-mail the group from a non-registered address, your message will not be delivered.
5. If you have any further technical questions, please e-mail **barbajones@yahoo.com**