

Greenbelt Children's Center

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JANUARY 2009 NEWSLETTER

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

Dear Parents,

Have you been checking out our GCC website? View a GCC calendar, Breakfast & PM Snack Menu, any newsletter or a news article highlighting our Pre-kindergarten program last year by USA Today on the web! Go to greenbeltchildrenscenter.com or type in on your web browser: http://www.usatoday.com/newseducation/2007-12-23-preschool_N.htm for the USA today story, which contains interviews of Ms. Maria, Pre-k teacher, Ms. Gee and several parents. This story was featured about a year ago but is timeless! GCC news also appears on the website of the MD Association for the Education of the Young Child at mdaeyc.org.

This month marks the end of the first semester of our school year calendar. Teachers have been busy observing children at work and play, as they continue recording observations of behavior and collecting samples of children's work to complete the midyear checklists and the reports for two year olds. Our teachers have completed the training for the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) several years ago. Mrs. Gee completed the MMSR Training of Trainers. This participation by our faculty has benefits for children as well as parents. The teachers are more skilled at observing young children and recording behaviors such as the child's approach to learning, one of the most important indicators of success in later school years. They save samples of children's work that represent actual artifacts related to what children understand and are doing in their day-to-day activities. This helps teachers to plan individually for each child and be objective while completing the Work Sampling System checklist. The checklist form has items grouped together in each of seven domains, which are considered "areas of importance... to learn by the time they enter school". This is an interesting slogan, as research shows that all children **are born ready to learn** and that the years zero to three are the most critical. A summary report of the child's checklist is shared with parents at conference time. The primary purpose of having teachers complete the checklists and summary reports is to share information with you about your child's development, according to the observations made in our program and what families have shared with the teachers. Research in early childhood education has shown the importance of fostering the development of the whole child and that is our approach at Greenbelt Children's Center. Parent-Teacher Conferences provide an opportunity for an exchange of information and to develop a relationship, for the benefit of the child. We hope you took the opportunity to meet with the teachers in November and will do so again this spring. You are your child's first and lifelong teacher!

Ultimately, this information will be shared with your child's next teacher and eventually with the public school system in a format that will allow the next teacher to individualize **their** program to fit your child's learning style and approach to learning. The process helps prepare you and your child for success in school. Parents are prepared because you will be accustomed to attending conferences as a skilled partner and participant in your child's education. Teachers may have your child for one year, but **you are the major and consistent influence**



for your child's entire life. It is very important for all parents to see themselves as their child's first and most important, lifelong teacher.

The Four Areas of Child Development

Fostering **emotional** development means encouraging children to recognize and handle their feelings in appropriate ways as well as supporting children's efforts to become more independent as they mature. This area also reflects the child's feelings of self worth and self concept; that is, who they are, what kind of person they see themselves as being and the development of self-discipline and the willingness to display age appropriate behaviors and responsibilities. Developing impulse control/self control is very important, as well as learning to wait for teacher's time and attention.

In fostering **social** development, the emphasis is on appropriate cooperation with peers and teachers, individually or in large or small group interactions. Social skills, based on the level of maturation, experiences, and understandings of the child, are an important element. This area may also include understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures and populations in our world, and developing tolerance for others who are different from us. Also included is taking the perspective of others, learning about the neighborhood and the world, community helpers, learning manners and customs.



Physical development is divided into two areas, gross motor (large muscles) and fine motor (small muscles). Both areas are important, not just for healthy growth, but also for later academic success. The child's understanding of his body in relation to other things is a very important link to the cognitive (intellectual) areas as the child begins to grasp the understanding of those same relationships in terms of object to object (spatial relationships). In later schooling, this becomes relative to reading and writing and, much later, will form an important foundation for skills needed to understand abstract concepts of geometry, physics, and other areas of mathematics and science. For now, fine motor skills are important to develop the strength and coordination to grasp a writing utensil correctly and to make successful marks when formal handwriting is introduced. Fine motor also relates to lip and tongue movements necessary for articulation and verbal skills, and learning the phonetic approaches to decode symbols (letters) for reading, as well as ocular (eye) movements necessary for reading.

