

ARDSLEY PTA NEWSLETTER

THE FOCUS

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A Message from the Co-Presidents

As we sit down to write our first message, it's hard to believe how quickly the first few months of school have passed. The PTA has been extremely busy during this time. We have wrapped up many of our fall fundraisers, hosted the New Parent Breakfast and our Principals' Panel. We also partnered with the High School and Ardsley Police Department on the High School Wellness Fair, which exposed students to a variety of topics including healthy eating, alcohol poisoning, drinking and driving, and fun ways to relieve stress. As for 2009, we have many exciting cultural arts activities planned and are finalizing details for our Spring Ardsley Family Academy speaker.

Our Town Hall style Principals' Panel in November gave the community a chance to learn what's occurring in our schools. Each of our schools were represented by its Principal and Superintendent Dr. Charles Khoury. Many meaningful questions were raised, ranging from the current budget constraints to the offering of a Chinese language option in the High School. Don't forget to mark your calendars for the Spring Principals' Panel on April 30th.

Thanks to all who helped make our fall fundraising a success. We've raised over \$40,000 through such traditional fundraisers as wrapping paper sales, the membership drive, school photos and the Concord Road Book Fair. The family movie morning, Ardsley spirit wear and directory sales also produced income and The Holiday Boutique will add to the fundraising total. We thank DeCicco's for their generosity in providing the receipt program. Proceeds from our fundraisers enhance the curriculum in each of the schools through cultural arts activities (author visits and character education programs), classroom grants, student activities including field trips, classroom magazine subscriptions, and much more.

None of what the PTA does is possible without our volunteers. Regardless of your time commitment, your help is always needed and greatly appreciated. One of the advantages of a small school community is that you have the ability to make a big difference with the smallest of contributions. So whether you join a PTA committee, coach a soccer team or little league, or work with the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts, please consider volunteering.

Finally, we want to take this opportunity to wish everyone the happiest of holidays.

Jamie Krumper and Deborah Pence

CARE Committee Update

The launch of the CARE (Care and Respect for Everyone) plan has been a success, says Committee member Jody Siegel. The initiative garnered a great amount of press, open houses were held and everyone – staff, teachers, parents and students – has signed their pledge to live by its code. "We are living by this," states Siegel, adding in no uncertain terms, "and disciplinary action will be taken with those who demonstrate harmful behavior. We want to see everyone treated with the same care and respect."

The mission statement lists the following norms:

- We respect each other and everyone in our community.
- We accept our differences.
- We treat others with empathy and compassion
- We respect authority, rules and boundaries.
- We express our opinions, feelings and concerns in a civil and thoughtful manner without hurting anyone.
- We demonstrate good character by knowing what is right, caring deeply about what is right and doing what is right.

In the Committee's first phase, there are several unique elements:

- Presentations were made at Concord Road Elementary School and Ardsley Middle School that were designed to open up a dialogue with students regarding behavioral norms.
- A logo contest will be open to AMS and the Ardsley High School students, with the winning design to be used on various district materials.
- The Guidance department will hold a series of talks for CRS parents geared towards reaching beyond the classroom to help children with their socialization skills. Some examples of topics to be discussed are "Teaching children to expand their circle of friends beyond just their classmates," "Body Image" and "Giving boys who are uninterested in sports to find a social outlet."

Adrienne Gibilisco



THE FOCUS IS ON...

Dr. Charles "Chuck" V. Khoury

Superintendent, Ardsley Schools

By Adrienne Gibilisco

Dr. Khoury came on board as the Superintendent of the Ardsley Schools this past July, after having spent 34 years in the public school system of New Jersey. His experience there was thorough, working as a teacher, coach, guidance counselor and director, assistant principal, principal, assistant Superintendent and, finally Superintendent. A brief stint on Wall Street prior to his teaching career gave him the extra insight necessary to balance and stretch school budgets to allow optimal use of funding, thereby benefiting students and, ultimately, communities.

He's a hands-on kind of guy, answering his own phone with an amiable, "Hello, this is Chuck," and instituting Open House coffees to allow for a free flow of ideas and communication between parents and the schools. From what we can garner from his successes at Ridgewood, Kinnelon, Paramus, Fairlawn and Cresskill high schools, the Ardsley School system is lucky to have Dr. Khoury at its helm.

The hullabaloo at AMS regarding the internet bomb threat by a student and subsequent allegations of bullying occurred just after you committed to your new position. Did you find yourself wondering, "What am I in for?"

Of course I did! (laughs) I thought, "I left a place where people loved me and there were no major issues and things were kind of running smooth and I'm going to be walking into a maelstrom." And I knew that everybody wanted to know, "What are you going to do?" I was at the meeting in June. It was an emotional evening. When I came on board on July 1st, I rolled my sleeves up and tried to figure out what happened and whether things needed to be changed. I knew we needed to regain the trust of the community because it clearly was shaken. I said, "Give me a chance. I know you have questions. I am committed to doing the right thing for the kids. You just have to trust me. If your children aren't nice and don't treat people with respect, we're going to be looking closely at them and deciding if this is the right place for them."

