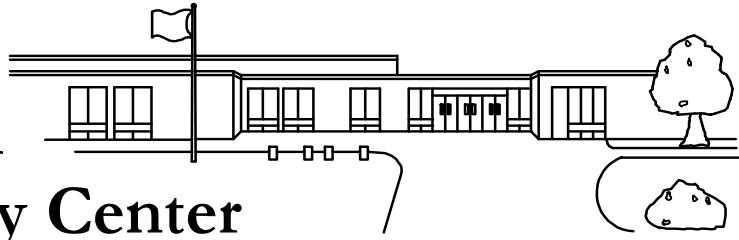


Portland Public Schools
**Riverton School
And Community Center**



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Our Newsletter – September 22, 2006

From the Principal

“Why do you do those early release days when they are so inconvenient for parents?”

The title of this article is a major FAQ (frequently asked question) in the life of a principal. So I thought we would take this opportunity to answer it for all of you. It is particularly timely since Wednesday, October 4, is the first early (2:00 PM) release in a successive string of Wednesdays from October through May. We appreciate that our time for staff learning may inconvenience families who have to make special child care arrangements. We hope that you will understand our motivation for scheduling staff development and how much we value that time.

Back in the 50's when I was in elementary school, our teachers presented “content” and it was up to us to “get it” or not. Every student in the class was presented the same content without regard to whether the content was at the appropriate level for individual students. If a student got a D or an F, it was assumed that the child didn't do his/her part to “get it.” No one took the time to look at whether the school was actually presenting lessons at each child's level. Whether every child graduated from high school was really not a concern. There were plenty of manufacturing jobs with decent wages available to those who quit school before graduation. In fact, history shows that if a young man quit school and went to work at SD Warren in the late 50's or early 60's, it was within his financial means to marry, have a family, and buy a home without struggle.

Now we face a different world, where jobs for those without diplomas are few and far

between. Schools are concerned that every child achieves and we are accountable to parents and the community for results. A large body of scientific and educational research is now available regarding which educational strategies are proven to get the best results. One of the things research has proven, is that a child achieves more when we teach him/her at the “zone of proximal development” ... which means at the exact level that is just a notch above where the child is now.

As a staff we are constantly learning about more precise ways of assessing exactly where a child is on the continuum of learning. Examining student work and tracking incremental achievement is key to targeting instruction that meets each child in that zone of proximal development. Such work takes time for teachers to meet and plan together. On our first two Early Release Wednesdays, K-2 staff will meet to discuss individualized Math and Reading assessments. Staff in Grades 3-5 will examine the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade MEA data from last spring's round of testing.

Recreation Department After School Programming will start at 2:00PM on Early Release Wednesdays. It is our understanding that that program still has space available. You can reach the Recreation staff at 874-8455.

This Year Riverton “Made AYP”

Every principal awaits the return of the scores from the Maine Educational Assessments to learn if the school achieved “AYP” (adequate yearly progress) status. “Making AYP” means that under the No Child Left Behind Act, our school's MEA scores were high enough, on average, not to receive federal and state sanctions. While making AYP doesn't change the

challenges of educating a diverse student population, it certainly eliminates the need for a school to jump through federal and state hoops, allowing us to concentrate on more important aspects of teaching and learning instead! And making AYP preserves the reputation of our wonderful school and the morale of our hardworking staff.

Here in Portland when a school does not make AYP it is inaccurately labeled “a failing school.” There are some 50+ ways not to make AYP. NCLB defines many sub groups of children and each of those sub groups must, on average, have high enough scores to clear AYP to keep a school from “failing”. When a school in Portland does not make AYP it is most often because of the scores of students who could not yet read the language that the test was given in - the sub group named “Limited English Proficient.” I am not quite sure who made the NCLB rule that states that a group of students who are just learning to speak English should be expected to take the MEAs in English and score as high as native speaking children – but that’s the rule we are stuck with. (I try to imagine myself being required to take my SATs in another language. I probably would not have been accepted at college!) Why should such a situation warrant the designation of “failing school?” This year, Riverton’s group of students who are just learning English naturally did not score as high as our native speaking students. However, we were granted AYP status because that group’s score was 10% better this year than it was last year. In order to maintain AYP status year after year, the Limited English Proficient group must raise its scores 10% annually. Catch 22: It is not possible to do so, because as soon as newcomer students can speak English well, the federal government moves them out of the Limited English group into the regular students group! So, by definition, the Limited English Proficient group is always made of kids who can hardly read the test!

So, when you read the “failing schools” list in the newspaper, please take it with a healthy dose of skepticism. All schools in Portland are striving for excellence while living within a system of federal rules that do not make sense.

To Our PTO – Thanks are due!

Thanks to our very supportive PTO we had a wonderful ice cream social, a brand new laminator, a new fridge and a new freezer in our community kitchen. We are very grateful!

School Pictures – October 5

Riverton School has arranged for LifeTouch Studios to take **student portrait pictures on October 5**. Every child will have his or her picture taken. Parents have the option to purchase the pictures in packaged groupings described in the flier sent home to you. If you wish to purchase a package, please return the payment envelope with your child on October 5. There will be a make-up day TBA for absentees and re-takes. **Picture Day** is a small fundraiser for our school. We use the funds to provide such things as student awards and school team entry fees, tee shirts and trophies. LifeTouch also provides us with small adhesive photos used for student records and classroom projects. Our previous picture provider, MacLean-Stevens was bought by LifeTouch, a national firm.

Class Changes

In the first week of school we learned that 12 second graders we expected had moved elsewhere. This enabled us to consolidate four second grades into three classrooms without exceeding school department guidelines for class size. We were then able to reassign the Ms. Glidden and Mrs. Baker teaching team to Kindergarten where we experienced higher enrollments than anticipated. Their new kindergarten class will begin Monday. Thank you to all parents involved in these changes for their flexibility, understanding, and assistance in making their children’s transition smooth.

Calendar of Events

- **September 25** Cub Scouts new member preview 6:15to 7:30 at the Father Hayes Center, St Joseph’s Church, 695 Stevens Ave. With “Sparks Ark.” FMI: Jennifer Libsack 865-9135.
- **September 28** gift wrap orders due
- **October 2** PTO Meeting 6:00 PM in the Media Center.
- **October 4, 11, 18, 25** Early Release Wednesdays. 2:00 PM dismissal.
- **October 5** School pictures taken
- **October 9** Columbus Day: no school
- **November 4** Annual PTO Spaghetti Dinner, 5:00-7:00 PM. Gift Wrap orders can be picked up that evening.
- **November 10** Veterans Day Holiday; school closed

Construction update: We’ve got concrete footings and walls. Slabs and steel are coming soon! Kids are doing great with new “construction-safe” routines!