



The Pulse of Potomac

Potomac Elementary School PTA Newsletter

October 2007

www.pespta.org



PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hello Potomac Families and Staff,

Many of you know we are facing a boundary study this spring to relieve our overcrowding. You may find it useful to visit this new link for the MCPS 2007-2012 plans for our cluster. There is a helpful map of current boundaries and a write-up on what is occurring at each of the schools in our cluster during the five-year planning period. Go to:

<http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/planning/PDF/CIP09%20Chapter%204%20Churchill.pdf>

Pepco and MCPS began work on moving the phone pole (at the entrance of our driveway) that was hit by a bus this fall.

Our PTA is off to a great start. Many PTA programs have already been quite successful. Remember that your best way to verify information is on our PTA website: www.pespta.org.

Remember, if you want to get involved, contact any PTA Board member and let us know – we always need volunteers. Thank you for all you do for our school.

Diana Conway,
PES PTA President

Thank You to:

- ✓ **Randi Gritz and the Sickels Family** for the wonderful *back-to-school picnic*
- ✓ **Chris Berkowitz** for another highly successful bookfair, complete with teachers' wish lists (thanks to the generous parents who donated books)
- ✓ **Loiuse Laudicina** for coordinating our *Booktrain* – which is roaring along with generous contributions from parents in honor of your children
- ✓ **Holly Lotwin and Jill Newman** for the continuing work on our community service projects – particularly for the *Walk for Homeless* and the *costume drive* in October
- ✓ **Jeanne Srour** for the directory
- ✓ **Virginia Horton** for coordinating *Sally Foster sales*
- ✓ **Kirsten Quigley** for rallying the *Earth Day committee* in beautifying the beds and pots around our school, plus our lovely butterfly garden, created so 2nd graders could release their science curriculum butterflies into a locally hospitable environment
- ✓ **Jeri Gelb** for coordination of our *Staff Appreciation luncheons* for our hard-working staff
- ✓ **Tammy Goldberg** for getting the *Logo/Spirit Wear* sale underway



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FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

Dear Parents,

We received many positive comments about the snapshots of classroom learning and activities in the last Potomac Pulse. I think that it is so important to understand that the students are introduced to new topics every year, and that, particularly in math and reading, they revisit the curriculum objectives and increase their depth and breathe of the content areas.

Potomac parents are so resourceful and creative. With the monkey bars removed, many of you have weighed in on your concerns about the opportunities available to children at recess. I want to thank you for your support in volunteering during recess. Mrs. Joyce Whang, Peter and Leila Durand's mom, created soccer rules with some students -- Alex Chen, David Stern, Drew Stern, and Peter Durand -- and they are vetting them with Potomac staff to develop a safer soccer game. They tried these rules out with friends in their own yards, and came up with several that

look workable. We will reinstate soccer, as we hire replacement staff and add volunteers on the playground.

Here's a tip! If you are a playground volunteer, feel free to join us during inclement weather. We would love to have an extra pair of hands to support us as we supervise our students.

It's hard to believe that parent conferences are just around the corner. Please see the National Education Association article on page 4 on some parent ideas to prepare for the conference with your child's teacher.

We enjoyed meeting you at the PTA Principal coffees, and we will be having additional coffees during the year. Please join us to learn more about the programs at Potomac and what Montgomery Public Schools has to offer.

Linda Goldberg, Principal

Get well soon!

We miss Jason Smith, physical education teacher. He had emergency surgery in the beginning of October, and he will return mid-November. Andrew Cumings, our trusty substitute teacher, has done an excellent job in Mr. Smith's absence. We are looking forward to Mr. Smith's speedy recovery and return to Potomac.

Important Web Sites

PTA: www.pespta.org

School: www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/potomaces/

Subscribe to Mustang Email: Mustange-mail-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Subscribe to MCPSQuicknotes: www.mcpsquicknotes.org

QuickNotes is your information connection to Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Available in six languages, *QuickNotes* will provide you with up-to-date news and information about the school system through the convenience of e-mail.



