

News from Burr

Burr's School Newsletter

Fall 2013

Message from the Principal



Dear Burr Community,

Welcome to the first school wide newsletter of the 2013-2014 school year. We will publish three whole school newsletters in addition to a monthly Principal's newsletter.

I wanted to begin by wishing everyone a happy holiday season and a restful, happy vacation filled with food, fun, family, and friends. December is a good time to take stock of the first part of the school year. Below are a few highlights of the work we have done.

- We have continued to build on the school climate work that we started last year. This includes planning a number of projects with our Student Council, revising our morning announcements to include birthdays, trivia, and character messages, starting a fifth grade Safety Patrol, and beginning monthly whole school assemblies based around character.
- We planned and implemented a lot of new curriculum including a new math curriculum in grades kindergarten – 2, a new writing curriculum in grades kindergarten – 5, and even a new pre-school curriculum. Additionally, we continued to deepen the research projects that our students do in collaboration with media and technology. These projects are social studies or science based and are organized around essential questions that require students to take a stand, formulate an idea, and explain their thinking. This work is about using facts to support thinking and ties together reading, writing, research, technology, and presentation skills.
- We are expanding our capacity to add rigor to both content and teaching practices. One example of this is the work teachers are doing to ask higher level questions across all content areas that move beyond recall to more sophisticated thinking processes such as evaluation, synthesis, and creativity. Additionally, teachers are working to build discourse skills in students. This includes the ability to express an idea, respond to a divergent idea, and create new ideas through conversation. This work is important for a number of reasons including it prepares students for their secondary and post secondary education, it is connected to the Common Core standards, and it will help students achieve success on the upcoming SBAC statewide assessment. It also makes for creative, dynamic classrooms where students are passionate and invested learners.





- We practiced and refined our safety procedures. This includes conducting a fall lockdown drill and educating students and staff to report anything that seems out of the ordinary. As we move into a new year, I want to update you on some revisions we are making to our dismissal policies. Please know that these changes are being put in place to make the school environment as safe as we can for your children. They will begin on January 2, 2014.
 - First, the cafeteria doors will be opened for any parents picking up their child at 3:25 instead of 3:15. This will ensure that we have the necessary staff coverage for the cafeteria before and during dismissal.
 - Second, if you need to leave the cafeteria to enter the school for any reason at 3:25, a secretary will be there with a sign in book and visitor badges. Please sign in with her and wear a badge.
 - Last, we would appreciate it if you are picking up your child for early dismissal, that you do so before 3:00. This will allow the office staff to manage the flow of traffic at dismissal. This procedure is not new but is very important to monitoring who comes in and out of the building.

Please know that parents are always welcome at Burr. We just want to make sure that we monitor the visitors to our school in a safe and responsible manner. As always, thank you for your support and delivering us such wonderful children. Have a wonderful New Year.

Jason

News from Pre-Kindergarten

Mrs. Totilo Smith

This fall, Pre-K has been learning about changes – inside and outside. We noticed the leaves changing colors and the weather turning cooler. We talked about how we have to change our clothes so that we wear clothing items to keep us warm. We hosted special visitors, including the local firefighters, nurses completing their clinical studies in early childhood, librarians from the Fairfield Public Library, and volunteer storytellers with puppets! We had our first Workshop Day, during which Pre-K parents had a chance to see how we participate in pre-literacy and pre-math activities during our daily meeting time. During the month of December, we will celebrate the variety of cultures in our classroom. Pre-K parents are invited to come in and share a bit about their child's culture and/or holiday traditions with their child. Coinciding with this, we are also learning about and drawing pictures of our families; identifying family members by name (Mommy, Daddy, Brothers, Sisters, etc.); and counting and comparing how many people are in our family. Happy Holidays to all from Pre-K!





News from Kindergarten

Mrs. Root, Mrs. Schallau, Ms. Sherwood, Mrs. Thompson

Our kindergarteners have adjusted nicely to their new school. They are enthusiastically learning to write true stories about their lives. In reading we have worked on learning the routines of Reader's Workshop. We know how to hold the book between us, so both partners can see the words and pictures on the page and figure out who should read first. We also worked on retelling familiar stories using the characters' names and telling the important events of the story in order. In math we are working on counting and recognizing numbers and quantities. Our work continues in Writer's Workshop with a focus on improving our writing so others can read it. We will learn to leave spaces between our words, add more sounds to our words, and make sure that our pictures help us read. In Reader's Workshop we will practice using print strategies so we can move from reading pictures to **reading words**. In math we continue our work with number sense.

