



Merriam Community News

Notes from Ed

On Sportsmanship

A Quick Preface: I have very strong opinions about this topic (which you're about to read), but as always, I am open to hearing your point of view – whether you agree with me or not!

I've learned countless things from my dad over the years, but one of the most powerful was around sportsmanship. I didn't like losing when I was young, and that was somewhat painful – because, as we all know, winning and losing are both parts of life. My dad coached my little league teams, and I could never seem to understand why he was complimenting the play of the kids on the other team (out loud, to our team), or why he made sure that everyone on our team got to try as many positions as they wanted to learn, or why he shook hands with the coach of the other team and asked us to do the same with the opposing players. It wasn't until I became a young adult and coached youth sports that I realized how grateful I was to my dad for teaching me these lessons.

Things can be pretty intense here in Acton; kids feel the competition around academics, the arts and certainly sports. I remember walking into the PDB about 7 or 8 years ago on a Saturday morning, and I heard loud voices coming from one of the classrooms. There was a basketball draft going on, and there was an argument about whose team a particular child should be on; it was getting pretty

heated. I poked my head in to find out what was going on, thinking that it was a high pressure high school league of some sort – and to my surprise discovered that it was a draft for boys' 3rd and 4th grade basketball.

At school we have a particular set of guidelines around sports that sometimes conflicts with the sports culture kids experience outside of school. The key elements of those guidelines are inclusion, fun, and “getting everyone involved”. At school we think sports should be about everyone getting a chance to play in a game, no matter what their ability. We want the attitude of all playing to be such that “having fun” is about playing together rather than necessarily winning. And inclusion doesn't just mean “letting anyone play” – it means helping to get everyone actively involved in the games. We often encourage kids not to keep score during games, so that the emphasis is less on who wins and more on the “three elements.”

Over the past couple of years I've had maybe a half dozen conversations with some of you about our PTO vs. Staff fundraiser basketball game. Some of you have raised questions about whether we're teaching the children appropriate lessons when we “make the score a tie” or have folks “stand on ladders while shooting” or “trade places with the ref” during the game. This game IS NOT competitive basketball. It IS ENTERTAINMENT (pies in the face, yoga, air guitar,

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and dancing are just some examples of the entertainment during these evenings). The message we want to convey is that if we have some fun together (and even embarrass ourselves a bit), it's a win-win. We raise money for classroom assistants AND entertain the children. Some of you seem to be concerned that the final score gets compromised because of some of our antics, and this is true. We want “who wins” to be the last thing people really care about at a game such as this. Perhaps we should consider not even keeping score next year as a way to eliminate this as an issue.

I love sports. I also know that at some levels wins and losses matter a great deal to people, and probably for good reason. Some of you may remember the “Handshake Project” at Merriam during 2003-2005, when MaryAnn Brandt's class and my class asked the Red Sox and Yankees to simply shake hands. Much to our surprise, the impassioned presentations created by our students literally drew worldwide attention. We can do even better than simply shaking hands at Merriam; we can make sports time at school or at our community events a fun and inclusive time for everyone – win, lose or tie.

News from the Parent Teacher Organization

January is a great time to try new things. To that end, we have a few new things to tell you about.

First, the Merriam PTO now officially has a Twitter account! Please keep in mind that this is a work-in-progress, and as of this writing, we have not yet finalized exactly what we will tweet, when we will tweet, and details surrounding how we will manage our account. We don't plan to send a barrage of information in this way, yet hope it will be helpful for last-minute reminders and other things. You may sign up from a button on our website: www.merriamPTO.org. Many thanks to Amy Fedyk for bringing up this idea and doing all the legwork to get started!

Secondly, many thanks to Janice Fahey and Frances Cook for agreeing to be the School Committee Representatives to the Merriam PTO. We hope having people in place to attend and report on every meeting will enable us to keep the Merriam community better informed of the issues facing the Acton public schools

today.

Next, we've been trying to raise awareness of issues that have the potential to impact the Merriam community, such as the current discussion surrounding the possibility of regionalizing fully the two school districts of Acton and Boxborough. Kristin Hilberg of Boxborough is actively working on this issue, and has written an article for this month's guest column. In addition, one or more of the members of the committee studying this issue will be presenting at our next PTO meeting, so please mark your calendars for Wednesday, January 25th.

