

May 2020



Notes from the Head of School

Mr. Watts and I were in the attic cleaning and going through outgrown clothes and toys when the news was delivered at the daily press conference. I was already feeling melancholy reliving my kids' earlier days and my memories as we looked through the numerous mementoes. When Governor Baker said the words - although not unexpected by any means, it was still devastatingly hard to process - the tears became larger.

We had planned to clean out the attic for weeks, but the irony of the news of the loss of part of the kids' school year coming at the same time as we were passing on a part of their early years to another family was not lost on me at all. Just as we were reminiscing about the early stages in their development, I was also processing that they were losing a different part of their childhood by not being able to return to school for the rest of the year. This year was a big year for my kids - Brady is finishing his freshman year, and due to the closing of Sacred Heart High School at the end of the year, this was the last time he would be with these friends in this building. Jameson is finishing sixth grade, and although he should be completing his time in the elementary school and moving onto the high school building down the street, the high school closure meant he would instead be staying at the elementary school for another two years. He also has many friends

who are moving onto other schools next year and was hoping to see these friends before they all dispersed. And Maya is in kindergarten, and would be moving onto the elementary school where Jameson's plans to NOT share a school with his sister were thwarted now that he would not be moving onto the other building.

The thing is though, any part of your child's development is big. They will never be this age again. As parents of young children, we are in the thick of things and we only know and feel what we know now. A friend posted an article on social media about the loss of her child's preschool year, and a friend of hers commented that "any milestone lost, at any age, is difficult and sad . . . for the parents too". I could not agree more. No one can tell you how to feel, and everyone is entitled to their feelings. We tell the students this all the time. Everyone can feel how they feel, we cannot make anyone feel a certain way as it is up to an individual to make the choice how they feel ("You made me sad" vs "I feel sad when you say that"). It is our job to respect a person's feelings, and perhaps try to understand their perspective. My reaction to something may not equal your reaction to something. However, I think we agree that this situation is sad on many levels. The loss of life trumps the loss of preschool days for sure, but again we are allowed to mourn the loss of this part of our child's stage of life. Will your child be ready for their next stage of development? Of course. Will they be sad about not seeing their friends in the traditional way? Absolutely. I'm sad about not seeing the 4 and 5 Day children participate in the usual activities as they get ready to move onto kindergarten. I have happy and sad tears in my eyes as they hop on the bus for their trip to check out the kindergarten classroom at Chandler. I always wish for sunny weather on Ice Cream Days so I can wear sunglasses and no one sees my tears. We'll do our best to experience some of these transitions in a non-traditional way, once it is safe to do so (I love me some Berrybrook vanilla ice cream, so I'll do my best to make that happen!)

It's been difficult for staff as well. We chose this profession because it is a

caring, hands-on career that makes a difference in the lives of little ones (and some families too!). When we left on March 13, we all had so many cliffhangers ~ we had so many plans and goals for the children and absolutely thought we'd be back to finish the year. Of course we have the projects that we all love to do with the children, but it's more of "Child X and Child Y are really starting to work so cooperatively in the Lego area lately, I can't wait to see how they work together next week!" or "So-and-so has been working so hard at zipping up her coat on her own, a few more days and she'll master it!" We get excited for this! We may have seen a thousand children learn how to zip their coat over the years, but we rejoice and celebrate and are so proud of them each and every time! We miss this! We miss our coworkers and the camaraderie we have with each other. In a normal world, we get together outside of the Berrybrook walls but clearly that's not happening now and we feel it. We truly are like a family, and not only are we not seeing our extended family such as parents and grandparents who don't live with us, we are missing our Berrybrook family members so much. We feel all of this too.

One "game" I find playing with myself and my family is the "Did we know" game and I think this COVID situation is such a defining moment in our lives that I bet you're playing it too. I find myself thinking, "Did we know then (for example: at Brady's birthday/when I had minor surgery at the beginning of March/when we went to see Blue Man Group during February break)? Did we know yet about COVID? How much did we know about the virus then? When was the first time we saw someone with a mask, before it was mandated, and what feelings did we have at that time? When was the last time my kids saw their grandparents, other than FaceTime? I try to remember what we knew during these events and what our thinking was at the time. And as I've said a few times before, I try to see what the lesson is in all of this. I loathe when people say to me, "Things happen for a reason!" because really, usually at the time I'm not the best audience for this life lesson but in time I look back and think that yes, there WAS a reason that I can see now. Years from now, I'll look back at this school year and marvel at how resilient our kids are and I bet we'll have COVID to thank for some of that.

 Mrs. Watts

Teacher's Notes

Life at home these days...

The following quote is from my oldest daughter. She lives in Northern Virginia with her husband who is working from home, along with nine-year old Mairead, six-year old Emrys, three-year old Fionnuala, and seven-month old Elowen. She is, I can imagine, going through the same things as all of the Berrybrook parents. I hear more intimately her struggles, and can empathize with all of you. She overheard this part of the conversation between her two oldest children while they listened to Christmas music and played an imaginary game before the everyone else came downstairs yesterday morning. She started off by saying...

"Because time is now irrelevant and meaningless, the kids are downstairs listening to Christmas music and pretending to wrap and open presents. Welcome to the new paradigm."

Mairead: Wait, it's still March, right?

Emrys: No! It's April!

