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JANUARY 2018

Important Dates/Info

FEBRUARY TUITION DUE JAN. 1

Classes resume Jan. 3

MFLC Fall Raffle Drawing Dates:
Jan. 8, 9, 10!

No classes Jan. 15 in honor of
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

MFLC Board Meeting – Jan. 17

In-house registration for 2018-19
school year Jan. 22-26.

Look for info soon on 'Flower
Power' fundraiser!

Enrichment Classes

Contact Miss Melissa at
melissa.oprison@gmail.com.

Outside Play – We go outside
if it's 25+ degrees & no rain.
Kids should be prepared with
labeled cold-weather gear.

Proper Shoes – Your child should
have proper play shoes (closed toe
with a back), especially on
movement day.

Change in your contact info?
Please let Joan know if your email,
phone or home address has
changed.

SAVE THE DATES!

School Pictures
March 5-7
MFLC Open House &
Musical
May 3

Ways to Help Mushroom!

- Youcaring.com/mushroom-family-learning-center
- **smile.amazon.com**: Choose Mushroom as your charity.
- *United Way*: Agency #885339.
- **Giant Eagle Apples for the Students program**: School code #5245.
- Tyson Chicken *Project A+* labels
- MFLC Scholarship Fund

From the Director ~ Joan Harrison

Dear families and friends, welcome to 2018! I hope you enjoyed your holidays. We are looking forward to a great second half of the school year with you and your wonderful children.

It's registration time again! It is time to think about the next school year. It seems so hard to believe we are halfway through our current school year. I am pleased to announce there will not be an increase in the fundraising fee, and only a slight increase in tuition for the 2018-19 school year.

Everyone will receive registration forms in their cubbies on Tuesday, January 16.

In-house registration for current families will be held January 22-26. Registration will begin at 9:00 AM. Sign-in will begin at 8:45 AM, and each registrant will be given a number in order of sign-in. **Please note: Each family must have a representative in person to sign in and register the family.** This designated person does not have to be a family member. And to be fair to all, we must have a limit of one family registration per person/sign-in. For example, you cannot give your family's registration to a friend to turn in along with her family's registration.

It is highly suggested that you register on the first day if you have a class preference. Completed registration forms will not be accepted until Jan. 22. In order to register, the following must be met:

- The form must be filled out completely.
- The nonrefundable registration fee must be attached.
- You must be current with tuition payments, including first-half fundraising fee.

Please be aware that classes fill up quickly!

Registration opens to the public on Jan. 29, so please be sure to register before this date. If you have any questions, please contact me.

The very best compliment you can pay our school is to recommend Mushroom to a friend or neighbor. If you know of a family who may be interested, please have the parent/guardian call to schedule a tour. Thank you for your continued commitment and support.

Scholarships are available; if you are in need, please come to my office for a confidential application.

Wishing you a 2018 filled with much love, joy, laughter, smiles, and good health!

Joan



If you haven't yet, register your Giant Eagle Advantage Card® and raise funds for our school! With every scan of your card at the cash register, points are automatically credited to your selected school.

1. Sign in to giganteagle.com or create an account.
2. Register your Giant Eagle Advantage Card® online.
3. Visit the "My School Programs" page and enter Mushroom's code, 5245. (You can enter more than one school to receive points if you'd like.)

Welcome Future Mushroomers!

Scarlett Geletko, born 12/8 – Congrats to parents Colleen and Rob and big sister Vivienne (4s-PM)!

Liam Butt, born 12/21 – Congrats to parents Jessica and Jason and big brother Bennett (3s-PM)!

Big THANKS to...

All the homeroom parents and helpers who coordinated the holiday parties. They were great!

Lipkin family (Charlotte, KToo, Henry, 2s) for their donation of crafts and clothes.

Erin Betler (Sylvie, 4sAM) for coordinating the Chipotle spirit night and the Play it Forward Drive service project. And thanks to all the parents, families and friends who helped stuff the truck!

Martha Jurczak (Xavier, 3sAM), **Erin Betler** (Sylvie, 4sAM), and **Kate Gigliotti-Gordon** (Laszlo, 4sAM) for coordinating the MFLC Fall Package Raffle. And thanks to the board members who secured prizes and sold tickets.

Our Fall Package Raffle donors: Betler family, Arpino Trattoria, Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, Meat & Potatoes restaurant, MWM Photography, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Scoops Ice Cream Parlor, Sports Haven Bowling Alley and The Fresh Market!

Miles Sponsler (KToo) for his donation of manipulatives for our classroom.

