

# Merriam School

# Visitor's Handbook

Acton Public Schools



*“The ‘thinking society’ of the twenty-first century can no longer be content with graduates trained to take in and recycle information handed out by teachers and other authority figures. Today’s students must be taught to think for themselves and to generate new information. But you cannot say: ‘We will lecture to you about how to be creative, and then we will measure your creativity with this multiple-choice test.’ We need a whole new approach to designing and running schools.”*

Edward B. Fiske,  
*Smart Schools, Smart Kids:  
Why Do Some Schools Work?*

## *School Hours*

From year to year, each elementary school in the Acton Public Schools alternates between the Early Schedule and the Late Schedule.

### *Early Schedule*

Daily, except Thursday:	8:30 AM – 2:45 PM
Thursdays:	12: 15 PM dismissal
Kindergarten AM:	8:30 AM – 11:15 AM
Kindergarten PM:	12 PM – 2:45 PM

### *Late Schedule*

Daily, except Thursday:	9:15 AM – 3:30PM
Thursdays:	1 PM dismissal
Kindergarten AM:	9:15 AM – 12 Noon
Kindergarten PM:	12:45 PM – 3:30 PM

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# *Merriam School Statements*

## *Merriam School Mission Statement*

The mission of the Merriam School Community is to create and sustain an environment that promotes academic excellence, encourages social development, fosters emotional well-being and instills a passion for life-long learning.

## *Merriam School Vision Statement*

The Merriam School strives to combine the thought provoking, enriching qualities of a children's museum with the nurturing and support of a family and the focused learning of a school.

The Merriam School holds community at its center — Merriam parents, teachers and students learn and work closely together. Deeply rooted in Merriam's philosophy is the idea that students, teachers and parents share an active role in decision making and feel empowered through their involvement with the school. Students have opportunities to make choices in their classrooms that really affect them, from creating classroom constitutions to deciding what to sell in the school store. Teachers are empowered to make significant decisions, including those regarding the school's budget, curriculum and operation. By design, parents are also deeply involved in making a wide range of important decisions, such as setting the school's goals, evaluating the school's progress, hiring new teachers and designing the plans for school improvement.

## Merriam School Core Values

The integrity of the Merriam School Community is built on a set of Core Values.

### *We Believe in Risk Taking*

All members of the Merriam School Community will be able to take thoughtful and appropriate risks and accept responsibility for the risks they take. Children will be encouraged and assisted to make a case for an unpopular view, to have the confidence to do difficult things, to have the courage to do what's right, to contribute new or different ideas in discussions, and to offer friendship to a child who has been excluded.

### *We Believe in Persistence in One's Own Learning*

All members of the Merriam School Community will demonstrate initiative and persistence in learning. Children will be encouraged and assisted to see a task through from start to finish, to ask for help from a variety of sources, to try multiple strategies in problem solving and to draw connections between learning experiences in and out of school.

### *We Believe in Respect*

All members of the Merriam School Community will demonstrate respect for themselves and others. Children will be encouraged and assisted to speak up against exclusion, to respond to someone in need, to acknowledge the efforts of a classmate, to be open to ideas and approaches not rooted in his own culture or experience and to value all members of the community as learners and teachers, followers and leaders.

## *Shared Beliefs among Merriam Staff Members...*

The Staff at Merriam believes...

- All learners can have successful and satisfying experiences through active participation in the educational process.
- Learning takes place in a dynamic environment which arouses curiosity, supports innovation and promotes a love of learning.
- Education prepares the learner for effective participation in communities beyond the school.
- The school is a central member of a community and family team that shares responsibility for the development of children.
- Learning takes place through experiences which link the learner's world to the great chain of ideas, past to future.
- Every learner comes with personal gifts.

*"We do interesting projects and experiments at Merriam. This is important because the things you learn this way seem real; not like something you just read about only from a book."*

A Merriam teacher

## Merriam School Structures & Strategies

The Merriam School Mission and Vision statements express the purpose and direction of Merriam School. The mission statement defines our purpose as an educational organization. The vision statement describes our ultimate goal as a community. Merriam School was designed with many structures and strategies to support and explicitly implement the mission and vision. These structures and strategies are the infrastructure of the school.