We will host a special morning gathering we call "Muffins with Mom/Donuts with Dad" at 7:45 a.m. where you bring your children and enjoy a light breakfast with other parents and students before our 8:30 a.m. PTO meeting. We will share an update of PTO business, hear our guest presenter, and work on preparations for the Camp Fair scheduled for the following evening.

Lastly, fundraising news is not new, but the second half of the school year is when PTO fundraising kicks into high gear. If you haven't already, mark your calendar for Saturday, March 17th for our largest fundraiser, the 13th annual auction. Now is the perfect time to start thinking about donating goods or a service to be included in the silent or live auction.

While we sincerely appreciate those big-ticket items like vacation homes, sports tickets, and dinner parties, you don't necessarily have to spend a lot of money or go it alone. Consider a skill or service that you (or a small group of people) could provide to others. How about cooking, music/voice, scrapbooking, financial planning, or sewing lessons/services? The options are limitless. Every year the auction includes a wide range of items and services that vary in cost, but are priceless to the winning bidders. Look for community donation forms in your child's Friday folder this week!

Volunteer Opportunities

Camp Fair - Save the Date - Help Bake or Donate

Mark your calendar for Thurs 1/26 ~ the Camp Fair Date. Camp Fair, Merriam's 2nd largest fundraiser, raises huge funds for Classroom Assistants.

It's the only fundraiser that earns money from businesses, not Merriam families.

It's FAST and easier than ever to view ways to help and to sign up! No more emails back and forth! Go to our new Camp Fair web site: <http://merriamcampfair.camp7.org/> and click on the Event Volunteer option.

If you can't help, please consider attending the Fair. High Fair attendance keeps

Camps returning year after year. You'll find great summer camps for your kids!

To share ideas or ask questions: merriamcampfair@aol.com Thank you!

Cultural Enrichment

The Cultural Enrichment Committee is looking for ideas for presenters: dancers, singers, scientists, cultural ambassadors...who are engaging and articulate, work well with children, and are budget-priced. In addition, we are looking for a young adult children's author to attend our Willow Books fundraiser evening on March 7th. This person would read to the 5th/6th graders and again, a nominal fee is most workable. Contact Rita Gupta rgrite@yahoo.com or Varsha

Deokar varsha_deokar@yahoo.com.

Book Fair

The Merriam Book Fair will be here before we know it! Dates of the fair are Friday, February 10 through Friday February 17. Students, parents, and teachers will have a chance to find some great deals right in the lobby of Merriam. This is a wonderful opportunity to buy books and to raise funds for our teaching assistants.

Volunteering at the book fair is a lot of fun, and there are lots of different time slots available for volunteers. If you'd like to help, please contact Sonal Mehta at 978-758-7791 or sonal.mehta@gmail.com.

Guest Column: Regionalization Committee

By Kristin Hilberg, Member, RSDSC

The Regional School District Study Committee (RSDSC) is a working group made up of three Acton and three Boxborough residents appointed by the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee (ABRSC) to research and evaluate the viability of expanding the current regional school district to include grades pre-K through 12. The RSDSC is also charged with reviewing all of the elements of the current Regional Agreement.

There are three school districts among the two towns: Acton Public, Boxborough Public, and Acton Boxborough Regional School District. Our task is to help both towns to determine whether it's time to combine these three districts into one. We recognize that this is a big step and that people will have many questions. We plan to thoroughly examine the potential educational, financial, and

political impact this change may have before making any recommendations.

Over the next several months, the RSDSC will be working on a preliminary study of the current operating environment in each of the three districts as well as completing external surveys of established K-12 districts in neighboring communities. We plan to complete the first leg of our study in February 2012 and present our findings to the governmental bodies and community groups of Acton and Boxborough towns for feedback.

Our next task will be to begin sketching out what a full K-12 region may look like for our towns. All of this is being done in preparation for presenting our findings to both Town Meetings to determine whether a full regionalization effort should be continued.

To that end, we're actively soliciting

community input and feedback. We've set up a website with our meeting schedule, agendas, and minutes as well as the information we've gathered to-date. Our meetings are open to the public. You can also follow our progress at <https://sites.google.com/site/abregionalstudycmt/home>.

