

Merriam School

■ Community News ■

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 9, MAY 1, 2008

MESSAGE FROM SANDRA

As many of you already know, Merriam will have a new section of fourth grade when we start classes in the fall. I think it is important for all parents to know the steps we're taking to add the additional section. The following letter has been sent to all third-grade parents.

The School Budget for 2008-2009 received its final vote of approval at Town Meeting on April 8, 2008. A focus of the Acton Public Schools budget was to try to reduce class sizes and reach School Committee guidelines for as many grades as possible. This plan includes an additional grade four. It also includes keeping the present fourth section of grade five.

These sections were planned for Merriam. We opened in 1993 to help solve the space problem in the town of Acton and continue to serve the school system in that way. This has meant that in the past Merriam absorbed extra sections when the kindergarten and grade one population projections dictated the need for additional sections.

There were several years when sections were not added at kindergarten and grade one, but now the class sizes have crept up above the guidelines by several students in each class across the system. By adding sections at Merriam, the idea is that class size will decrease in all schools. The plan includes not replacing students who move out of the other schools in grades four and five this summer. At

grade five it is quite easy for us to add a section. We will simply divide the current three fourth-grade classes into four for next year.

Grade four is not as simple in concept or implementation. We have, however, had significant lead time and have developed a plan to create a new class. This plan considers the way we value looping, recognizes the importance of balanced classes and appreciates children being grouped with comfortable peers. The third-grade teachers and I have been meeting throughout the winter and spring to refine this plan.

The teachers have grouped the students with comfortable peers. I will create the new class by selecting clusters from each of the three original classes. The second-grade teachers will be part of this process. We will certainly consider their thoughts, as they created the original third-grade classes.

Melissa, Leah, Colm and I talked to all third-grade students to tell them about the new class and how it will be created. We certainly put a positive spin on having another class and being in smaller classes, as well as the fun of having new students in each class. We told them it would be exciting to be in the new class with the new teacher. Our plan includes having the new class meet their teacher in June and spend a couple hours together to help ease any anxiety about the change.

Contd. on pg. 2 Sandra

Thanks to All For A Great Auction!

The Marriott Spring Hill Suites was the place to be on Saturday, March 29. More than 230 Merriam parents, teachers and staff attended this year's auction. With approximately \$54,000 in net proceeds, we were able to match last year's strong performance in this year's weak economy. What a great show of support from all involved!

As usual, the silent auction tables held many bargains, and the live auction brought some very exciting "dueling" paddles. Thank you to Christo Tsiasas for producing another fantastic Merriam Movie. (Look for a future PTO email on purchase opportunities for last year's and this year's movies.)

Thank you to all Merriam teachers and staff for the great array of auction donations and for all of those who also attended the event. Many Merriam students are now very happy beneficiaries of some really fun outings and baskets, and more than one or two adults are also pleased to partake in workshops, margaritas and golf outings! Thank you to Fran Strohm for her role as faculty representative extraordinaire.

A big thank-you goes to Colleen White, who took on the huge project of conceptualizing and producing this year's student artwork. The finished pieces were amazing, as the lucky 23 winners will attest to.

Contd. on pg 2 Auction

Contd. from pg 1. Auction



Thanks are due to the many people involved in all aspects of these projects, from paper collecting, paper making, marbling workshop attendees and art assemblers. And, of course, to the students, who created such awesome representations of themselves.

As we all know, these auction proceeds go directly to funding our teacher assistants. It is quite a testament to just how much our assistants are appreciated by the entire Merriam community by the outpouring of time and donations that are contributed to our auction. Thank you to all who have given us such a fun variety of donations to bid on this year. Thank you also to the many people who helped underwrite the cost of the auction, thus ensuring that more of the proceeds get back to our assistants.

A special thanks to the many, many volunteers that it takes to bring an auction like this to life. Thanks to my committee members: Shannon Bischoff, Susan Brager-Murphy, Jeanne Herring, Kathleen Iglesias, Linda Strahle and Colleen White, and all of the volunteers who stepped up to support them and who made the auction run smoothly.

And for those who like to plan ahead - mark March 28, 2009 on your calendar for next year's Merriam School Auction. Some of us will be returning in various roles, and some of us are looking forward to enjoying the auction from the sidelines. So as always, we will be welcoming all of you who are interested in helping out with such a worthwhile event.

