



**Mushroom Family Learning Center**

1240 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15228  
(412) 531-1225  
mflcdirector@hotmail.com  
mushroomfamily.org



**A Big Thank-You to...**

- All of our homeroom parents who coordinated the class holiday parties.

# News & Notes

**Important Dates / Info**

**TUITION DUE JANUARY 1**

**CLASSES RESUME JAN. 3**

**NO CLASSES JAN. 21 - MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY**

**IN-HOUSE REGISTRATION FOR 2013-14 BEGINS JAN. 23**  
General registration begins February 4.

**OUTSIDE PLAY**

Classes go outside if it's not raining and 28 degrees or above. Please be sure your kids are well prepared and mark all outerwear.

**CHANGE OF CONTACT INFO**

Please let the office know if any of your contact info has changed (phone, address, email).

**PARKING LOT SAFETY**

Please drive slowly in the parking lot. Remember it is ONE WAY entering off Washington Road and exiting to Sunnyhill Road.

**ENRICHMENT CLASSES AND "MUNCHIN' LUNCHIN" SPOTS ARE AVAILABLE**

(See pg. 6.)  
Contact Jamie Geisler at jamie\_geisler@comcast.net.

**WAYS TO HELP MUSHROOM**

- United Way agency # is 885339.
- Giant Eagle's Apples for the Students program # is 5245.
- Save Labels for Education (bin in the stairwell).
- Help other families by donating to the MFLC Scholarship Fund.

**From the director...**

Dear Families and Friends,

**W**elcome to 2013! I hope you enjoyed your holidays with your family and friends. We are looking forward to a great second half of the school year with you and your wonderful children.

I want to say a BIG thank-you to all of the parents and children who participated in our Scholastic Book Fair—those who purchased books and those who volunteered to make the book fair such a huge success. I am proud to report that by your generosity we netted 500 Scholastic Dollars, which enabled each teacher to purchase books for the classrooms.

*It's Registration Time Again!*

It is time once again to think about the next school year. It seems hard to believe we are halfway through our current school year. We are having a blast, but now we need to leap forward to get ready for next year. I am pleased to announce there will not be an increase in the fundraising fee and only a slight increase in tuition.

Registration will be held January 23-31. Everyone will receive registration forms in their cubbies on Wednesday, Jan. 16. Completed registration forms will NOT be accepted until Jan. 23. In order to be registered, the following items MUST be complete:

- ◆ Forms must be filled out completely.
- ◆ *Non-refundable* registration fee must be attached.
- ◆ Families must be current with tuition payments (including the first-half fundraising fee).

Registration will be open to the public on Monday, February 4. Please be aware that classes fill up quickly. If you have any questions, please contact me. Scholarships are available; please come to my office for a confidential scholarship application form.

If you know of a family who may be interested in our school, please have the parents call to schedule a tour. Thank you!

*Joan*

Joan Harrison

**To the Mushroom family community:**

*Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of Sandy Hook school and its surrounding community as it continues to grieve the loss of life and innocence as a result of last month's shooting. In light of the tragedy, we will be working with local agencies in the coming days to emphasize the importance of vigilance on all safety issues and doing regular reviews with our staff on safety plans. The safety of our students and staff is our highest priority. It takes parents, students, staff, and our community working together to keep our schools a safe and happy place. As always, I welcome your thoughts and concerns.*



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Should she stay or should she go?
When Your Child Should Stay Home

There are many different flu and stomach "bugs" going around and we want to do all we can to avoid passing these germs around. Please do not send your child to school if he/she has not been fever free or vomit/diarrhea free for 24 hours, or would not be able to benefit fully from being at school.



From the president of the board...

Happy New Year to my Mushroom family! This is both an exciting and bittersweet year for my family: exciting because we are building a new home in North Strabane, but bittersweet because it will also be my last year with a child at MFLC, and likely my last year (months, actually) as president of the board of directors.

Mushroom has been such a huge part of my life for the last four years and I hope that you all have as wonderful an experience as my family has. In my last few months, I hope to continue on the positive path that we have been on. You can be a part of it too! We will have several openings on the board for the 2013-2014 school year, so if you have an interest in getting more involved, please email me at bignellfam@yahoo.com.



