

# Merriam School

## Community News

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### MESSAGE FROM SANDRA

#### Conferences

It's hard to believe that within a month we will be scheduling parent/teacher conferences, a time for parents and teachers to look at student growth over the past year and, in some cases, to reflect over two school years.

This is an opportunity to review growth and discuss strengths and weaknesses as they relate to achievement. Social and emotional development and parent and teacher perceptions of growth in these areas are as important as cognitive development in the growth process. We know that when children feel good about themselves as learners and feel successful in school, they will take risks as students, and achievement will follow.

Conferences are being scheduled for May and June. Teachers will share concrete evidence of student effort and growth. This evidence may include pieces of written language, problem-solving challenges, communication samples, science and social studies projects, or artwork. Some samples may represent work accomplished as a member of a group. Recent research in education informs us of the importance of being able to work both independently and collaboratively. Group projects often involve the use of a variety of resources, such as teachers, fellow students, parents, books and available technology.

In this information age, when the knowledge base is growing at a rate we

find hard to comprehend, it's important for children to learn how to access information and how to synthesize it and put it to work for desired outcomes. The process and the end product of group projects are important individually and collectively to all members of the team. Students' assessments of their contributions and their perceptions of the learning involved are very important. We expect all students to develop their ability to self-assess as they grow at Merriam. If we take their opinions seriously, they'll be honest and forthright and will learn how to use their reflections for continued growth.

In addition to group work, teachers will share individual assessments in math, reading and writing that were done without the benefit of group support and/or group sharing. Through these pieces of work, teachers will discuss children's grasp of system curriculum goals and their strengths and weaknesses within the classroom. Many of these samples and projects will become part of your child's portfolio, which will be added to each year as your child moves from grade to grade.

The staff has worked very hard over the last few years to refine communication about student growth. We've done a great deal of work to develop our repertoire of effective assessment practices to extend and share comprehensive strategies to document evidences of learning. Teachers are committed to helping parents understand their child's learning.

*Contd. on pg. 2 Sandra*

#### It's Auction Time!

Tomorrow night the party is on at Marriot Spring Hill Suites Devens Common Center. Join us at the Merriam School Auction - doors open at 6:15 p.m. Be sure to arrive on time to ensure plenty of wandering up and down the silent auction tables. The first silent auction closes at 7:20 p.m., so latecomers will miss out on early-bird bargain opportunities. Be sure to check the website at <http://merriam.maestroweb.com> for the most up-to-date item listings.

If you haven't done so, you may want to consider signing up for Quick Check upon your arrival (you can do this at the Welcome Desk). With Quick Check, you register your credit card at the beginning on the night so that you avoid having to wait in line to swipe it at check out.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone there - don't forget that it's also premiere night for our new Merriam movie!

Do you still have questions on how the auction works? Please visit the website (see above for the address) and click on FAQs. See you there!



*Contd. from pg. 1 Sandra*

Please feel free to ask as many questions as you like, and we will always answer as comprehensively as we're able. It's helpful to the teachers to know your questions and areas of concern or particular interests ahead of time.

It's important to remember that this conference is not a time to discuss your child's program, class or teacher for next year. Planning for next year will be ongoing over the next few months on many levels (e.g., staffing assignments, student grouping and curriculum development).

Please be assured we will be giving these matters our careful attention. Your opportunity for input in the grouping process is explained below. The information you provide us about your perceptions of your child as a learner will be treated respectfully as an important part of the complex process of planning for the next school year

### **Class Groupings**

Creating class groupings for a new school year is a complex process. Merriam's professional staff seeks to create classes of learners who will work together and support each other's social, emotional and cognitive strengths while learning both individually and collectively. With respect for the varied learning styles involved, and with consideration of individual differences in teachers, assistant teachers and students, there is no "right way" to achieve perfect groupings. Perfection does not exist with regard to human beings. Creating balanced classes, however, is a goal worth working toward and something we strive to do well.

There is no formula for this process. It is not a science. I have been in schools where grouping was accomplished

arbitrarily by the principal, somewhat arbitrarily by teachers factoring in parents' requests, and teachers creating balanced classes and arbitrarily placing those classes with teachers. At Merriam, we have several advantages. The number of caring adults each child works with and gets to know first-hand here in a year is significant. Many adults in our school know most of the children. Most of the children know most of the teachers through shared experiences together. The children know many of the other children in all grades through shared activities. The sense of community is real, and feelings of trust and safety between children and adults are indeed very positive factors in our favor in this process.