Lisa Robb, 2008 Auction Chair

Contd. from pg. 1 Sandra

I recognize that many of you value looping as much as we educators do. However, I know you all appreciate that class size is also an important factor in your child's education and understand that this is a trade-off. Thanks in advance for your help with this.



Sharing Our World at International Night

Sights, sounds and tastes from cultures around the world were to be savored April 11 at International Night, an event jointly hosted by Merriam and McCarthy-Towne schools. More than 250 people — students, teachers, and families — gathered in the cafetorium, which was transformed for the evening by saris festooning the walls and Chinese lanterns hanging at the door. Families could mark their points of origin on a world map at the entrance. Once inside, kids could play an international trivia game, have their names painted in Chinese calligraphy with a special writing brush, and have their hand painted with a henna design. Families could choose from a sumptuous assortment of foods from around the world prepared by Merriam and McCarthy-Towne families. They ate at small tables decorated with brightly colored tablecloths and vases of daffodils.

After dinner came the show! McCarthy-Towne and Merriam students from kindergarten through sixth grade entertained the crowd with a variety of performances, including Hebrew songs and dances, Chinese ribbon and folk dances, Irish step dances, and Hindustani classical singing and Bollywood dance. Merriam alumnus Jason Pao was back by popular demand to demonstrate his skill with the Chinese yo-yo. Other performers at International Night were Jessica Shen, Lauren Zou, Chelsea Zhang, Jasmine Falk, Christine Lai, KaiLou Yue, Velerie Han, Kath-

leen Qiao, Vivian Soong, Cindy Qi, Celine Qi, Alaina Mishleg, April Mishleg, Carrie Yu, Angela Xie, Sufi Kaur, Elsie Liu, Alicia Dai, MeiLi Stanten, Annie Qian, Kai-Jia Yue, Serena Han, Emmie Ohnuki, Iris Zhao, Jenny Yuan, Amanda Wu, Leah Brandstein, Yasmine BenShir, Jana Davis, Eliana Gilfix, Miryam Gilfix, Michelle Zabaruk, Rui Tanimura, Helena Ma, Wendy Huan, Sarah Leandro, Emily Leandro, Emma Bowe-Shulman, Olivia Bowe-Shulman, Abby Kong, Joy Jiang, Jennifer Lu, Shawnae Ma, Sophia Meynard, Yuting Tarn, Judie Wang, Rupyayan Neogy, Colleen Griffin, Bridget Griffin, Alecia Reed and Alok Macharia.

Parker Damon International Night was made possible by support from the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council and from the Merriam PTO and the McCarthy-Towne School Council. Helping contribute to the success of the evening were a fabulous team of volunteers as well as cafeteria staff and custodians.

This unforgettable evening allowed our two schools that share the Parker Damon Building to celebrate together the fascinating cultural diversity that invigorates our community.

Come to the Yard Sale!



The annual Merriam Spring Yard and Bake sale is here! It will be held in the Cafetorium on Saturday, May 3, from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. Come and shop for:

- Furniture and other household items;
- Books, movies and music;
- Puzzles, games and toys; and
- Sports equipment.

And don't miss our new and delicious bake sale! See you there!

Consider A Direct Donation to Merriam

A few weeks ago, you should have received a letter from the Merriam PTO via Friday mail regarding our fundraising status. Thanks to the exceptional dedication of Merriam parents, we are fortunate to have been very successful in accomplishing our goals for this school year!

Many parents tell us that, rather than participating in some of the traditional fundraisers, they prefer to make direct donations. For this reason, the PTO Board wishes to give you this opportunity to make a cash donation and to take advantage of matching corporate funds if available through your employer. As you know, these PTO funds are dedicated to keeping teaching assistants in every classroom. As Merriam will experience previously unforeseen growth next year (a new fourth-grade class, and maintaining four sections in the fifth/sixth grade), additional PTO funds will be very useful and welcome. We all know that having assistants in every classroom has enormous educational benefits for our children every day!

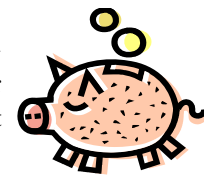


The Merriam Community PTO is a non-profit organization (i.e., 501c3). This means you may be eligible to have your donation matched by your employer. More than 1,000 companies match employee gifts to non-profits. Please check with your personnel office today to see if your donation to Merriam could be doubled by a matching gift from your employer! For a document verifying our 501c3 status, please contact PTO Treasurer Susan Russell.

