

February 3, 2009

Dear Parents,

The second trimester marking period is well underway. Can you believe we are half way through the school year? We continue to be very busy as we move into the second half of the school year. It is important to stress to our students that they must continue to study and complete their school work; it could affect their placement for next year or cause them to attend summer school. Please be aware that children may not be promoted to the next grade level without passing her/his present grade level. It is a good time for you to contact your child's teachers and/or the guidance counselor if you have any concerns regarding your child's progress. We want all of our students to successfully complete the 2008 - 2009 school year.

The students have been very patient as they spend more and more time indoors in school and at home during the winter months and we still have six more weeks of winter. It's a great opportunity to spend time with them; they won't be adolescents for long.

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

- **6th Grade Parents** should plan to have your children immunized before the start of 7th grade. The New Year is a good time to plan any needed appointments. All students entering the seventh next year (2009-2010) must have their vaccinations up to date before the start of the school year. 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
 - One dose of Varicella Vaccine or documented history of chickenpox disease
 - (A documented Physical exam is also required)

- **Letters regarding absenteeism and Truancy Court** are being sent home to parents whose children have been absent ten or more days. This letter is just let you know how many days your children have been absent and/or tardy.

Students absent eighteen days or more, without documented excuses, will be referred to Truancy Court.

- **No February Vacation** this school year. Except for Presidents' Day on February 16th, school is in session during the week of February 17 – 20. If you do not plan to send your child to school, please be sure you call the school to report the absence(s); 710-7500, #2 for the middle school and option #1 to report an absence. Thank you.
- **Recommended websites for parents of adolescents:** The Family Connection on the National Middle School Association's website (nmsa.org, click On Target then Services/Resources then Family Connection) and the New England League of Middle Schools has a Parent Network on their website (nelms.org). Our **PTO website** www.pmspto.org.

Stay warm and enjoy the rest of the winter!

Sincerely,

Patricia Marcotte
Principal

FEBRUARY

Raising Kids with a Healthy Body Image

Here are some ways to help your children love and appreciate the body nature gave them:

- If children feel bad because someone criticized their appearance, tell them you love them just the way they are.
- Praise your child. Cecilia Ford, a clinical psychologist in New York, says compliments are important. Tell a girl she looks pretty; tell a boy he is handsome. This helps them feel good about their bodies.
- Encourage healthy eating habits and exercise to keep weight under control.
- Don't suggest plastic surgery to correct a "flaw." Kids should feel good about themselves just as they are, particularly at home.
- Set a good example. Don't talk about your own body "flaws," your desire to lose weight, etc.



School Failure Rocks Mental Health of Girls

Girls who fall into early patterns of failure often suffer dire consequences, even more so than boys, new research shows. Girls who experience serious school failure by 12th grade--being expelled, suspended, or dropping out--were significantly more likely to have suffered serious depression by the age of 21 than girls who did not experience these failures. The study did not show the same correlation for boys.

"For girls there are broader implications of school failure," says Carolyn McCarty, a University of Washington researcher. "We already know that it leads to more poverty, higher rates of being on public assistance, and lower rates of job stability. And now this study shows it is having mental health implications for girls."

The study showed that girls who were expelled from school were more than twice as likely to suffer depression than girls who were not expelled. Thirty-three percent of girls who dropped out of school were later depressed, compared to 19 percent of those who did not drop out. Twenty-eight percent of those who were suspended suffered depression as compared to 19 percent of those who were not suspended.

Overall, girls who experienced major school failure suffered depression at a rate of 22 percent; for boys, the

depression rate was 17 percent. While fewer girls than boys experienced failure, the consequences were more severe for girls.



Nontraditional Activities Keep Kids Out of Trouble

A recent study conducted by Northeastern University researchers has found that nontraditional extracurricular activities for teens specific to each gender provided a higher degree of protection against juvenile delinquency than traditional extracurricular activities for each gender. A nontraditional activity for a girl might be participating in sports, the researchers indicate; a nontraditional activity for a boy might be attending religious services. Extracurricular activities can help teens deal more positively with unstructured time and give them an incentive to conform and form attachments to others in their communities and schools.