We have several exciting things coming up. MFLC was recently awarded a \$3,000 grant for facility improvements from Home Depot! That amount is to cover the cost of materials, and Home Depot is donating the labor for FREE!! We hope to get the work done over spring break so as not to interfere with class time.

The proposed plan is for new flooring in the Early Learners room (half carpet, half laminate for messy projects), new flooring in the two smaller Pre-K rooms upstairs (carpet), and we will most likely use the remaining funds to spruce up the playground, which is one of Mushroom's biggest assets! We will have more on this project as it gets closer and may need some volunteers to help. Stay tuned!

As far as fundraisers for the second half of the year, we will be doing a Tupperware sale in January (40% profit) as well as second Auntie Anne's and Mixed Bags sales in February and March. These have been some of our most successful fundraisers, and while we are always looking for new ideas, we also want to bring you quality products.

I am going to end with something near and dear to my heart: car seat safety! Please be sure to read the safety tips and rules on the last page of this newsletter for how to properly buckle your children and keep those babies safe!!

Thank you and let's make this the best year EVER!!

Erin

Erin Bignell

News from the Early Learners class from Theresa, Marlene, and Debbie...

Happy New Year and welcome back! What a wonderfully festive December we had. The room was filled with the colors and scents of the season. After listening to and seeing the story of the gingerbread man on the felt board, the children enjoyed the wonderful fragrance of ginger when they made their own gingerbread men. We discovered that foxes can indeed be very tricky. We enjoyed this wonderful season of family and giving and worked hard on that special gift for Mom and Dad. And of course the season was not complete without a glittery reindeer parade.

Now that all the festivities are over, we will settle in and have a quiet January together. This month we will talk about what the animals do during the cold winter months. We'll make bird feeders, flap our wings to keep warm and practice hibernating in our caves just like the bears do. Bears will be a big topic this month. We'll have a bear parade so everyone will need a SHOE BOX for their bears to ride in. You may begin bringing them in as soon as possible. If you have extras, we'll take those too.

What's a bear month without Goldilocks and the Three Bears?

We will act out some of our favorite stories and refresh our memories with our favorite nursery rhymes too! Since winter brings snow, we'll create our own winter resort and play indoors with some homemade snow of our own. Having this quiet month will provide the opportunity for the children to practice more of their socialization skills. The concentration will be on providing the children with more opportunity to experience the social aspect of being at school. We will be having fun and keeping busy!



We want to thank all of you all for your generous contributions of snacks. The children are always delighted to know that there is something good to munch on and they look forward with pride in sharing it. We always make sure to give a big "thank you" to our snack person of the day. The children just beam as everyone recognizes them and their donation.

Also, we would like to thank you for your patience in bringing all the outdoor gear to school. Some days the children guide us outside and some days they are comfy and cozy and just want



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School delay/cancellation



MFLC will follow Mt. Lebanon School District decisions during inclement weather: When MTLSD is delayed, MFLC will be delayed; when MTLSD is canceled, MFLC will be canceled. Delayed start time will be 10 a.m. for morning classes which will dismiss at regular time; afternoon classes will begin on schedule. Please check local TV and cable stations, email blasts and the school answering machine when in doubt.

to stay in. Either way, we always like to be prepared. We will go out, if only for a little while, even if it snows. Sometimes it's just to make footprints and look for animal tracks.

If you have any ideas or activities that you would like to share with us and the class, please let us know. We always enjoy visitors and new ideas to expand on. We are having a wonderful time with all your children. They are amusing, enchanting and downright fun!

News from the 3s class from Jamie, Debbie, and Christine...

I love the month of December. There is always a feeling of excitement in the air with so many wonderful holiday traditions being celebrated. The children are busy decorating their homes, baking lots of goodies, lighting candles and spending time with family members who have traveled from far away. The children are excited and so are the teachers.