The structures are the backbone of the school around which teachers, parents, and students are organized to facilitate teaching and learning. The structures that are designed to organize students and parents will not be changed without serious consideration, discussion, and input from the faculty and parents. Input gathering may include the following: PTO discussion, surveys, and focused community meetings.

Merriam School strategies are the methods used to implement the curriculum and communicate information. These strategies are core to Merriam and they will not be changed without serious consideration, discussion, and input from the faculty and parents. Input gathering may include the following: PTO discussion, surveys, and focused community meetings.

### Structures

Structures organize community members (teachers, parents, students) in order to facilitate learning and the exchange of information.

*“A human being and social situations are not without life, mere objects to be manipulated and judged from a distance. All people are dependent on tacit knowing, emotional knowing, intuitive knowing, body knowing, and not merely rational knowing. Teaching that is intended to enhance the intellect is strengthened by recognizing this, not weakened. We are social in every aspect of our existence. The place, the learning community, is of greatest importance for it is within the group that we come to value who we are and what we can do. Students in residence, confident in themselves and trusting of others, are in a position to take charge of their learning.”*

**Life in a Crowded Place** by Ralph Peterson

### Organizational Structures for Students

**Class Groupings:** The Merriam School believes that the development of a safe and supportive classroom community provides the anchor for children's academic, social, and emotional success in school. In accordance with this belief, the staff works closely and thoughtfully together at the end of each

school year to structure classes for the following fall. Serious consideration is given to the following:

- Grouping children with a comfortable peer (one with whom they work well).
- Balancing classes with respect to numbers of students, gender, special education needs, and academic, social, and emotional strengths and weaknesses.
- Looping classes together for a two-year period with the same teacher (first graders stay together with the same teacher for second grade; third graders stay together with the same teacher for fourth grade; fifth graders stay with the same teacher for sixth grade).

*Family Groupings:* At Merriam School we value community. Supported by parents and teachers, all students are organized into mixed-age groupings. Students participate in the same family group (whenever possible) throughout their Merriam career. Embarking on all-school field trips, participating in core value work and experiencing school theme day celebrations, the children develop and deepen ongoing relationships which foster a strong sense of community. As students advance through the grades, they take on more responsibility.

### *Organizational Structures For Teachers*

*Classroom Assistants:* Assistants are key supports in every classroom. The prime function of all fund-raising activities and efforts at Merriam School is to provide teachers with classroom assistants. Assistants work an average of 15 to 18 hours a week in a variety of ways, including: supporting project-based curriculum, working with small groups and individuals, supervising daily lunch and recess, and organizing materials.

*Grade Level Meetings:* Teachers on the same grade level meet weekly for an hour and a half on Friday (during the school day) to collaboratively develop meaningful curriculum, including projects.

*Faculty Meetings:* Merriam faculty meet regularly according to contract guidelines. Meetings are opportunities to discuss current teaching and learning topics of interest.

*Triads:* Triads is a peer mentoring model that consists of groups of three teachers (from across grades and disciplines) who support and observe one another during the teaching day on a monthly basis.

*“With triads, there is no way growth cannot happen. The staff can only become stronger as an entity and the children, of course, benefit as their teachers experience and model continuous learning.”*

A Merriam teacher

## *Organizational Structures For Parents, Teachers & Students*

**All School Meetings:** On Monday mornings and many Friday afternoons, the whole school gathers together to start and end the week as a community. Students and teachers showcase curriculum via poems, plays, performances and other presentations.

## **Strategies**

Strategies are methods used to implement curriculum and disseminate information.

### *Curriculum Strategies*

All Merriam School curriculum meets the APS curriculum guidelines. Schools have considerable leeway to go beyond these objectives to determine the appropriate sequence of learning experiences and to select and use the most effective methods and materials. Merriam teachers work together to shape the curriculum and make decisions so that the teaching and learning is comprehensive and responsive to the needs of their students.

