



OUR SCHOOL

teacher-parent cooperative

A Non-Profit Corporation Founded in 1973

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Disclaimer: Views expressed in this newsletter are provided for informational purposes and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Our School.

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From the Chair

Welcome to the 2002-2003 school year!

As the fall sessions begin, parents may have some questions on their minds: When do we co-op in our session? My child has never attended Our School before, so should I stay for the session, part of it, or not at all? What if my child cries when I leave or tugs at my clothing? What do the teachers do if my child cries while I am gone? How should my child be dressed? Can my child bring a favorite 'something'?

Co-oping: Each session has at least one room parent whose responsibility is to set up a co-oping schedule. The room parents for your session **contact you in August** to ask each one of you **when you CANNOT co-op**. Then room parents create a calendar schedule for your regular day **and** a "backup day" (the latter is to fill in for the parent who has an emergency on their scheduled co-op day and needs a substitute). Everyone will receive

this co-oping calendar. Then if you **need to change your co-oping day** because of a conflict that month or an emergency, **take care of it yourself** by using the "backup person" or by switching with another co-oper. Finally, please: 1.) Update the co-oping calendar located on the bulletin board in the parents' room, and 2.) Inform the room parent(s) and the teachers of the switch.

To Stay or Not to Stay:

Deciding whether or not to stay during a session often depends on the degree of anxiety of both the parent and the child. It also depends on the child's previous experience and/or the degree of difficulty a child has with transitions. Another factor could be how rushed the parent and the child are before school. If you do stay, consult with the teachers first, then inform your child of your decision in a brief, loving and concrete manner, and stick to it.

Bargains & Rewards: The children are at an age of development where they can reasonably be separated from parents for three hours as they seek more autonomy on their own. At the same time, staying with a parent is less risky. Herein lies the conflict. Parents have to understand the child's need for independent growth. True, it's easier for a parent to promise a treat or a trip to the zoo, for instance, than to hear their child crying for being left at school without mom or dad. In the long run, these "incentives" do not help a child to take a risk and be

responsible because it's the right thing to do. Furthermore, promised rewards keep children from concentrating on what the school curriculum offers, as they 'move through' the session with these rewards in mind. (Please read the article on *Separation* in your packet.)

"I'm ready to go but my child tugs at me and cries":

If you've been concretely clear to your child about when and how you're going to leave, **then leave and do not linger**. It may sound harsh, but if you linger, the child's anxiety (and yours) will increase to the point of no return. Then you'll have to repeat the same scene quite a few times, because your child will learn this expectation of interaction and power struggle. **Please be reassured that we'll call you if necessary. Or you may also call us within the next 1/2 hour to check in.** Then we can proceed based on what is happening with your child.

"What if I carry my child and her things in?":

If there is no snow, it's not slippery or raining hard, and your child knows how to walk, then don't carry her. She is not a baby anymore; it will show her that you are confident in her independence. Don't carry her backpack (make sure it's not heavy), and let her put it on her hook, for the same reason. Don't hold her hand, and do let her go first, if possible (yes, it's possible!). All these little things send a message of autonomy even more than reassuring talk.

“How should my child be dressed?”: In **play clothes**, of course. Avoid a battle, even if it means bringing your child in pajamas or in an inappropriate dress. Just bring the appropriate play outfit in a bag or backpack. (Please read the article on *Clothing* in your packet.)

“Can my child bring a ‘something’ to school?”: Of course! However, **do not ask your child if he/she wants to bring something to school**. The request should be on the **child’s own initiative**. Then it means it is needed for your child to have a sense of a link between home and school. At one point, you may see the reverse: your child may want to bring home something from school. Most of the time, it’s O.K. It helps the child learn how to borrow and bring back.

“What if my child says, ‘A kid hurt me, an adult scared me, a teacher was mean to me, etc.’?”: What am I to believe? Can it be true? It could, but certainly not here. Remember children sometimes dramatize an ordinary event either for attention or because they become influenced by their parents’ eagerness to know “what happened.” *Always ask Jim or Yvonne* to fill you in. They will also contact you regarding anything that’s important regarding your child.

Read Your Packet: Please read the articles in your information packet, including *Board Procedures*, *Co-oping Guidelines*, et al., and bring your questions to the Chair, Yvonne.

If you have any questions, or need information about your child and/or the program, don’t hesitate to ask the teachers directly. They are your most accurate source of information.

