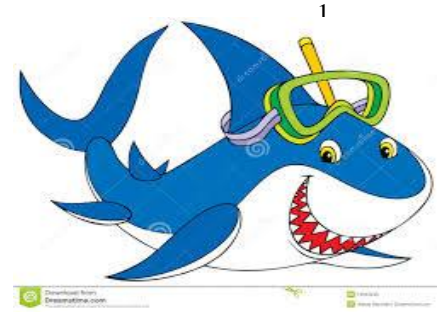


Roger Sherman Elementary School

250 Fern Street

Fairfield, CT 06824

Phone (203) 255-8330



Source: Worldartsme.com

Dr. Ian M. Banner, Principal

Any fool can know...the point is to understand.

– Albert Einstein

For: November 2019

Dear Parents and Families:

I have included a lot this month and mainly because I wish to establish a dialogue in which I invite you to join us regarding learning and thinking. I have also included some operational as well as pertinent seasonal reminders for your attention.

Learning and Thinking

There is an ever-growing difference between what classrooms aim to achieve when compared to classrooms of yester-year. Knowing information is still necessary, but just to have it serves little purpose, especially when we adhere to the notion that school is about living and not preparing for one day doing so. Learning, therefore, in the modern classroom is seen an act of thinking about how and when to use information and not simply reciting it. It is not therefore the charge of modern classrooms to support and command its students to acquire facts and knowledge. Rather, we need students to understand why various information is necessary to know so that they can solve problems and understand why things work the way that they do. Consider how many of us memorized the formula for determining the ratio of a given circle's circumference to its diameter using the formula $\pi = 3.14...$ without really understanding why this was the case. Instead, consider an alternative whereby students are led to understand the concept or idea behind *why* this existed and not told that all circle circumferences can be found using a quick and efficient method.

Each year, I had my 4th grade students use string to see how many times the diameter of a circle approximately equaled the circumference. They then repeated this process with four other different sized circles. Once they had completed this procedure, they always concluded that there were three and a little more of the diameter in the circumference and this was true for all five circles. When I showed them and explained what pi (π) meant and how we expressed it (3.14...), it almost immediately realized that the 3.14 represented three and a little more of the diameter, which equaled the circumference.

When later provided with an authentic, real-world problem that requires an understanding of how to determine a circle's circumference and asked how to find an unfamiliar circle's circumference, students were comfortably able to apply what they had understood about how to do this and articulately explain how they derived an accurate and relevant outcome. However, this would not have been possible, at least the explanation portion, had they only memorized a formula and not know truly why it applies. Thus, students were led to understand why this expression represented a reality rather than being told about it and to memorize it, which would have only lead them to know a seemingly arbitrary and abstract mathematical formula that had no meaning for them in the real world.

It is our on-going goal through today's learning to require students to move beyond what is known and how it works and to understand and be able to explain why. Furthermore, I would subscribe to another quote of Einstein in which he stated that if we cannot explain something to a 6-year old, then we ourselves don't understand it.

Social-Emotional Learning

Since September, we continue to embrace a moment of silence and stillness to focus on our breathing as a means to proactively practice calming our bodies and minds and preparing us for moving and thinking, rigorously. We have instituted this as a practice on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays following the morning announcements, although each class is permitted to do so as often as they deem necessary. The goal in this practice will be to equip all of us (students and adults) with a simple tool to help us to develop more effective and efficient breathing, as well as to help us regulate our emotions when upset, stressed or afraid, and to increase our capacity to feel more in control of finding calmness and patience throughout our day.

At last week's town meeting, Mrs. Lewis, one of our para-professional/support staff members highlighted the key aspects of correct posture (sitting up straight, but not stiff) and breathing rate (in through the nose for 3-4 seconds, holding the breath for a second, and exhaling through the mouth slowly for 3-4 seconds...) as Ms. Hoyt's first-grade class and I demonstrated for all to observe. Our intention was for all to see and hear first-hand exactly how we expect to each other to breath for calming, mindful attentiveness.

Many classrooms are utilizing this to great effect and none more so than 1H (see below). A parent of a student in Ms. Hoyt's class recently informed her that the child feeling particularly stressed went off to his room to practice mindful breathing...and to not be disturbed. He later returned renewed and calm. Way to go!