You can help your children at home by talking about things you do as a family that your child can then write as a true story. Discuss the events in order of what happened in the beginning, middle, and end. Read together and talk about the stories. Ask how the characters are feeling. How would the story be different if events change? Make sure your child knows how to read and write their sight words. In math you can help your child develop number sense by playing cards and board games that require your child to count, add quantities, and recognize combination of numbers. Don't forget to make it fun.

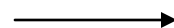
News from First Grade

Ms. Kurimai, Mrs. Musante, Mrs. Vigeant

In first grade, we are readers, writers, and learners. In Reader's Workshop, our students learned how to build good reading habits. We also learned how to choose "just right" books, read privately, partner read, and discuss books during class "book talks." We are reading, thinking, and talking about books. The next units of study focused on patterns in books and strategies to figure out tricky words. Parents, please continue to read to and with your child each night.

In the area of writing, we are finding out that we have stories to tell. It may be a small moment about having dinner, raking leaves in the yard, or riding the bus to school. We are currently using Ezra Jack Keats as our author mentor. Talk to your child about some topics to write for Writer's Workshop.

Through "game like" activities in math, the children are learning to count, compare, organize, and problem solve. In Unit One, we learned the doubles facts and investigated patterns made with two colors in the story *Grandma's Necklace*. In Unit Two, we are learning addition and subtraction within twenty. Students understand that numbers can be grouped in a variety of different ways or presented in a different order and the quantity will stay the same.





We are using the *Double Decker Bus* story to learn different quick and efficient math strategies for solving addition and subtraction problems.

Our first unit of study in science was *Living Things: Plants and Animals*. We discussed the pumpkin's life cycle and what plants and animals need to live. We kicked off our second unit of study about forces of motion. We had a scientist come in from *High Tech High Touch* to teach us about the Earth/Sun and Shadows.

We are looking forward to a great year in 2014!

News from Second Grade

Mrs. Cinquegrana, Mrs. Miles, Mrs. Uliasz

There's a flurry of learning going on in second grade as we approach the winter! In math, we have been exploring place value using the number line, and the "greater than" and "less than" symbols. Students have participated in math investigations to improve their number sense and have played games to build numbers up to 1,000. Keep practicing those math facts at home (especially those tricky subtraction problems.) There are a variety of math websites available on the Burr site. Students have been practicing retelling stories in sequence, using transition words, and details from the text. Currently, we are delving further into the text with a variety of comprehension strategies. Students are learning how to use schema (prior knowledge) and visualization to better understand stories. We used Mem Fox as a mentor author to try a variety of crafts in our writing. Our next unit will be nonfiction writing. We hope you enjoyed our healthy habits public service announcements (found on the Burr website) and our community interview presentations. In the New Year, we will be exploring and learning about the state of Connecticut in class and through a Webquest in the LMC. We hope you all have a wonderful holiday season, a relaxing winter break, and a Happy New Year!



News from Third Grade

Mr. Jasgur, Mrs. Noonan, Ms. Taylor

The third graders have been working hard this fall. They have transitioned well into the new grade level and are putting forth great effort with the third grade curriculum. Here is an update on what we are learning about and what will come next in our learning.

In reading, we are learning how to unravel our characters and get to know them like friends. We have practiced finding text evidence to support our thinking about our character traits. We are also working on writing our reading thinking in a clear and thorough way. Our new reading unit is on informational text. In writing, we have revised our memoir by looking at our sentence variety, our endings, and how to include the central message in our writing. We used a checklist to help finalize our pieces before moving on to publish. Our next unit will focus on informational writing. In math, we are learning about multiplication and how to represent multiplication concepts using repeated addition,



equal groupings, doubling, and halving. We have also discussed the concept of division. It is always helpful to practice math facts (addition, subtraction, and multiplication) at home so that your child becomes automatic with these problems. *XtraMath* is a useful website that we use, but there are many other strategies and games that you can find online or you can play together.

The third graders have also started their new science unit on matter. They started by going to the Discovery Museum and learning about mixtures, solutions, chemical reactions, and more! They were intrigued by the multiple experiments that they were able to conduct. The third graders have just ended their social studies unit on Native Americans and will begin their new unit on Asia in the upcoming weeks.

Students have been practicing their keyboarding in school using the *Type to Learn* program and through authentic writing on the computers. At home, students are also assigned weekly HW that requires them to type. This will vary for each assignment but may consist of typing up a writing assignment, contributing to our new class blog, or simply practicing how to type. Because keyboarding is now such an important skill in our lives, we appreciate your support of our efforts to increase all academic skill areas. Thank you for all of your support at home. We look forward to a great rest of the year!

