

CHARACTER MATTERS

LEADERS IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD



Back to School Carnival Style

As we embarked on our inaugural school year as Leaders In Our Neighborhood (LION) Charter School, we were thrilled to host a K-12 Back to School Celebration! On September 17th, our high school building radiated with joy from our LION students, family, and staff. Each floor featured myriad activities for students and families to engage in together. Students, with siblings in tow, raced from one activity to the next: getting their faces painted, jumping in the bounce houses, dancing with their teachers, and more. The energy throughout the building was electrifying! Family members were also able to get in on the fun, playing giant Jenga and Tic Tac Toe with their children and LION staff, posing for family photos, and creating slime to take home. Students, staff, and families alike enjoyed carnival treats throughout the event.

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Message from Our Executive Director

At LION, we remain deeply committed to our students, families, and community. Our pillars, Character, Leadership, Social Justice, Curiosity, Family, and Community, serve as the foundation of our program. Our emphasis on character ensures that there are myriad opportunities for self-reflection and feedback. In our classrooms and class meetings, students consider the state of our school, community, nation, and world, as they identify ways they can serve as leaders in partnership with faculty. We have also forged critical partnerships with nonprofit organizations and other neighborhood schools, recognizing that together we can affect the changes we seek to make. We are change agents, beginning with the evolutions we must make in ourselves, our families, and communities.

In this issue, you will read about the exciting things happening in our school. We celebrated the start of the school year with our families, whom we ensure feel welcome and supported. During LION 101, our staff orientation program, we pushed new staff out of their comfort zone and introduced them to our program and practices. This issue highlights the ways in which we are transcending the space of our school buildings in an effort to peak curiosity and build cultural competence. We also share how we celebrate identity and the cultural roots that inform our perspectives.

The success of our program is clear. We retain students and faculty at higher rates than our peer schools. We are proud to serve a diverse student population, including students with disabilities and multilingual learners. Students who complete our program matriculate into college, persist, and graduate from postsecondary institutions at rates that exceed national averages for students in the same demographics. Our alumni remain connected to our school, some joining our team as teachers, deans, information technology associates, development and marketing interns, and more. We credit these accomplishments, and others, to our thriving school culture and steadfast commitment to character.

I invite you to connect with us to learn more about the work we are doing and the ways you can contribute. Our supporters and community partners have a tangible impact on the students and families we serve. Thank you for your partnership and belief in our students' potential.

Sincerely,

Celia Sosa

Executive Director



Lion 101: The Beginning of a Character Journey

Each year, new staff at LION begin their journey of self-discovery with an off-campus retreat, which introduces team members to our mission, pillars, and signature practices. Throughout the retreat experience, staff engage in team building activities, workshops, and seminars about LION’s philosophy and practices. Staff are challenged to think deeply about how their life experiences inform their perspectives and their goals for their future. Seminars, team building, ropes course challenges, and conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism (DEIA) prepare staff to uphold our mission and support and challenge students and each other. Staff are able to reflect on their character and return to LION with a better understanding of who we are as a school and what distinguishes us.

John Swader, a 15-year veteran of LION currently serving as Recruitment & Hiring Manager, co-facilitates LION 101 with Celia Sosa, our Executive Director, and team members from across our school. In an interview, John shared some of his reflections on this summer’s LION 101 experience.

What were some of the most impactful experiences for staff this summer?

John: Our seminars are always meaningful, and during team building, people are relying on each other, so the trust is really there. The DEIA session was really impactful, and as a result, staff know who our students are – almost 100% students of color. It’s about really reaching everyone’s whole self, diving into who we are. At the heart of it, we’re people. We’re human. You’re not just teaching. You’re a part of our school. Outside of our school, what are we doing to make an impact? Those kinds of conversations amongst our staff and students will push them to do this work beyond the walls of our school.

What do you think were some of the biggest takeaways for staff from this experience?