Tahir (KToo) and **Jakub** (4sAM) **Dobraca** for their donation of a wagon for our playground.

Tiffany Apaliski (nanny for Eleanor Wood, 3sPM) for books for our reading library in the hall.

From the Board President ~ Kate Gigliotti-Gordon

Happy January! I hope everyone enjoyed their holiday break. This month always has a way of making me feel refreshed for so many reasons:

- There's a lovely feeling of 2018 being a clean slate, like anything and everything is possible.
- The shortest day of the year is officially behind us. From here on in, the mornings will slowly but surely get lighter and evenings longer.
- Indoor spaces look a little bit bigger now that the holiday decorations are packed away. Who feels a DIY project coming on?
- The supermarket aisles (where, alas, you do have to return) are back to their normal calm selves.
- Your evenings and weekends are your own again. No more to-do lists, shopping, decorating, or wrapping. You can unearth those books you never quite got a chance to finish. You can even experiment with a new recipe or two.

January is your oyster. Much as falling off the wagon of healthy (hmmm...ish) eating for a few solid weeks was fun, it's relieving to officially say "Enough" (and possibly sign-up your child and yourself for Mushroom's Kids of STEEL team?).

Within just a few days of normality, you can feel more focused and energetic. Even the preschool classrooms look a little different come January. All the holiday artwork has gone home and teachers have a fresh stack of books to read to the

➡ *Before I was a Teacher,
I was a Mushroom Mom... MISS KELSEY*

It was eight years ago I walked through the big red door
I was met with Joan's smiling face and any fear I had, I felt no more
It was an instant sensation of warm, quaint, and small
Classrooms filled with joy and adorable artwork all on the wall
A noticeable emphasis on learning through play
The perfect atmosphere for my first-born, is there any other way?

The Twos class is a safe haven for toddlers to thrive
Three-Fours encourages independence, but with a bit of support, for
when they are five

(I remember that Pre-K was a year full of great pride
With every step closer to Kindergarten, wow, my emotions
I just couldn't hide.)

K-Too is great for expanding horizons, hearts and minds
While making friends, they explore history, science, and cultures of
all kinds.

Each teacher is unique, not a bad one in the bunch
With love and kindness guiding their day-to-day crunch
Both of my daughters thrived and enjoyed each pre-school class
Meredith was cautious and sweet; Maggie was shy with a little sass
I loved it so much, I was fortunate to stay
Became a teacher to relive the adorable moments every day
I never questioned my girls' safety, early education, socialization,
or whether they were having fun
A truly special time and place, in my book Mushroom is number one!

kids. The children are rested after a nice break from school. Parents and teachers may or may not feel the same way!

I hope this month brings a big, fat snowman to my yard and yours. Even ol' Frosty can teach us a thing or two...

What we can learn about life from a snowman:

- > Hold your ground, even when the heat is on.
- > The key to life is to be a jolly, happy soul.
- > There's no stopping you once you're on a roll.
- > It's fun to hang out in your backyard.

Happy New Year's wishes to my Mushroom family. I wish you all happiness, health and prosperity in 2018.

Twos Class *Amy, Sheila & Marlene*

Happy New Year! We are looking forward to seeing you and your children after the break. Even after such a relatively short period of time, the children seem to be more mature and more talkative. We love seeing all the progress that they make throughout the year!

In December, we had such a great time making your gifts. We hope you will cherish them for many years to come! The project was broken down into many small tasks: painting, gluing, wrapping; each one using those fine motor skills that are so very important to develop.

One thing that you'll always see in our classroom is play dough. It seems so simple — play with dough, make cookies. But there is actually a ton of learning going on at the playdough table! First, of course, are those motor skills. Children use muscles that they might not ordinarily use in play when they're rolling out a ball of dough. Getting the dough nice and flat uses two hands, a roller of some sort, and the hand-eye coordination to make it all work. Pinching off pieces of playdough, putting them into a muffin tin, and pushing a cut cookie out of the cutter are all opportunities for fine-motor skill development.

We have a variety of different cookie cutters at the table. These provide chances for speaking and listening, another area we focus on. We use language to ask for a particular shape, to identify new shapes, and to explain what we are doing. We can ask a lot of questions and get responses — "What are you making? How many do you need if we give one to everyone in our class?" Many of the children just like to pick up the cutters and announce their shapes. You'll often hear, "Triangle! Circle! Airplane!" around our table. This is a wonderful activity for all language-learners, which includes ALL of our students, and especially for English language learners.