Assuming Town Meeting passes the budget as planned, we will have 24 sections next year. One more section of fourth-graders is planned. Next year there will be four fourth grades to allow for the number of students in each class to be within School Committee guidelines. This is a very positive step by the Administration and School Committee to try work toward reducing large class size at that grade level. It creates a challenge for us with looping, however it is a trade-off that I believe is worth it.

Our commitment to children and teachers staying together for two years will be upheld whenever possible. However, it will not be possible for all third-graders to remain in their current loops as they move to fourth grade. Parents of third-grade students will receive a letter from me after the Town Meeting vote. That letter will explain the process we will be using to form a new class.

All children will be grouped with a comfortable peer with whom school is socially rewarding. Within this framework, the staff will plan class groupings. We will, of course, weigh

strengths and needs, including special education criteria, in our planning. Decisions concerning which classes teachers will teach will be made at the end of this process. Please be assured we will do our best to plan balanced classes.

Parent input is requested by May 1. Please consider the framework within which we are working. This is your opportunity to provide us with the factors you most want us to consider when grouping your child. Please do not use names of adults or children. If you do, we cannot use your letter in the process. Your input should refer to your child's strengths, weaknesses and learning styles and those social and emotional factors you feel are important for our consideration. We value your perceptions about your child's learning profile, and we will give all information respectful attention in the process. Please do not describe what teaching style you feel would be best for your child. We seek information about your child as a learner, not your thoughts on the teacher with whom you think your child would do best.

Please keep in mind that this process is not about placing individual children; rather it's about creating balanced learning communities that will work well together. Curriculum will be planned to ensure that children will accomplish the Acton Public Schools curriculum goals within their elementary years. Merriam's teachers are committed to providing learning experiences that consider the educational backgrounds of children and are relevant and meaningful. This complex process of creating balanced student groupings and then assigning teachers to those classes will take place in May and June. We will be thoughtfully and carefully planning for next year while concluding the end of this year.

*Contd. on pg. 3 Sandra*

Contd. from pg. 2 Sandra

We expect to finalize these plans after the school year ends. Class lists for the 2008-2009 school year will be posted at school in August. The June newsletter will announce the exact date of this posting. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

### Hiring Process at Merriam

There will be new faculty positions at grades 3/4 (depending on the outcome of the Town Meeting vote) and 5/6 at Merriam next year. We don't know definitely how many, but we need to be thinking about the hiring process. We invite Merriam parents to participate in the search process for filling these openings, but want you to know in advance that hiring will take place over several weeks and may last into early summer. It can be a fairly extensive commitment.

The approximate hiring process dates are May 5 through May 30. During the week of April 21, Sandra will assemble teams from randomly selected parent volunteers and interested teachers. This will include contacting all of those selected to be sure that they can be available for the entire time frame of that particular team. Parents will be assigned to a team for a grade level at which they will not have a child.

If you would like to participate, please write a letter expressing your interest and willingness to serve in this important capacity and send it to the office by **April 14**. We encourage and appreciate your participation.



### Merriam Yard Sale Coming in May

It's almost here! The Annual Merriam Yard Sale will be held Saturday, May 3, 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. Donate those great items



## Cashless Fundraising Update

### Register Receipts for Education 2007-2008

LAST CALL FOR RECEIPTS FROM DONELAN'S AND CROSBY MARKET! The Register Receipts for Education Program for 2007-2008 is wrapping up. This is the last call to send in receipts from Donelan's and Crosby's markets. Please forward your receipts (dated 9/1/07 to 3/31/08) to the Merriam Office by April 4.



Merriam receives one cash value point for every dollar collected. Our February deposit put our year-to-date balance at 67,066 cash value points. We will keep you posted on the grand total for the program year and education equipment/supplies selected. If you have any questions regarding the program, contact Tricia Forrester at [pvoorrester@gmail.com](mailto:pvoorrester@gmail.com).

### Box Tops for Education

Keep encouraging your friends and family to clip and save Box Top for Education coupons for Merriam. Look for Box Top labels on some of your favorite products, and send them in to the Merriam Office. For more information, check out [www.boxtops4education.com](http://www.boxtops4education.com) or contact Susan Russell at [susanbrussell@yahoo.com](mailto:susanbrussell@yahoo.com).

