



Children's School

FAMILY NEWSLETTER

December 2003

Staff News

Goodbye to Mrs. Grabowski and Miss Schick!



As Mrs. Grabowski's husband, Bob, nears the end of his doctoral studies at CMU and begins full time employment, Mrs. Grabowski will leave the Children's School to stay home to care for their sons, Michael and Timmy (who is in our kindergarten class). For five years, Penny was a teacher in the Children's School Four-Year-Old Program. This fall she has served as the Professional Development Facilitator. She has done an amazing job organizing our new Discovery Area and the

Teacher's Resource Room and as she supported the four-year-old team as they began a new school year. We will all miss her (although she will be around as a parent in our kindergarten) and wish her family all the best as they begin this next step in their lives.

This semester, the Four Year Old Classes were fortunate to have a student teacher, Miss Nicole Schick, from University of Pittsburgh. The children and staff have enjoyed and benefited from working with Miss Schick. Some highlights of her activities include Barn Math and the Farm Center, helping the children with their postcards that were mailed home, x-ray art while the doctor's office was open and eye-drop painting. Wednesday, December 10th, will be Miss Schick's last day of student teaching at the Children's School. She will be student teaching in the second grade at Shadyside Academy in January. Please join us in expressing our appreciation for her contributions to our program and our wishes with her next step in her teaching career.



Winter Break College Student Assistants!

As CMU's college students leave for their winter break, we will have the help of two other college students. Marie Walton, a junior majoring in psychology at Vanderbilt University, and Erin Brownstein, a sophomore majoring in education at Westminster College will be with us after exams in December and again before classes begin in January.

Scholastic Book Sale

The Scholastic Book Sale on November 4 & 5 was a great success, providing exciting books for our children and raising \$883.60 for the Children's School. More than 150 parents, family members and university members visited the fair. Our classroom library received over 30 donated books! Along with **Deb Zuroski** who organized this event, we want to thank *the* following people who helped those two days:

Gaby Navarro and her children Dan, Maria, and Julian

Maureen and Paul Mayer and their daughter, Maggie Mayer

Susan Poole

Lara Cosentino

Ariel Carver (Dr. Carver's daughter)

Rachel King

Ken Zuroski with Tristan and Haley

Mary Beth Leech

Marcia Lovett

Tessa Nicholson and her son Mac

Plus, Collin, Deb Zuroski's nephew, aka Clifford the Big Red Dog!



Plans are already under way for the next Book Fair during November 2004. If you want to be a part of this wonderful event, please call Jean Simpson at the Children's School.

Food Bank



Thank you for all the food items donated for the Greater Pittsburgh Area Food Bank. Our families have always been so generous!

Spring 2004 Tuition

Invoices

You will soon be receiving the spring tuition invoice. To avoid paying the late fee, please have your tuition payment to the Carnegie Mellon Accounting Office by January 7, 2004.

Last Day before Winter Vacation

Three Year Old Class: Thursday, December 18, 2003

Four Year Old and Kindergarten Classes: Friday, December 19, 2003

A Winter Reminder

On days when snow or ice may affect driving conditions, please listen to the radio or the television. If the Children's School should close due to the weather, we announce our school closing on both WTAE and KDKA. Again this school year, WTAE will also announce school closings on their web page – wtaetv.com.



Safety Corner



Tips for both parents and children to help avoid winter colds and injuries:

- Wash your hands frequently. Colds are spread most often from hand to hand contact.
- Eat well. Eat five servings of fruit and vegetables a day to fight off germs!
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Wear snow boots on snowy days to avoid falls.
- Wear mittens, scarves and hats (cover all exposed skin well) to avoid frostbite. Children are more susceptible to frostbite since they have smaller fingers and toes. Plus, children can get so involved playing in the snow that they don't notice the symptoms.



Safety Tip: Want to know if a toy is safe for a child before you buy it? The web site, www.safechild.net is a comprehensive child safety site, an adjunct of the Consumer Federation of America. It provides information on choosing appropriate toys and equipment and offers e-mail notifications on toy recalls.