John: They got a sense of community. We’re one K-12 school community. I think they got a sense of how important the work that we’re doing is. It’s not just about numbers. It’s about social-emotional learning. It’s about the whole child. It’s about the family. It’s about going in and making a difference in the lives of so many people, not just our students, but our families and the community around us in Hunts Point. I think they got a sense of what the pillars are and what character education means at LION.

What have you noticed about the relationships staff build during LION 101?

John: There’s just something about the LION 101 experience that brings people together. People build really strong relationships that last for years, sometimes beyond the time they spend working at our school. In fact, I recently spoke to someone who continues to stay in touch with a person they met during LION 101, despite the fact that neither works at the school anymore. People build some really strong bonds, and it’s part of what makes staff feel supported at our school.



Summer Boost: Expanding Student Learning

This summer, we were elated to receive a grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to expand our summer program opportunities, allowing us to serve 296 students K-12. Through the Summer Boost program, students were able to hone their English and math skills and engage in enrichment classes. In addition to focusing on academic skills, students had opportunities to attend trips throughout the program. These trips included a tour of Yankee Stadium, a cooking experience at Creative Kitchen, and an exciting day to LEGOLAND New York theme park. The program culminated with a celebration of students' hard work with a carnival in our school yard. Summer Boost was a huge success, helping students to strengthen their academic skills and providing them with fun opportunities throughout the five-week program. Elementary Summer School Directors Lindsay Alexander and Jane Yang shared the story of a student who was timid and struggled to complete work at the beginning of the program. By the end, the student was no longer afraid to make mistakes and exemplified the ability to persevere, even when assignments were challenging. Middle School Summer School Directors Stephane Ubini and Tanisha Wilson noted a 6th grade student who illustrated the impact of the Summer Boost program by demonstrating 20% growth in both English and math classes. We are grateful for our teachers; their dedication to our students made this program possible.

A Partnership to Serve Our Neighborhood

In July, LION Family School Partnership Coordinators, Yris Moran, Tiffany Mayol, Marlla Torres, and Josmary Perez partnered with fellow community members Ricardo Polanco from P.S. 48 and Desiree Vega from Bronx Academy for Multi-Media (BAMM) to help serve our community members. The Summer Food Program aimed to supply families in the neighborhood with fresh produce provided by Fres Co, LLC and the Hunts Point Alliance for Children. A large number of families and community members attended, each receiving their own reusable tote filled with fresh produce. Marlla Torres explained that the program operated from a "From Us, By Us" mentality, seeking to demonstrate that, as neighborhood schools, we are more than just facilities to educate our students; we are part of a larger community that is striving to help support one another. Families expressed their appreciation for the event and goods provided as well as their hope to see more events like this in the future. The Community Leadership Board plans to host additional events like this one to continue to serve the community and help grow our neighborhood family.



LION Interns: Developing Career Skills in Our Neighborhood



As an institution committed to students' post-secondary success, we recognize the need to provide students with both a robust college preparation program and career exploration, including opportunities to engage in work-based learning. We are grateful for the long-standing partnership of several local businesses who have offered our students paid internships each year. These experiences allow LION students to develop occupation-specific skills, social capital, economic stability, personal responsibility, and self-confidence.

Mohammed Ceesay, Class of 2024, began his internship at F&F Supply in the spring thanks to a grant from AT&T in partnership with the Here to Here Foundation. The grant aimed to encourage business owners to provide work-based learning opportunities for high school students. Spirit Dillard, Class of 2022, and Daniel Tejada, Class of 2024, joined Mohammed at F&F Supply for the summer. All three students learned from the experience, including how contributing to a team in a work environment fosters a sense of purpose. Brian Jacobs, Director of Business Development at F&F Supply, was impressed by the interns' contributions and their ability to undertake a number of responsibilities. Mohammed and Daniel have continued this fall as part-time employees.

Additionally, Tatyanna Hunter and Jean Nuez, Class of 2024, interned at D'Arrigo New York for the summer. Matthew D'Arrigo, CEO, is a proud supporter of work-based learning and the values such learning instills in young adults. Both Tatyanna and Jean appreciated the opportunity to develop new skills and become part of a larger work culture. Tatyanna shared that her internship helped her to become "more outspoken and confident." Their hard work and eagerness to learn did not go unnoticed. Shelly-Ann Foster, Human Resource Director at D'Arrigo New York, gave both of them a glowing final report. She shared that both interns were "great additions to the team."

