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# Merriam Community News

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## Notes from Ed

### Classroom Assistants at Merriam

As most of you know, there has been a fair amount of discussion recently in the larger Acton community about the funding of assistants and other personnel at Merriam and other schools. These are very important conversations about somewhat complex issues. It may take some time for all of these issues to get ironed out.

I decided this might be a good time to write a note describing the integral role that our classroom assistants play in our school community. When Merriam reopened 18 years ago – with a project-based philosophy and mixed grade classes instead of looping classes, we realized that assistants would be essential to operating a school in that fashion. And now – 18 years later – with a teacher looping model, an evolved (and somewhat streamlined) project-based curriculum, and a portfolio means of assessment, classroom assistants play as much of a role as ever.

When you walk into a classroom you may see a classroom assistant doing many different things. She (or he) might be working individually or with a small group of students on math, reading, or writing skills. She might be consulting with a group about a project that they are working on. The assistant might be setting up one activity in the room while the teacher is setting up another, so that several exciting learning experiences can take place simultaneously. She might be sitting with the teacher discussing the next lesson while the children are at a “special” like Music. She might be helping to organize the curriculum materials in the classroom (teachers in grades 1-6 are responsible for two years’ worth of curriculum).

There are two other vital roles that assistants play. First, each assistant takes the children in her class to lunch and recess. Imagine how wonderful and safe it is for the kids to have familiar people, who know them, supervising the least structured part of the school day. Second, when a teacher at Merriam

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is absent, the assistant is often the substitute. Instead of worry about a “lost day” at school, the classroom teachers feel confident that the academic and social learning will continue in the classroom, even when they are out.

I could go on and on, with stories about the tremendous assistants I worked with as a teacher at Merriam, or the assistants who formed lasting relationships with my own children, or about each and every one of our current assistants. And maybe I will in a future newsletter. For now I want you all to know how deeply woven they are into the fabric of life at Merriam School.

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## Respect . Persistence . Risk Taking

# News from the Parent Teacher Organization

It has been a busy fall for the Merriam Community! The last two months have brought parent pot-lucks, the fall fair, school pictures, Merriam Wear sales, to name a few. In addition, planning has begun to prepare for some of our larger events later in the year. Many thanks to all who have helped in a myriad of ways to support our school.

In our newly revised newsletter, we have a section reserved every month for a guest column or special feature. This month, Merriam Mom Meg Brennan has graciously written a feature for us on exercise and

learning. If you have an expertise or interest to share with the school community and would like to write a short article for an upcoming newsletter, please email [krychlik@mac.com](mailto:krychlik@mac.com).

A few items of note:

\*We will be running a second SCRIP order in time for holiday giving. As a reminder, the SCRIP program allows us to buy gift cards with a percentage of proceeds given to Merriam. Look for forms coming home in backpacks on December 2<sup>nd</sup>; gift cards will be delivered home on Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>.

\*Missing your Innisbrook products this year? You can still purchase products online and 40% will go to Merriam. Watch for a special link on the PTO website - more info to come.

\*Save the date of November 30<sup>th</sup> for the annual Merriam Teachers vs. PTO basketball game at 6:00 pm at the Jr. High. For more details see the Volunteer Opportunities section of this newsletter. If you'd like to PLAY for the PTO team, please contact [krychlik@mac.com](mailto:krychlik@mac.com).

~[www.merriampto.org](http://www.merriampto.org)~

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## Cultural Enrichment News

On Thursday, Oct 27th, Odds Bodkin, an award-winning storyteller and children's author, performed his Golden Rule program at All School Meeting. He presented four international stories, with themes woven throughout focusing on inclusion/exclusion, bullying, physical strength over others, and the impact of lack of compassion.

Students were mesmerized by Odds' Celtic harp as they walked into the cafeteria; he added sound effects to his stories by playing his Celtic harp and string guitars. His compelling character voices and accompanying sound effects kept them engaged; students laughed and sang songs as they learned how kindness works best. The program was followed by K-2, 3&4, and 5&6 grade level discussions on the importance of treat-

ing others nicely and being kind and compassionate.

This program was part of October's National Anti-Bullying activities and was presented by the Merriam

School Cultural Committee. You can learn more about Odds' stories and download them from his website: [www.oddsbodkin.net](http://www.oddsbodkin.net).

### Volunteer Opportunities

#### **Merriam Staff vs. PTO Basketball Game - Wednesday, November 30th at 6:00**

Show your Merriam community spirit at this annual basketball extravaganza - come join the fun and cheer on your favorites as Merriam staff members play a friendly game of basketball versus PTO members on Wednesday, November 30th. The game begins at 6:00, with doors opening at 5:30. Mark your calendar and watch for more ticket information in the Friday Mail folders in November. Event organizers are looking for volunteers to help out that evening with tickets, concessions, and behind-the-scenes help. If you are interested and can lend a hand, please contact Carrie Mathews ([carrie275@aol.com](mailto:carrie275@aol.com)) and Meg Brennan ([pilatesmeg@yahoo.com](mailto:pilatesmeg@yahoo.com)).

