

The Conant Crier



Volume 1, Issue 7

March 2009

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PTO Highlights
Festival of Cultures
Community Service
Update
Nature Walks update
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March Calendar

- 3/10- Author's day
3/11
3/11 Principal's
Coffee, 9:30
AM
3/11 PTO Meeting,
7 PM, Library
3/25 School
Advisory
Council
Meeting
3/28 Conant Auction
6:30 PM to 9:30
PM
3/30- MCAS Testing
4/7 Periods, Grades
3,4,5,6.
Reading,
English,
Language Arts

Did you know???

Important Information about Conant PTO Fundraising and the 10th Annual Auction

- 1. The Auction is the largest and most important fundraiser for the PTO.** Our PTO budget for this year is over \$72,000, based largely on the proceeds from last year's auction.
- 2. 75% of PTO funds (about \$54,000) is used to pay for Teaching Assistants (TA).** The balance is used for things such as library books, cultural events, scholarships for families in need for field trip costs, etc.
- 3. Each School in Acton pays a significant portion of the cost of TA's.** Conant's PTO currently pays for five TA's, for a total of 78 hours of instructional time, while the Acton Public School budget supports three, for a total of 40 hours of instructional time. This averages out to about 3 hours of Teaching Assistant time per class per week (some grades getting more, some less).

As a point of comparison, some of the other elementary schools in our district have the financial ability to fund two and three times the number of hours due to the high level of family support for fundraising efforts (e.g. some of the schools raise as much as \$100,000 for their auction vs. Conant's

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The View from Here: Notes from the Principal's Desk



I hope you and your family had a wonderful, restful vacation week! There were a few days when it really seemed like spring--- sunny days, blue skies, and melting snow helped fuel the fantasy. As I write this, of course, winter is very much still on our doorstep, but somehow the promise of the past week makes it easier to take!

My family and I stayed close to home for our vacation time, enjoying a more leisurely pace than usual. While I did work part of the week, we took an afternoon to go into Cambridge to see the Glass Flowers at the Harvard Museum of Natural History. Though I've seen the Flowers many times, I'm always amazed by the genius of their creators, Rudolph and Leopold Blaschka. As luck would have it, there was another exhibit of their brilliant work, this one of glass models of invertebrate sea creatures, which were made for scientific study at a time when observing real specimens was very difficult. Their jellyfish and sea anemones are beautifully luminous and life-like--- it's hard to believe they're made of glass! Looking at their painstaking, delicate work, I wondered about the world of the Blaschkas. How long did they devote to each sea creature, each flower? For every

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PTO Highlights



I hope you have had a nice winter break and are ready for March, because it is a busy month here at Conant. Our March PTO meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 11th at 7:00 PM in the library. Please plan to attend, as we put final details in place for the auction and discuss upcoming events. In early March, we have 2 very special reading-related events planned. On Tuesday, March 10 and Wednesday, March 11 we have the Visiting Authors Program. Matt Tavares, a published author and illustrator, will visit Conant. He will work with Grades 2-6. Then on March 17, we will have a visit from Alyssa Capucilli. Ms. Capucilli is the author of the "**Biscuit**" series of books and will give presentations to Grades K - 2.

Also on Tuesday, March 10 we will have Willow Books Night. Willow Books is owned by a former Conant family; each year they have a special event when they contribute a percentage of their sales to Conant. Please plan to stop by Willow Books between 6:00 - 9:00 PM. See the related article in this edition of the Crier, or for more information contact Mary Tsacoyeanes.

The month culminates with the Conant Auction, which takes place on Saturday, March 28th. Put it on your calendar **RIGHT NOW** if you haven't already done so. Do you remember in the fall when we talked about "2 Hours of Power"? To refresh your memory, we asked that each parent, dads and moms alike, volunteer 2 hours of their time to Conant School during the school year. If you haven't done so, this is the time. There are plenty of small auction projects to do and many ways to help. Help us "Reach for the Stars."

