

Westbrook: Words of Wisdom

From Veteran Westbrook Parents to New Westbrook Families
(Updated October 2011)

Welcome to Westbrook!

This is not by any means an 'official guide' to Westbrook Elementary School. Rather, it is intended to be a concise primer with tips and information that we have learned over the years and that we wish someone had told us when our families were new to Westbrook.

Communication

WESTBROOK LISTSERVS

School families are invited to join the school listserv, an email distribution list which is used to post school related announcements. Almost everything you need to know gets posted on the listserv. This is often the way to find out about after school activities, sports teams and issues concerning the school. To join, please visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/westbrook-school>.

A separate listserv has been set up for the parents or guardians of a Westbrook student with special needs or learning differences or who receives educational support. To join, please visit http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WestbrookES_Special_Needs or e-mail WestbrookES_Special_Needs@yahoogroups.com.

For non-school related information, there are community based listservs available for announcements of local events, news, power outages or sales - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/announce-westbrook-hood>
- and for discussion of neighborhood concerns - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/discuss-westbrook-hood/>

These list-serves are not moderated, and users need to be aware that any message sent is delivered to around 600 people.

Tip: Join the Westbrook all-school and neighborhood listservs. It is the easiest way to stay informed.

Tip: Be sure to sign your name and your child's name and grade when posting messages on the school listserv.

Tip: Consider carefully before hitting "reply-all" on a listserv message!

RECEIVING EMERGENCY INFORMATION

Sign up for Montgomery County Alert, which uses the Roam Secure Alert Network to contact you during a major crisis, emergency, or severe weather event (e.g. water main break, tornado warning). If there is ever an emergency at the school and Ms. Jones cannot send a message via ConnectEd (the school's communication system), you will be able to receive information via Montgomery County Alert.

<https://alert.montgomerycountymd.gov/index.php?CCheck=1>

Tip: Make sure that the school has your current phone numbers and e-mail addresses so that the school can contact you in the event of an emergency.

GETTING INSIDE THE SCHOOL - SAFETY, SECURITY FOR VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Although Westbrook uses more than one entrance for dismissal, visitors must enter the school through the front doors, wait to be buzzed in through the security system, and sign in at the Main Office. For security reasons, the front doors are locked during school hours. There they will get a name tag sticker or pin to put on before proceeding to other areas of the school. This is a safety precaution so that all people in the building are accounted for in the event of an emergency. Parents volunteering in portable classrooms must sign in at the main office before entering the portables. If a visitor is coming to volunteer, he or she is encouraged to mark the hours of volunteer service in the blue PTA notebook so that Westbrook can report totals to MCPS.

Tip: See the staff in the Main Office for your own personalized Westbrook button. It can be left in the office for use whenever you come & go.

Organizations

PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

The Westbrook PTA is a strong and active organization of parents and teachers working together on behalf of our children. The PTA welcomes volunteers. During the 2010-2011 school year, at least 175 volunteers provided more than 5,000 volunteer hours to the school community. The PTA has 55 active committees chaired or co-chaired by about 80 parents. All parents are welcome to join the PTA and get involved at Westbrook.

With our current annual budget of about \$60,000, the PTA provides critical funds and support to Westbrook students, teachers, programs and facilities. Funds primarily are raised by PTA donations, Book Fair, a winter fundraiser and the Westbrook Carnival, which has been held at Westbrook since the 1940's and is eagerly awaited and attended by the Westbrook community. With the guidance of many dedicated volunteers, the PTA funds expanded music and arts programs, science and cultural arts assemblies, the Community of Caring program, parenting seminars, and sponsors before and after school programs at Westbrook, just to name a few things

Tip: Join the PTA! Go to www.pay4schoolstuffonline.com and set up an account for your Westbrook student. Join the PTA, pay class dues, buy an extra directory, and sign up for before and after school activities at Westbrook in just a few minutes.

Tip: Participate in the school listserv and attend PTA meetings to stay informed. PTA meetings are generally held the first Tuesday of the month. Childcare is provided for children 4 and over. If you can't attend nighttime meetings, read the PTA monthly meeting minutes and the PTA Patter, and take the opportunity to get a volunteer position you can do from home or work.

