



Morris School Newsletter

March 2010

Calendar Events

March 2—Dr. Seuss Day

March 15—Nutshell

March 23—PK Orientation

March 25— Science Fair

March 23— Report Cards

March 30 & 31—Pre-K Screening

March 29 & April 5— Kindergarten Orientation (see page 2)

April 6 & 7—Parent/Teacher Spring Conferences

April 7—1/2 Day

April 8 & 9— Professional Development 1/2 Days

April 19—23 April Vacation

Last Day of School is now June 21st due to Snow Days

From the Principal's Office:

We are in a stretch of the school year that can seem long to students. On the other hand, teachers begin to worry that not enough school year remains to cover everything they'd like to. The winter can drag on and the routines of the classroom and the school day no longer seem fresh.

Teachers **in classrooms** respond by using different projects to keep kids engaged in their learning. Our fifth grade just concluded their Social Justice Plays-dramatic interpretations of important people and events in history. Some fourth grade students recently completed an activity supported by parent volunteers that combined math, culture, and cooking. Students baked scones for an upcoming British tea event to

enhance a study focus on Canada. Hands-on activities like the creation of "Body Vests"

in Mrs. Slosek's first grade class keep learning fun. Lots of other great learning activities are happening around the school: famous people essays in grade 2, the creation of a "caring quilt" in Mrs. Hall-Jordan and Ms. Kennedy's third grade and students throughout the younger grades celebrate a really big deal: the hundredth day!



At home, the demands of the school year may feel a bit more during this sea-

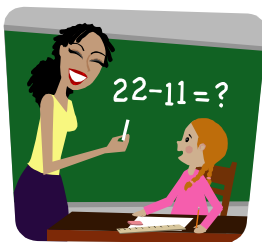
son. Parents are challenged to **balance the time** demands of basketball, skiing, dance, instrument practice, etc. with school work and less structured but equally important play time. As a parent, I know this can be tough. As kids get older I remind parents to seek balance between you being the constant taskmaster and allowing kids to develop their own time-management and prioritizing abilities. Many parents find this easier by identifying a regular time and place to do school work. Make it a routine, and during that half hour to an hour, school work is the only option. Stay close so you can help if needed, but seek to build independence. Praise your child when they "take care of business" (continued)

Mathman visits Morris:

A small but enthusiastic group of parents and students joined us for our first Family Math Night in January led by Mathman, Tom Schersten. His visit concluded a professional development experience with our staff to make math instruction more accessible and successful for more learners by using math tools.

Tom's work during the school day with fourth and fifth grade teachers included the teaching of demonstration lessons using math tools or "manipulatives" to teach concepts that the grades were currently working on. The demo lessons were preceded by meetings with teacher teams to discuss the importance of using these

tools to reach learners that may struggle with the language involved in learning math. Tom's recent professional development work with Lenox teachers included several sessions with middle and high school staff. He will be returning later in the year to continue his work which is funded by an ARRA Stimulus Grant. TL



KINDERGARTEN ORIENTATION AND REGISTRATION

Monday, March 29 & Monday, April 5
we will have kindergarten orientation to invite parents and future kindergarteners to learn more about our kindergarten program. These sessions will take place from 2:00 pm until 2:45pm on consecutive Mondays. The orientation will provide an opportunity to meet the kindergarten staff, the principal, the school nurse and a representative of the PTO.

Children will meet their future classmates and explore the activities of kindergarten. Parents are encouraged to bring the students to both sessions. At this event, we will also give a preview of the registration screen days scheduled for May 4, 5 & 6th.



This event will allow you to sign up for the screening when teachers, health staff and specialists will be looking at early communication and language abilities, fine and gross motor abilities, and social and group skills. We look forward to seeing you on **March 29th and April 5th**.



FROM THE MUSIC ROOM

The new piano has arrived! It is in the music room, awaiting an initial tuning. I will have our debut with this beautiful KAWAI instrument at our next Morning Meeting. Thank you to everyone who helped by fundraising and making donations. Our new piano should service the Morris community for many years to come.

In the past few weeks, I have been able to record classes in grades 1-4. If you would like a mp3 recording of your child's class, send me an e-mail with your child's class and grade and I will be glad to send one off to you. Chorus continues until June. This is a perfect time for new members to join us. Grade 2&3 meet Tuesday mornings from 8:00—8:35. Grades 4&5 meet Thursday mornings from 8:00—8:35.

