

First Friday Notes

December 4, 2009

Dates to remember:

December 5th 7-10pm - Coffee House Open Mic Night @ the Westminster Institute

December 7th 6:00pm-7:00pm– Daisy Scout Sign-ups for K-1 @ Westminster West School

December 7, 14 & 21 – Westminster West Ice Skating

December 7th- 6-7pm – East Wing Parent Association Meeting

December 8th 6:30pm-7:30pm – Westminster West PTO Meeting

December 9th - 6:30pm - 7:30 pm Westminster West PTO meeting is Tuesday,

December 15th – All School Meeting –

Center School Hall Mall

Okemo representative will be present to fit students with Ski & snowboard equipment.

December 15th - School Board Meeting 7PM at the Center School

December 24-January 3rd - No School -December Recess

Dear Parents and Families,

We want to thank you for your time in meeting with us at the end of our first Trimester to discuss your child's progress. It is critical that teachers and parents work together to benefit children in the academic and social development. We are fortunate as a school to have a community of parents so willing to engage in the discussion and to collaborate with us. It is our goal to listen to you - to use your knowledge to plan educational experiences that meet your child's specific learning needs.

We are often asked by parents, "What can we do at home?" While we recognize that children are often different at school than they are at home, we appreciate the question as it gives us the opportunity to ask you for help. Beginning in kindergarten we ask parents to make reading a priority at home. Certainly with our youngest learners a caring adult reading to a child is the best way to develop literacy - and many of you are reading to your children before they ever come to us. As children advance through the grades we ask that reading become an independent activity - with children expected to read daily/nightly. This cannot be stressed enough - the more children read - the better readers they become. So, setting aside thirty minutes every day for a child to sit and read is a huge help. Teachers send home book bags - or children choose books to read independently at home - and these books are generally chosen to be at the right reading level for the child.

Currently the leadership team is discussing homework across the school. There are a wide variety of views on homework - with some saying that elementary age children should not be required to do homework, while others want homework every night. Most of our teachers expect children to complete assignments at home that are connected to the in-class learning. The role of parents in this is to provide a space and time for the work to be completed - and some teachers request that a parent sign-off to indicate the reading and assignments were completed. This communication is often the evidence to the student that parents and teachers are working together. We expect that by the end of this school year we will be presenting a recommendation to the school board regarding homework across the school.

During the last two months we have been working to meet the requirements of being identified as a *school in need of improvement*. Teachers have taken on the work of "progress monitoring" on a regular basis - and using this information to meet children' needs. They also use this information to report to parents regarding specifics about students in reading and math. We have begun additional teaching blocks, which we are calling "Mix and Match" (or M&M time) where we are grouping students according to their needs as developing readers. Adults are matched with these groups who have the skills to challenge and extend student learning. We continually review our effectiveness. In January teachers will be writing reports as grade level teams, analyzing how well we are doing in meeting student needs. The Westminster Community should be proud of the work the teachers are doing - it is both exciting and daunting as we strive to improve our school.

The month of December can be a stressful month for many children (and adults) with less sunlight each day, holidays, and the demands of the end of the year. We will strive during this time to keep our schedule as close to "normal" as possible. It is important to note that while we do not celebrate - cannot celebrate - religious holidays as school sponsored events, we do use teachable moments and read children's books that highlight the many world cultures. Teachers provide opportunity for children to share and have discussions about diversity in our community. We welcome these opportunities. Many classrooms take time to celebrate community - and our accomplishments during this time of year. We take care to respect the views of families and the right to religious freedom. Public school teachers can never be in the position of presenting religious teachings or requiring students to practice/celebrate one religion over another. While this may be a change from "when we were in school" it is our responsibility under federal law - and as educators.

