Please join us for Family Learning

We hope to see all Children’s School families on Thursday evening, March 1st from 4:30 – 6:30 pm for our Healthy Mind & Body Family Festival. You’ll be able to explore the power of your senses, create a snack with the recommended balance of healthy foods, and learn how to keep your teeth strong. Try your skill at a variety of brain games, relax your mind in the “peaceful room”, and craft a personal Zen garden to take home. Families will receive colored activity cards indicating specific times for building muscles on the playground obstacle course (weather permitting) and for gaining flexibility by learning yoga. Wear comfortable clothes and be prepared to remove your shoes for yoga, and consider bringing a camera to take snapshots of your family exercising bodies and brains!

NOTE: There will be NO Extended Afternoon Program on the Family Festival day so that the staff can prepare the school for the event. If your child is enrolled in the Extended Afternoon Program, we will dismiss your child at the end of the regular school day. Thank you!

Enroll for Summer “Olympics” Camp

Enclosed with this newsletter is a brochure about the Children’s School Summer Camp, which is a mixed-age, four-week program that runs weekdays from 9am to 1pm with as much outdoor time as weather permits. This year, Miss Mangan, Ms. McMichael, Mrs. Opferman, Miss Scholes, Mrs. Solomon, and Mrs. Tomer will engage the children in a study of the “Olympics” to extend our emphasis on Healthy Minds and Bodies in advance of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. We anticipate investigating a wide variety of Olympic sports, as well as some that we modify or invent based on the outdoor terrain on our playground. We will read a variety of fiction and non-fiction books to enhance the thematic study, as well as offer related art, cooking, sensory, and manipulative activities. In addition, children attending camp enjoy water time with access to wading pools, sprinklers, etc. We provide a daily snack, and children bring their own healthy lunch.

March Dates
Thursday, March 1st, 4:30-6:30 pm, FAMILY HEALTHY MIND & BODY FESTIVAL
NOTE: There will be no Extended Afternoon Program on that day!!
Friday, March 9th Professional Development Day for Staff (NO SCHOOL for Children)
Sunday, March 11th Daylight Savings Time Begins so SPRING FORWARD 1 Hour
SPRING BREAK: Monday, March 12th through Friday, March 16th
Friday, March 23rd – Staff / Parent Discussion re: GYM 9:30-11:00 (child care provided)
Physical Education Highlights

During Gym classes this month, we will teach beginner game skills. Game skill activities develop the abilities children need to participate in most traditional games, such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, softball, and tee-ball. We introduce **soccer skills** using soft soccer balls and then move to harder balls with the older children. The physical development focus is foot-eye coordination, controlled dribbling, trapping techniques, etc., and the social focus is cooperation. Children develop foot-eye coordination as they explore moving and stopping a ball with their feet. I introduce the soccer terms “dribbling” and “trapping”, as well as emphasizing good ball control, no use of the hands, use of the non-dominant foot as well as the dominant foot to move the ball, and checking for good use of space.

We start integrating the skills in a game called **Island Soccer**. Island Soccer is played using carpet squares or “islands” of some kind for each player. This game incorporates the same idea as soccer but with a twist. Players cannot run with the ball. Instead, the islands are scattered around the playing area, one for each child, and players must kick the ball back and forth between the islands. Only two persons on each team do not have to be on an island: the goalie and the swimmer. The swimmer can move anywhere in the field. It is his or her job to get the ball back to someone on an island. The swimmers cannot score points. After each point scored, all players rotate so everyone may have a chance to be a swimmer and a goalie. We have the children wear a colored pinafore, either red or white. This helps them recognize their teammates. Much of the difficulty children have with getting to learn the game is the mass of children that usually gathers around the ball. The Island Soccer game eliminates that problem and allows children time to play more confidently and cooperatively.

Submitted by Ms. McMichael

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**Staff / Parent Discussion re: GYM**

Many parents have asked to learn more about our Gym program, so we are planning a Staff / Parent Discussion re: Gym on Friday, March 23rd from 9:30 to 11:00am in the West Wing Lounge. Preschool 4’s and Kindergarten children will be in school, and child care will be provided in the Red Room for 3’s and younger siblings. School will be in session; please park in the East Campus garage or at one of the metered spots near the school.