Thank You: To Ruth Johnson for taking care of school things while the teachers were on vacation. Thanks to Kate and Hannah for taking care of the guinea. Thanks also to all of you for making the workdays so pleasant and efficient.

Health Forms: If you need more time to return **all** the forms from your packets, **tell Yvonne**. Otherwise, they **all** have to be in now! The forms have to be processed through the computer, then put on file ready for the County Health and State Human Services Departments’ inspections. Thanks for your cooperation.

Food Certificates: For those of you who have not completed your Food Certificate forms, pick one up on the Parents’ room table and **fill it out right away**. As you know, the funds raised from this project become an integral part of the school’s working budget.

Reminder about Forms: The **Treasurer** would like to remind families **to send back a copy of your tuition and food certificate statement forms** with your payments. It facilitates the recording process. Thanks!

Our School Library: We are pleased to report our children use the school’s library extensively. We have over 1,000 books at this point and increase the amount periodically. To keep track of books, we need to routinely follow certain procedures:

- ◆ **Taking a book out:** An adult (mostly the teachers) supervises the child’s selection from the shelves in the “guinea’s” room. Jim or Yvonne registers the **date and the child’s full name on the white card inside of the book jacket**. The card is given to Jim or Yvonne. The child ‘writes’ his or her name on a piece of

paper (often it is scribbled, decorated, stamped, etc.). Please be patient. For a child, it is part of understanding the library process of borrowing and to be literate or creative about it. Then the child may put ‘his’ or ‘her’ card in the jacket of the borrowed book.

- ◆ **Book return:** After trying many systems, we’ve found that the simplest way is **to return the book to Jim or Yvonne**. This avoids the returned book being placed back on the shelves before Jim processes its return on the computer.
- ◆ **Damaged and lost books:** Books go home or back to school in backpacks or plastic bags to avoid unnecessary damage. Parents and drivers are responsible for the books taken out or brought back (the children are only partially responsible). Please **repair a book in case of damage** and inform the teachers. If it cannot be repaired or it is lost, **Our school will bill you** for its replacement (the School can get discounts for book purchases). Please check Our School Policies on this matter. We do appreciate your cooperation, because the message we want to convey to the children is that books are **permanent and precious** objects for one’s enjoyment, imagination and information.

Room Parents: Room parents are your contact for scheduling co-oping times. It is their responsibility to contact you for school events and to report to the Board on what is going on in your session. In order to help parents in the school, the Board needs to be accurately informed so it can deal with information and issues as they arise.

Membership: Contact Judy Rosen or Jeff Mason, Our School's Membership Chairs, if you know prospective families who may be interested in attending an Open House or visiting a session. You may also contact Yvonne.

Board Meetings: Board meetings are open to the school members any time (unless the Board is discussing a confidential matter). Ask Yvonne about the agenda. If you think you need the Board to consider some item, talk to Yvonne, the Chair, ahead of time. It can then be included or she'll direct you to the Board member that can help you. The Board meets on the third or fourth Thursday of the month (consult your Co-oping schedule for exact dates).

This year's Board members are: Ruth Johnson, Secretary; Judy Rosen & Jeff Mason, Membership; Steve Sullivan & Myron McCallum, Financial Advisors; Holly Hickman, Newsletter & Web site; Jennifer Fox & Jacqueline Sanders (2-day session room parents); Amy Fithian & Sharon Fitzsimmons (3-day session room parents); Lisa Ashbaugh & Beth Robinson (4-day session room parents); Jim Heaney, Treasurer and Director; and Yvonne Mayer, Chair and Director. (You can refer to the *Administration* description form in your packet.)

Other Meetings: Seminars, session meetings, required meetings, socials and Board meetings are on your co-oping calendar. Room parents also contact you as a reminder. Sign-up sheets for marking down your "yes" or "no" attendance can be regularly found on the Parents' room table.

Parking, Parking, Parking: Please, be understanding about the cooperation needed in the parking lot:

- ◆ We **cannot park** on the easement in front of or to the right of the school.
- ◆ **Do not park** on the right-hand side of the garage door and where cars have to turn around (i.e., by the yellow posts and the bushes next to them)
- ◆ The **co-oper parent's car** (and the one next to it) **should park as close to the patio wall** as possible (so other cars can turn around as they go out). In other words, park **so no one is blocked in or out.**
- ◆ **Better still, whenever you can, park in the lot at Platt Middle School.** It's hardly a minute's walk (or less if you run!) through the field to the metal gate. (You'll avoid much frustration.)

