



# West District News

Farmington Public Schools Website  
www.fpsct.org

February 2012

## Principal's Message

Dear Families and Friends,

If you were to ask my daughters if I was an overprotective mom when they were growing up, you would get a unanimous, three-thumbs-up YES! There was so much to worry about – and my heart broke when little things happened that were out of my control – like if my daughter was chosen last for a team at recess, or wasn't invited to a classmate's birthday party, or was teased because of her new haircut (my fault).

At home and at school, we do our best to protect kids from being hurt, both physically and emotionally. Paradoxically, if we protect our children *too* much, we leave them without the skills, experiences and life lessons they will need to handle bigger challenges as they grow up.

Part of our work is to help kids develop the coping skills to handle the things that are not under our control. In our classrooms, we build these coping and self-advocacy skills during morning meetings and informally when a situation arises. Sometimes, Mrs. Myers, our social worker, helps kids with these challenges.

Our goal is to have every child develop strategies and competence to successfully navigate a variety of social situations. We know that competence will bring our children a sense of confidence and resilience in facing life's little problems.

Warmly,  
*Sharon Lowery*



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## CALENDAR UPDATE regarding WINTER RECESS

Monday, February 20th-President's Day—No School

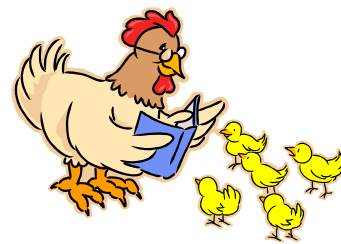
School will be in session for the rest of the week.

(February 21st—24th to makeup days from Storm Alfred)



## Kindergarten News

The kindergartners have begun 2011 in grand fashion! They are off to a great start with their work in all areas of the curriculum. Independent work skills continue to improve during literacy center time. This is especially important at this point for our Reader's Workshop. During this time, the children learn how to be part of a small book group at the reading table. While others are in their book groups, the rest of the children work independently at our literacy and math centers. In Writing Workshop, the students are enjoying writing personal narratives from their own lives. They will soon begin a unit on "All About..." books, where they will learn how to write non-fiction books. Many concepts, such as left to right directionality, spacing between words, hearing and recording sounds in words, sight word application, and focused writing are integrated into the writing process.



Counting, estimating and problem solving are topics we are exploring in math. The children are applying their literacy and numeracy skills to read and solve addition and subtraction word problems about themselves and their classmates. Be sure to look for these books, and keep these in the at-home reading folders for your child to read at home! We are fast approaching our 100<sup>th</sup> day of school. Many children and their families already have completed their "Read to the 100<sup>th</sup> Day" logs, and have brought them in to share with the class. Congratulations and happy reading!

We have been fortunate to enjoy the "almost balmy" January weather, and have played outside most days. The children are doing a beautiful job on their life skills of zipping, buttoning, and keeping track of gloves, mittens and hats! We thank you for reinforcing these skills at home!

## Grade 1 News

It may be chilly outside, but things are really heating up in first grade! During reading workshop, we continue to strengthen our comprehension strategies to help us deepen our understanding of text. We are learning to notice what characters do in stories and use what we notice to help us make predictions of what might happen next. By studying the characters behaviors and feelings, we are able to connect the text to our own lives. We have enjoyed stories such as The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats, Katy and the Big Snow by Virginia Lee Burrton, Williams' Doll by Charlotte Zolotow, and many others. Children are sharing their thinking with their reading partners, during Guided Reading Groups, and in whole class discussions.

Writing Workshop is brimming with excitement as we prepare to publish our personal narrative stories. Thanks to the efforts of our wonderful volunteers at the Publishing Center, first graders will have their stories turned into authentic published books that they will share with their class. Like all good authors, first graders plan their stories before they write them. They are using their writing partners to help them plan their story, think of ideas, and suggest ways to stretch out their ideas and add interesting details to their pieces. You can help your child with ideas for their pieces by sharing family stories at the dinner table or while riding in the car.

Math time has been filled with new learning. Children are beginning to tell time to the quarter hour, solving more complex storyproblems, and counting combinations of pennies, nickels, and dimes.

Did you know first graders have "Fact Power"? This means children know their computation facts "in a snap." The EDM and Xtra Math websites are excellent ways to help your children sharpen their math skills.



In social studies, we have learned about Martin Luther King, Jr. We have also begun our science unit on The States of Matter. Children also have enjoyed learning about penguins. Did you know the Emperor Penguin is four feet tall!