*“In hands-on museums, youngsters have the opportunity to explore rich environments and to play out their emerging understandings in meaningful contexts. On-the-job training, mentoring relations, and the involvement of professionals in the schools are all mechanisms for reducing the gap between the “agenda of school” and the “agenda of life.” And introduction into the classroom of meaningful projects, cooperative forms of interaction, and process-folios that document student progress can all sensitize students to their own thought processes and to the ways in which their conceptions mesh or collide with disciplinary knowledge.”*

*The Unschooled Mind* by Howard Gardner

**Teacher-Generated Curriculum:** Teachers collaborate to create units, projects and themes that combine personal ideas, student interests, grade level expectations, and selections from existing trade resources. Service learning and themes also serve as curriculum vehicles and provide interactions which unite the school community.

**Cooperative Learning:** Specific lessons guide students in small group work: students learn group roles, responsibilities and strategies for working

together. This grouping strategy supports academic learning. Depending on each other to reach group goals necessitates individual responsibility. Students learn to respect and appreciate differences in learning styles. As content area objectives are met and the classroom environment is enhanced, children are learning the team approach to problem-solving that is used in so many work settings nowadays.

*School and Community Service:* As a school, we value and encourage students to think about and do for others. Through school and community service, all Merriam School students learn to contribute to a community and experience a sense of commitment, responsibility, and pride. Service responsibilities are designed to provide age-appropriate, curriculum-rich experiences. Past service has included: school store, post office, recycling, messengers, school newspaper, disabilities puppets, conservation work, museum exhibit and program support, and nursing home visits.

*Cross-School themes:* Merriam School creates school-wide themes or theme days to enhance ongoing community building, cross-grade interactions and curriculum investigations and projects. On theme days, students engage in learning experiences with their family group members. Those experiences often include arts, drama, music, construction, and writing. Some of our yearly themes have focused on Change, Growth, Community, Architecture, and Building a New School.

*All School Field Trip:* An All School Field Trip is a curricular event in which the entire school community participates together. Examples include hikes up Nobscot mountain, all-school visits to the Science Museum and the Franklin Park Zoo, and a day at the DeCordova outdoor sculpture park. Children are grouped in multi-age groups (grades one through six) and participate in the field trip together.

*Project-based learning:* Project-based learning is a teacher-generated approach to curriculum that is organized and planned to be integrated, hands-on and authentic when practical. A project may be short-term or long-term. The Merriam School staff believes that experiential, hands-on studies provide the richest opportunities for the development of students' skills, self confidence, sense of responsibility, and enthusiasm for learning while supporting various learning styles. For this reason, whenever appropriate, the Merriam School offers a project-based curriculum. All students participate in a variety of projects over the course of a year. Math, science, language arts, social studies, and the arts are integrated into interesting, challenging, student-driven projects.

Much instruction is done within the contexts of these projects. Other explicit instruction and experiences are provided as well, to introduce, reinforce, complement, and enhance student learning. Examples of Projects around Merriam School can be found later in this Handbook.

*“What is a project? A project is an in-depth study of a particular topic that one or more children undertake.... Work on a project might extend over a period of days or weeks, depending on the children's ages and the nature of the topic.... Projects usually involve children in advanced planning and in various activities that might require several days or weeks of sustained effort. This approach emphasizes the teacher's role in encouraging children to interact with people, objects, and the environment in ways that have personal meaning to them. As a way of learning, it emphasizes children's active participation in their own studies.... An overall aim of this approach is to cultivate the life of the young child's mind. In its fullest sense, the term mind includes not only knowledge and skills, but also emotional, moral, and aesthetic sensibilities.”*

*Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*  
by Lilian Katz & Sylvia Chard

### *Assessment Strategy*

Decisions about student assessment will be made by the professional teaching staff. Merriam's commitment to authentic forms of assessment (i.e., portfolios, student journals, anecdotal record-keeping, parent-student conferences) ensures student involvement in the process. Parents and students participate in setting expectations and assessing progress of student learning. If during this assessment process, a student's progress warrants further evaluation, local, state and federal procedures for Special Education Evaluations are followed.