### Target's Take Charge of Education Program

Attention Target shoppers: you can easily enroll your REDcard in Target's Take Charge of Education program and choose Merriam School in Acton from their Eligible Schools list. Once enrolled, 1% of your REDcard purchases at Target and Target.com are donated to Merriam. For some schools, participation in the program adds up to as much as \$10,000 a year.

that have made every yard sale a huge success:

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

Volunteer - it's fun! Help is needed for Friday afternoon set-up, Saturday morning sales support, and post-sale dispersal of any unsold items to local charities.

Clean your house, recycle and raise money for a great cause: Yard Sale proceeds ensure that the sixth-graders get a superior send-off at the end of the school year.

Contact Sandy Cummings at [sbcummings1@verizon.net](mailto:sbcummings1@verizon.net) or (978) 201-2752 to volunteer.

### Farewell to Sandra Year-End Picnic Planned



The Merriam community will gather on Thursday, June 12 for a "Beach Party" to show our appreciation for Sandra and to celebrate all of our accomplishments this year. So save the date and get our your Hawaiian shirts and beach blankets for a terrific send-off!

## **Merriam Hosts School Committee**

On March 13, Merriam School hosted the School Committee meeting. Hosting includes making a presentation on a topic prescribed by the School Committee. This year the Committee asked schools to talk about their needs, so representatives from the Merriam School Council and the Merriam PTO focused on how we have worked together this year to achieve the goals of our school improvement plan.

The presentation began with a focus on how the PTO works to support the school overall, emphasizing the PTO's three major roles of communication, community-building and fundraising. PTO Chairs Cathy Utt and Carol Leandro spoke of continuing efforts to increase parent involvement across our diverse community. These efforts include holding meetings on various days and times, providing childcare for some meetings and providing Community Conversations on topics suggested by parents. We also celebrate our community and our diversity with many family-oriented social events, such as the International Evening, the Square Dance, the February Social, and Muffins with Mom/Donuts with Dad. Even matching our auction theme to the school theme for the year - Sharing Our World - celebrates our diversity and emphasizes that we all have a stake in our children and our community.

The PTO Chairs then spoke in detail about the PTO's focus on raising funds to support Merriam's goal to have a teaching assistant in every classroom. This is unique to Merriam, and a funding mandate for the PTO. It requires the creativity, time, talents and dedication of the entire Merriam community to raise more than \$80,000 to support teaching assistants at our school. PTO efforts towards this goal include: offering a variety of fundrais-

ers that appeal to diverse interests throughout the year, implementing several fundraisers that minimize direct costs to parents (e.g., Camp Fair and Directory ads), promoting cashless fundraisers, using a direct appeal (and doubling many donations through corporate matching), and linking all fundraising to Merriam's educational approach.

The PTO's portion of the presentation concluded with their focus on appreciating the contributions of all parents, staff and students. This includes acknowledging donations of time, services, skills, creativity, knowledge and goods, and valuing any form of volunteering as benefitting our students and our school. It was noted that by emphasizing communication and community-building roles along with fundraising, the PTO invites the greater participation of all members of our community.

Maryann Ayers took the lead in presenting the Merriam School Council's work this year on the School Improvement Plan. Goal One: continue our work encouraging parent participation that is more fully representative of our diverse community. Several strategies helped with the implementation of this goal, including distributing the Merriam School Parent Involvement Brochure to the school community, developing a parent resource area in the school library, and conducting a Homework Forum (to hear from parents about what they need to better support their children with homework.) The faculty has also supported this school goal with their professional development throughout the year, including research and development last summer and a parent involvement study group.

Goal Two of the School Improvement Plan is to develop a plan to provide teachers with curriculum resources in

order to support students with language-based learning needs. Teachers have worked hard on this goal throughout the year. They have developed an end-of-year Assessment Summary Document for ELL students, and plan to pilot the document at the end of this school year, gathered materials and created curriculum plans for grades 1-6 to support the varied needs of students with language-based needs. Again, the Merriam faculty has supported this school goal with their professional development, through faculty study groups, extensive curriculum work at staff meetings, and the creation of a resource notebook for teachers.

Continued work on these goals will include piloting the curriculum units, piloting the ELL summary document as an ongoing assessment tool, and developing a homework guide for parents next year. The Merriam School Council will be finalizing next year's school goals over the next few months, and they will likely include a focus on technology and math curriculum.

Many aspects of the presentation impressed School Committee members, including the clear efforts to achieve our school goals and the creativity of our fundraising and community involvement efforts. But what they commented on most was how the presentation itself, a shared effort by staff and parents, clearly reflected the energy and collaborative nature of the Merriam community!