Finally, the playdough table lends itself nicely to social interactions between the children. This is where some of them ask their first questions of their peers: "Can I have that?" We get to talk about sharing and taking turns. We resolve conflicts about who is going to carry the muffin tin to the stove. These instances are the socialization part of our mission in the 2s class.

Who knew all this was happening at our playdough table? The magic can happen at your house, too. Here's our recipe for playdough that lasts longer than any store-bought type. Enjoy!

Playdough

2 cups flour

1 cup salt

1.5 tablespoons cream of tartar

2 cups water

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Mix and then stir well over heat until a dough forms.

Add any food color you like!

Threes Class *Jamie, Debbie, April, Melanie & Kelsey*

I was having a deep discussion with my son regarding religion. The ins and outs of his faith was definitely interesting to hear from a 19 year olds perspective, but the most profound thing he said stuck in my head long after the conversation. He

mentioned we should just love other people. A plain and simple concept. I realize it is not always easy to love everyone but if we even took it down a notch, and tried to be kind to everyone, what a better world we would live in.

The 3-year-olds spent the month of December practicing this concept. We committed to completing 10 Random Acts of Kindness, and we succeeded in this task. The following lists the kind acts we performed over a two -week period.

1. We made get well cards for an Upper St. Clair senior who is recovering from a car accident.
2. We made bracelets for our families and friends.
3. We made cookies for the Mushroom teachers.
4. We asked our classmates to be our partners.
5. We collected 48 pounds of food for SHIM.
6. We invited the 5-year-olds class into our room for snack.
7. We comforted a friend who was crying.
8. We made play dough and shared with our classmates.
9. We used our good manners during snack.
10. We collected \$200 and bought a cart full of toys for children at Children's Hospital.

We ended our kindness unit with a Superhero party. We discussed how you don't need super powers to be a super hero. One just needs to be kind and caring toward others to be a true Superhero.

My mission for you, if you so dare to accept, is to be a Superhero in 2018. Be thankful, kind and accepting. Use your powers for good over evil. And, hopefully, you can save the day with just a smile and a helping hand.

Fours Class *Liz, Melissa, Jane & Lara*

My December mantra, in both preschool and life in general, is "Slow Down." It is easy to get so caught up in the excitement (and stress!) of the holiday season that we miss the small moments of magic and connection. Our "to-do" lists threaten to pull us out of the present moment. One of the reasons I love working with young children is that they are so thoroughly anchored to the present. To be with them, we need to stay in the moment, too.

Our official theme for December was "Colors, Lights, and Shapes of the Season." Although our families may celebrate different holidays and keep different traditions, our celebrations have common elements. Everywhere we turn this time of year, we are bombarded with a visual feast of color, light and shape. We began by looking at shapes. <Insert sound effect for stepping on the brake> As I listened to the "Slow Down" mantra playing softly in my ear, I realized we were not ready to move on. The idea of shapes was just too interesting, too captivating, too deep, to move on after a brief visit. Our unofficial theme became "Shapes, Lines, Curves, and Angles."

The children are already familiar with the large and small curved and straight wood pieces we have been using to learn about letter formation. As we make our way through the alphabet, we practice building a letter before we try tracing or writing it. They help us pay attention to the sequence of lines and strokes and give us a hands-on understanding of the relationship between the lines. As we talked about shapes, we noticed how many curves, straight lines and angles can be found in each shape. We used our wood pieces (and a few other odds and ends) to create a shape person and practiced drawing what we made. We even tried designing and naming our own new shapes.

As always, our explorations were fueled by some terrific books. "Mouse Shapes" introduced us to the idea of creating pictures using shapes. Add a triangle to a square and you have a house! Our drawings and collages reflected this awareness of shapes as visual components of objects. "Square Cat" inspired us to explore ramps. What shapes roll, what shapes slide, and what shapes can do either depending on their orientation? We brought in the giant hollow blocks (more shapes!) and tubes to continue our experiments with motion. "The Perfect Square" showed us how a shape could be deconstructed and turned into something new. It also conveyed a message of resilience, flexibility, and releasing perfection. Our own efforts to transform square shapes are on display in the hallway.

We enjoyed trying out some new art materials and processes in December. Monoprinting, decoupage, tape resist, spray paint resist, aluminum foil sculpting, and scrape painting were some of the techniques we explored. Both groups really enjoy creating with art materials, especially constructing with recyclable materials. By introducing new materials and techniques, we hope to expand the repertoire of skills they have at their disposal to pursue their own ideas. We are again rethinking our use of space to accommodate their insatiable drive to create!