We thank you for supporting our educational endeavors as we pursue our mission to *teach all children to become competent, caring citizens in a changing world through a challenging curriculum and supportive environment.*

Steven Tullar, Principal

Proposed Bus Route Change

During the last few weeks we have been working on a change of bus routes that would impact the time some students arrive home. We would like parent feedback on the proposed change. For years, we have had five bus routes with Archie Gleason running a second route in the afternoon. The students who ride this bus wait for twenty minutes after dismissal begins before getting on the bus. We are proposing the following:

Archie's 2nd will become "Archie's" - Bus 4- with all children living on Westminster Heights, Back Westminster Road, Davidson Hill, Rt. 121 to the Bellows Falls Village including those on Church Ave. This change will mean these students arrive home approximately twenty minutes earlier than they do now.

Jennifer' bus will stay the same with the addition of children living on Route 5 from School Street to the Interstate Access Ramp (children who formerly rode Archie's first). This change means these children will arrive home approximately twenty minutes later.

This proposed change would begin in January. The school board will make a final decision at the December 15 meeting (7PM at the Center School). Your input is welcomed. Please call Steve Tullar at 722-3241.

Winter Sports Update

The dates have been confirmed with Okemo; February 1 & 8th, March 1, 8, 15 & 22nd. The Clinics for Okemo are scheduled for December 12th or 13th. **Please remember that Registration forms are due ASAP from all Students.** If you have any questions feel free to call Mandy at 463-9409 or email her at mwalsh@wnesu.net.

Kindergarten News

Last week's Thanksgiving Feast was a wonderful success! Many thanks to all of you who were able to join us for this special school event. Your contributions of delicious stuffing were greatly enjoyed and appreciated (NOTE: we still have 3 unclaimed casserole pans). Special thanks to the fabulous group of parent volunteers that helped us prepare the 50 pounds of mashed potatoes. They were simply *smashing!*

As we continue to enjoy the last remnants of autumn the children have reflected upon our varied experiences and have written and illustrated two beautiful class books that honor and appreciate what has been a most beautiful fall season. Paula's class has written I Am Thankful For... and Valerie's class has written Fall. Drop by for a good read.

December marks the beginning of SPANISH WITH PAQUI! Originally from Spain, Paqui (also known as Emilio's mother) has just begun to teach us songs and games from her wonderful Spanish repertoire. The children will learn simple counting songs, color and animal songs, name games and more. *Bienvenido, Paqui!*

North Wing News

Many thanks to all who contributed time, food and supplies for our Thanksgiving Feast. As always, it was a wonderful gathering of family, friends and community members for a delicious feast.

We are starting to collect items for the Hall Mall which will be held later this month. More to come.

Clubs started on Thursday. Students will participate in clubs twice a week through the month of December.

As part of a Geography unit, North Wing second graders have been exploring the question "Where do you live?" We found that there can be many different answers to this question. We started small, thinking about our homes and continued branching out to bigger and bigger areas. Each student created a picture of their home. Then they made detailed drawings of their neighborhoods including their street names. We read about different types of towns and learned a bit about suburban areas. Each student colored in the different states they have visited on a US map. We also learned about some of the symbols of our country. After discovering the different continents on a world map, we began learning several songs to help us remember the names of the continents and oceans in our world.

East Wing News

The East Wing would like to remind parents of our next **Parent Association Meeting**. We will be meeting on **MONDAY, Dec. 7th** from 6-7:00. Our meeting agenda includes a discussion of 4 Blocks Reading Program and planning for Gift Making Day. Please come to learn how you can help with this special event that will be held on Friday, Dec. 18th. See you there! Please return your child's Field Trip Permission Form for our trip to the Montshire Museum on December 11th.

Fifth Grade News

Both fifth grade classrooms are researching Native Americans. We are taking different approaches to our studies: 5G is studying watersheds, focusing on the Connecticut River and including studies of Native Americans who live along the river. They have written letters to chamber of commerce contacts to find out more about the towns that are situated along the Ct River. 5PM is continuing to study explorers to North America. Our Native American studies revolve around the questions, What native peoples did these explorers and pirates come into contact with? Who was already living in the land where the explorers landed? How can you be credited with discovering a land that was already inhabited by others? 5PM will be publishing books that include maps, research and opinions about exploration.