Following the presentation, the School Committee focused on the 2008-2009 school year budget. Under significant pressure to substantially trim the proposed budget they approved at the previous meeting in February, the committee

*Contd. on pg. 5 School*

Contd. from pg. 4 School

decided not to include an additional third-grade section at Merriam next year. They are, however, moving forward with a proposed budget that includes the addition of a fourth-grade section at Merriam and maintaining the four fifth-grade sections at Merriam. These are the two grade levels that are most in need of class size reductions across the district. To support the School Committee's efforts to reduce class size and to support the committee's proposed budget, be sure to attend Town Meeting on April 7.

### **PTO Community Conversation: Bullying and Harassment**

A Community Conversation about Bullying and Harassment took place at the PTO meeting on Jan. 30, 2008. Teacher Maryann Ayers gave a presentation based on the in-service Professional Day attended by all Acton and A-B teachers last November. That presentation was led by Richard Cole, Assistant District Attorney, and Dr. Elizabeth Englander, Director of the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center at Bridgewater State College.

The Assistant District Attorney's definition of harassment and bullying is "unwelcome verbal, written, electronic, or physical conduct that creates a hostile, humiliating, intimidating, or offensive educational environment." The most common target is the child with disabilities, though any difference may be targeted. In the past, a bully often fit the stereotype of the unpopular, aggressive kid, but now bullies are often the regular and/or popular kids.

Kids are under enormous social pressure to be accepted and will often follow the lead of inappropriate behavior if they feel it guarantees their place within a group. They may bully, or act



## **SPRING CLEAN-UP IS HERE**

Get Out Your Gardening Gloves!

Spring Clean-Up of the grounds at the Parker Damon Building is

**Sunday, May 4 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

We need to get these Parker-Damon Grounds into shape for Spring! With your help we can make them look beautiful! Bring your rakes, weeding tools, trash bags and wheel barrows. **The whole family is welcome - and we need all the help we can get!**

**Show your school pride and help us out!**

The clean-up and landscaping of the Parker-Damon Building grounds is done only by volunteers and we need you!

For more information, or to help with landscaping tasks on other days, please contact Amanda Lye, Merriam PDB| Landscaping Committee co-chair, at [amandalye1@yahoo.com](mailto:amandalye1@yahoo.com) or by phone at (978) 635-9879.

as "egggers" who egg the bully on, or bystanders who don't step in to interrupt. As Sandra notes, "the lure of human connection is so powerful that nice kids will do mean things to be accepted." Most kids exhibit some bullying behaviors at some point in their elementary school years. It does not mean that they are "bad" kids.

Teachers, parents, coaches and other adult role models need to patiently teach and remind kids of what acceptable behavior looks and sounds like. Consistent modeling and communication about these behaviors is our best defense against bullying and harassment. Sandra encourages parents to tell her or teachers about any bullying situation at school or on the bus. Kids may be afraid of retaliation, but Sandra says that kids who bully usually stop when confronted.

Maryann then spoke about the fast-growing problem of cyber-bullying. It may occur on web pages, in e-mail, instant messaging, texting or blogging, or on MySpace or Facebook. Kids use these when they are away from adult

supervision, and often feel that they can act anonymously. The profile of a typical cyberbully is a girl who is usually quiet and even somewhat timid. Researchers believe that when students become angry, frustrated or hurt, they act upon these feelings by sending threatening or intimidating messages as a way to retaliate. It is important for students to remember that they should never post or respond to messages when they are angry or hurt.

Here are some important facts about computer use that need to be taught to kids:

The Internet is like a huge billboard on Main Street. Once you put something out on the web, it's out there for all the world to see. Passwords alone can't reliably protect your private information. Any "protected profile" is easily accessible. Others can alter your on-line words and pictures. Anything that is posted, including photos, can never be deleted. As a result, students should remember to think before they post.

*Contd. on pg. 6 Bullying*

*Contd. from pg. 5 Bullying*

College admissions officers and prospective employers look on-line to see what has been posted in the past.

Things you may do on-line that you consider harmless may actually be illegal, such as making threats or posing as someone else.

If you receive intimidating messages on-line, don't respond. Keep a record. Tell an adult.

The 5 Cs can help kids stay safe and be alert when they're on-line:

**Commerce:** The ads are there to try to sell you something.

**Contact:** Who are you communicating with? Beware of anyone you do not know personally. It is not unusual for people to pretend to be someone that you know, so be careful about giving out personal information on the web. Parents should be aware of everyone their kids have contact with on the Internet.