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November

- 5th PTA Exec Board meeting, 9:30 am
- 6th PTA Meeting, 7:30 pm
- 8th Staff & Teacher Appreciation Luncheon
- 9th Early Release (1:00 pm); parent conferences
- 10th Project: Quality Time, National Gallery of Art, a family field trip
- 12-16 **American Education Week**, Great Public Schools: A Basic Right and Our Responsibility
- 12th Early Release (1:00 pm); parent conferences
- 13th Kennedy Center field trip, grade 3
- 14th Strathmore Field Trip, grade 2 11:10 am-1:50 pm
- 14th Dedication of new Media Center. Please join us! 2 pm
- 14th Volunteers needed for MCPS-required mailing of all community flyers; 9:30 am Teachers Lounge
- 19th Meet your Councilmember Roger Berliner – PES Media Center, 7-9 pm
- 22nd Thanksgiving Break-no school
- 23rd Thanksgiving Break-no school

December

- 3rd School Improvement Meeting, 4-5 pm
- 6th PTA Exec Board meeting, 9:30 am
- 24,25 Christmas Holiday
- 26-28, 31 Winter Break

Save the Date!!

Save Thursday, March 13, 2008 for our 2nd PES PARENT SOCIAL AND SILENT AUCTION. For more information, please contact Michelle Benaim michbenaim@aol.com or Amber Hsu amberwonghsu@yahoo.com



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How to Make Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child

You've been asked to attend a regularly scheduled "report card" conference with your child's teacher. Or you've gotten a special note from your child's teacher asking to see you. In either case, you might be a little nervous.

Well, relax. Teachers don't want to put parents on the spot. They just like to meet with parents from time to time to discuss how to help students do their best in school.

All children learn in different ways. They have their own individual personalities, and their own listening and work habits. To help their students learn new knowledge and skills, teachers must know as much as they can about each child's likes and dislikes. No one knows more about these things than you, the parents. And no one has more influence over your children than you.

That's why teachers need your help to do a first-class job. Working together, you and the teacher can help your child have a successful school year.

Here Are Some Things to Keep in Mind

- Start the conference right: be there on time, and plan not to run over the amount of time that has been set aside, usually about 40 minutes.
- If you are a working parent who can't arrange to meet during regular hours, make this clear to the teacher and try to set up a time to meet that is good for both of you.
- The best conferences are those in which both teachers and parents stay calm and try hard to work together for one purpose and one purpose only: to help your child do well. Arguing, or blaming each other for problems your child is having, helps no one.

Getting Ready

Each teacher will probably come prepared with samples of your children's work and with ideas to help them do even better in school. You should get ready for each conference, too.

Talk to your children before the conference. Find out what they think are their best subjects, and what subjects they like the least. Find out why. Also, ask your children if there is anything they would like you to talk about with their teachers. Make sure your children don't worry about the meeting. Help them understand that you and their teacher(s) are meeting together in order to help them.

Before you go to the school, write notes to yourself about:

- things about your child's life at home, personality, problems, habits, and hobbies you feel it's important for the teacher to know
- your concerns about the school's programs or policies
- questions about your child's progress
- how you and the school can work together to help your child

If your spouse can't attend the conference with you, ask for his or her concerns and questions.

The Conference

Some good questions to ask are these:

- Is my child in different groups for different subjects? Why?
- How well does my child get along with others?



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- What are my child's best and worst subjects?
- Is my child working up to his or her ability?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Has my child missed any classes other than ones I contacted the school about?
- Have you noticed any sudden changes in the way my child acts? For example, have you noticed any squinting, tiredness or moodiness that might be a sign of physical or other problems?
- What kinds of tests are being done? What do the tests tell about my child's progress?
- How does my child handle taking tests?

It's a good idea to ask your most important questions first, just in case time runs out before you and the teacher have a chance to discuss them all. Be sure to ask the teacher for specific suggestions on ways to help your child do better. This is the most important part of the meeting. It will become your action plan. If the teacher says something you don't quite understand, don't be shy about asking for an explanation. It's a good idea to end the conference by summing up decisions you've made together. If needed, ask to meet again.

