Happy New Year, Everyone!

Though “Future Graduate” Ruthie (sister of Marley, PM 3’s) is too young to enroll at the Carnegie Mellon University Children’s School, it IS time to ensure that we have applications on file for all our infant and toddler siblings. It’s also time to plan for the 2014/15 School Year!

2014/2015 School Year Information

**Preschool Enrollment and Re-Enrollment:** Acceptance packets for incoming 3’s and Re-Enrollment packets for the 4’s Program will be sent on **January 13th**. You will be asked to submit a $500, non-refundable deposit to reserve your child’s space for 2014/15. After **February 3, 2014**, spaces will be offered to new 4’s applicants and children on our 3’s waiting list.

**Extended Programs:** Spaces in our Extended Day Programs are limited to 30 children in the morning and 6 in the afternoon, with preference given to children already in the program. These spaces fill very quickly, so return your forms and $200 deposit promptly if you are interested! The $200 deposit will be refunded if there is no space for your child in these programs.

**Open Houses:** Wednesday, **January 8th at 9:00am** and **Thursday, January 9th at 12:45pm**.
These Open House sessions for prospective preschool parents involve presentations by Dr. Carver and observations in the classrooms. Current parents are also welcome to attend.

**Kindergarten Re-Enrollment:** We coordinate our Re-Enrollment for kindergarten with the private school timeline, so packets will not be sent via backpacks until **January 31st**. Our kindergarten class is limited to 24 children. Based on the information we received during our Parent/Teacher Conferences, we anticipate having spaces for all presently enrolled 4’s whose families have expressed an interest in our kindergarten. **Nonetheless, we ask that you submit your admission documents and $700 deposit on February 3rd between 8 am and 4 pm.** If more than 24 applications are received during this time period, we will hold a lottery to determine acceptance into the Kindergarten and the order of the waiting list. If there are spaces available after this date, we will fill the class by date order of admissions documents received. **After February 14th,** new applicants will be admitted. Please contact Mrs. Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-3476 if you have questions about the admissions process.

The **Kindergarten Orientation and Observation Session on Monday morning January 27th** is intended for all parents. Please RSVP to Ms. Drash at adrash@andrew.cmu.edu for either the Preschool or Kindergarten Open House.

**January Dates:**
- **January 8th AM and January 9th PM** – Prospective Parent Preschool Open House
- **January 13th** – Re-enrollment Packets Sent to Current 3’s Families / Acceptances to New 3’s
- Week of **January 13th** – Speech & Hearing Screening Days
- **January 27th** – Kindergarten Orientation & Observation
- **January 31st** – Staff / Parent Discussion re: BIRDS & FLIGHT 9:30-11:00 (child care provided)

Re-enrollment Packets Sent to Current 4’s Families
Barnes & Noble Book Fair

Our annual Barnes & Noble Book Fair was a resounding success! The activities designed by Carolyn Colonna (Jackie, 3’s) and Katie Gancy (Julia, 4’s) were very popular. Mr. Bird joined Mrs. Bird in providing an hour and a half of musical entertainment and friends of the Gancy family, Carmen and Annette, played the violin and cello and performed a series of tunes that took their audience around-the-world! Chris Grill provided “Ask Me how your purchase can benefit the Children’s School” tee shirts and there were many, many parent volunteers assisting in the festivities. The fair grossed over $4,400 in store sales (on-line totals still pending) - $800 more than last year! The Children’s School will receive 15% of these profits.

Upcoming Screenings – Eyes & Ears

This year, the Easter Seals Speech, Hearing and Middle Ear Screenings will be held at school during the week of January 13th. The cost of the screening is $20 per child; please return the enclosed form with either cash or a check made out to Easter Seals to Maggie Rosenblum by January 10th.

The Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh will provide free Vision Screening on February 4th and 5th. Children are screened for visual acuity, muscle balance, and color discrimination using techniques approved by the American Academy of Pediatrics. If you would like your child screened, please return the enclosed form to the attention of Maggie Rosenblum.