The **cognitive** area is divided into several overlapping categories. The first is concept development. A concept is similar to a "pattern of weaving", in that once the understanding of the concept occurs, it can be used in many different "tapestries". The understandings form the basic foundations, regardless of the size or the color of the "yarn" that can be applied and used in many different ways. Concepts may be relative to more than one area of cognitive development. For example, the concept big, bigger, and biggest can be used to describe pictures in a story or to compare objects in a science project or math activity. Other areas of cognitive development will depend on the developmental level of your child. This is because our center adopts the standards of "appropriate practice" as recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This means that activities or skills appropriate for five year olds, such as formal writing, would not appear on the assessments for two or three year olds. In general, other cognitive areas include oral and/or written language, language & literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, and the arts (music, movement, and art). Remember that in each classroom at GCC, the teachers have posters of the goals in each domain for your child's age group, hanging up for your reference.



Teachers will note their observations of your child for each item on the assessment. "Proficient" basically means that your child exhibits a certain skill or understanding **each time presented** with the circumstance or opportunity. A child, who **sometimes** exhibits the same, is considered to be "emerging or in process" of obtaining that skill or understanding. Children apply and experiment with constructing knowledge based on prior experiences and perceptions. It is important to remember that young children are very perception bound in their thinking, and our role, as educators, is to provide many varied activities to help them to make personal discoveries that are necessary for learning or internalizing information. As professionals, we know the rule that "telling isn't teaching, necessarily." Teaching young children means setting the environment with props and

tools, facilitating, guiding, asking questions, observing, and letting children make discoveries on their own through problem-solving and experimentation. These are appropriate practices of a high quality educational program, and we aspire to always incorporate them into our daily program at Greenbelt Children's Center.

Having shared these hows and whys, I would encourage you to enjoy your conference times with teachers. Children are such interesting, complex, ever-changing phenomena, and we learn so much by watching them, listening to their expressed thoughts, and observing the world through their eyes. Use this opportunity for the sharing of information from your child's teachers to discover the "pieces of the puzzle" as they relate to your child in the Greenbelt Children's Center program. Also understand that sometimes the "puzzle pieces" may look different. It is only through the sharing of information between parents and teachers that we can see the "whole puzzle" together. Feel free to approach teachers to set an appointment for a conference if you should have any questions concerning your child's assessment or program. Remember also that weekly lesson plans are posted on the Parent Information Bulletin Board in your child's classroom to keep you in touch with all the daily activities planned for your child. Remember to have your child here by 9:00 a.m., each day so your child is included in all the planned activities.



JANUARY THEMES

All classrooms will be involved in units about the season of winter. Please remember to dress your child warmly so that they can be comfortable in exploration and play outdoors. Room 2 will also incorporate units on Feelings and Emotions, while Rooms 1 & 3 will introduce the Planets in Our Solar System, Space Exploration, and Dinosaurs. Children will also be introduced to the important accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. whose birthday will be observed this month as well as the historic Presidential Inauguration.

TAX TIME

Don't forget to claim child care expenses on your income tax!! You will need to use the Center's **Federal Identification Number: 52-1689271**. Keep this number handy so you will have it to complete your federal and state tax forms. You will soon be receiving a summary of all charges & credits for the 2008 tax year in your child's art folder. For families with an adjusted gross income of about \$25,000.00 or less AND especially those with more than one child, be sure to look at the **EARNED INCOME CREDIT (EIC) form** to see if you qualify for this tax credit. It has been described as the best real tax break for working families and you may be due a refund of several thousand dollars - even if you paid little or no taxes this past year. More information will be available about EIC this month, as the Maryland Committee for Children has asked that child care centers help spread the word to working families and assist them in taking advantage of this. Locally, there will be places such as the public libraries that will have VITA volunteers who can help you file taxes for free. As soon as we find information about this we will post it on the front door.



QUALITY TIME

Are you looking for ways to spend quality time with your child and avoid the winter doldrums on bad weather days? Below are some suggestions from the Complete Early Childhood Curriculum Resource Book by Mary A. Sobut and Bonnie Neuman Bogen, p. 155, Parent-Child Activities:

Practice hopping and standing on one foot.

Read some stories.

Make hot chocolate, add marshmallows. Watch what happens.

Match family gloves or mittens.

Cut a holiday card into pieces to make a puzzle.