Cashless Fundraising Update

Register Receipts for Education

Thank you to all the parents, students, teachers and staff who participated in the Register Receipts for Education Program for 2007-2008. We had the highest monthly cash value point deposit for March. We deposited 57,417 cash value points for a year-to-date total of 124,483 cash value points. This far exceeded our goal of 100,000 cash value points for the program year.



We will keep you posted as to the educational equipment that is selected by Merriam. If you have any questions regarding the program, please contact Tricia Forrester at pvforrester@gmail.com.

Box Tops for Education

Enlist the help of friends and family in clipping and saving Box Top coupons for Merriam School. Box Tops for Education labels can be found on some of your favorite products. Send them in to the Merriam Office. For more information, check out www.boxtops4education.com or contact Susan Russell at susanbrussell@yahoo.com.

Target's "Take Charge of Education" Program

Next time you're stocking up at Target or Target.com, be sure to remember to enroll your REDcard in Target's Take Charge of Education program (and choose Merriam School in Acton from their list of eligible schools). One percent of your REDcard purchases at Target and Target.com will be donated to Merriam. For some schools, participation can add up to as much as \$10,000 a year.

Thank you for participating throughout the year in the cashless fundraising programs at Merriam.

So please consider making a donation to our school. You can mail your donation to school or just drop it off at the office. Thanks again for your continued support. It is truly appreciated.

Lynn Armstrong, Carol Leandro and Cathy Utt, PTO Co-Chairs

Susan Russell, PTO Treasurer

Hannah Bloch, PTO Secretary

Attention Sixth-Grade Parents:



Were your children in Kirsten or Lee's class for kindergarten? Do you happen to know where your child's class photo from kindergarten might be?

The Sixth-Grade Celebration Committee is hoping to display all kindergarten photos on the bulletin board, and we're still in need of photos from those two classes. If you're willing to loan your photo, contact Sue Follett at thefollett5@verizon.net.

Saying Good-Bye By the Numbers

At the end of next month, the Merriam community will say good-bye to Sandra after 15 years as the school's principal. Here's a look at Sandra's career by the numbers:

1964: Sandra's first year of teaching;

Six: the only elementary grade that Sandra hasn't taught;

Seven sections, 175 kids: the number of students at Merriam in the school's first year;

23 sections, 556 kids: Merriam's current enrollment;

336: the number of cakes Sandra has shared with students at Birthday lunch;

851,078: the number of pennies collected in the penny tank, tallied three years ago;

725: the number of All-School Meetings Sandra has attended;

1,720: the number of students that Sandra has either taught or principal-ed.

Of all the numbers, it's impossible to calculate the number of lives Sandra has touched while serving as the only principal the school has known since it opened in 1993. Faced with increasing enrollment, the town decided to look into creating a new school based on concepts that hadn't been put into practice before in Acton. Opening the new school "was like having a child," said Sandra. "It wasn't always easy, but it was very new, very stimulating, and very rewarding."

Then, as now, she credits Merriam's "wonderful staff" for making Merriam the place that it is. "I love working with

our teachers, and seeing them grow and develop," she notes.

What's among her proudest accomplishments? "The school we designed is still in place today," says Sandra, "and that is very meaningful to me. It's the same school we worked hard to create, only bigger." The things that were important then - student engagement in learning, collaboration, community and parent involvement - remain important today, she adds.

Looking forward, Sandra says that her plans for the next phase of her life remain in development. Looking back, she notes, "I'm lucky I decided to become a teacher. I get up every morning, and I love my work. I've worked with wonderful people." I think all of us who know Sandra could say the same thing.

Get Up, Stand Up For A Caribbean Celebration



Please join us for a Year-End Caribbean Celebration to say farewell and thanks to Sandra. This festive, Caribbean-themed picnic will be held on June 12, from 5:30-7:30, and will celebrate Sandra's retirement and her many years of service at Merriam School. The picnic will be held rain or shine (indoor space is reserved in the event of inclement weather).

Can't you just hear Bob Marley and Jimmy Buffet? Come prepared for fun! Caribbean attire is encouraged! All you need to bring is your favorite picnic dinner, cool non-alcoholic beverages, and a comfy beach blanket, and "everything will be irie, mon." This year's entertainment will be provided by Pan Loco, a steel drum duet, and "Magician Extraordinaire" Eddie Raymond, back by popular demand. There will be a limbo contest, fun pic-

nic games, face painting and tropical tattoos. After dinner and activities, fruit and a delicious cake for Sandra will be provided.

