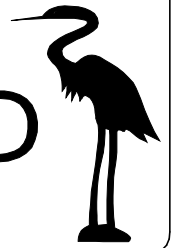


THE HERON HERALD



A PUBLICATION OF THURSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PTO

DECEMBER 12, 2008

Dear Thurston Families:

It is difficult to believe that we are already approaching Winter Break. The time between the start of school and now has gone quickly and much has been accomplished by your students, our teachers and you. As we approach the final week let's be reminded that we must keep our students on task and remind them to continue their best behavior.

Report Card Follow-up – If you had any questions regarding your child's report card I hope you have spoken with the teacher and had all your questions answered. The next report card will be given in March. If there were areas you questioned, I suggest you keep open communication with the teacher during the next few months to see how things are progressing and how you can help your child at home.

Attendance and Tardies – It is so very important that students are in school and on time. If not, they miss out on introductions to a new subject matter or they miss a review that could fill in the blanks they may have about math or writing. Of course if they are truly sick they should stay home, otherwise we want them here on time and ready for each day's experience.

Parking Lot Traffic Flow – Now that the weather has become more of a challenge, so has the traffic flow. It is imperative that you do not leave your car when dropping off your student and that you remain aware that buses must pass you to get to the front of the school. This may mean you will have to make the circle again to park or leave the lot and find legal parking in the street. I am still working with the AAA Safety Engineers and the City of Ann Arbor Traffic Engineers to determine how we can alter the drop-off patten for next year. Until then, we need your cooperation.

Thurston Talent Show – If you have a child in grades 3, 4, or 5, do encourage them to showcase their talents. This year we will have a performance on the evening of Thursday, January 29 and an in-school performance on Friday, January 30. There is a letter and sign-up sheet being sent home with this newsletter, please read it carefully and note the return date of January 9. One of our parents, Ms. Jennifer Puckett, will be assisting me this year. We also welcome any assistance and have included a form for you to respond if you would like to volunteer.

Thurston Lost and Found – Please, Please, Please, check for lost items that may belong to your child. Items left after December 19 will be given to the good will.

Thurston's Vision – I continue to move our staff toward improving as a Professional Learning Community. There are several building committees that specifically assist me with this vision. They are the: School Improvement Team, Building Equity Team, Building Collaborative Action Research in Equity Team (CARE), Building Faculty Advisory Committee and our Building/District Advisory Members. I will share more specifics of what each team does in the coming months. Their main objective is to meet regularly to check where we are and where we go next to accomplish our vision. As we move into 2009, and the second half of the school year, we will intensify our efforts to improve and, as always, we welcome parent input. The forum for your input is through our Thurston PTO.

In closing, I want to personally wish all of you a wonderful and happy Holiday Season and I look forward to seeing you again in 2009. BE SAFE!

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Manley, Principal

HOLIDAY GUIDELINES

Attached is a very comprehensive review about current accepted practice of holiday observances in the public school. It was adapted from *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools** by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas.

Please keep in mind the following local guidelines at the:

Elementary level

- Parties should not exceed an hour and one half at elementary.
- If students are excluded or choose not to participate they must have appropriate work and supervision.
- The activities should serve the academic goals of the course and school.
- Employee Handbook – As employees of the district, individuals shall not accept gifts of more than token value from students or their parents or guardians or from vendors or businesses. (Exception: gifts to a retiring or reassigned employee.)

Administrators will communicate this information to all employees, student teachers, students, and parents during September of each school year and again in the first week of December of each school year. (Policy adopted: December 9, 1987)

Secondary level

- **Any** movies shown should be the correct rating for the age group of the student audience and should only be viewed with parental permission.
- Parties should not exceed one class period at secondary.
- If students are excluded or choose not to participate they must have appropriate work and supervision.
- The activities should serve the academic goals of the course and school.
- Employee Handbook – As employees of the district, individuals shall not accept gifts of more than token value from students or their parents or guardians or from vendors or businesses. (Exception: gifts to a retiring or reassigned employee.)

Administrators will communicate this information to all employees, student teachers, students, and parents during September of each school year and again in the first week of December of each school year. (Policy adopted: December 9, 1987)

Tips for Planning around Religious Holidays

1. Any teacher or administrator should ask her/himself the following questions as s/he plans holiday activities:
 - How does this activity serve the academic goals of the course, or the educational mission of the school? Do I have a distinct educational purpose in mind? If so, what is it? It should not be the purpose of public schools to celebrate or observe religious holidays.
 - Are we prepared to teach about the religious meaning of this holiday in a way that enriches students' understanding of history and cultures?
 - If I use holidays as an opportunity to teach about religion, am I balanced and fair in my approach? If in December: Do we plan activities to teach about religious holidays at various times of the year or only in December? If I teach about Christmas and Easter, do I also teach about non-Christian holidays? Ask: Would this activity/event be equally appropriate in January, April, or September?
 - Does the planned activity have the primary effect of promoting or inhibiting religion? Does it, for example, promote one faith over another or even religion in general? Remember that the school's approach should be academic, not devotional, to teach about, not to preach. It is never appropriate for public schools to proselytize.
 - Will any student or parent be made to feel like an outsider, not a full member of the community, by this activity?
2. A common misconception is that it is permissible to promote Christianity at Christmas, provided that other religions receive similar treatment at other times. For example, some teachers may try to justify celebrating Christmas by celebrating Hanukkah. This approach is wrong. First, Hanukkah is not a major Jewish holiday and should not be equated with Christmas, one of the two most important holidays in the Christian year. Instead of "balancing" Christmas with Hanukkah, teachers should work to ensure that all holiday activities focus on objective study about religion, not indoctrination and are not unduly influenced by seasonal/commercial symbolism.
3. Symbols of a holiday may be displayed at an employee's individual work space, as long as they are of a secular (e.g., Christmas tree, Santa, wreath, dreidl), not of a religious (e.g., crèche, angel, menorah) nature. However, employees are encouraged to be sensitive to the beliefs and non-beliefs of those who work in proximity to them and of the clients/students/families/community members with whom they come in contact.

Important Dates

Tues., Dec. 16

Article Deadline for Newsletter

Thurs., Dec. 18

SIT Meeting 4:00pm

Fri., Dec. 19

Winter Break Begins at 3:42pm

Mon., Jan. 5

School Resumes

Sat., Jan. 24

Thurston Chess Tournament

Fri., Feb. 6

Used Book Sale

Please Recycle