News from Fourth Grade

Mr. Moura, Ms. Passero, Mrs. Sadick

Time flies when you're having fun in fourth grade! We can't believe that winter break will be here in just a few short weeks. We've been quite busy. In reading, students have been practicing reading comprehension strategies such as inferring, summarizing, and providing text evidence to support their thinking. In writing, we published a realistic fiction piece and are onto our narrative unit. We are studying Ralph Fletcher and other mentor authors to include craft in our writing. In math, students have been investigating and grappling with various concepts. Our current unit is multiplication and division during which students are exploring various strategies to solve problems. Please refer to the parent website for ways you can help your children at home: <http://fairfieldpublicschools.k5math.wikispaces.com/>.

Additionally, typing skills are becoming increasingly important. Please consider downloading *Type to Learn 4* on your computers at home and offer as many opportunities for your child to type as possible. We have been hard at work for months studying explorers of the past and present in the LMC. We are currently working on creating a persuasive argument to explore a new, unknown frontier! The students can't wait to present all their great work. Look forward to an invite in the coming weeks!

Thank you for your support of the Cesar Batalla holiday program. The students have been busy raising money for our adopted families and are excited to spread the joy of giving this season. Have a happy holiday and we look forward to a successful 2014!



**BURR ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL**



News from Fifth Grade

Mrs. Beno, Mrs. Chandler, Mrs. deRegt, Mrs. Phillips



As we move toward the winter solstice (Yes, we studied that!) fifth grade has already accomplished a great deal, and we're looking forward to our next units. In reading, we're finishing our inferencing unit and will be beginning non-fiction. Our new writing program included both narrative and fantasy genres. Next we'll be tackling history research reports. In math we're moving from place value to fractions. We're looking forward to the *High Touch - High Tech* program on senses, Discovery Museum for a day of light and sound, and a field trip to Stratfield School to see a play about Martin Luther King, Jr. - all in January. The completion of our DARE classes and DARE graduation will also be in January. Whew!

PE Happenings

Mr. Hilinski

It has been a great start to the school year in Physical Education. Students in Kindergarten - 2nd grade have been participating in a lot of gross motor activities such as basic locomotor skills (i.e. running, hopping, skipping, galloping, etc), overhand throwing, underhand throwing, catching, and of course, everyone's favorite, the parachute. Fourth graders participated in the state mandated physical fitness test where we saw amazing effort out of all of the students. The test is made up of four parts; the sit and reach which measures flexibility, push-ups which measures upper body strength, curl-ups which measures abdominal strength and the mile run which measures cardiovascular endurance. Students in 3rd and 5th grade participated in the fitness test as a practice in preparation for when they arrive in 4th and 6th grade. Fourth grade results will be posted on Infinite Campus in the near future...be on the lookout! Over the past fifteen weeks it has been a pleasure to have Brett Conner here at Burr School as my student teacher. Mr. Conner has been teaching the afternoon PE classes as he continued to work at Warde High School in the morning as a paraprofessional. December 13th was Mr. Conner's last day at Burr. We wish him all the best as he begins a new career as a physical education teacher.

As we look to the new year students will be involved in a variety of activities such as basketball, racket games, circus activities (juggling, spinning plates, etc.), and of course our body management unit, which is made up of climbing ropes, cargo net, and gymnastic skills. As we enter into the winter months it's easy for kids to become less active, but as we know, staying active helps students with their overall health and well-being. Please try to encourage your child to remain active for 60 minutes each day.

I look forward to the next several months as we explore many different ways of keeping our bodies active and healthy. Happy New Year!!!



News from Music

Mrs. Eckhardt, Mrs. Maravich, Mrs. Zwickler

“Bells are ringing, children singing, all is merry and bright”!! The children at BURR have been busy and involved in a two-month multi-cultural journey through music. Exploring traditions and music of people from different cultures helps us to realize the many similarities between all people no matter what the culture. Music is a way to bridge these cultural differences and to help us to embrace the beauty of the customs of all people. There is so much “good” music connected to the various holidays, and it would be sad if our children weren’t exposed to it and invited to participate in its performance. Our musical journey has included singing, movement and the sharing of actual traditions belonging to our children here at Burr. The culmination of this unit will take place in a rigorous sharing of music at our WINTER SONGFEST on the 20th of December at 10:00 AM in our gym. Through tradition we teach tradition, and our Burr family especially looks forward to this one!

