



# The Merriam Community News

March 2010 - Volume 18 - Issue 7

## Ed Notes

When I worked as a counselor at Harvard University a number of years ago I received some simple but wise guidance from several of my colleagues. They told me that when listening to students, it was important to help them to “hold” the uncertainty or ambiguity they felt about things in their lives. It took me a little while to fully comprehend the importance of this, but it became clearer to me as I began to think about the forces acting upon these students. These 18-21 year olds had been told for so many years that they needed to know the road ahead with tremendous certainty, and that they needed to drive straight down that road. The idea that they might need to take time to stop and think no longer occurred to them.



I remember talking to a college senior who had taken every pre-medical course that was offered, and then suddenly realized that he wasn't sure whether he was planning to become a doctor for himself or for his parents. It took him quite a while to sort out what felt most like his true path. Another student was in great distress because her high school boyfriend asked her to marry him, and she had mixed feelings that she needed time to work through. For these two students, the road ahead had disappeared, and they needed time to look inside and get their bearings.

Many of us think that it doesn't look good to be uncertain about things. We're labeled wishy-washy or noncommittal. And indeed for some, making commitments or finding clarity can be difficult to the point where it is a problem. However, I think that more often we don't give ourselves the time we need to reflect on situations in our lives. Life is coming at us at breakneck speed and “we'd better be prepared to react.” Reflection? No time for that.

The following statements are ones sometimes heard in schools – as you read them please note how they steer children away from reflection: “Digest as much information as you can, as quickly as you can.” “Finish this assignment, and then do this next one.” “Make sure that your group accomplishes the task—the product is more important than the process.” “We need to wrap up this terrific discussion because we need to move on to something else.” “Be sure to cover the next two chapters in your reading.”

What does it mean to “cover” material anyway? It sounds like we're closing it up and putting it away, rather than exploring it and making it our own. One of the luxuries that we have at elementary school is flexibility. If students are in the midst of a wonderful, rich discussion, we often can keep it going. And in my view, we should! Let's give our children the opportunities to work in some depth, to ponder their mixed opinions or feelings about a topic, to discover what they are certain about, and where they are unsure. Let's give them time to reflect about their work, both as individuals and as group members. Self-assessment is a valuable process, one that I'd like our students to do more of.

Teachers and administrators also need time to reflect. Sometimes I feel the pressure to have “all the answers” right at my fingertips – until I stop and realize how impossible that is.

A topic of recent reflection (and uncertainty) for me is the MCAS test (which is coming up soon). I will admit freely that I have mixed emotions about this test. On the one hand, it provides information that can be useful to us in assessing both students and instruction. For example, if a child has difficulty in a

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**Cultural Enrichment News:  
Willow Books Fundraiser  
Slated for March 10th**

Cultural Enrichment needs your support to fund the rich arts and science based programs that enhance and enrich the education of our children. Please come along to our fundraiser on Wednesday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 from 6-8 p.m. at Willow Books on Great Road in Acton. You and your children can hear their teacher read from his or her favorite book.

Willow Books will generously donate 15% of all book and cafe sales from this evening's fundraiser to Merriam School.

Also, parent volunteers are *\*STILL\** needed! Each volunteer will be matched with one of the teachers listed below during his or her time slot. For 15 minutes (or less) the volunteer will help with settling children, keeping track of time, etc. This is a huge help to our teachers! To volunteer, please contact Cath Smith at [cath.a.smith66@gmail.com](mailto:cath.a.smith66@gmail.com) or 978-263-4377. Please let Cath know if you have a time slot preference.

A huge thank you to those parents who have already

volunteered to help out -- further details about your exact time slot and duties will be coming shortly.

Other news: We wish to thank Merriam parent Jianying Shi, as well as all the performers, for the stunning and exciting ASM performance that took place on February 12 in celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Stay tuned for further details of our spring Cultural Enrichment 2010 programs at Merriam.

If you have any questions or suggestions concerning Cultural Enrichment at Merriam, or if you wish to join our committee and/or volunteer your services by previewing or recommending local arts or science shows for our school, please get in contact with one of the current co-chairs below:

Cath Smith at 978-263-4377;  
[cath.a.smith66@gmail.com](mailto:cath.a.smith66@gmail.com) .

