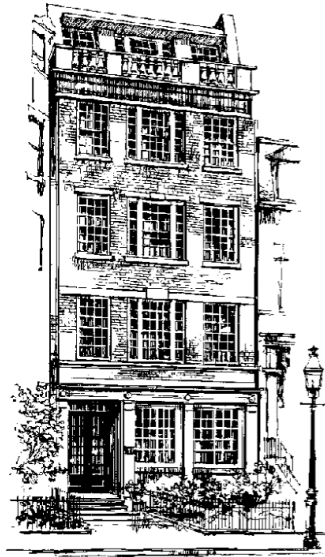


THE
LEARNING
PROJECT
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

PARENT HANDBOOK
2016-2017



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A Word About the Word “Parent”

Many of our communications over the year, like this one, use the word “parent” as a short hand to describe a person who is involved in a special way in the lives of our school children. The huge variety of important adult relationships and family structures that exist in our society, and which we intend to recognize and honor in our school, are not easily captured in a single word, and even the word “parent” runs the danger of seeming to be less than inclusive. On the other hand, entitling this document, for example, *The Handbook for Adults Fulfilling the Parental Role* seems a bit cumbersome.

So let us be clear at the outset: For us, the word “parent” is intended *inclusively* to refer to a variety of adult-child relationships—e.g., guardian, foster parent, grandparent, ‘auntie,’ or other relative, “significant other,” “domestic partner,” etc.—where the adult in the relationship fills that the parenting role for an LP child and takes responsibility (legal or otherwise) to love and to provide for that child and to share in the joys and obligations of raising and guiding that child to become all that he or she can be. Anyone who engages in that process does the crucial work of “parenting.”

A parent will be considered by us as doing an especially good job if their child comes to school well loved and well rested *every day*, with homework completed, a good nutritious lunch, appropriate outdoor clothing, and a positive attitude about the school, the community and learning. All that, alone, is an immense job and worth of admiration and appreciation.

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THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE LEARNING PROJECT

The Learning Project began as an idea: The new school would be distinctly small. It would be of a scale where the children were known to all of the teachers and to one another. It would be a city school, spilling outside its doors and using the vast resources of Boston. It would be a school that served not just a privileged few but the broad middle class, and those on either side. It would honor and respect traditional academic skills and values and, at the same time, it would have a pedagogy that was creative, intellectually challenging, and engaging for young children. It would recognize the various ways that children learn and would seek to accommodate differences. It would recognize, also, the many ways that children teach and learn from one another, and it would create opportunities for children of different ages and grades to work and to play together. It would be a school that embraced progressive social values, while honoring the core personal values of honesty, respect, responsibility and gratitude. And, it would be a place that would care intensely about each child's academic development and equally about the development of good character.

Its name was selected to focus attention on the school's commitment to purposeful activity and learning "by doing" and in the fall of 1973 the school opened. There were eight students, twelve by the year's end (first graders, all but one), and two teachers. The new school was strengthened by an enthusiastic group of parents and a supportive eleven member Board of Trustees.

During the first six years the school rented space in the basement of the First Baptist Church where it returned in 2006 to open a kindergarten. By its sixth year the school had grown to four full-time teachers and 43 students, and in June of 1979 the first class of eight graduated.

In 1977, in the school's fourth year, the Board of Trustees began formally to examine the school's need for new space and simultaneously to look at the philosophical foundations that might guide our choices. Two committees of parents, staff and Board were formed which met during the course of the year to discuss the school's future. The consensus of these meetings was excitement about what we had accomplished and an affirmation of the school's original and fundamental commitments. The school would, indeed, expand as planned to sixth grade, but to do so it would need to find a new location. With neither an endowment nor significant fundraising experience, a Building Search Committee set forth to look at available properties in the Back Bay. Eventually the search led us a block from our original "home" to 107 Marlborough Street.

The building at this address was constructed as a school in 1917—an earlier building, probably built in the 1870's, having been demolished. According to old records, The Lee School had an enrollment of 84 students—girls ages 4-18 and boys ages 4-9. In the 1930's, the building was acquired by the Mary Brooks School, a small junior college that operated until the early 1970's. The property then remained vacant for a number of years ostensibly under an agreement with a developer. Nothing appeared to happen, and in 1977, an attorney friend of The Learning Project's made contact with the attorney for the Mary Brooks School. He invited us to make an offer, which we did—assuming that if the offer were accepted we would somehow manage to raise the money.

Fortunately for The Learning Project, however, there was a significant and unforeseen turn of events. Around this same time, the City of Boston undertook a program to identify tax-exempt properties that were not being used for charitable purposes. The property belonging to the Mary Brooks School was a prime example. Under pressure from the city to either use the building for its tax-exempt purposes or to restore it to the tax rolls, the Directors of The Mary Brooks School decided to dissolve the corporation and to dispose of the property. According to the regulations governing non-profit corporations, at the time of a dissolution the assets of the non-profit corporation must be redistributed to another non-profit corporation. And so...at the right moment in the negotiations over the sale of the property, it was suggested to the attorney for the Mary Brooks Corporation that perhaps the Directors would find it pleasing to give the Corporation's assets—which consisted entirely of the building—to The Learning Project. And that, essentially, is what happened; the building was given to The Learning Project.

Six years of vacancy, New England winters and some vandalism had taken a toll on the property, and when we finally acquired the building in October of 1978 we had a year's worth of planning, fundraising and renovation ahead of us. It was a busy time, and we were helped in an extraordinary way by an extraordinary school parent, Arthur Erickson. Arthur, who was a civil engineer and handyman extraordinaire, volunteered most of his weekends and vacations to oversee and participate in the renovation. Extensive work was done on the masonry, on the roof, on the electrical system and on the plumbing. A new furnace was installed and the building was painted inside and out. And then, on a sweltering hot day in August, a work crew of LP families, teachers and friends moved the school around the block and into its new and present home.

During the 1980's the school community grew slowly but steadily in its number of students, families and staff, and to accommodate this growth, we began to make changes to the building's original layout. The two largest changes occurred in the 1990's. In 1992, we cleared out a warren of small rooms in the basement and built the science lab (now the kitchen) and the multi-purpose room—which was designated the “ballroom” by a second grade girl, a name that has stuck through the years. That summer we also installed the front office on the first floor and enlarged the sixth grade classroom on the second floor by removing a small office, a rear staircase, and a back hall. In the summer of 1998 the fifth floor—the Gamble Art and Science Center—was added to the building and the rear of the first floor was redesigned to accommodate several administrative offices and a conference room.

In 1997-1998 the school celebrated its 25th anniversary. The year-long celebration began on the first day of school with a birthday cake and an opening party for the children at the playground. Two LP graduates who attended the school in its first year returned and told what it was like to be part of The Learning Project in those early days. In December there were two large reunions for LP graduates, and then, through the winter, the school sponsored a series of Saturday performances for its children and for children from the neighborhood. In the spring, the students did a 25th anniversary musical show and then, that fall, we had the final grand event—a gala at the Copley Marriott. It was a full and splendid anniversary year.

In 2005 the Board of Trustees approved the expansion of the school to include a kindergarten program and the school entered lease negotiations with The First Baptist Church, where it had all started 33 years before. Extensive renovations to the original space occurred during the summer of 2006 in preparation for a fall opening of the kindergarten at the school's old location on Commonwealth Avenue. Due to construction delays, the first six weeks of the new kindergarten were held in the multi-purpose room on Marlborough Street, but, finally, on a sunny day in mid-October, the children in grades one through six lined the sidewalk and gave the Kindergartners a rousing send-off as they paraded over to their new space on Commonwealth Avenue.

The history of the school's early years, as well as the period since then, are a constant reminder of the ability of a small group of people, sharing a common vision, to accomplish a large goal. We are reminded, too, that every institution stands on the shoulders of those who came before. We inherit a school that others worked hard to make. Let us, as well, be able stewards of the school's future and leave for its children—five, ten, twenty years hence—a school even stronger than the one we have today.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES

The School is certified by the Boston School Department and is a member of the Association of Independent Schools of New England (“AISNE”) as well as the National Association of Independent Schools (“NAIS”). The school is subject to an extensive evaluation and approval process every 10 years. In 1988, as part of that approval process, the Board of Trustees approved the following mission statement, and has made some minor revisions to it over the years

Mission Statement

The Learning Project is a small, urban, elementary school that provides high academic and behavioral standards in a school community that welcomes diversity and is influenced by a deep respect for each individual. While we are a school that believes that children learn at different rates and some in different ways, we also believe that young children benefit from learning in groups and that they learn best when they are actively engaged and interested. We are a place where children in dynamic classrooms are challenged to work hard, to help one another, to make choices, to take risks, to learn from mistakes and to achieve. We endeavor to build on each child's inherent curiosity and profound desire to succeed and to be a place where the cognitive, aesthetic, social, emotional, physical and moral dimensions of life are nurtured within individuals and within our community.

The acquisition of academic skills is critical; so too is the development in children of a sense of purpose and of motivation. We strive to enable children to become increasingly self-directed, disciplined and independent learners and to develop the skills and the confidence they need to pursue their own intellectual interests. The child who knows how to learn and who loves to learn is well prepared for the future.

Our school is unusually small—for a purpose. We are small in order to ensure a close and personal relationship between each child and teacher, to be a school that is of a “manageable” scale for elementary aged children, and to be a place where children of different ages feel safe in their environment and have opportunities to teach, learn and socialize across age lines. The scale of the school enables a powerful sense of community to develop among students and faculty and parents, and a sense of involvement and caring that includes alumni, Board members and friends.

There is purpose, as well, to our urban location. We are a school that believes in the uniqueness and value of all human beings of whatever race, sex, age, ability, religion, family structure, sexual orientation, cultural, or socioeconomic background. The city offers such diversity and, where needed, our strong tuition assistance program enables us to support it in our enrollment. Additionally, the racial and cultural richness of the city provides a primary resource for teaching openness, tolerance and an appreciation of the ways in which people are different.

As a community and as an institution we are deeply dependent on the commitment and hard work of faculty and staff, of parents and members of the Board. We strive to maintain open and frequent communications and to invite participation in the life of the school. As an employer, we endeavor to be fair and to provide work conditions that encourage teachers and staff to grow in their skills and to remain in the profession if that is their choice.

Honesty in word and deed, courtesy and a sense of responsibility towards others, respect for nature and care of our material environment and a commitment to talking through and solving interpersonal or group problems are principles that give shape to who we are and what we do.

The Learning Project seeks to bring these ideals to the wider community through direct programs and by encouraging and supporting their application in other school settings.

Philosophy of Education

We believe . . .