Following Rules of Games Can Keep Kids Safer

While keeping your kids active is a good thing, you might want to make sure they know the rules of the game when they're

playing sports, says the Nationwide Children's Hospital. Between 2005 and 2007, an estimated 98,000 sports injuries were caused by an action ruled illegal by referees or disciplinary committees. All told, 6.4 percent of high school sports-related injuries were due to illegal activity. The highest proportion of those injuries occurred in girls' basketball (14 percent), with girls' soccer (almost 12 percent), and boys' soccer (11 percent) following. The bottom line: Pointing out illegal activity to young sports players and encouraging them to modify their behavior could reduce their risk of injuries.

How to Put a Lid on Anger

We all get angry, sometimes justifiably, other times irrationally. Regardless of the situation, there are some things we can do to prevent our anger from escalating into unconstructive thinking and behavior. The American Psychological Association offers these tactics for controlling anger:

- **Change the way you think.** If your inner thoughts are filled with cursing or grisly scenarios, you might be overly dramatic about the situation. When this happens, instead of thinking "This is the last straw-- everything is awful!" it might help to tell yourself, "I am frustrated, and that's understandable considering the circumstances. But it's not the end of the world. Staying angry is not going to fix this."
- **Try to get a more balanced perspective.** The world is not out

to get you, though it may feel like it at times. Ask yourself what it is that you want. The answers might be fairness, appreciation, agreement, or another person's willingness to do things your way. Remind yourself that everyone wants these things; everyone is hurt and disappointed not to get them. Ask yourself if you're being too demanding--because angry people tend to demand things, and when their demands are not met, they tend to get even angrier.

- **Remember that not every problem has a solution.** Sometimes things are just hard, and trying to come up with a solution when there really isn't one will only add to your frustration. Instead, you'll be better off determining what the problem is, then facing it and figuring out how to handle it.
- **Don't jump to conclusions.** When you're angry, your conclusions can be off-base. Slow down and think carefully about what you want to say. Try to avoid becoming defensive and fighting back.
- **Defuse your anger with humor.** Humor can help you confront your problem constructively. If you feel like calling someone a name, for instance, try to visualize what you're calling that person--literally. Sometimes it can make you laugh and break the tension.

- **Change your surroundings.** Give yourself a break. If something is really driving you crazy, and you can avoid the situation, then you'll be doing yourself a favor if you give yourself some downtime. If your child's room is a mess and it's getting on your nerves, close the door and don't look at it. If a colleague is trying your patience, find a reason to go to another department or do some of your work elsewhere in the office.



Antibacterial or Plain Soap?

Do you really need to use antibacterial soaps? No, says *Consumer Reports* on its Greener Choices website (www.greenerchoices.org). Here's why:

- In order to get the big reduction in bacteria that these products advertise, it's likely you'll have to clean a surface for several minutes. Using plain soap and water kills a lot of germs, and some studies have found no difference when it comes to antibacterial soaps vs. regular soaps.
- Some bacterial soaps have ingredients that can possibly

irritate the skin when mixed with chlorine in the tap water.

- Some studies indicate that use of antibacterial soaps can reduce the effectiveness of antibiotics.



Students playing in high school and college marching bands have a similar risk. Indoor rehearsals concentrate the sound. One student quoted in *USA Today* says that after indoor rehearsals, his ears hurt and start ringing. Now, he hears the ringing whenever he's in a quiet room.

Michigan State University and the University of North Texas, which have large music schools, are researching the effects of indoor practice and taking steps to protect band members.

Measures they take include offering free hearing tests and courses in occupational health, and lining practice rooms with sound-absorbing materials. They also monitor sound levels during rehearsals and give ear plugs to music students.

Stereos and Band Practice Threaten Young People's Hearing

Millions of children aged 6 to 19 have hearing loss in one or both ears. Audiologists at the University of Louisville in Kentucky say it's the same degree of hearing loss they see in 60-year-olds. Teens often turn up the volume of their car stereos so loud that the programming can be heard inside buildings they are passing by. This high volume damages the tiny hair cells in the inner ear that play a key role in hearing.

Pumping loud music directly into the ears from an MP3 player has the same effect. Over time, the hair cells begin to die out, and there is no way to restore them. The hearing loss is permanent.



"Go outside and play, but stay out of the sandbox. You know what that does to your cell phone."