I want to remind you that a successful auction is crucial for our PTO budget for next year. We hope that you will support this fund raiser in any way you can: hopefully by coming to it! Auction information is available in many places: in this issue of the Crier, in our weekly newsflashes, and on our website. Contact the auction chair persons: LouAnne Reynolds and Deb Keohan, or Pam or me. We'd like to thank Christina Haufler for her excellent organization of the Kindergarten tours and also thank the wonderful volunteers who gave tours of Conant to prospective families. With such enthusiasm, I am sure lots of people will love Conant. Nice job! Happy almost-Spring! Hope to see you at the auction.

Mary & Pam, PTO Co-Presidents

finished piece, how many "*mistakes*" did they make? And what would it be like to be able to focus so completely on one project at a time, uninterrupted, for as long as needed, in order to create something on the order of perfection?

These wonderings have stayed with me, and I share them with you as food for thought in the coming months. They make me consider how we, as teachers and parents, teach children to view time, tasks, and excellence--- how long do we give them to work? How much time is enough? Do we give children time to focus on one thing, to revisit and revise and recreate until something is finished, and finished well? Where is the line between good enough and perfection? We are, of course, very far away from 19th century Europe; our ability to focus is constantly challenged by all of the electronic distractions of our age. Yet the work ethics of the Blaschkas are very much alive--- careful observation, attention to detail, devoting the full time tasks require, maintaining a standard of excellence--- and in my view, they are very much worth teaching our 21st century children!

Dr. Christine Price, Principal

Enrichment Update

Our first Enrichment session was quite a success, with several of our workshops filling to capacity! The next session will begin March 16th, and a flyer will be sent home March 6th detailing the Enrichment offerings for this session. Registration will continue to be done through the Community Education office.

Dr. Christine Price

Don't forget Willow Books Night on Tuesday, March 10! Willow Books will donate 15% of all purchases made that evening from 6:00-9:00

Conant Auction 2009 "Reach for the Stars"

- ★ **Date** Saturday, March 28, 2009
- ★ **Time** 6:30 pm – 10:00 pm
- ★ **Location** Conant Gymnasium and Cafetorium
- ★ **Tickets** \$25 in advance (\$40 per couple in advance): \$25 per person at the door

★ Family Donations

★ Thank you to all those families who have already sent in donations. If you have not sent in a donation yet, please consider doing so **ASAP!** It is easiest to donate via the online [Family Donation Form](#) on our Auction website.

★ Paper copies of the Family Donation Form were sent home in backpacks just before vacation. You can also find paper copies in the school office or just get in touch with one of us. The catalog is being formatted for printing now. Please send in any last minute donations quickly – we want your donation to at least be listed in the Auction Addendum!

★ Tickets

★ Now is the time to order tickets. You can purchase tickets via the [Ticket Order Form](#) on the Auction website ahead of time and save time and money! **Remember:** event tickets include appetizers, dinner, and dessert this year in the **Taste of the Town** venue. Local restaurants and caterers will be on hand to offer you some of their finest cuisine. This is a great opportunity to try new dishes from new restaurants and caterers, or to enjoy more of your favorite foods.

★ Now is also the time to purchase **Raffle Tickets**. There are four Raffles this year:

★ **50/50 Raffle** – You may purchase 50/50 Raffle Tickets for \$20 each. The PTO receives 50% of the money collected and one lucky family receives the other 50%. Last year, there were over 150 bidders. If each of them purchased one 50/50 Raffle ticket, we would have a pot of \$3,000, giving the winning family \$1,500!!! The winner will be drawn at the Auction. You may purchase more than one ticket, and you may purchase tickets online or at the Auction, but **you must be present at the Auction to win.**

★ **Principal For A Day** – Principal for a Day is a unique chance for your child to help Dr. Price “run the show” and to see that spending time with the Principal is fun. The winner will be announced at the April All School Meeting..

Raffle tickets prices: 1 for \$10 3 for \$20 5 for \$30 10 for \$50

★ **Teacher/Staff Outings** -- This year, the [Teacher/Staff Outings](#) will be raffled. Look for a special Auction Raffle packet coming home in backpacks soon. The winners will be announced at the April All School Meeting.

