



# The Merriam Community News

September 2010 - Volume 19 - Issue 1

## Ed Notes

Sometimes things happen in life that cause us to examine what's truly most important. As many of you know, I had surgery for prostate cancer early this August. The wonderful news is that the surgery was successful – the cancer was caught early and doctors are fairly certain that the cancer was completely contained within the prostate. As I continue to recuperate, I'm very grateful for all that I have and for all of the wonderful experiences that await me.



It was hard not to be just a bit reflective as I was anticipating surgery. I began to think about the hopes and dreams that I have for myself, for my family, and for others in the world, and whether I was doing all that I could to make those dreams a reality. I continue to reflect on those questions; somehow I was jolted into making those reflections an active, conscious part of my everyday life. I hope that they'll stay there, in the forefront of what I do and how I live my life.

I share that personal information with you all because I want to give you an opportunity to do some reflection about your hopes for your children at Merriam. A jolt isn't always necessary to take a look at our priorities.

So here's the invitation. Send me an email that answers the following question: "What are the two most important things that you want your children to gain (or take with them) from their experiences at Merriam School?"

I'll review the responses and devote a future newsletter article to presenting you with the data. Hopefully, it will give us a sense of what our shared hopes and dreams are for the children at Merriam – and it may also help us to make sure that the path we're charting is leading the kids in that direction. So please – take a few minutes to send me your thoughts.

Welcome to all of the families who are new to Merriam, and welcome back to those of you who

are returning. I have a feeling this promises to be a terrific year!

## Q&A About Merriam's Parent Teacher Organization

A warm welcome to all Merriam families (student families and staff families)! The Merriam community is a wonderful place to share the experiences of elementary education. Here you will find educators, administrators, school staff, parents, and students who are excited about the growth and development of our community.

Beginning with the "Back to School Picnic" 9/3/10 at 5:30p.m., we invite the Merriam community to become active participants in the school, connect with each other, and know that the time you share is valuable and appreciated.

The Merriam School community agreed long ago, that one way to enrich the educational experience is to provide adult Assistants in each classroom. We have been fortunate, through the generosity of our community, to maintain this goal and continue to fund classroom Assistants through: funds from the district, earnings from our before and after school programs, and the fundraising efforts of the PTO.

**Who manages the PTO?** Led by Principal Ed Kaufman, the PTO Board consists of 4 parent volunteers: 2 co-chairs, a secretary, a treasurer

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**Looking for the WHAT WHEN WHERE?  
Check out the combined school and PTO  
calendar online at  
<http://merriam.ab.mec.edu/calendar.html>.**

**View it - print it - link it to your Google  
calendar! A paper version list-style  
calendar is included in this packet.**

## Looking to Help? Play The Matching Game

When parents are involved at school, children tend to achieve more and have better self-esteem, staff better understand families' cultures/ diversity, and communication between all parties improves. There are several opportunities for parents to get involved at Merriam. Check out our fun matching game to find an opportunity that works for you!

What You Can Give	What the School Needs
2-3 hours for 1-3 days/week	Auction/Camp Fair/Socials help
1-2 hours Friday mornings	Mail Distribution
1-2 hours Thurs, mornings	Office/Library/Nurse assistance
Baked Goods	Paper Copying
Event Planning	Edibles for various events
Box Tops, grocery receipts, donation	Planting & weeding
2-4 hours/month	Fall Social assistance
2+ hrs Friday 10/22/10	Box Tops, grocery receipts, SCRIP orders, donations
2+ hrs Friday 11/12/10	PTO vs. Staff BBall Game help
2+ hrs Friday 12/3/10	Auction/Camp Fair assistance
2+ hrs the 2nd week of Feb.	Gamewright Game Night help
Special Skill (IT, Sales, etc.)	Book Fair assistance

Once you've found a good match, contact Kim ([kim@mcc-group.com](mailto:kim@mcc-group.com)) or Neena ([NeenaArora@aol.com](mailto:NeenaArora@aol.com)) and we'll help you get started! Welcome to the community! And thanks, in advance, for your contribution.

## Important Information for All Parents Regarding Medications

Medication administration is an important issue in schools. Some students require medications at school in order to survive. Others need medications in order to learn. Occasionally,

students require antibiotics during the day following a bacterial infection.

The goal of your School Nurse is to administer only those medications that are absolutely necessary during the school day. All other medications should be given at home either before or after school.