School Photos – February 10th & 11th
Family Social Organization (FSO)

The FSO has had three awesome events during the first half of December. On December 8th, a group of families had a great time at Gymkhana, where a great mix of Children's School friends enjoyed a morning of jumping, swinging, rolling, and zip-lining!

The FSO book club had a great 2nd meeting as well. The next book club meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 15th after morning greeting at Resnick Café. Our January reading is a short story called "The Third and Final Continent," which can be found in the book "Interpreter of Maladies" by Jhumpa Lahiri. Please contact Michelle Landau (mklandau@mac.com) if you have any questions.

The FSO also hosted another tour of the Squirrel Hill Fire Station on December 13th. We'll let you know when the next set of tours is scheduled for those of you who haven't had a chance take part in one yet.

During the winter break, families gathered at the Waterworks Cinemas to see “Frozen” and had informal play dates at Sports Works and Phipps.

For January, the FSO leadership committee has scheduled a Preschool Martial Arts Class on January 18th at 1:30 at Ryer Academy. Watch your email for the opportunity to register.

Sincere thanks to Amee Chaudry and Julie Paris for coordinating such an active FSO schedule!

Winter Coats & Blankets

There is still time to contribute winter coats (adults and/or children), sheets, blankets and comforters for refugees in Pittsburgh. Daniel Plaut, a Children's School alum and current 8th grader at Community Day School, will collect them on January 17th for distribution by Jewish Family and Children's Services.
New Substitute Teacher

Beginning this month, we welcome Kristen Lackner Marshall as a substitute teacher at the Children’s School. Mrs. Marshall earned a B.S. in Teacher Development from the University of Pittsburgh, and a Masters of Public Management in Educational Leadership from CMU’s Heinz School. She is certified as an Elementary Educator and an Elementary Principal. Her teaching experience includes several years teaching 3rd grade in South Carolina and nearly two years teaching 2’s and 3’s at CMU’s Cyert Center for Early Education. Most recently, she has been focusing on raising her children, who range in age from early elementary to high school. Mrs. Marshall also enjoys both digital and darkroom photography.

January Web Artists

3’s Friends: Brandon C., Camryn C., Roxie F., and Ethan W.
4’s Friends: Adeline H., Lynn H., Milo L., and Broden S.
Kindergarten Friends: Savanna D., Ari P., and Mela T.

EITC and OSTC Updates

In December, we received several contributions to our Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. Through the EITC, eligible Pennsylvania businesses can earn tax credits while providing financial assistance for children to attend preschool. In addition to the donation from Beth’s Barricades mentioned in last month’s newsletter, we have received contributions from The Buncher Company, Duquesne Light, UPMC Diversified Services, and The PNC Financial Services Group, Inc.

Through the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC), eligible businesses can earn tax credits for contributing funds to provide tuition assistance in the form of scholarships to eligible K-12th grade students residing within the boundaries of a low-achieving school to attend another public school outside of their district or a nonpublic school. In addition to The Buncher Company mentioned in last month’s newsletter, we have recently received a contribution from PNC Bank, NA. With these funds, we are supporting 15 students in 9 different schools in Western Pennsylvania.

If you would like more information or can help us to build a list of prospective businesses, please contact the Main Office.
Stay Safe in Your Winter Wonderland!

For children, winter is not the end of outdoor fun. When properly prepared, children can enjoy safe and fun outdoor activities. "The inviting snow draws children to ice-covered lakes and ski slopes each winter, regardless of the frigid temperatures and the risks," says Heather Paul, Ph.D., executive director of the National SAFE KIDS Campaign. "Parents should watch their children closely, limit their outdoor playtime and make sure that they are dressed appropriately for the weather." Here are a few other winter tips to keep in mind:

• Parents and caregivers should inspect equipment and the environment for possible hazards before children engage in winter activities such as sledding, ice skating and skiing.
• Be aware that the increased use of hot tubs and whirlpools, as well as the danger of hidden bodies of water or weak ice, makes winter drowning a risk.
• If a child complains of numbness or pain in the fingers, toes, nose, cheeks or ears while playing in the snow, or if the skin is blistered, hard to the touch or glossy, be alert to the possibility of frostbite. Tell the child to wiggle the affected body part(s) to increase blood supply to that area. Warm the frozen part(s) against the body. Immerse frozen part(s) in warm, not hot, water. Frozen tissue is fragile and can be damaged easily. Avoid warming with high heat from radiators, fireplaces or stoves, and avoid rubbing or breaking blisters.
• Slippery driveways and sidewalks can be particularly hazardous in the winter. Keep them well shoveled, and apply materials such as rock salt or sand to improve traction.
• Make sure children wear appropriate boots and brightly colored (not white) clothing while walking and playing in snowy conditions. Use reflective stickers on clothing for maximum protection, especially at dawn and dusk.

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. Both stations offer a text service if you register on their web site. WTAE will also announce school closings on their web page: www.thepittsburghchannel.com/index.html. Because Children's School staff and families live in diverse areas in and around the city, we cannot factor travel conditions from every location into our decision about whether to delay or close school. Between 5:30 and 6:00 AM, we listen to the news, determine what other schools in the city are doing, and make our best judgment on whether to have a delay or close school that day. In all cases when school is in session, we encourage parents to use their best judgment about whether the roads in your area are safe to bring your child to school.

Depending on the road conditions, we will choose from three options:
• One Hour Delay: During a one-hour delay, we will greet the Morning Preschool and Kindergarten Classes at 9:30 AM. This option enables us to conduct the morning preschool classes, while giving our staff and families time for the road conditions to improve. Dismissal will be at the normal times and the Extended and Afternoon Programs will be on normal schedule.
• Two Hour Delay/No Morning Preschool: During a two-hour delay, we greet the Kindergarten Class at 10:30 AM and dismiss at the normal time. The Morning Preschool and Extended Morning Programs will be canceled but the Afternoon Programs will be on normal schedules.
• School Closure for all Programs
Perhaps you wondered …
why block play is so important in early childhood.

As both preschool and kindergarten classes begin thematic units on Building, we should all consider the developmental benefits of block building, along with the various levels of block play that we can expect as children progress. As you can see from the photos below, we even build with blocks outside. The winter months afford great opportunities for indoor building, and may also provide ways to transfer the learning outside if we get lots of snow. Enjoy!

**Developmental Benefits of Block Building**

- **Self-Esteem & Independence** – developing confidence in mastering diverse materials, taking responsibility for following the rules and cleaning up the space, managing emotions when structures fall, etc.
- **Interaction & Cooperation** – sharing materials, coordinating actions, negotiating cooperative designs, etc.
- **Communication** – learning new vocabulary, discussing plans, writing labels or drawing blueprints, reenacting stories, etc.
- **Discovery & Exploration** – exploring concepts of gravity as they relate to balance and stability, counting and measuring building features, strengthening geometric concepts and spatial skills, discovering multiple solutions to building problems, appreciating the value of learning from “mistakes”, etc.
- **Physical Capabilities / Health & Safety** – strengthening eye-hand coordination, building strength to handle large blocks, managing body movements to avoid bumping structures, following safety procedures, etc.
- **Artistic Expression & Appreciation** – experimenting with design & decoration while combining shapes, colors, textures, noticing varied features of buildings, replicating structure from designs, imagining new constructions, etc.

**Levels of Block Play:**

Children typically progress during the early childhood years from **carrying** and otherwise exploring blocks, to **building** mostly in rows (either horizontal or vertical), to **bridging** spaces, to **enclosing** spaces, to **making decorative patterns**, to **naming** structures that they build intentionally (e.g., saying they’re making a zoo), to **symbolizing** known buildings with blocks.