Your cooperation is very deeply appreciated in this matter.

Teacher's Reflections

by Jim Heaney and Yvonne Mayer

The Child, The Adult and Our School's Environment

Every environment has some kind of structure. Some environments are more tailored to children's developmental needs than others. Human beings are part nature, part nurture. For young children, nurture has to follow the understanding of nature, i.e., the natural tempo of a child's development. The more parents and other adults understand the bond between nature and nurture, the more their expectations become tailored to that understanding. Then challenges for growth are appropriately provided. The more these two key elements are separated, the more distortions occur in the healthy development of any given child.

In Our School, expectations are tailored to these guidelines. Growing up is a long process of differentiation. A preschooler is a

person in movement who needs a **variety of informal physical activities** to stretch her body in many directions and positions, but who also can learn to relax.

A preschooler has a **variety of emotions**, not just sad or happy. These emotions need to be responded to accurately in tone and language identification.

A preschooler's **language** is developing at lightning speed. But we need to remember that language facility does not necessarily mean a correspondence in conceptual understanding.

Preschoolers need a **variety of intellectual challenges** tailored to what is known about a child's conceptual development. Many more links within the brain will need to evolve and connect before conceptual comprehension may reach the abstract complexity of an adult brain. On the other hand, a **preschooler may understand many subtle things through her sensory system** that often escape adults' perceptions. Therefore, a preschooler is a person who interacts directly with things and people to make concrete sense out of them.

The nature of the preschooler's **social development** strives to be with other human beings, **especially peers**. A responsible nurturing adult has to provide environments to meet that need whereby a child's autonomy and social responsibility can be balanced. Human beings are learning organisms. The preschooler's **context has to be play, play and play**. Within play, there is room for imagination, creation, invention, observation, exploration, discovery and testing. There is no failure in play. Play also needs to be constructive, content-rich and expandable to make it worthwhile for learning. This is the most difficult thing for parents to understand. Parents tend to enter a

“laissez faire” mode or, worse, consistently give lessons, directions and instructions to “help” a child. In the first instance, not much harm is done and some worthwhile learning *may* take place. In the second, the child loses control and responsibility of the play direction as it moves onto that of the adult’s agenda. In the latter case, best intentions may lead the preschooler to lose her rightful sense of her own growing competence. Correct expectations and interactions between child and adult are worth pursuing for they provide a strong foundation for the child’s future competence and creativity.

To start with, parents have basic questions to establish some comfort level of trust and reassurance in this new environment. How is my child coping with separation? Does my child play with other children? Does my child *only* play with...? How come my child does not want to come to school or leave school without difficulty?

The next level of questions derives from their co-oping or home observations. Why is this child moving from place to place or this one staying with one activity? Why is this one staying with the teacher and this one following a parent? How come this one is by herself or this one following a child or children? Why is this one crying or running around when making a transition but another one seems to move with the flow of things? Why does this one say “watch me, watch me,” but another one does not? Why is this one painting, but this one wants to build? Why is this child playing with play dough day in and day out rather than painting or building? My child is irritable at home since the start of school; why? What are children learning through play, painting, blocks, etc.? “It depends,” you’ll often hear teachers say. They are not avoiding straightforward answers. They know the development guidelines

for young children. They know the relevant subject matter and its provisions. After these considerations, there are many possible or partial answers. Teachers also have to consider a variety of factors and events, as each child is a unique person with unique responses to events in various environments. Teachers have to consider the patterns of a young brain’s development as well, as this amazing organ accommodates, assimilates or rejects outside experiences in a selection process dictated by previous experiences and developmental maturity.

In a sense, teaching is science and art. The science part is discovering the developing patterns of a given child: developmental tempo, interests, focus, various abilities, cultural and family experiences, ways of interacting and communicating, habits, health, and more. These are revised and reinforced with time. As more observations are added, they become ever-changing assessments for interaction between the child and teachers.

The art is how teachers then proceed with interventions (or don’t) to nurture the latent potential of any given child in positive and constructive approaches. These rigorous assessments guide artful teachers as to when, how, with what and with whom to intervene, to what extent and with what possible outcomes. Play, body language, linguistic tone and expression are the organized “body of observational research” that is the art of teaching.

