

March 2, 2009

Dear Parents,

It has been a snowy, wet winter, is it ever going to end? And in true form, March has come in like a lion! We are all anxious for signs of spring – warmer temperatures, green grass, blooming crocuses, even mud would be a welcome sign that the ground is warming up. The second trimester ends this month, a sure sign that spring is on the way. Spring is traditionally the season of renewal and cleaning out. Take the opportunity to spend some time with your children cleaning out their book bags, checking to see that they have and are still using their Agendas, and to organize or replace any school supplies needed to get through the last months of school. It may not feel like spring yet, but it's not too early to prepare for your children's successful finish to this school year.

Please be aware of the following information to help you plan for March and the future:

- **Second Trimester:** Last day of the second trimester marking period is Friday, March 20th. Report Cards will be distributed on March 30th.
- **New Telephone Number:** If your child is absent, please be sure you call the school to report the absence(s). A new telephone number has been added to alleviate the high volume of telephone calls, **710-7500**, #2 for the middle school and option #1 to report an absence. This telephone number is a district telephone number so there are choices for connections - #2 for the middle school or #3 for the high school and the menus will direct you to the appropriate department. Thank you.
- **Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program:** The FFV Program has been a great experience! Students have been eating fresh fruits and vegetables for the past three months thanks to Sodexo, our school lunch provider and Mrs. Vallese's FACS classes. *A special thank you to Barden Family Orchard for providing fresh, local apples* – P.M.S. is proud to support this community business.
- **Wellness Fair:** you are invited to attend the Wellness Fair on Wednesday, March 11th from 6:00 – 8:00 P.M. in the Gym and Auditoria. ***All students must attend with a parent/guardian.*** The students and the P.E. Teachers have planned a fun and informative evening!

- **Spring Book Fair:** *Reading is a Healthy Habit!* March 10-12, the library is hosting a Spring Book Fair with a variety of great titles for middle school readers. There's something for every interest and profits from the book fair earn books for our school library. The book fair will be open during the school days and 5:30-8:00 P.M. during our Wellness Fair on March 11.
- **Reading Week is March 30-April 3:** "Books Expand Your Universe" - Celebrate reading with your children! More information about activities happening in school to follow.
- **Messages to Students:** There have been an overwhelming number of messages left with our secretarial staff from parents to students especially at the end of the school day. We will certainly contact students during class in cases of emergency, but please note that arrangements for transportation home should be made ahead of time. The overwhelming number of messages left with our secretarial staff does not allow for them to get the messages to each and every student before dismissal. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.
- **6th Grade Parents:** As per state law, students entering the seventh grade next year (2009-2010) must have their vaccinations up to date before the start of the school year. Students who are not immunized will not be allowed to attend school until they are immunized. Students entering 7th grade are required to have the following immunizations:
 - TD Booster
 - 4 doses of Polio vaccine (must have one after the age of 4)
 - 2 doses of MMR
 - 1 dose of Varicella Vaccine or documented history of chickenpox disease (A documented Physical exam is also required)
- **Free or Reduced Lunch:** Parents, please remember that *applications for free or reduced lunch can be completed or resubmitted at any time during the school year.* Many families' financial circumstances have changed recently. Applications are available in the cafeteria and from the Assistant Principal's office. And, free or reduced lunch also means free or reduced breakfast.
- **PTO News:** Parents, don't forget to send in your Dino's receipts. We are having a fundraiser at Pizzeria UNO in Smithfield on Thursday, April 2nd! Any food you buy during lunch and dinner – even takeout – part of the proceeds will benefit the PTO. Look for special coupons to come home and be posted on the website shortly. For more information regarding the PTO, visit their website www.pmspto.org

Historically, the spring is a very busy time of year especially in schools. I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of a very important meeting that takes place this month, the Foster-Glocester Regional School District Financial Meeting on Tuesday, March 17th 8:00 P.M. at the high school. There is a public hearing next Tuesday, March 3rd during the monthly school committee meeting where the school committee will present the budget and the thinking that went into it. I urge you to attend the meeting on March 17^h, your vote is needed to adopt the 2009-2010 budget so that we can continue to bring the best educational practices to our students. Again, your continuous support of the middle school and our programs contributes to our success and is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Patricia Marcotte
Principal



Sleep Affects School Performance

According to Brown Medical School and Bradley Hospital research, elementary and middle school students who don't get enough sleep at night don't perform as well in school. The study, funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research and the National Institute of Mental Health, also found that kids who don't get enough sleep have a harder time paying attention.