*Portfolio Assessment:* Assessment of student progress is considered an integral part of the learning process. Assessment is the ongoing process by which a learner's progress is monitored. It is interwoven with learning and directs the learner and the teacher towards areas of desired growth. Assessment does not summarize the end of a portion of study. It augments the learning process. Decisions include what to assess, how to assess and when to assess a learner's progress. Students and teachers are involved in assessments throughout the year. The Merriam portfolio system documents student growth over time through the collection of student work from across the curriculum. Work samples are collected three times over a school year.

*Parent-Teacher Conferences:* At least two parent-teacher conferences are held each year to discuss expectations and goals for learning, review students' work, and reflect on students' progress.

*Parent-Student Conferences:* Mid-year all Merriam students hold conferences with their parents in the classroom. This is an opportunity for students to reflect on their progress, present their work, and receive affirmation for their school experience.

*End-of-Unit/ End-of-Year Assessments:* End of unit assessments have been developed in language arts, math, science and social studies. Assessments are given to students at the end of each school year in reading, writing and math. An assessment summary report is generated for each student according to APS curriculum goals and objectives to document progress in writing, reading, math, and affective development.

### *Communication Strategies*

*Class Newsletters:* Merriam School values the home/school connection. Classroom teachers communicate with parents of their students to explain curriculum content and teaching and learning strategies that are the current focus in the classroom. This communication from school to home can take many different forms.

*Merriam Community Newsletter:* The administration, staff and parents publish the monthly Community Newsletter which is distributed to the greater Merriam community. It is the main communication from the school to the community. In it readers will find committee reports, notices about upcoming meetings and events, classroom highlights, volunteer opportunities, fundraising activities, and school wide celebrations.

*Web Site:* The Merriam School maintains its own web site to keep the community informed. (Address: <http://merriam.ab.mec.edu>). Among the resources posted at this site are the Merriam School Handbook, this Visitor's Guide, the school calendar of upcoming events, and copies of school forms.

*Handbook:* The Handbook is a family reference for school policies and procedures. The Handbook includes the mission and vision statements, defines the structures and strategies that have been designed to carry out the mission and vision, and outlines the general curriculum.

*Visitor's Guide:* This Visitor's Guide is a reference for visitors to the school. It contains the mission and vision statements, a description of the core values, and curriculum expectations.

## Specific Curriculum Notes

### Language Arts

#### Writing

- Children use their writing for real communications within and beyond the school community, for creative expression and for reflection on their own learning.
- Writing is integrated across the curriculum.
- Students are instructed in specific writing skills.
- Editing, spelling and handwriting receive special emphasis whenever a first draft is taken to a further stage.
- Computers are used in different ways across the grades to support children's developing writing skills.

#### Reading

- Fiction and non-fiction literature is used throughout the school and is integrated into curricular studies.
- Phonics instruction is provided through specific teaching.
- Reading is taught through a variety of tools and strategies geared to various styles.
- Specific interests on the part of the children drive reading practices; if children are allowed to read what interests them, they will read more, and the more one reads, the better a reader one becomes.
- Reading practice might include: reading buddies, which encourage interaction and practice in reading skills, book study groups and research.
- It is crucial that all children come to see themselves as readers.

#### Spelling

- Standardized spelling is achieved through a variety of methods which include the editing process, dictionary use, computer spell checks, phonetic rules, spelling lists, published materials, editing buddies and teacher feedback.

### Technology

- The Merriam School Computer Lab and classroom computers provide students with the opportunity to become proficient with technology.

- Multimedia presentation tools, graphics software, Internet research, spreadsheets and databases may be integrated into students' curricular experiences.

## *Mathematics*

- Understanding and articulating the process of solving math problems is as important as being able to solve them.
- Mathematical concepts build on each other through a developmental process, leading to a complete and complex understanding.
- The staff provides many experiences for children that support and stress the mathematics skills outlined in the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Math Standards.
- Math skills are applied to real-life activities such as the school store, the school post office, class surveys and projects.
- Published materials are used extensively. A wide variety of other materials also support children's learning of mathematics, including Cuisenaire rods, base 10 blocks, pattern blocks, geoboards, dice, graph papers, calculators, colored chips, attribute blocks and computers.
- Math practice is provided to strengthen students' understanding of basic algorithms.