Sixth Grade News

The sixth graders did an awesome job on our Thanksgiving Feast. They spent the morning setting up the gym for 200 people. Some spent the morning chopping and cooking root vegetables. A big thanks to Paul Harlow for providing the vegetables. Thanks to all the parents who came for conferences and by next week we will be 100%. People were introduced to our new report cards which were standard based and to the testing we have done this fall. Our parent group is working on ideas for an end of the year trip. In our classes we have done extensive research on Harriet Tubman and our now typing our reports by organizing our notes. We are also working on a second narrative. In the afternoon we participate in M & M which is a mixing and matching of 5th and 6th graders to work on various reading skills and strategies. In science children are wrapping up their research on cells and are working on creative projects to showcase their knowledge. In math children have finish a unit on multiplying, adding, subtracting and dividing whole numbers and decimals. They are beginning algebra. We have learned some new poetry and children always enjoy writing the different kinds. We have learned rhyming poems, haikus, senyru, tankas and acrostic verses. Children have been having instrument lessons on Thursday and soon we might have the beginnings of the Westminster Band.

The Westminster West School News

It was so wonderful to meet with so many parents (and older students) at conferences. Thanks for working with us to help provide a great educational experience for all of our children.

We had our first skating morning at Vermont Academy this past Monday, and it was a great success! Thank you to parents who helped tie skates and monitor our ice time. We all got on the ice smoothly and everyone helped each other out and had a fun time. Teachers and students extend a HUGE thank you to Board member and former teacher, Dick Miller, for sharpening all the skates. Helpers are always welcome: on Mondays we board the bus at the West at 8:30 am, and we return by 10 am.

Our next Westminster West PTO meeting is Tuesday, December 9th from 6:30 - 7:30 pm. Childcare is available. Please come and join our active team of parents and teachers working together to support our students.

The Westminster West Present Making Day will be on Friday, December 18th from 8:30 - 11:30 am. This is a wonderful morning of crafts activities in which students make non-denominational presents and learn crafts skills. We need lots of adult support, so please let us know if you can help. Keep an eye out for more information that should be coming home soon!

Health News

The second H1N1 flu clinic for children that need a 2nd dose of vaccine has not been scheduled yet by the Vermont Health Department. I will send home a letter with the date as soon as I am given a date for it. I am hoping it will be before the December vacation. Students who are 9 years and younger are required to get a second dose of the vaccine approximately a month after the first dose. If you have questions please contact Jen Burke.

The Girls On The Run program for girls grades 3-6 will start in March. I have had many girls asking me about it already. If you are interested in helping coach or just want to volunteer to help out from time to time please contact Jen Burke. It's a great time and the girls are such much fun to work with.

Parent Volunteers to host morning coffees

Tuesday Coffee House hours will continue: 8-8:45am. Stop in to visit with other parents, have a cuppa joe and a donut, see the bulletin board for info regarding PIRC meetings and other parent involvement information. This open house time is supported by PIRC Committee members and parent involvement funds. Help us develop the Parent Resource Room to be just what you'd like it to be.

School Community Survey

The PIRC (Parent Information Resource Center) Committee is asking parents and community members to complete the attached survey to help us assess and address issues important to our school community. We appreciate your input! Please return the surveys by Tuesday, December 22nd.

Community News...

R.H.A Martial Arts & Self Defense Center, Bellows Falls, VT is now accepting new beginner students for the Martial Arts program. Classes for 5-7 years/ 8-12 years/ 13- adult. Right now you can sign up for one month at the special price of \$29.99 and receive a free uniform. For more information & to sign up call 802-257-0720 or email drouleaul@comcast.net; 802-824-4216 or email alexanderstkd@live.com. Martial Arts will change your life!

Coffee House Open Mic Night at the Westminster Institute 7pm-10pm THIS Saturday, December 5th. Show up early to sign up to sing. Refreshments available & donations appreciated. This even sponsored by the Westminster Activities Commission.