After the Conference

Start immediately on the action plan you and the teacher worked out together. Discuss the plan with your child. Make sure he or she knows that you and the teacher care. To see if the action plan is working, watch your child's behavior and check your child's class work and homework.

Stay in regular touch with the teacher to discuss the progress your child is making. Meeting with your child's teachers should help build strong parent-teacher partnerships—partnerships that are needed if you and your child's teachers are to reach your common goal of helping your child get the best education possible.

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Health Room Update

Last week Dr. Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools, and Dr. Ulder J. Tilman, Montgomery County Health Officer and Chief of Public Health, sent home a letter informing you of a health issue that has been receiving attention recently in the media. We know that this issue is a concern for parents, as it is also for school personnel, because some cases have been reported in schools in the area. This bacterial infection has been resistant to more common forms of antibiotics.

In the letter you received, the bacterial infection is described as follows:

The infection is called Methicillin-Resistant Staph Aureus or MRSA. The skin condition most commonly looks like an infected pimple or boils and can worsen to include redness, warmth, swelling, pain, and discharge. It can be mistaken as a spider or insect bite. MRSA is spread by skin-to-skin contact, contact with drainage from the nose of a person infected, or contact with contaminated objects such as razors, soap, clothing, or towels.

These are the precautionary measures that we are taking at Potomac.

- Our restroom soap dispensers contain antibacterial soap, which students may use to wash hands.
- Grades 1 and 4 are able to have students wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before they go to lunch, since they leave from their classroom to go to lunch.

- Grades K, 2, 3, 5 where students are outside at recess before they eat lunch--we are providing an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for students as they come into the building to eat their lunch. If a student would prefer to wash his/her hands before eating, that student may refuse the offer of a hand sanitizer when coming in for lunch, and may instead go to wash his/her hands. Students may wash hands either before eating or once their lunch is at the table.

Alternatively, if parents would like to provide another option for their child, they may send another sanitizing product with their child for their child to use before eating.

- We will continue to emphasize the importance of thorough hand washing as a health precaution.
- We will also remind students to keep cuts and scrapes clean and to cover them with bandages. We hope that you will reinforce this message at home.
- We will also refer students to the health room if they need a bandage.

Additional information about MRSA and precautions is available at the following websites:

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org
www.montgomerycountymd.gov



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ON THE BLACKBOARD

Notes from across the grades

In Kindergarten....

The Kindergarten classes had a wonderful trip to Heyser Farm on October 16th. This trip tied in with the Science unit on living things. The children got to see and learn about a flower garden, chickens, and a fruit orchard. They also learned how apple cider is made and got to sample and fill a container of cider to take home. Students

selected a pumpkin to take home along with some apples they picked out. They had a lot of fun learning and observing living things in a farm setting. We hope the kindergartner's families got to taste some of the freshly made apple cider. It was delicious!

In First Grade...

The first graders have been busy identifying text features in non-fiction books. Among other features like the table of contents, labels, bold print, and captions, the students have learned to use the index to learn important information. In Social Studies, the students used the index to locate information about our countries leaders. We might have the next governor or president studying at Potomac! As our science unit continues, the students have learned how rocks turn to sand and explored the ways a worm can move. We are looking forward to our in-school field trip next month when the students will identify and collect fossils. We look forward to sharing the student's progress with parents at conferences November 10th and 13th.

In Second Grade...

Second graders are making wonderful progress this year! In Science your child is finishing up their studies of the painted lady butterflies. They released their butterflies 2 weeks ago and have been working on the butterfly's life cycles.

In Social Studies your child is immersed in the study of geography. They will begin learning about the physical and human characteristics that make up the United States, including major rivers, mountain ranges, and political divisions. Your child will also learn how to identify regions of the

world and be able to name and locate them on a map.

In reading, students are learning about poetry. They will be using elements of poetry to analyze the meaning of words, lines and stanzas. Your child will also be learning about important ideas and how to recognize the main idea or message of the book. As far as writing is concerned students are busy learning how to describe the setting in their writing. They will be able to use sensory details to expand ideas.