**Adult Support For Block Building**

- Build **WITH the children** to gently support their developmental progression without directing or frustrating them.
- Take the **child’s lead**, follow the child’s interest, and provide only the level of support they need.
- Add people, animals, vehicles, etc. to the selection of blocks to **extend the play**.
- Allow children to combine a **variety of blocks**.
- Consider building with other materials, such as cups,
- Allow children to continue working on a structure for a **period of days**.
- Encourage children to **disassemble buildings as they assemble them** – one block at a time (i.e., rather than knocking or kicking them down).
Birds are Amazing Builders

Birds need nests to protect their eggs and their young birds from predators, as well as from harmful temperatures and weather conditions. In many cases, birds try to make their nests difficult for predators to see or to reach. "Bird nests range from non-existent to extensive, multi-chambered apartments which can be fully weatherproof and may last for years or even decades" (http://www.earthlife.net/birds/nests.html). Bird nests may be shaped like a cup, a platform, a hanging elongated sac, or a suspended sphere. Other birds scrape natural materials together into a ground nest, bury eggs in mounds, build nests by burrowing into the ground, or utilize an existing cavity in a tree. "The smallest bird nests are those of some hummingbirds, tiny cups which can be a mere 2 cm (0.79 in) across and 2–3 cm (0.79–1.2 in) high. At the other extreme, some nest mounds built by the Dusky Scrubfowl measure more than 11 m (36 ft) in diameter and stand nearly 5 m (16 ft) tall" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bird_nest).

Like human builders, birds must choose their construction materials from readily available resources and then combine them with attention to both functionality and stability. Their sense of aesthetics is amazing, and the nests are often well camouflaged. During the January units on Building, when children are thinking about strategies for building stable structures with varied materials, help them consider the challenges birds face when making the nests that you see in your neighborhoods. When we study Birds & Flight in February, we’ve scheduled several Family Social Organization outings to the Pittsburgh Aviary, so you can continue the discussion of nest building together at that time.

Family Spotlight: Nurturing Capable Children

The Balogs! Doug and I (Jennifer) met in 1999 while working for the same company outside of Boston. (Fishing off the company pier, he called it!) When we welcomed Jane into our lives in 2005, we started to think that Boston might not be the ideal place to raise a family. Exciting, interesting, beautiful, historically significant - we loved it. I had spent half my life outside the U.S., and Boston felt so familiar to me. But looking at sweet wide-awake Jane, it didn’t seem to fit with our new role as a young family.

I’d always enjoyed coming to Pittsburgh to visit Doug’s friends and family, and it hit me on one of them that I should look around a little harder and pay attention a bit more. On our way back to the airport, I asked Doug if he’d like to move back home. Jane was five months old when we moved into our house in Point Breeze. Happy baby Michael was born 9 months after that, and cuddly baby Mae another two years after that. And over the years, Pittsburgh has far exceeded my expectations.

We’re now in our sixth and last (!) year at the Children’s School. I don’t remember how we first heard about it; I just remember wondering, “Is it really time to send Jane to school?” (Which now seems funny since as my mother says, “she just needs you to drive her places!”) We visited many schools that seemed warm, inviting, nurturing - what you’d want for preschool. But the Children’s School also believed that children are so very, very capable. Teachers can teach real, complex ideas as long as they are brought to the kids’ level.

Each of our children learned how to take surveys, graph, sew, cook, hammer and drill. They experimented with technology, learned that their input was valuable (especially through lab research), and met university students who showed them so many additional ways to move through an adult world. Michael learned as a 4 year-old that outer space is a vacuum (one of many “oh yeah, I think I remember that from school” moments for Mommy) and, therefore has no sound, with a simple jingle bell in a jar experiment. He learned about Antarctica and that polar bears and penguins don’t live at the same pole (really?). Jane learned and still talks about the human body and the systems that make it work. She taught us through retelling Native American stories that she understood people’s emotions more than we knew. Mae learned about the preciousness of water, its cycle and its different states. And by enacting the Native American “three sisters” farming practice, she will always know that beans were planted to grow up cornstalks, while squash covered the ground in between, so its broad leaves could keep the ground moist. They also made many friends and had fun.

