'School of the Woods had a busy Sports schedule this year

Lots of activity has been going on in School of the Woods athletic program this year.

We will have good coverage in photos in the next issue of our magazine, View From the Woods, to be published mid July.
Helping Students Make Those Big Transitions
When It’s Time to Move Up to New Classrooms

By Elizabeth Stepankiw, with Mary Clemer, Jane Collins, Margi Dhruv, Suzy Josef, Heidi Harbaugh, Lise Lawrence, Michelle Romero, Ginger Schwarz, Galina Seager, Kay Shields, Liz Shpata, and Chie Stephens

In May of every school year, the oldest students from each multi-age group look forward to new challenges and to moving to different classrooms. All of us at School of the Woods strive to make the moves stress-free and positive experiences. We offer here observations and suggestions which may assist you, the parent, help us accomplish that.

One aspect of our transitions programs is having the students visit their new classrooms in May before school is out for the summer. Also, parents of these students are invited to their own bridging lunch meeting on May 11. More about this later.

General Information

Your child’s Social Life:

Because of the three-year grouping in Montessori classrooms, moving to a new classroom means returning to the position of being among the youngest in the classroom.

Children continue to experience the art of growing from the humbling position of being "new" students to positions of leadership.

When children visit their new classrooms, they will have the opportunity to experience what is coming next and see models for maturity in the new classroom.

Because your child is entering an age of intense social learning, the classroom will provide opportunities to learn how to work cooperatively as well as guidance in how to be courteous and solve problems when they arise.

It is not unusual for children to experience "bumps" along the way as they learn patterns for healthy interactions. Conflicts with peers may occur; parents can help their children by encouraging them to communicate with their teachers and ask for help as soon as it is needed.

Your Child's Academic Life:

As is appropriate for your growing child, the work requirements expand with each year and the opportunity for your student to plan ahead becomes greater. Students will be asked to continually play a larger part in constructing their own education.

The Montessori curriculum responds to cognitive and social needs of the children as they build an understanding of the world around them and their own place in society.
The First Big Change: From Early Childhood to First Grade

You can expect your new elementary student to be tired at the end of the day during the fall months. Because your child is striving to become more independent, she may not share as much information about the school day as you are used to.

If your child is anxious about moving to a new classroom, the best thing you can do to help is to show confidence in your child's ability to handle new situations.

Reading at this age is of primary importance and includes phonics instruction, as well as whole language materials placed in every area of the classrooms.

We begin learning cursive writing in the first year of elementary with the goal of all writing to be cursive by the end of third grade. Research, journaling, and story writing are part of the beginning curriculum with an emphasis on content at first and editing skills being added once the child has gained confidence in writing.

Maria Montessori developed an extensive sequence of math materials beginning in early childhood and continuing through upper elementary that will give your child the opportunity to discover math concepts and practice facts.

The continuing manipulation of materials will provide your child with a foundation for understanding the decimal system as well as basic algebra and geometry concepts. Your child's growing imagination will be nourished through the study of history, geography, and science intended to spark interests that last for life.

In elementary, art and music classes are held in three-hour blocks of time on a weekly schedule. This schedule provides your child the opportunity to be part of a smaller group in the regular classroom on those days.

An exposure to Spanish begins with weekly lessons in the classroom, and other extracurricular activities, such as ballet, are scheduled after school. For most elementary students, celebration events are shared with all lower and upper elementary classrooms and with less parent involvement.

Goal-setting for academic work begins one-half day at a time and by third grade will be expected to occur on a weekly basis.

Homework for the elementary student begins with recording at-home oral reading and keeping track of a folder that goes to and from school on a weekly basis.

Research tells us that parents have the power to dramatically increase both comprehension and vocabulary by reading aloud to your children at home and discussing the reading together.

Beginning in first grade, children are asked to be present at conferences and participate in the conversation about their learning.

... Continued next page
From Third Grade to Fourth Grade in Upper Elementary

Independence for the nine- to twelve-year-old upper elementary student continues to increase.

Students plan their work for longer periods. More class work is expected daily as the year progresses. Children assume more responsibility for meeting many of their own needs at this level. This includes preparing their own lunches if they are not already doing so. They may choose to purchase lunches some days from the middle school catering business, as well.

Homework expectations include independent work. Children practice abstractly what they have learned to do with concrete materials.

Students use the Saxon Math 65 textbook, read and work the problems for each chapter, check their own work, making corrections as necessary, record the number correct out of total, and do a timed test of math facts each evening. This is turned in upon their arrival at school the next day.