The C.A.R.E. plan has been taken more seriously as a result of these efforts.

Yes, that was a great move. Nobody could disagree with any of the kind of core values that they espoused... but the rubber meets the road when maybe your kid's the aggressor, and you say, "Well, I didn't know you meant 'be nice' like that!" But I fully mean it and the principals know that we have a responsibility to create a distraction-free environment for kids and teachers and we have to eliminate the distraction, whether it's temporary or whatever, because we have to protect the rights of the kids who aren't misbehaving.

You've got a reputation as someone who responds to issues as they arise, often in a personal way.

It's helpful for me to say to parents, "If something's going on, you can call me." I don't want to necessarily be the first level to call, but the reality is, if they call me, they're going to get an answer and I'm going to look into it. If you're concerned enough to call me, I'll take the time. I've already driven to people's houses to see, if they complained about bus stops. Of course, I didn't realize at the time we have a Safety Officer who does that, but the reality is I took the call and was willing to interact.

Can we expect any curriculum changes this year?

Well, the curriculum is real solid. Ardsley's got great academic programs and the depth and breadth of what they offer is really very right on target. Still, (Assistant Superintendent) Dr. Allan keeps me advised of areas that may need improvement.

The biggest challenge facing the district seems to be the fiscal issues. How are we going to handle that?

The governor has proposed a four percent tax levy cap. But you have to look at opportunities to combine and retool or reorganize how you deliver services. If you looked at my budgets for the last five years, there was never a reduction of services in the classroom. There were actually increases in services in the classroom, because the relationship between teacher and student in the classroom has to be protected. When two teachers retired at Cresskill, I took their quarter of a million dollars a year in salaries and used it to hire more teachers and make smaller class sizes, then spread around more responsibilities to the staff. Reallocating resources solved a lot of problems.

What's your major goal this year?

For the community to get to know me and for me to know the district. Also, to deliver a fiscally responsible budget for '09/'10 and improve our communications. You're going to see a new website that will be much more interactive than our present one. Parents complained about having to fill out the emergency cards every year, so now it will be done through the web site and you'll make annual updates on line. It will also have an E-Newsletter. We have a new newsletter, The Connect, which will have five issues. Another component will be the NutriKids swipe card system for food management. It's wonderful because it streamlines the system, allowing you to pay on line for their meals – and check to see what they paid for – but you'll also be able to pay for fees for your child's class trip or graduation expenses online. It's all about using technology to improve the system.

PPLT UPDATE

Concord Road

At its first meeting, the Concord Road PPLT welcomed its newest parent and teacher members, as well as new Assistant Principal Thomas Holland. The group discussed a range of potential topics for this year's PPLT agenda. Additionally, we assigned representatives for specific school and district committees (e.g. Safety, Communications).

A key area of discussion, and a likely focus for the PPLT this year, will be the financial pressures on Concord Road as a result of the economic climate and anticipated State mandated budgetary constraints. The PPLT will work alongside the Administration in developing the 2009-2010 budget, and will advocate high priority initiatives with the broader community.

At our next meeting, we will also learn more about the K-12 Guidance Program, and the impact that these programs have in mitigating issues and teaching coping skills at an early age — skills that are carried into Middle and High School.

— *Sheila Narayanan*

Middle School

The Middle School is continuing to look at the Code of Conduct. We have a first draft, which was partially based on communication from the parents regarding what they'd like to see included. There will be specific consequences listed for particular actions and the Code of Conduct will be clear and consistent so that teachers and administrators will have a clear idea of what to do when an offense occurs...and the kids will know the consequences as well.

We are also continuing with the groundwork that was laid last year regarding progress reports and policy.

It is important for parents to know that we are always open to their feedback. Any time an issue needs to be raised, parents should feel free to communicate with the parent members on the PPLT.

— *Joann Lessem*

High School

During the 2008-2009 school year, the HS PPLT will focus on plans to renovate the cafeteria and revamping of the menu to attract more students and staff. . As we have done in past years, we will assess departmental staffing needs and make recommendations to the BOE for additional staff. For example, our Guidance Department continues to be stretched to their limits and the PPLT will resubmit recommendations to the BOE to hire an additional counselor. We will continue to discuss safety issues and implementation of ID cards for all students and teachers.

— *Roberta Wetherbee*

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS COMMITTEE

The Children with Special Needs Committee is dedicated to bringing information and networking opportunities to all those who can benefit. We feel that our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we react to what happens; not by what life brings us, but by the attitude we bring to life. A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. It's a catalyst...a spark that creates extraordinary results. Our mission is to offer information to provide a positive catalyst to help achieve optimal results for our children's futures.

We've scheduled five meetings for this school year and you are welcome to attend. Our speakers offer great information, but you'll find that the parents will be equally insightful. The first, scheduled for Tuesday, September 21st, will have already occurred with Perry Samowitz, Director of Education and Training at YAI. Mr. Samowitz is a Certified Sex Educator who has lectured in over 25 states, as well as Canada, Iceland, Finland and Israel. He will have tailored our meeting around concerns regarding sexuality challenges that our children face from Kindergarten through High School.