- That intelligence and learning are active processes that develop through the interaction between a child and their general environment (involving people, materials, activities and opportunities);
- That children learn at different rates, at different times, and in different ways and are best served pedagogically when each is working at their ‘just right level;’

- That we should nurture what a child already knows and target instruction (our time and teaching abilities) at what each child *doesn't* know;
- That we should provide children every day with meaningful tasks which move them from learning to thinking;
- That a broad general knowledge of history, geography, the sciences and mathematics, literature, writing, a second language, physical development and the arts are important areas for study;
- That teachers should directly instruct children in knowledge and basic skills; that they should foster positive attitudes about self and learning, about hard work and perseverance, about independence and responsibility;
- That the Workshop Model as used at this school (and described in detail elsewhere) best serves our mix of pedagogical goals;
- That a children's curiosities, interests, strengths and creativity must be nurtured and incorporated into *their* experience of our pre-determined curriculum;
- That academic mastery is important and leads to self-esteem;
- That to grow intrinsic motivation in children we must promote autonomy (independence and choice); relatedness (the sense of 'social belonging'); and competence (ability, confidence, resilience and grit);
- That teaching reinforces learning, and that we should provide children with opportunities to teach each other;
- That children should be encouraged to take appropriate risks and that the school should be a place where it is safe to make mistakes.
- That academic competition (the sort that pits children against *one another*, instead of encouraging each child to self-improve by competing against him or herself) can be harmful to academic development, self esteem and intrinsic motivation; that cooperative skills should be taught, instead; and that children should learn to help each other and to applaud each other's accomplishments.
- That we should maintain high scholastic and behavioral standards; that such standards should be adjusted, not abandoned, to allow for variations in development and ability;
- That learning should, in balance, be a joyful experience and that if children learn how they learn and to love school, the rest will follow.

Statement on Diversity

At The Learning Project we feel enriched by diversity, by the uniqueness of each individual, and we aspire to build an inclusive community shaped by principles of equity, justice, respect and caring. We work to be a school where *every* day, *every* child and adult will feel that his or her whole self will be honored, safe, valued and empowered, and where individuals learn to appreciate their own identities and the identities of others. It is our expectation that all members of our community will embrace diversity as the norm, and will work to understand its complexities, meet its challenges and learn its lessons.

The school supports diversity by seeking to honor and learn about all kinds of human difference and by requiring respect among all members of its community. Our curriculum and programs are designed to extend the knowledge and vision of the children beyond the world that is comfortable and familiar. We encourage our children to reject stereotypes and bias, to value different perspectives and to want to promote fairness and justice in their school and beyond. We educate our children about the injustices of the past and about the privileges and disadvantages that accumulate from that history. We teach them how ordinary people and those who are better known have worked to promote equity and social justice and we seek to cultivate in our children similar habits of the heart and mind.

The school promotes inclusiveness by making it possible for children from families of different financial means to attend; by providing supports and opportunities for different kinds of learners;

and by promoting within the entire community a deepening understanding of what it means to be a diverse and inclusive school. The school works to build a diverse community of children, families, teachers, staff and trustees, which reflects our society's diversity of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, ability and interest, and socioeconomic status. The school works to break down age and grade barriers and to build a sense of a single school community where the children all respect and care for one another.

Our effort to be an inclusive and diverse community is ongoing and the school always strives to do that work better tomorrow than it did today.

Guiding Principles

Ways to Respect Others:

1. Be honest with yourself and with others. Be honest both in word and in deed—in what you say and in what you do.
2. Do no harm—either with words or with actions.
3. Respect all people. Appreciate our differences. And be courteous. Treat everyone you meet as you would like to be treated in return.
4. Respect other's belongings. Someone else may care about something even if you do not think it is valuable or important. Take care of possessions—yours and others. Remember that communal or public property belongs to everyone and treat it with even greater care than you would something that is exclusively yours.
5. Be a problem solver. And be a peacemaker. Everyone has interpersonal problems from time to time. Learn to see these as opportunities and treat them as occasions to use your good will and creativity to find solutions.
6. Listen carefully to what others are saying. Listen not just to the words but listen for their meanings and hear the ideas and feelings being expressed. If you are uncertain about something a person has said, ask for clarification. Do not "fill in" assumptions. Sometimes people are struggling to say something different than what you expect. Give them a chance.
7. Know that people learn differently and at different rates. All of us have strengths and all of us can get better at many things. Encourage one another and cheer each other's accomplishments.
8. Be caring and kind and speak up for fairness and justice.
9. Help one another.

Ways to Respect Yourself:

10. Be enthusiastic and positive. You will be happier. No one wants to be around a grumpy person. Keep minor complaints private—most of them will go away on their own. Share your problems when they are worthy of someone's attention and help. Don't whine.
11. Welcome opportunities to meet people, to learn things, and to try something different and challenging. Be brave—not foolish—and open to new ideas and new experiences.
12. Make note of your accomplishments and keep a pocket full of memories of your successes. Reach into that pocket for a reminder of your competence and worthiness when you are feeling discouraged.

13. Do not waste time and energy comparing yourself to others. There will always be others who can do some things better than you and others who cannot do some things as well. Life is not a race or contest. Do *your* best and leave it at that.
14. Stay in control of your feelings—particularly your frustration and anger. There may be times when you need to walk away from a situation to calm down, but do not ignore or avoid the cause of your feelings. When you feel in better control, go solve the problem so it will not happen again.
15. Understand that everyone makes mistakes. Indeed, you should make mistakes while you learn; otherwise you probably are not working close enough to the "cutting edge" of your abilities. Learn from your mistakes—find a new one to make each time—and be generous to others about theirs. We all need forgiveness.
16. Work hard, especially on the things that are difficult for you. Get help when you need it. Aim for excellence of effort and performance, not perfection.
17. Be curious. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Ask questions. Listen to answers. Ask more questions.

Ways to Respect the Environment:

18. Respect and care for our environment—our classroom and school, your home, our city and our Earth. Do not litter or pollute. Reduce, Re-use, Recycle. Leave a space neater than you found it.
19. Respect and obey the rules of our school community. We have rules to keep us safe, to build a respectful community, and to make our space orderly, tidy and quiet enough so people can work and play together without bothering one other.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SCHOOL

The Corporation

The Learning Project is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation, overseen by a Board of Trustees who are its members and who elect Trustees on a rotating basis.

The Board of Trustees

The school is governed by a Board of Trustees that can have up to 23 members. The Board is composed of past and current parents; alumni; two faculty; the Head of the School, *ex-officio*; and from time to time members who do not have any of those direct affiliations. The largest group of members are those who are parents of children who have graduated from the school; they bring to the Board a variety of skills and perspectives which complement those of the Board's other members. The Board List is published annually and contained in The Blue Book of names, phone numbers and addresses.

Parents and members at large are elected for two-year terms at the Annual Meeting in the spring. The election is based on a slate suggested by the Committee on Trustees, although any seven members of the Corporation may propose additions to the slate by petitioning the clerk at least seven days before the meeting.

The standing committees of the Board are: Finance, Personnel, School Advancement, Trustees, and Financial Aid. The Board is responsible for oversight of the mission of the school. It approves the budget and reviews the operation of the school at regular meetings throughout the school year. A summary of meetings is routinely contained in the Parent Bulletin.

The Faculty and Staff

The Learning Project maintains a highly skilled and dedicated professional staff. The school employs nineteen teachers, all but one (Music) full-time. The administration consists of the Head of School, the Director of Academics, the Business Manager, the Director of External Relations, the Coordinator of Programs, the External Relations and Events Coordinator, and a full-time Administrative Assistant. The school employs a part-time bookkeeper and contracts out for custodial services and for support of the computer network.

Parent Participation

Since the beginning of the school parents have played an active role, and parent support and assistance is most welcome. In the past, parents have taught lessons related to the social studies or math curriculum, done cooking and arts and crafts, assisted on camping and field trips, helped with class plays and the production of Mayfest. Many parents each year work to organize and implement both social and fundraising events. Traditional social events for parents have been the Fall Class Visits followed by teacher presentations; Class Potluck Suppers; the Halloween Party (parents take the children to trick or treat for UNICEF); regular morning coffees during the year; the Winter Concert; the Annual Auction; Mayfest; a Spring Picnic; Graduation; and the Head's Party. Class Coordinators for each grade help organize parent activities. Most evening events—concerts and the picnic excepted—are just for parents.

Events are well publicized ahead of time through the weekly *Parent Bulletin* and the monthly school calendar. Some are also included on the yearly school calendar, a copy of which is in The Blue Book (the annual directory of the school community). Every event or activity you are able to attend will please your child as he or she sees *your* participation in the school. Your attendance will also enrich our community, strengthen ties between families, and, we hope, reward you as well. The simple truth is this: If you value the school's sense of community, you should contribute to it and join the work each year that is required to renew and sustain the ties that bind its adults and children together.

Over the years, we have come to recognize how useful it is for most parents to see their child at work in his or her classroom, as well as to watch other children of the same age interact and learn. The most comfortable and practical way for parents to get this "insider's look" is by spending an hour each year in the classroom. We recognize that employers can sometimes be difficult about releasing people for school events, but we hope that you will make every effort to take personal time and/or to persuade your employer of the importance of this visit. This hour spent in your child's classroom can take several forms. It can be simply an observation time, an event that is entirely comfortable for our teachers and our students, since interested "outsiders" frequently visit us. Or, if you so choose, you can pitch in and help, or even prepare and present a lesson. We have no expectations for parents other than that they come and see their child and his or her classmates at work—and, of course, that they make advanced arrangements with their child's teacher to do so. Please don't forget about this invitation and opportunity. You will be amply rewarded.

Finally, we want, as a primary dimension parent participation, to develop a strong *partnership* between school and family around the education of the child in our care. As educators with decades of individual and combined experience, we are acutely aware of how well most parents know their child, and while the child in school may appear different than the child at home (and vice versa) it is tremendously valuable to both parties if we can share with each other what we are seeing and experiencing. We also recognize that parents have insights about their child's learning that can be most helpful to us, and we encourage you to share those. And certainly, if you feel that we could accommodate your child's particular learning style more effectively, let us know. Our highest standard and aspiration is to meet the needs of each individual child—including yours.

Class Parent Coordinators

Each year the school's External Relations and Events Coordinator asks two parents in each class to serve as Class Parent Coordinators. The primary job of Class Parent Coordinators is to disseminate important information as it pertains to their child's grade, to encourage parent participation in school-

wide activities, and to help parents become good communicators with the school. This is accomplished formally by phone calls and emails, and informally by attending school events and by being active members of the LP community. Some of the specific responsibilities include helping to get drivers for field trips, helping to organize one of the school's annual events (i.e., Mayfest, the Halloween Party, etc.), collecting and managing the class fund, and planning the end of the year classroom party. Throughout the year, the Class Parent Coordinators are supported in their activities by the school's administration and, in particular, by the Director of School Advancement and the Events Coordinator.

ENROLLMENT

Admissions

The Learning Project does not discriminate for reasons of race, religion, national origin, gender, social class, sexual orientation or family structure in its admissions or tuition aid, or in the administration of its educational policies and programs. Beyond this, we are interested in fostering and supporting diversity within our community, and we actively seek candidates from a variety of backgrounds and from various neighborhoods.

Parents are unquestionably our best sources of referrals and you are encouraged to describe the school to families who might embrace The LP's values and culture. The main entry point for children is in Kindergarten where children need to be five by September 1st. In 2009, the school announced an "Early Admissions Program" for parents of children who are three by September 1st. The Early Admissions Program allows the parent both the security of knowing a Kindergarten place is being held for their child, and the option of keeping their child in a familiar preschool setting where they get to do the four year old program before changing schools. The Early Admissions Program is also advantageous to us. Since many other independent schools have four year old groups as their point of entry, our Early Admissions Program levels the playing field and allows parents to consider The Learning Project at the same time that they might be exploring other school choices.

Openings in older grades also occur from time to time and we encourage parents to think about families and students who might be interested in entering the school after Kindergarten and to make referrals to our Admissions Office.

The school's admission process is designed to ensure that a child is placed in a setting in which he or she will learn and grow. In the unlikely event that The Learning Project proves to be an unsuitable place for a child, this is usually evident to both parties, but if not, the school will so inform a child's parents and advise them about alternatives.

