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Upcoming Events

- Feb. 12 Infant and Toddler Classrooms Closed
- Feb. 15 • Re-Enrollment Forms Due
School Closed for Mid-Winter Break
- Feb. 16 Oak Farm Graduate Panel (please note change of date from February 17)
6 PM Middle School
RSVP to Kelly by February 11
- Feb. 18 Coffee with the Head 8:45 AM
Victorian Farmhouse
- Feb. 25 Primary "Bring Your Parent to School"
Upper Elem. History Fair 3:30 - 4:30 PM

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	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						

Headlines from Oak Farm Montessori School

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Our mission is to provide a Montessori environment that inspires children to reach their potential through meaningful work.

FROM JUDITH CUNNINGHAM, HEAD OF SCHOOL

Playing to Learn

By selecting Oak Farm Montessori School for your child you have voted for a more effective way for your child to learn. It is interesting that the new US Secretary of Education, who had a positive impact on Chicago's school system, is advocating school reform that resembles many of Montessori's basic tenets. Critics see that current public education—and the testing that is driving it—is at odds with what scientists understand about how children develop during the elementary school years. Current public programs have led to a curriculum that is strangling children and teachers alike.

My article this week is based on an article by Dr. Susan Engel, senior lecturer in psychology and the director of the teaching program at Williams College. It was recently published in the *New York Times* entitled, "Learning to Play".

In order to design a curriculum that teaches what truly matters, educators should remember a basic precept of modern developmental science: developmental precursors don't always resemble the skill to which they are leading. For example, saying the alphabet does not particularly help children learn to read. But having extended and complex conversations during toddlerhood does. Simply put, what children need to do in elementary school is not to cram for high school or college, but to develop ways of thinking and be-

having that will lead to valuable knowledge and skills later on.

So what should children be able to do by age 12, or the time they leave elementary school? They should be able to read a chapter book, write a story and a compelling essay; know how to add, subtract, divide and multiply numbers; detect patterns in complex phenomena; use evidence to support an opinion; be part of a group of people who are not their family; and engage in an exchange of ideas in conversation. If all elementary school students mastered these abilities, they would be prepared to learn almost anything in high school and college.

Dr. Engel recommends that children should spend two hours each day hearing stories read aloud, reading aloud themselves, telling stories to one another, and reading on their own.

After all, the first step to literacy is simply being immersed, through conversation and storytelling, in a reading environment; the second is to read a lot and often. A school day where every child is given ample opportunities to read and discuss books would give teachers more time to help those students who need more instruction in order to become good readers.

Children would also spend an hour a day writing things that have actual meaning to

LETTER FROM JUDITH

Continued from page 1

them — stories, newspaper articles, captions for cartoons, letters to one another. People write best when they use writing to think and to communicate, rather than to get a good grade.

In our theoretical classroom, children would also spend a short period of time each day practicing computation—adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. Once children are proficient in those basics they would be free to turn to other activities that are equally essential for math and science: devising original experiments, observing the natural world and counting things, whether they be words, events or people. These are all activities children naturally love, if given a chance to do them in a genuine way.

What they shouldn't do is spend tedious hours learning isolated mathematical formulas or memorizing sheets of science facts that are unlikely to matter much in the long run. Scientists know that children learn best by putting experiences together in new ways. They construct knowledge; they don't swallow it.

Along the way, teachers should spend time each day having sustained conversations with small groups of children. Such conversations give children a chance to support their views with evidence, change their minds and use questions as a way to learn more.

During the school day, there should be extended time for play. Research has shown unequivocally that children learn best when they are interested in the material or activity they are learning. Play—from building contraptions to enacting stories to inventing games—can allow children to satisfy their curiosity about the things that interest them in their own way. It can also help them acquire higher-order thinking skills, like generating testable hypotheses, imagining situations from someone else's perspective and thinking of alternate solutions.

A classroom like this would provide lots of time for children to learn to collaborate with one another, a skill easily as important as math or reading. It takes time and guidance to learn how to get along, to listen to one another and to cooperate. These skills cannot be picked up casually at the corners of the day.

Dr Engel affirms what we do everyday at Oak Farm Montessori School where our curriculum focuses on essential skills like reading, writing, computation, pattern detection, conversation, and collaboration. Such a curriculum, Dr. Engel believes is “designed to raise children, rather than test scores.” All of us at Oak Farm also share that belief.

OAK FARM GRADS TO DISCUSS HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITIONS AND EXPERIENCES ON FEB. 16

Please plan to attend our first graduate panel on Tuesday, February 16, from 6 - 7 PM at the Middle School. Several Oak Farm graduates will give updates about themselves and answer questions concerning their experiences in and transitions to high school. Childcare will be provided in the Victorian Farmhouse from 5:45 - 7:15 PM for \$5 per child. We ask that you RSVP for this event and pre-pay childcare fees to Kelly by February 11th.

