



# Nursery School News

## Director's Dialogue

by: Jane Adams

### No Tuition Increase

At our last board meeting, the trustees unanimously voted for no increase in tuition for the 2008 - 09 school year!

We were able to use funds that have resulted from profits made by our Fall Fundraiser over the past few years in order to avoid an increase in tuition. You should all thank yourselves for your hard work and contributions to the Fall Fundraiser and know that everyone in the school is now benefiting from that work. Typically in order to purchase supplies, equipment, fund the professional growth of our teachers, and to give the teachers a small yearly raise we must increase the yearly tuition. This year the trustees all agreed that we can maintain the same high quality of education without imposing a tuition increase. Thanks to everyone for a job well done on our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year!

**\* Save the Date \***

TUESDAY  
APRIL 8, 2008  
7:30 PM  
DR. WENDY MOGEL  
ST. PAUL'S 50<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY  
SPECIAL GUEST  
SPEAKER.

For many of you this is the time of year to think about kindergarten readiness. Some children are obviously ready to move ahead, in chronological age and all other areas of development. Others, though meeting the legal age for kindergarten entry, are not ready for the shift. It is only January, and that is part of the difficulty. It is very hard to predict how much young children will mature in the months prior to September.

Children develop in unpredictable and uneven ways. This is further complicated by the fact that the average age of kindergarten entry has dramatically increased over the past 30 years. Along with the increase in age, not surprisingly, there has been a steady increase in the academics presented in the kindergarten year. What we have today is a typical chronological age spread in many kindergarten classes of almost two years.

In reality a group of young children cannot all succeed at the same time when pressed to learn on schedule, especially when that group ranges in age anywhere between a young 5 year old and 6 & ½. It is unrealistic and unfair to assume that all students in the class will master the same concept or skill at the same time. Children need to be allowed to acquire skills at their own individual pace. Because of the diverse age spread and levels of development, those children who are the youngest and least mature may be at risk. The critical question that parents must ask themselves is whether or not behaviors of immature children or very young children will simply proceed forward with the passage of time. In other words, will another year in nursery school protect these children from the stress of possible over placement or will it be a waste of their time because they will naturally catch up later?

The research of Chess and Thomas in a longitudinal study of children found that high activity level, distractibility, and shy or slow to warm up behaviors are the result of inborn temperamental traits. While these traits tend to persist throughout childhood, they become less dominant with age and improve when children are thoughtfully cared for by adults. More mature behaviors can then emerge when children are provided with the needed time to grow in non-stressful situations. However, children who start school too soon often become stressed and turn inward, focusing primarily on their own concerns.

continued pg 2

# Director's Dialogue

continued from pg 1

Not only is this the case in kindergarten, but also with each additional year of over placement, the pressure increases and they are likely to become even more self centered and less able to cope with the increasing academic demands

So there are a number of complex issues that we must attend to at the same time when we consider what is the best decision for each individual child:

1. We must consider the chronological age of the child.
2. We need to understand each individual child's strengths and weaknesses.
3. We must consider the expectations of the particular kindergarten that the child will enter in September.

This third issue has been less well defined and articulated in the literature than intellectual and social and emotional readiness. In most of the communities in our area, there is a component of readiness that is primarily a cultural process through which members of the community develop their unique local meaning of readiness.

A good example of readiness that differs from one community to the next is the City of Pittsburgh, which distinctly differs from that of Mt. Lebanon and many communities in the South Hills. I have a nephew with a late August birthday who lives in Squirrel Hill. When my brother and sister-in-law decided to send him to kindergarten when he was a very young 5, I was frankly alarmed. But once I saw the diverse levels of maturity that were acceptable in the city, I understood their decision.

So, there are clearly defined formal elements of readiness derived from child development theory and informal elements generated in local communities, neighborhoods, schools, and families. What is interesting and of real concern is that by most standards one would think children from our population would be less likely to be at risk for kindergarten unreadiness. This thought is based on the fact that most of our children enter kindergarten with a rich base of quality preschool experience and strong parental support for their education. Thus most parents have very high expectations for their children's kindergarten performance. The result is that our kindergartens have been caught in a system of ever increasing standards as children are held out of school and the entry age has increased over the years in an effort to make sure that they can meet the high standards and expectations. It is a bit like the "tail wagging the dog!" The more we hold our children out of kindergarten in order to ensure readiness, the older the average entry age becomes. The final result is that expectations and standards then escalate in response to the overall age of the children, thereby causing many children who are less mature or young to be at risk.