**Crime:** It's illegal to post false information about people or to pose as someone else. Threats are also illegal.

**Cyberbullying:** It is not okay to cyberbully. If you receive threats or intimidating messages, don't reply. Print copies and report it to an adult.

**Content:** Can you trust what you read? Check to see who runs a website, what its purpose is, and how recent and accurate its information is. Can you find the same information on other similar sites? Do the links on the site work and bring you to other credible sites? Always evaluate what you read!

- Hannah Bloch

## **If I Were The President...**

During a recent snack break, one first-grade girl in Fran's class announced to her table mates, "I'm voting for Hilary Clinton. She's giving all sick people medicine." This led to a class discussion about the upcoming 2009 election. The adults in the room were amazed at the knowledge of the six- and seven-year-olds in the room. The students were able to share their thoughts and ideas about being president of the U.S.

The class then decided to have each child create a book entitled *If I Were President*. After each child decorated the cover, they colored in a regal looking desk, chair, American flag and the presidential seal. A small head shot of each child was placed behind their colored desk. Once the class was able to get past the giggles, they were able to focus on their thoughts and complete sentences about being President.

Below are some examples of what these first-graders would do as President.

### **If I were President, the first thing I would do is:**

- say good bye to my family.
- hire a maid.
- make my brother Vice President.
- fly to Washington D.C. with my dog.
- have a good bye party for me!

### **If I were President, I would eat:**

- lots of junk food.
- Smores.
- only steak and noodles.
- lots and lots of candy.

### **If I were President, I would travel to:**

- Storyland.
- India.
- California and then Cape Cod.

## **If I were President, I would have a pet**

- parrot named Bobby Jr.
- horse named Hailey.
- dog named Fran.

## **If I were President, I would pass a law that:**

- there would be no wars.
- no one goes too deep in the ocean.
- there is no smoking.

## **If I were President, I would help:**

- poor people.
- all dogs find homes.
- my mom and dad.

Would you do anything differently? Children are our future. It is important to foster the skills necessary to dream, lead and articulate our plans and ideas as a nation and as individuals. This activity provides an excellent opportunity for children to develop many of these skills along with providing a laugh or two. The class of 2019 certainly has a promising future!

## **Cultural Enrichment Busy This Spring!**

There's been a lot going on with the Cultural Enrichment Committee over the past few months:

### **Programs**

As part of Merriam's Literacy Week celebration, children's author Stephen Krensky visited Merriam on March 3. Mr. Krensky gave an entertaining and informative presentation at All-School meeting, which was followed by nuts-and-bolts writing workshops with students in grades 3-6.

In celebration of St. Patrick's Day, Celtic performers Jerry and Nancy Bell, accompanied by their children, treated us to an energetic Irish and Scottish musical and dance show at All-School Meeting on March 14. As well as learning simple Scottish, Irish  
*Contd. on pg. 7 Culture*

*Contd. from pg. 6 Culture*

and Appalachian dance steps and songs, we listened to the story of The Boy Who Couldn't Play The Fiddle and enjoyed musical demonstrations of the fiddle, Scottish and Irish pipes and bouzouki (a type of Irish harp).

### **Willow Books Night**

To support the Cultural Enrichment program, a special fundraising night was held at Willow Books on March 10. A considerable number of Merriam families turned out to browse, socialize and hear teachers read their favorite books. Based on sales that evening, Willow has donated more than \$400 to Merriam's PTO to support cultural enrichment programs. Many thanks to everyone who attended and, in particular the awesome teachers who were willing to

come out at night to read to the students: Myrna Gutfreund, Lee Trench, Judy LaFrancis, Karen Sonner, Leah Richardson, Melissa Reinhardt, Tom Sidley and Maryann Ayers.

On Friday, May 26, the final Cultural Enrichment performance of the school year will take place during All School Meeting. With Bamidele Dancers and Drummers, students will experience the dances, rhythms, folklore and songs from West Africa, Brazil and the Caribbean.

The Cultural Enrichment Committee arranges for a variety of performances and cultural events to enhance and deepen the educational experience of Merriam students.

Please contact Cathy Castaneda ([cathy\\_castaneda@hotmail.com](mailto:cathy_castaneda@hotmail.com)) or Catherine Smith ([cath.a.smith66@gmail.com](mailto:cath.a.smith66@gmail.com))

with any questions or suggestions about Cultural Enrichment.