Ronit Ben-Shir at 978-263-9872;  
[rbenshir@jccgb.org](mailto:rbenshir@jccgb.org)

Lisa Jensen-Fellows at 978-274-2504;  
[Lisa@myfanwy.com](mailto:Lisa@myfanwy.com)

**Willow Books Fundraiser Tentative Schedule**

6:00	Myrna Gutfreund (grade K) Lee Trench (grade K)
6:15	David Ljungberg (grade 6) " <i>Oh The Places You'll Go</i> " by Dr Seuss Tom Sidley (grade 5) " <i>Sir Fartsalot Hunts The Booger</i> " By Kevin Bolger
6:30	Linda McMullon (grade 1) Fran Strohm (grade 1)
6:45	Karen Sonner (grade 2): " <i>Snoring Beauty</i> " by Bruce Hale Annie Doble (grade 4)
7:00	Melissa Reinhardt (grade 3): " <i>The Castle in the Attic</i> " by Elizabeth Winthrop Michelle Pruett (4th grade): " <i>Toys Go Out</i> " by Emily Jenkins
7:15	Melany Appelle (reading specialist): " <i>Did You Say Pears?</i> " by Arlene Alda and " <i>Kids are Funny</i> " by Rosie O'Donnell. Alyson Whatcott (grade 5): " <i>Evolution of Calpurnia Tate</i> " by Jacqueline Kelly
7:30	Maryann Ayers (grade 6) Mary O'Brien (gym): " <i>The Secret Garden</i> " by Frances Hodgson Burnett and/or " <i>Chicken Soup with Rice</i> " by Maurice Sendak

## **Help Needed Friday Mornings**

The fine folks who get those weekly mail packets distributed to every Merriam family need a few more volunteers. We get together every Friday morning (not Thursdays) from about 8:45 to 10:00 a.m. to collate, staple, talk together, and watch the Merriam day happening around us. It's low-stress and easy. It would be great to have someone who could commit to coming most every week. We're also happy to have people who can come sometimes, maybe only staying for part of the time.

E-mail coordinator Hannah Bloch at [hannah@newview.org](mailto:hannah@newview.org), or just show up on a Friday morning at the bottom of the main lobby stairs.

## **Important Notice for Sixth Grade Parents & Guardians**

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has the following requirements for all students entering Grade 7 in September 2010:

- MMR: 2 doses or 2 doses of measles and one dose of mumps and rubella
- Varicella: A physician-certified history of chicken pox disease or one dose of vaccine for students under 13 years old or two doses of vaccine for students over 13 years old
- Hepatitis B: 3 doses
- Td/Tdap: One booster dose of Td (tetanus/diphtheria and acellular pertussis) if it has been more than five years since the last dose
- A copy of an up- to-date physical examination will also be required for all students before entering Grade 7.

Many of the above vaccines may have been administered while your child was in elementary school. Please check with your Healthcare Provider to be certain that your child's immunizations are up-to-date and documented in his/her record. Send a copy of the exam and updated information record to

your elementary school health office and the information will be included in your child's health record when it is transferred to the junior high in June. If you do not have the necessary paperwork completed before the end of school, send it to the school nurse at the Junior High School by August 27, 2010.

- Betty Mazzone

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### *Ed Notes – from page 1*

particular section of the test, it can serve as a “red flag”, and might signal that this is an area of attention (Chris Whitbeck, principal at Douglas School, has written a great essay entitled “Check Engine Light”, where he compares this process of noting that a child might need help in a given area based on test results to the flashing signal on our car dashboard that something may or may not be wrong with our car). It's something we need to check out.

MCAS results can also steer us toward kinds of questions or areas of the curriculum where we might want or need to improve or change our instruction. Since there are so many factors that affect results in a given year, we have to look carefully at all of the variables and all of our results to see where we might need to make improvements. Every year our staff carefully takes a close look at individual and school-wide results, and then we decide on actions or further discussions that are necessary.

On the other hand I am very concerned about the time and energy that we put into this test. In some districts teachers are instructed to literally “teach to the test”, where almost all instruction is directed toward students' performance on these tests. The MCAS certainly addresses some important skills; but what about creativity, teamwork, social skills, problem-solving, and integrated, in-depth learning? I fear that these other vital elements of our children's growth and learning are potentially getting squeezed, and I want to preserve them. And the anxiety that this test adds to the lives of our young students is something else that greatly concerns me.

Fortunately I've learned that it's OK to “hold” two disparate views simultaneously. I thank my old colleagues for that....

## **CAMP FAIR 2010: Event Summary and Thank You**

Merriam’s 17<sup>th</sup> annual Summer Options Camp Fair was held on our first ever snow date this year! With a beautiful, sunny day, and the special election and bad weather behind us, a crowd of over 400 families attended! We appreciate the support of all the Merriam families who attended and who volunteered.