We tried to keep the excitement alive but still focus on our normal routine. We put together some wonderful crafts to decorate our bulletin board. The children painted a tree, decorated shiny ornaments, created shape menorahs and put glitter on pretty much everything! The children worked hard on a special gift for Mom and Dad by using their hands to make wreaths. Crafts are one of our favorite things to do at Mushroom school.

We also love to read in our classroom. The students in the threes class were busy learning new traditions about Christmas and Hanukkah. We read many stories and discussed the main characters by describing them and reviewed the order of events that occurred in the stories. We also used our question-of-the-day to practice comprehension skills and love listening to stories over and over again.

The children also began to participate in small groups where we focused on strengths and areas of need. Several practiced their number skills while others wrote their names. We had many social groups where we practiced communication skills and learned how to be a good friend. We also focused on iden-

tifying shapes and learning how to count objects. We teachers love working with the students on an individual level to meet all of their learning needs.

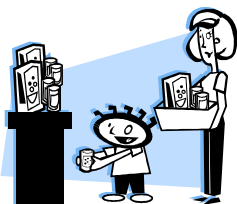
Our short month ended with a wonderful winter party focusing on The Polar Express. Thanks to all of our parents who helped out in one way or another. We made ornaments out of applesauce and cinnamon, used sunflower butter to make pinecone bird feeders to help out the animals, sang songs using the jingle bells and even paraded around the room to get a little exercise during a dreary day. The students then got their tickets to ride on the Polar Express. We listened to the story and then had hot chocolate during snack. Finally there was a huge dance party with all of our Mushroom friends from the older classrooms. We sang, danced and had a lot of fun. It was a great way to start our winter break.

In January we will focus on the winter weather with several science experiments. We will read stories about snowmen and hopefully have enough snow to make our own outside. I would also like to spend the month of January helping other people find joy, like Debbie, Christine and I experience every day with our beautiful three-year-olds class.

I was sitting in the Galleria a few weeks ago and noticed a young mother of two having lunch with her children. I smiled at them briefly, as I often do when children are involved, and noticed a lollipop sticking in the back of her hair. I laughed quietly to myself and then walked over to let her know. She was somewhat embarrassed until I told her I was also a mother and preschool teacher and could understand the "sticky situation." It got me thinking about how we all need a little help now and again, whether it is a shoulder to cry on, a smile from a stranger or the mention of a lollipop in someone's hair. It doesn't take a huge gesture to make someone's day or a lot of money to show someone that you care.

During the month of January, our class is going to commit "10 Random Acts of Kindness." Even though we are only three, there are so many small gestures we can do which can lead to moments of happiness. All of our acts of kindness are going to be written on our bulletin board downstairs.

I challenge everyone reading this newsletter to commit one





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**BRRRRR!!!** Now that the weather is colder we would like to request that you send your children in appropriate outdoor clothing: warm jackets, hats, gloves, and boots. The children go outside every day, weather permitting — no rain and a temperature of 28 degrees or higher. Please be sure your kids are well prepared (with labeled items) including proper play shoes for movement day. Thank you!

Random Act of Kindness. Once you do, let me know and I will add it to our bulletin board. We have a wonderful school filled with so many wonderful families, students and staff. Let's make the world a better place one act of kindness at a time.

### News from the 3/4s class from Liz, Marlene, and Brian...

**H**appy New Year! We hope everyone had a wonderful time over the holidays.

December was a quick month. We tried to keep things low key in the classroom, as this time of year already brings so much excitement! Our theme was "Colors, Shapes and Lights 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 looked for examples all around us, whether it be the triangle shape of a Christmas tree, the Star of David, or the crescent moon that marks the beginning of Eid at the end of Ramadan (OK, we cheated a little on the timing of that one), we mark our traditions with iconic shapes. The children were excited to share their own traditions as well as to learn about those of their classmates.

Our classroom was also invaded by mice, courtesy of Ellen Stoll Walsh. We read *Mouse Paint*, *Mouse Shapes* and *Mouse Count* and used our toy mice to explore the math, science and art concepts through hands-on play activities. We had the mice "dance" in puddles of paint, built block houses for them, and helped them hide from a hungry snake. The children, of course, also had their own ideas for the mice!