Important Dates:

May 25 K-1 Music Night, 6:30 pm. More details to follow

June 9—Band and Choral Concert 7pm

MORRIS PTO IN ACTION!

The Morris PTO has been doing a lot to support learning and family community involvement at our school. A PTO Family Game Night at the end of January was fun for a good number of students and families. In February our PTO hosted a parent talk on the topic of bullying with guidance counselor John Evans. In March the PTO will sponsor two cultural events at the school including a performance by Latin-american music group Surcari on March 3 and, for our youngest audiences, a performance of the play "Pirates" by the Nutshell Playhouse on March 15. Later in the school year our PTO will be involved in some other school events like the Science Fair, the fifth grade outing and Field Day.

Our PTO supports Morris in many ways and you can support our PTO by participating in the ButterBraid Fundraiser. A delicious way to support your school!

Butterbraid fundraiser going on now through March 8!



Reading News!

In our last newsletter, I discussed the first key area of reading instruction according to the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, the ability to identify, blend and manipulate speech sounds. Phonics, the second key element, is the matching of these sounds to letters and understanding that there are consistent sound-letter correspondences. Since approximately 84% of all written words are phonetically regular, teaching children phonics

in an explicit and systematic way will allow children greater access to print and improve their ability to spell. Next year, we will be introducing a new phonics program to our K—2 grade classes called Foundations, a systematic, sequential, multisensory program.

To help children become familiar with letters and their corresponding sounds, try some of the following activities at home with your children:

* Foster print awareness by reading with your child. This will allow your child

to associate written words with spoken sounds and to better recognize letter shapes.

* Play alphabet games. For example, name an animal and ask your child to tell you the letter that begins the animal's name.

* Encourage children to write stories and to spell words by matching letters to the sounds that they hear.

* Sing the Alphabet Song while pointing at the letters of the alphabet to encourage letter recognition and letter naming.

Mrs. Fisher, Reading Specialist

From the Principal's Office cont'd

by themselves.

Here in the **administration office**, the work of finalizing budgets, writing grants and selecting a new superintendent trudges ahead while the school day and its demands buzz by. Both the Special Education Department and the Title I Program just concluded a rather involved audit conducted by the state. This is done every six years to assure that federal funds are being used as they are supposed to be used. This work, while rather dull and not all that newsletter-worthy, does give me the opportunity to recognize some hard-working members of our staff: kudos to Cindy Dinan and her SPED team and thanks to Lynn Schmitter and the office team of Jill Barnoski, Sue Hanson, and Kathy Koscher.

Another fact of this time of year is that we are entering **MCAS time**. MCAS stands for Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System and every child in the state who attends public

schools will start taking the tests almost annually starting in grade 3. The tests are used primarily by schools to evaluate their instructional programs and assess which students might need a higher level of support. Our state is known to have some of the highest standards and highest performance rates in the country and our district typically rates in the "high" or "very high" performance range on MCAS. March and May are MCAS months and during these months I will be asking parents to pay extra attention making sure students eat a good breakfast and get plenty of sleep. Besides some practice in test taking skills and review of topics that haven't been covered in a while, we don't really "prepare" for MCAS.

I hope you enjoy our March Newsletter and as always I invite your calls or e-mails with questions or comments.

TL

Morris Newsletter to Go Paperless

Secretary Jill Barnoski is building her e-mail list of parents and community members so that we can send the newsletter and many communications via e-mail instead of using paper. Please keep the office up to date with your current e-mail.

Pennies for Peace

Please remember to collect your pennies for the fifth grade! Our pennies can help other children less fortunate than us. Please bring in pennies to your teacher and/or to any of the fifth grade teachers.



SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH INFORMATION

The Lenox School Committee has appointed a 12-member Advisory Committee to assist them in reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and helping to select an outstanding Superintendent of Schools to begin on July 1, 2010. The vacancy has been advertised in recent weeks with a deadline of March 8 for applications. Preliminary interviews will begin during the week of March 23 and it is hoped that a final selection will be made by mid-April.

One important step in the search process is to gather opinions and viewpoints from people in the schools and community about the knowledge, skills and attributes most desirable when searching for a new leader. A series of focus group sessions has been arranged for this purpose.