Look through a magazine or catalog for winter clothing.

Sing winter songs.

Finger paint with white shaving cream - no paper needed - right on the table!

Make angels in the snow.

Play a game or put a puzzle together.

Visit the library. Get a library card.



Make a tiny snowman. Bring inside to watch what happens.
 Feed the birds. Count them in your yard.
 Fold napkins into rectangles and triangles.
 Pick up white cotton balls with tweezers or clothes pins to count them.
 Make snowman with marshmallows.
 Play in the tub. What sinks and what floats!
 Sort the silverware!



MANY SINCERE THANKS TO EVERYONE FOR ALL THE GOODIES, GIFTS, AND SURPRISES LAST MONTH!!!

Special thanks to some folks who helped to make last month very special for GCC children and teachers:

- Thank you to all the moms and dads and grandmas who joined us for the December Book Club Event and Holiday Party and for all the goodies you sent in! The children loved the books that they selected to take home and build their home library. We thank PG County Public School for the Judith P. Hoyer Grant that pays for them!
- Thank you for being generous to the teachers at holiday time! Teachers really appreciate your acknowledgements!



Parent Involvement is Important!

Please don't hesitate to volunteer in our Center. Whenever you have the time, we have the place! Our staff will welcome you with open arms!

Also, everyone, check your child's extra clothes box today! Take out those shorts!!! It's COLD out!

Buckle up. Every Trip. Every Time.

The University of Maryland Police Department is the only permanent Child Seat Fitting Station in Prince Georges County, one of the largest counties in the state. Trained officers check nearly 20 seats a week, every week. To contact the fitting station to have your car seat checked for safety, call 301-405-3555.

Wolf Trap Artist in Residency Program

Coming in January, the children have the opportunity to participate in a program with Wolf Trap for the Performing Arts. The program involves carefully chosen multi-cultural books that are age and season appropriate. The students successfully act out songs, dances or the story in the books during each session after the professional teaching artist leads students in exploring and dramatizing the book. The program encourages reading, language, thinking skills, creativity, teamwork and self-esteem. Some book titles in the past included: *Caps For Sale* by Esphyr Solobdkina, *Room on the Broom* by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Betsy Lewin, *Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin, illustrated by Betsy Lewin, and *We're Going On a Lion Hunt* by David Axtel. We have participated in the program for six years and have been quite impressed with the program and the way the children have responded to the activities. Last year, Wolf Trap honored two GCC teachers, Ms. Donna and Ms. Sherelle at a special dinner and program for their spirited commitment to the program and for the ways they incorporated what was learned from the teaching artist, into their every day activities with the children. This program is funded by the Judith P. Hoyer Grant from the Maryland State Department of Education,



through our partnership with Prince George's County Public School, with additional funds from the Maryland Arts Council.

Thought for the month:

"If there is right in the soul, there will be beauty in the person. If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be peace in the world." Chinese Proverb

Congratulations to Room 2 and 3! Have you seen the new curriculum materials that have been recently added to their programs? Both rooms were successful in receiving a grant from the Maryland State Department of Education, Early Learning Division. Both curriculums are research based and approved by the state of Maryland, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which is our accrediting body. Room 3 has been using the Houghton Mifflin Curriculum for many years and was glad to get the updated version and all the components. Room 2 will be using the Creative Curriculum from Teaching Strategies for the first time and are spending time becoming familiar with all the materials. The cost for the combined curriculum was just under \$10,000.00 and we are very grateful to have qualified for the grant during this very difficult economic time. We believe that this will add to the already high quality program that the children participate in. Room 1 also uses the Houghton Mifflin Curriculum for Pre-K and that is also provided by the Pre-K grant that is subsidizing all the Pre-k tuition by 40% for each family. What a big help this is during these difficult economic times. Parents, GCC has spaces available in each classroom and we would like to offer an incentive of \$50 credit to your account for any new enrollments that you send to GCC after they have attended their fifth week! Your referral is the best testimonial to the quality of the GCC program and we thank you in advance for your continued support of the program.

Remember to read at least 10 books per month from the GCC lending library so that your child's classroom will receive a special incentive, each month that all families meet or exceed the 10 book minimum!

Happy New Year! Wishing you a fine 2009!

