



www.polarisprogram.dpsk12.org

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September 11, 2008

Dates to Remember

Friday, Sept 12—Sock Hop,
6pm-9pm in the Gym

Friday, Sept. 19—NO SCHOOL

From the Principal's Desk

Dear Polaris Families,

Thanks to each of you for your participation in our Back to School Night. It was lovely to see familiar faces and new families gathering to meet with our faculty in order to understand the inner-workings of individual classrooms. Each Polaris teacher strives to provide a unique and highly engaging environment that contributes to your child's learning experience. Your interest in your child's learning and your support of our teachers is invaluable to your child's education.

This week third through fifth graders participated in their first round of district Benchmark assessments. Although benchmark tests are often used to predict student performance on other tests (such as CSAP), we prefer to use them as formative assessments, allowing teachers the diagnostic tools necessary to inform their instruction. While we dislike giving up precious learning time, these tests guide instruction and help children learn to utilize skills that will be necessary throughout their educational careers. Testing in itself is a disciplined exercise that requires intense task focus.

Benchmarks provide crucial feedback which helps to ascertain the current "status of the class," focus instruction, and ultimately effect student achievement across the curricula. I am pleased that Denver Public Schools has instituted such a tool. While some may argue it a waste of time, I believe any opportunity to examine student work as a faculty is a professional responsibility worth its endeavor, and we will do just that on September 19th.

Please note there is no school for students that day, as the entire faculty and I will evaluate the 3rd-5th grade Benchmark tests. At the end of October, during parent/teacher conferences we will provide parents of 3rd-5th graders with their children's first scores. Students will test again mid-year and also in the spring. This is a thorough process and aids us in differentiating for each child.

It is inherently sound to pause and recognize the achievements, as well as the vulnerabilities that our students possess. Such practice allows us to move children forward by planning strategically at grade levels, while solidifying student growth and mastery. The Polaris program is committed to the on-going pursuit of academic excellence, while remaining grounded in child-centered best practices of supporting our students intense imaginations, wonderful artistry and courageous exploration of the world.

Dr. Diana Howard's gift of giving to this community continues. Last year, she was awarded the Success through Art (StART) Schools Implementation of Arts and Education grant. This is a three-year grant, which will be implemented in every classroom each year, by all of our wonderful teachers, with help from several talented artists-in-residence. This year, we will use StART funds to synthesize science learning with sculpture. Each of our classes will choose to work with either Vicky Smith (a gifted ceramics artist) or Bob Pietruszewski (a well-known kinetic sculpture artist) to deepen their exploration and understanding of different grade-specific scientific concepts with art.

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Cell Phones Off, Please

Parents, We have noticed an increased use of cell phones by children here at Polaris. While children are allowed to have phones here in the building, we ask that they turn them off when the bell rings at 8:40, and that they secure their phone with their classroom teacher or with the front office. It has been noted that valuable items sometimes go missing from the backpacks in the hallways and the safest place for your child's phone is locked in their teacher's desk. If you do need to reach your child during the day you are welcome to call the front office and ask to be transferred to the classroom, or leave a message for them with the secretaries. We appreciate your cooperation in this matter. We understand that this is a communication tool for many families. Children may turn their phones on again at 3:30 when the bell rings to collect any messages. Thanks so Much!!!

From the Principal's Desk cont'd

Teachers will work with the artists and Leigh Alvarado Benson (our StART science facilitator) to authentically link, coordinate, and strengthen their science units through sculpture.

Clearly, Dr. Howard's passion for this school and its continued arts integration opportunities prevails. One of the tenants of her philosophy for educating our highly-gifted learners was to infuse high-level learning by creatively weaving the arts into all curricular areas. Specifically, this grant enables us to incorporate ceramics and kinetic sculpture to support both the DPS TRACKS and our school-specific science curriculum. As we transform and deepen our children's scientific understanding, products of their learning will surround us in a permanent art installation, to be known as our "Garden of Possibilities." This garden will reflect the breadth and depth of science learning that occurs at Polaris. We encourage you to watch our garden of science learning as it grows this year!

If you happen to be in a long grocery line this week, you might want to leaf through, peruse or pick up a copy of **5280**. We are featured in this month's magazine along with a fine assortment of distinguished schools in the metropolitan area.

Thank you for selecting Polaris @ Ebert to participate in your children's education.

Karin Johnson
Principal

Second Grade Scientists Get Together To Investigate Gravity!

During our first science session the kids were asked to accomplish a few impossible physical challenges so that our discussion about our own center of gravity, or point of balance, would make more sense. Try keeping your heels and bottom against a wall while picking up an item from between your toes if you can't bend your knees or hold on to anything. Oh and you have to keep your feet together. Our amazing scientist made links during our discussion which lead to questions about gravity, the universe and our solar system.