Sibling preference for admissions is intended to accommodate families who like the school and understandably want to have both children in the same school, at least for a time and sibling preference for admissions is given as a matter of policy only when the siblings will be enrolled at the school together for at least a year. Younger siblings are also not automatically admitted, they must go through the admissions process along with other applicants. The school prefers to accommodate siblings, and rarely has doing so not seemed like a wise decision.

Conditions of Enrollment

An important feature of independent schools is the *voluntary* nature of the basic relationship. (The children may not feel much like "volunteers," but that's another matter.) Parents freely choose to apply for their child to attend an independent school, and the school freely chooses whether to offer a place—and whether to continue a relationship through the year and into the next. Both parties can withdraw from the commitment at any time—with certain financial obligations still obtaining.

The school strongly desires to work with a range of families and with a range of needs. However, the school also has clear expectations around matters of cooperation, support and civility and is unafraid to set limits. As outlined in the Registration Form that parents sign each year, "If, for any

reason, The Learning Project believes it is not in the best interest of the school, or in the best interest of the child to allow the child's continued participation in the program, The Learning Project reserves the right to require that the child be withdrawn from the program. In this event, the parents will be held responsible for payment of tuition through one month beyond the date of withdrawal."

Parents are expected to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the school's philosophy, its expectations and its style of doing things and, in general, to act in a supportive fashion. The school considers the cooperation of parents essential to the education of their children and therefore reserves the right to terminate the relationship if that cooperation is not forthcoming.

Most school communities, despite their substantial strengths that carry them through difficult times, are in many ways fragile and vulnerable entities. Minor mishaps or misunderstandings can be easily blown out of proportion and consume time and energy that should be devoted to our primary mission—serving the scholastic and emotional needs of our students. Parents, as well as other members of the community, need to keep in mind that the careless spreading of hearsay or harshly critical behavior do harm to the community by distracting it from its major purposes and by dispiriting its members. (The speed, intensity and easy distribution of email messages has significantly increased this potential.) Such behaviors, when they become detrimental to our community, will not be tolerated without a firm reply.

This is not to say that questions or concerns about your child's classroom experiences or the school in general should not be expressed. However, we consider it essential that such concerns be brought *directly* to the person who might best be able to help, most likely your child's teacher or the Director of Academics. Disagreements or concerns with matters of administrative or Board policy should be discussed with the Head or with a member of the Board, who will as a matter of course report the conversation to the Head and to the Chair of the Board. The expression of a concern or request does not necessarily imply that things will change, but all concerns will be listened to objectively and carefully and, at the very least, kept in mind.

Out-Placement After Sixth Grade

Placement counseling is done by the Head of School. The formal process begins with a meeting of parents in the spring of fourth grade. Starting in fifth grade, parents are provided with extensive written guidance, opportunities to attend group meetings, and certainly the Head's availability for a private meeting. School parents, here and elsewhere, are also a good source of information—and occasionally misinformation.

Over the years, Learning Project graduates have attended Belmont Hill School; Beaver Country Day School; Dana Hall; Milton Academy; Mt. Alvernia; St. John's School; St. Patrick's; Fay School; St. Sebastian's School; The Kingsley School (no longer offering middle school); The Park School; Trinity Academy; The Winsor School; Nobles and Greenough; Buckingham Browne and Nichols; Fessenden; Brimmer and May; Shady Hill; The Waring School; Rivers; Hillside School; Fayerweather; Roxbury Latin; Boston Latin School; Boston Latin Academy; Catholic Memorial; John D. O'Bryant School for Math and Science; Boston Public Middle Schools; B.C. High (Arrupe Division); and Ursuline Academy.

Admission to one of the Boston Exam Schools (Boston Latin, Boston Latin Academy and the John D. O'Bryant) is based on citywide rankings arrived at *via* a formula that weighs a child's test scores (the ISEE test given in the fall of sixth grade) and a child's grades in Math and Language Arts from fifth and sixth grade. Accordingly, The Learning Project does letter grades in those two areas (in fact, we do several preliminary grades and then a final one) starting in fifth grade. These grades are provided only to the Boston Public Schools and are not sent to any independent schools, which receive, instead, copies of recent Narrative Reports as well as letters or reference.

Parents are urged to begin considering seventh grade placement options at the end of fifth grade. The Learning Project maintains a library of public and private school catalogues as well as a network of

parents whose children have attended various secondary schools. Please feel free to take advantage of these resources and of the Head's experience as you think about the options for your child.

Parents should know that letters of reference by the Head or by their child's teacher are written as confidential communications to another school and are not made available to parents. While we believe that most parents would be more than pleased—and perhaps pleasantly surprised—with what is written, we feel that it is our professional responsibility to keep these reports confidential. If you have concerns or questions about the recommendations we have written for your child, we will, at your request, review in general terms what was said, but we cannot share the text directly. To do so would be to violate the trust of the author, who understood that this was to be a confidential communication between schools.

Re-registration

In order to plan for the admission of new students, the school asks current parents to indicate their re-enrollment plans for their children in February. Re-registration forms will be sent out in late January, and the form and deposits for the following year will be due February 1. While we understand that there are circumstances in which a parent may be uncertain about re-enrollment at that time, their deposit will oblige the school to keep a place open for them until May 1 and is non-refundable. There are considerable costs the school incurs when a student does not return, including potentially the opportunity to fill the place during this reserved period.

The parent of a child who has applied to another school, but who also wishes to retain an enrollment option at The Learning Project, must return the deposit on the prescribed due date. The standard notification date among AISNE schools is March 10th. If The Learning Project is notified by March 12th that the child will not be returning to The Learning Project, the deposit will be returned.

Tuition

For the convenience of parents, unless other arrangements have been made, tuition is due in five installments on May 1, July 1, September 1, November 1 and January 1. After May 1, parents are responsible for the full year's tuition. If a different payment schedule is required, parents should make arrangements to discuss and sign an alternative schedule with the school's Business Manager. If unforeseen circumstances arise that will affect a payment, the parent should inform the Business Manager *before* the payment comes due.

Financial Aid

Although full tuition represents a huge sum of money, The Learning Project's fee is comparatively low. Many independent schools in the Boston area charge several thousand dollars more at each grade level, and in some cases are 50% to 75% more costly.

The school was founded on the principle that it would make itself as available as possible to the broadest range of the socio-economic spectrum and so a commitment to providing financial aid has been a major one and one of which we all are proud. Currently, the Board of Trustees assigns an amount equivalent to 15.3% of tuition income for financial aid. Some funds from specific grants as well as income from the Prindle Scholarship Fund are annually included in or added to that amount.

The school has also recently launched The Community Scholarship Program, which solicits generous donors who can fund a Learning Project student for the full seven years. We presently have two Community Scholars in place and are hoping in a short time to increase that number. Referrals and/or introductions to people who might be in a position for this level of philanthropy are encouraged and will certainly be most welcomed. A brochure about The Community Scholarship Program is available from the Development Office.

Grants to families are made based on need, and vary widely in size from small to virtually full. (Every family is expected to contribute something, and even small amounts, proportionately, can reflect a large sacrifice.) The school has allocated approximately \$365,000 to Financial Aid for 2011-2012.

A committee of the Board makes decisions about specific grants after careful review of an extensive financial assistance form. Parents interested in finding out about Financial Aid are encouraged to call the Admissions Office. The school uses the School Scholarship Service of the National Association of Independent Schools that is used by many independent schools. Applications need to be completed by February 1st and the Board Committee makes grants for the following year in March.

Late Payment Policy

The effective collection of tuition, which comprises over 90% of the school's income, is the key to the school's sound financial structure. Parents are asked to be mindful of payment due dates, since late payments are costly to the school—in terms of administrative and bookkeeping time—and to the parents in terms of late fees.

Payments made after the due date will be considered late unless a special arrangement has been made. In the absence of such an arrangement, tuition payments not received within fifteen days of the due date will be subject to an automatic late fee of \$25. Any outstanding balance on the last day of the month will incur an additional finance charge of 1%.

Parents are strongly urged to carefully consider the obligations of tuition before deciding to enroll a child in the school and to assure themselves that the obligation can be met, at least for the current year. Noting that the ultimate responsibility for payment must belong to the parents, the Board of Trustees a number of years ago adopted a policy that the failure to make a tuition payment within thirty days of the due date may lead to a child being unable to attend the school until tuition is brought up to date. On several occasions, unhappily, this policy has been enforced.

School policy requires that tuition be paid as agreed upon and that a sixth grade child whose tuition is not paid in full will not be permitted to attend Graduation. Further, the status of unpaid tuition accounts will be included in school reports to other independent schools, and made a part of the child's school attendance record.

School Forms

Your child is required to have a complete physical examination by his or her doctor before entering school each year. We consider an exam still valid if it has occurred in the past six months. (Waivers are permitted for religious reasons.) While this is not a general legal requirement, it is our requirement—on the advice of our school physician—and exceptions are not made. This health record, along with the Immunization Form, is kept in your child's file at school. Other forms, such as the Emergency Information Form, provide vital information to the staff. Please make sure to complete these forms fully and return them to school promptly. Children whose essential school forms are incomplete cannot be permitted to attend school. Be sure to notify the office of any changes that occur during the school year—especially changes in work or home telephone numbers. **Our address list and phone list must be kept current for everyone's convenience, and in case of an emergency.**

To comply with a new state statute (Chapter 333 of the Acts of 2006), we have been advised to include in The Parent Handbook this statement:

The Learning Project Elementary School does not conduct or require the health examinations that the state of Massachusetts requires for all public school students. We recommend that you consult with your health care provider, your local school committee or your local board of health for information about these examinations and to ensure these exams are carried out for your children.

Please refer back to the paragraph above for the requirements of our school.

THE SCHOOL YEAR

It has been suggested to us that it would be especially helpful to new parents if the Handbook contained a brief compendium of annual school events highlighting, in particular, what part of the day they occurred and where they stood on the 'must attend' to 'more optional' spectrum. Since we do so many things here—some of higher attendance priority than others—and typically invite parents to all of them, it is understandable that such guidance would be helpful.

There are many activities involving parents over the course of the school year. Some of these events are quite important and parents should make *every* possible effort to be there; other activities are more 'optional.' Here is a chronological list of those events with a brief description of each. Don't hesitate to ask someone at school or a 'veteran parent' for additional information. Also, as we get closer to these events, the Parent Bulletin will usually offer reminders and additional detail.

Top Priority Parent Events: September to December (or throughout the year)

Secondary Schools Night (7:00pm): Held in September at the LP. For fifth and sixth grade parents and sixth grade students.

Parent Class Visit and Curriculum Review Presentations: Each fall, parents in grades 1-6 briefly visit the classroom at 7:45am and then gather at 8:05 in the 'ballroom' to hear about the year's program from their child's various teachers. Kindergarten parents gather at #107 at 8:05 am for a similar presentation. These mornings conclude around 9:00am.

Parent Conferences (late September to mid-October): These are scheduled to last 30 minutes and are an opportunity for you and the teacher to get to know one another, to discuss your child's transition to a new grade, and to review any particular goals you might have for the coming year. It is useful if parents come prepared with their questions and issues and put these 'on the agenda' early in the conference.

Fall Potluck Dinners (6:30pm until c.9:00): A mostly social evening for parents from: K and First; Second and Third; Fourth and Fifth; and, separately, Sixth Grade. An event for parents only.