Raffle tickets prices: 1 for \$10 3 for \$20 5 for \$30 10 for \$50

★ **Class Gifts** – Again this year, the [Class Gifts](#) will be raffled. Look for a special Auction Raffle packet coming home in backpacks soon. Winners will be announced at the Auction so you can take your special prizes home.

Raffle tickets prices: 1 for \$10 3 for \$20 5 for \$30 10 for \$50

Look for a special Auction Raffle Ticket packet!
Coming home in backpacks soon!

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\$42,000 in '08). Although it is difficult to have an exact comparison of hours for TA's (due to how schools choose to use the hours and the corresponding pay scale for less trained individuals), directionally we are clearly behind. For the other schools, their average amount of assistant time is about 17 hours, per class per week.

4. Teaching Assistants at Conant are certified or certification-eligible teachers who provide direct instruction to individual and small groups of children as needed by the classroom teachers. Our Assistants support learning in reading, math, language arts, social studies, and science, rather than performing clerical duties or non-teaching duties, as may be the case in other schools. This is extremely important given the growing number of students per class and the diversity of student needs. The value of a teaching assistant has been characterized as "critical" by Conant Teachers. The presence of an instructional TA allows students of all abilities to receive more individual attention.

5. There are approximately 350 total families with about 500 students at Conant. About 40% participated in the 2008 Auction and this year we need more! If we have enough families supporting this important event, we will reach our 2009 goal of \$65,000. This will allow us to add 19 more assistant hours per week, at a cost of about \$11,000 per year.

All students benefit from having more teaching resources in their classrooms. If we can increase the funds raised at the Conant Auction, we can begin to close the gap between or children's classroom experiences and those of students at other Acton schools. There are more ways than ever to participate in the Auction such as:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attend the Auction! 2. 50/50 Raffle 3. Classroom Gift Raffle 4. Teacher Outings Raffle 5. Silent Auction Items | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Live Auction Items 7. Principal for the Day Raffle 8. Buy it Now Items 9. Family Donations 10. Neighborhood Donations |
|---|--|



Look for more auction details in the coming weeks leading up to the main event on March 28th!

Deb Koehan

Students at Conant participate in an exhibit at the Worcester Art Museum



Kelly Connors – Gr 6, Thomas Tormey, Gr 2, Chris Potter, Gr 2, Annie O'Brien, Gr 1, & Benjamin Kim, Gr K have been selected to participate in the Youth Art Month celebration at the Worcester Art Museum, along with hundreds of other students throughout the Metro West and Central MA area. Students from grades K – 12 participate in this show each year. Every March the Worcester Art Museum joins the Massachusetts Art Education Association to celebrate national Youth Art Month with a salon-style, floor-to-ceiling exhibition of more than 400 student works. They will each have one piece of artwork showcased in the Higgins Education Wing.

Youth Art Month is an annual observance in March to emphasize the value of art education for all children and to encourage support for quality school art programs.

Youth Art Month was created in 1961 by ACMI, a non-profit association of art and craft materials manufacturers, in cooperation with the NAEA, the National Art Education Association. Acton has been participating in the Youth Art Month celebration at the Worcester Art Museum for over 10 years.

Please feel free to check out the exhibit during the month of March for free at the Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury Street, Worcester MA. Entrance into the Higgins Education Wing is near the Lancaster Street entrance. Exhibition dates are from March 1st – March 31st, with viewing times Monday through Friday 9am – 6 pm, and Saturday 10AM – 3PM.

Melissa Hayes

Festival of Cultures Update

Please mark your calendars for the Festival of Cultures on Saturday, May 16 in the evening at the Junior High. This event celebrates our student population's rich ethnic and cultural diversity. We hope to recruit ambassadors from all areas of the globe. Ambassadors set up booths, representing countries, where children can visit and learn. The booths typically have items of clothing, books, music, photographs, artwork, and games from the country being represented. Last year we had representatives from Belgium, China, Ecuador, England, India, Ireland, Pakistan, and Mexico. This year we already have volunteers to represent the following countries: Belgium, China, England, Ireland, Mexico and the Philippines. Thank you so much to those who are willing to be ambassadors!