State law requires a written order by a licensed prescriber and written parental permission before any medication can be administered to students, including over-the-counter medications. You can obtain forms for this purpose from the School Nurse, or from most Health Care Providers. All medication MUST be in the original labeled container and be labeled with the student's name. The School Nurse will not administer the following: expired medications, medications delivered in unlabeled containers, and medications in inappropriate containers such as zip-loc bags.

For the safety of all students, no medications are to be carried to school by students. The only exception to this rule is for Junior High and High School students who are allowed to carry inhalers or Epi-pens after certain requirements are met.

With your help, the School Nurse can provide a safe, supervised environment for students who require medications at school.

Feel free to contact the Merriam School Nurse, Betty Mazzone RN, at x3752 with any questions.

## School Picnic September 10



Please join us Friday, September 10th from 5:30 - 7:30pm on the back playground for the Back to School Picnic.

This is a wonderful chance to meet new families and catch up with old friends. Bring your own picnic dinner, non-alcoholic beverages, and a blanket or chairs. This is not a drop-off event: all kids must be supervised by an adult.

## **Merriam's Fall Fundraiser is Coming - September 13th - 27th**

Help us raise critical funds to support Teacher Assistants in each classroom! This year's goal: about \$20 per student, which should bring in a mighty \$8,000!

Back by popular demand, INNISBROOK!

- Highest quality and value - wraps, gift items, kitchen essentials, delicious chocolates, and more
- A generous 50% profit on most orders
- Visit [www.innisbrook.com](http://www.innisbrook.com) for a sneak peek and to learn about their "Commitment to Green" and best manufacturing/business practices

### **Frozen Cookie Dough**

NEW - We are excited to also offer this year:

- Frozen cookie dough and other delectable items from OTIS SPUNKMEYER!
- Visit [www.spunkmeyer.com](http://www.spunkmeyer.com) to learn about this industry leader, their best-selling products, and nutritional information.

We encourage every family to participate in whatever way they are able. Every order helps us keep Teacher Assistants in each classroom. Don't forget to share catalogs with family, friends, and co-workers!

\*\* Look for catalogs and ordering information in your Sept. 10th mail packets \*\*

For more information – contact Mindy Shapiro at [mindyshapiro@yahoo.com](mailto:mindyshapiro@yahoo.com)

## **Oktoberfest 5K Run/Walk: Saturday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>**

*Includes Kids Fun Run and Raises Money for Teaching Assistants*



Do you want to know who is the fastest mom or dad in Acton? Then participate in the Oktoberfest 5K

Run/Walk. On Saturday October 2 at 10AM, the Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce will be

holding its annual 5K road race/walk to kick-off the annual West Acton Oktoberfest Celebration.

### **Looking For A Way To Help?**

It's easy, it's flexible, it's rewarding, it helps you get to know your child's class - it's a Room Parent - and it could be you! Room Parents can work individually or in teams.

To help out this year contact:

Grades K-2: Lauren, [lpollak@partners.org](mailto:lpollak@partners.org)

Grades 3-6: Miriam, [mwsmith@comcast.net](mailto:mwsmith@comcast.net)

This year they have also added a Kids Fun Run for kids age 8 and under. The Kids Fun Run will start at 9AM and will include goodie bags for all participants.

In addition to being a great way to get some exercise and support the Acton community, the Metro West Chamber of Commerce will donate \$5 of the \$15 5K registration fee (\$20 to register on race day) and \$2.50 of the \$5 Fun Run registration fee to the Merriam Community PTO to fund our full-time teaching assistants in each classroom.

When you register, there is a question asking you to choose a non-profit organization to donate a portion of your registration fee to. Just select Merriam Community PTO from the options or type it in to the field. Merriam will get the \$5 or \$2.50 donation for each registration that mentions the Merriam Community PTO, so recruit neighbors, babysitters, older siblings, neighborhood kids in Junior High or High School, friends from the gym, etc.

Registration and more information is available at the Metro West Chamber of Commerce website: <http://www.mwcoc.com>. You can email Lisa Pratt if you have additional questions: [lisapratt2001@yahoo.com](mailto:lisapratt2001@yahoo.com).

## **Purchase Gift Cards to Help Fund Classroom Assistants**

The Merriam PTO is pleased to once again offer families the Scrip Shopping Card Program. This is a program where you can purchase gift cards to many of the places where you already shop or eat, at no additional cost to you, and the Merriam PTO earns a percentage of each card. Last year, the PTO earned more than \$1500 to support teaching assistants through the Scrip program!