Book Fair (11:00-3:00pm, usually an early October Weekend): This is our first community fundraiser of the year and it is organized and run by the parents. We need every parent, if at all possible, to support it *both* by attending AND by signing up for a work shift. This is a fun event for the children and many LP graduates enjoy returning.

Class Plays: Happen for different classes at different points in the year; parents are notified well in advance. Plays are performed for parents usually at 8:15am, and later in the day for the school.

Winter Concert: In December, at 7:00pm; all children participate.

Top Priority Parent Events: January to April Vacation

Read-a-Thon: January or February, 6:30-8:30pm; a fundraiser for books and trees; the children get pledges then come to school with their stuffed animals and sleeping bags to read for two hours on a winter's night. This is a student only event, but, since this event is in the evening, parent support is required in getting the children to and from school.

Winter Parent Conferences (late January to mid-February): A chance to talk about the year to date and any 'mid-course' adjustments for the months ahead. Children above grade two participate for part of the conference. Conferences are scheduled for 30 minutes.

LP Auction (a Friday or Saturday evening, usually March or April) This is the major fundraiser of the year and we would like every LP parent to participate in the work beforehand (and there is a lot that can be done, e.g., collecting items, helping to set up, etc.) and to attend the event itself, where there are many ways to participate at many different levels. The evening includes a large socializing component and is a good time to be with old friends and to make new ones. We do not want cost

considerations to deter LP parents from attending a good party and complimentary tickets are available for those who need them. Please do not hesitate to ask.

Fifth Grade Parent Meeting (8:00am, usually in March or April): The process of applying to secondary schools is addressed in this parent-only event.

Sixth Grade Dance (April): An evening event (requiring transportation by parents) for students in grades 4 through 6; LP 7th graders are also invited. Sixth graders run the event, with funds being applied to the D.C. trip. Guests – even former LP classmates – are not invited.

Sexuality Education Parent Meeting (8:00am; usually in April): Primarily for first grade parents and parents of 2nd-6th graders who are new to the school.

Top Priority Events: April Vacation to Graduation

Sixth Grade Pre-D.C. Parent Meeting (8:00-9:00am, early April).

Annual Art Show (7:45-8:15am, usually a morning in April): The school is transformed into an art gallery where every child has two pieces of artwork on display through the building and parents are invited to wander. A coffee/tea reception for parents follows.

Fourth Grade Parent Meeting (8:00am, usually in May): Grades and the fifth grade overnight are some of the topics covered in this event for parents.

Mayfest (1:00, at Copley Square usually in May but known to happen in June because of rain postponements): This is a major performance event for the children and should not be missed. Regular dismissal from school at 3:15pm.

IRS Presentations: Children in grades 3-6 present their independent research work to their schoolmates and parents in the morning.

The School Picnic (6:00pm, usually in June, but entirely weather dependent): A very important event for the children that should not be missed—youth baseball programs and other spring activities allowing. Bring your own picnic dinner (grills are usually available, if you choose to prepare something on site); picnic tables are available, although you might choose to bring blankets and/or lawn chairs. Also plan to bring your own sports equipment. Siblings are welcome.

Sixth Grade Parent 'Farewell' Dinner (in late May or early June; 6:30-c. 9:00pm): Join us at the LP for one last in-school get-together.

Graduation (10:00am-c.12:00, always the last day of school): This event involves all of the children, is a celebration of the sixth graders, and is a major musical performance. A reception follows. We ask that a parent or 'someone important' be in attendance for *every* child. This is a marvelous moment—and all the children participate in beautiful singing and gift giving. Children are dismissed directly after the program.

Head's Party (6:00pm, usually several days after Graduation): All parents and teachers and Board of Trustee Members are invited to this end of the year celebration. Food, drink and good company aplenty; a very fun event. This is an event for adults only.

Lesser Priority Parent Events

First Grade Expert Reader Program (8:00-8:30am, usually Monday): Parents are given the opportunity to visit the classroom to listen to children read. Scheduling is arranged by the first grade head teacher.

Parent Morning Coffees (periodically scheduled—announced in Parent Bulletin).

Halloween/Trick or Treat for UNICEF (1:00pm): Closest school day to October 31st. Many parents are needed to take our children out to various locations around Back Bay to collect for UNICEF. When the children return, around 2:20, they perform our famous Zoodio dance on the sidewalk in front of school. Many parents come at least once to see this curious spectacle. Regular 3:15 dismissal.

Optional Parent Events

Fall Adventure Trip (canoeing): For students in grades 4-6 (and not younger siblings). Parents are needed to help with transport and supervision.

Winter Ski Adventure Trip (Always tentative): In January or early February, for students in grades 4-6 (and not younger siblings); knowing how to ski is not a requirement. Parents who ski are needed to help with supervision.

Performance Festivals: Three a year, announced in the Bulletin, and usually occurring at 11:00am on a Thursday or at 2:00pm on a Friday; these are opportunities for children to share a song, a joke, a gymnastic move, a piece on the piano, etc. with their schoolmates. They are not 'command performances' as far as parents are concerned, but usually a small handful of parents attend. Nice for you to see during your LP career.

Class Field Trips (periodically scheduled): Chaperones are often needed; nice for you if you can do one during your LP career.

Field Day (10:00-2:00pm, usually late September, on the Boston Common): At this event, the children are divided into age-integrated teams and they compete against themselves and one another in a series of physical challenges. Parents are invited to watch, but cautioned about not allowing their child to become drawn away from their group and its work together. Program activities last until 11:30 in the morning and start up again around 1:00pm; in between the children have lunch with their groups and then 'all school recess.'

Valentine's Day (February 14th, or as close to the date as possible): Many children exchange cards (the preparation for which usually involved parent support). The 6th graders hold a bake sale to raise money for their trip to D.C. LP children are invited to purchase three treats on this special day (likely requiring parental financing!).

Science Festivals: Grades 2, 4, and 6 at various times in the year do presentations of projects. All parents are welcome, but the parents of the presenters may want to be sure to attend.

Olympics (10:00-2:00pm on the Common): Similar to Field Day, but organized and lead by the 5th graders (our experts on classical Greece), this is a fun day for the children and parents are invited to attend with the same caveats that apply to Field Day.

Class Party (usually in the morning, often after a performance) These are brief, low-key gatherings of 25 minutes or so, with light refreshment and an opportunity for parents to give their joint gifts to several teachers.

THE SCHOOL DAY

Philosophy

Of interest to some parents might be a brief explanation of how and why The Learning Project arrived at its yearly calendar and daily schedule. Several factors have guided decisions about these matters over the years: what we have found works well for the children; what we believe to be

pedagogically sound practice; and our commitment to be supportive of parents and families and of our faculty. These three factors are always considered simultaneously, and we have sought to achieve them.

Regarding the annual scheduling of the school year, of some note is our school's long standing practice of doing 180 instructional days (a small number of them 'half days') which is the mandated standard for public schools, but not required of independent schools. More common among the latter is an annual calendar several school weeks shorter, and, at that, often sprinkled with whole days when the school is open for professional development or for parent conferences but not for the children. Such days reduce instructional time and are inconvenient for parents who need to work outside the home. We do not have them.

Our school day is also typically longer on a daily basis than that of many independent schools. It wasn't always this way; in the school's earliest years the day started at 8:30 and for many years we had a half-day regularly every Wednesday. But as the academic program grew in depth, quality, and reach, we recognized that we needed more time with the children and so gradually—always with the input of the then current parents—we added time to the school day. As happens with time—as well as with financial savings and affection—a small amount accumulated daily over a long period becomes a large amount with startling reliability. An extra 10 or 15 minutes added to the daily schedule means an extra hour or so on a weekly basis or, on a yearly basis of roughly 36 school weeks, the equivalent of an entire extra week of school. It has been noted that an LP student receives an extra year of school time over the course of seven years compared to students in many independent schools. Most parents seem to like this commitment, but a few haven't—believing that we overdo school time at the expense of a fuller childhood. We have never asked the students their opinion.

If the longer school year and school day work well for us, some may wonder about the rationale for not extending these boundaries even further. There are several reasons we haven't. Young children do not have the stamina that older children have; they simply "run out of steam." And while our older children, perhaps, could handle more school, our younger children couldn't; the day is long enough, they work hard, and they are finished by 3:15. A differing dismissal time for our older and younger children would be inconvenient for families with several children in the school, plus many of our children, young and old, are engaged in afternoon activities that often begin around 4:00. In terms of the length of the school day, therefore, we have sought, and we believe, we have arrived at, a workable middle ground.

As for the length of the school year, many charter schools, some district schools, and schools in other countries, do, indeed, have longer school years—some with as many as 200 or even 220 school days. There are good reasons to have more school time, both pedagogical and practical—school vacations are challenging for working parents. However, the long summer break provides its own significant benefits. For children, it is an important change of pace, a break from routine, and a time to immerse themselves in different sorts of activities—swimming, drama, sports and so forth, all offered in general day camps, specialized camps, and, for some, sleep away camp. The practical challenges, moreover, for working parents have largely been addressed by a host of summer camps and community programs. And for faculty—after a high pressure 'run' of thirty-six school weeks, each requiring far longer hours and more creative energy than is usually appreciated (in this respect, teaching is akin to stage acting, except that the script in teaching changes daily!)—the extended summer break is similarly revitalizing. It allows teachers an opportunity to take classes, read books, travel and recharge for the opening of a 'new show' the next year.

Still, the school building is hardly a quiet place during the summer. Preparations for August Scholars keep us very busy before that program starts in July and when it ends in early August, we are deeply engaged in preparing for the school year. Summer is the time when quite a lot of program planning is done, when ideas generated during the school year (when everyone is much too busy to develop them) can be given the time and attention they deserve. It is primarily during the summer when existing curricular programs are reviewed and refined, and new programs developed. The summer weeks are also the time for occasionally major renovation projects, for ordering new books and

supplies, and for repairs and maintenance. In this way, the school ‘needs’ the summer months for other important purposes.

Specific decisions around the particulars of a school calendar rarely please everyone. A colleague for years regularly asked his parents whether they would prefer the February and April vacation routine (what we do) or two weeks in March (common among independent schools). Consistently, the preferences were equally divided. The fact is that each family’s life is complex and at least somewhat different from everyone else’s and we all have good reason for our own preferences.

Nonetheless, school does need to begin and end on the same day for everyone (and have a single vacation schedule), and the decision about where to place those dates has been the one that causes members of our community the most angst, particularly when school begins before Labor Day, or even in August, as it did in 2010 and 2002 and several times before. Labor Day, of course, is one of those holidays that moves back and forth on the calendar—one year the first Monday in September falls on the first day of the month, but then that first Monday moves gradually over the years toward being the seventh day of the month, and then back again. (Who knows what a leap year does to this pattern?) When Labor Day falls later in the month (on the sixth or seventh), we typically need to start before Labor Day; when it is earlier in the month (on the first or second), we can more typically start after Labor Day. In between, we need to do some figuring.

We also like to begin the school year on a Tuesday or Wednesday. During the first few days of the school, as the children transition from a summer schedule and slower summer pace to the school schedule and a quicker pace, they are typically exhausted. A shorter week, therefore, is preferable. Indeed, the ‘ideal’ beginnings happen when Labor Day is late, because then we can have a short week, followed by a three-day break, followed by a second shorter week.