According to the **Active Start Guidelines for Preschoolers** (American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance), “Preschoolers should accumulate at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity each day.” We do provide weekly gym classes for all of our children, but families must also provide structured activities in order to meet the 60 minutes per day guideline. You can learn some yoga to do with your children at our March 1st Family Festival, as well as some techniques for practicing warm ups and other valuable skills at this Staff / Parent Discussion.

Yoga with CMU’s Donna Morosky

Thanks to Donna Morosky, the Director of Fitness for the Department of Athletics, for teaching yoga to our children during the Healthy Mind & Body Unit. Donna is responsible for developing recreational fitness and group exercise programs at CMU. You and your children can experience Yoga with Donna at the Family Festival. Some of the Preschool 3’s also practiced yoga with Tara Hofkens (Rohan, AM 3’s).

Let’s Move, Pittsburgh

Let’s Move Pittsburgh is “a collaboration of organizations in Southwestern Pennsylvania committed to leading children in our region toward a healthier future. Inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign to curb childhood obesity through raised awareness about the benefits of healthy foods, decreased screen time and increased physical activity for children, Let’s Move Pittsburgh aims to put solutions to this national problem into swift action here at home.” Visit www.letsmovepittsburgh.org to explore strategies for eating healthy foods and increasing your family’s physical activity, as well as to register for a monthly e-newletter with additional tips, resources, and pointers to local activities.

Screening Updates

In January, 68 children participated in the Vision Screening offered at the Children’s School by the Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh; two were flagged for possible vision problems and two others for possible color deficiency. In the Easter Seals Speech and Hearing screening, six children were found to need additional testing of their hearing, three testing of their language, and two of speech. All of our eligible children participated in the broad Developmental Screening offered by the Pittsburgh Public Schools, and seventeen were referred for more detailed assessment, with eight of those relating to articulation, six to fine or gross motor skills, two to cognitive, and one to language. Being referred for additional evaluation does not necessarily mean that there is a delay requiring intervention, but rather that a more detailed assessment would be beneficial for determining whether focused therapeutic activities could help the child progress.
Library Cabinet Painting Committee

Our library cabinet painting committee has been doing a wonderful job painting the grey, metal book cabinets located in our hallway. Katie Salvi (Harrison, K), has created a design to mimic library bookshelves (inspired by an idea of Elinor Nathanson, Benjamin, PM 4’s), and she has been nobly assisted by Ann Kelton (Noah, PM 4’s), Bob Slammon (Liam, AM 4’s), Jennifer Huffman (Aaron, PM 4’s), Aimee Chaudry (Kabir, K), Sonia Mino (Peter, K), and our own Mrs. Brynn Flynn. At the Family Festival, each family will be able to paint a family “book” on parachute cloth to be added to the decor of the newly renovated cabinets.

Family Social Organization (FSO)

This month 16 families joined the FSO at the Gemini Theater. The group saw Snow White and had a tour by the actors involved in the production.

Watch for these upcoming FSO events:
1. Parents' Night Out at Brgr in East Liberty, in late March / early April
2. International Children's Festival in Schenley Plaza, May 16th-20th

Please contact Aparna Brown if you have any suggestions or questions.

Message from Me (MFM) Update

Thank you for all of the feedback on the Message From Me project! Our pilot testing plus your input has helped the CREATE Lab to fine-tune the message sending kiosk and the website. In January, the Children’s School hosted an information session for educators from 7 early childhood centers that will be receiving MFM kiosks as part of a grant from PNC'S Grow Up Great. As part of this grant, the Children’s School educators have been developing curriculum materials for these centers to use as they embark on their journey with Message From Me. In early March, we will be hosting professional development sessions for trainers from the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC) and for educators from these and several other participating centers.

It is not too late to register to receive messages from your child! Log on to www.messagefromme.org to create your own user account!

Fundraising Update

In the December 2011 newsletter, our fundraising needs were described in an article entitled, “Perhaps You Wondered...” As illustrated in that edition, most of our fundraising efforts are aimed at covering the tuition waivers that we offer to families who can demonstrate financial need. To that end, we have raised $23,635.16 so far during the 2011-12 school year! We have raised $4,390 from personal donations, $18,000 from Educational Improvement Tax Credit donations ($5,000 from Duquesne Light, $5,000 from UPMC Health Plan, and $8,000 from Highmark Casualty Insurance Company), and $1,245.16 from School Fundraising Efforts ($529.47 from the Barnes & Noble Book Fair, $442.68 from GoodSearch, and $273.01 from our Ten Thousand Villages Shopping Night).
Family Spotlight: City Boy, Country Boy

Although Noah Hritz (PM 4’s) was a “newbee” this year, he wasn’t a stranger. Noah’s dad Ricky was a Pittsburgh Public School SOS student at The Children’s School when Noah was born, and the proud papa delighted in showing off his son to the staff. Ricky is now a machinist. Mom Ashley Weaver is a student and nursing assistant who will begin training to become a registered nurse in the fall.