Many of the kids were also making connections between gravity and magnetism which lead to our next session together. We compared magnetism and gravity with venn diagram before observing magnets in action. Our Free Fall cup drop came into play because the variables of weight and speed were brought up during our past scientific discussions. We are looking forward to many more exciting discoveries together this year. We'll keep you posted!

If you are interested in trying out another center of gravity activity together at home, check out 'Butterfly Center of Gravity' on YouTube. Enjoy and keep asking questions!

Box Tops for Education

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Box Tops for Education program. Last year we redeemed more than 3000 Box Tops coupons, adding \$311 to the school's coffers. We would like to see more families participating. Just doubling our coupons would provide a substantial contribution to Polaris funding. What can you do? Look for products with Box Tops redemption logos: including Betty Crocker, Bisquick, Cascadian Farm, Chex, Cheerios, Cottonelle, Fiber One, Fruit Roll-Ups, General Mills, Hefty, Kleenex, Lucky Charms, Nature Valley, Old El Paso, Pillsbury, Scott, Total, Yoplait, and Ziploc. Each logo is worth 10 cents. It's easy - save, clip, and drop them in the large Cheerios box in the office.

4th Grade Reporter Featured on NPR

Congratulations to Bridget Galaty and the 4th graders in Mr. Isaac's class for being featured recently on the national radio program, "All Things Considered," which aired on NPR on August 29, 2008. Bridget is a reporter for "Youth Radio," and her broadcast from Polaris room 206 featured the 4th grade "Book Election" currently underway. You can listen to the story by going to npr.org and clicking on the links for "Voting for a Book."

News from Fifth Grade

YASSOU, EVERYBODY!

Students in grade five are diligently and enthusiastically engaged in studies of Ancient Greece. Arts, literature, history, numerous writing activities and skill development, technology skills and creative application of knowledge make for a rigorous, integrated unit of study. Students are creating tech projects with Mrs. Loehr, learning mythology and performing readers' theater with Mrs. Axt and immersed in literature in the classroom. Don't be too surprised if you see Zeus or Socrates or possibly Persephone and Demeter walking the halls of Polaris on September 25, as we bring our studies to a close with a grand celebration.

Coyote Counters Needed!

Yes, the City of Denver has asked for help in mapping the wildlife in our city. We have more and more incidents of contact with wildlife, and the city would like to hear from you. This is a perfect fit with the 4th grade study of ecosystems and our class requirement to observe nature. Students are asked to keep an observation journal of any wildlife around their home. Spot any coyotes? You can contact Ashley DeLaup, Wildlife Ecologist with the City and County
Ashley DeLaup
 Wildlife Ecologist
 Parks and Recreation
 City and County of Denver
ashley.delaup@denvergov.org
 Dial 3-1-1 for City

Hear Ye, Hear Ye - Calling All Submissions!

We are always looking for articles about the Polaris community. So, if you know about something of interest that is going on around the school or in the community, please e-mail the information to PLPERNELL@MSN.COM. A list of published newsletter dates will be posted on the Polaris website. We normally publish a newsletter twice a month. All submissions should be sent to Paula Pernel by 5 p.m. on the Monday before publication dates.

Did You Know That You Can Find the Newsletter On-line????

The Polaris school webpage is <http://polarisprogram.dpsk12.org/>. Current and past newsletters can be downloaded all year long under the communications tab on our website.

A Note from Room 121

It has been a busy first few weeks in Mrs. Stromberg and Mr. Ashburn's class. Among the many election-themed lessons during the week of the Democratic National Convention, the kids participated in their own electoral process focused on choosing a phrase or action that will signal the time to move from one activity to another. They got to nominate transition phrases and then held "district caucuses" to select their candidate/phrase of choice. The top five candidates from the caucuses went on to primary elections, and the winner of the primary held a showdown with Ms. Van Pala's class. The kids were really invested in the process! The class also looked at issues of fairness and justice through civics lessons based on Heifer International's "Beatrice's Goat," a true story of an Ugandan girl who was able to realize her dream of going to school from the money raised by the sale of her goat's milk and offspring. We explored how rules are created, how to evaluate rules, and how to take a stand when you think something is not fair!

Come dance the night away!

2008 POLARIS

Free admission!

SOCK HOP

Friday, Sept. 12th
6-9 pm

Polaris at Ebert Gymnasium

Everyone welcome!

Music by Coach D.J.

What's Hotter than Hot?

by Mrs. Kat's Class

- A bomb,
- A star,
- The sun...bright, shiny sun,
- My bus with the heater under our seats,
- Two fires,
- Summer,
- Last week,
- Blue stars,
- A light bulb,
- Venus,
- A red star,
- Boiling, hot water,
- Yellow stars,
- Mercury (the planet),
- The earth's core,
- geysers,
- and volcanoes!