

September 22, 2008

MSB Parent News

The Montessori School of the Berkshires, 55 Pittsfield Road, Lenox, MA 01240 (413) 637-3662

Be sure to check the back page for important reminders and upcoming events!

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Berkshire Montessori School, Inc. admits students of any race, color, national, or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at this school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, or ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Dear Families,

We are off to a great start to the new school year. It has been a busy few weeks so I wanted to recap some things that have happened as well as highlight some events coming up.

The parent group has already met and has scheduled the fall filled with social gatherings, fundraiser, and other planning meetings.

As you have already read, the school has purchased land for the new site and we are excited to move forward with finalizing plans for site work and the building. Please be on the lookout for this information as it becomes available.

This year we also bring you Parent Education Nights. These are monthly programs where we will share the progression of lessons through the different disciplines. The first one is Thursday, September 25. We hope to see you there.

Todd Covert, Head of School

School News & Updates

First Parent Education Night!

On Thursday, September 22, from 6:30 to 7:30 pm, the school will host the first of a series of parent education nights. This first session will focus on practical life, art, sensorial activities. Childcare will not be provided.

School Closed on Friday, Sept. 26

Throughout the year school will be closed for professional development days. During this time staff may be attending workshops, preparing new lessons for the classroom, observing other programs, or meeting to discuss best practices. This first professional development day is a full-day.

Specialist Schedules

Children's House students have creative movement or yoga on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and music on Fridays.

Kindergarteners have creative modern on Mondays, yoga on Tuesdays, art on Wednesdays, Spanish on Thursdays, and music on Fridays.

Upper elementary students have creative modern class on Mondays, drama on Tuesdays (starting next week), Spanish on Wednesdays, yoga or art on Thursdays, and music on Fridays. In place of drama this month, the upper elementary students have been conducting science experiments.

Montessori Philosophy

Each newsletter we'll provide some background on aspects of Montessori philosophy. This piece focuses on the presentation of lessons to younger children.

Maria Montessori emphasizes that lessons are prepared and presented with “the necessary brevity, simplicity, and truth.” (*The Discovery of the Child*) In presenting a lesson, the teacher is essentially infringing on the child’s choice in that moment, so her presentation should be brief and to the point, so as to not dominate the child’s time unnecessarily. Furthermore, too many words can cloud the lesson’s content. “The fewer the words, the more perfect will be the lesson,” explains Montessori in *The Discovery of the Child*. “Special care should be taken in preparing the lesson to counting and picking out the words to be used.” In choosing words for the presentation of a lesson, the teacher must also take care in removing aspects of her personality, such as her own opinions, and focus on the truth of the objects being presented. “This means that the teacher forgets herself and focuses the attention of the child entirely upon the object. For the most part, the short and simple lesson should consist in an explanation of the object and of the use which the child can make of it.” (*The Discovery of the Child*)

In order to focus the child’s attention on the lesson being presented, the teacher must also give the lesson in a space that is cleared of other materials. To maintain this focus, the teacher presents the lesson with extreme exactitude, which also teaches the child the proper use of the objects. One aspect of this exacting approach is laying out the material so that it isn’t necessary to shift things around during the presentation. By moving the objects around and around, the focus of the lesson becomes dispersed as the child watches and absorbs this unnecessary movement rather than the actual content of the lesson. The beginning and ending of the presentations are equally important. To peak the child’s interest in the

lesson to be shown, the teacher can allow her enthusiasm for the work to shine through. “Whenever a teacher offers an object to a child, she should not do so coldly but rather display a lively interest in what she is doing and attract the attention of the child to it.” (*The Discovery of the Child*) And at the lesson’s conclusion, the teacher always shows the child how to return the lesson to its proper location.

Of course in any lesson presentation the teacher should also note the child’s interest and use of the object. “In the giving of such lessons the fundamental guide must be the *method of observation*, in which is included and understood the liberty of the child. So the teacher shall *observe* whether the child interests himself in the object, how he is interested in it, for how long, etc., even noticing the expression of his face.” (*The Montessori Method*) If the child does not seem ready or interested, or if he has made a mistake, the teacher should merely thank the child and perhaps even make reference to doing the lesson with the child at another time. Ultimately the teacher must not force the child’s use or interest in the lesson, for the goal of the teacher is to nurture the child’s development of liberty and spontaneous activity.

School Pictures on Oct. 7

School pictures will be on Tuesday, October 7. We will be using Susan Lacombe Photography this year for our school photos. If the weather permits, pictures will be taken outside. Susan’s all digital process offers flexibility and a quick turnaround. She offers competitive pricing and online ordering.