These focus group meetings will be held on Tuesday, March 9, 2010:

School administrators	12:30 to 1:45 P.M.	Superintendents Office
Middle-High School teachers and staff	2:30 to 3:15 P.M.	Lenox Memorial Middle-High School
Elementary teachers and staff	3:30 to 4:45 P.M.	Morris Elementary School
Parents, students, residents	6:00 to 7:30 P.M.	Lenox Town Hall

Each focus group session will be conducted by Dr. William Erickson, a search consultant from NESDEC, who will also answer any questions people may have about the search process. Results of these meetings will be reported in the form of a candidate profile to advise the School Committee in the selection of applicants to be interviewed.

Everyone in the community is invited to participate in one of the focus group sessions listed above, and to bring ideas and suggestions that will help guide the Superintendent selection process. The School Committee will greatly appreciate the contributions, thoughts and opinions of Lenox residents and school employees.

Emergency Call List

Please let us know if any of your emergency contact numbers should be changed or removed from our calling list. Many thanks!!

Lost & Found

Please put your child's name inside each piece of clothing, especially jackets and sweatshirts. We give away hundreds of dollars worth of your clothing each year and a simple name on the label would allow us to send it back to you!

PRE-K SCREENING & ORIENTATION

The Lenox Special Education Department offers an annual screening for Lenox and Lenox Dale three and four-year-old children who will not be entering kindergarten in September 2010. The purpose of the screening is to identify children who may have substantial needs in speech/language, cognitive, emotional/social or physical development. Identified children will be further evaluated and may be eligible to receive special education services prior to entering school. Research studies indicate that early identification

and remediation of potential learning problems improves school performance in later years. Parents who would like to have their child considered for the preschool program as a typical (non-special needs) child, MUST have their child participate in this screening.

Orientation Meeting - March 23

All parents of three and four-year-olds are encouraged to attend an orientation meeting on Tuesday, March 23, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. at Morris Elementary School. The meeting will provide an opportunity for parents to meet the screening team and to examine screening materials.

Screening - March 30 & 31, 2010

The screening will be held on March 30 and 31st from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Morris School. Appointments for screening are required. Please call the Special Education Office beginning March 8, 2010 at 413-637-5571 to make an appointment.

All families listed on the 2009 Lenox Town Census with children in this age range will also be contacted directly by mail. If you have a three or four-year-old and you do not receive a direct mailing by March 12, 2010, or if you have any questions concerning the screening process, please call the Special Education Office at 413-637-5571.

Service Club is on the Move!

The Service Club got off to a great start with 47 enthusiastic members from the fourth and fifth grade. These students have chosen to give up one recess per week to provide a service within the Morris School Community. They can be found doing various activities such as helping kindergartners in the cafeteria, and during music class, putting mail into mailboxes for teachers, playing outside with younger students, helping with boots, mittens, snow pants and jackets and helping to tidy up the art room. With six weeks completed, the members have given about 4,000 minutes of volunteer service to the school community. Also, at our February meeting, the members made beautiful Valentine cards for the senior citizens that visit the Lenox Community Center. What great role models! The next service club meeting is Tuesday, March 2nd.



After School Pick Up

Occasional snarls at pick up time and a few potentially unsafe conditions have prompted us to issue this reminder about pick-up at the back door: Students in grades 2-5 are brought to the back door for pick-up at dismissal time. Parents arriving in cars to pick up should form one line of cars at 3:10, leaving plenty of room to loop around and exit again. As your car approaches the door your child will be released. To keep everyone safe please observe these pick-up guidelines:

1. Be patient. Do not pass vehicles lined up to pick-up students. Having to wait three minutes or so in the name of safety is worth it!
2. Don't linger after picking up. Visiting in the pick-up line slows up the process for everyone and could prompt other drivers to pass unsafely.
3. If you are a Lenox resident and find p.m. car pick-up a hassle, re-consider the bus. Most of the p.m. routes have plenty of room for more students and two buses drop-off at the Community Center. Call us for more bus info.

Thanks for your cooperation! TL

Science Fair

The Morris School PTO is having a spring Science & Technology Fair on March 25th.

The projects are to be made by the children during their nonschool time and will be their own creations. This is a great opportunity for students to showcase their interests, observations, research, results, what has been learned and what questions remained. Participation is voluntary. Stop by the Main Office if you didn't receive the packet of information on this fun event!

