

BY LEAPS AND BOUNDS



The Principal's Newsletter

Burning Tree Elementary School

Nancy L. Erdrich, Principal

January, 2009

With Appreciation:

- Special thanks to **Katerina Papaioannou** and **Celine McGowan** for a successful Lunch with a Scientist. Every class had a presenter, and almost 100% of the students attended. Our visitors were thrilled to present to our students, and were impressed by their questions and comments. Thank you, also, for working so hard to make the science fair a success. The science fair is rescheduled for February 5th (with set-up the evening of February 4th).
- Special thanks to everyone who attended the **health committee** meeting. The committee will review current school policies regarding “competitive foods”: food served at school and PTA events (including birthday parties), treats distributed at school, and food incentives. The committee will also look at MCPS policy regarding what a la carte options are available and students purchasing extra lunches. The next meeting will be on February 6 at 8:15 a.m. Everyone is welcome to attend.
- Special thanks for those who attended the **environmental committee** meeting. The committee will be writing a proposal for a grant to the Audubon Naturalist Society, working with the school’s green team, and planning a program for Earth Day. For more information on how you can be involved, please contact Ira Feldman and join us at the next meeting.

A message from the Principal:

There has been a great deal of interest regarding whether Montgomery County Public Schools should continue to label students as gifted and talented. Burning Tree is one of two MCPS schools that does not label its students. Our students go through the same “global screening” process as all second graders in MCPS, and we gather the same information regarding our students’ abilities as every other MCPS school. The only thing we do differently is we do not label our students. Instead, we use the global screening information to plan appropriate instruction and to identify hidden potential. Below is a summary of “how we do business” every day at Burning Tree and how we are meeting the academic needs of every student.

How does being a “no-label” school affect instruction?

Being a no-label pilot school really does not affect instruction at Burning Tree. It truly does not matter whether a student is labeled gifted or not; what really matters is that students receive access to advanced instruction when they are ready for it, or when we see that they have the potential for it. We have high expectations for student achievement at all levels (including our students with special needs), and the teachers regularly differentiate what is taught (content), how it is taught (process), and what is expected from the students (product). Grouping tends to

be flexible and students are grouped according to skills, interests, and needs based on pre-assessments and formative (ongoing) assessments.

Burning Tree teachers enrich the curriculum every day by extending learning opportunities and providing opportunities for higher order thinking. These opportunities are open to every child, and not limited to students who have been labeled gifted and talented.

We teach the same advanced content that every other MCPS school teaches, including William and Mary, Jacob's Ladder, and Junior Great Books, but our students also participate in Math Olympiad and the National Geography Bee. Every math teacher focuses on grade level objectives with extensions into the next grade level, and one 2nd, 3rd and 4th class is learning the next grade level curriculum with extensions into the following grade. Our students excel so much in math that over 50% of our fifth graders take math 6 and math 7 and then go on to do extremely well at Pyle Middle School.

We use the Writers' Workshop format to produce some incredible narrative, poetry and non-fiction writing, and every one of our students does a research project that focuses on both reading/language arts and science skills. Students are taught how to choose and research their topics while teachers simultaneously focus on quality informational writing. In addition, thanks to the staff/family partnership, Burning Tree provides science enrichment opportunities that include lunch with a scientist, family science night at the Air and Space Museum and our science fair. We are also fortunate to have 30 fourth and fifth grade students participate in the First Lego League club, an after school program where scientists from the Naval Surface Warfare Center teach BT students to build and program Lego robots.

Burning Tree provides accelerated and enriched learning experiences to students who in other schools would be labeled gifted, as well as to students who show motivation, interest and academic potential. Our goal is to extend the learning opportunities for all of our students.

How does Burning Tree meet the needs of all of its students?

We strive to meet the needs of all of our students. We are constantly looking at student data to determine changes to instructional practices and student groupings. Some of our math classes are co-taught which enables us to better differentiate instruction, and some of our students receive additional math and reading interventions. And all of our included learning center students receive support in their general education classrooms from a paraeducator, a special education teacher, or a resource specialist. Having another adult in the classroom allows us to better meet the needs of all of the students in the classroom.

We also focus on enhancing our students' learning through arts integration, which means that teachers are using the arts to teach the content areas. Our current artist-in-residence is working with every grade level and every student. She is presently using bookmaking and book arts to teach different areas of the curriculum. Last year's resident artist worked with the students to create the wonderful mural in the gym lobby.

Thank you for your support in helping us meet the academic, physical and social/emotional

needs of all of our students. The unique partnership that exists between the Burning Tree parent community and the school truly makes Burning Tree Elementary School an amazing place to learn.

