

December 2009



News from Learning Circle Preschool

Wishing You a Happy and Peaceful Holiday Season

Dates to Remember

- Wed 12/2 **Book Discussion: Taking Back Childhood** at 7:30 PM
- Wed 12/9 **Financial Meeting** at 7 pm
- Wed 12/9 **Board Meeting** at 7:30 PM
- Thursday Dec 17 beginning at 8:30 **Family Open Door Day**
- Friday December 18 **Family Dance** at 11:10 am
- Wed Dec 23 – Jan 1 **NO SCHOOL**
- Jan 5 – **Governance Committee Meeting** at 10:15 am
- Jan 13 – **Financial Meeting** at 7 pm
- Jan 13 – **Board Meeting** at 7:30 pm
- Mon Jan 18 **NO SCHOOL** Martin Luther King Day
- Tues Jan 19 **NO SCHOOL** Professional Day
- Saturday Jan 30 **Performance by Yorick Marionette Theatre 11 AM** (Save the date for a great marionette show!)

Invitation to Classroom Participation

We'd like to remind you as we move into winter that you are all welcome to come and spend a day (or part of a day) in your child's classroom here at school.

There's nothing like a classroom visit to get a concrete sense of classroom life and what the school experience means to your child in particular.

Perhaps you are curious about something your child's teachers mentioned at your recent conference. Maybe you'd enjoy sharing a favorite recipe on a day your child's class is cooking. Maybe you'd like to help teachers by sitting with children and writing down their ideas as they dictate descriptions of drawings and stories to add to their writing journals. Or maybe you'd like to read with children, sit and watch a while, or join the class outdoors.

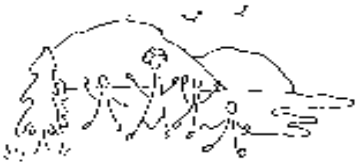
If any of these ideas is appealing, please join us!

Although you are always welcome to participate in your child's program, we do appreciate a bit of advanced notice for the sake of planning. Just let a teacher know when you'd like to come, and, if you have ideas about what you'd like to do with the children, talk to your child's teachers about that too. You can come for all or part of a day, and, if you like, join the class on a regular schedule (for example once or twice a month).

In addition to classroom visits in your child's class, we want to invite anyone willing to help to visit in a different class too! Barbara could use someone in the goldfinch room to help support classroom activity while small group projects are underway. She could also use some assistance with record-keeping, writing in journals, and taking class photos.

If your child attends in either the nuthatch or goldfinch class, chickadees could use your help too. As small groups develop around common themes, it's great to have extra help for writing words, reading books, and generally supporting classroom activity.

Wherever and whenever you take the time to join, know that your contributions of time are greatly appreciated by the children and by all of us. And there is really no better way to get a feel for what your child's day at school is like!



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Annual Appeal Update

Thanks to the generosity of about 25% of current families, the families of alumni, and community supporters of our programs, the annual appeal has already raised over \$2000.

With your contributions we will be able to assure enrichment programs can be scheduled for all the children, and we can begin planning with Trinity Church for a natural habitat space as an extension of our playground this spring. We hope to be able to add additional raised garden beds as well, especially given our successful beginnings with the Early Sprouts curriculum this year.

It's never too late to participate, and we hope to realize 100% participation among our current families.

The Annual Appeal is on-going throughout the 2009-2010 academic year.

Donations are tax deductible, as we are registered as a 501(c)(3) organization. The school's Federal # is 65-1271115.

Good Toys for Young Children

When you are thinking about toys this holiday, it's important to remember some basic principles:

- ☞ Good toys are open-ended, and allow children to use them in a variety of ways.
- ☞ Good toys are well matched to each child's developmental stage and their current interests
- ☞ Good toys require children to think about their play, and to solve problems as they play. The decision about how to use them has not been made by the toy manufacturer, a television show or movie, etc., but the toy's value lie in what each child brings to the play experience.
- ☞ Good toys are safe and will last. It is better to have a few well made materials to use over time than to have a huge variety of toys.
- ☞ Children are easily over stimulated, and can experience stress from being overwhelmed by too many choices. Stress looks different for different children, but can look like boredom to adults, since children may have difficulty engaging in materials or ideas when they are distracted by too many choices. For young children, the maxim "less is more" applies.
- ☞ Many adults need help recognizing the characteristics of good toys. Feel comfortable helping extended family make purchases that are a good match for your child.
- ☞ Children need calm and uninterrupted time with important adults, and will appreciate your model on how to use new materials

Read more about good toys and children's play at this website: www.truceteachers.org.