Parents' Group Update

The following minutes are from the Parents' Group meeting on September 11.

To kick off our year, we focused on two tasks: (1) choosing a regular time for monthly Parents' Group meetings, and (2) sketching out a calendar for the school year of events to be sponsored by the Parents' Group.

I. Monthly meetings

Regular monthly meetings will be held the second Monday of every month at 7:00 pm. During months when the second Monday is an official school holiday, the Parents' Group meeting will be held the second Tuesday of the month. In October, for instance, the second Monday of the month is Columbus Day, so the Parents' Group meeting will be held the following day, Tuesday, October 14.

We know that not everyone who wants to attend Parents' Group meetings will be able to attend on Mondays (we wish it had been possible to find a day when everyone could magically make it!) but hope parents will keep in mind that: (1) Every parent of a child at Berkshire Montessori is considered a member of the Parents' Group, whether or not s/he can attend meetings; (2) There are many other ways to participate in the Parents' Group other than attending meetings (for instance, by joining in conversations on the listserv, by attending events like potlucks or parent socials, or by helping plan fundraisers or other activities); and (3) Any parent is welcome to drop in on a meeting at any time. If you can't normally make it to meetings but find yourself available even once during the year, please join us!

Todd will send an email to the listserv if a Parents' Group meeting needs to be re-scheduled because of snow or other inclement weather. Whenever possible, the meeting will be re-scheduled for the next day (i.e. the second Tuesday of the month).

II. Calendar for 2008-2009 School Year

Last year we came up with events on a somewhat ad hoc, seat of the pants basis. This year, we'd like to try to map out the calendar a little farther in advance (but still leave some room for spontaneity). The proposed calendar is as follows:

Fall Semester (September- December)

Tuesday, September 30, 7:00 p.m.

Parents Night Out (parent-only gathering) at Moe's Tavern in Lee

Friday, November 7, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Family Potluck (bring everyone) at Lenox Community Center

November

Berkshire Grown Fundraiser* (Families will have the opportunity to order food and other goods from local companies; items will be delivered before the holidays)

* This fall, the school will also participate once again in the "For Small Hands" fundraiser where families have the opportunity to order items from a Montessori-specific catalog for themselves and directly for the school. A portion of all sales becomes a credit for the school to order materials. More information will be provided when the catalogs arrive.

Spring Semester (January - June)

Thursday, February 26

Parents Night Out (hopefully at Chocolate Springs)

TBA: Spring Family Potluck

TBA: Spring Spruce-Up (playground, garden, etc.)

TBA: Spring Fundraiser*

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Children's House & Spanish Update

Dear Parents,

My name is Patricia Pent, and I am one of the teachers in the Children's House classroom along with Joey and Rose.

I'm so excited about the start of a new school year, meeting the new children, and seeing the old children again. In the Children's House we have made some adjustments, such as having the kindergarteners help with the new children. In general, the children have been doing very well. The younger, new children are learning to adapt to the routines and rules, while the "more experienced" children have been very happy helping the new children with the routines. So we survived the first week! Things are falling into place and the children are really enjoying all the lessons. They have been very busy practicing lessons or asking to be shown new ones. We are now sailing along and I'm anticipating this to be a wonderful year.

I am also the Spanish teacher. I will be te



mariposa

some songs and words to the Children's House students, and in the afternoons I have started teaching both the kindergarten and elementary children. For the children who have been here before, the first couple of months will be a lot of reviewing. In this way I can get the other children up to where we were. Also, this review helps the children who have forgotten what they learned last year!



tortuga

In both the elementary and kindergarten groups, the children will be getting handouts of parts of the lessons that we do in class. I hope that they will use these handouts to practice their Spanish during other times. My aim is to have them all learn some basic conversational Spanish. To keep things interesting, I will also be including games, songs and silly things.



conejo

Parents' Group Minutes continued . . .

*We briefly discussed a number of different models for fundraisers (including event-based fundraisers like wine tastings or dinners or auctions as well as other sales-based fundraisers like the fall Berkshire Grown one). Please feel free to share any specific ideas or recommendations on the listserv or at future meetings.

Last year's flower bulb fundraiser (held in the fall) was successful: it not only raised money for the school but our orders also earned the school a large number of free bulbs that were planted in the gardens on school grounds. We discussed doing the bulb fundraiser again this year but it was felt that we would be better off waiting until next year so that all the free bulbs could be used to beautify the grounds of the new school location.

Other events will be held throughout the year, including a number put on directly by the school (as opposed to the Parents' Group)—for example, monthly Parent Education nights and a possible performance during which children demonstrate what they have learned in their "specialist" classes (music, drama, creative movement).