Noah has a large family, with six grand and great-grandparents, eight aunts and uncles, and cousins by the dozens (literally). He is half “country boy” and half “city boy” as he splits time between Ashley’s family in the Belle Vernon area and Ricky’s family in the City of Pittsburgh. Grandma Kathy “TaTa” Weaver and Grandparents Ann Kelton and Jeff Hritz consider themselves truly fortunate to be involved with Noah on a day-to-day basis. Last but not least, Noah loves his dogs Moose and Reco, as well as TaTa’s six cats.

In the last year, Noah has learned to ice skate, ride a bike without training wheels, swim and ride horseback. He enjoys books (current favorites: “Not Last Night But The Night Before” and “Which Would You Rather Be?”), “Uno” and “Memory” card games, and playing or watching any kind of sport. He just began learning to play hockey and dreams of becoming as good as his hero, Sidney Crosby. Noah comes by this naturally, as he was born several hours after his parents attended a Pens game!

Noah loves going to The Children’s School. He has soaked up knowledge like a little sponge, but more importantly, he has become much more outgoing and receptive to new experiences. He has developed a positive attitude towards learning that we think will be a great benefit to him in later life. And, though it’s been tough, his family has finally gotten over their “separation anxiety.” Kindergarten, here we come!

March Web Artists

3’s Friends: Maya D.W., Felix G., Shaylee G., Leila P., and Rohan P.

4’s Friends: Mintaek C., Roland C., Perry D., Neve G., and Younghoon K.

Kindergarten Friends: Caroline B., Delia B., and Julia G.
Perhaps You Wondered …

… what it takes to become accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Though the Children’s School has demonstrated excellence in early childhood education in many ways since 1968 and the national accreditation system has been in existence since 1985, we have only chosen to spend the significant time and money necessary for our work to be evaluated and recognized by NAEYC for the past decade. There are currently only 313 NAEYC accredited programs in Pennsylvania, with only 57 of those located within a 10-mile radius of Carnegie Mellon.

The rationale for our history of participation decisions could be the subject of a whole “Perhaps You Wondered …” column, but the short story of our early 2000’s decision to begin the process is that both public and private funding agencies began to tie eligibility to NAEYC accreditation and an increasing percentage of our professional development outreach was to educators working in centers that were in some stage of the accreditation process. The Children’s School earned its first accreditation in 2003 and was then among the first to earn accreditation under the “re-invented” system in 2008. During the latter round, we offered support to our colleagues at CMU’s Cyert Center for Early Education and Pitt’s University Child Development Center (UCDC), developed seminars for local educators pursuing accreditation, and began posting web resources for educators across the country. Dr. Carver has also provided feedback and improvement suggestions to NAEYC, both individually and via the local PAEYC when she was serving on their board. It has been gratifying to see that the revised accreditation and new renewal process incorporate some of these suggestions.

So, now is the time for Children’s School educators to begin the Accreditation Renewal process to complete it before our 6/30/13 expiration date. The NAEYC fees for a center our size will total $3,000. Since 2008, we have submitted the required annual reports to demonstrate ways we are improving our program relative to the 10 program standards (with over 400 related criteria). In preparation for our 4th annual report due this June, we must conduct both family and staff surveys, using the questions NAEYC specifies. Though we gather family and staff feedback about our program each spring as part of our continual quality improvement process, this year we must incorporate the standard questions AND ensure at least an 85% response rate for families (100% for staff). To help achieve this goal, we subscribed to Survey Monkey ($300 per year) so families can respond at their convenience. In June, we will also submit our “Intent to Renew” form. By September 30th, we must submit our “Renewal Materials” to show that we are prepared for the required site visit that will occur sometime between October 2012 and March 2013. In order to complete those materials, the administrative team must update our Program Portfolio while the teaching teams update their Classroom Portfolios. After rescuing our physical portfolio boxes from two major floods in 2009 and 2011, we have subscribed to an online portfolio service ($386 per year) so that we can easily link digital documents to the criteria required in each portfolio and have secure, professional archiving of our documentation. Because we have been proactive in preparing our handbooks, orientation materials, daily family communication, lesson and unit plans, and monthly newsletters in ways that are closely aligned with the NAEYC criteria, we anticipate that we will be able to do this portfolio work by offering 1 day of online portfolio training for the staff on March 9th, using 3 days of our May professional development time, and then spending 2 days in August. Feel free to review the program standards and criteria on NAEYC’s web site for families to see what we’ll be documenting (http://www.naeyc.org/families).
Practicum Experience for Korean Students

