

# Merriam School

## ■ Community News ■

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### MESSAGE FROM SANDRA

Every year, each of the Acton elementary schools has an opportunity to present itself to the community of prospective kindergarten parents at an evening planned for that specific purpose. The following is my message from February 5, which was Merriam Kindergarten Night.

Welcome to Merriam School Kindergarten Night! This is our opportunity to showcase our school - to show you who we are. There are students, faculty and parents here to help with this process.

We are all members of this school community and equal partners in the process of supporting children throughout their education. The strength of Merriam, as is true for all schools, is our staff as integral members of the school community. Our teachers, specialists, assistants, custodians and office personnel, along with you as parents, support your children and meet their basic needs while providing an environment where learning can happen at its best. It is our respectful relationships and ability to work together that enhance teaching and learning for all our children.

My goal for this evening is to tell you what I think is most important about Merriam. This year I thought I would share some students' thoughts. I asked the students to tell me what they think is most important about their school, and they did. One student-a fifth grade girl named Katie-wrote me a speech.

Dear Prospective Parents,

Hello, and thank you for coming to Kindergarten Night. I am an eleven-year-old and am in fifth grade at Merriam School. I have been attending this school since I was in kindergarten so I have a pretty good idea of what it is like. So hop aboard, hold onto your hats, and get ready to learn and play, the Merriam way!

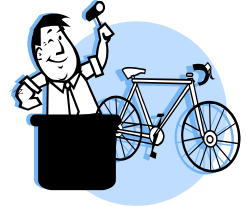
For starters, Merriam is a very tight community. Once or twice a week, we have an All-School assembly where Sandra gives messages, and kids of all ages can perform some things they practice at home, like playing the piano. Teachers and their students also put on skits or sing songs. Back in their classrooms, different classes are paired up. Teachers match an older student to a younger student, and they read together. These are called reading buddies. Lastly, we also have family groups. These are groups of kids of all ages, kindergarten through sixth grade. This way, children can relate to other kids in different grades and classes. There are 40 groups, with about 12 kids in each. With these kids, we do lots of things like the annual All School Field Trip, fun activities revolving around a certain theme, and so much more that involves the whole community.

Ah, moving on to curriculum. We learn things in a really cool way at Merriam. In every grade, the teachers combine different subjects to learn certain topics. For example, in kindergarten we study the Middle Ages.

*Contd. on pg. 2 Sandra*

### Merriam Auction 2008 Seeking Volunteers

Have you been wondering how you could help with the Merriam Auction this year?



Volunteering on the night of the auction is a great way to get involved and support our largest fundraiser of the year. We hope you can join us on Saturday, March 29, 2008 at the beautiful Marriott's SpringHill Suites Devens Common Center.

The auction has lots of volunteer openings available. You can help by selling raffle tickets, working the check-out desk, helping with set-up, working the welcome desk, closing the silent auctions or being a runner (taking bids to the check-out desk). And many of these jobs are scheduled as shifts, so you work for a little while and have fun at the auction for the rest of the evening.

And if you have energy and time to share, but you cannot come for the night of the auction, just let us know. We can put you in touch with someone who is doing preparation in the next few weeks leading up to the auction.

Let us know if you have a specific job that you would like to do or just let us know that you want to help and we will find something for you! To volunteer, contact Linda Strahle at [Lindastrable@yahoo.com](mailto:Lindastrable@yahoo.com).

Thanks!

*Contd. from pg. 1 Sandra*

In fifth grade, we learn about the American Revolution. But learning about those things is not just from reading information out of a textbook. Merriam teachers bring art, math, music, language arts and everything else to learn about that specific unit. My opinion is that this is a great thing because we have more fun at school this way. I think this can give us a whole new perspective on certain subjects, which otherwise might seem boring to kids. This is a glimpse of curriculum here at Merriam School.