Tip: Getting involved is a great way to meet other Westbrook families and learn about what is going on in the school community. There are lots of evening and weekend volunteer opportunities if you are not able to volunteer during the school day.

FRIENDS OF WESTBROOK SCHOOL (FOWS)

FOWS was established in 1999, as a not-for-profit organization to raise money for specific capital projects that fall outside MCPS or PTA budgets or spending guidelines. Parent membership on the Board is open to any interested parents. Past FOWS projects include renovation and playground equipment for the middle and the lower playgrounds, a new sound system for the All Purpose Room, and a security system to monitor entrances to the school building. During Westbrook's expansion, FOWS will focus on raising funds to pay for expansion-related projects not funded by MCPS, like an outdoor courtyard classroom.

Resources and Rules

WESTBROOK DIRECTORY INCLUDES SCHOOL POLICIES AND CALENDAR

The Westbrook Directory is so much more than a directory! It contains the school calendar, MCPS policies and logistics particular to Westbrook, contact information for PTA leadership and committee chairs, in addition to other important information.

When you join the PTA, you get a complimentary, bound copy of the Westbrook Directory with your membership, as well as a mobile directory.

Tip: Buy additional copies (one for your car, one for your children) at Back to School Night, or from the Westbrook office. You will be glad you did!

Tip: Be sure to always update your information with the Main Office if you have changed jobs or phones. This is the actual data used to reach you in an emergency as well as to create your directory entry annually. You definitely want this to be accurate!

WESTBROOK WEBSITE

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/westbrookes

The school website is a great source of MCPS information. The PTA portion of the website features an up-to-date online calendar, committee information, archived issues of the PTA Patter and a link to the FOWS website. Be sure to check back frequently for the most current information.

PTA PATTERN

This is a newsletter from the PTA featuring news, student articles and various committee reports. It is published about 6 times each school year, and is available on the listserv and distributed via children's backpacks.

WESTBROOK MONTHLY

This is a monthly calendar update from the principal on upcoming events . It is distributed at the beginning of each month via student backpacks and is typically on brightly colored paper so you can find it easily.

PARKING AT SCHOOL/TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

It is quite obvious that parking at Westbrook is not easy! In fact, parking and pickup can get so jammed that many times it is easier to walk to school, even on bad weather days. If you live close enough, just get an umbrella, some boots, and a good jacket, leave a few minutes earlier and spare the earth some emissions.

When driving, there are several rules that MUST be followed:

Obey ALL posted signs – they are there for a reason. For example, cars parked at the bottom of the Allan Terrace hill can make it impossible for the buses to turn the corner. In addition, it is illegal to park in front of a fire hydrant.

Do not enter Allan Terrace from the intersection of Baltimore and Allan Rd. during posted times. The street is one way during drop off and pick up hours. If you happen to have a child at the Westmoreland Children's Center, be considerate and do no 'cut in' on Allan Terrace during the morning and afternoon rush.

Do not stop on the street side of the school bus area in front of the school to drop off a child. It is a dangerous place to cross onto the school grounds, and it blocks the traffic flow.

“KISS AND GO” MORNING DROP OFF LANE

Near the fire hydrant in front of the school on Allan Terrace, you will notice traffic signs bracketing approximately four spaces. These few first spaces on the school side of Allan

Terrace are reserved from 8:15-8:50 on school mornings for parents to temporarily pull out of traffic while their children hop out of the car. Please do not idle, or leave your car in these spots during these times. If everyone cooperates, this can be a safe and efficient way to get our children to school.

To use the “Kiss and Go” you must feel confident that your child can get out of the car and walk independently into the school. Please be courteous and remember it only takes one car to start a traffic jam that makes others late.

Parents have been known to "out" drivers who violate the parking and/or “Kiss and Go” policies on the listserv.

Tip: If you can, walk to school as much as possible or, if you live in Brookdale or Westmoreland Hills, have your children take the bus. If you must drive, drive slowly and cautiously, and be courteous to your neighbors. There are very few sidewalks in the neighborhoods surrounding Westbrook.

School Year Events

BACK-TO SCHOOL PICNIC/END-OF-SCHOOL PICNIC

School picnics are very informal gatherings of families, usually held on a Friday early in September and in June. Bring a blanket and something to eat, and enjoy socializing with other families on the school field and playground.