Some people have asked over the years why we end several weeks before the public schools—even though we are both completing 180 days. Public schools typically start a bit later than we do, and then take off various days that we do not, and they are also legally required to make up snow days, which we are not. So, our closing date is determined by when we have achieved our 180-day school year goal (more or less—one year we only had 179 days; another year we had 181 days). Another factor determining our closing date is the availability of our graduation venue. Finally, in reply to the question “Why not start later and end later?” there are two reasons we have designed the calendar as it is. First, and foremost, the weeks after the long, restful summer break are pedagogically more useful than the final weeks of June, when children (and teachers) are exhausted and ready for vacation to begin. Second, in the independent school world, workshops and trainings typically start in the third week of June and while this is certainly not a compelling reason to end when we do, the mid-June closure date allows us from time to time to take advantage of these opportunities.

This may be more information than you ever cared to know about the rationale for our calendar and schedule, but if you have further questions or wish further insight you are most welcome to ask. We also welcome your comments, ideas and opinions. Agreement is never a requirement at The Learning Project—only agreeability!

What Your Child Needs to Bring to School

Besides a good attitude, a good night’s rest, any homework and schoolbooks, food and a beverage for a snack and lunch, your child does not have to bring much—and, in fact, the less the better. We supply books, paper, folders, pencils, etc. Please encourage your child to take good care of these materials as he or she will be asked to pay for text or library books that are lost or damaged.

Here is a list of what children should bring.

A backpack—of moderate size: The backpack is used to carry lunch, the homework folder and a few books. We are mindful of backpack weight issues but also know that children come in different sizes and what’s light for one is heavy for another. If a backpack on wheels is necessary it

is necessary, but we have very limited storage space and hope that the regular sort of backpack will suffice for most.

A lunch box or lunch bag—of standard size: Plastic mini-coolers take up too much space and are not permitted.

A plastic drink container in the lunch bag that is re-sealable: Juice boxes and juice bags do not reseal and lead to spills. They are not permitted in school. Glass juice containers also should be left at home because of breakage concerns.

A small plastic cup: The cup (8-10 ounces) with your child's name on it to be kept in the desk for water. Plastic yogurt cups work well. If a child wishes to have a water bottle in addition, it must have a nipple top (to contain large spills) and it should be no more than 24 ounces in size. Please also write your child's name on the bottle in a clearly visible location.

Sneakers for Sports Days: Should be worn to school on sports days, not stored at school.

Children should **not** bring three ring binders, notebooks, "trappers," pencils or erasers or other desk items. We supply what is needed and we are also interested in containing the amount of "stuff" in the students' desks.

Drop-off /Pick-up and Double Parking

Children in grades 1-6 should be dropped off at #107 Marlborough Street. Children in kindergarten should be dropped off at #110 Commonwealth Avenue.

We want to be good neighbors, and we are. However, we do sometimes impact on the neighborhood in ways that can be annoying and most of that happens around drop-off and pick-up. In general, we do both very quickly and smoothly but there have been occasions when LP parents have caused neighbors tremendous inconvenience. That's simply wrong on a person-to-person basis and it also damages the standing of the school in the community. Causing an inconvenience to the blocked-in owner of a legally parked car (who is probably in a great rush at 8:00am), or causing a huge traffic jam, and blaring horns are not good ways to endear us to our neighbors.

To minimize our negative impact around drop-off and pick-up time, here are the key guidelines that we ask all LP drivers to follow—whether on Marlborough Street or Commonwealth Avenue:

- If you drive and double-park, please do not leave your car unattended unless absolutely necessary and then only if you are parked close to the school door AND only if you are going to be away from your car for a minute or less, which is just enough time to walk a child into #107 or #110. Parents should double park *only* for the purpose of escorting a child into the kindergarten or the lobby of #107 or to drop something at the office. Double parkers should not linger inside. If you wish to do so, please find a proper parking space first. It's often not that difficult to find a metered space on Clarendon or on Dartmouth.
- Always place the LP "Dropping off/Picking up" sign (available in the vestibule at #107 or at #110) on your dash so that our neighbors know that you will be returning momentarily.
- On Marlborough Street especially, if you are briefly double-parking, please be careful not to block the street or to cause traffic to weave back and forth. All double parkers should park on the same side of the street, and leave plenty of room for the easy flow of traffic. By tradition, we double park on the school side of Marlborough Street—unless there is a car already parked on the other side and then we park on that side.

- Be alert to the damage our children can cause by energetically swinging open a car's rear door and dinging the side panels of a parked car. This is preventable. Pull forward so your rear door opens up between parked cars or get out and help your child open the door. Car doors are often hinged in such fashion that they swing open abruptly and since they are heavy, young children cannot be held responsible for controlling them perfectly. Another parental duty!

Arrival Time

Our instructional day begins promptly at 8:00 for all grades. The front door in both buildings opens officially at 7:30, which allows a large "window" of opportunity for those who need to provide for the vagaries of Boston traffic. At #107, children wait in the lobby and are permitted to go upstairs at 7:45. It is best if all the children arrive as close to 7:45 as possible and most certainly **before 7:50** so they have time to unpack, greet classmates and teachers and settle into the day. By 7:58, we parents to start leaving the classroom floors and we start settling the children into their desks morning in preparation for the official start at 8:00. At 8:00, the front door is locked and late arrivals need to ring the doorbell and report to the front desk for a 'late slip.'

The school expects children (and their parents) to be punctual. Punctuality is a matter of common courtesy and enables the school to run smoothly for everyone's benefit. Occasional lateness will happen—occasionally. Repeated lateness should not happen. A child who is regularly late to school may be sent immediately home so that the parents and child can more fully understand the importance we attach to punctuality.

In inclement weather, the school expects parents to allow enough extra time so they might be extra safe in their travels, so that they can allow for expected delays, and so that their children will still arrive at school on time. We also understand that under certain circumstances, even the best-laid plans may go awry.

Parents should know that we are asked to report attendance and punctuality records to independent schools at the time of application for seventh grade. A consistent pattern of tardiness is not a positive mark on a child's record and can make the difference between receiving an acceptance or not—as it does, in fact, during our own admissions process.

Late arrivals that are due to medical appointments, school visits, or the occasional decision by a parent to let an exhausted or recovering child sleep late will be excused—provided the front office has been properly notified. All others—including those due to bad traffic, MBTA delays, and other transportation mishaps will, in general, be marked "late." "Late" is not a moral judgment, it is a statement of fact. Regular lates, however, begin to move into the zone of inadequate attention to the expectations of the school, and are not regarded favorably.

Walking Children Up the Stairs/Classroom Visits

Parents are welcome to walk their children up to the classroom in the morning, but we also encourage you to be mindful of when it is time to "let go" of that lovely ritual. None of us should be an enabler of undue dependency and letting children have their independence at the appropriate time is crucial to their successful development. We like to see second graders, at least by mid-year, routinely make the long trudge upward on their own. They can all do it! This does not mean, of course, that parents should then never walk upstairs in the morning. Occasional quick visits to see work, to say "Hello" to your child's teacher, and so forth, are most certainly appropriate—even for parents of the older children who may see themselves as much too sophisticated to have a parent in their classroom.

Another important matter for parents to be aware of in the morning is that these few minutes prior to the start of school are never a good time to engage teachers in long conversations. If you have a quick piece of important information (20 seconds worth) to share with the teacher, that's likely okay, but please do not monopolize teacher attention in the mornings. Their attention needs to go to the children—to greeting them and to the crucial the business of getting the class settled so the day can start promptly at 8:00.

Parents should depart the classroom promptly at 7:58 unless, of course, they have arranged to visit that morning. Please understand that this request is not about keeping parents out of our classrooms. We, in fact, *want* you to come in to visit and to observe the class in action. However, we also want to get each and every school day started in a prompt, orderly and “let’s-get-down-to-work” fashion, and having parents lingering in the room past first bell makes that a more difficult transition. So kindly leave the room promptly after first bell.

The Attendance Policy

The school’s clarity and firmness on this matter is distinctly different than the practice at many independent schools, and we ask parents to read this section with particular care.

In general, requests for absences for causes that might be otherwise scheduled should not be made.

Excused Absences: Absences due to illness, medical appointments or to religious celebrations requiring no more than two consecutive days will be excused. Parents from faith traditions that may require extended time away from school may need to consider whether this is the best school for their family, as prolonged absences for religious purposes are typically not excused. Also excused are absences due to tutoring, testing, school placement visits, or, at the Head’s discretion and with prior approval, extra-curricular events or performances. Absences due to funerals will be excused, as will absences due to family emergencies. If those require being called out of town suddenly, the school should be notified of the situation by the first morning the child will not be present and informed about plans for the child’s return to school. Absences due to weddings will be excused, but if more than a day’s absence is desired, the plans must be discussed with the Head well in advance and approval sought for any extra days away. [Fair warning: The Head expects a quick turn-around time if missed school days are at stake.] Absences due to difficult international travel for the purposes of visiting family *may* be considered (e.g. not Paris, not the Caribbean, but maybe Ulaan Baatar). Since permission might not be granted, requests for an excused absence should be directed to the Head well before plans are made and tickets purchased. A note or a comment to a teacher or other school staff member will not be considered a request for an excused absence.

Parents should notify Headmaster at the earliest possible moment of any prescheduled and foreseeable absence—e.g., a family wedding—to clarify that parental expectations align with the school’s requirement. In the case of illness, please see the section on “Notifying the School About an Absence” several pages on.

Unexcused Absences: Elective absences due to extended vacation or extended weekend plans, to different school holidays in the same family, to the vagaries of airlines schedules and fares, or to other situations that are deemed by the school ‘discretionary’ should not occur and will be considered “unexcused.” Absences that occur when a child arrives late to school or is removed early from school under circumstances described above will also be considered “unexcused.” (Specifically, children are not excused early to attend opening day at Fenway).

Other Absences Requiring Advanced Approval: Absences for other family events that cannot be differently scheduled may be considered excused at the discretion of the Head of School. Requests must be made directly to the Head and should be made well in advance in order to be considered. The prior purchase of airline tickets and the possible loss of thousands of dollars will have no bearing on the Head’s deliberation.

Consequences of An Unexcused Absence: Parents are asked to understand that unexcused absences are not acceptable at The Learning Project for the reasons explained in the Parent Handbook, and the Board of Trustees urges parents not to violate the policy. It is the intention of the Board of Trustees to assure, through the clarity and broad dissemination of this policy, that no parent will ever choose to take an unexcused absence for their child.

To underscore the seriousness of this matter, the Board of Trustees has directed that a parental choice to withdraw a child from school for unexcused purposes will, at a minimum, result in the suspension of the child from school, and may result in immediate expulsion or a withdrawal by the school of an invitation to re-enroll the child for the coming year. A sixth grade student in violation of the policy may not be permitted to attend Graduation.

Some Background on the Attendance Policy

The school's attendance policy is deeply rooted in several of the values that underscore The Learning Project's Mission—in particular, respect for others, responsibility and fairness. The Learning Project stands for the principle that one should meet one's obligations and that one should play by the rules. We believe that by doing those two things we demonstrate our respect for one another and our commitment to responsible and fair conduct.

The school takes attendance seriously not because we dislike vacations or fail to see—or provide for—reasonable exceptions to the policy. We take attendance seriously because we wish to honor the principles stated above. Moreover, we believe that it is reasonable that children should be expected to attend school—barring illness, religious observances, and so forth—when school is in session. It is also the law.