Readiness for kindergarten is increasingly being recognized as a crucial component in the education of children. It would simplify matters if parents routinely sent any child of legal age to kindergarten, and schools would in turn ***appropriately deal with and accept the wide range of young children's varied and unique patterns of development.***

According to David Elkind, parents tend to focus primarily on skills and academics when considering kindergarten readiness. He feels that this is not a very useful approach, and suggests that the following 3 abilities are the most important expectations that a child needs to have mastered prior to kindergarten entry.

1. The ability to listen to and follow instructions given by an adult.
2. The ability to start a task and bring it to completion.
3. The ability to work cooperatively with other children, take turns, stand in line, and generally follow the standards of reasonable behavior when in a group setting.

Elkind explains that, "These are all essentially social skills. It is important that parents read to children, talk about numbers and letters etc.; *but*, parents need to understand that all the research shows that children *must* have first mastered these skills in order to begin to learn academics."

As things stand now, there are distinct strengths, skills, and abilities that children need to have mastered for a good beginning in kindergarten. As long as we observe children closely, are aware of the issues, put our children's needs first, and keep an open mind about the best time for each individual child to move on; we are far more likely to make good decisions and send our children on when they are ready and able to succeed!

If you have concerns or questions about your child's readiness be sure to schedule a conference with your child's teacher. Our teachers have observed many children over the years and really can help you make your decision about the best time to start your child in kindergarten. I am of course also available to answer questions and address your concerns.

## Parenting Discussion Group

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee book by Wendy Mogel will be the basis for a parenting class that will meet for 6 consecutive Tuesdays starting on February 18 – March 25 from 5:00 pm – 6:30 pm. There will be a childcare program offered in the Big Room that will be supervised by Pat Hurd. There will also be the option of dinner for parents and children upstairs in the church Undercroft served at 6:30 pm. Parents all received a registration form in their school mailbox.

Each week there will be a different speaker. Topics will include:

- determining realistic expectations for each child
- respect for adults
- chores
- mealtime battles
- coping with frustration
- developing independence and self-control
- resisting over-scheduling and over-indulgence

Speakers include Jane Adams – St. Paul’s director, Meredith Cohen – psychologist, Keri King – psychologist, Eileen Sharbaugh – educator, Margaret Vines - St. Paul’s Church Christian Educator director, and Mel Woods – family therapist.

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee guides us toward effective, enlightened parenting in an increasingly speedy, material, and competitive age. Even if you cannot attend the parenting classes I highly recommend the book.

### Board of Trustees Nominations

Our Board nominating committee is currently looking for parents and community members who would be interested in serving on our Nursery School Board of Trustees for a two year term.

We are particularly interested in people with backgrounds in education, law, finance, medicine, communications, psychology, and child development. If you or anyone that you know would be interested in serving on the Board, please contact Becky Sutherland at 412-561-3859 or e-mail her at rebsutherland@yahoo.com.

# Calendar

### Monday, January 21st

NO SCHOOL - Martin Luther King day

### 2008-09 Registration week

January 21 – 25 for currently enrolled & siblings of currently enrolled children.

Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup> - Earliest registration for all other children

### January 2008

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

### February 2008

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	

### Friday, February 15th

NO SCHOOL -

Teacher In-Service

### Monday, February 18th

NO SCHOOL - Mid-Winter Break

# Is Your Child Ready for Kindergarten?

*Gerriane Bobrosky, Ph.D., has developed the following guidelines for kindergarten readiness. You may be interested in them as you think about your own child's level of readiness.*