In the study, teachers completed weekly performance reports with no knowledge of the amount of sleep students received. They rated students who had gotten eight or fewer hours of sleep as having the most trouble recalling material, learning new lessons, and completing high-quality work.

Seventy-four children from Rhode Island and Massachusetts, aged 6 to 12, participated in the study. They were screened to ensure they were healthy and did not suffer from sleep or psychological disorders.

Children spent three weeks in the study. One week they went to bed and woke up at their regular times. Another week they stayed up much later than normal; this meant 8 hours of sleep for first and second graders and 6.5 hours for third graders and up. During another week,

they spent no fewer than 10 hours in bed each night. Study participants wore wrist monitors that logged motion day and night, to ensure they were complying.

Teachers then filled out a 34-question survey rating classroom behavior and performance. They reported more academic problems and attention problems when sleep was restricted to shorter times.

Gahan Fallone, the study's lead author, says, "Just staying up late can cause increased academic difficulty and attention problems for otherwise healthy, well-functioning kids. So the results provide professionals and parents with a clear message: When a child is having learning and attention problems, the issue of sleep has to be on the radar screen."

Considering that so many children are being diagnosed with attention disorders and learning disabilities, sleep should be on the minds of all school professionals and parents.



New Backpack Reduces Load by 86 Percent

Biologists at the University of Pennsylvania have developed a new suspended-load ergonomic backpack that reduces the force of a backpack's load on the wearer by 86 percent. The backpack was created with soldiers and

emergency workers in mind and could prevent injuries associated with running while carrying heavy items. Wearers will be able to run far more comfortably with heavy loads, say Penn researchers in the journal *Nature*. Researchers also say the backpack will be beneficial to school children as well, since heavy backpacks carried by children whose bones are still growing can inflict muscle and orthopedic injury.

Larry Rome, professor in Penn's department of biology says, "For the same energetic cost, you can either carry 48 pounds in a normal backpack or 60 pounds in a suspended-load ergonomic backpack. It is like carrying an extra 12 pounds for 'free.'"

The backpack has a rigid frame, similar to what hikers often use; however, the sack carrying the load is suspended by very compliant bungee cords.

"The ergonomic backpack reduces the force of the load on the wearer by reducing the effect of the load as it shifts up and down," Rome says. "What is striking is that you can feel the 86 percent reduction in force with every step."

Previously, Rome, a muscle movement physics expert, introduced a power-generating backpack. It converts mechanical energy from walking into as much as 7.4 watts of electricity. That's enough to run a number of portable electronic devices at once. Those findings were published in *Science*.



Getting Kids Active and Keeping It Fun

All Jack likes to do is sit at the computer. He's only 9, but already his lifestyle is sedentary and his weight isn't what it should be. As a concerned parent, you encourage him to exercise: You tell him how important it is and that it's good for him. And if Jack's like most children, your explanation gets you exactly . . . nowhere! So what can you do?

Try some of these kid-friendly tactics:

- Don't use the word *exercise*. Instead, use words such as *fun* and *play*.
- Keep a stock of items that your child can get active with: beanbags, jump ropes, kick balls, hula hoops.
- Suggest a party or get-together for your child and his or her friends during which they can play active games like "Red Light, Green Light" and "Simon Says."
- Sculpt your approach around your child's natural interests. If your child loves to read, suggest

riding a bike to the library to get books. If your child loves surfing the Internet, ask him or her to research a topic--gardening, for instance; then plant one together. If your child's passion is video games, buy one that incorporates body movement, such as "Dance Revolution."