From January 22nd to February 3rd, we collaborated with the Falk School (Pitt) and the Campus School (Carlow) to host fourteen early childhood education students from Duksung Women’s University in Seoul, South Korea. Each student had a cooperating teacher at one of the practicum sites and spent about 2/3 of the days as a student teacher. At the Children’s School, they had orientation similar to other undergraduate assistants and participated in team and staff meetings. As a group, the students also toured the other practicum sites, two additional centers, the Children’s Museum, the Carnegie Museum, and Phipps Conservatory, as well as meeting with the PAEYC executive director to learn about state and national early childhood policy. The students lived with host families to learn about life in American homes with young children. The students also had a pizza and discussion session with American undergraduates, and they had weekend time to explore a mall and experience young adult nightlife. At the end of the two weeks, they had farewell festivities at their practicum site and as a whole group, as well as opportunities to reflect on the experience with their cooperating teacher and with the administrators. Everyone involved in this international practicum experience expressed positive sentiments and identified significant learning. Many thanks to the whole staff and to the Browns and the Parks for hosting our five students!

Our students were Jeong-Eun Yong, Hyun-Joo Kim, Hea-Lim Kwen, Eun-Hye Lee, and Eun-Ji Choi.
Research Spotlight

The Fish Game

Dr. Anna Fisher is investigating the relationship between young children’s reasoning skills and other general cognitive processes such as memory, attention, processing speed, executive function, and language ability. In this “fish game”, graduate students Karrie Godwin and Bryan Matlen are measuring the extent to which children can inhibit distracting information and selectively focus on relevant information.

The task involves a computer game during which children are presented with a series of fish similar to the ones pictured below. Children are told that their task is to feed the center fish by pressing either the *left* or *right* mousepad button, depending on the direction that the fish is facing (e.g., "Your job is to feed only the fish in the center. So what matters is where the middle fish’s mouth is pointing."). In this game, the center fish is surrounded by four other fish (two to its left and two to its right). Sometimes the four fish may be swimming in the same direction as the center fish and other times the four fish may be swimming in the opposite direction. This task is called a “flanker” task because it tests whether children can ignore the objects that flank the focal object and respond only based on the object of interest. In the case below, no inhibition is necessary because all the fish are facing in the same direction, but the task is much harder when the flanking fish are facing the direction opposite of the center fish.

The Shape Game

Dr. David Klahr and graduate student Bryan Matlen are interested in what types of examples optimize children’s learning of basic shape categories. To determine these features, they show children standards of various shape categories (e.g., rectangles, triangles, pentagons, etc.) and ask the children to compare them. Some comparisons have two positive examples of a particular shape (e.g., one rectangle shown straight and the other on an angle), and others have both a positive and a negative example of a particular shape (a rectangle and a five sided figure as shown below). After learning about a shape category from these examples, children are presented novel shapes and asked whether they are also examples of the trained shape category. We are interested in what kinds of comparisons optimize the correct generalization of a shape definition, as well as which comparisons appropriately limit the definition’s generalization to shapes that are not in its category. This research will help educators determine how to best explain and exemplify concepts during instruction.
Research Spotlight, continued …

The Magnet Game

Undergraduate Benjamin Howe is completing dual thesis as the culmination of his studies in Architecture and Psychology. With the guidance of Dr. Sharon Carver and architecture professor Dale Clifford, he is designing an educational activity that demonstrates the fusion of learning and design principles in order to effectively engage children in exploring magnetism and learning key concepts about magnets. At the Children’s School, Ben will observe children’s engagement with his Magnet Learning Center and do pre- and post-test interviews with children about their knowledge of magnets. As a comparison, half of the children will spend an equal amount of time exploring a popular commercially available magnet toy to see whether those who interact with the toy Ben designs learn more. This research could be beneficial in providing a new educational magnet toy on the market for use in schools or informal settings at museums only if it can be demonstrated that the Magnet Learning Center truly has an educational impact that other magnet toys on the market may not be able to match.