The articulation of this clear and principled policy arose in response to many changes throughout our society that have encouraged families to remove children from school for vacation travel. Always there is a reason: parents have been working extremely hard and need a break; a parent has a business trip to a wonderful and educational place and the child can come along; the airfare is significantly discounted if the family returns on Monday instead of Sunday; one child goes to a school with a different Spring Vacation schedule and the family wishes to travel together; or, more simply, it would be preferable to schedule the trip to take longer than the prescribed school vacation.

While each of these reasons may be compelling, the implications for the school community are also serious: if each of us decides individually when it is most convenient or most economical or most desirable for us to travel, it becomes impossible for us to enjoy the benefits of a strong and steady school program that builds on continuity and participation. Sometimes it is not possible to “have it both ways.” And therein lies the tension between private decision-making and the obligations each of us has as a member of a community.

We certainly understand the educational benefits of travel, and, in fact, wish that all of our school children could do more of it. But we also have an important agenda to complete at school, and a very fixed time in which to complete it. There are approximately 180 days in the year when travel and family vacations can occur without a child missing school time, and it is better for everyone if parents arrange for family vacations to correspond with Learning Project school holidays.

A casual attitude about attendance presents a school community, and a child, with an array of problems. Absences interfere with the absent child's steady progress in learning. Absences also have serious consequences for the class. Lessons are delayed, or lessons have to be re-taught; cooperative projects need to be put on hold and classroom rhythm and momentum are interrupted. Teachers are also inconvenienced. They know, of course, that they need to deal with necessary absences; however, it is neither fair to them nor respectful of their time and priorities to ask them to deal also with absences that are discretionary and unnecessary. Discretionary and unnecessary absences from school are unsettling to other children in the community. It does not feel fair to children when one child gets to do something special outside of school on a school day and others do not. Such obvious displays of unequal opportunity are not the “LP way.”

It is also worth considering the message that a permissive attitude toward attendance sends to our students. It suggests that school isn't really “all that important.” It suggests that one does not really have to play by the rules. It suggests that obligations can be set aside if they are inconvenient or if something better comes along. It suggests that it is acceptable to dishonor a teacher's work and daily preparations if one has something better to do. It suggests that one's commitment to the community is

substantially less important than the pursuit of one's own pleasure. None of these are lessons we wish to impart to our students.

Many schools, it would appear, have simply conceded on the attendance issue. They may implore parents to understand the rationale described above and to comply out of respect for that rationale and the community. This is precisely what The Learning Project did for many years, and still, some parents took vacations at their convenience instead of at the times prescribed. Eventually, it became clear to the school that an even more carefully articulated policy was required, and that such a policy, if it were to be effective, would need to articulate some serious consequences for violation.

A word about those consequences, which potentially include expulsion from the school: Many people in the community, including those on the Board, had to wrestle with the question, "How can this school—especially—promote a consequence that falls so heavily on the shoulders of a child?" The answer to that troubling question is twofold:

First, the *intention* of the attendance policy is to prevent harm to children, not to inflict harm. For all the reasons cited above, unexcused absences are harmful to the absent child and harmful to the entire community of children in the school's care. As explained earlier, unexcused absences are also demoralizing and unfair to the teachers. The school has a policy against unexcused absences precisely because it desires to protect children from harm. We also have the policy because we want to protect our teachers from disrespect, disruption, and unnecessary additional work. It is their work every day that provides benefit to our children. If we harm that work, we harm children.

Second, the *intention* of the prescribed consequence is not to punish a child. The intention is to dissuade a parent from electing a harmful course of action that will lead to a most unfortunate outcome. The policy exists to inform and to clarify; it exists to perhaps dissuade a parent from a foolish course of action and to encourage a correct course. It is not the policy that would cause harm to the child. It would be a parent's decision to violate the policy that would be the cause. And one is hard pressed to imagine a parent making such a choice.

Notifying the School about an Absence

As a safety check—so that we know everyone is accounted for—it is important that the school be informed promptly if a child will be absent. Please notify the front office of any absence BEFORE 8:00am. Before 7:30am, you may leave a message on Voice Mail, Extension 101.

Please explain the reason for the child's absence so that correct and reliable records can be kept. Student absences, mostly, are due to illness and the school asks to be kept informed of the nature of the illness and symptoms so that we might monitor the health of the community.

Recording of Absences

The recording of absences (and also of tardiness) is done by the front office and reported to parents on the Student Evaluation Form that is sent home twice a year. These attendance records are also provided to the child's next school, and, as mentioned earlier, a large number of tardiness does not enhance a child's application to seventh grade.

Parents of students in grades five and six (whose children are graded on their work, as required for the seventh grade admissions process to the Exam Schools), should be aware that if their child misses a test or quiz or other graded class work because of an unexcused absence, the missed work will be recorded as a zero.

Doctor's Appointments

Routine medical and dental appointments should be arranged after school hours as much as possible. Check the school calendar for Early Dismissal Days; those days may be convenient times for you to schedule these appointments.

Food

Children bring lunch every day and should also bring something to snack on at midmorning break, including all half days—except the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, when we have a huge ‘feast’ and children do not bring lunch or snack, and on Graduation Day, when we provide a snack and dismiss around noon. Parents should pack a second snack if their child is going to be in the After School program. Food should be ready to eat, and children should have their own cups and spoons. Since lunches are not refrigerated, thermoses are advisable. Drinks should be sent in easily sealed containers (no juice boxes or bags), and lunch boxes or brown bags should be clearly labeled.

The question of what children should bring in their lunches is complex, and we have discussed over the years many different approaches to the issue, none of which seems entirely satisfactory. Most parents agree that “junk food” should not be sent to school, but how do we define “junk food” and do we really mean “never?” The food industry, ever responsive to fads and mindful of the attraction of sugar (and salt and fat) makes the process of definition ever more difficult. Now we have “fruit roll-ups” and “health-food” granola bars (mostly sugar and covered with chocolate) and carbonated “fruit” drinks.

Beyond the definitional problems, there is also the issue of our being, increasingly, out-side-the-home-fully-employed “working” parents (parents have always worked!), with our lives filled with obligations and not much spare time to bake wholegrain breads and grow organic gardens. Even if we do so somewhat guiltily, it is hard not to take advantage of the pre-packaged solution.

So why, at school, do we even bother raising the issue of what children should bring in their lunch buckets, and then—further foolishness!—struggle toward the setting of some standards? First, all of us, parents and teachers alike, want “our” children to eat well and to be healthy and strong. Second, we recognize that in these early years we are establishing eating and nutritional habits that may last a lifetime. Third, we understand the critical influence of peer pressure—for better or for worse. We know that parents are challenged regularly with, “So-and-so gets to bring four cookies, chips *and* a fruit roll-up, so why can’t I have two cookies?” It thus seems that there is no choice other than to try to establish some community standard.

Accordingly, we offer some general guidelines and some specific restrictions. We put them forward hoping not to step on anyone’s toes nor to seem too critical of anyone’s value judgments, but believing that common understandings—and commitments—are critical to the success of a classroom and school community and that standards make life easier and more pleasant for everyone.

It is our opinion—based on years of observation—that, in general, children should not make their own lunch nor should they be charged with purchasing a lunch on the way to school. Most children won’t make the best choices about nutritional balance. We can find less consequential ways to empower our children apart from the crucial arena of nutrition.

It is also our opinion that lunches should contain a minimum of “prepackaged” or “fast” foods. The recent innovation of “Lunchables”—high in convenience, cost, fat content, and wasteful packaging—are the ultimate manifestation of this phenomenon and they are discouraged in school.

A good lunch is a sandwich, and/or some of last night’s leftover dinner, a piece of fruit, and a beverage. For mid-morning snack, pack some crackers or some raisins or other fruit or some carrot strips, or some cheese, or some dried cereal or granola or an extra half sandwich. Fresh fruit—a banana, several orange slices, some melon, etc.—also makes a good snack. The annoyingly common inhibition among children that they cannot eat an apple slice if it is the slightest bit discolored is something we collectively might seek to dislodge.

A good lunch will also occasionally have some “food for the spirit”—a surprise note telling your child how terrific he/she is, or wishing him/her good luck on the spelling test. And amidst your regret of having to pack yet another lunch, try to remember that doing so is another opportunity for you to

show your child how much you care, day after day, through one tedious chore after another. They'll 'get it,' even if they don't know they did.

Now, what about "junk food?" Some schools have been known to ban it—e.g., "no cookies or cake allowed." We are not that strict at LP about this matter, but, nonetheless, we prefer to see a minimum of sweets. While "junk food" can be a treat, a convenience and maybe even a life affirming experience, we wish to limit the amount of it in lunches, and its visual impact. So, please do not let junk food prevail on a daily basis, and if junk items do on occasion creep into the repertoire, we encourage you to remove them from the store packaging so it is not quite as obvious and seductive to the other children in the class. In terms of how the other children experience your child's treat, it matters whether you send a few chips in a container or send in an entire pre-packaged "individual serving," whether you put pudding in a Tupperware container or send it in a "convenience pack."

We do not allow candy and soda, but here, again, we need to ask parents to use good judgment, as these items are not so easily defined as they once were. Fruit roll-ups, shark bites, and many "granola bars" and certainly many pre-packaged beverages are virtually the same in terms of sugar content and nutritional values as a candy bar or a soda. Please be aware of this and help our children get the good nutrition during the long school day that they need in order to learn and to grow healthy bodies.

We do not allow children to swap or give away any of their lunch, unless it is to someone who has forgotten to bring a lunch, in which case we cobble together a lunch from several sources. Children are encouraged to eat what you have sent, and if they do not care for your offerings, we want them to bring the unfinished lunch home so you can see the results of your noble—if under-appreciated—efforts that morning.

In recent years a few parents have made use of the Smart Lunches service. (Google it to find out more). We ask that not family use this service more than 50% of the time in order to keep it from seeming like a 'special privilege'.

Packaging Carefully/Lunch Containers/Pack-In Pack-Out

The school encourages children and parents to think about ways we all can "Pack Carefully" so that we dispose of less and reuse and recycle more.

Each classroom has limited storage space and so lunch boxes (or bags) should be conventional size so that we can fit sixteen lunch containers on the assigned shelves. In order to reduce the amount of food that gets wasted and the amount of trash the school produces, the school has implemented a policy of packing out what is packed in. As mentioned above, children are required to bring home for your inspection and consumption or disposal whatever food they have not consumed during the school day. They are also required to take home any disposable packaging—of which we hope there will be little.

Dismissal

On Monday through Friday school ends at 3:15; the Kindergarteners leave their building around 3:05 and walk to Marlborough Street for dismissal. A few "early dismissal" exceptions are noted on the yearly calendar. All early dismissals, except graduation, are at 12:15.

Kindergarten dismissal is done at #107 Marlborough Street at 3:15 for the convenience of parents with older children—and so that we get a chance each day to see one another.

If you are meeting your child at school, please be prompt. Parents who arrive early to meet children are encouraged to gather out front or in the lobby. Please take this opportunity to introduce yourselves to one another. You and the parents around you are wonderful sources of information and wisdom about children, parenting, and school(s), and sharing that is important. We learn from one another and our larger community develops as a result of these myriad smaller connections.

Changes in Dismissal Plans

The school has a system for tracking children at dismissal time and the effectiveness of that system depends in good measure on parent-to-school communication. If you make changes in the dismissal routine for your child for a particular day, be sure to inform the *front desk* of the change—preferably earlier in the day—so it can be posted on the check-out boards that teachers use at dismissal. Do not assume that if you have told your child’s teacher at morning drop-off about a change that this information will end up in the relevant place—the checkout board downstairs. You *must* inform the front office either by phone, email, or in person.