We appreciate F&F Supply, D'Arrigo New York, and all local businesses who have employed our students for providing these essential opportunities and supporting our students' growth. We recognize your leadership in these efforts and look forward to continuing our partnerships within the community for many years to come.

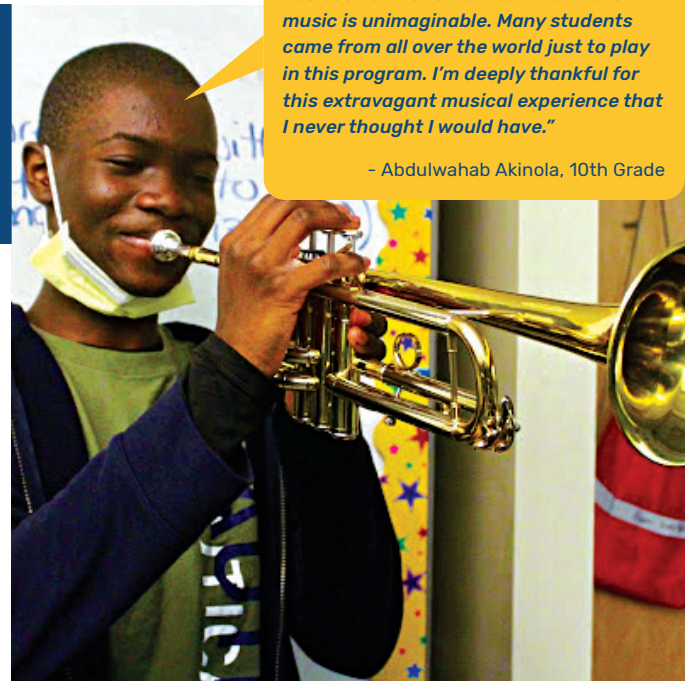


"In my educational journey, music has been the one thing that puts me in a separate dimension. That's why I was so happy when I heard I was going to be able to attend the Manhattan School of Music this summer. This opportunity to explore the meaning of different types of music has been an honor for me...The level of music is unimaginable. Many students came from all over the world just to play in this program. I'm deeply thankful for this extravagant musical experience that I never thought I would have."

- Abdulwahab Akinola, 10th Grade

Our Lions Explore and Soar

Through our 2022 Spring Social Celebration in April, we raised over \$30,000 towards unique summer opportunities for our students. Thank you to all those who participated in our Mission Explore and Soar event and online auction! Your contributions were instrumental in providing the following opportunities across our K-12 community: career and interest-focused 12-day experiences for 300 middle school students in June, STEM boxes for 284 elementary school students, lacrosse camp at Pace University for six middle school students, volleyball camp for five high school students, tuition gap and transportation for one middle school student to Camp Kiniya, tuition assistance for one high school student to attend a pre-college class at Fordham, and, thanks to the Roberta Flack Foundation, a full scholarship to the Manhattan School of Music's Summer Jazz Program.





Back to School Carnival Style

(continued from cover)

As a community school, we value our local partners, including but not limited to the Hunts Point Alliance for Children (HPAC), Rocking the Boat, Eyes on Education, and Urban Health. During our event, students and families connected with these partners and others who shared enrichment opportunities and resources available in the neighborhood. Our partners were delighted to see so many students and their families. They expressed gratitude for LION's long-standing partnership with the community in support of our students and their potential.

Not only do family events bring students, staff, and family members together; they create the deep connections that are at the heart of our character culture. At LION, we welcome all families and value their identities, experiences, perspectives, and feedback. Our vision is for each LION family to be fully engaged. Our program centers on self-reflection, student and family well-being, and communication. Events such as our Back to School Celebration create the foundation upon which our family program is built and help bring our vision to fruition.