Now for some of Merriam's funky facts. In many ways, this school is very different from the average elementary school. First, we call teachers by their first names. I like this because it makes you feel more comfortable with them, and you feel like you can talk to them if

there is a problem. We also have assistants in our school. This is a great thing because we have extra adults in our class we can talk to. Another thing is that instead of getting a little bit of homework everyday, kids in third grade and up get a packet of homework every Friday or Monday, and it is due the next Friday or Monday. I like this because some days kids have really busy schedules, and they just don't have time to do any work. This way they can just plan to take a day off when they need to. Finally, we sit at tables instead of desks. I think this is great because we get to make new friends and do a lot of group work, which helps us learn to cooperate with other people now and later in life. These are some different and creative things that happen at Merriam School.

All in all, the students, parents, teachers, administration, and staff are like a

big family here at this school, and I am happy to be a part of it.

After Katie's words, which I think present a very accurate description of our school, I said a few words in conclusion:

At Merriam, we aim to create opportunities for lifelong learning, consider the emotional well-being of students and adults of utmost importance, and design learning experiences that are not static but active and participatory. Family support is essential to our teaching and learning model. The Merriam School core values of respect, persistence in learning and risk-taking are all exemplified in our teaching and learning.



## **Merriam Auction 2008: Sharing Our World**

This year's school auction will be held Saturday, March 29, 2008 at Marriott's SpringHill Suites Devens Common Center.

We invite all Merriam parents to think about what our classroom assistants mean to our children. Classroom sizes have been growing. Teachers utilize their assistants to help provide small group opportunities, support for our project-based curriculum, one-on-one attention and consistency across the school day. All auction proceeds help to pay for our wonderful classroom assistants. Please consider "Sharing Our World" by "Sharing Your World" with the larger Merriam community. Our community is diverse and creative - the building blocks of our school strength. We know that your willingness to share your time, energy, talents and resources will result in a great auction event!

Each year we try to improve the auction process by adding capabilities that allow easier or additional participation. Last year, proxy bidding and credit card payments were well received. We look forward to offering these options again this year. And once again, you will be able to RSVP to the auction, pay for your tickets, and browse the auction catalogue online. More information will soon be available on the Auction page at [merriampto.org](http://merriampto.org).



Auction invitations will be coming home in backpacks late February or early March-please look for them. We invite all newcomers to Merriam to join

us on March 29, whether you are a new kindergarten parent or guardian, new to Merriam via transfer (from another school or town), or new to the auction itself. The doors open at 6:15 p.m., the Silent Auctions close at 7:30 p.m. and 7:50 p.m., dinner will be served at 8:00 p.m., and the Live Auction begins at 8:45 p.m.

We recognize an auction can be a bit intimidating. If you have never been to the Merriam auction, we hope this will be your year. We are stronger as a community with your presence. We look forward to having you with us.

For more information, contact Lisa Robb, Auction Chair, at [lisa.robbs@verizon.net](mailto:lisa.robbs@verizon.net).

## International Night Planned for April

Save the date for the second Parker Damon International Night: Friday, April 11, at 6:30 p.m. in the Cafetorium. Please join families from Merriam and McCarthy-Towne to celebrate our diverse culture at the Parker Damon Building.

Families will make and display a flag, dress in costume (optional) and bring a food item from their country of origin to share. Students will also have an opportunity to share a poem, song, dance, story, etc. from their country of origin. Look for more details soon.

If you would like to volunteer to help with this evening, please contact Merriam parents Beth McKeon at [bethanne.mckeon@verizon.net](mailto:bethanne.mckeon@verizon.net) or Virginia Taylor at [virginiarosstaylor@verizon.net](mailto:virginiarosstaylor@verizon.net), or McCarthy-Towne parent Jane Ceraso at [jane.ceraso@paragon-c.com](mailto:jane.ceraso@paragon-c.com). Volunteers are needed for set-up, clean-up, supervising children, cueing performers, coordinating A/V equipment, videography and photography.