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In Third Grade...

During the month of October the students read their realistic fiction chapter books in their guided reading groups. We discussed the story elements, and focused on plot. However, we will also begin to shift our focus to informational texts. The students will be learning how to state the purpose of a text, as well as how to extract the important information. We will identify text features (bold print, caption, etc) and then evaluate them on how they help us understand the text.

In writing the students are completing their spooky stories. Our two main focuses for this writing piece were ideas and word

choice. We brainstormed good words to include in a spooky story, sorted by the 5 senses. These words helped the students add sensory details to their stories, which made our stories come alive! When we discuss ideas, we concentrate on having a well developed idea that follows a logical timeline of events.

The students had a fun time creating their stories and are eager to share their stories with their classmates. We also thank our parents for participating in the Halloween festivities and making the parties fun and enjoyable. We could not have done these parties without you!!

In Fourth Grade...

Fourth graders have been extremely busy; students have been working with a puppeteer from the puppet factory. With our puppeteer students have worked on story structure, they developed a setting, problem, characters, and a solution. Students will continue to work on developing character traits while they create puppets with their classmates. Fourth grade will continue to work with our artist through November.

In science students have created their own independent ecosystem by stacking two litter soda bottles with an aquarium on the bottom and a terrarium balanced above. Students have been able to study many living creatures such as isopods, crickets, snails, and fish. We have taken a closer look at the life cycle and how things depend on one another for survival. We will continue to use our ecosystems to examine how animals interact with each other and take a closer look at adaptations among animals.

In Fifth Grade...

In reading, 5th graders have just finished their Historical Fiction unit and will start to work on the different elements of informational texts. Students will read description, compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequencing and problem and solution texts. Students will be asked to

find vocabulary that helps them determine what type of informational text it is they are reading. In writing the students are finishing their personal narratives by adding details and their senses to make their story more interesting.



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COUNSELOR'S CORNER

LIZ BORRA

Last week our students participated in Red Ribbon Week. This national celebration allows educators, parents, and community groups to focus on the work being done to stop the spread of drugs and to draw attention to the millions who have pledged to live drug-free. This renews our commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Our students wore red ribbons daily to show commitment to a healthy and drug free life style. Students wrote poems and created illustrations on ways to say healthy and make good choices for our bodies. Additional activities were done in their classrooms. Keeping Youth Drug Free, which came home last week, is a guide that includes strategies and ideas that support the goal of growing up drug free.

Perseverance is our character virtue in November. We remind students that perseverance is the ability to stick to something and complete the task even though, at times, you may experience some difficulties. Students are encouraged to practice perseverance at school when engaging in learning tasks and completing assignments. At home, students practice perseverance when finishing chores and completing special requests from their parents. We also continue to emphasize respect and responsibility as the foundations of a positive school environment.

Children, like adults, experience stress due to the complexities of their own lives. Stress is the body's physical and chemical reaction to anything that frightens, confuses, or endangers a person. The pressure to evaluate options, make choices, and arrive at decisions can produce a stressful situation for anyone. Educators and parents recognize the shared

responsibility for providing experiences and support healthy, responsible coping mechanisms. A caring atmosphere is essential for students to explore options and consequences as they work through solutions to conflict and stress.

Signs of stress may include:

- Headaches
- Stomach problems
- Depression
- Irritability
- Poor work habits
- Problems with peers
- Appearing overwhelmed and unable to cope

Here are some tips on what you can do if your child shows any of these signs:

- Be aware of any persistent signs of stress. Talk with your child as to what may be causing it and find ways to deal with it
- Talk with your child if he or she demonstrates that they are not comfortable with a situation.
- Be aware if your child is resistant to attend school. You need to be firm about the importance of school.
- If complaints of headaches and/or stomach aches lead to missed time in the classroom, discuss with the teacher or school nurse.

Information and applications are now available for the Middle School Magnet Programs at Takoma Park MS, Eastern MS, and Roberto Clemente MS. These programs provide a fully differentiated, three-year interdisciplinary curriculum for students who are strongly interested and working, or have the potential to be working above grade level in the areas of math, science, computer science, or the



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humanities. Please contact me if you are interested in obtaining information. Application deadline is December 7, 2007.