Nutrition Corner

We are always hearing “5 a Day” in reference to how many fruits and vegetables we should eat. But how do we get our children to eat all those fruits and vegetables? The International Apple Institute, the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and the Medical College of Georgia worked together to develop a school-based curriculum designed to boost children’s consumption of fruits and vegetables. Here a few of their suggestions:



- Make more sound like less.** Eat 2 fruits and 3 vegetables a day. One at breakfast (orange juice), one a lunch (carrot sticks), one as a snack (apple), and two at supper (salad and baked potato).
- Bring out the cook in your child.** Let your children shop, chop, make and bake fruit and vegetables. The more they help in the preparation, the more likely they will eat.
- Crunchy munchies!** Raw produce (apples, carrots, cucumbers) is the preferred choice over cooked fruits and vegetables.
- Dip it, dunk it!** Fruits and vegetables taste better when combined with low-fat dips and dressings.
- Set an example.** If your children see you eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, they’re more likely to, as well.



Staff/Parent Brown Bag

*“Where Do We Go From Here?
Making School Choices”*

Presenters: Mrs. Donna Perovich, Miss Linda Hancock & Mrs. Jean Simpson
Friday, December 12, 2003 12:00 to 1:30 PM

Come with your lunch for a discussion about readiness issues, what to consider when choosing your next school, and a look into our kindergarten program.

Child care will be provided. Please complete the enclosed flyer with the number of children and their ages and return to the office by Wednesday, December 10. Parking in our lot is limited. A suggestion is to park in the parking garage on Forbes Avenue, which has a “pay as you park” system.

Web Art Gallery

December’s Web Artists are: Corinne Z., Neil P., Ruth K., Meg W., Caleb H., Peter W., Madeleine P., Sophia D., Philip S., Alex P., Jaya A., and Victor Y.



New Research Initiated

The Letters Games

Daisy Powell, a post-doctoral fellow working with Dr. David Plaut (a former Children’s School parent), is investigating the foundational skills for learning to read. Two specific challenges of interest are children’s learning of subtle visual distinctions between the written forms of letters and their ability to associate the names of letters with the sounds they represent. The research goal is to separately assess these visual and phonological factors and to determine how these individual abilities are related to each other.

Because this study involves multiple tasks, it will be conducted in a series of sessions. One computerized task involves testing children’s ability to distinguish letters and non-letters presented in a variety of orientations. The child first sees a cartoon animal moving on the screen and then covered by a letter-like form (such as a letter, a mirror-image of a letter, etc.). The next screen shows two similar letter-like forms, including the original one and a “distracter”. The child’s task is to push a key indicating which form was the one that covered the animal. Another task addresses the phonological skills. The child is asked to name pictures of common objects and then to say just the first or the last sound of the word. Children’s performance on these tasks will be related to their ability to name letters, write letters, and say the sounds that each letter makes. Dr. Powell and her research assistant, Ms. Shervin Bazmi, will collect data several times during the year to investigate developmental progress in these skills.

Holiday Time at the Children's School



At the Children's School, holidays are seen as educational opportunities and they give us the chance to learn about our own diverse population. As part of our emphasis on family identity and respect for diversity, we do encourage children to talk about their family traditions, and we share stories related to the meaning of holidays. We plan age-appropriate activities to involve the children in preparing for school celebrations and to help them contribute to family events (e.g., basic cooking, making gifts, and so forth). We limit our school celebrations to very brief spans of time (typically one day), attempt to maintain our regular school routine, and, as always, are ready to provide extra attention and comfort as needed. Because the children often prepare their own special snack related to holidays and because many children have dietary restrictions (especially related to candy and other sweets), please do not send any food as gifts for children. In all of these ways, we can create meaningful celebrations with the young children in our educational context.

Holiday Gift Ideas

If you would like to show your appreciation for any of the Children's School staff at the holiday time, we suggest a simple gift, a donation to one of the foundations recommended by our teachers (see below), or a donation to the Children's School. A gift for the classroom (books, train pieces, etc.) is another great option. Involving your child in the decision and/or in the creation of a card or gift focuses the activity on the joy of giving rather than on the gift.

Make a Wish Foundation of Western PA

Westin William Penn Hotel, Suite 417, 530 William Penn Place, Pittsburgh, PA
15219-1817 (471-9474)

Ronald McDonald House

500 Shady Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206 (362-3400)

Beginning with Books

7101 Hamilton Ave. Pittsburgh, PA 15208 (731-1717)

Family Hospice

1910 Cochran Rd. Pittsburgh, PA 15220 (572-8800)

Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh (687-8017)

P.O. Box 9024 Pittsburgh, PA 15224

American Cancer Society

241 Fourth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222 (261-4352)

L.J. Hancock Music Foundation

P.O. Box 502, Irwin, PA 15642
www.ljtribute.org

Most organizations provide cards for notifying the special person of your gift.