Burr Band has worked hard since starting September 20th. Band students have one 30-minute lesson per week and rehearse before school with all instruments at 8 am on Friday mornings. On Wednesday, Feb. 12, Burr Band will join other students who will attend Tomlinson Middle School at an INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND. Students will work in their home school band rehearsal on a common piece, and then rehearse it with all the rest of the band students attending TMS on February 12. This event will be held at FAIRFIELD WOODS MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR BURR STUDENTS from 7:30 -8:00 P.M. The middle school band teacher will be in attendance for any questions from students or parents regarding middle school. May 22 is the Burr Spring Concert featuring 5th grade Chorus, Band, and 4th and 5th grade Strings. (Burr Band does not play in the winter concert.)

On December 2nd, the combined Burr and Jennings Fifth Grade Ensemble had their first performance. During the daytime, students in the third and fourth grades listened to almost 30 minutes of tunes, including “Carole of the Bells,” “Le Petit Traineau,” and a favorite, “’Twas the Night Before Christmas.” In the evening, the parents were treated to the same concert. This was an even more exciting performance since the Ensemble members sat next to high school string players who played the same music with them. Many of the high school string players were former Burr and Jennings graduates!!! The entire fifth grade orchestra is busy preparing music for their upcoming performance in February. They are learning music in three different keys, which requires much advanced technique. Ask your fifth grader to show you!!! Fourth grade string players have started playing in a new book. They are in the process of learning over 35 songs, most using the eight notes in the D Major Scale. The challenging part is reading the notes while each hand is doing different things at the same time. But they all know that the more they practice, the easier everything will be. Their concert will be in February as well.





Art Room Happenings

Mrs. Yessenow

Art this year has some new exciting projects! Ask your children to tell you what they learned when they bring home a piece of artwork. Some assignments you will have to wait to see at our annual Art Show. Kindergarten students have been learning about all different kinds of lines and shapes. We have special dice that we can roll to create our drawings. First graders are learning how primary colors mix to make secondary colors with model magic clay. Second grade art students have been turning 2-dimensional paper into 3-dimensional puppets with lots of pop-out shapes. Our third graders are inventing textures and patterns on animal scratch papers that glow in front of the windows! Fourth graders have been weaving large bowls with colors chosen in a specific color family. Fifth grade students feel like real artists using special art pencils to draw a glass bottle with values to make it look like a 3-dimensional form. When you stop by the school, check out the children's amazing art on our bulletin board and in the glass showcases in the lobby.

Noticias de la Clase de Español!

News from Spanish class!

Mrs. Sugrue

We have been very busy this year communicating and practicing new vocabulary and language skills in our Spanish classes! During class, students are provided with opportunities to be actively engaged in activities that make language-learning useful, meaningful and connected to other areas of study. Grade 4 students began the year learning how to introduce themselves and others. They also learned various expressions used to greet and say goodbye, which are used at the beginning and end of each class! Students were introduced to the concept of formal and informal levels of language in Spanish, and had the opportunity to practice the appropriate form of address when greeting adults, family members, friends and pets! In our second unit, students learned various ways to answer the question, ¿Cómo estás tú hoy? How are you today? We have also worked on learning numbers to thirty and have applied them to practical use in solving math problems, giving phone numbers, and stating the date and birthdays. Our upcoming unit will involve learning about the travels of three Spanish explorers, the names of the continents in Spanish, and the location of some of the Spanish-speaking countries. Students will apply their knowledge of vocabulary related to colors to describe flags of the Spanish-speaking countries and name their favorite colors as well!

Grade 5 students are at the end of a unit of study entitled Mi Familia and are now able to answer questions about their family members and pets. Each student had an opportunity to write and talk about their families by creating a hand drawn photo album page to share. Students also learned the numbers to one hundred to talk about the various ages of family members and friends. In our upcoming unit, students will be learning about Madrid and the exciting places to visit there! They will be able to talk about places they visit in Fairfield and draw comparisons between the two.

A fun way to reinforce what we are learning in class, is to ask your child to teach you some Spanish expressions and vocabulary! Sharing is an exciting vehicle for practicing what has been learned in class! ¡Muchas gracias for your support and I wish you and your families a ¡Feliz Año Nuevo!

Pupil Services

Mrs. Gardner, Mrs. Harkins, Mrs. Lawrence,
Mrs. Montgomery, Ms.. Raucci, Mrs. Shea, Mrs. Zarrelli

Our Burr children have had an outstanding start to what is looking like an amazingly kind year! In October, Burr celebrated our first ever Unity Day, powered by our own Grace Rhatigan from 5C. Having gotten the inspiration from *Time for Kids*, Grace organized this effort with friends to help raise an awareness of the impact of bullying. Within two school days, these most encouraging students inspired the creation of a chain of almost two hundred links of kindness and had us all wearing orange to show our support for this worthy cause.