We all know individual human development *is far from simple*. However, the teachers are always available to help parents with support and understanding. It is their responsibility to educate children well and help parents raise children with the understanding, joy and wonder that is necessary, and,

at times, minimize parents’ frustrations. Raising children “naturally” is easy. The child “knows,” “understands,” and his/her wants are met and adjusted as learning is through natural consequences...or so it seems. Raising children in an authoritarian or arbitrary way is also easy. The adult controls and decides for the child and the child follows the rules...or so it seems. Of course, it is taken for granted that parents are loving and respectful of their children as individuals. Then both children and parents learn and grow together and can manage well.

However, educating children with the professional knowledge and understanding of their individual nature, their ways of thinking, their growing abilities, and the many influences bearing upon them is a teacher’s responsibility. Only then can that teacher provide nurturing environments to meet that understanding and evaluation. An early childhood educator knows, or should know, that a young child can not, and should not, be molded or trained in a Skinnerian behaviorist model. Children’s minds, bodies and emotions are created by their brains and a blend of their own biology and individual responses to environments. For teachers, an appropriate educational nurturing is not an opinion but an accurate professional assessment—an awesome educational challenge for teachers! It’s also a soul-searching challenge for parents for they need to question their own childhood upbringing and the influence of cultural factors, and filter the accuracy of the overwhelming early childhood information they’ve received.

Parents who are interested in not only their own children but also others’ can learn from this school experience, just like teachers observe and learn about parenting styles as the parents regularly co-op. Mothers and fathers challenge, widen or strengthen their

knowledge by attending and participating in session meetings and seminars. Thus their parenting ability evolves as their children mature. With their increased understanding comes greater competence, greater confidence, and greater discernment about expectations.

A fascinating and challenging aspect for the teachers, which can be frustrating or overwhelming for parents, is the ever-changing patterns within the continuity of development. Body, emotions and mind mature in invisible threads of subtle differentiation and understandings. **We witness the end product or the expression from behavior and language, not the process itself.** The teachers constantly need to be aware and alert to that underlying and invisible process as it gets more complex and refined. Biology does not do it alone. Just like any other living organism, environmental provisions influence the outcome in an eternal present.

All Sessions: Please sign children in and out (your own and car pool) on the sheet in the Parents' room (required).

Session Lists: Session lists with family contact information are available in your mailboxes in the Parents' room, as well as co-oping schedules (unless e-mailed at your request). A session and co-oping schedule are always posted on the bulletin board in the Parents' room.

Web Site: Our School's Web site can be found at:

www.ourschoolpreschool.org.
The school also has a fundraising Web site called ShopOurSchool.com (**www.shopourschool.com**). Anyone who likes to shop online can help Our School raise money by "clicking through" the merchants on **ShopOurSchool.com**. Participating merchants contribute **up to 20%** of

online purchases to Our School. A small ad-hoc committee is being formed to address ongoing issues related to Our School's Web presence. Anyone knowledgeable and interested, contact Yvonne.

Our School Needs: In this newsletter, we regularly publish school needs that members may be able to donate or have access to. **Contact the teachers regarding this.** Some examples include:

- ◆ Suitable shades for the kitchen windows and door
- ◆ Donating or making a 'neutral-looking' curtain for the sliding door between the "yellow" and "guinea" rooms
- ◆ Dress-up clothing (about 8-year-old size)
- ◆ Making doll clothes
- ◆ Pillow cases & pillows

Calendar

PICNIC: Aug. 8, 2002; 4 -7 p.m. (see flier)

OPEN HOUSES: Aug. 7 & 14, Oct. 5 & 19, 10 a.m.-noon

SEMINAR/WORKSHOP: Sept. 18, 7-9 p.m., Siblings, peers in conflict & adult interaction

SESSION MEETING, 2-DAY CLASS, Sept. 25, 7-8:30 p.m.

BOARD MEETING, Sept. 26, 7-9 p.m.

SESSION MEETING, 3-DAY CLASS, Oct. 7, 7-8:30 p.m.

SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING (required), Oct. 17, 7-9 p.m.

SESSION MEETING, 4-DAY CLASS, Oct. 21, 7-8:30 p.m.

BOARD MEETING, Oct. 24, 7-9 p.m.