Dear families;

Student Led Conferences (SLCs) will be happening at Arts & Letters over the next couple of weeks, with the majority of you coming in on Thursday, November 16th. Asking your children to be the leaders of these conferences builds each student’s voice and sense of responsibility for their own learning. We have found over time that this arrangement also greatly enhances family engagement in children’s education and in our school.

Since the beginning we’ve been making small shifts and changes to our SLCs each semester, based on feedback from students, parents, and staff. Last year we received some very pointed and astute feedback from families about the benchmark assessments upon which much of the SLC is based. Parents felt that they wanted more voice in the development of their child’s “glows” and “grows.” Given that these celebrations and goals are based on benchmark assessments, parents were asking to see the benchmarks before the conferences.

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November & December Events

November 7th: Election Day (No school for students)
November 15th: PTA General Meeting 9am (Discussion on Emergency Preparedness)
November 16th: Fall Student-Led Conferences (11:30 Dismissal for Students)
November 17th: A&L Fall Day of Service
November 23rd-26th: Thanksgiving Recess (No school)
December 1st: Lower Grade Family Sing 9:15 in the gym
Parent Coffee Social 8:45 in the Library
December 8th: A&L Staff PD Day (No School for Students)
December 9th: Winter Craft Fair
December 11th: Picture Day Retakes
December 22nd: Fall Afterschool Program Ends
December 23- Jan 1: Winter Recess (No School)
So for these upcoming conferences we will be sending home the rubric-graded benchmark assessments with each student from 4th to 8th grade. To make this work there are some logistics that must be attended to on our part and on yours. Your child’s advisor/classroom teacher will create a portfolio of the graded benchmark assessments that your child has just taken, with rubrics, and send it home with sufficient time for you to go over the assessments with your child and talk about what went well and what needs improvement. The portfolio then needs to come back to school for the SLC. The SLC cannot happen without the work in front of the student.

Please know that while sending home the benchmark assessments is a great way to help families understand their children’s work, it is not meant to change the protocol of the SLC which has our students’ voices at the center (i.e. if you have questions about the assessments, please save them for another time).

I hope that you all had a pleasant weekend.

- John

P.S. Below are links to past letters that we have written about SLCs and benchmark assessments:
Parent Blast 11.13.15
Parent Blast 11.14.14
Parent Blast 11.15.14

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Thursday’s Book Talk
with Ms. Ballantine

**Bloody Horowitz** by Alex Rider

A teen gang leader taken for a deadly ride by a car with a mind of its own… A boy haunted by a phantom cobra… A reality TV show pitting teens against grown ups, with only one survivor… From whose twisted mind can such gruesome stories unfold? Only Anthony Horowitz. From the internationally bestselling author of the Alex Rider missions, this collection of harrowing tales is sure to have you smiling in terrified pleasure. But whatever you do, don’t turn out the lights!

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Celebrations for 11.3

8th: Michelle Mejia- Clarity
7th: Demara Spencer- Clarity
6th: Donovan Larrier- Clarity
5th: Abie Temple- SHoW
Staff: Ms. Casey- Clarity

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Word of the Week

**Exhilarating**

1: to make cheerful and excited
   : enliven, elate

2: refresh, stimulate
On Saturday October 28, Arts & Letters along with 27 other schools participated in our first MSQI debate for the 2017-2018 school year. The MSQI debate league uses an evidence based argumentation curriculum to increase student literacy, writing, public speaking, and critical thinking skills. This is our second year having an Arts and Letters debate team.

The resolve for this debate: “Resolved: The U.S. federal government should require all American citizens 18 years and older to vote.” Arts & Letters debate team consists of eight students in grades 6 -8. On debate day students are paired with a team member and participate in three rounds of debate where they either affirm or negate the resolve. Students have to be prepared to argue both sides in a debate that follows the public forum format.

Our debate team did extremely well during this first debate. Oscar Fabricant won the top speaker award after having to debate maverick. The top speaker award is giving to the student who scores the most points in all three rounds in his category. Josie Bines and Sheelagh Doe won both top speaker award and top team awards. Srenti Frett and Lamis Idris also won top team awards. We are very proud of our debate team!
We recently began our weekly nature experience, called Outside Classroom. Just as in the classroom, children benefit greatly when there is a dependable schedule. We take a schedule with us to the park and display it where children can see it. Most weeks, the schedule goes like this:

- **Investigation** – focused learning designed by teachers but influenced by what we’ve children interested in.
- **Circle Time** – a time to share learning/discoveries... and sing songs!
- **Snack**
- **Explore & Play** - the open-ended part of the day in which students have (nearly) complete input into the activities they are doing.

Our early Investigations so far have included “Collect nature and bring it back to the circle;” “use a clipboard and a trip sheet to tally how many trees are changing colors”; “find 2 (or 3 or 4) different leaves and sketch them.” On the day we collected nature, we discussed what made something nature. There were a lot of rocks, as well as a couple of pieces of asphalt, clearly made of rocks - what qualified for nature in that case? We brought a lot of nature back to the classroom - sticks, rocks, leaves, cones, a random feather, sticky balls, etc. Later we opened a new Worktime center called Nature Build. There’s a photo below of students building with nature in the classroom.

