

August, 2009

Dear New Falk Family,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you from the Falk PTA! With a child(ren) at Falk School, you are now part of a unique and very special community. As the new school year approaches, you may have questions and concerns in anticipation of entering a new school. To help ease this transition into Falk, the PTA has put together the enclosed document that includes important information about the school's philosophy, operational concerns, and daily procedures, as well as some other information regarding the PTA, its functions and events.

In conjunction with the Special Subjects Curriculum Meeting, we have planned a New Parents' Coffee for Wednesday evening, September 30th from 6:00 to 8:30 pm in the Falk School Cafeteria. This is an opportunity to hear from the Humanities/Special Subjects faculty about their work with our children as well as to meet other new Falk families and school and PTA representatives. Please, join us for this informative and fun evening.

There are also a number of other meetings early in the year that provide valuable information, including the following:

Tuesday, September 15th – Middle School (Grades 6,7,8) Curriculum Meeting 6-8:30 pm
Tuesday, September 22th – Primary (Grades K,1,2) Curriculum Meeting 5-6 pm
Thursday, September 24th – Intermediate (Grades 3,4,5) Curriculum Meeting 5-6 pm
Wednesday, September 30th – New Parents Coffee and Special Subjects Curriculum Meeting 6:00-8:30
Thursday, October 29th – First General PTA Meeting 7:30 pm (Childcare available)

The Falk School PTA is a very active organization made up of committed parents and teachers who welcome all and work to encourage new members to participate in established activities as well as contribute new ideas. There are many ways to become involved. In addition to attending the General PTA meetings throughout the year, you may want to consider a position on the PTA Executive Committee, which meets monthly and votes on important issues. You may choose to become a room parent, or library volunteer for your child's classroom, or to help with one or more of the PTA-sponsored events that occur during the school year.

Falk Talk, the PTA newsletter, is produced bi-monthly and is an important way to keep informed of school and PTA events. Additionally, the Falk School Handbook and the Directory, which is published early in the school year, will contain valuable detailed information and contacts.

If you have any questions, Martina Wells, New Family Representative for the 2009-2010 school year, is available to ensure a smooth transition to our school. Please, feel free to contact Martina at (412) 681-4603 or martinawells@verizon.net, or me at josaboma@msn.com.

I look forward to meeting you at the New Parents' Coffee, and offer best wishes for the upcoming year!

Sincerely,

Kim Lincoln
President 2009-2010
Falk School PTA

What is Falk?

Under a charter agreement between the University of Pittsburgh and Leon Falk Jr. and Marjorie Falk Levy, Falk School has operated as the laboratory school of the University of Pittsburgh since 1931. The school was established in honor of the Falk's mother, Fanny Edel Falk.

Falk School's purposes are stipulated in its charter. The Falk's were interested in the promotion of progressive methods of teaching and affording students of the University of Pittsburgh who expected to follow teaching as a vocation the opportunity to observe new and different methods of instruction. The University wanted to establish and maintain a progressive, experimental and demonstration elementary school as part of its activity as an educational institution. It was agreed that the school would be an integral part of the University, that the administration and operation of the school would be through the University administrative channels and that all teachers at Falk would be accorded faculty recognition by the School of Education. A school board of 11 members was formed and given the power of approval over the general purposes and activities of the school, subject to the final decision of the Board of Trustees of the University of Pittsburgh.

Philosophy

Education is of optimal value when it results in enriched personal living, understanding and appreciation of a heritage, and development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that help to preserve the best from the past while making contributions to the future. The family is the fundamental unit of society and the purpose of the school is to reinforce (not to replace) the teaching of the home and to provide additional learning that cannot typically be attained in a home environment. Because children enter school with unequal academic aptitudes, different personal needs, and varying rates of maturation, it is not possible for every child of a given age to be capable of identical achievement. The most viable approach to securing a desirable education for all is to foster the personal growth of each individual child according to his or her unique capabilities. It is the responsibility of the Falk School faculty to keep informed about the latest information in psychology and education, and to employ practices which hold the best promise for effective learning for every child.

It is the policy of Falk School to provide a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, non-sexist educational environment. Because teacher attitudes and expectations have profound effects on children's perceptions and beliefs, Falk School teachers do not communicate personal biases to students. However, non-discrimination goes beyond the concerns of racism and sexism. Among human beings there is no rationale for discrimination based upon political persuasion, religion, age, societal role, marital status, physical or mental disability, socio-economic status, ethnic origin, sexuality or any other non-bona fide criterion.