**How does it work?** Merchants agree to participate in the scrip program and offer their cards at a discounted rate. Discounts vary. For instance, if you buy a \$25 gift card for Roche Bros, Merriam will get 3% (\$.75) back; if you buy a \$25 gift card for the 99 Restaurant, Merriam will get 13% (\$3.25) back!



**Why should I participate?** This program is a great way to help raise money for our school without doing anything additional or different; just shop as you normally would.

- Do you shop regularly at Roche Bros. or CVS?
- Do you go to The Gap, TJ Maxx, or Macy's for clothes, or visit Ace Hardware, Home Depot, or Lowe's for supplies for home projects?
- Do you stop by Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts for coffee in the morning?
- Do you purchase gift cards for your family, coaches or teachers for birthdays and holidays?

Now you can buy the cards and Merriam will benefit as well. Please look over the complete list of participants and if you ordinarily shop or eat at any of the participating businesses, consider buying a gift card and help raise money for our school at the same time. There are more than 100 merchants participating that are in our local area so you're sure to find ones that appeal to you!

**How do I buy cards?** It is a very simple procedure. Simply fill out the order form distributed in Friday mail, and then send it back to school with a check, payable to "Merriam Community PTO". Your cards will be distributed a week after the deadline. We will let you know when your cards are in. You will have a choice of

picking up your cards at the office or having them sent home with your child.

Scrip is available to order several times during the school year. The deadline for the first Scrip order will be early November and the cards will be delivered before Thanksgiving. If you have any questions, please contact Rita Gupta at [rgrite@yahoo.com](mailto:rgrite@yahoo.com).

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### ***PTO Q&A — from page 1***

**Who is on the PTO?** All Merriam families and staff! Last year over 85% of the Merriam community attended events or volunteered and 70% of our community made a financial contribution to the PTO. We encourage everyone to be active in the educational experience by attending events, helping out in classrooms, assisting with school activities, and/or donating time or making a financial contribution.

### **What are the goals of the PTO?**

1. Facilitate parent and faculty communication
2. Advocate for Merriam students
3. Encourage parent involvement
4. Raise funds to enrich the educational experience, specifically to fund the salaries of classroom Assistants.

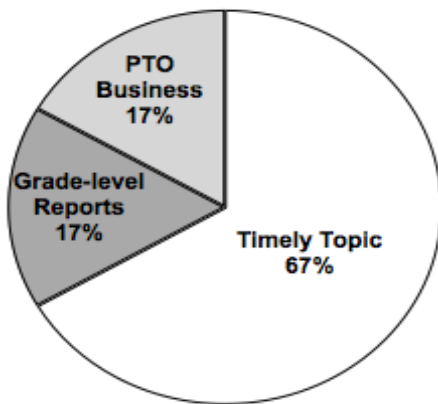
Thanks to the positive energy of Merriam volunteers and the generosity of our community, we achieved our goal last year and raised over \$88,000! This year, our goal is \$90,000. In addition to an annual direct appeal in May, the PTO organizes creative and efficient fundraising events that help meet our goal while bringing our community together or providing valuable resources. Our first fundraisers this year are school pictures and the Innisbrook/Otis Spunkmeyer offer.

**How can I help the PTO?** Check out the "Matching Game" in this newsletter or contact this year's co-chairs Kim McCormick and Neena Arora directly ([kim@mcc-group.com](mailto:kim@mcc-group.com), [NeenaArora@aol.com](mailto:NeenaArora@aol.com)).

Again, welcome to our community! We look forward to a spectacular school year!

## Merriam Community Conversations

What are "Community Conversations?" They are a way to connect with parents, educators, and administrators in a conversational format on topics aimed at building a better community. At Merriam we host five to six Community Conversations throughout the school year where we become more familiar with each other, know what is happening at school, and leave with information that helps us improve the educational experience of our children! Each Community Conversation is 90 minutes and is generally organized like this:



We are excited to announce the first Community Conversation of this school year:

### MCAS Growth Model with Ed Kaufman and Deborah Bookis

Massachusetts has developed a method of measuring growth in student and school performance over time. Deborah, Director of Curriculum and Assessment, and Ed will explain the model and share their insights on how to interpret MCAS results.

**When:** Monday, September 20th - 7:30pm  
**Where:** Parker Damon Library

Questions? Contact Kim McCormick at [kim@mcc-group.com](mailto:kim@mcc-group.com).

### Cultural Enrichment at Merriam

Cultural Enrichment at Merriam works hard to bring the additional K-6 curriculum-enhancing programs to our school in order to deepen and enliven our children's education.