Revenue for the 2010 fair far exceeded our expectations under the circumstances. This event is expected to contribute **over \$18,750** in net profit to fund our Teaching Assistants. This represents a new record we couldn’t have achieved without all your help, donations, and support. *Thank you!*

- The Gym was at capacity with 95 exhibitor tables and a total of 110 participating summer programs. As in years past, we had a waitlist for camps wanting to exhibit.
- With our highest attendance ever of over 400 families, Camps were extremely happy with the crowds of potential customers flowing through the gym the entire evening.
- The bake sale and food concessions were a huge crowd pleaser and also raised more funds than ever before..... \$948!
- The following volunteers had major roles in the planning and success of this event. A special Thank You to these very dedicated people:

Dianna McNeish	Camp Fair Directory Editor
Judy Nolan	Director of Donations, Food Concession and Bake Sale
<u>Vidya Kumar</u>	Print Publicity
Lauren Pollak	Event Coordinator
Deb Matthews	Bake Sale Coordinator
Jayanthi Srinath	Publicity Flier Designer

Vinita Asija	District Publicity Coordinator
Elena Petrov	Camp Literature Coordinator
Katy Frey	Web Page Designer
Tony Ain and George Olson	Technical Crew

A huge thank-you to Tony Ain for 6 consecutive years in this role! We will miss you Tony!

### **Thank you to all our Camp Fair Volunteers**

Over 60 volunteers either rearranged their schedules or stepped up for the new date after the postponement occurred. We truly appreciate your time and help so that we didn’t disappoint our customers – the Camps and the public. Your hard work enabled this large event to run smoothly.

**Publicity:** Vidya Kumar, Marla Wagman Maisel, Heidi Thompson, Laura Wordsworth

**Bag Stuffing:** Hannah Bloch, Andrea Medved, Dianna McNeish, Elena Petrov, Judy Nolan , Pam Saarinen, Kathy Simmons, Luke Zhang, Ximena Lievano, Rebecca Raja, Neena Arora

**Event Set Up:** Judy Nolan and Tommy Nolan, Janice and Matthew Fahey, Donna McGavick, Deb Matthews, Dianna, Karly and Erin McNeish, Denise, Paris and Lee Al-Atraqchi, Laura Wrenn, Ximena Lievano, Shigang Shen, Tony Ain, George Olson, Luke Zang, Remy and Lauren Khosla, Maya Patel, Danielle Fredericks, Rita Gupta, Jayanthi Srinath

**Camp Check In:** Dianna McNeish, Donna McGavick, Denise Al-Atraqchi, Deborah Diamond, Sanjay Khosla, Beth and Jana Davis, Christo and Bethany Tsiaras, Danielle Fredericks, Jayanthi Srinath, Kim McCormick

### **Event Staff - Greeters, Bake Sale, Food Concession and Child Care:**

Dianna McNeish, Sanjay Khosla, George Chigas, Kathleen, Georgie and Amanda Iglesias, Judy Nolan, Heidi Barron, Christo Tsiaris, Danielle, Katie, Nicole, and Jessica

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Did You Know? Through the Merriam PTO website, you can access information on the fair's participating camp programs. Go to [www.merriampto.org](http://www.merriampto.org), click on *Camp Fair*, then click on the *Participating Camps* button on the left . . . Have Fun!

#### *Camp Fair – from page 4*

Fredericks, Margaret and Fiona Miley, Karla Smith, Liz McGovern, Lisa Caputo, Tina Humphreys, Deb Matthews, Cathy Utt, Elena Petrov, Lynn Armstrong, Vinita Asija, Jayanthi Srinath, Wenju Seng, Laura Wordsworth, Donna German and Kim McCormick

**Clean Up:** Chris Tolley, Heidi Barron, Kristen Warren, Brian Finkel, Judy Nolan, Sanjay Khosla, Cathy Utt, Mark Humphreys

**Bakers:** Elaine Czarnecki, Holly Neale, Leslie Carroll, Wendy Marotta, Lisa Pratt, Susie Alex, Beth Davis, Kara Sullivan, Allison Sartini, Kristin Warren, Lisa Robb, Denise Al-Atraqchi, Kim Van Savage, Dianna McNeish, Amanda Lye, Terry Linsey, Jean Zhang, Ann O'Grady, Amy Slaughter, Lana Paone, Stephanie Cahoon, Yvonne Dailey, Lauren Pollak, Clelia Solis, Cathy Utt, Jen Izzo, Vinita Asija, Nicole Ross, Kristina Rychlik, Donna Griesenbeck, Kristin Osborn, Thida Loeung, Kristen Koehler, Ximena Lievano, Deb Matthews, Kim Feinstein, Kathy Simmons, Alice Greer, Kim McCormick

