



October 2020

October 12

Columbus Day - no school



Notes from the Head of School

When I first thought about writing newsletters for the 2020-2021 year, I thought every month it would be a lot of “Sorry folks, due to COVID we can’t do ‘X, Y, Z’”. However, I quickly learned that even during a pandemic, there’s not much we absolutely cannot do at Berrybrook.

One of the unique things about Berrybrook is the thinking that goes behind each and every decision. It’s a running joke that Berrybrook doesn’t make changes quickly. Well, thanks to COVID that unquestionably has changed! We’ve made many alterations to Berrybrook’s every day operations but underneath it all, it’s still the same ol’ Berrybrook. When I read the first version of regulations and mandates from the Department of Early Education and Care back in June, I will admit I had a moment where I cried and told myself that this was impossible. That there was NO way we could provide a Berrybrook experience to children under these rules. In 100% transparency, I had an adult beverage after reading those 32 pages that fateful afternoon and went to bed. At 6PM. I pulled the covers over my head, had a good pout session and pity party and went to sleep (well, tried to anyway). The next day, I woke up and told myself that we would still provide a Berrybrook experience for every child, but in a different manner. I knew we could do it, but it just required A LOT of thinking outside the box. I went to bed thinking we would never be able to have play dough again; I woke up knowing that we could offer children individual play dough options. I went to bed thinking that parents wouldn’t be able to see what the classrooms looked like; I woke up knowing we could do videos like the teachers had been doing during the spring for the children. I went to bed thinking that it was the end of home visits;

I woke up knowing we could offer an outside version. And so on, and so on. I quickly came to realize that there wasn't much we couldn't do, but it just would be different. After a few weeks of school, from the confident strides of children into the building at arrival to the awesome conversations I'm having with students on the way to cars at dismissal I know we're all doing a great job; from the families who are trusting that we are working to provide a safe and healthy environment (both physically and mentally), to the staff who are working 200% we're all in this together to help children feel safe and HAPPY! We're able to make these changes because at the core, Berrybrook is all about children's social and emotional development. That's always been our focus; it's not like all of a sudden we're stopping to say "Oh no, it's a pandemic, what about the children's feelings?" As I mentioned before, Berrybrook is both a noun and a verb - it's a school and a way. That's not new, and it certainly won't change during these times.

~ Mrs. Watts



I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Reopening Committee, who met and connected via email countless times during the summer to help plan out what school year would look like. Board of Director Members Emily Balboni, Andrea Doton, Rachel Ezell, Beth Marois, and Sarah Murray joined myself, Mrs. Connell, Mrs. LaForest, and Mrs. Piccuito. A gigantic THANK YOU to Mrs. Connell and Mrs. LaForest for all they did; there's no way school would have opened without their work.

~ Mrs. Watts



Teacher's Notes

Three Important Words

Every school year, in Classroom 2,
comes a very important thing to do.
Choosing three words that very best fit.
To introduce when, as a class, TOGETHER we sit.

A favorite story, read every school year,
Mentions the three words for all to hear.
Two characters discover their likes and dislikes,
From houses, to sports, to riding their bikes.

Traditions we like abound here at Berrybrook;
Every year the SAME, when you take a close look.
Applesauce, jelly, seeds of milkweed pods flying.
Carving pumpkins, tapping maple trees -
We'll never stop trying!

What's DIFFERENT about all the traditions will be,
Is how to consider everyone's health and safety.
Washing hands a bit more might be an extra task,
And so are our faces being a bit hidden by masks.

But DIFFERENT we'll do to keep most things the SAME.
No DIFFERENT will it be when we call out by name;
The names of children singing the Hello Song, it's true -
Children will be smiling under masks when we all sing
"Hello! And how do you do?"

The SAME things we have, the SAME things we do.
From playdough to building to children play cooking for you!
Our "own" materials we now have to keep things safe and clean,
But sharing our ideas TOGETHER will always be seen.