REMINDER: NEXT MONTH'S MEETING WILL BE TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14 AT 7 PM. ALL FUTURE MEETINGS WILL BE THE SECOND MONDAY OF EACH MONTH.

Packing Lunch & Empowering Your Child

By Meagan Ledendecker

Last year I heard from a couple of parents about how their early childhood-aged children were involved in the process of packing lunch. At first I felt slightly guilty. Here I am a Montessori teacher and school administrator and my own child wasn't packing her lunch for school!

It's so hard to set aside our adult need for efficiency, especially when it comes to routines that determine whether or not we get out the door on time (especially with arrivals ending at 8:15 am!). So this year Todd and I decided to sit down with Willow and figure out together how to make it possible for her to pack her own lunch.

For our family, we realized that a crucial element to this process was shifting lunch packing to the evening rather than the morning. Between waking up groggy and needing to get to school early, we just didn't have enough flexibility in the morning to allow Willow the time and space to choose and pack the foods she wanted.

So we decided that each afternoon or evening, Willow would be responsible for emptying her lunch box, and preparing the foods she needed. We helped move appropriate foods down to shelves she could reach, and made sure easy-to-open containers were also accessible.

With everything in place and guidelines established, we were ready. We also made sure that Willow understood that she was ultimately responsible for making sure she had her lunch and snack ready to take to school. The first few days took some reminding, but we stayed hands-off, and Willow quickly learned that in order to have lunch, she would need to pack it!

In order to insure there are foods Willow wants (and that we approve of), we brainstorm what foods should go on our grocery list. As Willow gets older, she can eventually take responsibility

for adding those foods to the list. But for now, we write them as she thinks of them. In the future we can also weave in budgeting, so she can learn about planning and paying for the foods she wants.



The whole process is chock full of practical life lessons and can help extend the kind of independence your child experiences at school.

To get started, I recommend the following:

1. Talk with your child beforehand to set up expectations. Also use this time to brainstorm what your child needs to make the experience successful.
2. Make sure you've discussed appropriate foods and that those foods are easy to access. Remember that you always have veto power, just be sure to use that power respectfully (e.g. "I'm not willing for you to take . . . what else would you like to have?").
3. Whenever possible, involve your child in choosing and stocking appropriate lunch and snack foods.
4. Provide containers that are child-friendly. Lock and Lock containers are one example of containers that children can open and close with ease.
5. Once you've gotten everything ready, stay out of the way! Provide help only when asked and remember the Montessori child's axiom, "Help me do it myself."

As you try this within your own family, let us know about your experiences so we can learn from each other's challenges and success!

Parenting Basics: “Preventive” & “Firefighting”

by *Bill Corbett*

I received an email the other day from a parent asking for help involving their child's use of the Internet. They had a suspicion that their son visited an inappropriate Web site and wanted to know how long they should ground him from using the computer. My response to the parent was that they had more work to do than just the grounding.

I believe that parents should be actively using two types of parenting: preventive and firefighting. Preventive parenting is made up of all the things parents should be doing all the time, especially when the children are behaving well.

Firefighting parenting is the immediate actions that must be taken when misbehavior occurs. The more time and attention parents give to preventive parenting practices, the less likely or less often misbehavior erupts, minimizing the need for firefighting parenting actions.

If you suddenly discover that your child has used the Internet inappropriately, the immediate firefighting action plan below will help. Then I'll offer you some suggestions on what the preventive parenting that is required to keep this from occurring again.

An Immediate Action Plan

At a time when you can remain calm and be in full control of your emotions and actions, ask him respectfully for his time by asking, “Is now a good time to talk with you?” If he responds with no, ask him when a better time would be and set an appointment with him. Be sure to follow through and be available for him at the predetermined time and place. This technique may sound silly if you've

never used it before, but it demonstrates respect for him and his time. When we demonstrate respect for our children, their space, thoughts, ideas, and time, it models for them what respect looks like and they will feel respected by us and be more cooperative.

When the discussion finally occurs, begin by getting to his eye level. This in itself also makes the child feel respected and valued, and more likely to respect you in return.

Next, come from an informational position that you are aware that someone was on an inappropriate Web site and you are not pleased about it. You want to be very clear that you are in charge of the use of your (or the family's) computer and you will not allow it to be used for inappropriate uses in any way.

State this as a declaration and then

end the discussion, especially if there is remote chance that it wasn't him. The firefighting is now complete; you stated the problem and set a boundary.