Please continue to read a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes each day with your child. Re-reading books that your child brings home in his/her book bag is very important. These books may seem easy for your child; however the re-reading of "easy" books greatly improves reading fluency



## Grade 2 News

In reading, we have started studying realistic fiction books in preparation for writing. We are studying the main characters by looking at their actions, thoughts, feelings, and words to make decisions about their personalities. Students are using specific words to describe the main character in a book. We have also looked at how authors of realistic fiction make characters believable. Students are using this information to create their own realistic fiction character in writing. We have also looked at the structure of a narrative story using the story map as a tool to talk about stories in reading and plan a story in writing. Students are using this tool to help them identify the problem or goal in a story and to see the events that lead to the solution in a story. We are also working to use evidence in the text to support our ideas about characters. At home, when talking to your child about his/her reading, encourage him/her to share evidence from the text when explaining his/her ideas about the character. You can also model your own thinking about choosing a character trait to describe a character by using information from the text.

In math, students are sharing different ways they solve two digit addition problems, such as using base-ten blocks to add, adding the tens and ones mentally and putting them altogether, or using the number grid. We have just started looking at the partial sums method as one way to show our work in a two digit addition problem. This is a method students will explore more and have more chances to practice in the next units. Students are also finding different ways to organize their thinking in a story problem by using diagrams like the part-part-total or the start and change diagram. When problem solving, students are using what they know about reading to read the problem more carefully and to picture it in their heads. We are also using charts, diagrams, and sketches to show our work when solving these problems so our work is easy to understand by others.



This month we began our first science unit by studying scientists. Students read various books about scientists to identify different jobs scientists do on a regular basis, such as observing carefully, measuring, taking notes, watching things change, and sharing information they learn with others. After identifying different jobs they do, we looked at different areas in our day, such as reading, writing, math, and social studies and thought about how we do some of these same jobs in other places of our day. We have also explored how we use science in our everyday lives to make decisions such as what to wear each day and what snacks to choose. Ask your child to share how these decisions are influenced by science. Together, think of other everyday decisions we make that are influenced by science. We will use what we know about scientists' jobs to begin our study of Balancing and Weighing.

## Grade 3 News

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character -that is the goal of true education." Third graders are receiving this kind of education as they engage in thoughtful work across the curriculum. In January, students finished a reading unit featuring realistic fiction. In this unit they learned how to determine characters' traits and feelings by noticing what they think, say, and do; and to make connections between the experiences and feelings of characters and their own life experiences and feelings. When writing responses about our connections to characters, we use the code "TLC" to remember what is most important – including information from the text, your own life, and explaining the connection. To support this work, when you read with your child, ask him or her to think about a character's traits and feelings and how they are similar or different from his/her own.

In our new reading unit, children are learning and practicing strategies for reading and drawing conclusions. They're also continuing to craft written responses to texts that make sense, answer all parts of the question, and include specific evidence from the text to support conclusions. Most importantly, third graders are learning that these strategies aren't only helpful when responding to CMT like questions, but they're used by good readers over a lifetime of reading. In writing, third graders are revealing their hidden identities.

Did you know that third graders are really super-heroes in disguise? They are... and each one has finished writing and revising his or her realistic fiction story, and is ready for the next adventure. As you've probably seen, superheroes are quick and creative. With sidekicks, they use their powers to defeat enemies. In the same way, with the help of their teachers, classmates, and parents, third grade writers are building their powers to plan and write quickly to a prompt, using tools including engaging leads, setting, and the use of "show, don't tell" when explaining feelings. Students can also carefully balance action and dialogue, all before defeating the "enemy" (the clock)! To support your child as he or she prepares for the direct assessment of writing this March, discuss quick plans for prompts. Ask your child to imagine realistic or fantasy situations such as being caught in a snowstorm or having a toy come to life. How would he or she feel (and what would happen to show this feeling)? What would he or she do? Think of, create, and share different versions of the story. Have fun planning and writing these stories together!



As mathematicians, third graders are reviewing place value and beginning to explore geometry. Key vocabulary included words like point, line segment, ray, parallel and intersecting lines, and the names for different polygons. In the next month, we'll be reviewing some important mathematical skills that students have developed throughout their school experience: estimating solutions to addition and subtraction problems, estimating lengths and areas, sorting and classifying objects by their attributes, determining probability, and solving multi-step problems. As they problem-solve, students will be encouraged to label the important parts of their solutions and explain their thinking.