## *Science and Social Studies*

- All five elementary schools teach the same core topics in Science and Social Studies.
- Science topics are taught through hands-on scientific exploration and investigation.
- STC kits support science instruction at all grade levels.
- Social Studies topics are taught through projects, field trips, research, study groups and published materials.
- Science and Social Studies are opportunities to integrate reading, writing and math skills.

## *Arts*

- The arts — visual arts, music, drama, dance and story-telling — are valued and supported as a vital form of communication and expression.
- Arts experiences are integrated into students' curricular studies through the arts program and within classrooms.

## *Library*

- The library provides rich resources for our students and teachers to support project curriculum, research, the reading buddies program, etc.

## *Physical Education*

- Physical education classes, outdoor play, cooperative games and challenges are all considered important elements in children's learning at Merriam School.

## *Instrumental Music Program*

- Students in grades 5 and 6 may choose to take lessons in woodwind, brass, or percussion instruments once a week before school.
- Grade 6 students participating in the instrumental music program may play in the school band which practices once a week during school hours. Grade 5 instrumental music students may join the band at mid-year.

## *Student Support Services*

### *Counseling*

The goal of the counseling program at Merriam is to ensure a successful school experience for students, one in which they develop a positive self-image, the skills to interact productively and the maturity to make wise decisions.

### *Speech and Language*

The speech and language program at the Merriam School serves students from kindergarten through grade six who have communication difficulties.

### *Special Education*

The special education program at Merriam is designed to support the student's educational needs within the regular classroom, the resource room, and in the learning center.

### *Reading*

The reading program at Merriam is a regular education support service designed to assist students in the acquisition of reading skills.

## *Homework*

At Merriam, homework:

- Fosters a partnership between school and families
- Provides opportunities for application of skills and knowledge in contexts beyond the school
- Extends school experiences and learning
- Completes work and projects begun at school
- Reinforces concepts and skills learned at school
- Provides opportunities for time management skill acquisition
- Is organized in a weekly packet for students in grades 3-6

# Acton Public Schools Core Curriculum Topics for Science and Social Studies

## Kindergarten:

*Social Studies:* Myself and Others. Exploring similarities and differences between self and others

*Science:* Teacher designed explorations guiding children to observe, classify, describe and question

## Grade 1:

*Social Studies:* Some Ways the Same, Some Ways Different. Exploring families here and in two other (non-English) speaking cultures.

*Science:* Land and Water Organisms and Habitats, Solids and Liquids, Weather

## Grade 2:

*Social Studies:* Local Studies and Far Away Places. Exploring the economic and social life in Acton, today and long ago. Compare with a far away place during a similar time period.

*Science:* Plant Growth and Development, Life Cycle of Butterflies, Amphibian Life Cycle, Balances and Motion, Magnets, Sound, Rocks, Minerals and Fossils

## Grade 3:

*Social Studies:* The Development of Cities & City Life. Exploring the development of cities by studying an agricultural town, an industrial city & Boston.

*Science:* Owls, Electrical Circuits, Chemical Tests

## Grade 4:

*Social Studies:* The Seeds of Change & Cultural Connections. (Three emphases) Exploring relationship between Native American peoples and the lands of North America and first contacts with Europeans; early, mostly European explorers; cultural study, likely a modern day look at a Native American group

*Science:* Experiments with Plants, Astronomy, Land and Water

*Grade 5:*

*Social Studies:* Formation of a Nation. Focus on American History between 1700 and 1870. Exploring the role of New England in the early formation of the United States, the development of the colonies, the Revolution, Westward Expansion, and the Civil War.

*Science:* Ecosystems, Motion & Design, Transport Systems

*Grade 6:*

*Social Studies:* The culture and world view of several Ancient Civilizations. Exploring ancient civilizations, (Egypt, India, Greece, Rome, etc.) incorporating a study of the origins of government, religions and written language.

