

October 15, 2010

The Wildwood Window



First Day Parade 2010

All around Wildwood: The Principal's view

Welcome to the first edition of the Wildwood Window for the school year 2010-11! We hope to publish this newsletter once a month in order to inform our families about the learning and events that are taking place in the classrooms and throughout our school. During the month of September we had three all-school gatherings which will create the foundation for our school culture for the upcoming year. The First Day Parade (see photo above) kicked off the school year with excitement and celebration. This positive feeling of hope can give us energy as we face the challenges of the year ahead.

A few weeks later we had our first Welcome Assembly in which we greeted all of the new students and staff to Wildwood. We gave a special welcome to children who were new to the Amherst Public Schools by having a friend from their classroom escort them up to the risers in the front of the gym. Every grade level learned how to say the word, *Welcome*, in a language other than English, and we all shouted these words out one at a time in a coordinated *Wave of Welcome!* Some of our sixth graders were brave enough to say a few words about how others helped them feel welcome when they were new. As a staff we later met to brainstorm and discuss ways to make Wildwood a 'Welcoming School'.

Our most recent assembly focused on the theme of creating a vision of how we want Wildwood to be as a school. Using a Town Meeting format, students from every grade level stood up and spoke of their hopes and dreams for our school by completing the phrase "*I want Wildwood to be a school where...*". Whether it was the simple words of a kindergartner stating that she wanted '*everyone to be nice*' or an eloquent plea for inclusion from a

sixth grader the children's words struck common chords of feeling safe to be oneself, understanding others, and being able to focus on learning at school. We then introduced the Wildwood Agreements that Guide our Behavior as a framework that will make this vision possible. These Agreements, which outline the rights and responsibilities of being a student at Wildwood, were then recited by the entire school as a promise.

Now every member of the Wildwood community can participate in developing the vision for our school. Parents, guardians, students, and staff members are invited to complete the attached template which has the heading "*I want Wildwood to be a school where...*" in their own words. Drawings to illustrate your thoughts are also welcome. Students will be doing this exercise in their classrooms, but they certainly can contribute additional ideas if you want to make it a family activity. The completed forms can be returned to your child's classroom teacher or the school office. They will then be displayed throughout the hallways of Wildwood for all to see. I look forward to not only creating a shared vision for our school, but taking the steps to make it a reality.

Nick

Important Upcoming Events

October 18 – First Wildwood PGO (Parent-Guardian Organization) meeting, 7-8:30 pm, all invited.

October 26 - School Committee, Town Hall 7 pm

October 28, November 2 – Early dismissal (1:20) for parent/teacher conferences

October 28 – Basic Rights Workshop for special education and 504 process, Middle School Library, 7 pm

November 4 – Picture Retake Day

ABC Walk

The Amherst ABC Program will hold its 39th annual Fall Foliage Walk on Saturday, October 16, 2010. For more than forty years, Amherst A Better Chance has worked towards educational equity and racial diversity in our community. A Better Chance (ABC) is a national high school program that prepares academically talented and highly motivated students of color from underserved communities for college and future leadership roles. ABC Scholars attend Amherst Regional High School and live in the ABC House near downtown Amherst. The Walk is a major fundraiser for the ABC Program. This year one can choose between the 20K walk which will start at Mill River Park at 8 am or the 5K walk which will begin at the Amherst Common at 10:30 am. Wildwood fourth, fifth and sixth graders are invited to join Nick at the Amherst Common at 10:30 am and participate in this year's walk together. Of course, families can also join their children of all ages on the Walk. Once again, there will be a barbeque and live Music on the Common starting at 12 noon for all participants.

A Few Reminders:

Absent Line

Please call the special school number, 362-1401, before 9:15 AM if your child will be absent. Please read the attached letter from Marta Guevara describing the school district's attendance policy. Since school attendance is such an important factor in relation to academic success we would like to work closely with all families to ensure that every child attends school on time regularly. Please do not hesitate to call the school guidance staff or Nick or Linda Gianesin if any issues arise that affect your child's attendance.