Later that month a fourth grade Outreach group raised over \$50.00 for the American Cancer Society by making and selling ghost pops during the week of Halloween. Another fourth grade Outreach group was hard at work in November as well, raising money for the Humane Society. This amazing group of girls sold paper feathers for their cause and later gathered them to create a beautiful turkey for our Thanksgiving holiday. Congratulations for raising \$345.00 for a wonderful cause. Our congratulations also go out to another fifth grade Outreach group who helped collect a box of school supplies for a neighboring town as well as the Student Council Spirit group who collected non-perishable food items for a nearby food bank.

The kindness doesn't stop there, as there are many, many more projects in the works. Just keep your eyes and ears open to all the goodness going on in Burr and open your heart to help!

News from Math/ Science

Mrs. Sherman

Walk into any classroom during math time and you will see students working through problems, talking to their classmates, and explaining their thinking. It is an exciting time! Kindergarten students launched the year by focusing on numbers 0-5 and then on numbers 6-10. As they wrap up those units they will move into a unit on 2-D and 3-D shapes. In first grade students have been busy working on addition and subtraction through 20. They spent some time investigating arrangements of numbers and discovered many strategies for determining missing numbers! They too will be moving into their geometry unit next. Our second grade students started the year by working with addition and subtraction strategies. They then moved on to working with place value and





learned many ways to represent a number. Ask a second grader and they will tell you that 37 can be represented as 3 tens and 7 ones, 2 tens and 17 ones, and 37 ones! They will be moving into a new unit on money.

In the intermediate grades all the students started the year working with whole numbers. Third graders focused on estimation while working with addition and subtraction before moving into a unit on place value. They are now well on their way to learning about multiplication and division concepts! In fourth grade the students started their year with multiplication and division. They worked through a place value unit and are now in the midst of learning about multi-digit multiplication and division. Finally, our fifth grade students worked with numbers in the millions before moving into their first exposure to decimals. They will soon be connecting their work with decimals to a fraction unit.

In the larger school community, our students are often very excited to take part in our monthly estimation station! When the estimation station is up you will often see small groups of students gathered around near the front entrance, trying to guess just how many objects there are in the jar. Their strategies for figuring out the solution are both interesting and impressive! There is also a new *Mysterious Math* bulletin board that is filled with brain benders and mind teasers! Students are encouraged to try out the problems and then check their answers when the solution is posted on the bulletin board at the end of the month. Of course, the ever-popular *Problem of the Week* continues at Burr! Students are stretching their minds as they solve problems and explain their thinking! Finally, thanks to a generous grant from the PTA, Burr launched its first ever Math Club! The Math Club is open to students in grades 3-5 and meets monthly to solve challenging problems and participate in *Continental Mathematics League* meets.

If you ever have any math related questions, check out the new parent math website: <http://fairfieldpublicschools5math.wikispaces.com/home> and, of course, you are always welcome to contact me at asher-man@fairfieldschools.org.

News from Language Arts and the Library Media Center

Mrs. Felberbaum, Mrs. Henkel, Mrs. Persson

The district purchased new writing units of study for all grades this year, and it has been amazing to watch student writing take off across the school. Every grade level will have a focused unit on narrative, informational, and opinion writing this year. You may think, "How can my child write an opinion piece?" Later in the year you will see! Even kindergartners have opinions about their favorite toy or their favorite animal and will be able to explain/write why. The practice of using varied genres in writing comes from the Common Core State Standards and partly from research showing us the kinds of skills students will need in the future. We are encouraging students to see that they can write a good lead, a strong conclusion, or use writing crafts and correct mechanics in whatever type of writing they are doing. In other words, we are lifting up the quality of writing!



We are also focusing on how technology will help all students with their writing. It is easier to revise and edit using technology than to erase or cross out. As students grow in their keyboarding skills, they will be able to compose written responses on computers, instead of just publishing their pieces. We appreciate your help at home with programs such as *Type to Learn* and other typing programs that can be found on Burr's website.

Students are continuing to be exposed to a greater variety of texts as well in reading. The goal is for all students to read many different genres, such as fiction, informational, historical fiction, poetry, biography, myths, and fantasy. Please feel free to call on us (or write to us!) with questions or concerns you may have.

End of Newsletter—Thank you for reading!