Positive Discipline Pointer

When preparing for **holiday celebrations**, consider the following statement. "While children may be quick to tell their parents that what they want is designer clothes, the latest electronic gear, and brand-name toys, underneath these predictable requests is an unspoken plea for **four, more basic requirements**:

1. A relaxed and loving time with the family.
2. Realistic expectations about gifts.
3. An evenly paced holiday season.
4. Reliable family traditions."

(From *Unplug the Christmas Machine* by Jo Robinson & Jean Coppock Staeheli)

If you are interested in helping your family focus on building relationships and memories during the holiday season, follow these **tips for joyful rather than tearful holidays with young children**.

1. Take your time. Children enjoy helping in family preparations (for example, decorating, wrapping, and table setting) when parents allow the time to follow the child's pace. Gift giving time should also be leisurely; allow children time to play with special gifts before rushing them to the next item.
2. Keep it simple. Be realistic about your child's tolerance for excitement and novelty. Dress children in comfortable clothes that they can easily manipulate for toileting. Bring your own "child-appropriate" foods if you anticipate hosts serving unusual or sugar-filled foods. Expect more shyness than usual in crowded situations with people who haven't been seen recently.
3. Pace yourself. Space exciting events widely so the family can rest and prepare carefully; then relax and discuss each event afterwards. Plan only a few activities that require alterations in sleep patterns.
4. Give extra hugs and kisses. Holidays can be stressful times for all family members. Extra attention and affection from parents can help children relax. Bringing a special toy from home can also provide the comfort a child needs in a new situation.

Director's Corner



Spending time with family and friends often reminds us of how challenging it is to help our children become both generous givers and gracious receivers. Fred Rogers shared his ideas for promoting this development in *The Giving Box: Create a Tradition of Giving with Your Children* (Running Press, 2000). He stressed the important point that even the most independent among us needs help at times and that our experiences in receiving loving gifts help prepare us to give lovingly. “Becoming independent is much more than mastering new skills. One of the most important parts of independence is knowing there are times when you can be helpful by giving things to others” (Rogers, 2000, p. 8).

Early childhood is a perfect time to model the reciprocity of helping and being helped, as well as to explicitly discuss the ways that each of us receives and gives assistance. At the Children's School, we emphasize this exchange from the first interactions we have in the morning when we work as a team to greet the children. We thank the children for their smiles and hugs even as we help them enter the school and remember to follow their morning routines. Giving notes to the staff, taking responsibility for classroom jobs and cleaning up also provide key opportunities for children to be helpers. As you prepare to spend several weeks together during the winter break, I encourage you to both notice and mention the giving and receiving of help that occurs on a daily basis. At the same time, you might also want to consider opportunities for you and your children to recognize gifts, particularly by offering thanks and making thank you notes. The time we take to show appreciation is a gift in itself.

One way the Children's School family will acknowledge the many gifts we have received is by participating in our community's Mister Rogers Neighborhood Sweater Drive. During the first two weeks of January, we plan to gather gently worn sweaters and other outer garments (coats, hats, scarves, mittens, gloves, boots, etc.) for people who are cold and don't have the money to buy warm clothing. In preparation for this “sweater drive”, your family might discuss the ways that you could share clothes with “neighbors” who need them to stay warm this winter. Fred Rogers explains that, “I know how tempting it could be to encourage generosity by asking people to help ‘the needy’ or those who are ‘less fortunate.’ That kind of thinking divides people into ‘us’ and ‘them,’ and doesn't necessarily contribute to a sense of ‘neighborliness’ ... Everyone has needs and everyone has something to give. As different as we are from one another, as unique as each one of us is, we are much more the same than we are different” (2000, p. 13ff). You might also be interested in viewing the community kick-off for this event, which is the *Fred Rogers: America's Favorite Neighbor* television special on New Year's Day, January 1st at 9:30 pm.

Thank you for the many ways that you invite us to partner with you to facilitate your children's development and for the ways that you offer your special talents to support the whole school. Together we have created a school community in which all of us can experience the joy of both giving and receiving.