Change in Dismissal Routine

Please send a note to your child's classroom teacher if you plan to pick your child up earlier or you would like to change your child's way of going home for that particular day or on a regular basis. Since all students will need a bus pass filled out by the office in order to ride a bus that they are not assigned to or if they are riding their assigned bus, but want to get off at a stop that is not their assigned stop we ask that you let the teachers know at the beginning of the school day if possible.

Parent Pick-Up Room procedures

All students who get picked-up by their families or a designated adult are asked to wait in the Cafeteria One which is the cafeteria closest to the playground. We are currently examining the procedures in the parent pick-up room in order to ensure your children's safety. Please make sure to tell the Wildwood staff member that you have picked-up your child(ren) and try to exit the cafeteria in a timely fashion since it can get quite crowded and noisy inside.

Side Parking Lot

It has come to our attention that the side parking lot can become congested at arrival and dismissal times. For this reason please make sure to walk your children carefully to your car. Please park in such a way that you do not block traffic. We are in the process of developing clear, safe traffic flow pattern for this parking lot.

Early Dismissal Days for conferences with classroom teachers

Don't forget: there will be an early dismissal (1:20 pm) on October 28 and November 2 so that most of the parent/teacher conferences can take place on these afternoons. Please contact your child's classroom teacher if you have not set up a conference time.

News from The Wildwood PGO

- **The 1st Parent Guardian Organization (PGO) meeting** of the year is **October 18th, 2010, 7:00 to 8:30** in the Wildwood Library. We will be electing our new Chair and a Co-Chair if you are interested in running see information below. Childcare for this meeting will be made available to families that need it.
- **The Wildwood Directory is almost done.** This year more than ever the Directory will be a very valuable tool. With many new families at our school the directory gives our children a way to contact their new friends, outside of school. Your phone numbers' and emails also give the PGO a way to keep you informed of community events and opportunities to volunteer. If you choose not to be in the Directory you can still subscribe to the PGO blog information feeder. Just go to www.wildwoodpto.org and click on the subscription tool on the sidebar. If you did not hand a directory permission form in at the beginning of the school year and still want to be included in the Directory, please turn in your form or email wildwoodelementarypgo@gmail.com ASAP.
- **Box Tops** will be collected on October 22nd and the classroom with the most Box Tops will have a brownie party and your teacher will receive a \$25 gift card to Staples!
- **Fall Gift Wrap Fundraiser:** Please join us in this important fundraiser supporting Wildwood Enrichment Programs for every child, including special performances, field trips and more! Genevieve's offers gift wrap and many other wonderful products and gifts for everyday and holiday. Shop locally and support a Valley company while benefiting our school. Wildwood receives a generous portion of every sale and puts it directly into programs benefiting every child. Last year, this fundraiser raised \$2500 for Wildwood. If you have not returned your forms please return them with payment by as soon as possible. Questions? Please contact Sheilah Jones at sheilahjones@gmail.com.
- **Stop and Shop:** Don't Forget to Sign up for Bonus Bucks! The **Stop and Shop Bonus Bucks** program starts October 8, 2010 and runs through March 25, 2011. If you have a Stop and Shop card, please sign up for this program. It's easy and it costs you nothing! A flyer is coming home in your child's back pack with this memo. Last year, Wildwood earned over \$1400 from YOUR shopping. Remember, even if you registered your card last year, **you must re-register** your card this year for our school to receive credit. **Wildwood's ID # is 0 5168.** To achieve our goal of **100% participation**, we are holding a contest at Wildwood! The class with the highest return rate of the Bonus Bucks forms that came home in your child's backpack will win a **CUPCAKE PARTY** and a **\$25 gift certificate for the teacher**. In the case of a tie, the **FIRST** class to return their forms to the Bonus Bucks Box in the front office wins. All you have to do is register your Stop and Shop card and designate Wildwood Elementary School. The only information you need to register your card is Wildwood's ID# 05168, the 13 numbers printed by the barcode on the back of your own shopper's card and the first three letters of your last name. There are many EASY ways to register: Log on to www.stopandshop.com/aplus to designate on-line OR call 1-877-275-2758 to designate over the phone OR email Vivian with your info (vivianfliu@comcast.net) OR fill in the form coming home in your child's backpack.
- **Class Parents: Thank You** to those parents who have volunteered to be our Class Parents. If you are interested in being a class parent and you have a child in any of the following classes please contact Jill Shulman. 548-8084, jill@mlcreative.com - **DONNA GAGNON** Room K-1, **RACHEL CUMMINGS** Room F-3

