



## MUSCOTA NEW SCHOOL

"Turn the World Around"

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November 20, 2006

Dear Families,

My letter last month was filled with all the upcoming plans; they have all now begun, plus new programs coming up.

~ The **first early dismissal Wed.** was held on Oct. 25; kids were all picked up on time and the staff was delighted to be able to work as a large group for a 2-hour block. The biggest undertaking for the Empowerment Schools this year is designing our own periodic assessments. That is, how can we somewhat formulize and then more publicly document the way in which all teachers across all subjects and grades assess what the children are learning and how to meet their emerging needs regularly throughout the year. Individually teachers are very aware of the need to continually evaluate their students' progress as well as learning gaps, but we are also extremely aware of and sensitive to the building pressure to test and categorize everything children do in school. Keeping the balance to ensure that kids have a chance to grow in all areas of development, not merely the basic academics. Several staff members attend regular Design Team planning meetings in both Math and English Language Arts to work on these more open-ended assessments. At our first afternoon professional development time the staff worked in small groups to brainstorm the ways in which different teachers currently assess and record student learning and how that may change depending on the subject or grade.

**The next early dismissal Wed. will be on November 29. A sign-up sheet for Project Kids childcare that afternoon will come up this week as well.**

~ **Muscota Arts Afterschool** began on November 2. It took longer than I had anticipated to organize the groups of children and arrange for meeting space in our tight, overused building. I expect that next September the program will begin in September, but now that we are running the program for about 65 children every Tuesday and Thursday, it is going great! Children are taking Puppets and Playwrights, Drumming, Tap, Ballet, Chorus and Musical Theater, plus upper grade students being able to work with Ellen on Internet research and homework support in the library. For now all classes are full. Anyone still interested (grades 2-5) in still signing up will go on a waiting list.

~ Our academic Extended Day program for grades 1-5 is also meeting with classroom teachers on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays until 3:40. Siblings waiting in school during that time join the Puppets and Playwrights group. Teachers are making the decisions about which children they want to work with at that time, and this can change throughout the school year. If you have any information about work done at that time and where your child fits into this extra tutoring time, speak directly to your teacher.

Also in the last month:

~ **School Directories** have gone home with address and phone number for each child in the school this year, organized alphabetically by school and by class. If you have not received your copy just let Denise or Bree know and we will send a copy home to you. If your family information is incorrect we also need to know because that means the information in the Dept. of Education computer and the school emergency info may be incorrect.

~ Thanks to Mandy Ehrlich (Lilly in Lesia's class) for organizing the **Parent Handbook**. There was a trimmed form of this guide when the school first opened. An updated and expanded version has been much wanted and needed for the past 10 years. With Mandy's encouragement it was possible to lay out everything we thought parents would want to know about the school they have chosen for their child's education, along with information that we need you to know in order for us to run a safe, effective school. Due to the difficulty in finding a parent or business to assist with the copying costs, we only sent a copy of the Parent Handbook to K/1 families. If you would like a copy and did not get one, again, just let someone in the office know – or email me or Denise – and we will backpack it.

~ Most of the classrooms have decided to replace the meeting area rugs with colorful rubber floor mats. We are hoping that this will decrease the exposure to dust for asthmatic children. It took many weeks of measuring and designing, but the floors are in place and look great. There are also several displays of the work the kids did in working out their class orders – see the bulletin board on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor as well as the kindergarten posters outside of their classrooms.

~ Almost all families have had their **Family Conferences**, with the last few finishing up this week. You have reviewed your child's and teacher's goals for the next few months, as well as been able to share your expectations for your child at school. Your copy of the completed goal sheet will come home next week, along with the feedback from the Arts team and any service provider that works with your child. If you have not made the time yet for a conference, remember that it is an expectation that every family meets with their teacher at least twice a year. If you are having any difficulty connecting with your teacher let me or Denise know and we will assist. It makes the biggest difference to your child's success that the family takes an active interest in his/her work.