There will be a meeting for volunteers at Beth McKeon's house (11 Alcott Street) on March 5 at 7:30 p.m. Please contact Beth if you plan to attend.

## Help Needed With Snack Sales

Volunteers are needed to help with Snack Sales during Community Ed Basketball games held at the Parker Damon gym, from 8:45 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Saturday mornings through mid-March.

Every other Saturday, the Merriam PTO has a great opportunity to raise money by selling snacks to the basketball community. We'll need volunteers to help with Snack Sales on March 1 and March 15.



This is a fun and easy volunteering opportunity. If you can help out for an hour or so on either of the Saturdays listed, please contact Suzanne Joris at (978) 283-0559 or [suzannejoris@comcast.net](mailto:suzannejoris@comcast.net). We thank all the members of the Merriam community who have generously volunteered their time during our January and February snack sales. They were a huge success!

Suzanne Joris

## Thinking About Boy World?

If you have a son, you won't want to miss our next PTO Meeting, a *Community Conversation* about "The Social and Emotional World of Boys." The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 18, 6-7:30 p.m., and will include childcare for school-age children.

*Community Conversations* offer Merriam parents a chance to explore and discuss topics of interest to them in an informal setting with other Merriam parents. In the fall, many parents and teachers had a chance to share their knowledge and experiences of the social worlds of their daughters. Those of you with sons wanted a similar chance - including a focus on better understanding boys' emotional experiences as well as social predicaments they face.

If you would like to read more about this topic before the meeting, some suggested books are *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood* by William S. Pollack, or *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson. These books are only meant as background - come to share your thoughts and experiences even if you will not have a chance to read the books. Carol Leandro, PhD, Merriam parent and psychologist, will facilitate our discussion.

## 2008 Book Fair A Big Success!

Book Fair co-chairs Pam Shields, Diane Johnson and Lisa Pearson are happy to announce that last month's Book Fair brought in **\$2,892.28** in support of teaching assistants for the Merriam community. Thanks to all students, parents and teachers who attended!



This event would not have been successful without the help of many great volunteers, including Sue Metcalf, Julie O'Hara, Elena Petrov, Pam Saarinen, Sarah Dawley, Suzanne Joris, Caroline Weaver, Yvonne Benelli, Gina Crooks, Gretchen Turner, Kathy Simmons, Susan Avery, Wendy Wildes, Allison Sartini, Nhuy Hoang, Dave Kolpin, Laura Wrenn, Lisa Robb, Frannie Osman, Karla Smith, Julia Cates, Hannah Bloch, Lingya Zhou, Camille Crossman, Sarah Murphy, Heidi Thompson, Lori Locascio, Katy Frey, Helen Webster, Nicole Ross and Susan Brager-Murphy.

The co-chairs would also like to thank Sandra, Diane and Judy for their support, as well as the custodial staff, including Nirman, Dave, Peter, Guy and Cathy.

## Connect-ED Info

Parents and guardians, please note: the district will be using Connect-ED to notify families of weather-related closures and emergencies. Calls will be made to A-B homes at 6:15 a.m. and to Acton Public Schools homes at 7:30 a.m. with weather-related information. Connect-ED will NOT be used if school is cancelled the night before.