Additionally, the evening includes a program featuring children performing music and dance from around the world. **The program for this year is quickly filling up so please contact us if you know of a student or group of students who would like to perform.**

We will be having a meeting for the ambassadors and volunteers in the next couple of weeks. Keep an eye out for an email with more details. If you are interested in being an ambassador, or know of someone who would like to perform, please contact Yang Liu at (978)394-7665 or yangliu_acls@hotmail.com. Thanks to all who have already emailed me!



Yang Liu

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Volunteers

Volunteers, of course, are needed. Many have already signed up to help in some way – thank you. We still need help with:

collecting promised items,
set-up and decorations,
food,
check-in,
data input during the event,
proxy bidders,
table closers, and
clean-up.

Please contact either one of the Co-Chairs to tell us how you might be able to help.

Cover Contest

We had an overwhelming 50 entries to the Cover Contest this year! Thank you to every child who submitted an entry – they are all beautiful. Visit the Auction website to see the Cover Contest slide show. Thank you also to **Melissa Hayes** for being our Cover Contest Judge this year and to **Theresa Hoggins** for running the contest.

2009 Auction Cover Contest Winners



1st Place Winner (front cover): Grade 5: Joy Zhong



2nd Place Winner (back cover): Grade 2: Anna Dai

Honorable Mentions

Grade 6: Carolyn Z., Mrs. Meek
Grade 5: Jennifer M., Mr. Foley
Grade 4: Nathan D., Mrs. Winters
Grade 3: Stephanie H., Mrs. Buck
Grade 2: Morgan D., Mrs. Brusie
Grade 1: Antara P., Mrs. Kennedy
Grade K: Nidhi B., Mrs. Mehler

Congratulations

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Auction Website

Have you been to the Auction website this year? With the generous time put in by **Pam Nelson** and **Mike Ford**, we have a fabulous site again this year. On this site you can:

- view the Class Gifts,
- watch the Cover Contest artwork slide show and see who the winners are,
- purchase event and raffle tickets,
- find hundreds of donation ideas,
- fill out your donation form,
- learn who our generous sponsors are,
- see the Live Auction items and more!

The site is updated almost on a daily basis now, so visit often.

Sponsors

Conant School PTO would like to thank all of our generous sponsors. Thank you for all that you do, and thank you for sponsoring our 10th Annual Auction. Conant Families - please remember to show these our sponsors how much you appreciate their support by patronizing their businesses.

EVENT SPONSOR



www.rkpclaw.com

SILVER STAR SPONSORS

Arthur's Oil Company www.arthursoil.com

Mingchun Chien DMD, Specialist in Pediatric Dentistry, www.drchienchildrensdentist.com

Middlesex Savings Bank <http://www.middlesexbank.com>

If, sadly, you cannot attend this year's Auction, or if you would like to place a bid for a family member or friend, you may use the [Absentee and Proxy Bid Form](#) to place your bids. Complete the online form and our Proxy Team will ensure your bids are placed and will notify you of any/all items you win!

Thank you families for your time, energy and generosity in making this an event to remember!

2009 Auction Co-Chairs: Lou Anne Reynolds, louannereynolds@msn.com Deb Koehan, ferro_dm@yahoo.com

IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS: IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PARENT/GUARDIANS OF SIXTH GRADERS

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health has the following requirements for all students entering Grade 7 in September 2009:

| | |
|-------------|--|
| MMR | 2 doses or 2 doses of measles and one dose of mumps <u>and</u> rubella |
| Varicella A | physician-certified history of chicken pox disease or one dose of vaccine for students under 13 years old <u>or</u> two doses of vaccine for students over 13 years old. |
| Hepatitis B | 3 doses |
| Td/Tdap | one booster dose of Td (tetanus/diphtheria and acellular pertussis) if it has been more than five years since the last dose |

A copy of an up- to-date physical examination will also be required for all students before entering Grade 7.