# Guest Column: Exercise, the Master Key to Brain Function

The more kids move, the more they learn. John Ratey, MD, an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Clinical Psychiatrist in Cambridge, advocates that exercise plays a critical role in our brain function and is exactly what kids need in order to learn and excel. Ratey's book, "**Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain,**" reveals that exercise is a workout for the brain in addition to the body:

First, it prepares the brain to learn by optimizing one's mind-set. Second, it encourages nerve cells to bind to one another, which is the cellular basis for learning new information; and Third, it promotes the

growth of new brain cells

Exercise plays a pivotal role in our children's academic achievements and learning process as well as a profound impact on their mental health. In addition to improving attention and decreasing stress levels/anxiety, exercise has proven to increase motivation and help students try things they may not have tried before. The good news: Kids love to MOVE! By infusing exercise into our daily lives as parents, we set the example for our children. Exercise appears to be the most powerful tool we have to optimize our brain function. Imparting this knowledge of the mind-body connection to our children will transform the way they live

their lives; and the earlier we start promoting it with our children the better.

As a society, people are so accustomed to jumping in the car and driving everywhere. Many of the places we need to go are walkable distances (school, extracurricular activities, friend's houses, grocery store), but it is just easier to drive, right? I made a conscious lifestyle decision when my children were born that I was going to infuse exercise into my daily routine for their sake and mine... and we walk, ride, or scoot everywhere around town and my kids love it!

By Meghan Brennan, Merriam Parent and Pilates Instructor

## Health News: Lookout for Lice!

For information about this important topic, see the complete article online at [www.merriampto.org](http://www.merriampto.org).

### WHAT ARE HEAD LICE?

Head lice are tiny, wingless insects that are tan to grayish-white, but may take on a reddish-brown color after feeding on their host. They are about the size of a small sesame seed, and their six legs have claws for grasping hair. They cannot fly or jump. Head lice, which have a life span of about 30 days on a host, are parasites that feed on human blood. The lice bites cause itching. A female louse lays 100+ eggs ("nits"), which hatch in 7-10 days. Nits are oval or teardrop shaped, and may be colored yellowish-brown, white, or silver. They are

tiny, about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. Lice attach nits at an angle to the side of a hair shaft with a water-proof, cement-like substance; therefore, nits cannot be washed or brushed out of hair like dandruff or other debris.

### HOW ARE HEAD LICE SPREAD?

Head lice are spread through close contact with an infested person or by sharing personal items such as hats, clothing, combs and hair accessories. Because head lice can survive for 24-48 hours off of a human host, they also can travel through coats and hats that are hung or piled together. Also, head lice can remain undetected on upholstered furniture, stuffed toys, pillows, and bed linens.

### HOW TO CHECK FOR HEAD LICE

Because head lice move so quickly, they are difficult to see, so the diagnosis of infestation is usually made on the basis of finding nits. Nits are barely visible to the naked eye. It can be especially difficult to see nits in light-colored hair. It may be helpful to use a magnifying glass to search for them. It is also essential to use a bright source of light, with natural sunlight being optimal. Comb carefully through the hair, looking for nits. Pay close attention to the back of the head, nape of the neck, and behind the ears. Nits are most commonly clustered in these areas, but examine the entire scalp.

# Schedule of Upcoming Events at Merriam

## November

- 11/8 Tuesday — School Council Meeting (6-7:30 pm)
- 11/11 Friday — Veteran's Day -- NO SCHOOL
- 11/15 Tuesday — HALF DAY
- 11/17 Thursday — School Committee Meeting @ Merriam (7:30 pm)
- 11/23 Wednesday — EARLY DISMISSAL
- 11/24 Thursday — NO SCHOOL
- 11/25 Friday — NO SCHOOL
- 11/30 Wednesday — PTO vs. Staff Basketball Game (6:00 pm)

## December

- 12/2 Friday — Newsletter Distribution
- 12/13 Tuesday — School Council Meeting
- 12/24 - Jan 2 — Winter Recess - NO SCHOOL

### Save the Dates:

- 1/26/12 Merriam Camp Fair
- 3/17/12 Merriam School Auction

## Merriam Elementary School

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

## Merriam Community News

Editor: Joe Campo  
Production: Jennifer Izzo

The next newsletter will be published on Friday, December 2. Email articles by November 25 to Joe at [jb\\_campo@yahoo.com](mailto:jb_campo@yahoo.com).

The clip art is licensed from the Clip Art Gallery on [Discovery-School.com](http://Discovery-School.com).

If you are a designer or artist, we'd love your help in creating unique images and logos for the newsletter!

## Food Service News—Healthy Pumpkin Bread Recipe

Treat family and friends to our slimmed-down quick bread.

Total Time: 1 hr 10 min. Prep Time: 20 min. Oven Temp: 350.

1 cup (packed) light brown sugar

2 large egg whites

1 cup pure pumpkin (not pumpkin pie mix)

1/4 cup canola oil

1/3 cup low-fat plain yogurt

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 cup all-purpose flour

3/4 cup whole wheat flour

1 teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

### Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Spray 8 1/2" by 4 1/2" metal loaf pan with nonstick cooking spray.

In large bowl, with wire whisk, combine brown sugar and egg whites. Add pump-

kin, oil, yogurt, and vanilla extract; stir to combine.

In medium bowl, combine all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, baking soda, and salt. Add flour mixture to pumpkin mixture; stir until just combined.

Do not over mix. Pour batter into prepared pan. Bake 45 to 50 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center of loaf comes out clean. Cool in pan 10 minutes. Invert pumpkin bread onto wire and cool.