Undergraduate Spotlight

Tyler Dossett is a junior Psychology major at Carnegie Mellon. Tyler writes, “I am always thrilled to go to work at the Children’s School. After I graduate, I plan to use my major and minor to become a children’s drama therapist where I will use acting and the arts to conduct therapy sessions. Working at the Carnegie Mellon Children’s School is such a rewarding experience not only because of its wonderful teachers, who are all very passionate about teaching, but also because of the amazing children that I get to work with every week. The Children’s School has such a positive and upbeat aura, and it is always inspiring to see the children so interested in learning and exploring the world around them, especially when I get a chance to participate by reading to them or playing games with them. Every day, I see the children grow so much by learning new skills, such as writing or counting. It is so great to have a part in their development into amazing people.”

Katie Schaefer is a senior education major at Carlow University who is doing a seven-week, full time student teaching experience at the Children’s School. She has joined the Preschool 3’s Team to work with her cooperating teacher, Mrs. Flynn, until Friday, April 6th. For the previous seven weeks, Katie was a 3rd grade student teacher at the Campus School of Carlow University.
Director’s Corner: Critical Thinking

According to Ellen Galinsky in *Mind in the Making*, the fifth of “seven essential life skills every child needs” is **critical thinking**. Galinsky defines critical thinking as, “the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide our beliefs and actions” (p. 204). Critical thinking depends on the first four essential skills because one needs **focus and self-control** to keep the essential elements of the situation in view while avoiding defensiveness and easy answers in the search for solutions to our dilemmas, **making connections** while seeking alternate solutions, **perspective-taking** to consider how our alternatives might affect others, and **communication** when seeking information and working with others in the decision-making process. At the same time, critical thinking goes literally above and beyond these foundational skills because it requires “‘thinking about our thinking’ by reflecting, analyzing, reasoning, planning, and evaluating” (p. 204). So-called “metacognitive” processes are essential for discerning which people and what messages to believe.

This skill is evident most clearly in the Children’s School developmental objectives for discovery and exploration, which includes the positive, proactive and resourceful approaches to learning, together with the basic scientific method of questioning, predicting, observing, and explaining how the world works. By providing broad opportunities for exploration in life, earth, and physical science contexts, as well as in the social sciences and arts, plus occasions for more in-depth studies of interesting themes, we engage children’s natural motivation to learn. Children begin very early in life by noticing patterns of evidence and using them to explain non-obvious causal relationships, such as what makes people happy or sad or what makes a worm move or a machine work. Fortunately, in terms of “naive psychology”, children have innate biases that prepare them to pay attention to people’s intentions and goals, so they quickly learn to cooperate with cooperative people and to ask for help from those who have been knowledgeable and helpful in the past. Research shows that even preschoolers categorize expertise such that they ask for help with people issues from those who they’ve seen to be good with people and for help with mechanical objects from those who have previously demonstrated knowledge of tools, vehicles, etc. Young children also know that people can make mistakes or might not know certain facts, but it takes longer for children to understand that people may have biased perspectives or be intentionally deceitful.

Preschoolers are naturally more curious and will spend more time exploring situations with non-obvious mechanisms, which can lead them to opportunities for learning critical thinking skills IF adults interacting with them respect their *Why?* questions. In these situations, **both parents and educators can intentionally** promote critical thinking by modeling effective inquiry processes as we help them find answers. Because of both attention and memory constraints, young children need our help to focus on the most important features of the evidence, to try varying just one aspect of the situation to gather new evidence, and to then interpret the pattern of evidence. At the same time, remember to let the child’s interest lead and to gently guide with questions, such as, “What do you think would happen if …?” You can also start helping children evaluate information quality, such as with rumors vs. reality or in product advertising, by asking, “How can we discover if this information is true?” Here again, modeling your own decision-making processes in the context of child-appropriate dilemmas, such as meal, gift, or activity choices, you’ll help them learn that for most decisions there is more than one “right” answer, so there’s value in weighing alternatives and considering their consequences. After pursuing the final choice, be sure to reflect on the outcome to best learn for future decisions.