~ The school received the parent packets for the **English Language Arts test** results for the exam taken last January in grades 3, 4 and 5 (current 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders). Everyone whose child took this exam last winter should have received this envelope about 2 weeks ago. We are still awaiting the math test packets. I have the score if anyone wants to know that now. I have mentioned this several times in previous letters but it is worth writing again. I am outraged that first kids and families are put through the pressure and tension of taking these high-stakes tests with all the threats about failure and hold-over, and then that same system allows 9 months to pass without informing those families of the results. The schools also do not get any breakdown of information that presumably these tests could provide in planning for the specific academic needs of their students. It is the contention of many schools, Muscota included, that these tests do not provide any reliable feedback on academic growth for any child, and the sloppy and unprofessional way in which the multi-million dollar business that runs the testing responds to the families and schools would confirm those objections.

On a more positive note, there is a lot coming up that is worth getting excited about at school –

~ Girls in grades K-3 are invited to join one of the **Girl Scouts troops** run by parents and teacher volunteers. Meetings will be at the school on Friday afternoons beginning in December. Registration is this week, but there will probably be another round later on when interest spreads. Let us know in the office if you are interested but did not respond last week. Parent Mandy Ehrlich brought this idea to us; she did all the research and preparations. If anyone is interested in any other special clubs for kids (maybe a 4-H group for boys) I am always open to hearing about other possibilities.

~ **Scholastic Book Fair will be held at the school the week of November 27-** as soon as we come back from Thanksgiving break. Look for the flier letting you know when your child's class will come to the fair. Denise also needs parents to volunteer their time to run the fair. It is completely supervised by parent volunteers, with profits turned back into books for the classrooms.

### **Other issues for parents:**

**Bathroom Graffiti:** There have been some incidents of writing on bathroom walls in both the girls and boys 3<sup>rd</sup> floor bathrooms lately, along with the trashing of toilet paper. Each class already has a bathroom caddy for toilet tissue and soap so that none of this is kept in the bathroom. Teachers are very careful about who goes to the bathroom, how often and with whom. We want the children to take on the responsibility for coming and going down the hall, but recent events have made us concerned. There have not been a lot of problems, but it is very disturbing to the adults and kids when our shared space is not respected. Please speak to your child about the need to act appropriately at all times.

**Homework Help:** The NY Public Library has a helpful on-line site to assist kids with research and information doing their homework. It is **homeworknyc.org**.

**Health Concerns:** Nan Berlind, our very attentive school nurse, has been following up on all health issues to make sure that teachers are knowledgeable about what their students might need.

This includes having emergency medication on hand for chronic asthmatics or children with severe food allergies. We need written documentation from your child's doctor to provide medication. If your child has any health condition that may affect him/her in school, be sure that both your teacher and the nurse are informed. We are also still finding out about special services (occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech) that some children have received in past schools that should be in place now. Remember that if you don't tell us about this, we don't know it. Do not depend upon the Dept. of Education to inform us. It is also hurtful to your child to hide special service information from us; we want to be sure we are giving your child every possible chance to do well and we need information from you, the parents, to do so.

~ **Parent Tours for Sept. 2007** are being reserved now. Tours begin in January. If you know anyone who might be interested in Muscota, they must take a tour first; that is how you get an application. Have them call the school now to sign-up or just stop by. For families who have a younger child for kindergarten next year (born in 2002), we have an automatic sibling admission policy, but we do need to know that the other child exists, so let Denise or me know that as well.

~ Under the federal law NCLB, all schools receiving Title I funding, which is the federal money the school receives based on the lunch forms we asked you to fill out earlier this year, must notify families that they have a right to know about their child's teacher's certification. All Muscota teachers are fully certified to be teaching their subject/grade, but I am requiring to formally inform each family of the law. The notice attached to this letter explains this further. If anyone needs additional information about NCLB, feel free to contact me directly.

Well, that's should bring us up to date – a lot of business to cover. I hope to get into more curriculum and educational information in future letters, along with sending home useful articles about the work your child is doing every day. Our classrooms are so rich in content; hopefully that was clear to all of you who visited the school last week.

Enjoy the coming holiday with family and loved ones. This will be my granddaughter's first Thanksgiving – first parade too. She is too young to actually eat the turkey and fixins' but it is still a momentous occasion for my family. Find the moments with your kids that make this weekend –and all others- so special.

Sincerely,

Upcoming:

No School: Thursday and Friday, Nov. 23 and 24  
Scholastic Book Fair week of November 27  
\_ day school 11:40 dismissal November 29