To bring these shows successfully to Merriam, we need YOUR support!

### What are some examples of the programs Cultural Enrichment has brought to all of our K-6 Merriam students?

Some examples of programs in the last school academic year of 2009-10 that our Cultural Enrichment funds brought to Merriam were: a wonderful oral storytelling performance by poet, Odds Bodkin, K-6 grade-level cartooning workshops by a Pulitzer prize nominated editorial cartoonist, Dave Granlund, an inspirational talk by the Vice President of the Lowell Spinners, as well as a celebration of Chinese New Year with performances by dancers, martial arts specialists, and Chinese Yoyo. In addition, we introduced our students to the medium of drama with excerpts of dances and songs from shows such as "Into the Woods, Jnr," "Aladdin," and "Leader of the Pack" from the local Starz-N-Lightz theater rep. company at our All School Meetings (ASM) throughout the school year. Previous years have brought the award winning bilingual Latin song group, Sol Y Canto, performances of The Nutcracker and other dances from the Boston Commonwealth Ballet Company, as well as numerous visits from authors and artists in order to celebrate Merriam's literacy week.

### What programs are Cultural Enrichment going to bring to Merriam this year?

Looking ahead to fall 2010, Cultural Enrichment at Merriam is planning to celebrate October's National Disability Awareness Month with a wonderful group called *Dancing Wheels*, who are America's first and foremost physically integrated dance company of artists with and without physical disabilities performing together. *Dancing Wheels* are tentatively booked to perform at our ASM on Friday October 29th. More details will follow, but meanwhile check out [dancingwheels.org](http://dancingwheels.org).

The rest of the year's programs are still in their early planning stages, so if you want to get involved or have a recommendation, please get in touch with us!

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## Want to Know What's Going On?

### Sign Up for PTO E-Mail

It's Sunday night and you're wondering what's going on this week at school - not to worry! Each week families will receive an email\* that highlights school events.

We will also send e-reminders 12-24 hours prior to each event. This year, the PTO and administration office plan to send most information via e-mail.

- To ensure you receive this important information, check that your email server will accept email from: [ekaufman@mail.ab.mec.edu](mailto:ekaufman@mail.ab.mec.edu), [kim@mcc-group.com](mailto:kim@mcc-group.com), [NeenaArora@aol.com](mailto:NeenaArora@aol.com).
- We send emails through our Google account so all messages are addressed to [merriam-parents@merriampto.org](mailto:merriam-parents@merriampto.org) (your individual e-address is hidden).
- A copy of each email will be on the PTO website at [www.merriampto.org](http://www.merriampto.org), in case you delete one.
- Merriam PTO emails will have "Merriam N2K - (date)" in the subject field (N2K = need to know)

\*Providing your email address to Merriam PTO is a choice. If you choose not to provide your email address, please contact the office to determine another way to receive PTO and school information.

To enter your email address into the system:

- Follow the steps outlined in the Emergency Response System at <https://absis.ab.mec.edu> under the icon button "School/PTO Permissions"
- OR, click the "Sign up for Merriam Emails" button on [www.merriampto.org](http://www.merriampto.org).

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### *Cultural Enrichment — from page 5*

**How are these programs you bring to Merriam funded?** Most of the programs are funded by parent donations and sometimes by grants from local supporting agencies, such as the Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council, if we are lucky. Our Cultural Enrichment Committee is completely parent run, alongside help from the teachers and the Principal. Therefore, it is vital we have YOUR support!

## How can I help?

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 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)

## Merriam School FAQs

### *What opportunities do parents have to learn about activities at Merriam?*

There are many ways in which parents can find out what's going on at Merriam. Among them:

- Merriam School/PTO website
- Friday family mail packets
- Monthly school newsletters
- Classroom newsletters
- PTO Classroom Representative
- Community Conversations
- Monthly PTO meetings
- Monthly School Council meetings
- Welcoming Committee
- School Directory/Calendar

### *What opportunities do students have to meet students and teachers in other classes and grades?*

Community is at the heart of Merriam. There are many school structures and strategies designed to facilitate a sense of community. Some include:

- Family Groups (mixed-age groups of children that meet for Community Day and Theme Days)
- Reading Buddy Classes
- Birthday Lunch
- All School Meetings
- Theme Days
- Community Day
- Multi-aged groups on the playground, at recess, and on the bus



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## **Merriam School FAQs — from page 6**

- All School Meetings
- Theme Days
- Community Day
- Multi-aged groups on the playground, at recess, and on the bus

Merriam School values the relationships between students and students, as well as between students and teachers. Merriam teachers decide individually how they would like children to address them. Most teachers choose to have students address them by their first name. Their rationale is that the relationship begins at a more personal level.