Many of the above vaccines may have been administered while your child was in elementary school. Please check with your Healthcare Provider to be certain that your child's immunizations are up-to-date and documented in his/her record. Send a copy of the exam and updated information record to your elementary school health office and the information will be included in your child's health record when it is transferred to the Junior High School in June. If you do not have the necessary paperwork completed before the end of school, send it to the school nurse at the Junior High School by August 28, 2009.

Heather Makris

What is a concussion ?

The brain is made up of soft tissue and is cushioned by blood and spinal fluid. When someone takes a blow to the head or hits something very hard, the brain suddenly shifts inside the skull. This causes the brain to knock against the skull's bony surface.

- 1) A concussion is a temporary change in the way the brain works when it is suddenly moved or jarred.
- 2) A concussion may last a few moments or a person may be knocked unconscious for a couple of minutes or longer.
- 3) Every year more than 400,000 children are sent to the ER with serious brain injuries.
(Car crash, playground accidents or sport related accidents)



What are the symptoms of a concussion?

Symptoms may be subtle and may not appear immediately. Symptoms can last for days, weeks or months. Two most common ones are **forgetfulness** and **confusion**. *Other immediate signs and symptoms are: headache, dizziness, ringing in ears, nausea, vomiting, slurred speech, visual changes, feeling sluggish.* *Some symptoms do not appear until hours or days later: mood or cognitive disturbances, sensitivity to light and noise, sleep disturbances.*

What should be done when concussion is suspected?

Anyone suspected of having a head injury should seek medical attention. The doctor will check reflexes, pupils and balance. A CAT scan may check for bleeding and fractures. In the case of a **concussion, the brain needs time to heal**. While your brain is healing, you are much more likely to have a second concussion and should not return to sports/activities until **cleared by a physician**. Remember to inform all coaches that your child has sustained a concussion.

How can a concussion be prevented?

Always use proper sports equipment, including personal equipment (helmet and mouth guard), when playing sports, bike riding, horseback riding, skateboarding, and skiing.

<http://www.mass.gov/dph>

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/tbi/TBI.htm>

<http://www.kidshealth.org>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com>

<http://www.sportsconcussion.net>

Heather Makris

WINTER NATURE WALKS

January and February found the Conant meadow covered with deep snow and the stream frozen -- perfect conditions for winter nature walks! Grades 3 and 5 do not go out for winter walks, but the students in the other grades had wonderful opportunities to examine and explore the winter conditions of their schoolyard. Here are some highlights:

- **Kindergarten** – The youngest Conant students started their session on the familiar Conant playground, taking a close look at how its ground and trees change in winter. They dug into the frozen ground, looked at snow through a magnifying glass, and stood quietly under the Eastern White Pines and listened to the wind. They also examined the buds on the branches on a Pussy Willow and a Maple tree. Always a special treat for Kindergarteners is crossing over the bridge and examining the stream. This year it was frozen solid.
- **Grade 1** – First Graders focused on how animals in the Conant schoolyard cope with winter by hibernating, adapting, and migrating. Although the First Graders went out on days that were cold, they were fortunate that there was fresh snowfall with lots of animal tracks. One lucky group followed a set of deer tracks all the way across the meadow, and speculated that the deer met a second deer at the stream; other groups reported finding fox, rabbit, and squirrel tracks; one observant group sited evidence of deer in the meadow not by their tracks, but by their droppings.
- **Grade 2** – The Second Graders continued their study of plants and trees by visiting the same four trees that they had observed in the fall. Armed with illustrations of four tree buds in their winter state, the students identified the trees by matching their buds to the illustrations. They traveled all the way across the meadow in snow two feet deep to look at a Red Oak with its leaves still on, a Gray Birch with its catkins, as well as Aspens and Red Maples. Along the way they collected lots of seeds, leaves, pine needles, and broken branches to bring back to the classroom for discussion.
- **Grade 4** – Have you noticed the bright pink tape on the tree branches as you enter the driveway to the back parking lot? These markers indicate the trees that the fourth graders visited this winter and identified by their buds. The students started their study of trees with an indoor session during which they examined 20 different twigs and used a key to identify them by asking such questions as: is this from an evergreen or deciduous tree, are the branches positioned in opposite or alternating patterns, is the bud in a cluster or single? Luckily, the Grade 4 students had a nice warm day for their outside session so that they could comfortably take their time with each of the eight trees and work through all the steps of the key.