- Plan a nature walk or a day out skating, swimming, or any other active endeavor your child enjoys.
- If your child is a TV-watcher, take advantage of the commercials. Suggest doing a little cardio movement (just don't call it cardio!) before the show resumes. Walk up and down some stairs, see who can do more toe touches or jumping jacks, or march in place and count the steps.
- If your child is a pet-lover, ask him or her to take the dog for a walk or race with the dog in an enclosed area.
- If you need something from the store, ask your child to walk there with you. Play "I-Spy" or other such games along the way.



TV Linked to Child Obesity, Hypertension

Researchers have found that television viewing is linked to childhood obesity and hypertension. The researchers (from University of California, San Diego; the Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego; the University of California, San Francisco; and the University of South Alabama) determined that television viewing time was directly linked to the severity of obesity, and that both of these factors were predictors of hypertension. Children who watched two to four hours of television per day were 2.5 times as likely to have hypertension as those watching television for zero to two hours per day. For children who watched television four or more hours per day, the chances for hypertension were 3.3 times as great as for those watching zero to two hours.

The study was originally published in *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Make Sure Kids Get Enough Calcium

Childhood is a key time to build healthy bones, which can help prevent osteoporosis and fractures in later life. Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become fragile and break

easily. Here are some recommendations by the National Institutes of Health's Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases National Resource Center (www.osteo.org) and the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (www.niams.nih.gov):

- Be a good role model for your child. Practice good nutritional habits and get enough physical activity.
- Eat plenty of foods rich in calcium and vitamin D (see list below). Most kids get enough vitamin D through their diets, but not enough calcium for peak bone mass.
- If your child drinks soda, remember that replacing just one soda a day with milk or a milk-based drink, such as a smoothie, can significantly increase his or her calcium intake.
- Try making soup or hot cereals, such as oatmeal, with milk bases instead of water.
- Serve milk over cold cereal for a snack.
- Serve other foods that contain calcium, such as almonds, tortillas, and broccoli, on a regular basis.



Reading Shakespeare Revs Up the Brain

Researchers at University of Liverpool say they are starting to understand why Shakespearean plays have such a big effect on readers. There is new evidence that the language in the bard's works excites positive brain activity in those exposed to it.

Shakespeare, researchers say, frequently used a linguistic technique they call "functional shift," by writing sentences in which a noun serves as a verb. This results in the brain perceiving the meaning of the word before it understands the function of the word in the sentence. For instance, the phrasing of "he godded me" from *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* forces the brain to work backward from the way it usually functions, and causes a peak in activity in order to understand what was said.

"[It's] similar ... to putting a jigsaw puzzle together," says Professor Philip Davis of U of L's School of English. "If it is easy to see which pieces fit together you become bored of the game. But if the pieces don't appear to fit, when we

know they should, the brain becomes excited. By throwing odd words into seemingly normal sentences, Shakespeare surprises the brain and catches it off guard in a manner that produces a sudden burst of activity--a sense of drama created out of the simplest things."

Researchers are excited about the new findings, saying that new technology and studies are allowing them to peer at the very motions of the mind.

Capture Your Time Effectively

One thing in life that is certain is that once time has passed, it can't be recaptured. This is what makes using our time well especially important, says Lodewijk van den Broek on the Zen Habits blog (<http://zenhabits.net>). So how do you go about using your time as effectively as possible? Simplify, van den Broek says. Here are four ways to do just that:

- Do it once, and get on with things. Why? If you procrastinate, your mind will enjoy making you think about it over and over until you get it done. This wastes considerable time and brainpower.
- Whatever you do, do it smart. Most likely you're not the first one to attempt the task you're undertaking. Search the Internet and other sources to glean the experiences of those who have gone before you.



- Automate what you can. Use software to rid yourself of repetitive tasks. Try automating your everyday tasks as well to maximize your efficiency.
- Outsource what you hate to do. Then you can spend your time on what you love and are motivated to work on. You'll likely find you end up with better results when you let go of something you truly don't like doing.



"If you think it will help, yeah, let's hear your spin."