



GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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Volume 93 Number: XVIII

"Cultivating Success in Every Child"

Friday, February 5, 2016



Thoughts for the Week

By Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster



This is the time during the school year when we all begin to feel the effects of winter and the limitations it can impose on our activity. All of us know what it means to be restricted to being in our homes, or even worse, being unable to move about our city. Last week's winter storm made the point in a very powerful way. Although our school remained open, we all had to face the difficulties of commuting and to limiting our travel to simply going to and from work and school.

Children feel this infringement on their freedom of movement more than adults, who generally have lower energy levels and consequently adapt more easily to the lack of active movement in our lives. Sometimes we are happy simply to stay home and read, watch television, talk or simply take in easy and do nothing.

Children, however, need to move and release all of the energy that is contained within their minds and bodies. Because of all of the energy required to grow, children need to expend rather than conserve energy, which raises the level of important of physical activity through the school day.

At Garden, we have recess everyday and physical education classes ranging anywhere from twice a week to five days a week, depending on the age of the children. Younger children require even more recreational time than older children, who frequently expend physical energy that do not require a formal program.

Today, I observed a full period of recess for seventh and eighth grades; it was fascinating. The amount of energy put into impromptu soccer, basketball and volleyball games was extraordinary. There was non-stop movement for forty five minutes! It was informal, casual, friendly and dynamic. It was clear that this was a very important part of the day for these students, who not only enjoyed this recess period, but needed it. When the weather improves, this same activity will take place outdoors. After the recess period, the group went to lunch, which I also supervised today along with another administrator, who remarked how incredibly calm the lunch period was. Of course it was; all of the energy that needed to be released was indeed expended during recess.

All of this suggests and supports the importance of physical activity within the school day. There is a clear connection between physical activity and the ability to focus on an academic or intellectual task. The two are mutually necessary to each other and to create a level of concentration that will enhance the students' experience. It is a very classical idea, going back to the 'academy' in Ancient Greece—that the stronger the connection between body and mind, the greater the alertness of both.