Grade 6 – During their last year at Conant, the sixth graders break into groups of four and each month monitor their own square meter of land. They record the wind direction, the angle of the sun, the length of a shadow, and the temperature of the ground, air, and water. They also observe the seasonal changes from month to month and predict the next month's conditions. This year, the sixth graders went out in December and February, skipping January due to very icy conditions.

Thanks to our many, many volunteers who chaperoned our students and ensured that these winter walks took place. All grades go out for spring walks, with Grades 3 and 4 going on two walks each. If you'd like to lead a small group of students on a spring nature walk, please contact the Nature Walk Coordinators, Sytske Campbell and Deborah Malloy. You're sure to learn something new and gain an appreciation of the natural beauty of the Conant schoolyard.



Deborah Malloy

Recycling at Conant school



Great news! In 2008, Conant School and families recycled a total of 11.78 tons of paper. According to the Abitibi Recycling Program, Conant School increased from the previous year the amount of paper it recycled by a little more than two and a half tons. That is more than an Abitibi retriever full! 11.78 tons is the equivalent of 79 cubic yards of landfill space. Wow! Thanks go to everyone for recycling classroom papers and bringing in paper from home. Remember...you can easily play a part in Conant's program that earns money for each ton recycled by bringing to school your newspapers, magazines, unwanted paperbacks, junk mail, and even your work place paper recycling.

The more the better. Right now we earn just \$5 for each ton. If we recycle more than one ton per month, Conant will earn \$15 per ton! That is a big incentive to help the earth while helping the school to earn money.

Sytske Campbell

The School Food Drive is Coming Soon!!!

Hope you all had a good vacation. We all know that this winter has been especially tough for many families, the extreme cold plus the economic crisis. As a school community, we have helped families in many ways and will continue to do so. Our next community service project, a **food drive to support the Acton Food Pantry**, is coming soon. We will be collecting different foods by grade level from March 2 through March 25. Food will be collected in classrooms as well as in the foyer by Luther. We will need your help! All of the food will be delivered to the Acton Food Pantry. More information will be coming home this week, which will include the list of requested foods by grade level. Please keep your eyes open for this information.

Also, we are still waiting to hear whether we won a visit from Bruins' PJ Axelsson and BLADES for our large donation of 312 pajamas to the Cradles to Crayons organization. However, we are all winners as we helped 312 children during a very difficult time. We will keep you updated.

Thank you once again for your generosity!

The Conant School Community Service Learning Committee

Please Read the Conant Crier!

The *Conant Crier* is the newsletter of the Conant School and is published every month during the academic year. Many notices concerning school events will be published in it — there may not be separate fliers sent home regarding these events, so please read the *Crier* carefully!

The best way to submit an item for the *Crier* is to send it via email either as an attachment, or as part of the email message text to the editor in charge of the next publication. We will be happy to confirm receipt of the item. Submissions are always welcome from anyone in the Conant community. The *Crier* staff also has a mailbox in the main office. Please feel free to leave articles/information that may be of interest to the school community and we will consider it for publication.

In order to publish the *Crier* **on time**, please follow these guidelines for submitting articles:



Issue: April; **home:** April 3rd
Article Deadline:

Wednesday, March 25th

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sudhir_krishnan@yahoo.com

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A message from the Food Service Department:

Did you know you can apply for free or reduced lunch at any time throughout the school year?

If your financial situation has changed and you would like to apply for assistance the link below will bring you to the application.

www.ab.mec.edu/departments/deptspdf/Application

Please fill out the application and return it to your child's School. You only need to fill out one application per family.

If you have any questions regarding the process please contact me.

Kirsten Nelson

Food Service Director

Phone: 978-264-4700x3221

E-mail: knelson@mail.ab.mec.edu



Check out the weekly news flashes for up to the minute PTO and School information. Go to <http://conant.ab.mec.edu/pto/index.html> to sign up for the email list.

You can also preview class gifts for the 2009 Auction on this page!!