Organization

The Falk School organization includes features that are not yet common in all American schools including the use of multi-age classrooms and modified team teaching, whereby each class includes a Master Teacher and a Master of Arts in Teaching student. Each homeroom consists of approximately 22-24 children. Classroom assignments are made to provide heterogeneity and balance with respect to general academic ability. Children typically remain in the same classroom for two or more years, consequently, the teacher gets to know each child very well. Teams of teachers who are responsible for the same age clusters of children plan their work together. By using each child's educational background and daily work pattern, the teachers are able to assign students to the instructional groups to which they are best suited.

Heartwood Program

The Heartwood Program was adopted as part of the Falk language arts curriculum. The Heartwood Program is a literature-based ethics curriculum for children.

The program uses illustrated books, many of which are by award-winning authors, chosen for their representation of cultures from around the world. The books, which are read aloud in class and then discussed, are primarily legends and folk and hero tales. Sometimes they create a starting point for related projects, writing assignments in class and discussions at home. The books help children understand seven attributes: courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty and love. The program has been adapted for all grades at Falk using three basic kits with two books for each attribute in each kit. Each month a different attribute is assigned and included in the curriculum. The list of books for the current and upcoming attributes is published in FALKTalk each month and it is hoped that parents become involved by both being aware of the books being used and in making an effort to read the books at home. Teachers believe that the more times the children hear the stories, the more likely it is that the messages will be internalized.

In discussing the goal of the program Ms. Laurie Williams, who chairs the Language Arts Committee, explained that in-service training was provided to all teachers when the program was adopted. There were discussions of the history of teaching values, how children learn right from wrong, and the three levels of ethical understanding: to understand cognitively, to behave in a way that demonstrates the understanding, and to internalize the understanding. Ms. Williams expresses the goal of the program this way: "By making a conscious and deliberate effort to deal overtly or explicitly with [the issues], we're hoping that over time an implicit change and understanding will take place and will grow in the kids." When questioned about the difficulty of teaching what the attributes mean given that they could mean different things to different people at different time, Ms. Williams said this is "an inherent part of the program" and one that she does not view as a problem. She also commented that "we like to think that so much of what we teach is concrete and black and white and narrowly defined, but it's not...sometimes the important thing is just the exploration."

A typical day/week

The following schedule represents what a "typical" day might be for the primary student:

Language Arts - reading, writing, listening, speaking: 90- 120 minutes each day

Math: about 45 minutes each day

Science and Social Studies: 3 or 4 times per week for 30-45 minutes

Art: once a week for 1 hour

Library: once a week for 1/2 hour

Computer: once a week for 1/2 hour

Music: 3 times a week for 1/2 hour (including 1 period of Theater Arts)

Spanish: 15 minutes a day

Gym/Physical Education: 3 times a week for 1/2 hour

Recess: usually twice each day, at noon and in either the morning or afternoon, depending on whether the room has lunch early (11:20) or late (12:30)

The exact configuration varies from room to room, and each teacher has special activities that make his/her schedule unique (like our students!).

School cafeteria

Falk has a school cafeteria, managed by Ms. Roberta (Bertie) Poziviak, serves luncheon items on both a "full meal" and an "à la carte" basis. Items from the daily menu are available to those children who opt to bring a "bag lunch" on an à la carte basis. Lunch menus are sent home once a month. This year the lunch program is being coordinated by Horizon. A separate mailing was sent by the school explaining how the new program will work.

Carpool and Buses

Buses will always offload at the Bus Lane and people who drop off children in the morning should utilize the new Governor's Drive in front of the building. This area is reserved for carpool. Traffic should enter from the south and exit at the north. If you are walking your son or daughter into the building, please pull as close to the curb on the school side as possible. This will allow other traffic to drop off children in the left lane and exit the Drive. There is still a right turn only at the exit end of the Drive. No child should ever be let out of an automobile so that he/she has to cross Allequippa Street.

At dismissal, because we are the first stop for most of the bus lines serving Falk School, busses will begin filling the bus lane by about 2:30 PM. Busses arriving after the bus lane is full will wait in the staging area along Lower University Drive. Children will be walked to the bus pull-off lane and loaded at that point.

At dismissal time, parents should not arrive prior to 3:00 PM. All bus students are dismissed first, and not until the final bus had departed are the carpool students dismissed. Parents should approach the carpool lane from the south, forming a single line next to the school side curb. The lane is wide enough to have two cars parked side-by-side; however, for safety reasons we will only load students from the right hand lane.

Buses

CITY OF PITTSBURGH RESIDENTS will have bus transportation arrangements made by Ms. Kelly DeGroot. It is assumed that all city residents will use the bus service unless you inform Ms. DeGroot to the contrary. The Pittsburgh Board of Public Education will transport Falk students living at least 1.5 miles from Falk School. Those students who live closer than 1.5 miles are considered "walkers" by the Board of Education. You will receive notification from them relative to your child's bus route number and the time and location of pick-up around the middle of August. If you have not received this information at least one week prior to the start of school, please contact Ms. DeGroot at 412-624-8024.