During Explore and Play so far this year, children have made restaurants, had pretend birthday parties, and drawn elaborate maps in the dirt. We often see social combinations during this time that we don’t see during other parts of our day.

When we decided to start Outside Classroom a couple of years ago, our former colleague, Valerie Lockhart, did much of the research so that we could cogently articulate a rationale. Her writings show the essential value of unstructured nature play to cognitive and social/emotional development. Here are some excerpts from her thesis:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics’ research shows play is integral to the academic environment, helping children adjust to being in school, enhancing their readiness to learn, and developing their problem-solving skills, while optimizing their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development (Ginsberg, 2007; Pediatrics, 2013).

- Play is comprised of three main features: recasting of experience in symbolic form; exploration of the child’s environment and the materials within that environment; and the forming and deepening of interpersonal relationships, offering a time and place where children can collaborate, negotiate, and exchange information with each other (Nager and Shapiro, 2000, p. 54). When children play, they are synthesizing information and making meaning of the world around them. They are unpacking questions and elaborating on their ideas about the everyday; they are building, creating, exchanging information.

- Research shows that children who engage in complex forms of socio-dramatic play have greater language skills than non-players, better social skills, more empathy, more imagination, and more of the subtle capacity to know what others mean. They are less aggressive and show more self-control and higher levels of thinking. (Miller and Almon)

- Play in natural settings fosters the creative thinking and inventiveness important in problem-solving and cognitive processing. Children are constantly using different pieces of nature as imaginary tools. This stimulates their imagination better than modern toys, leading to better problem-solving abilities (Kenny, 2013, p.13).

Finally, in terms of equity, nature exploration levels the playing field. Physical competence isn’t valued over creativity as can be the case on a playground. Prioritizing experience and exploration allows all children to do the work that is most appealing to them and to engage with classmates in unique ways. And we have found over the past two plus years that children collaborate more effectively with much less conflict than in other contexts.
Physical Education with Mr. Johnson

Hello friends and neighbors,

Our young friends have enjoyed their time in PE. They've been excited to sit at their color spots, warm up and partake in the activity for the day.

The core elements we are working on are:

Communication
Spacial Awareness
Working with others

Our students have played variations of flag tag and capture the flag. Flag tag asks students to say "May I have my flag back?" and respond with "thank you". This allows children to develop formal communication skills while keeping the PE experience positive. Spacial awareness is also key as students must dodge, bounce, and evade other students so their flag will be pulled.

Capture the Flag is big on communication and working with others. Students must coordinate offensive and defensive positioning. This game also allows students to work on finding voice in a larger group while compromising on their views and strategies.

Here's to a successful start of the year and remember, water bottles and sneakers!!

Carlton 2nd Grade with Ms. Urato and Ms. Devedas

Carlton has just started our Geometry unit in math. We have been working on identifying, describing, and exploring 2-D and 3-D shapes. Students have been building structures using 3-D geo-blocks, while describing attributes such as edges, faces, and vertices. Students were excited to build cubes, rectangular prisms, and triangular prisms while using toothpicks as the edges and marshmallows as the vertices. As we continue our discovery of shapes, students will begin to explore polygons and they will engage in opportunities to build polygons using GeoBoards.
In Clermont kindergarten, we have been using cooking to teach a math unit which is focusing on counting and cardinality. One week we made applesauce and charted which color apple each student liked the most after a taste test. You can find this chart hanging outside of our classroom in the hallway. We talked about which apple was liked the most, and the least. We also counted the total number of people who voted on their favorite apples.

To continue with real life experiences in counting, we also made pumpkin seeds- one batch with brown sugar and another batch with salt and garlic. Then we shifted our focus to sizes and sorting. Students were asked to honk about the similarities and differences between our small, medium and large pumpkins. They found differences in the texture, color, stem and sizes. They noticed that all sizes were pumpkins, had green stems, all has seed and were all orange. After sorting the pumpkins themselves, we allowed the students to discuss the size, shape and texture of the seeds inside of each pumpkin.

Cooking and math go hand in hand. It's also a great time to watch kids socialize and bring in their own experiences about cooking. Stop by on a Friday afternoon to see what Clermont has going on with cooking in the upcoming months.
A & L HAPPENINGS

Dress as your favorite book character day 10.31.17
Second Grade Reading Stations

Tad Hills and Barney Salzburg Author Visits
Lower Grade Family Sing 11.3.17

Snail Study in Kindergarten

Marathon Weekend for our A&L Running Club

A special congratulations to our fearless A&L Running Club coaches, Grace Hunter and Nicole Tu, for being finishers in the 2017 NYC. Our team and our school community is so proud of you!
Our A&L grade teams faced off against each other in our Annual Election Day cook-off. Teams put together a series of dishes around an original theme, and were judged based on taste, style and cohesiveness. Our 5th grade team repeated as winners in 2017, with their theme of “the babies of the middle school” theme.
As part of being in the Learning Partners Program, we hosted a visit from our partner schools and looked at student voice through a Racial Equity lens. Ms. Swift and Ms. Casey facilitated a student focus group of 12 students in grades 6-8 that discussed questions around racial identity.

A red-tailed hawk nests in our schoolyard trees during recess.