Generosity is another tradition we all share. The children really enjoyed creating something special for you. Thank you for your generosity as well. Your gifts were truly appreciated! Thanks, too, to all the parents who helped create a fun and festive winter party.

Next month our theme will be "Animals in Winter." We will

look at the different ways animals cope with the elements during the cold winter months. If the holiday week is any indication, we should have plenty of opportunity to learn about and enjoy the snow!

### News from the 4s class from Liz, Kim, and Melanie...

**W**e hope everyone had a wonderful time over the holidays. We'd also like to thank you all for your generosity. Your gifts are truly appreciated!

This month our theme was "Colors, Lights and Shapes of the Season." We mixed colors, played with flashlights, and cut holiday shapes. We explored the similarities and differences in the ways people celebrate during the winter holidays. Our fours students really pondered the Question of the Day as it changed from "Do you celebrate Hanukkah?" to "Do you celebrate Christmas?" They considered what activities they engage in that might constitute celebrating. We discovered that although our holidays and traditions may be different, we all enjoy decorating, using light, spending time with family, listening to cherished music, and preparing and eating special foods.



This month also provided our emerging readers with plenty of opportunities to experience different types of symbolic representation. When we learned about Hanukkah, we played the dreidel game. The children quickly learned to recognize the Hebrew letters on the dreidel and everyone was excited when it landed on Gimme! We also learned about the language of music. We showed them how the different symbols tell which note to play as we played holiday songs on the piano.

As always, the children kept busy with imaginative play. We are always looking to find ways to extend their play and incorporate math and literacy concepts. Our cookie party provided ample opportunity to practice patterning, counting, and one-to-one correspondence. Our "phone book" not only gives new ideas for role-based play, but also invites practice with number recognition and sequencing.



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Mushroom Wish List ~ If you or someone you know may be able to contribute, please let Joan know!

- Little Tykes ride-on fire truck
- Clothes: underwear, socks, pants, tops, gloves and hats
- Helmets
- Costumes that your children may have outgrown — great additions to our dress-up collection!

We had a wonderful holiday celebration, planned and executed beautifully by the parents. We really appreciate your efforts and had so much fun celebrating with you!

In January, we will explore the theme "Animals in Winter." We will learn how different animals cope with colder temperatures and limited food supplies.

We wish you a very happy new year!

News from the Pre-K morning class from Cara, Jane, and Brian...

What causes day and night? This was the question I was hoping we'd be able to answer at the end of December. We began our exploration by first finishing our dream catchers that we had begun at the end of November.

We enjoyed being astronomers and learning about the planets, our universe and constellations. We created our own nighttime sky in the hallway by first painting our moon using bubble wrap with white, black and brown paint.

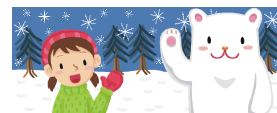


With our knowledge of the universe, we could now tackle the relationship between the sun, moon and Earth. We first created a model that exemplified how Earth orbits around the sun and the moon orbits Earth.

We also enjoyed being gift givers this month. In our dramatic play area, we had a wrapping station set up so that the children were able to choose gifts, purchase them and wrap them.

This month we also did a home project that was then shared with the class. Each child created a booklet with their family that described what we would see, hear, touch, taste and smell in their house during a favorite holiday.

We ended the month by sharing a fantastic dance party with the other classes and then having our own celebration the last day of school before winter break.



As we move into the new year, we will enjoy creating our classroom Moon Phases journal, learning more about our classroom mascot, Snowy the Owl, and some of his other wintertime friends.

News from the Pre-K afternoon class from Cathy and Melanie...

We managed to have a pretty mellow month leading up to "the most wonderful time of the year." I hope you had time to really enjoy your little ones.

The new year is here... so is the snow! The month of January will find us making snowflakes, singing "winter" songs, using tons of white glitter and maybe painting with snow.

We will learn about animals that hibernate and, of course, continue with the alphabet—letters J, K, L, and M. Our word list is getting longer and longer with each letter we add.