*Science:* Microworlds, Energy Sources, Human Growth & Development

## Typical Projects at Merriam

### Kindergarten Projects:

#### *Knights, Castles and Medieval Times*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Build a castle in the classroom
- Play act medieval life
- Sing songs about life in medieval times
- Learn poems
- Plant oats & peas & barley
- Visit the Higgins Armory Museum

#### *Narcissus Bulbs*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Plant bulbs
- Draw stages of growth
- Measure growth
- Record observations in writing and drawing

### First Grade Projects:

#### *Japan*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Taste foods
- Cook Japanese food and/or visit Japanese Restaurant
- Learn songs
- Act out Japanese fairy tales
- Write in calligraphy
- Practice Ichibana
- Observe artifacts
- Learn about schools, homes & transportation
- Study geography

#### *Habitats*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Observe animal habitats
- Record observations through words and drawings
- Research what animals need to live
- Create a habitat for classroom animals
- Set up classroom fish tank (pond or saltwater)
- Compare land & water habitats
- Take a field trip to an ocean or pond environment
- Create computer slide shows to demonstrate learning

## Second Grade Projects:

### *Acton Long Ago*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Observe artifacts (household/cooking/arts)
- Tour Acton to see old buildings
- Interview people of different generations
- Spend a day in an old school house (field trip)
- Read & hear about Acton life in the early 1900s

### *Life Cycles*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Observe the life cycle of a butterfly
- Observe the life cycle of an amphibian (frog)
- Draw and record observations
- Visit natural habitats (field trips)

## Third Grade Projects:

### *Farm to Factory (Development of Cities)*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Tour Sturbridge Village
- Write journals as members of Sturbridge family
- Research resources a town provided
- Visit mills in Lowell
- Read mill stories
- Study geography of Mill towns
- Learn about rivers' relations to mills
- Create models of mill towns

### *Electrical Circuits*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Experiment with bulbs & batteries
- Design and build a flashlight
- Draw a diagram of a closed circuit
- Integrate with study of cities.

## Fourth Grade Projects:

### *Native Americans*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

- Study a tribe in depth
- Create diorama of life of the tribe
- Learn music of Native American peoples
- Cook and taste various Native American foods
- Read myths & legends & connect to Astronomy

Act out Native American myths and legends  
Write about Native Americans  
Stories, first-person journals

### *Astronomy*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

Connect to Native American studies  
Observe & illustrate shadows  
Create Models of Solar System  
Dramatic presentations of knowledge for ASM  
Observe the moon and record observations  
Collect data on shadows, moon & movement of stars

## Fifth Grade Projects:

### *American History*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

Design and create Colonial ABC books  
Research a particular colony of the first thirteen  
Learn technology of graphics and design  
Make trading cards of the Revolutionary period.  
Field trip to Boston Revolutionary sites  
Re-enact debates at Old South Meeting House  
Learn and use note taking skills  
Research paper on a topic in American History  
Role play an historical person or event  
Read historical fiction of the period

### *Transport Systems*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

Research circulatory, digestive, respiratory systems  
Create drawings and/or models of lungs and hearts, dissect lamb or pig hearts and lungs  
Research a disease related to one of the 3 systems  
Interview a medical professional  
Write a report about the disease/syndrome  
Create a "Medical Museum" presentation  
Present new understanding to other students

## Sixth Grade Projects:

### *Ancient Civilizations*

*STUDENTS MAY:*

Learn about cultures of Ancient world  
Study Egypt, Greece, Rome, India  
Read period historical fiction  
Study ancient myths & legends and act them out

- Create Egyptian mummy cases
- Explore concepts of archeology today ( hands-on)
- Study geography of ancient civilizations
- Research one ancient civilization in depth
- Study art of ancient civilizations
- See ancient art at MFA and/or Peabody Museums
- Explore Greek and Roman architecture in Acton
- Produce and present research in a research paper

### *Service Learning*

#### *STUDENTS MAY:*

- Experience meaningful work for others' benefit
- Work weekly at an off-campus site (1/2 day; 1/2 year)
- Plan and prepare for each visit
- Reflect and write about experiences working in service.

## *School Council, PTO and Committees*

### *Merriam School Council*

As defined by the State Educational Reform Act, all schools in Massachusetts are required to form a School Council. The School Council is responsible for assisting the principal in:

- Identifying the educational needs of students,
- Reviewing the annual budget, and
- Formulating the school improvement plan and educational goals

The Merriam School Council members include the principal, four parent representatives, three teacher representatives, and at least one community member. Each member serves a three-year term. Early each year, the number of openings on the Council are announced to the school community. Interested parents are encouraged to submit their names to the PTO which is responsible for running an election to fill vacant seats. The Council meets 8-9 times a year. The meeting dates are announced in the Newsletter. All School Council meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome.