We extend deep gratitude to our staff, students, and families who made this event possible. Our family program and character education will continue to distinguish us and inform the unique ways we engage with one another. We can't wait to see you at our next event!





Les Léons dans la ville des lumières (Lions in the City of Light):

LION World Scholars Are Going to Paris!



We are proud to launch LION's World Scholars Program, inspired by the school's first international trip to Cuba in 2018. We believe in the power of experiential learning and are committed to providing experiences for our students that will prepare them to be leaders in our local community and beyond. Our World Scholars Program aims to help students see the world and themselves in it through annual international trips. The knowledge and skills our students attain through these experiences will ensure they are poised to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world and will prepare them to embrace the challenges and opportunities of our globalized society. This year's trip, "France Beyond the Eiffel Tower: Unveiling the Hidden Stories of People of Color & Immigration," will give bright, hardworking, and dedicated students the opportunity to see firsthand international ties to their humanities and social justice curriculum.

Connected to our Social Justice pillar, students will balance exploration of Parisian history, art, food, and culture with groundbreaking conversations, looking beneath the stereotypical veneer to discover truths about contemporary Paris. In preparation for this experience, students will conduct research, take an introductory French language course, and network with French students and educators. During our trip, students will visit historical sites, such as the Louvre Museum, Bastille, and Eiffel Tower, as well as a refugee reception center, school, and restaurant dedicated to refugee chefs (as pictured in the bottom left photo) in Ivry-sur-Seine. As they travel through the city, students will collect portraits, stories, and interviews from myriad perspectives. They will learn about the intricacies of immigration policy in combination with activist movements and investigate what mainstream schooling means in the context of immigration and assimilation. Students will also have the opportunity to meet their French peers to learn about their perspectives on social movements and activism.

Vida Ebron, co-leader of LION World Scholars explained the goal of the program: "to offer students innovative, cross-cultural experiences to develop the essential skills and capacities needed to understand and address global challenges. As educators, we build students up academically and as people. LION is allowing us the chance to ensure that our students are developing holistically through this real world experience." The 20 students who will embark on this journey are beyond excited for this experience. Xavier Feliciano, 8th grader, stated, "LION World Scholars is making my dreams come true because I have always seen pictures of Paris on the internet and on TV. Now I know that when I dream of something it can actually come true." 7th grade parent Myra Marin is overjoyed that her daughter will have this experience. "My daughter having the opportunity to go to Paris is such a big deal because when I was younger I didn't get a chance to travel. I want my daughter to get a chance to see that there is a world beyond New York City. It also means so much for me to know how hard she works in school and for her to see that opportunities come to you when you work hard. I am so grateful to the school for this!" As our students and chaperones prepare to travel to the City of Light, what exciting experience will next year hold for our World Scholars?





JetBlue: Soaring Towards Future Career Possibilities



On October 12th, a class of LION sophomores was invited to visit one of JetBlue's hangars at JFK Airport in Queens. The exuberant JetBlue Guide Team welcomed our students and gave them a tour of the hangar. JetBlue employees in myriad positions, including a Maintenance Manager, Materials Specialist, ground operations crewmember, in flight crewmember, Chief Pilot, and Airports Leader, shared their day-to-day scope of responsibilities.

The JetBlue team's passion for their careers inspired our students to consider pursuing some of these options as career goals. The employees shared the sacrifices they made in pursuit of their dreams of careers in aviation, impressing upon our students the work it takes to pursue their careers. Students appreciated the honesty of the speakers' personal stories and availed themselves of the opportunity to ask direct questions about their journeys. LION Board Trustee Tony Stoupas, who helped organize the event, was impressed by the students' engagement throughout the day. Darci Williams, Senior Analyst at JetBlue who spearheaded the planning for our students' experience, shared her appreciation for our students. "The students were a blast," she said. "We loved them."

Ultimately, our LION sophomores enjoyed their visit to JetBlue and all the possible STEM careers presented. Now they have a better sense of the many opportunities available to them in aviation as well as the resources an inclusive company like JetBlue has to offer. Who knows? Maybe you will encounter one of the students from the Class of 2025 on a future JetBlue flight.