Have you found them?
The three words with which this year we will weather?
Yup! You've found them!
SAME
DIFFERENT
TOGETHER

~ Mrs. LaForest

Mrs. LaForest teaches the 4 Day and 5 Day classes

From The Board of Directors

Anyone who has been at Berrybrook for a few years might remember me from the hallway. I was that mother who was 8 months pregnant, twin girls in a tandem stroller and a crying four year old clinging to my leg in the doorway of room two. At the beginning of each school year, my son always took a few weeks to “adjust” to his new routine. He adored his teachers, his friends, his classroom and really every single moment of his time at Berrybrook, but he very simply did not want me to leave.

After a few weeks of tearful goodbyes, my son came home with a little book tucked into the front pocket of his backpack and a note:

“Don’t feel pressured to use it, but I thought it might help.” – Mrs. LaForest

Recognizing his need for predictability and routine, Mrs. LaForest created a personalized book of laminated pictures just for him; a page for each step that he would face between the gate and my departure.

It did help.

We went through the steps each morning and within a few days our tearful drop-offs were a thing of the past. At the classroom door I would get a quick “I love you” and he would scurry off to the block area. He would find a very specific block from the shelf each morning (he called it his “magnetizer”) and my science-loving boy would peer through the window and wait for me.

I would quickly exit through the front doors, hook a left before the gate and whether there was snow, hail, or gale force winds you would find me pushing that double stroller back through the playground, behind the bushes, to the window and his smiling face. He would hold his “magnetizer” up to the window from inside the classroom and I would rummage for something in my bag (ex. keys, a sticky binky, a diaper, a piece of artwork from his cubby, etc.) and hold it up to see if it was attracted to his “magnetizer”. It was the craziest thing, but every single item that I held up for the entire year stuck to his “magnetizer”, a metaphor perhaps that Mommy’s love could stick to him like a magnet for every second of those 2.75 hours until pick up. Satisfied, he would then run off to start his day. While his routine was lengthy and may have seemed ridiculous to some, it worked for him and his teachers were supportive and encouraging. They celebrated his newfound confidence right alongside him.

I’ve thought about our old routine a lot over the past few weeks as I drop my twins off at Berrybrook. Drop-offs look a lot different now than they did back then and I wonder how my son would have coped at age four with a quick masked goodbye at the front door. My girls on the other hand, rarely look back. “I hear our friends,” they say as they skip happily through the front door.

On the occasion that I do pass by another parent dropping off a tearful child, I *always* feel for them. Despite the strict new regulations, socially distanced drop-offs and masked faces, I actually think I’ve seen less tears this year than I have in years past. The children all seem to be well adjusted and confident. At pick up the children look cheerful, even elated, as they walk to their cars. I am sure that this is in large part due

to Berrybrook's incredible teachers and staff. Their unwavering dedication to meet the needs of each individual child has allowed the students to feel confident and happy in an environment that at times can still feel scary for many adults. I have no doubt in my mind that our children will grow to be more resilient individuals this school year, not just because of this pandemic but because this is what Berrybrook teachers have *always* done for their students.

My son is in first grade now and his first assignment of the year was to write about his "First Day Jitters". He thought long and hard about what he wanted to say and then wrote in his carefully formed letters, "*When I was in preschool I felt jitters when Mommy left. Now I just feel excited!*" What more could a parent hope for?

I know that Berrybrook paved this path for him. He grew immeasurably during his time on Winter Street. I, however, am still hoping that one morning I'll get my own personally laminated book from Mrs. LaForest to help me navigate these "steps" in parenting. In the meantime, I'll wave from the sidewalk as the bus fades from view, hoping that my children always know that even though I'm not holding my "magnetizer", I'll be with them every second of the day until that school bus drops them off right back at home.

Emily Balboni

President, Berrybrook Board of Directors

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Berrybrook Families are growing!!!!

Welcome

Connor Doyle

(big brother Bennett is in 4 Day room 1)

Bennett Gaskins

(big brother Parker is in 3 Day room 1)

Jaxson Savoy

(big sister Lyla is in 5 Day and big brother Jordan is in 3 Day room 1)