Mairead: No, we just had my birthday, it's still March.

Emrys: No! It's April, you dumb face!

Mairead: Oh, who cares, keep wrapping.

"Didn't you know? Christmas is tomorrow! Yesterday = any day before today, Today = today, Tomorrow = any day after today. So much easier this way!" She and I had a good laugh at the time of the conversation.

Now I look at this as I am writing and think, I can hardly remember what day it is when I wake up each morning much like my grandchildren. I woke up today thinking, "It's Monday! I forgot to send Mrs. Piccuito my newsletter article!!" then slowly, it dawned on me; it's only Saturday. My heart slows down, I wipe my brow, and go down stairs to let the dogs out. Phew! I can send it to her later.

We are all under such stress. As adults, we have many more skills to cope with stressors in our lives. Some good and some not so good. But for children, they look to play. My two grade-school aged grandchildren are spending their time doing their distance learning, virtual dance classes, and even virtual Girl Scouts.

But I have to give my daughter a shout out. She is allowing the kids to choose when they feel overloaded with the work. She plans their days to allow plenty of time for unstructured play. This little scenario of imaginary gift wrapping started out as an early morning dance party, then morphed into Christmas music; that led to wrapping presents and this game of giving themselves wrapped presents to open. It probably was a game that helped them feel safe and secure and loved. (Backwards to a safer time). *As an FYI, these kids do not watch tv, they attend public school, and were just introduced to their first video game - a Harry Potter Lego game during the shut-down.*

This is one of the major benefits of play - unstructured, child-led play. Children who do not have experience with this type of play often will keep engaging an adult with questions, or state “I’m bored”, or “I don’t know what to do”.

At Berrybrook, when a child says, “I’m bored”, we give them two options; you could do _____ or _____. Then we move away and observe. The key is not to engage in a verbal back and forth. AND we give the child time to think about what was said; give them time to consider what they can do. So, when things are getting to be too much, let them PLAY!

We need to live in the present! Remember Today= Today.

Stay healthy, stay safe,

~ *Mrs. Dunn*

Mrs. Dunn teaches in the 3 Day room 3 and the 2 Day classes

Parents Association Notes

Hello everyone and happy spring!

While we certainly miss everyone at Berrybrook, hopefully these beautiful days are helping to ease the stress that we are all feeling during this crazy time and you and your families are staying healthy.

The Parents Association is thinking of everyone in the Berrybrook community and can't wait to be back in the fall. At that point, we are planning to throw what is sure to be the best Harvest Festival yet!

Please reach out to us with any questions that you may have and know that your families are always on our minds!

Stay healthy, safe and happy.

Have a WONDERFUL summer! See you in the fall ~

Diana Stewart and Jess Bisceglia Co-Presidents
berrybrookparentsassociation@gmail.com

From The Board of Directors

The Power of Perception and Perspective

When I volunteered to write the May 2020 newsletter back in September, I planned to focus on how wonderful the school year was, delve into some of the school highlights and to share some of the fun activities planned for the summer. I still plan to.

Despite the current pandemic putting some major kinks in the aforementioned—don't get me wrong, the past five weeks have been some of the most challenging—there's a lot to thankful for, and to be happy and excited about.

When schools closed and the stay-at-home order was put in place, I admittedly took for granted how perceptive George (my four-year-old in the 3-day program) is. I also realized very quickly how much he loves and misses his friends and teachers. Last week when George woke up in the morning, he said he had a dream that the virus was over, and he was back with his friends at Berrybrook. We spent a few minutes talking about some of the specific things he missed—the playground, going to the Nook, celebrating birthdays, and snack time—and, I'll say it again, despite these last couple months, it's been a good school year full of growth, fun and learning.

That said and in the interest of bringing some light and realities into this newsletter, here are a few highlights from our quarantine:

- **Positive:** At the beginning of the pandemic, we ran into Mrs. Rosen (one of George's teachers) in our neighborhood, which was a great surprise!
- **Debatable:** Also, at the beginning of all this, when my husband and I were spinning our heads trying to work and be with our children (still are), and it didn't stop raining (still hasn't), I had to do something. I ordered a bounce house. It arrived this week and is currently in our living room. I still don't know whether this was a brilliant or not-so-brilliant decision. We'll see how the tears and the arguing go. I'll report back.
- **Positive:** Both of my children have become obsessed with numbers and counting—silverware, animals, toys, everything — and I'm in awe at how well they're understanding and having fun with numbers.
- **Debatable:** During one of the rainy stretches, we took the boys for a drive to get out of the house and to maybe have one or both fall asleep. That backfired quickly when one became carsick and promptly threw up three times in the car. Seems about right.

None of this is easy and we're all facing similar, yet very unique, challenges as we [try to] adapt to working from home, social distancing and teaching our children.

In addition to the positives listed above, I've loved watching my children play—both together and independently—become more comfortable on their bikes, exploring the woods behind our house, help with yard work and playing without the need to rush.

As for summer plans, we had plans to travel to see family and be at summer camps, but it's looking more like it will be much of the same. Hopefully, we'll be able to play at the beach if the weather ever gets better!

We truly hope to see some of our Berrybrook friends and classmates this summer, but if not, we're very much looking forward to getting back in session soon.

Stay safe, stay healthy and stay happy everyone!

Whitney Parker

Berrybrook Board of Directors