Our Community Service project for November is the annual food drive for Thanksgiving. This project will run from November 5th until November 19th. We'd

like donations of canned nonperishable food items. A big thank you for those who participated in the Walk for the Homeless. Fannie Mae donated money based on our student body participation. Our community makes a difference in the lives of so many others.

COMMUNITY SERVICE UPDATE

Get ready for our NOVEMBER FOOD DRIVE!

From November 5th through the 16th, PES will be collecting non-perishable food to benefit local families in need. Each classroom will have its own collection box outside the door. Any non-perishable food items in unopened packages are welcome, but please check all expiration dates.

COMING IN DECEMBER -- SPONSOR-A-FAMILY!

Last year's Sponsor-a-Family program was so successful that we've expanded it! This

year, each class will be assigned a needy family and will shower them with holiday gifts (and gift cards). Look for more detailed information in late November.

THANK YOU!

Thanks to all those who donated Halloween costumes! If you still have costumes, clothing, shoes, or other items to donate, we recommend you bring them to the Interfaith Clothing Center's bin in the Church parking lot adjacent to PES. It is a great organization that gives directly to families in need in Montgomery County.

UPCOMING...

■ **November 5-16** FOOD DRIVE

■ **November 26-December 14** SPONSOR-A-FAMILY WISH LIST

■ **February (TBD)** VALENTINE'S FOR NIH PATIENTS & OPERATION SHOEBOX

■ **March (TBD)** PENNIES FOR PATIENTS

■ **April (TBD)** "No Trash Day" to celebrate Earth Day & potential "Green" Project

■ **June (TBD)** Good Deed Day- including Project Lunch sack, Letters to Soldiers and more!

■ **QUESTIONS?** Contact Holly Lotwin at lotwin5@comcast.net or Jill Newman at jillnewm@mac.com.



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FROM THE MUSIC ROOM

K and 1st grade

Students in Kindergarten and 1st grade will continue to learn about keeping steady beat, four ways to use their voices and to identify music concepts such as high and low, loud and soft with many new songs and music games. They will also learn to use individual space as they move and sing songs for the autumn season.

2nd Grade

After learning about the instruments in the orchestra and their families, students in 2nd grade will attend a great concert at the Strathmore Music Center presented by the National Philharmonic Orchestra where they will get a chance to see and hear all the instruments playing some famous classical compositions.

Pitch is the focus of our next unit in second grade. The students will learn how to identify by sight and sound different pitches as they enjoy activities and songs for the autumn season and Thanksgiving

3rd Grade

A big excitement for third graders is going to the Kennedy Center for the Opera Look-in of Mozart's Don Giovanni. This wonderful event is a great opportunity for learning in many different disciplines from literature, reading and drama to history and art.

3rd grade students are also getting acquainted with the music notation before they start playing recorders. They will also enjoy many songs and activities while identifying music form, melody and accompaniment and some new musical terms.

4th Grade

Ask your 4th grader about Johann Sebastian Bach or George F. Handel.

Students in 4th grade will get introduced to one famous composer and his/her work each month.

In the next unit they will work hard on preparing for the December 6th performance of the Musical Revue "Carnival of the Animals". While enjoying various songs from the Revue, they will also learn concept of meter in music as well as to read and perform simple rhythm patterns.

5th grade

Ask your fifth grader what is the difference between unison and harmony in music

They are singing some great songs as two parts or round songs. Students are also becoming familiar with the music and instruments from other cultures.

Syncopated rhythm is another focus of this unit. While getting introduced to the patterns of syncopated rhythms, students will also explore some of the songs from American musicals, such as "I Got Rhythm" by George Gershwin.



Happy Halloween!



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FROM THE ART ROOM

Project: Quality Time
Come together for "quality time" with family, friends, and some great works of art.