The remaining meetings are as follows:

- Thursday, January 8th - Joint meeting with the PTA regarding nutrition
- Tuesday, January 27th - Dr. Seth Pearl will discuss Holistic care
- Tuesday, March 24th - Charlie Moskowitz will discuss coping skills for parents and siblings
- Tuesday, April 21st - Topic TBA (we are open to your suggestions!)

For details regarding our meeting times and speakers, please check our new web page by clicking on the "PTA" tab at ardsleyschools.org. I look forward to seeing you there!

Phyllis Lombardi

Ardsley Education Foundation

The AEF broke with tradition and held a fall fundraiser this year, at Pumpnickel. The event raised roughly \$2,200 from both attending and non-attending donors, which will be put towards the purchase of a new Smart Board (this is in addition to the four Smart Boards that the Foundation earned via grants this year). The rare, adults-only night out in Ardsley was such a hit that the AEF is planning on a second outing at Pumpnickel for either March Madness or Cinco de Mayo.

The AEF continues to raise funds through the inscribed bricks at the high school and will expand their professional-grade graduation DVDs to all three schools this year. As for the annual spring auction, planning has just gotten underway and a new date will be announced soon. Co-Chair Jodi Siegel has asked that anyone wishing to offer ideas and/or donations for the auction contact her directly at 478-2818.

— *Adrienne Gibilisco*

NOTES FROM THE SCHOOLS

CONCORD ROAD

Concord Road School kicked off its C.A.R.E. initiative with Pajama Day, in which students (and some teachers) participated in the "Wear a Pair and Bring a Pair" plan, designed to help children in foster care and shelters. Westchester County's total collection of pajamas was 2,900, of which an impressive 524 came from CRS, loaded onto the pajama bus by our fourth grade student council members.

In Mrs. Behren's class, an exciting Composting project is in the works, thanks to a mini-grant from the PTA. Her goals for the program are to teach students how to create soil and encourage composting, using excess food from the cafeteria. The program should kick off with the second graders later in the school year during their lunch period as she teaches them how to separate unwanted food (not meat or dairy, however) and place it into the Urban Composter unit to create compost.

Finally, in our efforts to save trees and encourage recycling, Newsletter communication from Layne Hudes is going paperless this year. To view Newsletters and Letter Home for updates or to learn what is happening at CR, simply go to the district home page at www.ardsleyschools.org; click on Concord Elementary; and click on Communication.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Buon Giorno! This is "good day" in Italian and something you will hear as you enter the new Italian class in grade 7. This is the first year Ardsley Middle School is offering Italian to seventh grade students. The class has proven to be quite popular and filled quickly. Ms. Michelle Jenna teaches one section at Ardsley Middle School and spends the remainder of her day at Ardsley High School teaching Italian. Her goal is to cultivate the students' passion, allowing it to grow as she transitions them into the high school and through all four levels of the program.

Ms. Jenna incorporates Italian music to assist her students in pronouncing the words correctly. An example would be the song "Volare." Ms. Jenna reports that now that they've had a taste of the language, her students are devoted to their decision to take Italian this year. Some of her students have a Spanish background and welcomed the opportunity to take a language other than their native one. Ms. Jenna also reports that the parents she has met with are enthusiastic. Beginning Italian in 7th grade,

versus starting in the high school, allows the students to pick up the accent much faster. As October was Italian Culture Month, the students focused on the culture, holidays and various geographic areas of Italy. Students researched different cities and created collages detailing the chosen theme.

We are thrilled Italian has been positively received and pleased to be able to offer three of the romance languages to our students.

HIGH SCHOOL

Our fall season has been marked with numerous successes. Feedback from students, teachers, and parents has been very positive and we're ensuring that the academic challenges of the high school curriculum are meaningful and appropriate. Our ninth grade class has had a smooth transition and our sophomores and juniors should be commended for their commitment to their studies and extra-curricular sports and activities. On the other end of the spectrum are our seniors, who have taken on a leadership role in the life of our school. Thus far, their "senior events" have been characterized by mutual cooperation and a real sense of fun. They are also very much involved in the process of college applications. Initial word is that close to 50% of the class are completing their applications for Early Decision or Early Action.

Our academic, extra-curricular, and athletic programs have had a great start and there are numerous accolades to share: We have had our usual high number of National Merit Semi-Finalists and Commended Students. The College Board has recognized 71 of our juniors and seniors as AP Scholars; this fall two high school students were invited to perform as members of the All-State chorus; Spencer Smith and the Select Chorus have been invited to perform at a mass at the Vatican at the start of their tour this February; Alex Carballo, our Latin teacher, was recognized for his exemplary teaching and Latin program in New York State; one of our art students was invited to show her work as a part of the 15th Annual Women's High School Art Exhibition at the College of New Rochelle; Our football team and volleyball team qualified for the Section 1 playoffs; and, the girl's swim team, the boy's cross country team, and girl's tennis team all finished their season near the top of their leagues. Our community has a great deal to be proud of!

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