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***Does your child love being at Mushroom?***



*Could you use a little more time for errands or work?*

***Then sign him/her up for enrichment and/or "Munchin' Lunchin!"***

Supervised lunchtime is \$6 per day for kids 3+. In enrichment, the children have fun making crafts, cooking, learning Spanish and reading new stories. Classes are available for those 4+ on Mondays and/or Fridays each month; \$14 per class. Sign up for however many you like! Contact Jamie for more info at jamie\_geisler@comcast.net.

We have a new friend who starts this month, Metta. She came for a visit and was an EASY fit with our class. Welcome — we are so happy you chose Mushroom!

Please remember BOOTS, HATS, and MITTENS. We try to get outside EVERY DAY (28 degrees and above). Remember snowpants too...we like to make snow angels!!! Keep the kids working on trying to be in the zipper club; they need this independence heading toward kindergarten. Thanks so much.



**News from the K-Too class from Marilyn...**

The month of December kept both the morning and afternoon classes busy, busy! We needed at least another month to fit in all that we wanted to learn and do!

We learned and wrote about a different international holiday over two class periods. We constructed a lighted model of the sun, Earth, and the moon to help us understand when Ramadan begins and ends. We pretended to search for the first sliver moon (with flashlights in the darkened classroom!), fast, and then feast (snack by lamp light) when the sun went down.

The children put together free-form natural wood menorahs, played the dreidel game, and feasted on latkes for Hanukkah. For Christmas each child made a snow globe from jars, water, glycerin, glitter, and a figure they created from clay in the middle. We decorated gingerbread houses and cookies, and sang Christmas carols.



The children learned that all of these holidays are celebrated everywhere on the globe, although they originated in specific countries.

Every celebration had a connection with light, caring, community, and specific traditions and symbols.

January will be a bit more relaxed and we will return to our journals, playing, exploring, and learning "Mushroom-style." We have been so busy with holiday projects that I think the kids miss the relaxed flow of the day. We will complete our world holiday study the first part of January with Diwali (India's holiday) and Kwanzaa (African-American holiday).

We will be science oriented for the remainder of the month: winter, snow, the water cycle, and beginning our study of electricity (unless they show greater interest in another subject).



Parents, if you have any special connections for field trips, science topics, community places, let me know. I want to start introducing possible areas of study to the children to gauge their interest level.

I hope you all had a wonderful and relaxing holiday and break. Thank you for the wonderful gifts. I truly appreciate your generosity! Thank you also for sharing your children with me. They are delightful and we enjoy our time together. Happy New Year!

***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 a tree,***

***And sing more joyful songs!***

**— William Arthur Ward**



# Car Seat Safety Guidelines

Compiled by Erin Bignell

## General Car Seat “Rules”

- ✧ Read the car seat manual as well as the manual for the vehicle to make certain you are properly installing the seat and that the seat is appropriate for your vehicle, as well as for the size of the child.
- ✧ When using the LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tether for Children) system during installation, be sure you are using it properly.
  - Vehicles have weight limits for use of the LATCH system.
  - If only the outside seat positions in a row have LATCH anchors, you may not “borrow” one from each of the outside positions for the center position.
  - Do not use both the car seat shoulder/lap belt and the LATCH system. One is not better than the other, but the use of both is not recommended.
- ✧ Chest clip should be at armpit/nipple level no matter if the child is rear or forward facing.
- ✧ To tell if the straps are tight enough, perform a “pinch” test: pinch the strap above the chest clip in your child’s collarbone area. If you are able to pinch the strap and it folds, it is too loose. Your fingers should slip off when trying to pinch the strap. This test should be performed with your child wearing regular thickness clothes.
- ✧ When properly installed, a car seat should not be able to be moved more than one inch in any direction when pushed/pulled on.
- ✧ Never allow your child to wear a winter coat while in the car seat. When in an accident, even at low speeds, the impact will compress the coat and it has the same effect as placing your child in the seat with the straps too loose. So if you have to loosen the straps to fit the thickness of your child’s coat, it’s too thick to be worn under a harness. Other options include:
  - Place your child in the harness with no coat, buckle the harness, and place the coat on backwards over the harness.
  - Use a car seat poncho, blanket or other cover in the vehicle.
- ✧ The use of any car seat accessories that go between the child and the mechanism of the seat (such as a Bundle Me or head positioner) is not recommended. These items have not been tested, and like a winter coat, may compress during an accident and result in the harness to not work as it should. The car seat manual most likely states not to use “after-market” items. If you need more of a support for an infant’s head, it is advised to roll up receiving blankets and place one on either side of the infant’s head.
- ✧ Any time you install, or re-install, a car seat, be sure to get it inspected. You may locate an inspection station using this link: <http://www.nhtsa.gov/cps/cpsfitting/index.cfm>.