Other Dismissal Guidelines

- During the regular afternoon dismissal time, always confirm that any child going with you has checked out properly with a teacher. Ask each child directly, “Did you check out?”
- If you are taking a sick child home early, or leaving the school for an appointment, always check out first at the front desk.
- If someone not known to the school is meeting your child, or if there is a change in the routine, you should write a note to the office or call in the morning so that we can remind the child at the end of the day. This is particularly important with younger children, who easily forget your careful instructions. We cannot dismiss a child to someone not known to us or not authorized by you.
- For most children it is important that dismissal and after school plans be clear and certain to them before they come to school. Unclear plans or “pending possibilities” can become major distractions and worries to children throughout the day and preempt learning.
- We are part of a residential neighborhood and we place enormous importance on making every possible effort to be good neighbors. Please do not allow our children, or younger siblings, to climb on the fences or slide down the staircases of our neighbors. It is appropriate that we teach young children the concept of respecting private property and the opportunity to teach that lesson arises frequently as families wait outside our school. The property line for our neighbors is the front of our garden; their pathways are also private property.
- Parents are asked to be mindful of their child’s behavior on the sidewalk after school. The sidewalk is a public way and other pedestrians are entitled to passage without having to weave through a gaggle of unruly children. The sidewalk is not a good place for roughhousing or running. The playground, just around the corner, is the place for that.

Transportation

Transportation is arranged by parents—individually, or with carpools, walking pools or group arrangements on public conveyances. (The Copley Square station on the Green Line and the Back Bay station on the Orange Line are only a few blocks from the school.) If you are interested in cooperative arrangements with other parents, the school will be happy to provide you with the names of those who live near you.

The Boston School Department provides free bus transportation to any Boston child in first through fifth grade who lives more than two miles from the school. For many years we took advantage of the bus service. However, for the 2007-2008 school year the School Department changed their bus assignment routines and only offered us service at hours that would have seriously compromised our program (8:25am and 2:30pm). With regret, we declined.

Safety

Because many of our children walk to and from school, their safety is a primary concern. Good communication between home and school is the key—we need to know any variations in your child’s

daily routine, and it is vital that we be able to reach you in case of any emergency or questions. Here are some safety tips to parents that have been passed on to us:

- Teach your children that if they are being followed, they should not hide, but run to other people in lighted areas.
- Listen when your children tells you they don't want to be with someone; there may be a reason.
- Don't allow your children to wear clothing that displays their name. Children are likely to respond to someone using their name.
- Select a code word that only you and your children know. The code word should be used when someone else is picking them up from school or another location. Tell your children never to go with someone who doesn't know the code word. Do some role-playing.
- Encourage your children to use the buddy system. Children should walk with friends to school, playgrounds and social functions. Safety is in numbers.
- Adults usually do not ask children for directions. Your child should be told never to respond to strangers in a car.

AFTER DISMISSAL

After School Arrangements

The Learning Project offers two after school programs: Extended Day for children in grades K-3 and Homework Plus for students in grades 4-6. Parents are invited to register their children for either program on a regular schedule. Depending on the availability of space, children may be allowed to attend on a "drop-in" basis. Space in these programs is limited, and we are sorry that we may not be able to accommodate everyone. If that situation arises, we will do our enrollments on a first come/first served basis.

Our collaboration with Hill House allows for children enrolled in programs there to stay here at The LP under the supervision of, an intern. The intern will supervise snack, time at the playground (time permitting), and homework completion. At the appointed time, the intern escorts the children to their Hill House program. Pick-up is at Hill House. Information regarding the available programs is sent home at the appropriate sign-up time.

Occasionally parents have gotten together to organize after school activities for their children. The school is happy to facilitate such activities by sending home notices, although we do not as a matter of policy endorse any particular after school function. If you are interested in notifying parents of some after school activity, please check with the Head. Also, from time to time, parents in a particular class or neighborhood have worked together to provide shared coverage for half days, vacation weeks or other school holidays. We are happy to act as a "clearing house" for such efforts, though the school cannot take responsibility for solving individual problems.

When making after school arrangements, parents should be mindful of their child's homework responsibilities, as well as of the need for most children to have some "down time"—quiet time for themselves. Our children have a long school day and they work hard. Also, during the school week, homework should be a first priority, and Little League, dance or pottery should be worked in accordingly.

After-school visits among children are an important social experience, and parents are encouraged to facilitate them as often as possible. Please keep in mind that there may be some children in the class who are not as sought after as playmates, and make an effort to include them in your plans as well. Play date invitations are particularly important for children new to the class at the beginning of the year, but their importance to every child's development of a healthy self should never be underestimated.

Be mindful, too, that there may be children whose family situation may make returning invitations difficult. Still, it is vitally important for every child in our community to feel affirmed and to be included, and encourage your child to seek out a variety of after school or weekend classmates as playmates. Two children who may be having difficulty in school (frequently it involves a third child whose attentions are sought after by both) can have a wonderful time on a play date—just the two of them, and that event, alone, can work wonders for their relationship back in school.

Arrangements for after-school visits are best made at least a day in advance. Children's attempts to make last-minute plans often distract them during the day, and can end in tearful disappointment when expectations cannot be realized. Please help your child to plan ahead.

It is the school's policy not to call taxicabs for students. If your child needs a cab, please arrange for it and let the office know when it will be coming.

Occasionally older children will be asked to stay after school, sometimes to finish their work, sometimes to have a talk with their teacher, sometimes as a consequence of poor conduct. Children will not be detained if they have an appointment, but they may be asked to stay late on another day. If your child is expected home promptly but is asked to remain late, we will attempt to notify you. If it is not convenient for the child to stay late on that particular day, please let us know.

Homework

Homework is an essential part of the school's program, and the discipline of doing homework and returning it complete and intact begins in first grade. Homework may be skill review or drill or some other extension of class-work. Homework provides your child with an opportunity to learn to work independently, to be resourceful, to fulfill an obligation and to meet a deadline. Children should be encouraged to do their homework in a quiet spot early in the evening before they are tired. Depending on your family's schedule, early morning may also be a good time. Children may need to be reminded to put their homework, books, etc., together and in a place where they won't be overlooked in the morning rush to school. Homework assignments are carefully explained and reviewed before the children leave school. If your child has questions about homework after returning home, he or she should call a classmate, not the school or teacher.

The development of good homework habits is important from the first assignment in first grade to the last assignment in sixth grade. As children move up the educational ladder, their ability to complete homework assignments thoroughly and on time becomes an increasingly significant factor in determining academic success—or failure. While the consequences of failing to finish a single assignment should not be exaggerated, a pattern of failure to finish work is detrimental to a child's attitude and academic progress.

As a general standard, homework should be done thoroughly and neatly every time it is assigned. Children should be discouraged from using their creative energies contriving excuses for failing to do what is reasonably expected of everyone in their group.

The school's original homework schedule was first delineated in 1981. Over the next 20 years, the length of the school week was incrementally increased by almost six hours, but the homework schedule remained unchanged. In 2001, the homework load was adjusted to reflect this changed reality. Homework was substantially reduced to balance the fact that our children were now spending so many more hours each week *in* school, and had less time at home. The homework schedule has been tinkered with several times since then.

We refuse to be drawn into the 'Homework Competition' which promotes the idea that the better the school the more the homework. We believe that what we expect is reasonable and sufficient for our purposes.

Allowing for day-to-day variations and differences in individual speed, the homework schedule is as follows:

Kindergarten:

No 'official homework requirement;' occasionally given but no set schedule

First Grade:

10 minutes 4 nights a week plus 30 minutes 'book time.'

Second Grade:

20 minutes 4 nights a week plus 30 minutes reading

Third Grade:

30 minutes 4 nights a week plus 30 minutes reading

Fourth Grade:

40 minutes 4 nights a week plus 30 minutes reading

Fifth Grade:

50 minutes 4 nights a week plus 30 minutes reading

Sixth Grade:

60 minutes 5 nights a week plus 30 minutes reading

All students in grades 1-6 keep a daily home reading log that is signed by parents—or by After School Teachers.

'Book Time' for first graders acknowledges that 'looking at books' as well as reading may be appropriate for a time; we do, however, want to move first graders as quickly as possible into spending 30 minutes exercising their actual *word* decoding skills—which is the reason, wonderful as they may be, that comic books and graphic novels do *not count* as reading practice at The Learning Project.

Parents are also encouraged to read to their children as long as the child enjoys that shared experience.

Children have occasional homework in Science and in Spanish. We do this in large measure to allow our parents to have a 'glimpse' into those two academic programs. The teachers in those subjects will coordinate their assignment plans with each Classroom Head to avoid 'overload' on the students.

Please remember that these are *guidelines*, and that different children will accomplish more or less within the time prescribed. We do not want children to do (much) more than what we've outlined; and occasionally, children will have a "light homework" night and do less. Also, parents are advised that if their child is a fast worker and does homework efficiently, thoroughly, and in less than the prescribed time, we do not "punish" that gift by piling on more work. To do so could be quite counter-productive.

Please notify your child's teacher if the homework load is routinely not falling within our guidelines for your child or if in some way homework responsibilities are becoming stressful for you or your child. We are aware that homework can sometimes become a negative experience in part because it arrives after a long day when children—and parents—are tired. Homework sometimes needs to be fit in following a play date, or a sports activity, or a visit to the doctor and all of this can cause unnecessary anxiety and frustration for our children—and occasionally for their parents. We do not want it to head, routinely, in this direction.

Homework should not be viewed as an "alternative" to afternoon television—parents should provide many and varied alternatives other than television, or homework. And whatever merits homework does provide, it is not a substitute for good, daily family time—for the card game after dinner, for time spent reading together as a family in the sitting room, for the game of catch outside or the after dinner walk around the block—or for that discussion of Plato's influence on Western thought. Homework *does* have a place, but it should not dominate a child's post school hours and it should not undermine "down time," family time or activities in addition to school.

How Much Help Should I Give?

This is a complex question to which, in general, the simplest answer is, “as little as possible.” Essentially, the children are given assignments that they should be able to do. However, sometimes an assignment is not always as clear as it should be; sometimes it is more difficult than anticipated by the teacher; sometimes a child may not have been listening as carefully as required; and sometimes, like the rest of us, children simply forget what to do.

If you need to occasionally answer a question about the directions—or even about the substance of an assignment—that is fine. If questions are coming at you night after night, however, it is probably time to check in with your child’s teacher.

Remember, at some point, it is quite appropriate (and certainly consistent with our goal of teaching responsibility) to tell your child simply, “Homework really is your responsibility. If you don’t get it, then you will have to talk to _____ tomorrow.”

The question of parental help becomes particularly urgent toward the end of the year for children in grades 3-6, when Independent Projects may seem insurmountable. In general, the school encourages parents to function as resources and safety nets—to help find sources, to set up interviews where appropriate, to help transport the young researcher on his or her quest and, of course, to notify the teacher if it all seems to be too much. It is not, however, in the best interests of the child’s learning for parents to participate directly in research, note taking, editing, and preparing the final draft of the project. A few spelling errors are a small price to pay for giving the child the satisfaction of completing a significant piece of independent work.