Finally, you can email comments to the group at

rsd_study_comm@mail.ab.mec.edu.

While we cannot promise an individual response, be assured that your feedback will be incorporated into our study. The more community input we can gather now, the more productive conversation we can have at our Town Meetings. We look forward to hearing from you, and hope you'll become involved with the process!

Health News: Reminders from the Health Office for a Healthy Winter

* The CDC recommends reminding children to:

1. COVER THEIR NOSE AND MOUTH with a tissue when they cough or sneeze, and have them throw the tissue away after they use it.

2. WASH THEIR HANDS OFTEN WITH SOAP AND WATER, especially after they cough or sneeze, use the bathroom, and before handling food. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

3. NOT TOUCH THEIR EYES, NOSE, OR MOUTH. Germs often spread this way.

* Your child should stay home from school if he or she has a fever, vomits or has diarrhea within the past 12 hours,

appears lethargic, or has a persistent cough. If your child is sick and goes to school, you place others at risk of getting sick as well.

* Before returning to school after an illness, your child should be fever-free for 24 hours and have enough stamina to manage a full day of school activities including P.E. and recess. If your child is taking an antibiotic, he or she should remain at home for the first 24 hours. Please notify the health office if your child tests positive for strep infection.

* All medications should be brought to the health office by a parent. Do not send in medication in your child's backpack.

* Check your child for lice once a week, and contact the health office if you find

lice or nits. The most effective control is careful, repeated inspection of the child's hair and scalp by parents.

* Students need to get plenty of sleep and physical activity, drink water, and eat good food to help them stay healthy in the winter and all year.

* Please make sure that your children are dressed appropriately for outdoor activity; our students will continue to go outside for recess unless it is extremely cold or raining. Coats, hats, mittens, and boots are a must when the weather is cold, and don't forget snow pants when there is snow on the ground. Dressing appropriately for the winter temperatures will keep children not only warm and comfortable, but healthy as well.

Schedule of Upcoming Events at Merriam

January

1/11 Wednesday -- Theme Day

1/16 Monday -- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day -- NO SCHOOL

1/23 Monday -- Kindergarten Change Over

1/25 Wednesday -- 7:45 a.m. Muffins with Mom/Donuts with Dad PTO Meeting and Camp Fair Prep

1/26 Thursday -- Camp Fair (snow date, 2/2)

February

2/7 Tuesday -- School Council Meeting

2/10 to 2/17 -- Scholastic Book Fair

2/10 to 2/17 -- Student-Led Conferences

2/20 to 2/26 -- Winter Recess NO SCHOOL

Merriam Elementary School

11 Charter Road
Acton, MA

Phone: 978-264-3371

<http://merriam.ab.mec.edu/>

Merriam Community News

Editor: Joe Campo
Production: Jennifer Izzo

The next newsletter will be published on Friday, February 3, 2012. Email articles by January 27 to Joe at jb_campo@yahoo.com.

Food Service News

If you have an account set up in ParentOnline, please be sure to set a low balance reminder for your account.

The Food Service Department is sending out a call to all families that have \$5.00 or less in their account each Sunday afternoon. If you receive a call and you have a balance due, please keep in mind that the payment online can take 24-48 hours to reflect on your child's account. We do accept cash or checks at the school in addition to online payments.

As always, if you have any questions please feel free to contact either the Cafeteria Manager at the school or the Food Service Department Office.

It is our pleasure to serve your children every day! Happy New Year!

Kirsten Nelson

Recipe for Popcorn Balls

Did you Know—January 19th is Popcorn Day!

Popcorn balls are easy to make and inexpensive. With imagination, kids can use their cooking skills to transform a simple treat into something truly delicious and special. Here's one simple recipe for popcorn balls:

Combine:

1 cup sugar

1/4 cup molasses

3/4 cup light corn syrup

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons butter

16 cups popped popcorn (or 1/2 cup unpopped kernels)

Mix the sugar, syrup, molasses, butter and salt in a pan and cook over a medium heat for three minutes.

Then pour the ingredients over the popcorn and mix well. Form the popcorn into balls by hand and set them on a greased baking sheet.

Enjoy!