## This & That



### Merriam School/PTO Events:

- Monday, March 3: Author and guest speaker **Stephen Krensky** is presenting at All-School Meeting, followed by separate workshops for grades 3-6; 8:35a.m., Cafetorium. Presented by the Cultural Enrichment Committee.
- Monday, March 3 through Friday, March 7: **Literacy Week** at Merriam. Watch for details!
- Monday, March 10: **Willow Books Night Fundraiser** for Merriam's Cultural Enrichment Committee; 6-9:00 p.m., Willow Books & Café, Route 2A, Acton. Come and enjoy readings by several Merriam teachers in a comfy, cozy setting!
- Tuesday, March 11: **School Council**, 6:00 p.m., Conference Room. Open to all.
- Wednesday, March 12: **Birthday Lunch** - March birthdays.
- Thursday, March 13: **Acton School Committee meeting**, 7:30 p.m.; Parker Damon Cafetorium. Light dinner provided for School Committee by Merriam's Hospitality Committee.
- Friday, March 14: **Jerry and Nancy Bell, Irish musicians**, are tentatively scheduled to perform at All-School Meeting, 1:35 p.m., Cafetorium. Presented by the Cultural Enrichment Committee.
- Tuesday, March 18: **PTO Meeting & Community Conversation** - The Social and Emotional World of Boy's; 6-7:30 p.m., School Library. Childcare provided.
- Monday, March 24 through Thursday, March 27: **MCAS exams for grades 3, 4, 5 and 6.**
- Saturday, March 29: **The Merriam Auction 2008**: Sharing Our World; Marriott Spring Hill Suites Devens

Common Center, Devens, Mass.  
Doors open at 6:15 p.m.

### Regional School Events:

- Wednesday, March 19: **Kindergarten Registration** for Acton Schools; R. J. Grey Junior High.

### No School: Friday, March 21.

### Coming Soon:

- Monday, April 7: **Acton's Town Meeting starts**; High School Auditorium.
- Friday, April 11: **International Night Celebration** by McCarthy-Towne and Merriam Schools.

## Cultural Enrichment Plans Spring Events

Cultural Enrichment has arranged for a number of exciting programs this spring.

As part of the Literacy Week celebration, Merriam will welcome children's author Stephen Krensky on March 3. Mr. Krensky's books include *A Big Day for Scepters*, *The Dragon Circle*, *Lionel at Large*, *Ben Franklin*, *Too Many Leprechauns*, *What's The Big Idea*, *My Loose Tooth*, *Abe Lincoln and the Muddy Pig*, and *The Iron Dragon Never Sleeps*.

Mr. Krensky will begin his visit with a presentation at All-School Meeting. He will use several of his books as examples to demonstrate the writing and publishing process he uses to transform an idea into a book. As a follow-up to the school-wide presentation, Mr. Krensky will take part in workshops with students in grades 3 through 6. There will also be an opportunity for the students to bring along their books to be signed by Mr. Krensky. For more information about the author, go to [www.stephenkrensky.com](http://www.stephenkrensky.com).

DUE TO A SCHEDULING CONFLICT, THE SECOND ANNUAL WILLOW BOOKS NIGHT HAS BEEN CHANGED TO MONDAY, MARCH 10. Please visit Willow Books between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. on March 10. Parents and students will have an opportunity to browse and listen as Merriam teachers read their favorite books. Scheduled to read so far are Karen Sonner, Judy LaFrancis, Leah Richardson, Melissa Reinhardt, Tom Sidley, Maryann Ayers, Lee Trench and Myrna Gutfreud. A percentage of all sales during this evening will benefit Cultural Enrichment programs at Merriam.

On March 14, Irish musicians Jerry and Nancy Bell are tentatively scheduled to perform at All-School Meeting. Their energetic show is guaranteed to provide a different perspective on St. Patrick's Day.

The final Cultural Enrichment performance of the school year will take place May 23 during All-School Meeting. With Bamidele Dancers and Drummers, students will experience the dances, rhythms, folklore and songs from West Africa, Brazil and the Caribbean.

Cultural Enrichment arranges for a variety of performances and cultural events to enhance and deepen the educational experience of Merriam students. Please contact Cathy Castaneda ([cathy\\_castaneda@hotmail.com](mailto:cathy_castaneda@hotmail.com)) or Catherine Smith ([catb.a.smith66@gmail.com](mailto:catb.a.smith66@gmail.com)) with any questions or suggestions about Cultural Enrichment.

The next Community News will be published on March 28, 2008.

Email articles to Sue Follett at  
[TheFollett5@verizon.net](mailto:TheFollett5@verizon.net) by  
March 21, 2008.