Bus transportation is available to SUBURBAN RESIDENTS through their local school districts. Ms. Tina Mattis notifies the school district that your child will be attending Falk School. You will receive notification of your child's bus number and time and location of pick-up from either Falk or your school district (each district does things a bit differently!) but if you have not received word from either of them at least one week prior to the start of school, please contact Ms. Mattis at 412-624-8021. You may also contact the transportation department in your school district if you have specific questions on bus stop and time.

Bus SAFETY is always a concern, so please be sure that your child is aware that good bus etiquette is required and that, among other things, they stay seated while the bus is in motion and that noise be kept to a minimum.

An additional note about buses: If your child is planning to visit another child directly after school, you must provide the transportation. FOR INSURANCE PURPOSES, CHILDREN ARE NOT PERMITTED TO RIDE ON BUSES OTHER THAN THE ONES TO WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED.

Instructions explaining any change in normal transportation arrangements (e.g. your child normally takes a bus, but you plan to pick up your child on a given day) should be sent in writing to the homeroom teacher. Otherwise, the teacher will assume that dismissal arrangements are the normal ones.

Visiting School

If you are visiting the school during the day there are 36 spaces along Lower University Drive that are designated as Falk School Parking (UDA). You can also park in the Bus Lane between the hours of 9:00AM and 2:00PM. You may park in the right lane of the Governor's Drive during the day as well. Please keep the left lane open for through traffic. There is no parking at any time on Allequippa Street.

Extracurricular

We have several Girl Scout Troops based at Falk. Weekly meetings are held during the after school program. Announcements for troop sign-ups will come home in September. Other extracurricular activities include Middle School boys' and girls' sports teams.

Other events include field trips, picnics and attendance at cultural events. Some of the events are planned around the curriculum while others are just for fun. Falk family social events have included ice skating parties, bingo nights, dinners and other level-specific gatherings.

Middle School students can participate in an array of interscholastic sports programs. These include cross country, soccer, basketball and tennis.

Forms

Trip permission forms

No child is allowed to go on a field trip without a signed parental permission form. Make certain that you have signed and returned the form with any payment necessary. Otherwise, your child may be left at school waiting to be transported home or to the field trip site by you. Making this clear to your child will encourage your child to bring such forms home! And you might want to check with your child on a daily basis.

Physical and dental exam forms

Physical examination forms are required by the state and the Pittsburgh Board of Public Education for children in kindergarten and sixth grades. Please have your child's

pediatrician examine your child, fill out the appropriate form, and return it to the school nurse.

Dental examination forms are required for each child entering kindergarten, third and seventh grades. These may be handled in the same manner as the physical examination forms. Please be sure to get these forms back to the school office in a timely fashion. This is a state requirement.

Medication form

This form should be used when your child must take medication at school. It is to be sent to the nurse via the school office. In this way your child's medicine may be kept secure and administered as prescribed. Also, the school personnel can watch for signs of side effects or the onset of more acute illness.

If your child may take Tylenol administered by the school nurse without your time-by-time permission, sign the medication or physical exam form giving this directive.

Falk Family Information Form

This form is used to collect information on your child(ren)'s doctor, dentist, preferred parent contact and emergency contact information. It is very important that this information be updated as changes occur.



Falk School teachers and administrators are very accessible. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers when they have questions or concerns about any aspect of their children's experience at Falk School. Falk teachers take pride in their professionalism. Conversations with parents are held in confidence. Children are never negatively affected by communication between parents and teachers. Teachers need to be informed in a timely fashion about parents' concerns so that, as a team, they may address issues in a prompt and concerted way.

Suggested methods to initiate communication:

1. Send a note with the child to the teacher.
2. Put a note into the teacher's mail slot in the school's main office.
3. Call or email the teacher (phone numbers & email address are listed in the directory) and request a return call or reply from the teacher.

Parents meet with teachers twice a year for regularly scheduled conferences, but are welcome to schedule additional appointments with teachers whenever necessary. Questions or concerns should always be directed to the teacher first. After thorough discussion, if parents feel the need for further consideration, they should contact the school's director, Dr. McConnaha.

Two other sources of help with information are available to parents:

1. The room parents, two in each class.
2. The chairperson of the PTA Interpretations Committee, identified in the PTA Executive Board list in the front of the Falk directory. The Interpretations Committee provides a confidential liaison between parents and the school when other routes of communication fail or are felt to be inappropriate.