Tip: Bring the bug spray and a trash bag to cart your garbage off the school grounds. Also bring some spare change - - usually ice cream or gelato is available for sale at the picnics.

Tip: The bathrooms in the all purpose room at Westbrook will be open during the picnics.

SEPTEMBER - BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT (BTSN)

Back To School Night (BTSN) occurs on a weeknight and is a parents-only event. (Typically there will be a different BTSN for grades K-2 and grades 3-5.) First the principal introduces the staff, then parents split up by grade level and usually the teaching team for each grade presents an overview of the curriculum with a question and answer session. Then parents are invited to visit their child’s classroom and leave a note at his/her desk. After the program, parents gather in the all-purpose room to sign-up for various activities at tables run by their children’s room parents, including a teacher conference at the end of the 1st marking period, usually around Veterans Day.

Tip: This is a great opportunity to learn about school and meet other parents. Introduce yourself and bring your calendar!

OCTOBER – PARENT VISITATION DAY

Parent Visitation Day is usually scheduled on Columbus Day (a federal holiday) and is an opportunity for parents to visit the classroom and see what a typical school morning is like. (It is typical, except for the fact that there are 30 parents sitting in the classroom, too). Visitation Day usually begins 20-30 minutes AFTER the start of school and lasts through the morning and ends before lunch.

Tip: This is an activity that many parents attend. You must arrange for childcare for pre-school age children.

NOVEMBER - BOOK FAIR

The Book Fair is a significant fall fundraising event held in the Media Center over the course of a few days to raise funds and promote reading. Often special events (authors, speakers or activities) are a part of the fun – some events are held in the afternoon and some in the evening.

Tip: Book fair offers a great opportunity to buy holiday gifts early. Look for your child to bring home a wish list of books to purchase. Also, check out teacher and library wish lists and consider making a donation to the school.

NOVEMBER - SPIRIT WEAR

A PTA committee sells “spirit” wear in the fall- comfortable clothing (usually pants, sweatshirts, pjs and tees) in school colors (navy & white) with Westbrook logos on them. The spirit committee also sells magnetic car stickers with the Westbrook logo. Announcements that the sale is on will come home in the students' backpacks as well as on the listserv.

Tip: The sale is by advance order only. Clothing will come home in backpacks.

DECEMBER – SKATE NIGHT

MARCH - INTERNATIONAL NIGHT

International Night is a long-standing tradition. It is usually held in the all purpose room at Westland Middle School, which is located by the Little Falls Library. It is a springtime evening event where families share their cultural backgrounds with the school community. Families often wear their national dress and provide samples of their cuisine for small fees. Cultural exhibits and activities are also a part of this fun evening. The PTA coordinated language classes usually perform short programs at this event.

APRIL - CARNIVAL TEE SHIRTS

Different from Spirit Wear, these short sleeved tee shirts feature artwork of Westbrook students. They are sold by advance sale – usually beginning in late March -- and delivered to the classroom before Carnival. The vast majority of students wear these special keepsakes on the day of Carnival.

Tip: Look for the Carnival Tee Shirt Art Contest announcement if you think your child might want to submit a thematic drawing.

MAY - CARNIVAL

The Westbrook Carnival is (and has been for decades) held after school on the first Friday in May. A wide range of activities - including games and rides - and food in the form of concessions, bake sales and a cake walk provide fun for the whole family.

Tip: Plan to participate somehow - by taking a daytime or afternoon volunteer shift at Carnival. Parents with young children often help with set up the morning of Carnival. Volunteer shifts are also available for middle and high school students. Carnival is a major undertaking that requires the assistance of every Westbrook family to ensure its traditional success.

BINGO NIGHT (Date varies, in the spring or fall)

This fun evening is open to all Westbrook families. Cards are available for a minimal fee and there are many opportunities to win fun prizes.

Tip: Bring money to purchase pizza and desserts and make it an evening outing for the entire family!

TALENT SHOW (Date varies, in the spring)

All Westbrook superstars in grades 1-5 are invited to showcase their talents at the annual Westbrook Talent Show, held one evening in the spring. This fun event is eagerly anticipated by all Westbrook students!