Thinking about a Young Child's Perspective on Changes in Routine

Recently, when I needed to attend a meeting at another school before the end of our typical chickadee class morning, I used meeting time to tell the children what would be happening. I used a story format, and said something like this:

"Today, after we play for a while and somewhere around snack time I will have to go to a meeting that is not at Learning Circle Preschool. Sometimes I go to a meeting that is in our school office, right outside the chickadee class. But today my meeting is at another school and I will have to drive there.

When it's time to go, I will say goodbye, go get my coat, get in my car, and drive to another school. Then I will park my car and go into my meeting. When the meeting is over I will go back to my car, and drive back to Learning Circle Preschool.

I hope that I will be back in time to say goodbye to all of you in the chickadee class. But there is a chance that my meeting will be too long, and I may not be back in time to say goodbye. I will see all the children staying for lunch, and I will see all of you on our next school day."

Then, Michelle and I talked with the children together about ways friends could help friends and make a good day, even without me there.

The conversations that followed offered a good reminder of the fragile link children may have to a sense of comfort and control in their environment, and offer a reminder of how disconcerting even a small change in routine can be for children. After talking about the weather (how important it was not to forget my coat) and my car, children repeated their understanding of what I said, confirmed that they might not see me, and then confirmed that I really would be coming back. The next focus was on where this other school is (Will it be far? Do you know where it is and where to go?) One child suggested that I check maps to be sure I knew the route, and offered to bring in some of his maps from home.

As we begin a busy holiday season that may be filled with changes in routine and expectations, shopping trips, different transitions, and family visits, please keep in mind how important consistent routine is to young children. Keeping the pace slow enough and clear enough for the children will help insure each child's sense of control and confidence among these changes, and will help children both enjoy and contribute to a happy and calm holiday season.

Two important family events

Please check your child's cubby today for information on two upcoming events at school.

On the morning of Thursday December 17 we will be inviting you to a Family Open Door Day beginning at 8:30, when you bring your child to school. Each classroom will be set up with displays and activities featuring the ways in which we have been supporting child collaborations as part of our curriculum focused on strong classroom communities. Between 8:30 and 9:30 parents are invited to participate in their own child's classrooms and visit other classrooms. From 9:30-10 we will meet in the welcome room to talk about experiences and observations, and so that you have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

On Friday December 18 at 11:10-departure time, we invite you to celebrate winter solstice at our annual Family Dance. We will set up an informal snack, sing songs, and enjoy line and circle dances together.

All are invited to both events, regardless of the day your child attends school. Please do join us!

Promoting Self Esteem in the Preschool Child (source unknown)

Child development experts tell us that the beginnings of a concept of self begin as early as 16 months of age and that by the time a child is school age he already has very definite feelings about himself, his appearance, his intelligence, his "goodness" or "badness," feelings that become a deeply imbedded aspect of his personality. Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can give the preschool child is a sense of competence, a sense that he is a very special human being and unconditionally valued.

What are some ways we can help a child develop a strong sense of self-esteem?

Perhaps one very important way is by really listening. It is so easy to only half pay attention to childish chatter, but it can mean so much to the child if we really concentrate, ask a question ("What happened then?"), respond to a feeling expressed ("That must have made you happy."), maintain eye contact, and express enjoyment in the conversation.

It is very important to recognize that a child is already developing a unique personality, one that is different from every other human being. Observe the words and actions of your child to understand the person underneath and express encouragement of those qualities you would like to see develop. Catch the child being good. In our jobs as disciplinarians we sometimes overlook all those things that the child consistently does well. Make a point of calling attention to these, such as, "I really liked how gentle you were with baby brother." Or, "It's so helpful when you put your toys away." These comments can be especially effective when they are least expected.

Encourage improvement. Don't wait for a perfect accomplishment, but praise an attempt. A child who gets positive feedback for a new task will try all the harder the next time.

Use a child's name frequently, especially in positive situations. "Oh, Mary, what a nice drawing." At the same time, try not to use the child's name during punishment. A child needs to associate his name with positive feelings and reactions in others.

Don't overreact to mistakes. Help the child to realize that mistakes are a way we learn and that they do not mean we are less worthwhile as people.

Express the belief that you are confident he can solve problems for himself. Don't be too quick to jump in and resolve conflicts for him or he will get the message that he is not competent to deal with situations himself.

Always remember that inside each child is a very special treasure waiting to be found. Discovering that treasure, and helping the child to discover it as well, is the basis for helping develop an adult with a healthy mental outlook.