### **Mothering Boys Seminar Planned**

Mothering sons means parenting children who are, and always will be, inherently different from you. This presents special challenges and offers satisfying rewards. What makes mothering sons unique? How can we maintain strong connections with our sons while helping them navigate their way to manhood? Come join a discussion led by Betsy Wisch, MA, LMHC on May 8 at 7:30 p.m. at the RJ Grey Library in Acton. The topics we will explore include myths, beliefs and the emotional side of boys; strategies for building strong relationships; and managing the boy code-supporting all sides of our sons.

*Contd. on pg 10 Sons*

### **Boston Lyric Opera Performs Hansel & Gretel**

On March 10, Merriam students watched a preview of Hansel and Gretel performed by members of the Boston Lyric Opera for an upcoming performance. Merriam third-graders will go to Merrimack College to watch the full performance on May 6, and first-graders have been studying this opera and will be watching a video version.

The Boston Lyric Opera offers a family performance every April and May. They sing a "kid-friendly" opera in English, and condense the story to one hour. Below is the information for these performances.

I have attended these performances for many years both with my own children and my students. It is a fun way to introduce your child to the beauty of opera.

Marblehead Veterans Middle School Performing Arts Center 217 Pleasant St. Marblehead, MA Sunday, March 30, 2008 1:30 p.m.	John Hancock Hall 180 Berkeley St. Boston, MA Sunday, April 13, 2008 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.	Brandeis University Spingold Theater 415 South St. Waltham, MA Sunday, May 4, 2008 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.
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For Marblehead and Boston performances, call BLO at (617) 542-6772. For Waltham performances, call Brandeis Tickets at (781) 736-3400, option 5, or purchase tickets online at [www.blo.org](http://www.blo.org)

## Parent Forum: What To Expect In Junior High

The Acton and Boxborough local and regional PTSOs are pleased to announce a program for the parents and guardians of sixth-grade students: The Junior High School and What to Expect, featuring a panel of parents who have children attending R.J. Grey Junior High.

During this time of transition, with many changes and unknowns, it is not uncommon for both students and parents to experience anxiety. This program will include a panel of current and former parents from your elementary school who have children attending the junior high school and/or the high school. This session is designed to reduce parent anxiety by giving you information.

Parents will share their experiences of the transition- what worked or didn't work for them and their children. You'll have an opportunity to ask questions and to hear honest answers about your concerns. R.J. Grey counselors will also offer their perspectives.

Panels will be held for different elementary schools on different dates so that groups will be smaller and panels can be representative of those parents whose children are attending those specific elementary schools. The Merriam, McCarthy-Towne and Blanchard Parent Panel will be held Thursday, April 10. The Douglas, Gates and Conant Parent Panel will be held Thursday, April 3. All panels will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the Junior High Library. Please feel free to attend either panel should one date be more convenient.

Please contact Jan Couch at (978) 263-2118 or [jccouch@comcast.net](mailto:jccouch@comcast.net) with any questions.



## From Sandra: Hats Off To Judy and Diane

As I know you all know, I am leaving Merriam at the end of this school year, and a new principal has been hired and announced to the community: Merriam teacher Ed Kaufman. The community of parents, teachers and students has expressed their excitement and warm welcome to him. Congratulations, Ed!

There are some other office employees who are very important to the school who are also leaving at the end of this year. They are Judy Craig and Diane Walsh, who are leaving to have more time with their families. It is a coincidence in timing that these changes are all happening at once. We will have a person in Diane's position after April vacation, which will allow for a comfortable and smooth transition. The person hired in Judy's position will start in September.

Judy and Diane have given generously of themselves to this school for 10 years. They interface in the most respectful manner with students, parents and teachers every day. We all depend on them to know everything: to solve problems with lunch money, bus passes, missed buses, Friday mail, purchase orders, attendance and everything else imaginable. They deal with us when we are upset, happy, disappointed, excited, sad, worried and hungry, and they are always patient and respectful no matter what we are feeling and showing.

We will have opportunities before the end of the year to say good-bye and thank you to these two wonderful ladies, but for now I want to say, "Hats off to Diane and Judy! We love you! You will be missed!!!"

## How Important Is A Good Night's Sleep?

Why is sleep important to overall wellness?

**Health:** Not getting enough sleep increases the risk of having high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and obesity. During sleep, your body produces hormones that fuel growth in children, helps build muscle mass, and repairs cells and tissues.

