

October 31, 2014

*It were happy if we studied nature more in natural things; and acted according to nature: whose rules are few, plain and most reasonable. Let us begin where she begins, go her pace, and close always where she ends, and we cannot miss of being good naturalists.*

William Penn, *Fruits of Solitude*

Dear Parents,

### **Sustainability in the Curriculum**

It has been a busy couple of weeks, during which time we have lifted up many special aspects of our school. Our all-school theme of sustainability was chosen for this year because it emphasizes our connection to the Earth and obligation to protect its resources. It was also chosen because it taps into what William Penn saw as children's "natural genius to ...physical or natural knowledge." Affirming this natural genius, Penn noted, "would be of exceeding use and pleasure to them through the whole course of their lives."

All around, as we renew our emphasis on nature and the earth in our curriculum, we see the benefit and enjoyment of our children. Our teachers have embraced this theme with gusto. The third and fourth grades are studying the Lenni Lenape Indians and their close connection to the earth. This morning they shared with many in the school what they are learning about the respect the Indians had for and careful use of their natural resources. They have worked with the Kindergarten to talk about farming, which fits in with the Kindergarten's study of the seasons and the harvest. As we speak, all of those classes are making pumpkin pancakes. They are creating a joint banner that will focus on the question of what the Lenni Lenape would ask us about taking care of the land. The Kindergarten and preK will be visiting a farm on Monday, to underscore to the children our agrarian roots. What a great way to begin the month of November, the time we express gratitude for the earth's bounty!

In addition, the first, second, fifth and sixth grades have gathered this week at the Daniel Boone Homestead in Berks County for a camping trip. The trip ties into the ½ curriculum of colonial Pennsylvania, but it primarily provides the benefits of beginning and ending where nature ends and proceeding at nature's pace. The fifth and sixth graders prepared many terrific workshops for the first and second graders. They did a stream study and a nature hike. There was an arts and crafts workshop, and another workshop on how to make paper airplanes and paper boats. The students went on a scavenger hunt where they had to search for things that could act as simple machines. The homestead also has a trail for visitors to do a sensory hike: one holds a rope and then walks with one's eyes closed and experiences the area by sense of smell. The students then collected firewood for a campfire to make s'mores. They prepared a delicious pasta dinner that included bread made by 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders.

Today, those classes visited a landfill. We are emphasizing at our school the importance of recycling and composting as a way to reduce and eliminate waste. The visit to the landfill helped our students see what has to be done with the stuff we do not recycle or compost. The people who operated the landfill talked about how the landfill is constructed, with many different layers, each with its own purpose. For example, every landfill needs a liner to make sure that the leachate does not contaminate the groundwater. In addition, there must be ways for the methane gas, a product of decomposition, to be collected and then used to generate electricity. They landfill also talked about how they process trash, and all the controls they have to protect groundwater and prevent trash from leaving the premises. We hope that, seeing this, our students will be even more vigilant about reducing waste.

### **Sustainability in Practice**

Our theme of sustainability pertains not just to the curriculum, but also to how the school operates. The school's strategic plan calls for us to address more sustainable energy use. I am happy to report that last week we replaced the thirty-year-old boiler of the main building. The old boiler, at 1,000,000 BTUs was oversized for the building, and very inefficient. We have replaced it with two smaller, very efficient boilers, each of less than 400,000 BTUs. This will result in lower fuel bills, a smaller carbon footprint, a warmer building, and fewer maintenance expenses.

### **Quakerism 101**

This Sunday will be the final installment of our three-part Quakerism 101 talks at 9 am in the Meetinghouse. I encourage you all to come and hear Emma Lapsansky, a member of Lansdowne Meeting and a professor at Haverford College, talk about Quaker business practice.

I had a terrific time teaching the first lesson on October 19<sup>th</sup>. I focused on the history of Quakerism, and began with an examination of the wide diversity of early Christianity before 400 CE, and then covered the origins of Quakerism during the English Revolution and its roots in the Reformation. Some in attendance indicated they would like more such education. Please let me or Nancy Werner know if you would be interested.

### **Cross Country**

We finished a very fine season of cross-country. We had a team of 24 runners and all showed great improvement in form and stamina. I love the sport because it teaches sportsmanship, grit, good competition, and an *esprit de corps*. Most importantly, there are five different ways that one measures success in this sport: i) Did you do your best, ii) Did you have fun? iii) Did you improve your time? iv) Did you beat someone else? and v) Did you break a record? Our last day of the season, October 22, was the Germantown Friends School Invitational in Fairmount Park. There, our fifth and sixth graders were able to say that they achieved four of the five measures of success. (Our last runner was ahead of 9 other runners, and almost all of the other students were 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.) Well done!

Have a great weekend.

Sincerely,

John McKinstry  
Head of School