An Ongoing Plan for Success

Now its time to focus on the preventive parenting practices and this can be done as soon as you're ready. Begin by placing the computer used by the kids in a common area that you can regulate and monitor at any time. Computers should not be located in bedrooms. When I bring up this topic at my seminars, parents often complain about not wanting a computer in the dining room or living room. Single parents usually express their frustration over not having enough room in their small apartments to allow for a computer in a common area. I encourage them to realize that keeping their children safe is more important than Feng Shui or organized living spaces while they are



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Parenting Basics . . . (continued)

raising children at home. When I was raising mine, we decided to place the computer in a small sunroom located off of the kitchen. I would have definitely preferred using that room for relaxing, plants, and letting in the sun, but we knew that our focus was our kids for now and we'd have more time later for setting up the house the way we wanted.

Once the location is set, time frames and rules should be established for use. I suggest that each child be given a limited amount of time for non-school use of the computer and this limit should be monitored and enforced by the parent. If these changes are new for your home, be prepared for objections and opposition. Don't get angry with your children and let them vent their frustration. It's also important to set up consequences if time frames are deliberately exceeded or if rules are ignored.

Some parents may have situations in which the kids are home alone and use of the computer cannot be monitored. Although some might disagree, I suggest purchasing filtering or monitoring software that runs on the computer and records the user's actions. Easy to use software programs such as Spector PRO or eBlaster from SpectorSOFT record screen shots of the computer every few seconds for viewing later or can be emailed to the parent. You can find this software at <http://www.software4parents.com>.

During the week, our children usually arrived home before we did. I wanted them to have access to the computer so I purchased and installed Spector PRO myself. In one of our weekly family meetings, I revealed to them that I would be installing monitoring software to keep them safe and not because I didn't trust them. I told them that at the end of each day before I retired to bed, I would examine the reports that showed me all the internet activity for the day, including chat conversations, emails written and read, and Web sites visited.

They weren't happy about it and voiced their objections that it wasn't fair, but reading the reports each night gave me a feeling of comfort that they were safe. It also motivated them to discipline themselves on their appropriate use of the computer. Occasionally I would read a warning to a friend from one of my kids in a chat or email: "Please don't use any swears, my Dad is reading this!"

Bill Corbett teaches discipline classes for parents and professionals. He has three grown children, two grandchildren, and lives with his wife Elizabeth near Hartford, Connecticut. You can send your questions to him at <bill@billcorbett.com>.

Tips & Tricks

When teaching Grace & Courtesy at school, we demonstrate how to apologize sincerely. This first means never apologizing unless we really, truly feel sorry. A flip and insincere, "I'm sorry," really doesn't address the hurt that another person may be feeling. So we often help children ask for what would help them feel better. Some children might prefer to have a hug, or to do an activity together, rather than just hearing a rote, "I'm sorry."

However, if someone does sincerely want to say, "I'm sorry," for something that happened, we also teach the other person to respond with, "Thank you for the apology," or "I accept your apology." All too often individuals respond to an apology by saying, "That's okay." But it's never okay to hurt someone, intentionally or not. Instead, we want to help children understand that an apology means the other person recognizes our feelings and thus we can thank the person for or accept that recognition. Try it at home. It's a subtle shift that feels so good.

In Appreciation . . .

Thank you to everyone who brought in cloth napkins for the classroom. We are also immensely grateful to Pine Cone Hill for their generous contribution of well over 100 cloth napkins!

We again thank Country Carpets in Housatonic, for donating carpet samples to the school. The children use these carpet seats when they work on the floor.

We appreciate all the help with laundry on the weekends. There are two "slots" for laundry sign-up so that the pile can be distributed between two families each weekend. Also, we welcome snacks and fresh flowers on Mondays. Soon we'll distribute a wish-list of snack/cooking ingredients for our cooking days!

Thanks as well to Kehr Maldonado and Jamie Berg for watching the afterschool children on Monday afternoons so we can have all staff attend our weekly staff meeting.

Check out our Wish List in the "How You Can Help" section of BerkshireMontessori.org!

The Montessori School
of the Berkshires

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Remember to visit the
Montessori Blog for updates
about what is happening on
a daily basis!

www.BerkshireMontessori.org

Upcoming Events & Reminders

Thursday, September 25, 6:30-7:30 pm

Parent education night on practical life, art, and sensorial lessons. Parents only.

Friday, September 26

School closed for teacher in-service day.

Tuesday, October 7

School pictures.

Monday, October 13

School closed for Columbus Day.

Thursday, October 23, 6:30-7:30 pm

Community meeting. Parents only.

Friday, October 24, 11:00am-12:00pm

Family sharing day. Detailed schedule will be provided.

Friday, October 24

Half-day. Dismissal at noon.