Jane and Michael love coming back to visit and seeing what Mae is up to. And I know they’ll still want to come back even after Mae has joined them at the Environmental Charter School (ECS). I’m not really sure what I’m going to do the first time my car turns onto Margaret Morrison Street and I realize I’m not supposed to be there. Maybe I’ll stop in and learn something new!

Editor’s Note: You’d be welcome any time, Jennifer!
Undergraduate Spotlight

Emily Lawlis writes, “Working with the children at the Children’s School is not only a joy, but it also provides peace and stress relief. As a sophomore chemistry major at CMU, hard work and stress go hand in hand. It is too easy to become immersed in classes and homework and to lose perspective of why we do all the work that we do. Teaching and helping with the children strengthens and grounds me.”

“As soon as I walk into the Children’s School, my daily anxiety is lifted from my shoulders. Watching the children’s excitement over learning activities reinforces my love for my own classes. Their joy and happiness when they accomplish something is similar to my own excitement when a tedious experiment actually works. The children’s obvious thrill in creating, learning, and exploring reminds me of my own joy in discovery in the chemistry lab and encourages me to continue my studies. Helping the children to explore new ideas and concepts while having fun is the highlight of my day.”

“It is challenging and, at times emotionally draining, work, but it feels good to serve and to impact their lives. I know that I have learned a great deal from my work experience at the school. It has given me the opportunity to learn patience, to tolerate and to understand others. Most importantly, I have learned to use a variety of approaches to help each child achieve his/her potential. All these qualities will no doubt benefit me in whatever career I chose.”

Early Childhood Practicum Students

From January 18th through February 2nd, we will host four early childhood practicum students from Duksung Women’s University (Seoul, South Korea) for an International Practicum Program (see photos on the next page). The Campus School at Carlow University, the Falk School at the University of Pittsburgh, and the University Child Development Center will each also host students, with the total group including 10 undergraduates and 2 graduate students. We look forward to learning more about the initiatives our South Korean colleagues are leading in early childhood and in reflecting with them about the cross-cultural similarities and differences in our values and approaches related to educating young children.

Thanks to the Moraski (Boden K and Brylie 3’s) and Sekula (John K and Jane 4’s) families for offering housing to these visiting students. There are still opportunities to help by preparing welcome bags for the students, offering to provide lunch for them at the school one day, providing transportation to cultural attractions, etc. If you are interested in helping, please contact Dr. Carver at sc0e@andrew.cmu.edu to discuss options.
Early Childhood Practicum Students, continued ...

Young Kyoung Lee  Jeonghyo Kim  Soobin Lee  Jin-Hee Kim  
Junior        Junior       Senior       Masters Student
Young 3’s / Extended AM  Older 3’s / PM 3’s  Older 4’s / PM 4’s  Kindergarten

Research Spotlight

The Hearts & Flowers Game

Graduate student Karrie Godwin and her advisor, Dr. Anna Fisher, are investigating the relationship between learning and other general cognitive processes such as attention, memory, processing speed, executive function, and general reasoning ability. In the *Hearts and Flowers Game*, they are measuring children’s cognitive control and their ability to inhibit a behavioral response. In this computer game, children are presented with a series of hearts and flowers. Children are instructed to respond to each object as follows: When children see a heart on the computer screen, they are told to press the response button on the same side that the heart was presented (e.g., if the heart appears on the left hand side of the screen, the correct response would entail pressing the left response button). However, when children see a flower, they are instructed to press the opposite response button (e.g., if the flower appears on the left hand side of the screen, the correct response would entail pressing the right response button). Next, children are shown pictures depicting the sun or the moon. Children are asked to provide a verbal response that conflicts with the picture. For example, if children see a picture of the sun, they are instructed to say “night”; and when children see the picture of the moon, they are instructed to say “day”. In other studies, children’s skill at tasks that require such inhibition of the common response predicts their learning ability. Discovering the precise correlations will help researchers and educators know how to best facilitate children’s learning foundations.
Research Spotlight, continued …