In lieu of individual gifts for Sandra, staff and parents have come up with an idea for a very special gift to come from the entire Merriam community. If you would like to learn more about this special gift and how to contribute, please contact Karen Sonner at ksonner@mail.ab.mec.edu or Catherine Longwell at cmlongwell@comcast.net.

As with all of our fun, cool Merriam events, this a volunteer effort. Please contact Donna German at donna@obx.nj.com or Gina Crooks at cngcrooks@comcast.net if you would like to help with set-up, clean-up or games in order to make Sandra's Caribbean send-off a spectacular event!

Sixth Grade Celebration

The Sixth Grade Celebration Potluck Dinner will be held Monday, June 16, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Parker Damon Building. The dinner, a Merriam tradition, provides an opportunity to say goodbye and best wishes to our wonderful sixth-graders. The dinner is for sixth-grade students, their parents/guardians and the Merriam staff. Save the date!

If you have any questions about the festivities, please contact Kelly McEwen at mcewen@comcast.net or Carmen Dajer at cdajer@msn.com.

Merriam School

Community News

The next Community News will be published on June 1, 2008.

Email articles to Sue Follett at TheFollett5@verizon.net by May 23, 2008.

PIP Offers Summerskills Sharpeners

PIP (Parent Involvement Project) is coordinating the sales of Summerskills Sharpeners, a series of math workbooks spanning PreK-8, Pre-Algebra, Algebra I, Geometry and high school math. The workbooks are aligned with the National Math Standards and are designed to reinforce the mathematical concepts learned in the just-completed school year. Parents are generally advised to select the book for the grade level that corresponds with the grade their student has just finished. Summerskills Language Arts (PreK-7), Spanish (I, II), and French (I) workbooks are also available through PIP.

The cost is \$16 per book, a savings of \$2 over the publisher's list price. For each book ordered, at least \$1 goes to support PIP family math and science activities. Samples of the Summerskills workbooks are on display at the Acton Memorial Library in the teen area of the Children's Department, or can be previewed at www.summerskills.com. Order forms are available online at www.actonpip.org, and with the samples at Acton Memorial Library.

Orders placed by May 16 are guaranteed to be available before the end of the school year (approximately 3 weeks later); one additional order will be placed on May 30. Contact Susan Krikorian at (978) 635-0174 or actonpip@yahoo.com for more information.

This year, in celebration of Earth Day, you can have your Summerskills books delivered in an "eco-friendly," reusable PIP grocery bag for an additional \$5 donation to PIP. Stop by the PIP table at the Acton Earth Day event on May 3, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at St. Matthew's Church in Acton for more information.

PIP is a network of parents, educators, community and business partners supporting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education in kindergarten through grade 12. For more information about PIP, visit www.actonpip.org.

John Petersen

Attention Sixth-Grade Parents: Immunization Requirements

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has the following requirements for all students entering grade seven in September 2008:

MMR: 2 doses or 2 doses of measles and one dose of mumps and rubella;

Varicella: A physician-certified history of chicken pox disease, or one dose of vaccine for students under 13 years old or two doses of vaccine for students over 13 years old;

Hepatitis B: 3 doses;

Tetanus/Diphtheria: one booster dose of Td (tetanus/diphtheria) if it has been more than five years since the last dose.

A copy of an up-to-date physical examination will also be required for all students before entering seventh grade.

Many of the above vaccines may have been administered while your child was in elementary school. Please check with your health care provider to be certain that your child's immunizations are up-to-date and documented in his/her record. If you send a copy of the exam and updated information record to your elementary school health office, the information will be included in your child's health record when it is transferred to the Junior High School in June. If you do not have the necessary paperwork com-

pleted before the end of school, send it to the School Nurse at the junior high by August 29, 2008.

Join Us!

For Our Final Meeting of the Year!

Merriam PTO Meeting

Monday, May 12, 2008

7:30 p.m., Parker Damon Library

Fundraising Review for 2007/2008

PTO Planning for 2008/2009

Thanks to all of you, this year's fundraising has been very successful. Please join us as we review our accomplishments, consider changes and plan for next year.

From the Food Service Dept.: Healthy Snack Ideas

Healthy snacks offer a between-meal energy boost, provide extra fiber and nutrients and help prevent over-eating at mealtime. Take caution, however. Snackers who eat out of the bag or box triple their calorie intake without even knowing it. Remember to always choose fresh or raw snacks and avoid sugary, fattening, empty calories. Try these snacks to keep your 100-calorie options fresh. Be sure to keep them chilled!