**Mood:** Not getting enough sleep can make you irritable and contributes to bad behavior and difficulty with relationships. People who chronically lack sleep are more likely to be depressed.

**Learning:** We need sleep to think clearly, react quickly and create memories. The pathways in the brain that aid with learning and creative problem solving are very active during sleep.

**Athletic performance-** According to the National Sleep Foundation, sleep deprivation can affect athletic performance by reducing cardiovascular performance, decreasing mental functioning, reducing endurance, impairing motor function and delaying visual and auditory reaction time.

How much sleep do you really need?

Sleep needs vary from person to person and change throughout one's life span. According to the National Sleep Foundation: preschoolers (3-5 years) need 11-13 hours of sleep, school-aged children (5-12 years) need 10-11 hours of sleep, teens (13-17 years) need 8.5-9.25 hours of sleep, and adults need 7-9 hours of sleep each night.

For more information on the importance of sleep visit the National Institutes of Health at [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov) or the National Sleep Foundation at [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org).

## **Teresa's Class Posts Wikipedia Listing**

Teresa's fourth-grade class wrote about Merriam for the online reference Wikipedia. We split up into seven groups, and each group put thoughts into a topic. All-School Meeting, Merriam Specials, Birthday Lunch, Looping, Field Day, Theme Day, and Core Values were our topics. After the groups thought of what to write, they wrote their first drafts. Then, our groups went to other computers to edit each other's work. We used the feedback from the other groups to write our final drafts.

The meaning of this project was to inform the world with information on our school, Merriam. Also, if parents are looking for schools for their kids, they will be able to find out what it is like to be part our school's community. So check out what the fourth-graders wrote at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org). And feel free to add on to our paragraphs or write your own!

- Melissa Capland, Julia Beerman and Maya Haigis

## **Thanks From The Hospitality Committee**

On behalf of the Merriam PTO Hospitality Committee, a HUGE thank you goes out to the volunteers whose food donations treated our hardworking School Committee to a delicious dinner during their March 13 meeting hosted by Merriam School. (For more information on the meeting, see the article on page 4.)

Thanks go to: Helen Webster, Joanne Urso, Donna McGavick, Deb Matthews, Marisa Olsen, Maya Patel, Beth Browning, Susan Avery, Katy Frey, Judy Nolan, Darlene Durkin and Kathy Simmons.

The School Committee members expressed their gratitude to the Merriam Community not only for the fabulous food, but also for our community's graciousness in welcoming them to our school each year. Thank you, again, for helping the Hospitality Committee with another spectacular event!

- Lisa Pratt and Donna German, Hospitality Chairs

## **Volunteers Pitch In For Basketball Snack Sales**



Since the beginning of January, many Merriam parents and students graciously volunteered their time on five alternating Saturdays selling snacks during the Community Education basketball games held at the Parker Damon Building. Our volunteers' outstanding efforts this year meant that the snack table sales raised \$648.88 for the Merriam School and the activities it sponsors.

The Merriam PTO would like to thank all of the parents and students who helped out during the 2008 basketball season: Suzanne Joris, Adrienne Beerman, Julia Beerman, Danielle Beerman, Carol Leandro, Sarah Leandro, Emily Leandro, Diane Johnson, Daniel Walton, Leah Walton, Kristin Norwood, Josh Gilbert, Jenny Patterson, Donna McGavick, Lynn Armstrong, Donald Armstrong, Dan Armstrong, Matthew Armstrong, Tommy Armstrong, Dewi Win, Danielle Cusato, Margaret Miley, Dorene Bowe-Shulman, Tina Humphreys, Kevin Humphreys and Gail Humphreys. We would also like to thank everyone who supported the snack table by purchasing items throughout the season!

## **Merriam Library Can Solve All Your Problems**

Okay, maybe not all of your problems. But did you know that the library has more than 600 books for parents and teachers, on a broad range of subjects? The parent/teacher section, formerly housed in Room 222, can now be found in a peaceful corner of the Merriam library.

All Merriam parents are welcome to borrow books from the library, and topics in the new parent/teacher section include self-esteem, family relationships, child development and child psychology. Educational resources, such as books on reading development, nonfiction writing and team building, are also available. Parents will soon be able to borrow PIP Packets, games and activities designed to encourage math, science and technology skills and provided by the Acton Parent Involvement Project.

The library is open during school hours, and parents are reminded to sign in at the Merriam Office before coming to the library. For more information, contact Joan Hilton at the Merriam Library or at [jhilton@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:jhilton@mail.ab.mec.edu).