**Donors:** The Pachecos, McNeishs, Smith/Actons, Germans, Koehlers, Gorman/Montelelones, Caputos, Rychliks, Lis, Wordsworths, Wangs, Aniges, Iglesias', Parrys, Faheys, Fredricks, Freys, O' Gradys, Simmons, Purakayasthas, Sathayes, Cassidys and Woods.

The committee would also like to thank Ed Kaufman and Allison Nicole for their help and support on this fundraiser.

We apologize if we've missed anyone. Due to the schedule change, some volunteers popped in last-minute without telling us ahead of time – thank you!

The Merriam PTO also thanks our major sponsors: Cambridge Savings Bank and Acton Real Estate.

The Merriam PTO is proud to have run this free public event for 17 consecutive years, each year contributing a larger amount to the Merriam Community Fund. Our goal is to continue with this event's incredible success. We have some new and exciting ideas to help this happen, and we'd love any new volunteers! Time spent can be minimal. Please contact Trudy Khosla at 978-263-6258 or email [trudykhosla@aol.com](mailto:trudykhosla@aol.com) to get involved with Merriam's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Options Camp Fair in January 2011!

--Trudy Khosla and Marisa Olson,  
Co-Chairs, Camp Fair 2010

### **This Month's Healthy Recipe: Dessert Tortillas**

#### **Ingredients:**

3 6 - inch tortillas  
Cooking Spray  
1 ½ tablespoons sugar  
1 ½ cups fresh strawberries cleaned and hulled  
1 tablespoon orange juice  
8 ounces vanilla yogurt  
1 cup chopped strawberries  
½ cup shredded coconut or white chocolate shavings

**Instructions:** To make tortilla chips, heat oven to 350°. Cut the tortillas into triangles. Lay them on a baking sheet and spritz them with cooking spray.

Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of sugar over tops of tortillas and bake for 12 minutes or until crisp.

For strawberry sauce, combine strawberries, orange juice, and remaining ½ tablespoon of sugar in a blender. Puree ingredients until smooth.

Once the chips have cooled, set them on a plate. To complete the buffet, set out separate bowls containing the strawberry sauce, yogurt, chopped strawberries and coconut or chocolate shavings. Serves 4 to 6.

## Report from The Acton Public School Committee

During the last two months, the school committee and administration have been busy preparing FY2011 budgets for Acton town meeting approval in April. The flowchart below outlines the budget processes for Acton Public Schools.

Major revenue sources to fund Acton Schools (including junior and high schools) and municipal services include:

- Local Revenues (property tax and fees) which account for about 80% of total revenue
- State Aid (primarily chapter 70 fund) [about 15%]
- One-time Revenue (reserve and federal stimulus money) [about 5%]