Information

Each Fall, the PTA publishes a directory of Falk students by homeroom. The directory lists each student's name, and parents' names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. The front of the directory includes a calendar of all important dates for the school year, names, addresses and phone numbers for Falk faculty and staff, names and phone numbers of all PTA officers and committee chairpersons, and other general Falk School information.

The Falk School Handbook, which outlines the organizations and documents that guide the operation of the Falk School, has been distributed to all new parents. There will also be a summer mailing from the office with pertinent information regarding the start of school.

What to do if your child...

...becomes ill at school

If a child is sick at school, he/she will be sent to the nurse's office. The parent will be called and asked to pick up the child. If no parent is available, the emergency contact person listed on the child's information form will be contacted. If that person is unavailable, the child will be cared for in the nurse's office, Room 119, until a parent is able to come.

...must take medication

Medicine must be administered by the nurse. There is a form contained in the acceptance packet that must be filled out and brought in by the child along with the medicine. Medication cannot be dispensed unless it is accompanied by this completed form. The medication must be in its original package, so consider asking the pharmacist to split the prescription into two marked containers (one for home and one for school).

...is absent from school

When a child is absent due to any reason, a phone call or a message to the teacher is expected and very much appreciated. You can leave a message with Ms. Cindy Mazzotti at 412-383-7026. If you know in advance that your child will be absent, notifying the teacher can help in planning for make-up work or work that might be taken with you. A note or a phone call about your child's illness can aid the teacher and the school nurse in detecting lingering symptoms and watching for similar illnesses in others. This is particularly important in cases of communicable diseases. Schools are unfortunately ideal breeding places for germs of all kinds and we are continually concerned about the health and safety issues of our children. If a teacher notes that your child is not in attendance, and there is no note, you will receive a phone call asking for a reason.

When your child needs to leave school early, please send a note to the teacher explaining what time the child will be picked up.

After School program

The After School program is an opportunity for Falk students to socialize and play in a well-supervised environment with a minimum of constriction. The program is open from 3:15 pm until 6 pm. Hourly rates are charged. Bills are sent monthly, and are payable upon receipt. The After School Program is explained in detail in a separate letter within this packet.

PTA

The Parent-Teacher Association at Falk (PTA) is a very active group. All parents and teachers are encouraged to become members of the PTA. Dues are \$25 a year per family. All activities sponsored by the PTA are open for the whole school to enjoy.

The general membership of the PTA has three meetings a year. Usually the topics for the meetings revolve around current issues in the school. Recent topics have included: Competition and Our Children; Nutrition; and Computer Technology.

PTA functions are organized by an executive committee comprised of the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and various committee chair people. The officers are elected at the Spring general membership meeting. They convene monthly to conduct the business of the PTA. All monthly board meetings are open to all Falk parents, faculty and staff.

Each year the out-going PTA President rotates onto the Falk School Board which is the policy-making body for the school. Term of office is three years.

The following is a sampling of activities organized by the PTA committees: holiday gift sale for the children, talent show, Spring Carnival, gift wrap sale, bingo, multicultural picnic, TELE FALK, School Directory, and the Halloween program for the children.

In addition, the PTA provides such support services as Room Parents, the monthly FalkTalk newsletter, and auxiliary library help. Participation on all committees is always welcome. This is a great way for parents to get acquainted with each other and learn the inner workings of Falk.

Money raised by the PTA supports the Excellence in Teaching Scholarship Fund, the Falk School Fund, holiday gifts for the staff, the majority of field trips for all grades, an end of the year faculty lunch, and other special activities or equipment for the school that cannot be covered in the normal operating budget.

Keeping informed

The PTA publishes a newsletter, FALKTalk, usually on a bi-monthly basis throughout the school year, which is designed to be a direct method of communication between the parents, teachers and administration of the school. The newsletter contains all current information, announcements and special items that can be useful to all parents, in addition to a calendar of coming events at the school.

Thanks to the help of the Falk office staff and parent volunteers, the newsletter is mailed to your home. Consider this a vital connection to your life at Falk.

In support of excellence

PTA-supported funds

Two funds are supported by PTA fundraisers and also by individual contributions.

The Falk School Fund was created to facilitate the purchase of items and support of faculty initiatives not normally provided for in the school budget. The fund is administered by a three-member board of trustees.

The Excellence in Teaching Scholarship Fund is intended to increase the diversity of the student population by providing tuition support for minority students, to provide emergency assistance to Falk students whose families unexpectedly are unable to meet tuition deadlines, and to honor Falk teachers who have excelled or been exceptionally dedicated by placing their names on the Excellence in Teaching plaque.

Other support

The Gertrude and Elias Sunstein Scholarship Award was created to honor a Falk student who demonstrates exceptional ability and achievement and to provide additional support of the school library.