SGA SPIRIT DAYS

During the school year, the SGA will sponsor “Spirit Days”, which follow different themes such as, “Wacky Hair Day”, “PJ Day” or “Jersey Day.” Participation is entirely optional and may be practiced by the whole school or a single grade. Spirit Days are often announced only in school – and not on the listserv or through a notice in the backpack.

Tip: If your child starts making their hair wacky one morning, it could be a sign that it’s actually SGA Spirit Day. You can call the office to confirm as no child wants to miss out on being wacky!

How Does It Work?

LUNCH/CAFETERIA

Lunch is served daily and the menu is distributed to the students. It can be accessed electronically at:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/foodserv/menus/cafemenus.shtm>

If your child plans to buy lunch, you need to deposit money (check payable to Westbrook Cafeteria) in your student's account or online at www.mylunchmoney.com. To purchase food, each student is given a PIN number. The PIN is used to debit the cost of their lunch purchase from this account. Notices of low balances are regularly sent home.

WHAT IF MY CHILD FORGOT LUNCH OR HOMEWORK?

Have you seen the Drop-Off Table? It is located in the main hall just outside the Media Center and main office. Parents can place items such as lunches, books, assignments, etc., on the table as long as they are clearly labeled with the child's name. Teachers are reminding students to check this table during the day if they are expecting (or hoping for) any items. With a little practice it will become an efficient way to make a connection.

Tip: Do not enter the classroom without prior approval since each visit interrupts instruction. If you're leaving something not expected by your child, tell the main office you've left something and they can notify your child's teacher.

WHAT IF MY CHILD IS LATE TO SCHOOL?

School starts promptly at 8:50 am and any child arriving thereafter must sign in at the main office. Escort your child to the office and sign your child in on the blue clipboard on the counter. Older students may sign themselves in and all students can find their classrooms themselves. Leading a child into the classroom interrupts instruction and the flow of the morning.

Tip: The principal is watching. Parents of regularly tardy students will hear from her.

HOW CAN I COMMUNICATE WITH MY CHILD'S TEACHER?

Emailing the teacher is usually least intrusive. You may also call the office and leave a message for the teacher so that the teacher can return your call. Do not stop by the classroom unannounced.

Tip: All teacher and staff email addresses are located on the Westbrook web site under the staff tab.

TEACHER APPRECIATION

Using funds set aside from PTA dues, room parent committee chairs host a teacher luncheon each semester on behalf of the PTA. The luncheon is catered (wraps, salads and dessert), and is always very graciously received. A pot luck luncheon is organized as a second teacher appreciation event each semester. Families that cooks or bakes for the luncheon will be recognized for their contribution. Feeding the folks who tend to our children for 6 hours a day, 5 days a week is a great way to say, "thank you"!

Another beloved teacher appreciation tradition is Thanksgiving Pie Day. Each class donates three pies to the event on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving vacation and each staff member gets a pie to take home for the Thanksgiving Holiday.

In addition to these organized teacher appreciation events, families may, at their discretion, give their teacher(s) each a gift of up to \$25 each semester. Room parents typically send a reminder at the winter holidays and end of the school year. Gift cards or homemade treats are much appreciated!

HOW DO I RESERVE A ROOM FOR A NEW ACTIVITY?

Each year, one of the PTA vice-presidents is responsible for making reservations for PTA activities through the country reservation system (called the ICB or Community Use of Public Facilities Office). Even though Westbrook is "our school," every club, event, or after-school activity must reserve the space and pay a small fee. If you are trying to start a non-PTA activity, you will need to attend training and receive your own login and password to the CUPF online reservation system. More information can be found at: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cupf

PLAYDATE ARRANGEMENTS

Do NOT call the office to notify your child about a play-date for that afternoon. Last minute social arrangements should be made outside of school.

Tip: Keep a directory handy or have the directory website programmed in your phone so that you have a backup plan if something comes up around dismissal time.

WESTBROOK'S EXPANSION

Westbrook is expanding! The new addition to our building will include 12-15 new classrooms and a full-size gym, along with more bathrooms and other support rooms. Construction will begin at Westbrook in January 2012 and is estimated to be completed in time for the opening of school in fall 2013.

Tip: To learn more about the construction at Westbrook, visit the Expansion website <http://westbrookexpansion.wordpress.com/>.