OPEN HOUSES SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY AND APRIL

Open enrollment is currently underway and we will be hosting two open houses for prospective new families. According to a recently conducted parent survey, three out of four of you first heard of Oak Farm by **word of mouth!** Please help us spread the word about Oak Farm by inviting your family, co-workers, and friends to an open house—it's a wonderful opportunity for prospective families to see Oak Farm and our students in action. Perhaps you could offer to accompany a prospective family to an open house and share your experiences first-hand. If you know of families looking for a Montessori environment that inspires children to reach their full potential through meaningful work (our mission), please encourage them to attend an open house on **Wednesday, February 24, from 9 AM - 3 PM** or on **Thursday, April 8, from 9:30 - 11:30 AM**, or to call and schedule a personal tour.

OAK FARM PARENT ORGANIZATION (OFPO) IN ACTION

Winter Wonderland Update

By Abigail Loeffler and Shannon Leman

Great news! We will be accepting Master Card, Visa, Discover, and American Express credit cards (as well as cash and checks) again this year at the Winter Wonderland silent auction.

It's not too late to make your reservation to attend the Winter Wonderland event on February 20th at Ceruti's Summit Park. We will be accepting responses at the Victorian Farmhouse drop box through Wednesday, February 10th. We need your response by that date in order to guarantee your seating requests. If you have any questions please contact Abigail Loeffler, (260) 710-1607 or aloeffler4@gmail.com

In the near future we will be sending out the Winter Wonderland program via email. The program will give all the details about the night including descriptions of the auction items that have been so generously donated to raise money for our children's education.

If you are traveling from out of town to attend the event, or just want the night off, some hotels within five minutes of Ceruti's at Summit Park are:

Baymont Inn (260) 489-2220 Don Hall's Guest House (260) 489-2524 Courtyard by Marriot (260) 489-1500



CROSSING THE BRIDGE . . . COMMUNITY SERVICE AND MORE ANIMALS

By Elizabeth Smith-Meyer

We are well into our third quarter at the Middle School. The second quarter ended successfully before winter break with the performance of two original and curricular plays and many contributions to the canned food drive that the middle-school students coordinated. On December 18, we delivered nineteen boxes filled with hundreds of cans to the Calvary United Methodist Food Bank/Food Pantry in Avilla. We are glad to say that the effort was school wide, NIDO through Middle School, and we appreciate all the help and donations we received from the other students.



Pictured from left to right delivering canned goods are: Sumaiya, Rachel, Janice Parks from the Calvary UMC Food Pantry, Megan, and John Meiser Oak Farm Erdkinder Manager.

In terms of academics for the quarter, the sixth years are studying the Middle Ages in Humanities. To complement that study, we are reading the epic poem *Beowulf* in verse and learning about this heroic age and Anglo-Saxon poetry. In Science, we are studying weather and researching individual interests such as acid rain, the Palm Sunday tornadoes, and the effects of lightning on the human body. The seventh and eighth years are studying Colonial America and the causes of the Revolutionary War. To complement this work, both classes are reading works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, either his most well-known novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, or his short fiction, such as "The Minister's Black Veil" and "Young Goodman Brown." In Science, the seventh and eighth years have progressed to a unit entitled "Energy Resources and Sustainability." For this work, we are all engaged in a home-energy audit to discover how efficient our own homes actually are.

We have also added farm elements into this new year already. Two alpacas have joined our sheep to enhance our fiber program. They are both male but very gentle and kind, and we have had no temper issues with them as we sometimes experienced with Joe, our former ram. Our plans for the barn are also progressing. We are all excited to add these components to our program for this year and look forward to warmer weather when we can begin our outdoor projects and studies.

KEEP US IN THE LOOP!



We know that many Oak Farm students (both past and present) are involved in activities and events outside of Oak Farm. We'd like to share this information with the Oak Farm community but need your help. We welcome newsletter article submissions from parents and students, please email your article and any pictures to Laura lpounds@oakfarmschool.com by 9 AM Mondays.

Jordan Miller (Oak Farm student 2002 - 2006) will be spending 5 weeks this summer at the highly acclaimed Pacific Northwest Ballet in Seattle. Jordan auditioned for, and was accepted to, several renowned ballet schools around the country, including the San Francisco Ballet, Houston Ballet, and the Kennedy Center's program with Suzanne Farrell. She chose Seattle after being awarded a full tuition scholarship. It has taken much perseverance, dedication, and hard work to reach this level of proficiency and we congratulate Jordan on her achievement.

Congratulations to the following Oak Farm graduates and former students (now in high school) who made the first-semester honor roll or dean's list: from Central Noble High School: **Emily Cole** (Oak Farm student 2006), **Erin Cole** (Oak Farm graduate 2009), **Matt Pounds** (Oak Farm graduate 2008), and **Sara Pounds** (Oak Farm graduate 2007); from Carroll High School: **Andrew Green** (Oak Farm graduate 2009); from Canterbury High School: **Ryan Byer** (Oak Farm graduate 2008); and from New American Youth Ballet: **Jordan Miller** (Oak Farm student 2002-2006)