Calling All Wildwood Parents! The PGO Needs YOU!

Want to have an impact on our newly merged community? Looking for an efficient and effective use of your limited volunteer hours? Consider running for PGO Chair or Co-Chair. Send in your nominations now since elections will be held at the first PGO meeting, Monday, October 18 from 7-8:30 in the library.

The current PGO members are listed in parentheses and welcome your call or email to answer any questions or to provide more detailed information regarding the position.

Chair/Co-Chair

Run four general PTO meetings. Work closely with administration and staff to determine school needs that PGO can support. Communicate with coordinators of Communications, Fundraising and Community Building events to ensure a fun school year.

In order to stagger elections for the Chair & Co-Chair in the future, the newly-elected Chair will serve a two year term, while the newly-elected Co-Chair will serve a one-year term. Next year, we will elect another Co-Chair for a two-year term.

(Ann Marshall, 549-5932, annmarshall@comcast.net, **Interim Chair**)

(Megan Rosa, megan.rosa@comcast.net, **Marks Meadows Chair**)

(Prentiss Austin, paustin@student.umass.edu, **Marks Meadows Chair**)

(Tracy Hightower, 413-657-6879, tracy@waterfieldfarms.net, **Communications Chair**)

Thank-Yous

A BIG THANK YOU to Keisha Dennis and Jen Mendelson for putting the Welcome Back Picnic together.



A BIG THANK-YOU to Liz Rosenberry and all of the kids who participated in the Read-A-Thon. They collected \$2800 for the Wildwood Library. The Library's annual budget for new books is only \$1200. This additional \$2800 enables Wildwood to purchase 300 more books for our library. We are looking for someone to coordinate the Read-a-thon this summer. Please contact Liz at rosenberry@verizon.net if you are interested.

2010 Read-a-thon participants

THANK-YOU to our custodial and maintenance staff who worked so tirelessly to move all of the equipment and materials from all of the elementary schools and who got Wildwood ready for the opening of school!

THANK-YOU to all of the Wildwood staff who worked so hard packing and unpacking all of their materials and preparing their rooms for this momentous year of transition in our elementary schools.

THANK-YOU to the UMASS Band members who truly made our First Day Parade a spirited beginning to the school year. A special posthumous thank-you to George Parks, the beloved UMASS band director for over thirty years. He will be missed by the entire UMASS community, past and present.

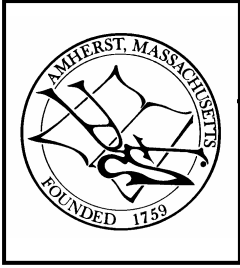
Setting goals with your children

The start of school is an opportune time for parents/guardians, children and teachers to talk about their hopes and dreams for the upcoming year together. Many classrooms have set aside time for students to reflect on their goals for themselves at school. When asked, what do your children say to you about this topic? You might also want to discuss a few goals that you have for them. You could share the content of these conversations with your child's teacher during your Fall Conference.

Basic Rights Workshop

October 28, 2010, Middle School Library

The Federation of Special Needs will present a workshop on your basic rights in navigating the IEP and 504 process within Special Education. This workshop is open to all parents and others from the community. Childcare and refreshments will be provided. Please let Mary Kiely (413) 259 1822, maryliely@msn.com know if you will need childcare.



THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS

OFFICE OF STUDENT SERVICES
INTERVENTIONS AND ELE
170 CHESTNUT STREET
AMHERST, MA 01002

413-362-1871 (PHONE)
413-549-9834 (FAX)

September 8, 2010

Dear parents/guardians:

We are very excited to be working with your children and look forward to a very productive, challenging and fun year. We wanted to give you an update on the work we began two years ago to align our districts' attendance guidelines. We are committed to ensure the safety and academic achievement of your children and have designed our guidelines to reflect that.

As you know, regular and punctual attendance to school is essential for the success of students in schools. Students who attend school every day, on time, learn more and are more successful than students who do not. Students who are absent to school miss out on carefully, well planned units of instruction, active learning experiences and class participation. Students who are absent frequently are more likely to fall behind and more likely to drop out of school, after their elementary school years.

Because attendance patterns are formed early in a child's educational life, we need to help all children develop good attendance habits. Massachusetts state law dictates that children between the ages of 6 and 16 attend school regularly and name parents/guardians as responsible to ensure it happens. It is essential that families teach their children, in a developmentally appropriate way, the importance of school attendance. Because there are very few reasons for an absence to be "excusable" in our district and state (illness, religious, court mandate, serious family crisis such as an accident or death), we expect all children to be in school everyday, on time.

We are committed to providing a welcoming, caring environment, whereby each member of the school community has a sense of belonging and safety in their school buildings. Our school staff will work hard to ensure all families and students understand the attendance policies and guidelines in the district. We have established what we believe is an effective and efficient system of communication to provide information, advice and support to families in all matters of attendance. With this in mind, families:

- Will receive the school handbook (s) of the school (s) their children are enrolled in during the first weeks of school, where all attendance guidelines are explained.
- Must understand that the superintendent or his/her designee (usually the school principal) is the only person that can legally excuse an absence. Parents/guardians must report absences of their children to school, but it is up to the school to decide if the reason given for the absence is "excusable" or not.
(over-->)
- Should know that students may be excused temporarily from school by the superintendent or his/her designee for the following reasons: Personal illness or quarantine, Family emergency such as a Death or serious illness, Religious observance or obligation, **Urgent** medical or dental treatment.

- Must call to report absences on the same day and no later than the start of school (8:40 for elementary and 7:40 for MS) to report every absence.
- Tardiness will not be excused. All students arriving to school after the start of school must report to the main office before proceeding to their classroom.
- Will have to send a note to school upon the students' return to school, if they did not report an absence as outlined.
- If you do not report an absence, you will be contacted by the school and the absence will be recorded as "unexcused".
- Must send a note, explaining the reason for the absence, upon the students' return to school after being out three days or more.
- Should feel free to ask questions/clarification about any of the attendance guidelines. Each school will identify the person who can field these inquiries. When in doubt, inquire in the main office.

We have partnered with the Prevention Office of the Northwestern District Attorney's Office to provide a continuum of services and support to families pertaining to issues of school attendance. Their "School Is Where It's At" (SIWIA) program works with district staff, children and families in the process of understanding the importance of attendance to school and provide support whenever issues of truancy (excessive absences or tardiness) occur.

Our district is committed to the academic achievement of "every student, every day" and we expect that every student will come to school every day and on time to take advantage of the educational experiences our teachers plan to challenge and motivate all learners. Our mission is to provide the best education possible for your children and we look forward to working with you to make this possible. Have a wonderful school year!

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Marta Guevara
Office of Interventions and ELE



Amherst Public School District

170 Chestnut Street
Amherst, MA 01002

September 28, 2010

Dear Wildwood Parents/Guardians:

We wanted to begin by sharing the fact that Wildwood Elementary School has been selected as one of the 188 schools in the state to get a Commendation for the high academic growth and gains in narrowing the achievement gap. Special thanks go out to staff and parents/guardians for their important role in supporting the high academic achievement of our students that gave us this distinction.

At the same time we celebrate a state recognition for improvement, we must share that Wildwood Elementary School has been identified for improvement under the accountability status of *No Child Left Behind* based on state MCAS test results. Although we are on target for both, performance and improvement, we must do so for a period of two years.