The Similarity Game

In this study, Dr. Anna Fisher and graduate student Karrie Godwin are investigating how young children learn synonyms. They present children with reasoning tasks in which children must rely on their knowledge of labels to solve the problem. They are interested in the degree to which children utilize their knowledge of labels in various reasoning tasks. In the Similarity Game, children are shown identical pictures of doors, trees or rocks similar to the ones presented below. The children are told about objects that are hidden behind the pictures. For example, we might tell children that there is a bunny, a rabbit and a squirrel behind each door (or tree or rock). The children learn that one of the objects has a particular property. Then children must decide whether this property can be generalized to the other two objects. Having the doors, rocks, or trees as hiding places provides an engaging context for the game, but the objects remain hidden during the task and are never revealed because the researchers do not want the perceptual similarity to influence the children’s decisions. Learning to better understand how children reason about similar objects in the absence of visual images can help researchers and educators more effectively prepare instruction that will support children's learning most effectively.
Director’s Corner: Lead from Within

When we begin to anticipate the ways that we and others can “Be a Contribution”, then The Art of Possibility’s fifth practice, “Leading from Any Chair”, is a natural extension. As with many of the book’s anecdotes, this practice’s signature phrase originated in an experience the second author, Benjamin Zander, had while conducting an orchestra. In this case, Zander’s insight came from his recognition that the “silent conductor”, who makes none of the symphony’s beautiful music, is truly powerful only by “his ability to make other people powerful” (p. 69). He then reflected on ways to best create conditions that would encourage “the greatest possible attentiveness and participation of all the players” (p. 73). He gradually discovered that by intentionally seeking and then actively utilizing the input of the musicians, including occasionally asking them to conduct, that he could more effectively partner with the orchestra to offer the best performance possible.

At the Children’s School, we try to create such synergy by going beyond valuing each individual’s contributions to actually inviting leadership from within the organization. As Zander explains, “A leader does not need a podium; she can be sitting quietly on the edge of any chair, listening passionately and with commitment, fully prepared to take up the baton (p. 76).” I distinctly remember a shift in the Children’s School staff culture when educators stopped bringing problems for me to solve and started coming instead with descriptions of challenging situations, ideas about possible courses of action, and a suggestion about which one to pursue. In similar ways, the teachers aim to balance proactive planning of each day’s learning activities with flexibly responding to the children’s ideas and initiative. Fostering that type of culture within a school, or indeed within a family, requires that those in the official leadership positions prepare themselves and those they lead by offering diverse opportunities to explore varied roles. During the units on Storytelling (3’s), Folk Tales & Fairy Tales (4’s), and Patricia Polacco (Kindergarten), the children re-enacted stories in the role of different characters, took turns as the narrator, compared and contrasted different versions of stories told by different authors, became authors and illustrators of their own stories, etc. This month, they will all be studying “Building”, which is another context in which they can practice collaborating and contributing their ideas about what will make their constructions stable, functional, and aesthetically interesting.

Regardless of the unit topics, our educators aim to facilitate children’s effective interactions in social situations. For the natural leaders among them, that means helping them practice being inclusive rather than bossy; whereas, for others, it means helping them to stand up for their rights within the peer group. One of the books we have utilized recently to prompt this discussion is called “One” by Kathryn Otoshi. In the story, “BLUE is a quiet color. RED is a hot head. RED likes to pick on BLUE. YELLOW, GREEN, PURPLE, and ORANGE don’t like what they see, but what can they do? When no one takes a stand, things get out of hand. Until ONE comes along and shows all the colors how to stand up and COUNT.” I’ve read this book during several Question & Answer sessions recently because parents have asked how to help their children navigate the common power struggles among siblings and peers, as well as how to respond to situations in which their children witness injustices in the world around them. As we begin a new year, let’s commit to dialogue and partnership so that together we can help all of our children gain confidence in their ability to lead from within their families, their classrooms, and their communities.