

# Children's School

FAMILY NEWSLETTER

February 2004



## Thank You

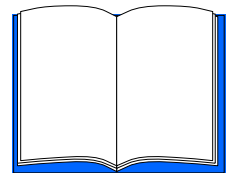
Thank you for your donations of sweaters, coats, mittens, scarves, etc. for the Mr. Rogers' Sweater Drive. As always, our families are very generous. The kindergarten children had fun counting and sorting their donations. The kindergarten collected:

214 sweaters	14 pairs of gloves	3 baby snowsuits
47 coats	14 sweatshirts	3 pairs of legwarmers
21 hats	7 earmuffs	2 snow pants
21 mittens	4 headbands	2 sweatpants
18 scarves	4 shirts	2 pants
15 pairs of shoes	3 pullovers	1 robe

The 214 sweaters included 12 red, 15 purple, 16 white, 16 black, 19 blue, 12 brown, 21 gray, 10 yellow, 2 magenta, 7 pink, 16 green, 7 orange and 61 multicolor.

In February we will continue with "creating a tradition of giving with our children" by participating with Mon Valley Education Consortium, Borders Books and WQED in "For the Love of Books". The goal this year is to collect 100,000 gently used or new children's books in order to help a child and promote literacy. The event will kick-off February 6, 2004 at the Monroeville Borders store at 7:00 PM. There will be a brief program followed by Hors D'oeuvres and refreshments in the Café. During this event, there will be special child-oriented entertainment at the Borders' stores (South Hills, Monroeville, North Hills) such as, storytellers and noted children's authors. The books will be distributed to the area children through local food banks where they're offered as the "Fifth Food Group – food for the Mind".

We will collect books (gently used and new) at the Children's School from February 6 to February 12, 2004. We are also looking for parents who are willing to take the books we receive to the Borders store in Monroeville. Please call Mrs. Simpson (412-268-2198) if you can help.



*"Helping our children consider charitable giving is a process that continues to grow as our children grow." Mr. Fred Rogers*

## Calendar Notes

As with most holidays, we have only a minimal emphasis on Valentine's Day at the Children's School. Each class will have a chance to share simple cards with their friends. If you would like to send Valentine cards to school with your child, please include one for each member of his/her group. You may also include cards for any child in other groups. Have your child bring the cards to school on Thursday, February 13<sup>th</sup>. If you are not familiar with the Valentine's Day tradition and wish to send cards, please check in the office to see samples. They can be made with common materials or purchased in sets very inexpensively. Remember, helping your child to sign each card can be a very good language experience. For kindergartners, adding their friends' names to the outside of the card is also encouraged. Please remember our holiday policy (found in your parent handbook). Our children often prepare their own special snack related to the different holidays and many children have dietary restrictions (especially related to candy and other sweets). For these reasons, do not send any food/candy or any other gifts for children.



There is no school on Friday, February 13<sup>th</sup> and Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup>. Friday is a Professional Development Day for our staff and Monday is President's Day. Enjoy the long weekend!

## Hearing Screening

On February 17, 18, 19, and 20, 2004 Margie Dubner from the Easter Seals Communication Department will be here to conduct a speech, language, hearing and middle ear screening program. This service helps to identify communication and/or hearing problems early and will recommend courses of treatment. Written results will be given to parents. If you would like your child to be screened, please send \$12 (cash only) along with the completed form to Mrs. Simpson.

In April, Margie will be back to conduct Vision Screening. She will be screening our children for visual acuity, muscle imbalance, lazy eye (amblyopia), and color deficiency. Screening is important because children's eyes are fully developed by eight years of age, yet few children have eye examinations before entering grade school. You will receive more information in April.

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### **Save This Date: Thursday, February 26, 2004**

Join us for our annual Family Festival. Explore some of the children's favorite activities. The extended afternoon program will end at 4:30 that day, so that families can enjoy the Festival together! Watch for a special flyer as we get closer to this event!

## The 2004/2005 School Year

Letters to reserve your child's space in the four-year-old and kindergarten programs for the 2004/05 school year were mailed last week. The \$200 deposit and all of the completed forms for the four-year-old and the kindergarten programs are due by **February 21<sup>st</sup>** to reserve your child's space. After this date, the spaces will be made available to applicants not currently attending the Children's School.