News and Notes:

- **Shared sadness:** As you know the Burning Tree community experienced the death of one of our students, Nikki Rann. Information will be coming out shortly regarding how you can contribute to a memorial fund that is being set up for Nikki. We are also discussing what the school will be doing to remember Nikki. We send our condolences to the Rann family.
- **School closings, delays, early dismissals, and emergency notices:** Please sign up for Quick Notes at <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/quicknotes/welcome/english/> to have emergency information sent to you directly. Another option is to go the MCPS home page at <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/> for information about changes to the school schedule.
- **Two new staff members:**
 - We are fortunate to have been allocated a .5 teacher to reduce class size in the 2/3 learning center class. Ms. Justina Miller, our new teacher, will be working with some of our second grade learning center students. This will enable us to better differentiate reading/language arts instruction. Parents who are affected by this change have already received letters.
 - Mr. Robert Oyler, our new .3 speech pathologist, will be taking over Ms. Barkan's caseload. He will be starting shortly and will primarily be working with the same students.
- **Attendance matters!** MCPS and the State of Maryland track absences, tardies and early dismissals. *We must have 94% attendance for the school year!* When your child is absent, please call the school. When your child returns to school, *please send in a note explaining the reason for absence* (within three days). This is a State of Maryland requirement.
- **Save these dates:** Standardized tests are coming soon and we need 100% attendance. Please do not schedule any doctor's appointments or vacations on the following dates:

MSA Reading	Grade 3 & 4	March 16 and 17
MSA Reading	Grade 5	March 18 and 19
MSA Math	Grade 3 & 4	March 20 and 23
MSA Math	Grade 5	March 24 and 25
MSA Make-up	Grades 3-5	March 26 and 27
TerraNova2	Grade 2	April 27 – 30
MSA Science	Grade 5	May 4 and 5

- **Kindergarten orientation is May 8th.** Parents will be invited to Burning Tree on that date to register, meet our kindergarten staff, and engage in exciting activities. Next year's kindergarteners will have an opportunity to meet prospective classmates. If you know of anyone with a young child who will be new to our school, please tell them to contact the school to get on our mailing list. We need an accurate count of prospective students to ensure the allocation of enough kindergarten teachers.
- **mylunchmoney.com:** Did you know that you can check your child's lunch account on mylunchmoney.com? This will give you an opportunity to view your child's lunch account.

It has come to our attention that some students have been buying flavored water and two lunches without their parent's knowledge. Please check your child's account and talk to your child about what can be bought at school.

- **Is your student's emergency information accurate?** As the water main break on River Road reminded us last month, an emergency can happen any time, resulting in the need for school closures. During these times it is imperative that we can reach all families. Please call the office to update emergency information, including additional phone numbers of persons to be contacted in case a parent cannot be reached. Also, you should have an alternative plan for where your child will go if you cannot get home in time for the school's dismissal - a friend's or neighbor's house.
- **Increasing physical fitness:** Are you interested in helping to increase student fitness? We would like to increase our Fitness Frogs and Girls on the Run programs. Please contact Mr. Tark if you have time to give.
- **Come and get it!** Our lost and found is overflowing. The last day for picking up your child's lost items will be February 13. All items left behind will be donated to our sister school, Broad Acres ES.
- **Homework Hotline** resumes on MCPS-ITV. Please check the newspaper for channel numbers. The number to call is 301-279-3234 if your child needs help with his or her homework.
- **Another chance:** If you haven't done so already, please fill out the online 2008–2009 Parent Satisfaction Survey. Your responses are completely confidential, and your feedback lets the Burning Tree staff know how we are doing and how we can improve our school. It also gives you an opportunity to give MCPS valuable feedback. Please fill out the survey on the following website: <http://sharedaccountability.mcpsprimetime.org/ParentSurvey/>
- **Fifth grade parents:** Family Life is part of the MCPS curriculum, however, you will have the opportunity to view the materials prior to the lessons and opt out of having your child participate, should you choose to do so. You will be fully informed as to when this will take place, and you will receive more information prior to the beginning the family life unit.

Upcoming Dates:

Friday, January 27	Second semester begins
Friday, January 30	Principal's Advisory Committee - 8:15 a.m. Report cards distributed
Tuesday, February 3	PTA Meeting 7:00 p.m.
Wednesday, February 4	Staff Appreciation Lunch Science Fair set-up - 5:00 p.m. - 6:45 p.m.
Thursday, February 5	Science Fair - 7:00
Tuesday, February 10	Family Science Night at the Smithsonian
Thursday, February 12	Instrumental Music Concert - 7:00 p.m.
Friday, February 13	Instrumental Music Concerts Grades K-2 9:45 a.m.; Grades 3-5 10:45 a.m. Valentine's Day Parties - 2:00 p.m.
Monday, February 16	President's Day – No School
Friday, February 20	Family Skate Night
Tuesday, February 24	2 nd grade concert

Quotable quotes:

- Heard as a student in Mr. Wells' class was leaving the book fair, "*What's more important than children's education?*"
- Fourth grade student's response when asked why he was saluting during the singing of our school song during the fourth grade concert, "*I did it because I thought it was so important that I needed the whole world to know that.*"
- Written by a kindergartener in Ms. Merritt's class when the class was asked to write about the inauguration, "*He lets all the people drink out of the same water fountain.*"

Learning Opportunities:

Although the following programs are not endorsed by MCPS, the following programs have come across my desk. Please check the bulletin board above the PTA cubbies in the lobby for further information or go the noted websites:

- **Aspergers Disorder and Autism, Advances in Understanding and Interventions** is a one day seminar on March 31 in Towson MD. For more information go to www.neel.org.
- The Dyslexia Education Center has upcoming workshops. Please check their website at www.asdec.org.