Project: Quality Time is an exciting program that is sponsored by MCPS elementary art teachers and is held at The [National Gallery of Art](http://www.nationalgallery.org). The purpose is to have parents and children spending time together in an art-inspired environment. These events foster and promote family togetherness. Through art, parents and children can get to know each other's thoughts and opinions.

Mark your calendar and save the dates!

There are two dates for our school; one is on a Saturday in the fall and then again in the spring. The scheduled Saturday dates for Potomac Elementary School are November 10 and March 1. You are welcome to attend on any date that is convenient for you and your family. The gallery is aware of the program on the days assigned to MCPS. Project: Quality Time volunteers will only be available on the dates listed on the website. Other families from Montgomery County and your school will be at the event on the assigned dates and you are likely to see some your classmates and even meet their families.

Here's how to participate:

When your family arrives at the East Building of The National Gallery of Art, you will be greeted by an MCPS art teacher at

the sign-in table. This sign-in table will be located near the information desk. You will receive a self-guiding brochure and a map. The self-guided activities are intended to help your family learn to look at and talk about art. It is suggested that you apply these activities to any works of art in the galleries that interest you and your family. You will find permanent collection works, or works that belong to the gallery, and special exhibitions of works on loan from other museums. Feel free to ask gallery staff if you need assistance locating a particular work of art.

Visit the Project: Quality Time website for additional information:

www.projectqualitytime.org

Here is some additional information about The National Gallery of Art:

Website: www.nga.gov

Location: On the National Mall between 3rd and 7th Streets at Constitution Avenue, NW

Hours: Monday through Saturday, 10:00 am to 5:00 p.m. and on Sunday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Transportation: Parking on the Mall is limited. Taking Metro is highly recommended. Metro: Red Line (exit Judiciary Square Station), Green/Yellow Lines (exit Archives Station), Blue/Orange Lines (exit Smithsonian Station)





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Message from Your MCCPTA Churchill Cluster Coordinators

Congrats Churchill! We are so proud of Winston Churchill High School for achieving the National Blue Ribbon award! Only one other public school in the state of Maryland can share this honor. This accomplishment is truly a team effort where credit goes to our entire cluster—thanks to all teachers, students, administrators and volunteer parents!

Construction is happening! Wayside is currently undergoing an addition which is on schedule for completion in August of 2008. After years of delays, Bells Mill will finally start construction in spring of 2008. The students will attend Grosvenor holding school with 8 portables about 10 minutes away beginning January 2008. A new Bells Mill is scheduled for completion in August 2009.

Cabin John is about to undergo the schematic planning process for its modernization scheduled for completion in August 2011. Funding for this project is not yet guaranteed and will depend upon local and state funding. We are keeping apprised of the situation and may call upon parents to advocate for the CIP funds needed to support this and other cluster projects that are on the modernization schedule.

Boundary Study: As most of you know, a boundary study is about to begin which includes the geographical areas of three of our cluster schools, Seven Locks, Bells Mill and Potomac. The purpose of the boundary study is to help relieve the overcrowding at Potomac Elementary school. Each PTA president from the three elementary schools plus Hoover and Cabin John Middle Schools will help to form a boundary advisory committee in January. This committee will represent a diverse group of parents from different geographic areas. The individuals chosen will have familiarity with the three school communities. There will be a community presentation in early spring to explain the process. After the advisory committee gives its input and MCPS hears community, PTA and other stakeholder concerns, Dr. Weast will present his decision in October of 2008.

Parent Involvement: We have met with all principals and presidents to discuss parent involvement in schools. No Child Left Behind laws have stressed the importance of parent involvement as a key to student success and we are listening and working with each other to determine how parents can be involved in the planning and implementation of school goals.

MCCPTA Committees: Do you have a passion for certain issues involving your child's education? MCCPTA has a number of committees that are working to advocate for our kids. A few of these committees include a curriculum committee, special education committee, and grading and reporting committee that meet once a month in the evenings. We need fresh ideas from parents in the Churchill cluster, so please consider getting involved at the county PTA level. You can obtain more information on the MCCPTA website.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us!

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Linda Goldberg, Principal
Diana Conway, PTA President
Jeanne Srour, Newsletter Editor