The kindergarten class is limited to twenty-two (22) children. After the first twenty-two deposits and forms are received, the remaining deposits will be put on a waiting list in the order they arrive. As of now we have 20 completed registrations for the kindergarten.

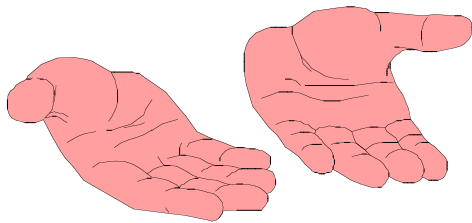
Letters to reserve your child's space in the three-year-old programs for the 2004/05 school year will be sent next week and those deposits are due by **February 27<sup>th</sup>**.

Applications for the extended-day programs were mailed with the acceptance letters. **There is limited space available.** Preference is given to currently enrolled extended-day students. Registration will then be on a "first come; first served basis". To apply for an extended-day program, complete the application and include a \$100 deposit. Applications received after the programs are filled will be held on a waiting list and checks will be returned.

**Note:** In previous years, the extended day program has filled VERY QUICKLY! Submit your forms early if you are interested in this program! In fact, the extended afternoon program is already filled.

## Safety Corner

*Wash Your Hands!*



It could be the best preventative medicine. In fact, handwashing has been described as the cheapest, easiest, single most effective way of preventing the spread of infectious disease. Experts say there is no substitute for washing hands vigorously for 10 seconds with soap and hot water, however, if water

is not available, hand sanitizer or baby wipes are the next best thing. You may have noticed the handwashing signs in our school. NAEYC requires that we follow proper procedures during handwashing, and we recommend it for everyone! Proper handwashing procedures include washing with soap and warm running water for at least 10 seconds, using single use or disposable towels, and avoiding recontamination from faucets by turning off faucets with towels. So, stay healthy this season and help others stay healthy by washing your hands properly and often!

## Nutrition Corner

According to the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, up to 6% of children in the United States under the age of 3 have food allergies. Even though food allergies are less common in adults, food allergies affect nearly 4 million people. When a child has a food allergy, the body reacts as though that particular food product is harmful. The reaction to the food item can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin or cardiovascular system. The most common food allergens in children include: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat. Many of our children at the Children's School are allergic to peanuts and tree nuts. Please ask your child's teacher about any allergies in the class before you send a special "treat" to school.

If your child has a food allergy, it is a good idea to be cautious about serving processed foods. Many of your favorite family recipes can be modified to fit your child's needs. For more information about food allergies and food substitutions, check out the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (<http://www.foodallergy.org>).

Please let us know if your child has a food allergy. We have a form you can complete that not only states the allergy, but also gives us signs to watch for and what to do if they should happen to digest a food that can cause an allergic reaction.



### Positive Discipline Pointer

Interestingly, novel and challenging explorations, like those discussed in the Director's Corner, often contribute to a reduction in negative classroom behavior. When you are frustrated by behavior problems at home, consider ways to increase the cognitive interest and challenge of the available play materials. Follow the child's lead in terms of topics that seem the most intriguing. Choose age-appropriate non-fiction books from the library. Add related play items to blocks, play dough, and other traditional toys. Create collages with pictures from magazines or calendars (which are often on clearance at this time of year). Dance or play charades with animal words. Let your child dictate stories about animal encounters. Learning together in these ways shifts the focus of your relationship with your child from behavior problems to important topics and productive interactions.

### February's Web Artists are:

Jesse P., Sophia S., Emma W., Maya G-F., Mac N., Joshua C., Leah F., Lainey N., John R., Elena P., Jackson B., Joshua C., and Krishnan A.



## Director's Corner

During the month of February, we are beginning a **whole-school exploration of Animals**. The preschoolers will start with discussion of pets, then extend to backyard animals, and finally consider animals in temperate forest, rainforest, and arctic habitats.



The kindergartners will focus more deeply on birds, beginning with direct observations of my pet cockatiel, Lemon Spice. Key concepts will include the ways that animals are adapted to their environments so that they have everything they need, such as food and water, shelter and other types of protection, exercise and fun. We will discuss the ways they communicate and the ways families interact.