The primary purpose of this work is to help students build a life skill. However, our in-house research has shown an improvement in math skills as well.

Students participate in field studies in areas of archaeology, paleontology, and history. The field studies are an integral part of the curriculum.

In addition to the content, students also grow in independence as a result of personal money management and managing themselves in public for an extended time without their parents in attendance. Regular library trips and other local outings are also part of the Upper Elementary curriculum.

Science work is conducted in multi-age groups to prepare students for the real world where few projects are performed by a lone person without interaction with others. Students work in informal study groups in other areas as well.

Social interactions become more complex during this period. This is the age in which peer relations bloom. Friendships tend to revolve around a small group of close friends. Children will need guidance from teachers and parents while they build communication and social skills.

Parents can be most helpful to their children at this time by encouraging them to ask the teacher for help when it is needed.
Spring Time Celebrations –

April 21

For Woods Lower School

Photos by Barbara Bends
Maria Montessori said it best:

“We have only to apply these principles [of student-centered learning] to see a calm come upon a child which characterizes and, as it were, illuminates all his actions. There is thus truly born a new child, a child that is morally superior to one who is treated as a helpless and incompetent being…I must confess that this experience filled me with wonder. I had been subject to the delusion of one of the most absurd procedures of ordinary education. Like others I had believed that is was necessary to encourage a child by means of some exterior reward that would flatter his baser sentiments…and I was astonished when I learned that a child who is permitted to educate himself really gives up these lower instincts.”

From “The Discovery of the Child”

And Daniel Pink observes:

“The study of human motivation reveals some simple yet powerful truths. Reward-and-punishment systems, which are thought to be a “natural” part of human enterprise work sometimes but are “effective in only a surprisingly narrow band of circumstances.” Science shows that the secret to high performance is in “our third drive-our deep-seated desire to direct our own lives, to extend and expand our abilities, and to live a life of purpose”

From “Drive”

In his article titled “The Issue is Not How but Why,” Alfie Kohn questions why we feel we need to assign grades, a common reward-and-punishment system, to a student’s learning. First, if we are grading for the purpose of grouping students, we must be aware that not only have grades been demonstrated through studies to be a “subjective rating masquerading as an objective assessment,” but we must also question whether or not sorting students is compatible with the goal of helping students learn. Secondly, if we are grading to motivate students, then we need to be aware that grading is counterproductive to motivation. Studies show that students are actually less interested in the subject and remember less of the information when they know they will be graded on it. And thirdly, if we are assigning grades to provide
feedback to the student, then grades are an inadequate means of supporting a student’s development and helping them learn. In a learner-centered setting, the most authentic ways to support students through assessment include teacher’s observations, a system in which students are invited to participate in determining the criteria by which their work will be judged, and portfolios that are not assigned a grade in the end. Kohn suggests that when conventional grades and testing must be used, teachers and parents should work to reduce their (salience)(significance).

Daniel Pink, again:

“When carrots and sticks encounter our third drive, strange things begin to happen. Traditional ‘if-then’ rewards can give us less of what we want: They can extinguish intrinsic motivation, diminish performance, crush creativity, and crowd out good behavior. They can also give us more of what we don’t want: They can encourage unethical behavior, create addictions, and foster short-term thinking. These are the bugs in our current operating system.”

….From “Drive”

It is clear that children are born with a desire to learn and that one of the greatest gifts education can give our children is to preserve that natural love of learning.

…. Compiled and discussed by Elizabeth Stepankiw

**Don’t miss the Student Dance Recital On May 27-28**

Dance/drama teacher Cindy Nevels has developed a masterful revue of the many versions of “Cinderella” from literally every corner of the world. It will be presented in Hamman Hall, Rice University, on Friday evening, May 27, and Saturday afternoon, May 28.

The Cinderella story is thought to have originated in classical Greek antiquity, some 2000-2500 years ago. One of the oldest versions tells of a girl who was bathing when an eagle snatched one of her sandals from her maid and carried it to Memphis, where the King was holding an open-air court. The eagle flew over the king’s head and dropped the sandal in his lap. You may recall what happens next.

Another ancient version was written in Chinese in 850 AD. The basic story has been popular continuously over the centuries and the title character has been given many names in different cultures - Aschenputtel, Solvuschka, Cenicienta, Critheanach – with many enhancement details added along the way.

Performance times are Friday, May 27 at 7 PM and Saturday, May 28 at 3 PM. Admission is $5.00.