***When do I have a chance to review my child's progress with the teacher?*** Merriam teachers schedule two Parent-Teacher conferences per year (many parents/teachers schedule additional conferences). Students conduct conferences with their families in February. Children's work is collected and organized in a portfolio that travels with them from kindergarten to sixth grade. Merriam School is required to meet the goals of the Acton Public Schools (as are all schools in Acton), and teachers assess children on the accomplishment of these goals. End of the year Assessment Summary Reports record the progress of children's attainment of these goals in reading, writing, and math.

***How do I know that my child's learning style will be suited to a project-based learning experience?*** In order to implement project-based learning, Merriam classrooms are highly organized learning environments. Children learn to take responsibility for and pride in their schoolwork and, in the process, develop skills of independence, resourcefulness, and team building.

***How do I purchase milk and/or lunch tickets for my child?*** Lunch tickets may be purchased from the cafeteria for \$2.25 each. Order forms are available in the office or on the Merriam website. Tickets can only be purchased in batches of 5 and the cafeteria can only accept checks as payment for tickets. Once you have ordered your tickets

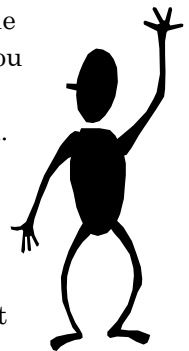
they will be processed within 2-3 days and sent home with your child.

***When my child will be out of school due to illness or family holiday, do I need to contact someone?*** YES! Every day your child will be out of school, a phone call must be made to the Safe Arrival phone number: (978) 264-3373. Your call should be made before the start of the school day. For any long-term absences, both the office and the classroom teacher should be notified of departure and return dates.

***How do I ensure that my child will be included in the bus system?*** All kindergarten students will receive a printed bus tag prior to the first day of school. Bus schedules are available on the Acton Public Schools website ([www.ab.mec.edu](http://www.ab.mec.edu)). The Transportation Department can be reached at (978) 263-3451.

***What do I do if my child wants to take a different bus to a friend's house?*** Bus passes are available in the school office and are sent home in the first Friday family mail packet. Students in grades one through six are allowed to use bus passes. They must be filled out and given to the teacher on the day of use. Please remember to print clearly and to include all required information. Parents will be notified when buses are closed to passes due to occupancy numbers.

***What is the process for dropping off my child?*** School starts this year at 9:15 a.m. therefore, students should not be dropped off any earlier than 9:00 a.m. as there is no one available to supervise them prior to this time. Cars are not allowed in the front circle between the hours of 8:45 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. so you will need to drop your child off in the lower parking lot by the loading dock. If a student needs to be dropped off later than 9:15, please inform the office that your child will be late and remind them to sign in at the office when they arrive to ensure that they are not marked absent.



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**Merriam School FAQs — from page 6**

**What do I do if my child is to be picked up at school?** If you will be picking your child up from school, you need to send in a dismissal note with your child in the morning. This ensures that both the teacher and the office are aware of the dismissal plans for that day. Dismissal notes are available in the office and also on the Merriam website. Your child can either be dismissed outside to the car pick-up line, or you can meet them in the lobby.

Please make sure your child knows where to meet you. If your child needs to be dismissed early, you should also send in a dismissal note in the morning indicating the time you will be picking up your child. In this case, you will need to meet them in the lobby and sign them out in the office. We strongly encourage parents not to pick

students up between 3:15 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. as this is a very busy time in the classroom.

**What is Friday family mail?** Friday family mail is Merriam's system for sending important notices home. At the end of each week, mail is sent home with the youngest Merriam student in each family. The mail will contain important information such as school notices, class newsletters, monthly school lunch menus, forms, flyers, and fundraising materials.

**What is the best way to contact teachers during the day?** As you can appreciate, teachers are very busy during the school day. If you need to contact a teacher, the best method is to send them an e-mail or leave them a voicemail. Teachers will generally respond to e-mail and voicemail at the end of the school day. If you need to reach a teacher urgently, contact Allison in the main office and she'll get a message to the teacher.

**The Merriam Community News**

Editor: Joe Campo ▪ Production: Sue Follett

The next Community News will be published on Friday, October 1.

Email articles by September 24 to Joe at [jb\\_campo@yahoo.com](mailto:jb_campo@yahoo.com).