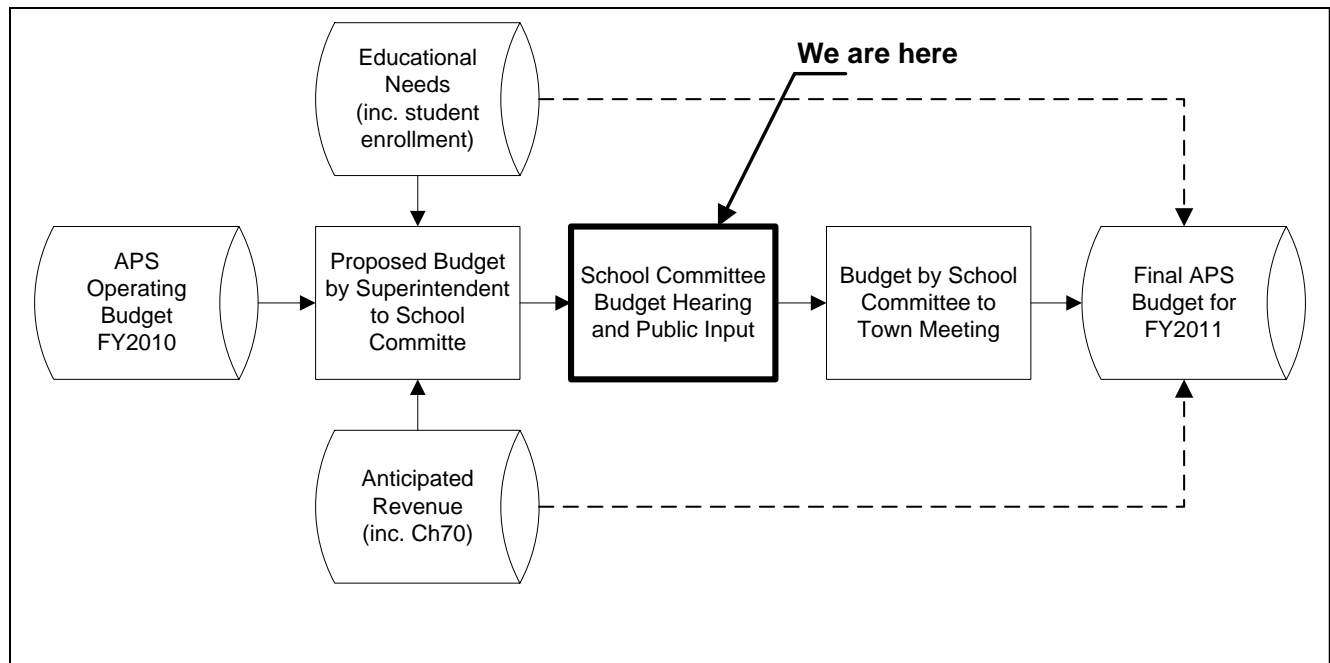
For FY2010 (July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010), Acton and Acton-Boxborough School Districts received about \$11.8M in Chapter 70 state aid. Projections for FY2011 Chapter 70 range widely from \$10.7M to \$12.8M with the most recent “whisper” number being \$12.4M.

In consultation with other town officials, School Committees and administration are vigilant in updating our budget assumptions with various state budget proposals from the Governor and Legislators. The School Committee has discussed and you may have heard the proposals to reduce services at APS. Under the most pessimistic assumption for Chapter 70 state aid, many APS service cuts have been considered. However, we may be able to protect some services if Chapter 70 state aid is higher than \$10.7 million. Superintendent Mills has proposed and the School Committee supports the following priority list of service to protect:

1. Classroom Assistants (\$46,000) [Highest Priority]
2. Technology Support Specialists (\$30,000)
3. Curriculum Specialist (\$134,000)
4. SPED Assistants (\$70,000)
5. Technology Equipment Budget (\$20,000) [Lower Priority]

We welcome your input at our next meeting (March 4<sup>th</sup>) or you may send your comments to the school committee at [apsc@acton-ma.gov](mailto:apsc@acton-ma.gov). We hope you will attend town meeting in April to vote on our budget proposal.

-- Xuan Kong, Chair



## **Thanks for Making the Book Fair A Huge Success!**

Thanks to all students, parents, and teachers who attended February's Scholastic Book Fair! Co-chairs, Diane Johnson, Pam Saarinen, Lisa Sippy and Lisa Pearson are happy to announce that the Book Fair brought in \$11,022.46 with a cash profit of just under \$3,000 to help support our wonderful Teaching Assistants. This event is a great way to raise money and provide books to all of our young readers.

Thanks so much to all of our wonderful parent and children volunteers who generously gave their time and made it possible to manage and run this fundraiser all week long.

The co-chairs would also like to thank Ed and Allison for their support, as well as the custodial staff. Happy reading!

A sincere thank-you to the following 2010 Scholastic Book Fair Volunteers:

Karla Smith	Laura Wordsworth	Susan Brager Murphy
Yvonne Bennelli	Nancy Depew	Wendy Wildes
Jennifer Whitney	Stephanie Parry	Mandy Zervoglos
Sarah Murphy	Lynn Armstrong	Laura Wren
Kathleen Iglesias	Kelly Vialle	Janice Fahey
Helen Watt	Wei Li	Kristina Rychlik
Beth McKeon	Hannah Bloch	Pam Shields
Daphne Barbas	Linda Strahle	Ayesha Khurram
David Kolpind	Tina Humphreys	Jennifer Xu
Marla Bruce	Lisa Robb	Amanda Clark
Karen Brandstein	Caroline Weaver	

### **The Merriam Community News**

Editor: Joe Campo • Production: Sue Follett

The next Community News will be published on Friday, April 2.

Email articles by March 26 to Joe at [jb\\_campo@yahoo.com](mailto:jb_campo@yahoo.com).