The children used their creative skills to create gifts and cards for their families. It was inspiring to see how much they enjoyed creating something for you. We hope you enjoy their gifts as much as they enjoyed making and giving them. We also hope you were able to take some time to enjoy the special gift your children offer you throughout the year: the gift of the present.



Dress for Success! Now that the weather is getting colder, we request that you send your children in appropriate outdoor clothing: **warm coat, hat, mittens, snow pants, and boots** when necessary. Items should be labeled and placed in the child's bag. The children go outside every day, weather permitting - no rain and a temperature of 25 degrees or above. Please be sure your kids also have proper play shoes, *especially on movement day*. Thank you!

JANUARY ENRICHMENT DAYS

Enrichment classes are available for those 4 and older on Mondays and/or Fridays each month, 11:30am-2:00pm. Please pack your child a healthy, meat-free lunch. \$15 per class. **Email Miss Melissa at melissa.oprison@gmail.com to register!**

Days and Themes This Month...

MONDAYS with Miss Sheila

Jan. 8 -- Paint GIANT clothespins; **Jan. 22** -- Crayon Resist Art; **Jan. 29** -- "There was a Cold Lady Who Swallowed Some Snow" story!

FRIDAYS with Miss Marilyn

Jan. 12 -- "The Snow Globe Family" story and create a kind of snow globe!; **Jan. 19** -- "Panda and Polar Bear" story and make a bear to take home! **Jan. 26** -- "Woodpecker Wants a Waffle" story and make waffles!

In January, we will keep going with our study of light and color as we also explore night and day. We will be studying the phases of the moon as well. We wish you a very happy New Year!

Fives Class *Cara & Melanie*

It is always a balance to provide a classroom environment that provides inspiration for the children without becoming too teacher-directed. Melanie and I had noticed that the children love using the envelopes in the writing center and making signs for the forts they were building together. So, we decided to take that kernel and provide more inspiration by turning the dramatic play area into a post office, as well as begin a classroom postal project together. Our classroom project has asked all the families to provide an address for someone of the child's choosing who is a friend or family member. We have begun to receive our letters back and have received ones from Fort Myers, Florida (along with sand from the beach), and another from Aliquippa, PA. We are excited to continue to receive return mail from across the country and find the locations on our classroom map.

Inside the classroom, we read a few books on sending letters, such as "Dear Mr. Blueberry" and "Yours Truly, Goldilocks." The post office, with all of its materials, provided the inspiration we were hoping for. Several of the children decided that they wanted to write letters to other children and teachers in the school.

They then decided that each classroom should have its own mailbox. I had, ahead of time, spent some time researching different ways you could make homemade mailboxes with the hope that the children would want to do such a thing. So, when the magic happened and they came up with the idea, I could easily provide the materials for them to create what they had in mind. Some children decided that they would write letters to other children in our classroom. Some were

missives letting the peer know that they had an idea they wanted to share or that they loved them. Siblings sent letters to younger siblings in other classrooms.

One child had come to the table one day and I could tell that she had something on her mind. I asked if she would like to write a letter, and she nodded her head in agreement. I asked what she wanted to write and the child said, "I want to write, 'Can you invite me to your playing?'" She then worked really hard to write the message and delivered it to her peers. I read the message to them and they invited the child to join them. Miss Melanie's and my hearts just melted. So many layers of amazing things happening in their child-directed play!

I was reminded yet again how we, as adults, should be providing the platform to allow children to take it deeper and make it more meaningful for themselves, even in my own home. My 10-year-old daughter really enjoys writing, so for a gift, my mom and dad had personalized note cards made for her. They have a picture of her on one side, and on the other side on the bottom it's printed "From the pen of Anja Williams." My daughter loved the gift and already had ideas of how to use the cards. The next day she was deep into hatching a business plan of selling Polaroid pictures to her sister. She came running downstairs for her new stationery and, in front of my mom and me, started penning a missive to her sister, which she then delivered by hand.

I watched my mom's face and recognized the look that washed over it. I'm sure she envisioned Anja using the gift to pen beautiful letters to family and friends, and here she was using the material in a completely different way. I chuckled and said to my mom that it is for us as adults to constantly take off our preconceived notions when it comes to child's play. I told her that she should feel really happy because her gift inspired Anja's creativity and self-directed activity, which is the ultimate gift.

Here is an excerpt from **Pop-Up Adventure Play's P.L.A.Y. Guide** by Anna Housley Juster, Ph.D., about the amazing benefits of child-directed play:

When children play this way, they...