Merriam School

Community News

Editor: Sue Follett  
Production: Joe Campo

The next Community News will be published on May 2, 2008.

Email articles to Sue at  
[TheFollett5@verizon.net](mailto:TheFollett5@verizon.net) by  
April 25, 2008.

# This & That - April

## Merriam School/PTO Events

Friday, April 4: **Deadline for the Register Tapes for Education Program.** Please submit all your Donelan's/Crosby Markets register receipts dated between 9/1/07 and 3/31/08 to the Merriam office.

Wednesday, April 9: **Birthday Lunch** - April birthdays.

Friday, April 11: **International Night** with McCarthy-Towne, 6:30 p.m. in the Cafetorium. Celebrate our diverse cultures!

Thursday, April 17: Landscape Committee **Spring Clean-up Day**, 10 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on school grounds.

### A mini-May Preview:

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

Monday May 12: **PTO Meeting**, 7:30 p.m., Merriam Library. Review of 2007-2008 PTO fundraising, and planning for 2008-2009.

### **A/B Regional School or Acton Town Events:**

Tuesday, April 1: **Acton Town Elections.**

Monday, April 7: **Town Meeting** starts, 7 p.m., Acton Boxborough High School Auditorium. The school budget needs to be voted in, along with other important town business decisions.

Thursday, April 10: **Forum for parents/guardians of sixth-grade stu-**

**dents:** Junior High School and What to Expect, 7 p.m. in the Junior High Library.

Wednesday, April 30: **Informational meeting** for parents/guardians of sixth-grade students, 7:00 p.m., Acton Boxborough High School Auditorium.

### **No School April 21 - 25: Spring Vacation Week.**

### **Two Schools Plan International Night**

Bring your family and come to Parker Damon International Night on Friday, April 11 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The evening starts with an International Potluck: please bring a dish or dessert to serve 8-10 people. Don't forget to label your dish with your name and school and write the name of the dish and all ingredients on a 3x5 index card.

Following the Potluck, enjoy the cultural entertainment that students from Merriam and McCarthy-Towne have prepared to celebrate the diversity throughout the two schools. Ethnic dress is encouraged but not required.

We are still in need of an audio-visual volunteer to help set up and operate a CD player, microphone and lights, and a person to help set up and monitor the drink and dessert tables. Contact Beth McKeon at [bethanne.mckeon@verizon.net](mailto:bethanne.mckeon@verizon.net), Virginia Taylor at [Virginiar-osstaylor@verizon.net](mailto:Virginiar-osstaylor@verizon.net), or Jane Ceraso at [Jane.ceraso@paragon-c.com](mailto:Jane.ceraso@paragon-c.com) if you are interested. Thank you!

### **Scrip Program Nets \$1,200**

The Merriam PTO is delighted to announce that in the first six months of operation, the Scrip Shopping Card Program has already earned more than \$1,200 to support teaching assistants in the classrooms. Best of all, this money was raised at no additional cost

to the Merriam community. Thank you to all the families who participated in the program through gift card purchases.

We will place two more gift card orders this school year. Order forms will be distributed in early April with a deadline at the end of the month; another order will take place in May so gift cards can be delivered in early June, in time for end-of-year gifts.

**As an extra incentive to order in April, CVS has raised its contribution to 5% (from 2%) for a limited time.** By purchasing gift cards through Scrip for your regular CVS purchases you can earn dollars for the school.

Check out the extensive list of participating merchants on the order form available on the website or distributed through Friday mail.

If you have questions about the Scrip Program, please contact Cathy Castaneda at [cathy\\_castaneda@hotmail.com](mailto:cathy_castaneda@hotmail.com).

### *Contd. from pg 7 Sons*

Betsy Wisch is a psychotherapist and parenting specialist with more than 20 years of experience working with parents and children and facilitating workshops. She has a private practice in Concord and is the mother of two sons.

In addition to hosting this meeting, our support group, Acton Boxborough Parents of Children with Challenges, will also have monthly morning meetings at 9:30 a.m. on April 3 (topic: take care of yourself) and May 22 (mothering boys) at Acton Boxborough High School in Room 121 East. We will discuss these topics in addition to our general open session. For further information on our group, contact Francesca Ricciardi at [fmr08@verizon.net](mailto:fmr08@verizon.net) or Lynn Armstrong at [lynn.armstrong2@verizon.net](mailto:lynn.armstrong2@verizon.net).