1. A child must be *physically* healthy and strong enough to enjoy the challenge of going to school and dealing with the increased stresses.
2. Emotionally, a child must be able to *separate comfortably* from his/her parents and spend a significant number of hours each day in an initially unfamiliar place with new adults and children.
3. A child must have a long enough *attention span* to be able to sit for periods of time such as listening during story time, or *persisting in the completion of tasks* such as simple games or puzzles.
4. A child must be able to *tolerate some frustration* in not getting immediate attention from the teacher and others, and be able to wait and take turns. This implies a degree of mastery and control over impulses so that he or she does not have to discharge or react to internal or external stimuli.
5. A child must be able to follow 2 or 3 component directions.
6. A child must be obedient in that she is able to take what is said and act on it.
7. A child must be able to do some table work (eg. writing letters, cutting, coloring, drawing).
8. A child must be able to understand the concept of sequencing and have the ability to do and put things in sequence.
9. A child should have a solid self concept and sense of competency, and not be unduly threatened by new or difficult tasks.
10. A child should be able to express herself verbally so that she can indicate needs and carry on reciprocal conversations. Examples are: baby talk should be given up; sentence structure should be basically grammatically correct; should be able to participate in group discussions.
11. A child must be able to *retain information*.
12. A child should be *socially mature*. This includes daily living skills, self-help skills, tasks around the home, school, and neighborhood, and socialization skills (not requiring an adult to help in solving all problems).
13. Developmental levels should be commensurate with chronological age. For example:
  - Language (expressive and receptive): be able to answer questions about age, birth date, siblings etc.
  - Fine motor: print first name, copy a square, cross, circle, draw a person. Handedness is usually established by age 5.
  - Perceptual skills: ability to remember and differentiate forms, simple puzzles, etc.
  - Memory: verbal and nonverbal experience.
  - Conceptual: ability to classify and generalize colors, animals, shapes, etc.
  - Gross motor: stand on one foot, hop, walk a straight line, balance, etc.

*Significant deficits in any area should be evaluated.*





Please check with your child's teacher before planning valentines. In any event, **do not** put the name of the recipient on the outside of the envelope. Simply include the correct number of cards for everyone in your child's class. Names on envelopes add confusion to a hectic day and make it very difficult for the teacher. This is not only the case for the very young children who cannot read names, but even the older children who can read names tend to become confused in the midst of the excitement! Finally - ***Please - no candy in the valentine cards.. Many types of candy have hidden peanut products in them.***

### KINDERGARTEN READINESS PANEL DISCUSSION

**Monday, January 28<sup>th</sup>  
7:00 pm at Temple Emanuel**

The South Hills Preschool Association will present a panel discussion with kindergarten teachers and administrators from Mt. Lebanon, Upper St. Clair, South Fayette and Peters who will discuss readiness issues for preschoolers including information about what you and your child can expect during a typical kindergarten day. Questions from parents will be welcome. Even if your child is not going to kindergarten next year there will be useful information presented.

### Nursery School Parking Space

You will all notice that there is a new parking sign designating the parking space closest to the doors on the left of the building (next to Cannon Davies garden) to the nursery school. That space was an auction item at the Fall Fundraiser and is reserved for the winners – am and pm. So please, refrain from using that space – unless of course you were the winner!

### Snow Days

So far so good! On snowy days check the local cable channel (channel 7) if you have cable and the status of our school will be listed. If you do not have cable check KDKA or WTAE for our school status. Typically we will be closed if the Mt. Lebanon schools are closed and if Mt. Lebanon has a late start time we will do the same.

We also have a phone chain that your child's teacher will initiate for each class when school is canceled or delayed. Sometimes the phone chain is ineffective, so listen to the radio or TV if it is snowing. Most important of all, whether we close or not – use common sense. This is preschool, your child will not receive an unexcused absence if they are not present. If you are not comfortable driving on the roads, please do not take chances!

## Mayfair Committee Needed

by: Jane Adams

Saturday, May 17th \* 11am to 2pm

I need a few committed people who would like to organize our annual Mayfair. There is very little preparation needed. Basically we make some phone calls to line up the Moon bounce, pony rides, and order pizza. Beyond that it is just a matter of getting folks to come out the day of Mayfair to help out with the little games, sell the pizza and help out with shoes at the moon bounce. The date of Mayfair is Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup> from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm.

Saturdays are becoming increasingly difficult for families as parents and children are involved in more and more extra-curricular activities. If there are enough parents to help out, we will have it. But if families are just too busy, the last thing that they need is something else on their plates. Let me know if you would like to help out. Also, if you think it is just one more activity to add to an already busy Saturday, let me know that as well. I have always loved Mayfair for the children, but we have been doing it for over 30 years now. Perhaps it is time to move on. If families would like to continue it, we will. But if it is just adding to our already too busy lives, perhaps we need to rethink it. **PLEASE let me know what you think!**



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