



October 26, 2022

Dear Families,

This letter talks about Halloween in our school, opting your child in or out of the DESSA social-emotional questionnaire, and one more thing about last Saturday's Fall Festival

### **Halloween at CPE1**

Halloween in our school is not about being scared and eating candy. Halloween here is about *childhood* – imagination, creativity, wearing something special that the whole community sees.

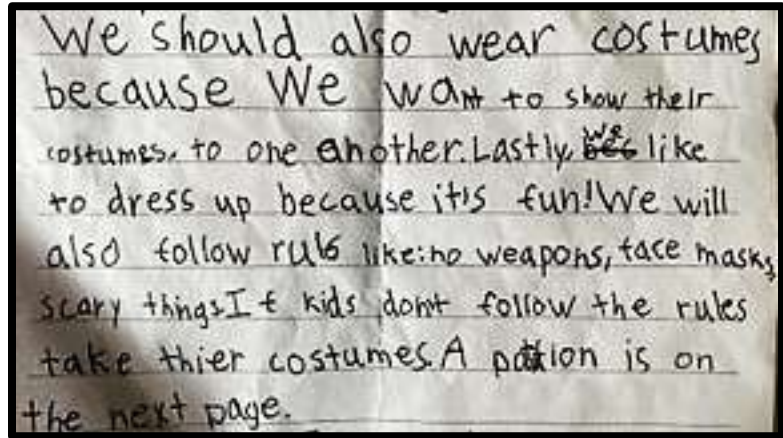
For pre-K and K-1 classes, this celebration happens after lunch this Friday, October 28, starting at 1:00. Here are key details:

- Pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade wear regular clothes. They change into their costumes after lunch.
- Older children and adults do **not** have costumes in school.
- Home-made costumes are encouraged.
- Costumes are **not**:
  - Scary
  - Violent
  - Masks
  - Superheroes
  - Princesses
  - Carrying weapons
- Young children parade in costume, cheered on by older children.
- Younger children parade outside in the neighborhood.
- Younger grades gather after the parade for treats (no candy) at Lehman Playground.
- Families are welcome to attend. Please do not take photos of any child but your own.

- Children do not wear costumes in school on October 31.

Not all students or staff participate in Halloween. We always have class discussion if anyone is not dressing up. Our children learn more when they explore the different traditions and beliefs of our community.

I was in the middle of writing to you about why older children and adults don't wear costumes here even if we still like to dress up and pretend. A third grader walked into my office and handed me a letter, attached to a petition, signed by 45 second, third, fourth, and fifth graders. As you can see, *they* know the "rules" about weapons, masks, and "scary things." Our students offer a rule-based solution



We should also wear costumes because we want to show their costumes to one another. Lastly, ~~we~~ we like to dress up because it's fun! We will also follow rules like: no weapons, face masks, scary things. If kids don't follow the rules take their costumes. A petition is on the next page.

We talked, and it sounds as if our older students don't expect any changes this week. So, for now, this expectation is still in effect:

- Students in grades 2 – 5 *still* don't **not** wear costumes to CPE1.

That's a quick decision, but it requires longer discussion. With any community expectation, it's important to talk about the *why* with children. And, we need a fuller conversation with children to hear their ideas thoroughly. All schools teach children persuasive writing; schools actually would not want, as this petition suggests, to "take... costumes" from kids who "don't follow the rules." But Halloween comes once a year; democracy should be part of every day.

### **DESSA Starts Again**

This year New York City schools will be using DESSA, the Devereaux Student Strengths Assessment. DESSA is a questionnaire for grades K – 12. It asks how frequently children exhibit behaviors such as speaking positively about themselves or looking forward to school. The answers lead DESSA to score a child's social-emotional development.

Adults complete DESSA alone; children do not take a test. This year, if you choose, you can complete DESSA for your child. If you fill out the DESSA form and send it back to the school, it will be combined with teacher results to get one score.

You have three options for DESSA:

- Teachers complete DESSA for your child
- Teachers complete DESSA at school and you complete DESSA at home
- Opt your child out completely

Last year, CPE1's first with DESSA, those social-emotional scores were very high. In fact, CPE1 received visitors from the central office to find out more about how we got such high results.

One reason, I told our visitors, is that our staff spent much more time working on DESSA. The instructions say teachers should work alone to complete a DESSA survey, taking about five minutes to respond to forty questions. At CPE1, teachers and paraprofessionals often worked together to complete the questionnaires. They spent up to an hour per child, remembering examples of when a child 'kept trying when unsuccessful' or 'or 'spoke about positive things.' I am guessing that the extra time and more collaboration helped our staff uncover strengths and avoid the biases that could lower scores in other schools.

NYCDOE's original letter says that you should write to me if you wish to opt your child out of the social-emotional screening. I simplified this to a quick yes-or-no survey. If you wish to opt your child in or out, just click here.

The DESSA asks questions about areas of social-emotional functioning including decision making, relationship building, confidence, and others. This tool will be

- 3 keep trying when unsuccessful?
- 4 handle his/her belongings with care?
- 5 say good things about herself/himself?
- 6 serve an important role at home or school?
- 7 speak about positive things?
- 8 cope well with insults and mean comments?
- 9 take steps to achieve goals?
- 10 look forward to classes or activities at school?
- 11 get along with different types of people?

completed by someone who knows your child really well—in most cases a teacher.

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Gabriel