- *Figure out things for themselves.*
- *Learn how to take healthy risks.*
- *Find innovative ways to think about the world and how it works, based on their own self-led, intrinsically motivated interests.*
- *Practice necessary skills such as overcoming obstacles, creative problem solving (on their own or with other children), communicating their feelings effectively with others, and working with those who may have different points of view.*
- *Experience the joy of self-discovery, the thrill of being able to pursue their own creative ideas without the*

fear of failure that usually arises when there is one predetermined way to be "right" or to "win."

Years of research show conclusively that child-directed play fosters the development of the whole child – children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills; contributes to school success; and is a necessary and important part of every child's life.

Melanie and I look forward to continuing to provide an inspired environment for the children to learn and grow in all areas. We will be using the night sky as our invitation to inspire this month!

K-Too Class *Marilyn, Cara & Christine*

We learned about Benjamin Franklin's life, discoveries, and inventions in December as a pre-cursor to our exploration of electricity. Mr. Franklin experimented with naturally occurring static electricity, which led to his discovery that lightning was electricity. K-Too did experiments with static electricity using wool, balloons, combs, tissue pieces, and water so that the children had hands-on experiences to compare to Franklin's excitement when he observed that electrically charged kite string and key in a storm.

The children enjoyed reading "The Magic School Bus and the Electric Field Trip," by J. Cole to guide their understanding of the atomic level of electricity. We even pretended to be metal atoms and passed our electrons (tennis balls) to make our own electric current. The children had fun and built their fine motor muscles taking electrical items apart to see the pathways electricity takes to make phones transmit sound, DVD players project movies, and rice cookers heat up.

At the end of our study the children made their own "electric house" to take home. With my, Cara, and Christine's help, they wired cardboard boxes with little lights and decorated them with found objects for a little Mushroom Mouse (a colorful cat toy mouse) to live inside. We also found time to have a lovely holiday party and paint a ceramic tile as a gift for families during this time of giving.

I hope you all cozied down and enjoyed uninterrupted family time over the winter break. Most people dread winter, but I associate the season with savory meals, snow play, long hot baths, and soft sweaters.

Make sure to get your children outside every day during the winter months to keep them healthy and happy. My son's Boy Scout leader always said, "There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad gear!" Be sure to bring cold weather gear to school so that we can get out and play.

LOOK FOR INFO SOON ON AN UPCOMING FLOWER SALE!



Join the Mushroom Kids of STEEL Team!



Registration Deadline:
March 31

The program itself is free. If you choose to culminate with a Pittsburgh Marathon event, there would be a fee for the event.

Online or paper program registration is required either way.

WHAT IS THE KIDS OF STEEL PROGRAM?

Kids of STEEL (KOS) is an award-winning, free youth physical activity and nutrition program designed to instill lifelong healthy habits in children. Mushroom Family Learning Center is a participating KOS program site.

"Training" plans are geared toward age-appropriate exercise and healthy eating habits.

Children can track their activity and nutrition on a provided log and turn it in for a finisher prize by the May 5 marathon day. They are encouraged, but not required, to complete the KOS program by participating in a Pittsburgh Marathon event on **Saturday, May 5:**

- UPMC Health Plan/UPMC Sports Medicine Pittsburgh 5K Run (North Shore and around North Side then Downtown)
- Toyota Pittsburgh Kids Marathon – 1-Mile Run, appropriate for ages 5-12 with parent/guardian (North Shore to Downtown)
- Sheetz Pittsburgh Toddler Trot – 100-Yard Run, recommended for ages 2-4, with parent/guardian (in Point State Park)



LOOK FOR INFO IN YOUR CHILD'S CUBBY SOON!

If you'd like to register now, visit kidsofsteel.org/join-kids-of-steel. Please be sure to select *Mushroom Family Learning Center* as your Kids of STEEL site from the list.

For more information or assistance in registering, contact Mushroom parent Kelly Lotter at kelly.lotter@gmail.com or 412-596-0536.

A nutrition/fitness coach from Kids of STEEL will visit Mushroom on March 1!

SAVE THE DATES!

School Pictures

March 5-7

MFLC Open House & Musical

May 3

Another fresh new year is here...
 Another year to live!
 To banish worry, doubt, and fear,
 To love and laugh and give!
 This bright new year is given me
 To live each day with zest...
 To daily grow and try to be
 My highest and my best!
 I have the opportunity
 Once more to right some wrongs,
 To pray for peace, to plant to tree,
 And sing more joyful songs!

William Arthur Ward
(allgreatquotes.com)