Our thematic approach is designed primarily to help children develop a rich knowledge base about topics that relate to their lives and are interesting to them. Developmental psychologists have documented that individuals with rich content knowledge in particular domains demonstrate both quantitative and qualitative advantages on learning, memory, and problem solving tasks in those domains. During thematic units, we read non-fiction materials to promote explicit understanding of the distinctive features and important contrasts in the domain. The children offer information and raise many questions, which often lead to productive searches for more information, particularly via classroom books and the web. Providing a wide range of theme-related activities during circle time and in the classroom centers gives children with different strengths and preferences a variety of ways to connect with the topic. Studying one topic for a significant period of time enables the class to experience and discuss many links between different aspects of the key concepts, as well as to gain proficiency by repeating new vocabulary, factual information, and related skills.

In the context of these thematic studies, we also have opportunities to foster skills in each of the developmental domains. Children develop a sense of themselves as competent learners, strategies for collaborating with peers and adults, approaches for communicating their ideas verbally and visually, means of discovering and recording new ideas, skills for small motor manipulation of tools and materials, and means for expressing their creative ideas and appreciating those of others. Because of the wide array of open-ended activity choices, teachers can emphasize particular skills according to the general level of the class and /or tailor approaches for the specific skill level of each child. Watch the white board and classroom newsletters for more information about how this specific Animal unit develops!

We invite you to participate in our exploration by observing and reading about the animals that you see and then sharing your drawings, photos, etc. with us. Trips to the park, zoo, and aviary could spark interesting conversations. Also, on February 26<sup>th</sup>, please join us for our annual Family Festival, where we will celebrate our learning by sharing it with our families. Together we will experience the activities that most engage our young learners during the month, as well as seeing some of the ways the children have expressed their knowledge through visual arts, stories, and other creations. I'm always amazed at the children's insight and their excitement about communicating their discoveries, and I hope you will be too!

## Undergraduates learning at the Children's School

The Children's School will be buzzing with undergraduate activity this semester. In addition to the typical "Principles of Child Development" observation sessions and the "Research Methods in Developmental Psychology" studies, we will host students from three additional classes. During early February, eight students from Duquesne's "Educated Citizenry" course will serve as interns on three school days to gain experience actually working with young children in a developmentally appropriate classroom context. In March, Carol Tenny's "Nature of Language" class will collect language samples from our youngest children during the normal classroom interactions. Also in March, we will work with Mark Baskinger's "Designing Interactive Systems" students on a project sponsored by Children's Furniture Company (Charlottesville, VA) that involves designing computer furniture and activity centers for children. Our kindergartners will be the "user group" and get to test the prototypes.

If you have a moment, read the article "Psych Tykes" posted in the greeting area; it describes many opportunities for undergraduate learners at the school with the main point that "the link between the psychology program and the Children's School benefits both".

### New Research Initiated

#### *"Watch the Aliens Game"*



Gary Lupyan, a graduate student working with Dr. David Rakison and Dr. Jay McClelland, is investigating how language affects conceptual development in children and adults. He is interested in questions such as how does the process of learning a language help children think and learn about objects and actions. Children will watch a number of short animations, each one lasting about 10 seconds. During each clip, an animal-looking object (described as an alien friend) either approaches or moves away from a house, and does so in a particular way-either looping through the air, or jumping and gliding. Some children hear novel words associated with the types of motion and the moving characters. For instance, they might hear "This one is a *talp*" or "This one is *geking*". Other children hear generic terms-"Look at this one" or "Look at what this one is doing." After seeing several of these movies, children see several test trials that are similar to the previous ones, and they asked whether this alien was the same, or doing the same thing as, the earlier ones. The answers the children provide shed light on how they represent the object (alien) or action (the way the alien moved) in their memories.

The researchers predict that hearing labels like *talp* and *geking* will help the child form efficient representations of the characters and types of movement based on the evidence in the training. Moreover, they predict that labeling will be more helpful in learning actions than objects (which they expect to be learned well even without labels) because actions rely on more abstract types of information compared to objects. This experiment is the first of a series of planned studies that launch an exciting investigation into the role of language in cognition. Specifically, the researchers suggest that a primary role of language lies beyond communication-in helping humans think about and conceptualize the world.