### *PTO (Parent Teacher Organization)*

The Merriam School PTO has 5-6 meetings scheduled during the school year. All parents/guardians and teachers are members of the PTO. The purpose of the PTO is to:

- Promote and facilitate parent and faculty communication
- Advocate for Merriam's students
- Encourage parent involvement
- Enhance Merriam community relations
- Raise funds to enrich the educational experience at Merriam School

### *Committees*

#### *Merriam Subcommittees*

Teachers and parents work together on a variety of subcommittees to accomplish the many tasks required for a strong school foundation. Parents and staff may suggest the formation of a new subcommittee to the School Council or Principal whenever the need arises. Subcommittee size is determined by interest and need. Parents are encouraged to submit their names to the appropriate subcommittee contact person when interested in serving

on any subcommittee. A list of subcommittee contact persons is included frequently in the Merriam Community Newsletter. News from the various subcommittees is reported in the Merriam Community Newsletter. The subcommittees are as follows:

- Budget
- Fundraising
- Cultural Enrichment
- Hospitality
- Gift Book Program
- Celebrations & Traditions
- Welcoming (new families)

### *Parker Damon Building Steering Committee*

The Parker Damon Building Steering Committee meets monthly during the year. Merriam School and McCarthy Town School share the Parker Damon Building. The PDBSC works to make sure the two school communities collaborate well in this shared space. There are three standing PDBSC subcommittees:

- Friends of PDB (fundraising)
- Landscaping Committee
- Playground Committee

### *Acton Community Committees*

- Inter-school Council
- PTO Chairs
- Superintendent's Advisory Council on Health

## Community Events

The Merriam School is a community of learners in which each has a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility. Each individual within the community is respected and valued as a contributing member. The community is at the heart of the school.

### *Community Events for All Students, Parents and Staff*

- Merriam School community picnics in September and June
- School fundraising and social events
- Open House/Back-to-School Nights
- Student exhibitions
- Grade level presentations

### *Collaborative Events Between Parents and Staff*

- Parent-Teacher conferences in Fall and Spring
- Ongoing subcommittees and School Council work
- Monthly and bimonthly communications between classrooms/school and home
- PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) 5-6 times during the school year

### *Community Events for All Students and Staff*

- All-School Meetings every Monday morning and many Friday afternoons
- Mixed-Age Groupings for activities, including all-school field trips; school theme day celebrations; and reading, writing and math buddies.

### *Collaborative Events Between Students and Parents*

- Mid-year student-led conference for all Merriam students with their parents
- Homework activities
- Special project work

## *Rights and Responsibilities*

The following Rights and Responsibilities were developed by the Merriam Staff.

### *RIGHTS*

- Right to be heard
- Right to be safe physically and emotionally
- Right to kindness/to respect
- Right to learn
- Right to work/participate in learning
- Right to have property respected
- Right to a pleasant, organized environment
- Right to participate

### *RESPONSIBILITIES*

- Responsibility to listen
- Responsibility to behave in a safe way
- Responsibility to treat others with kindness/respect
- Responsibility to help others learn
- Responsibility to consider learning needs of others
- Responsibility to respect the property of others
- Responsibility to contribute to a pleasant environment
- Responsibility to be inclusive

Most behavioral issues are handled directly and immediately by the classroom teacher or teacher assistant in charge at the time. When problems persist, teachers may consult with parents to devise a collaborative plan of action to best support a child's success. For more serious behavior difficulties, parents will be notified of the problem by the classroom teacher or the Principal.

In some instances, students may be sent home or kept out of school while parents and faculty confer and make appropriate arrangements to resolve the situation. Fighting or causing someone intentional harm are two examples of situations that may have this type of consequence. The expectations the faculty have for student behavior are founded, in part, on the strong belief that if adults model and expect responsible, appropriate behavior, children will act accordingly. The school's Core Values are the standards by which most behavioral expectations are set.