The Amherst School District and Wildwood Elementary School have been taking actions to improve student performance according to standardized measures, while working to maintain the richness of curriculum and instruction for which Wildwood is known. The school district is providing technical assistance to the school both for the delivery of instruction and in the analysis of data in order to improve the quality of instruction for all students in our school. We are in the second year of implementing a school improvement plan, created by our School Council and approved by the School Committee in August of 2009. The plan includes goals and objectives that respond specifically to MCAS identified needs in English/Language Arts and Mathematics.

According to the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools that have not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English and Language Arts (ELA) or Mathematics (in MCAS) for two of the past four years, in the aggregate or any subgroup, have a 2010 accountability status of "Improvement - Year 1." AYP must be met for two years in a row, in the underperforming category, in order to have an accountability status removed. Based on 2010 MCAS scores, Wildwood did meet the AYP goals in Mathematics, but it did not meet the goal in some student groups in English Language Arts.

Ideas and comments on how to improve learning in the school are welcome. Parents are encouraged, as always, to contact Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Principal, at 362-1400 with any questions.

Sincerely,

Maria Geryk
Interim Superintendents of Schools

Nick Yaffe
Principal

Map Project Information

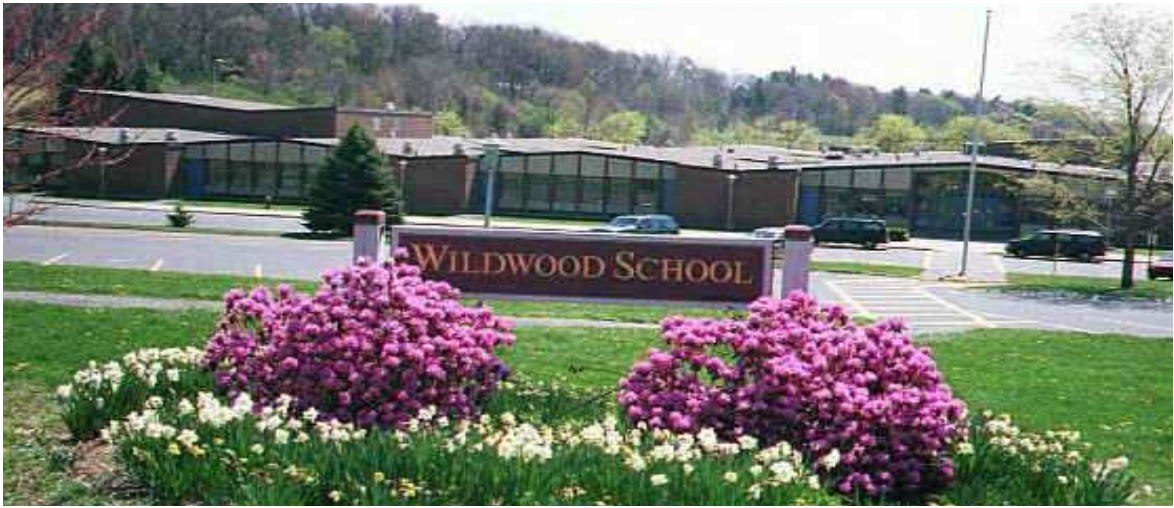
Dear Families,

You might have noticed that there is a gigantic world map in the front hallway of Wildwood. We are starting a project which will showcase the family heritage of all of the Wildwood students. On the map we will display photographs of our children grouped according to their countries of origin and ancestry. In this way we will be able to marvel at the diversity of our school and see how we are connected to each other. Everyone can learn about and be proud of his/her ancestry and heritage. Please fill out and return the form below to the office or your child's classroom teacher if you would like your child to be included on the map. We ask that you list up 1-4 countries only so that we can fit all of the children on the map.

Child's Name _____

Please list one to four countries from which your child can trace his/her ancestry or country of origin:

(share your vision for Wildwood on the back)



I want Wildwood to be a school where.....