Contd. on pg. 6 Snacks

This & That - April

Merriam School/PTO Events

Saturday, May 3: **Merriam Yard Sale**, 7 a.m.-11 a.m.; Cafetorium. Clean out the house and raise money for sixth-grade celebrations.

Sunday, May 4: **Spring Clean-up**; 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; Parker Damon Building grounds. All families welcome. Bring rakes, weeding tools, trash bags and wheelbarrows.

Monday May 12: **PTO Meeting** in Library at 7:30 p.m. Review of 2007/2008 PTO fundraising and planning for 2008/2009.

May 12 through May 29: **MCAS testing**.

Tuesday, May 13: **Merriam School Council Meeting**; 6 -7:30 p.m.; Conference Room. All parents welcome.

Wednesday, May 14: **Birthday Lunch** - May birthdays.

A/B Regional School or Acton Town Events:

Thursday, May 8: **Forum** to Help Mothers Understand Sons, led by Betsy Wisch, MA, LMHC; 7:30 p.m.; R.J. Grey Junior High Library. Sponsored by A-B Parents of Children with Challenges.

Thursday, May 15: **Acton School Committee Meeting**; 7:30 p.m., McCarthy-Towne.

Wednesday, May 28. **Band concert**. 9:30 a.m.

No School Monday, May 26:
Memorial Day observance.

Learn The Diabetes Warning Signs

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases in children. In the U.S., 1 in every 400-600 children has Type I diabetes. (National Diabetes Education Program). Type 1 (Insulin Dependent) diabetes is most common in youth, and Type 2 (Insulin Resistance) diabetes is most common in adults but is on the rise in youth.

According to the American Diabetes Association, "diabetes is a chronic disease that impairs the body's ability to use food properly. Insulin is a hormone produced in the pancreas that is necessary for the body to convert food into energy. In people with diabetes, either the pancreas doesn't make insulin, the body cannot use the insulin properly, or both. Without insulin, glucose (sugar) builds up in the blood."

Early detection and knowledge of the warning signs is your greatest weapon against the disease and its complications. Behaviors a child might exhibit in school that could indicate undiagnosed diabetes are:

- Excessive urination (frequent trips to the bathroom, especially in close sequence; bedwetting);
- Excessive thirst (frequent trips to the water fountain);
- Irritability;
- Lack of energy, fatigue, drowsiness;
- Rubs eyes, complains of difficulty seeing the board; and
- Difficulty paying attention.

Other symptoms may include:

- Sudden vision changes;
- Fruity/sweet odor to breath or urine;
- Increased appetite;
- Rapid or unexplained weight loss;
- Nausea, vomiting or abdominal pain;
- Tingling or numbness in the legs, feet or fingers;
- Frequent infections of the skin, cuts that are slow to heal;

- Darker patches of skin, usually in neck folds; and
- Itching of skin and/or genitals.

It is important to note that many of these symptoms can be related to illnesses that are not associated with diabetes. Only a health care professional can provide appropriate diagnostic tests and treatments.

References:

- American Diabetes Association: www.diabetes.org
- National Diabetes Education Program: www.ndep.nih.gov.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov

Summarized by the APS/ABRHS school nurses, 2/08.

Contd. from pg. 5 Snacks

10 Great Snacks Under 100 Calories

- $\frac{3}{4}$ medium papaya or mango and 1 medium kiwi - 100 calories
- $\frac{3}{4}$ whole grain bagel with 1 tablespoon light cream cheese - 87 calories
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup bran cereal with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup blueberries - 100 calories
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup trail mix with raw almonds and dried cranberries - 80 calories
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cottage cheese with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup peaches - 95 calories
- 2 tablespoons hummus spread and $\frac{1}{2}$ pita pocket - 93 calories
- 6 medium carrot sticks with 1 tablespoon low-fat ranch dressing - 90 calories
- 3 ginger snaps - 89 calories
- 1 medium nectarine - 67 calories
- 1 cup grapes - 100 calories

This information was found at www.fit-fresh.com/recipes/snacks.

If you have any questions or comments about the lunch program, please contact

Kirsten Nelson, Food Service Director, at Knelson@mail.ab.mec.edu or (978) 264-4700, x3221. It is our pleasure to serve you!