Some of you have asked about links to places to acquire direction on mindful breathing, and I can only reply that there are numerous and none to which dutifully subscribe. Rather, we subscribe to simply holding our posture more upright, and maintaining a consistent slow breathing rate. And we accept that we encounter greater awareness of the constant noise of our thoughts and simply allow them to pass and to keep reminding ourselves to pay greater attention to our breathing.

See photo to be sent in a separate attachment courtesy of Ms. Hoyt (1H).

Grit & Perseverance (G&P) and Kindness & Compassion (K&C) Continue...

Last year, we launched a focus on Grit & Perseverance and Kindness & Compassion. We recognized numerous students for acts of exemplifying these character traits throughout the year. We still feel these to be essential for students to function well and to support their academic and social endeavors. Having learned some lessons from the way we acknowledged and celebrated them last year, we will recognize students for these traits through Proud Board this year and in so doing, we will acknowledge both the process of learning and performing along with the products that students derive.

Furthermore, we want to promote habits of grit and kindness and not just singular acts. Therefore, in the older grades we will require a number of genuine demonstrations before formally recognizing students for G&P and/or K&C.

Some Important FYIs

Investigating claims of mean-spirited behavior and bullying

In my September newsletter, I write the following:

mean-spirited behavior is not acceptable nor permissible at any time, and I urge you not to minimize such acts by overlooking them. I truly believe that these issues have and likely will occur as a natural product of how children develop, but it is what the adults do immediately following that counts and dictates whether we accept the behavior or reject it.

Please email your child's teacher primarily, or me if you feel this is most necessary course of action, so that we can immediately look into the issue. If you feel strongly that anonymity is necessary in the reporting of an incident, you can access a link on both our school webpage, or the district's page called TIPS (report incident).

However, the more we know and the sooner we know, the quicker we can attend to a situation.

The most important aspect of you becoming aware of an issue is sharing it with us immediately, and I cannot stress this enough. Additionally, the information cannot be vague and general. Rather, it must be specific so we can investigate thoroughly and fairly, regardless of how you communicate it to us. Simply saying that there's a problem in x grade does not provide any real direction on which we can follow up. I would also encourage that upon being aware of a possible issue that you refrain from drawing conclusions until all sides of it have been explored and multiple perspectives have been gleaned.

When information is shared with us, we explore the details by interviewing students that can likely provide accurate, first-hand accounts and as discretely and sensitively as possible. This will include those who may have been mistreated, those who are suspected of the mistreatment, and those who may have witnessed it. It is important to note that the latter group will also need to include students who can provide an unbiased perspective and not one that may favor either party.

Once an adequate overall picture has been established from what has been shared in the interviews, along with what may have been captured on video (e.g. on the bus, inside or outside of the building), we make a decision based on the available evidence. Again, we remain as discrete and as sensitive as possible.

The obvious and common challenge by sharing such information is the possible backlash that can occur. This is where grit and courage really come into play. However, the consequences of withholding information that can prevent further emotional or physical distress should outweigh the fear of repercussions. And whilst possibly unpleasant, such repercussions do provide justification on which to act more intensely against the undesirable behavior.

We promise that we will fairly investigate any and all issues brought to us as long as the information is specific enough, and because we feel that every one of our students are important and a valued member of our community.

Nurse leaving

It is with sadness that I inform you that Mrs. Nancy Prusak, our school nurse, will be leaving at the end of next week. Her last day will be Friday, November 15, 2019. Please join me in wishing her well in her new assignment at Norwalk Hospital. At this time, I have not received an update on the status of the replacement for Mrs. Prusak, and will update you once I do.

Students arriving early

Please remember that...

- The school building opens for students at 8:45 am. Staff members are *not* contractually available to supervise children before 8:45, which is the reason that students are not permitted to enter the building before then. Therefore, please do not drop children off and leave them unsupervised before 8:45 am.
- This is also the case on a 2-hour delayed openings; students may enter the building at 10:45 am.
- While this is important throughout the entire school year, it is particularly imperative with the dangerously low temperatures we experience during the colder months. As such, we greatly appreciate your cooperation in helping to keep all of our students safe.

Weather wear

As the much colder temperatures befall us, we still feel it is important that the children get fresh air and some outside time each day. Therefore, please ensure that you child(ren) has the appropriate attire to be able to go outside in cold temperatures and remain comfortable and warm.