## Rear-Facing Seats

- Infant seats are seats that can be removed from the vehicle each time you exit the vehicle.
- Convertible seats are seats that remain in the vehicle, but can be rotated to forward facing when the child reaches the height or weight limit for rear-facing.
- When rear-facing, straps should be AT or BELOW the child’s shoulders.
- Children should remain in a rear-facing seat until they reach the top height or weight limit allowed by the manufacturer of the seat. The AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) recommends that children remain rear facing at least until the age of two, and then until the height or weight limits of their car seat’s manufacturer. This may mean switching a child to a convertible car seat that will face the rear in order to reach the age two recommendation.

- And yes, a child’s legs may have to get creative in position to remain rear facing until the age of two or even three, but there has NEVER been a documented case of broken legs due to being rear facing for too long...however there are thousands of cases of children being injured/killed due to being forward facing at a young age.

## Forward-Facing Seats

- When a child has reached the height/weight limit of their rear-facing car seat, it is time to either turn a convertible seat to the forward-facing position, or buy a forward-facing car seat.
- If using a convertible seat, be sure to check the manual to change from rear to forward facing as it may not be as simple to just turn it around. Often times the angle needs to be changed, or LATCH belts re-routed.
- When forward-facing, harness straps should be AT or ABOVE the child’s shoulders.
- Be sure to use the rear tether when the seat is installed forward facing.
- The AAP recommends that children remain in forward-facing, harnessed seats until they reach the manufacturer’s height/weight limits on their forward-facing car seats. Many car seats now have limits of 65 to 80 lbs. However, many children first outgrow these seats by (seated torso) height first.

## Booster Seats

- The AAP states that children can move into belt-positioning booster seat when they reach the weight/height harness strap limits of their forward-facing car seat.
- However the maturity of the child is also an important factor when making the move to a booster. It is important to be able to sit upright for the entire ride, leave the seatbelt in the proper position, and not “goof off” when riding in the seat.
- It is also important that the child’s legs are able to reach far enough to bend at the knee over the edge of the seat in a booster. If this is not a naturally occurring position, the child will most likely slouch so that the legs bend properly, and thus will not be sitting properly in the booster.

## Regular Seat Belts

- A child should not be moved to a regular seat belt, with no type of car seat, until they are large enough for the seat belt alone to protect them properly. This usually does not occur until a child has reached 4 feet, 9 inches tall (57 inches) and are between 8 and 12 years of age.
- For a seat belt to fit appropriately, the lap belt should lie across the upper thighs and not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie across the chest/shoulder and not the neck/face.
- Children under the age of 13 should always remain in the rear seats of the vehicle to avoid injury due to air bags.

## **Has your seat been involved in an accident??**

If you have been involved in any type of accident, no matter how minor, it may be necessary to replace your car seat, even if it appears to have no damage. Your insurance company (or the other driver’s) will likely cover this cost. However you may continue using your seat if ALL of the following are true:

- The vehicle was able to be driven away from the crash site;
- The vehicle door nearest the safety seat was undamaged;
- There were no injuries to any of the vehicle occupants;
- The air bags (if present) did not deploy; AND
- There is no visible damage to the safety seat.

## References

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/Safety/CPS>  
<http://pediatrics.about.com/od/carseats/a/car-seat.htm>  
(AAP recommendations)  
<http://www.car-seat.org/index.php>