Last, but not least, in social studies, students have been researching the First American tribes who lived in various regions of the United States. Working collaboratively, students studied the region's geography, how people met their basic needs, and what their beliefs and traditions were like. They discovered how, in early and present times, resources affect ways of life and beliefs affect cultural traditions. Soon, students will become teachers as they present their research to the rest of the class.

Through all of these practices, students are developing critical thinking and good character, sharing their ideas, considering differing opinions, and communicating respectfully. Thank you for supporting these values at home, and for all of your support in providing "true education" to our students.

## Grade 4 News

Our fabulous fourth graders have been increasing their work in math from basic facts to extended facts and multiple digit multiplication. They have been showing persistence with these tricky skills! Math has also been giving us more opportunities to practice our problem solving skills. These vital skills are important life long skills that, as adults, students will use from here on out. To help your learner with these skills you may think of asking him/her to help with some authentic problem solving tasks at home, such as planning a grocery trip budget or figuring out how many pages in their reading they have read so far this year. Using approximates by estimating is a skill we are continuously working to increase. So any time they can estimate will help, too!



In addition to the Custom Typing students do in the computer lab, they are also using that time to do *Everyday Math Games*. This is a great site for your learner to enhance important skills. Just go to the Farmington Public Schools website found at [www.fpsct.org](http://www.fpsct.org) and choose West District from the schools list. Then choose the "Websites for Kids and Parents" link. There you will find the Everyday Math link, along with many other helpful sites. If your child forgets his or her SRB at school, you can refer to this site for helpful information and guidance using the *Interactice Student Reference Book*.

Your child can even log in using his or her login name and password to access the Math Games. If you, or your child, no longer remembers the username and password, please contact your child's teacher and she will get that to you!

Fourth graders are just about to finish the fantasy genre in both reading and writing. Wait until you read the amazing, creative, fun stories they have conjured up! Students have enjoyed fantasy and as a class we have been reading *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, a fantastic example of what the genre has to offer. Students are still expected to be reading at a rate of 20 pages in 30 minutes, as well as filling out their reading logs, nightly. This is vital to helping students see the patterns in their reading lives.

Aside from academics, students in fourth grade are working hard towards becoming more persistent students that exhibit positive working behaviors. Ask your child what they have done today to show persistence, personal responsibility and/or accuracy in their daily work. Strong work habits of mind are imperative to have a successful academic career.

## HAPPY WINTER FUN!





2012, the year of teamwork and becoming the best teammate a West District student can be continues! Through various sports, events, and activities we will be working to make each West District student the best teammate they can be. This past month we have learned how to do that in the sport of basketball.

In grades K-2, students have been learning about various basketball skills. They have seen improvement in their dribbling, passing, and shooting. We have talked about the 100 shot rule. While in class we learn the correct shooting form, and then try to get 100+ practice shots through various shooting games in class. I have been encouraging students to practice dribbling a ball on their own at home (as the weather improves of course), and shooting around for fun as a way to improve. Students are learning that when they practice, they get better at their favorite activities. They are learning to both physically show and verbally prove how their skills are improving. Practice makes perfect!

In grades 3-4, students have moved very far in our basketball unit. Students at this point have mastered the basic skills of dribbling, passing, and shooting, and now are learning teamwork skills of playing defense, moving

without the ball, and involving all teammates. I always say I hope that all students at this age could watch a local basketball game, or even a Uconn game on TV and fully understand what is going on. We have seen great strides this year for this age group!

As we move forward in both class and before\after school sports, we will be working on our throwing in the form of the very popular Team Handball sport. This is the ultimate teamwork game, which is a skill that is our PE program's main focus this year.

Remember that the before and after school events calendar is on the Friday Folder, and also on my website (link is below). We will see a variety of events in February, but keep your eyes out for the March schedule, which has our most events for all grades and is the most popular time of year. There will be a mix of before and after school events in the next couple of months before moving to before school events in the spring to limit conflicts with spring sport leagues and school events. It is still not too late to sign up!! Contact me at [Ziffj@fpsct.org](mailto:Ziffj@fpsct.org) if interested.

Thanks for encouraging your child to practice, be a good teammate to others in all sports, and to stay active!