New Websites

As of today (11/12/19), the platform for our district and schools' websites have changed and our new-look websites have been launched. Please see the links, below:

District: <https://www.fairfieldschools.org>

Sherman: <https://sherm.fairfieldschools.org>

School Safety

Per section 11-7.1.2.1 of the CT Fire Safety Code, we are required to conduct a fire or emergency drill each month. On the weeks specified below, which may be subject to change, we will conduct either a fire or lockdown drill. During these exercises, students will practice responding to such events under trained faculty direction and in a calm and orderly manner.

These drills are also an excellent opportunity for the staff to further review and refine our procedures. Additionally, the goal of these drills/exercises is to enable everyone to know what to do in the event that an emergency situation does occur and to be able to act with speed and efficiency.

Month	Week of	Safety Drill
September	30 9-13	Fire drill Lockdown drill 1
October	14-18	Fire drill
November	4-8	Fire drill
December	9-13	Lockdown drill 2
January	6-10	Fire drill
February	17-21	Lockdown drill 3
March	2-6	Fire drill
April	20-24	Fire drill
May	25-29	Lockdown drill 4
June	1-5	Fire drill

Important Events and Dates

Fire drill	November 4-8. Sometime during the week
NO SCHOOL (Election Day) (Teacher Professional Learning) PTA Bake Sale in Lobby	Tuesday, November 5
School Store	Wednesday, November 6
NO SCHOOL (Veteran's Day)	Monday, November 11
Reflections Theme contest submissions due	Friday, November 15
FAY presentation	Friday, November 22
Early Dismissal (at 1:40) Turkey Trot	Wednesday, November 27 (on blacktop)
NO SCHOOL (Thanksgiving)	Thursday, Friday, November 28, 29

Note. Please *SharkBytes* for additional PTA information and events.

Reminders

Tools for Schools

As a reminder, *Tools for Schools* is a program developed by the EPA that enables us to monitor our indoor air quality and areas in and around the school that may be in need of attention/repair. Our committee, consisting of three parent volunteers and selected staff members, have each month and will be meeting on 11/12 to review and discuss checklists completed by staff from observations in their rooms or the building at large.

In past years, there have been questions raised about the humidity in our Library Media Center (LMC), which can lead to air quality issues. The replacement of ceiling tiles and cleaning of the air vents in the LMC during the summer was a much welcome sprucing of this space, and as of last week, we have begun humidity monitoring to gauge readings across two seasons. Continued monitoring may be required beyond the winter period to derive a

clearer picture of how the humidity levels fluctuate over the year and to help us determine whether additional steps may be required to prevent air quality issues from arising.

Recycling and Environmental Conscientiousness

We continue to emphasize with our staff, especially during lunch, the need to have and remind our students to employ environmentally friendly practices that include placing their plastic and metal recyclables on the metal cart in the cafeteria instead of throwing them in the garbage bins.

We also continue to emphasize the *sharing table* in an effort to reduce waste where students can place unwanted and unopened food items (only those purchased from school) so that other students can take them free of charge.

We have acquired our hydration station that permits water bottles to be filled. This is situated in the foyer immediately outside of the APR. in the short time since its installation, we have filled and thus avoided needing to have purchase the equivalent of approximately 2000 plastic bottles.

Please encourage your child to support these efforts in school and to recognize opportunities out of school to support environmentally conscious practices. Also, consider having them join the Earth Rangers club. For more information, contact: Alexis Donovan or AC Cochran at RSSGreenTeam@gmail.com.

Reflections

The PTA is already advertising for participants in this year's Reflections Arts Program (see *SharkBytes*, 11/1/19). This is a wonderful opportunity to support your child in developing other and often less emphasized forms of expression and creativity. Given my youngest son's penchant for expressive movement, I have recently enrolled him in dance and acting classes, which is serving as a valuable opportunity to develop his whole being, and I encourage you to consider the same for your children through *Reflections*.

Stop-Kiss-n-Go

Please remember that the Stop, Kiss and Go (SKG) line is *only* on the school-side of the street. No drop-off or pick-up is permitted on the other side of Fern street (the houses side of the road). Please also remember to inform others, such as grandparents, babysitters, who you charge with dropping off and/or picking up your children. I have encountered a good few who have stated that they didn't know the expectation for SKG. Thank you in advance for alerting them to these communicated expectations.

Your Feedback

Let me know what questions you have on these and any other topics, as well as how we're doing. While the staff and I are very busy in the educating of our youngsters (your children), an important and essential element of doing that effectively is having an open and on-going dialogue with you.

Yours truly,

Dr. Ian M. Banner

ibanner@fairfieldschools.org

Follow us on Twitter: @rogershermanllc