Move Your Feet to that Latin LION Beat

LION elementary students started this year with a focus on our community's vibrant Latin heritage. English teachers highlighted the stories of Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Peru, and more in their first unit. They read several books, including *Paletero Man* by Grammy-winning musician Lucky Diaz, *Coquí in the City* by Nomar Perez, and *Bodega Cat* by Louie Chin. Students also wrote their own travel journals. The enrichment team explored the rich and varied cultures of our Latin students, families, and staff through visual arts, music, dance, and sports. Students absorbed the rules of Mexican kickball in Physical Education class and several key Latin rhythms in Music and Performing Arts classes. They learned about flags as representations of our identities and the beauty of Otomi embroidery in art class. Finally, they were ready to show off what they had learned in the first elementary showcase of the year!

For the first half of this year's Elementary School Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month Showcase, guests rotated through multiple spaces to admire the art gallery featuring personal flags first grade students created and Otomi-inspired artwork by third grade students, learn how to play Mexican kickball, and take photos in the photo booth. Then everyone transitioned to the auditorium for a whole elementary school music and dance performance. Kindergarten students demonstrated their mastery of tango, mambo, and cha-cha rhythms. Next, second and third grade students danced the bachata, merengue, and salsa through the aisles. Finally, students were enthralled by the performance of a professional salsa dancer. Afterwards, they were excited to ask her questions like, "How did you learn how to dance so well?" and "How did you get so famous?"

Experiences like this showcase and the learning that preceded it honor the roots of many members of our LION community. They connect students whose families come from Latin countries with their heritage, and those who do not have the opportunity to learn about new cultures. We appreciate the efforts of all our staff to ensure that our students see themselves represented in their curriculum and are able to engage in learning that is culturally relevant and sustaining.





LIONS Roaring Home

This year LION High School hosted its first Homecoming weekend. The agenda was action packed, with games and activities for everyone to enjoy. We began with an electrifying pep rally in the student-filled Lion's Den. Sports teams were cheered on by the student body. Performances from the Dance Team, Step Team, and Cheer Squad had everyone on their feet. There was even a surprise performance from our 3rd Grade LION Cubs along with the three high school performance teams! The STEM faculty bested Humanities in a Tug of War Challenge, and a faculty dance off had all the students clamoring for a front row seat.

Friday afternoon and evening, we hosted a luncheon and game night for all before Saturday's staff vs. students basketball game. Our students are very competitive and love challenging our staff members to friendly competitions! This helps our students and staff bond and create strong relationships. Finally, we welcomed the first LION Homecoming Court at our inaugural Homecoming Dance. The weekend's activities boosted school spirit and allowed our alumni to return to their roots and reminisce on their time at LION. We want our alumni to know that they will always have a home here at LION; once a LION, always a LION.

The students and alumni were not the only ones who got to enjoy their time; staff members also got in on the action. Yashika Walker, High School Director of School Culture shared, "LION's first homecoming was a great way for students to come together and show pride in our school. Every student participated in at least one event over the course of the weekend. The joy on our students' faces was a great reminder of why I do this work." One of our veteran history teachers, Rick Rowe, was happy to see some familiar faces. He was able to attend our pep rally, and exclaimed, "Seeing former students return to LION was such a delight! I was surprised, but pleasantly so, that every single graduating class was represented. It shows the great strength and endurance of our community and its impact. I can't wait for the next event!" We will continue to host events for our current students and alumni and look forward to seeing all of our LION at the next one.



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DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND FOSTERING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN THE HUNTS POINT COMMUNITY

**GIVING
TUESDAY**

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Support Our College Persistence Fund

Support Leaders In Our Neighborhood this Giving Tuesday, and your gift will be matched dollar for dollar thanks to three generous donors. Funds raised will support our Elementary Literacy Program, K-12 Family Program, and College Persistence Fund. Together, we will grow readers, family, and learners.

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