

August 28, 2016

Hello Upper School Families and Students,

What a great week of school we have had. This group of kids, despite their wide differences in age and abilities, have meshed into an amazing team, who are working well together. We still have some details to work out with switching classes and making our bullet journals easier to work with, but these will come over time. The one trait that really stands out with this group is how they all jump in to help each other. They have some good examples to follow as you will see in the thank you list below.

Thank you to Gwen LeBeau for donating a printer cartridge for our Brother printer. This is so important because our kids write a lot and there is something magical about seeing our thoughts in print. Also thanks to Ellen Jahn and Thom Goodin our students are using Macbooks this year. We have 14, but still have the net books as well if we get more students. I have to admit that we are all learning together with the new computers. I have never been an Apple person and probably never will be, but I am learning right along with the kids. I think that they really enjoy the fact that they get to see their usually capable teacher stumped and then being able to help me. Don't tell them, but I really like it when they are teaching me new things too.

I want to thank everyone who has worked so hard to make the three fundraisers we have started the year with so successful. Melissa Camasta has put in a lot of blood, sweat, and tears and is using the fundraisers to bring people together and forge a tighter bond between our families as well as help CNS financially. Thank you, Melissa. Special thanks to all of the wonderful families who both contributed to the recent yard sale and spent time working there

and moving things from the school to make it a success. I saw a ton of Upper School parents there when I stopped by just as the sale was starting. I hope we can keep this enthusiasm going as we move into September with two more fundraisers.

September is going to be a busy month as school gains momentum. Starting this Thursday, September 1, we have a board meeting at 6:00 p.m. in the second floor conference room. All corporation members are welcome and encouraged to attend. New voices and ideas are what make CNS great. The following day, Friday, September 2, school will dismiss at noon. There will be childcare provided until 5:15 for those of you who wish to have your children stay. Others can take advantage of an early start to the Labor Day holiday weekend. There will be no school on Monday, September 5, as we celebrate Labor Day by doing less work for one day. On Thursday, September 8, we have our first corporation meeting of the new school year. We will kick this off at 5:30 with a potluck dinner to welcome new families and renew acquaintance with families we have missed over the summer. The corporation meeting follows at 6:00 p.m. We are still working to arrange child care during the meeting time, but will let you know via email and Face Book if and when we have that arranged. All the time at the corporation meeting counts toward your service hours as does any child care time you put in.

On Wednesday, September 14 from 5:00-7:00 we are honored to have Shannon Green presenting a class on mediation for parents and children. Mediation is one of the backbones of our program here at Carbondale New School and Shannon's class will provide a great introduction. We are including both parents and students in the class, so if you feel your child is mature enough to be able to benefit from this please include them. Remember that two hours is a very long time for many youngsters to concentrate when it isn't screen time. We are

working on arranging child care for this as well, and will let you know when and if it happens. Again, you will receive service hours for attending the class or helping with child care. We do need to know ahead of time how many will be attending to make sure we have adequate materials, so please RSVP by Friday, September 9.

On Saturday, September 17 we will be having our annual trivia night at Pagliai's Pizza starting at 6:00. Melissa Camasta will be sending out more information on this event. It will be a great deal of fun so I hope you will participate. Helping will again earn your family service hours.

Finally, on Tuesday, September 27, we have a fund raiser at S&B Burger Joint as part of their "Pay It Forward" program. CNS will get a percentage of the sales for every sales ticket turned in for us that day. This is a little different that last year, because we only make money on what is turned in not the entire restaurant's sales. We need to have representatives from the school at S&B from 11:00-2:00 and 5:00-8:00. What a great and easy way this is to earn service hours too. You eat, drink and represent our school. Fun as well as easy. Let us know if you will be one of our representatives to get credit.

Back to classroom news, two of our very favorite, smart and kind students have birthdays the month of September. I am so lucky to have these two students in my class. Can you guess who they are?