### Upcoming Dates To Remember

Wednesday, February 1st-Good Start Mtg-6:30 pm

Tuesday, PTO mtg.-Library-7 pm

Mon/Tues, Jan. 13th/14th—BOE @ FHS-7 pm

**Monday, February 20th-**

**President's Day-No School**

Monday, February 27th—BOE @ FHS-7 pm

Tuesday, February 28th—Grade 4 Parent's Night  
at West Woods-7 pm

Wednesday, February 29th—Assembly—2:15 pm

Tuesday, March 6th—PTO mtg.-Library 7 pm

Wednesday, March 7th-Good Start Mtg.-6:30 pm

Monday, March 12th—BOE @Noah Wallace-7 pm

Friday, March 23rd—Report Cards Go Home

**Monday & Tuesday, March 26th & 27th—**

**Parent/Teacher Conferences-Early Dismissal  
Gr. 1-4, 8:45-1:15, AM K, 8:45-11 am, PM K, 11-  
1:15 pm**

Monday, March 26th—BOE @ FHS-7 pm

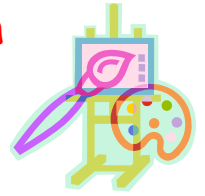
Friday, March 30th—Assembly—9:00 am

Wednesday, April 4th—Good Start Mtg.-6:30 pm

**Friday, April 6th—Good Friday—No School**

**Need to email us -  
[wdooffice@fpsct.org](mailto:wdooffice@fpsct.org)**

## Artistic Updates from Mrs. Bastiaanse-Fritch



The K-12 Select Art Show will be held on February, and the awards ceremony will begin promptly at 5:30pm. If your child's art work was selected for this show your child would have brought home a "special note." All are welcome. It's a wonderful event to see the art curriculum from Kindergarten through senior year of High School!

we hang their artwork on the clothes line. If you are really motivated, How about painting your garage wall with magnetic paint and create an art gallery? Of course you could always frame them or hang them on the fridge! Just a few ideas....Have fun!

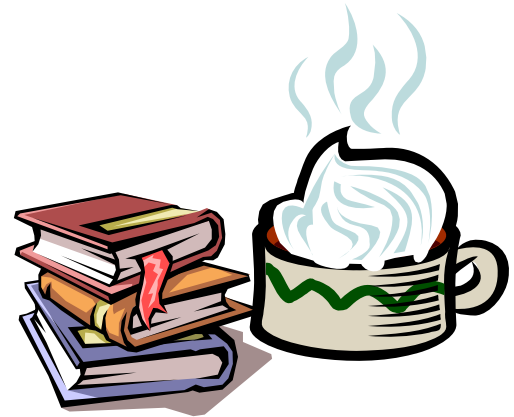
Like me, you might wonder to yourself, when your child comes home with his or her artwork....What do I do with all this art? How do I store or display it? There are many ways to keep them forever...or for a few years anyway. Here are a few ideas, you could take digital photos of your child's art and upload them to your favorite photo site to create a photo book. You can laminate them and use your child's art as placemats, or door hangings. String the art together to make a calendar. I hung a "clothes line" of ribbon in my daughter's rooms, and let them decorate the clothes pins with stickers and paint and

Attention! As ceramic pieces go home BE CAREFUL! Clay is fragile and can easily break if dropped. Also, some of the edges may be sharp, that's why I send them home wrapped in a bag.

Lastly, I just want to send a Big HUGE thank you to the Dinner Squad, the PTO and all the families who made me cards when I was out before vacation due to my accident. I truly felt cared for and your generosity is greatly appreciated! Thank you again!



## SNUGGLE UP WITH A GOOD BOOK



## Music Notes from Mrs. Raczkowski



This month's Music Spotlight is on...drum roll please!... Third Grade! Third graders have been very hard at work learning scales and note/rest values. They have learned the solfege pitches of the pentatonic scale and the major scale. In addition, they have learned the following notes and rests: whole note, half note, quarter note, eighth notes, sixteenth notes, whole rest, half rest, and quarter rest. All of this knowledge will come in handy when they begin to compose their own songs this winter! Third graders have also learned songs to sing in unison, in rounds, and as partner songs (2 different songs sung simultaneously!). These songs include: *Mr. Moon*, *Canoe Song*, and *Land of the Silver Birch*. Two special Native American songs have been the focus in the music room: *The Navajo Happy Song* and the *Apache Melody*. Students learned about musical phrases with the *Navajo Happy Song* by creating beat motions for the changing phrases. The *Apache Melody* required students to pass rocks in a circle to the beat while singing, and to play instruments as the accompaniment! These instruments included the Native American drum, bells, triangle, and hand drum. Way-to-go Third Graders! Please "tune" in next month to see who's in the Music Spotlight!