

# K-K News

September 12, 2008

Dear K-K Families:

A wonderful thing happened yesterday: we had a full length recess. While this should not be a shocking event, it is significant because of what it represents in the classroom. Our recess is scheduled at the end of the morning, for reasons I will discuss at Back to School Night next Wednesday. Unfortunately, having recess at the end of the morning means that when we release students early, or activities in the classroom take longer than anticipated, or packing bags at the end of the day takes a long time, our recess time is shortened. Yesterday, several things clicked. The children really worked at listening effectively during group instruction times, thus allowing us to move through activities more quickly than we had so far. At the end of the day, backpacks and folders were gathered with greater efficiency than they had been previously, which allowed us more time on the playground. As I wrote last week, learning routines is a tremendous part of these first weeks of school. As the routines move more quickly, we are afforded more time for the things we all want to do -- including recess!

In many ways, the whole year in kindergarten is spent helping children learn how to learn in a group. At this age, children are naturally quite egocentric and learning how to listen, focus on a speaker, and tune out other distractions are major challenges. We will continue to work on these skills all year. You should know, however, that many of the routines and rituals that we are establishing in the first weeks of school create the framework in which children learn those skills.

In addition to learning where materials in the classroom belong and how to sign in each morning, our social curriculum is in full swing in the classroom. Social skill instruction occurs both formally and informally. You may have noticed that I am stopping the children as they enter the room in the morning. Communicating that I expect them to make eye contact and greet me is one small but critical aspect of social skill instruction that occurs during the day. During choice time, which occurs four mornings per week in our classroom, the children are constantly interacting with peers and

solving age appropriate social problems about taking turns, sharing materials, and leadership in play. Julie Felo and I observe, interact, and support children as they build social skills during this time of the day. Similarly, we interact with children at snack time and line up as they negotiate table selection, line order, and so on. Our job is to support children as they learn how to interact with one another appropriately.

The more formal part of our social curriculum is called Open Circle. This is part of the Social Competency Program developed at the Stone Center at Wellesley College. If your child mentioned moving chairs and tables to you last week, he/she was not kidding. As a group, we determined that the best place for us to have regular class meetings in a circle was in the middle of the room, so we devised a plan for moving the tables and chairs to enable that to happen. During Open Circle, we teach social skills such as listening respectfully, giving and receiving compliments, and solving problems effectively. Last week, our class worked to develop a set of rules for the classroom. We have created a classroom contract of desired behaviors, and the children have agreed to: Be safe. Listen to the teachers. Work together and help each other. Take care of each other and classroom materials. They have all signed a classroom contract agreeing to these rules, and we will use them as the foundation for solving problems in the classroom this year.

### **In other news...**

- In addition to our social curriculum work this week, the children have begun work in our mathematics program. There is a handout in the home folders today that describes some of the work we do in this first unit of the year.
- In science, we talked about what scientists do and the children drew and wrote about a scientist. In the weeks ahead, we will be working to develop the descriptive vocabulary that is so important to sharing scientific discoveries in class.
- We have begun work on a class book for which we are interviewing each child on his/her line leader day. This gives the children practice at asking good "getting-to-know-you" questions; listening effectively

to a peer; and writing/reading as we record our interview results in the book.

- Please remember that book orders are due by Monday, September 15. Directions for ordering can be found in the newsletter section of the classroom web site.
- I have noticed a large number of absences for dental and doctor's appointments in the past eight days. While I recognize the difficulty of scheduling appointments, I would appreciate it if you could make every effort to make these appointments outside of school time when possible, especially when the children are not staying for full days yet. Midmorning departures from the classroom are disruptive, and the missed activities are hard for children to make up this early in the year. Thank you for your help with this.
- Please remember that next Wednesday night is Back to School Night. I am looking forward to sharing more information about the curriculum, and the schedule, with you then. (If you are not coming from another classroom presentation that evening, please aim to arrive at 7:15. There is much to cover, and we really want to begin at 7:20.)

I hope that everyone that attends the ice cream social tonight has a wonderful time. Again, I am sorry not to be able to join you, but Julie (Mrs. Felo) is hoping to see many of you there.

Enjoy the weekend with your children!

Sincerely,

*Lynn Kaminski*