We have started our study of the microscope in science class. We have looked at some weird and scary things under low magnification and tried to identify them. We are now learning the names and functions of all the different parts of the microscopes. There will be a test on

this on Monday (tomorrow). We will then learn how to handle and care for our microscopes and we will have a lab practical for students to demonstrate what they have learned.

Social studies and language arts are being taught together. In other words, our spelling/vocabulary will be based on two things: what we are learning in social studies and words students are using in their writing and having trouble with. The mechanics and grammar studies will also be based on what I am seeing students struggling with in their writing. This is one reason why the daily writing assignment is so important.

On that comment, I think I had better explain the homework that the students have. Four days per week (M, T, W, Th) students in grades 4-6 have an hour of homework, and students in grades 7-8 have 90 minutes each of those nights. This homework usually consists of reading, writing, and research equally divided in time. (Grades 4-6, 20 minutes each; grades 7&8, 30 minutes each.) Students will usually choose what they are reading, writing, and researching, although sometimes they may have a specific assignment like our country reports, etc.) This way each child works at their own level and gets to investigate his/her own interests.

Some students have trouble with this open ended assignment and I will give them ideas to write about and you can give them ideas as well. Other students write about a wide variety of topics. Some talk about what they did that day or things they really like or dislike. Others write short stories and some even are working on longer tales (book length) that they add to daily. Editing and improving first drafts are also counted as writing time. What is not counted is copying anything from words to song lyrics. In our class *writing* is all about *thinking* and not penmanship or keyboarding.

Reading material is again up to the student. We keep reading logs each month and all students are expected to read at least 500 pages at their own reading level. (They have as much time reading in school each day as they do at home.) Obviously, each student is at their own level and I will keep an eye on this. They may read lower level books to count **if** they are reading them aloud to a younger student. They may reread books from previous years, but can only count them once in the school year. Good readers do reread books and gain new insight each time as well as enjoy the company of old friends in these books, but we also want to encourage kids to read more and a greater variety.

The research section of the homework is often confusing. It is all about curiosity and inquiry. Everyone has questions that come to their mind daily and this research homework is set up to encourage kids to find answers to these questions. There are as many ways to find these answers as there are questions. There are what may be thought of as traditional ways like looking the topic up on line or in an encyclopedia or book. There is also the avenue of asking someone who knows about the things the kids are curious about. Here we have a limitless number of resources including parents, other adults, and even other students. Kids can ask the health care provider why they have to have a certain shot; they can ask the grocer how a certain food is prepared and eaten; they can ask their families why they observe certain customs and their history. The questions and sources of information are infinite and it is my hope that with this part of the homework that my students will become curious, lifelong learners. Anyway, we are starting that portion of the homework this week so it is added to last week's reading and writing. I can't wait to learn what things my kids are interested in and learning about.

I am very consistent in my belief that children need to spend a certain amount of time each night on homework. It prepares them for work ahead and gives them a sense of responsibility. I am also consistent in my belief that this amount of time be limited and thus the one hour and 90 minute times for different ages. So if for some reason your child cannot finish the daily classwork, then they will take it home to work on, but whatever time they spend on finishing this work is subtracted from the total. If your fifth grade child spends 20 minutes finishing their math, then they only have 40 minutes left to work on reading, writing, and research. If they only have time to do one, then I always emphasize writing as a priority, with reading second. In many ways they can all three overlap as well.

If for some reason a student cannot complete homework on one night due to family plans, classes, or other activities, they are encouraged to plan ahead and complete it on one of the other days they do not have an assignment. Kids can use free time at school, the weekends, or other times okayed by me. On hot or rainy days, many students prefer to come upstairs to work on their homework to playing in the playroom. Please note that most days I am available at lunch to help kids with their work. As the year progresses and things settle down, I think I will be available even more often at this time.

I think that I have taken up enough of your time, so I will sign off. Next week's newsletter will talk about bullet journals and how we are using them in the classroom. I hope you all have a great week and thank you so much for sharing your kids with me.

Best wishes,

Carla