Homework Tips

Here is a neat summary of Homework Tips paraphrased from the Parents Place Bulletin, Volume 10, Number 4:

- Set a Regular Homework Time
- Set up a Regular Study Spot—preferably a table surface for proper writing posture.
- Make a Homework Supply Kit—with pencils, eraser, etc.
- Be Available—see above section, but remember that your mere presence lends ‘moral support.’
- Praise Effort
- Follow-up—if your child has some difficulty with an assignment, follow-up the next evening, or perhaps with the teacher the next day

Why Homework is Often Drill and Lacking in Creativity

Over the years, we have found that the best homework assignments are those that are straightforward, doable for the children generally on their own, and not requiring an enormous number of brain cells late in the day. Of course, there will be exceptions to this—assignments that do require major thinking. But mostly we want homework to be reinforcement and drill, and not to be an enormous intellectual challenge at a time when children are tired, parents are harried, and teachers are not available to re-teach and reassure. We do the harder tasks—and often the more creative challenges—in school.

Testing

Classroom tests are used regularly to check progress in certain areas. They are sometimes administered one-on-one and several times a year (e.g. tests to determine reading levels), they are sometimes administered to the whole group weekly. By sixth grade, regular tests and quizzes are given in language arts, math, and history and geography. The major purpose of classroom testing is to provide teachers and students a measured evaluation of learning and performance and to help us adjust our teaching. Test information can then be used to help the student and teacher better focus their time and attention. The school continually reminds students that they are competing against their own performance, and are not in an academic race with others.

The school's math program emphasizes, among other goals, the memorization of the math facts and the children are regularly tested but individually on these facts and also taught strategies for memorization. By the end of fifth grade most children are expected to know automatically all of the math facts through 10.

It is important that our children learn standardized test-taking skills, even though these tests are limited in their ability to tell us what a child knows, and so the school has used standardized tests for a number of years. Beginning in the spring of first grade, the children take a series of achievement tests published by the Educational Record Bureau and known fondly as "ERB's." These tests, which are given over three or four mornings, are widely used in independent schools. The school always sends ERB scores to parents, but most emphatically does not want specific numbers shared with the children. We also annually spend a prescribed number of hours on preparation for standardized testing (reviewing earlier tests, discussing strategies and so forth) and the amount of time increases each year. The sixth graders do an extensive in-class six-week test prep unit as they ready themselves for the ISEE exam (the Latin school exam) in November and an "Extra Prep" course is offered after school as a supplement for those who might need it.

Accommodations—usually meaning extra time—are made for certain learning disabled children when taking the ERB's. Such accommodations can also be arranged, with adequate support documentation, for children in sixth grade who take the ISEE exam for the Boston Exam Schools.

Screen Time

The Head takes a dim view of over-use of screen time believing that the less is generally better. Recent research indicates that today's children are spending only minutes outside playing, and hours, instead, in front of screens. Alternatives to screen time are strongly encouraged, and parents are reminded that they can (and should) both limit the amount and restrict the type of games, videos or t.v. programs that children see. None is always an option. Several short but compelling articles about television's harm (read as 'excessive screen time') to children's attitudes and expectations about learning are available for interested parents.

Except in instances when a t.v. program relates directly to school curriculum, children are not permitted to use school time to discuss their television viewing.

It has come to the school's attention that some of our older children have been allowed to play video games for hours on end and/or watch, especially on vacations, a seemingly continuous parade of videos, some violent and/or sexually explicit. This should not be necessary. School children in years past found ways to entertain themselves without benefit of videos, computer games, and television.

There was an era of human history—not too long ago—when there was no such thing as television or the Internet. For many hours, children played outside. Sometimes they read books or played board games or pursued hobbies. And sometimes children got bored and that well might have been a critical childhood experience because boredom can provide an incentive to take the next step to the independent creation of activity. So, we ought not so fill our children's lives with passive entertainment that we rob them of the primal experience of boredom, and, hence, of the occasion to *make* something of time and of themselves and with their lives.

Social Networking (Facebook and Texting)

"Chatting" on the computer or via text messaging has become an increasingly popular pastime among some of our older students and it seems, at best, a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it encourages social interactions, and it provides practice with a keyboard, but mostly what we notice at school is the negative impact of these "conversations." It is true that pre-teens and teens have forever said horrible things to one another in person and on the telephone and it is equally true that the tool of email communications simply offers them yet another opportunity to do so. But that begs the question: Why should we be increasing those opportunities instead of reducing them?

There also appears to be something about the electronic medium itself that does not bring out the best conduct in children. Electronic communications are very different than face-to-face chatting (or even telephone chatting) and they seem plagued with far more problems than more “primitive” forms of conversation.

Indeed, at school, we often witnessed the now passé instant messaging phenomenon (now mostly replaced with texting) as yet another source of misery, confusion, ill-will and misunderstanding among children. The issues that are left unsettled by them from the night before always get carried forward into the school day and those issues and the chaos of feelings surrounding them impact negatively on a child’s performance in school.

In recent years, some older LP children have also been attracted to the social networking phenomenon—i.e., Facebook and MySpace. While there is no question that these services have enormous potential to facilitate positive communications in the right (and mature hands), they are also seductive, largely unregulated, probably somewhat addictive, easily subject to misrepresentations and misuse, and certainly NOT appropriate for unsupervised use by elementary aged children. Our concern is not simply theoretical; we have, in fact, learned of several instances of LP children who, without parental knowledge, engaged in stupid and dangerous behaviors, including misrepresenting their ages, entering into exchanges with people much older, being recipients of entirely inappropriate messages, and revealing personal information that rendered them completely identifiable. Parents should not regard the Internet as benign in the hands of their children.

Again, we advance essentially the same message: Our children need fewer distractions in their lives—not more. This is probably good advice for their mental and spiritual health, and it is most definitely good advice for their scholastic health. Each morning our children need to turn their fullest possible attention to the important work of school. If they are worried about what was said about them in a text message the night before, this is infinitely more difficult, and sometimes impossible, for them to do. If your child wants to communicate with a friend, it is better by far that he or she picks up the telephone and has a real conversation, rather than an exchange of flippant, hurried, and cryptic text messages.

Bedtime

School is demanding, and your child needs to be well rested. Please try to make sure that your child gets enough sleep, and let us know if he or she hasn’t, so that we can adjust the day’s expectations. Although individual children differ, typical bedtimes for our age groups seem to be: kindergarten 7:00-7:30; first and second graders 7:30-8:00; third and fourth graders 8:00-8:30; fifth and sixth grade 8:30-9:00. Children are, of course, masters at convincing parents that they won’t be harmed if they are allowed to stay up just another half hour. Don’t be fooled. We can tell right away at school if a child has not had enough rest. Sleep matters, and children who are not well rested can truly “miss” an entire day’s academic work. *It’s not worth it!*

Another matter to be aware of: young children who stay up extra late on the weekends and change their sleep cycles often have a very hard time on Mondays. An extra half hour late to bed and an extra half hour sleep in the morning is probably inconsequential, but big swings in bedtime patterns on the weekends are truly not helpful to academic performance and should be carefully avoided.

HEALTH ISSUES

To Keep Home or Not to Keep Home

By the time children are coming to elementary school, most parents are already well practiced with this dilemma. Here are some thoughts:

Regular and punctual school attendance is critical both to your own child’s progress and to the dynamics of his or her group and to the cohesiveness of the classroom program. While sick and

contagious children should not be in school both for their own sakes and for the welfare of others, children who complain of minor ailments should probably toughen up and come. We respect real illness, and like you we are often befuddled about how to make a correct assessment when the symptoms are vaguely defined. We dislike “wimpitude” and believe that children should learn to live from time to time with some discomfort, but don’t send us a clearly ill child.

Please do not tell your child that he or she can call you later if they are not feeling well. Nine out of ten times, this is a virtual guarantee that they *will* call. It is far better to let us assess the situation and we will call you if we deem it necessary.

Make-up Work at Home

If your child is going to be absent for more than two days, and seems well enough to handle some assignments, please let us know. Keeping up with assignments at home will enable your child to reenter the classroom more easily when the illness is over.

If teachers are notified in the morning about excused absences, they will probably be able to provide a make-up packet that can be sent home with a neighborhood friend or picked up after 3:00pm at school.

Returning After an Illness

Here are some common guidelines to help you decide when to send your “sick” child back to school:

- No fever
- Return to normal sleep
- Eating and retaining a regular diet
- If on antibiotics, 24 to 48 hours after starting medicine.

In general, children should not return to school until they can participate in all school activities. If you wish your child to be excused from some school activity (such as sports or recess), he or she **must** have a note signed by you. Too often we have learned after the fact that the “My mother said I didn’t have to go to sports if I didn’t feel well” claim was an instance of wishful thinking. Without a note, or visible symptoms, the child will be sent to participate best he or she can. Assuming we are not risking a medical calamity, it seems wise to err on the side of promoting perseverance and a ‘can-do’ attitude—as opposed to enabling a child’s slow descent into hypochondria.

Medical Problems

In the event that a medical emergency occurs during school hours, every attempt will be made to notify you or someone you have listed on the Medical Form. Unless you have indicated to the contrary, the school will provide medical treatment as indicated in the unlikely event that you or your child’s doctor cannot be reached.

It is vital to the health of the child and the school that a sick child not be sent to school, despite the scheduling problems this sometimes entails. If a child seems too ill to function normally in school, you will be notified immediately and asked to come and take your child home.

Strep

Strep throat is unfortunately a common communicable disease. Please inform the school if your child develops strep, so that other parents can be alerted. When strep is present in the school, be particularly alert for signs of infection in your child.

Fifth Disease

Another unfortunately common communicable, yet mild, illness is Fifth Disease. It is nearly impossible to detect until about 7-10 days after the period of communicability, when a red rash appears, usually on the cheeks, but sometimes elsewhere on the body as well. When contracted, the child may feel feverish, achy, flu-ish, or nothing at all. By the time the rash develops, the child is no

longer contagious and usually feels normal aside from the itchiness that may accompany the rash. Although mild, Fifth Disease occurs in epidemics, and can be dangerous to pregnant women who are not already immune. Children with the rash need not be kept home from school if they feel well.

Lice

An epidemic of lice in a school can make life quite miserable for many people for a long time. It is important, therefore, for parents and children to know that this condition has nothing to do with health habits but it does have to do with vigilance and cooperation. With these, and consistent effort, the chances of an epidemic in school can be greatly reduced.

Lice cannot jump or fly; they are transmitted by contact with infested persons or their clothing, comb or brush. Since lice are sometimes picked up during the summer months through camp programs, parents should check their children carefully before the opening of school. Children who scratch their heads frequently should be checked immediately, although not everyone experiences itching.

Lice are about the size of a sesame seed, and usually light brown in color. Since they are difficult to see, diagnosis is usually made by finding nits (eggs), which are tiny yellowish-white oval specks attached to the hair shaft, which will not wash off, or blow away. Nits are usually found at the nape of the neck, behind the ears, and on the crown.

Several frustratingly long episodes of nit infestation—a decade or more ago—convinced us that we must have a **no nit policy**. Under such a policy, even a child who has been treated, who still has nits in his or her hair, will be subject to being sent home until all nits are removed.

If during the course of this school year you discover that your child has nits or lice, you are obliged to inform the school *immediately* and let us know what treatment you are using. Children diagnosed with head lice must be treated promptly, and no child should come to school without treatment. On our part, we will let you know of any cases that arise here and, should a child be found to have lice or nits, he or she will be isolated and sent home as a protective measure.

There are a variety of louse remedies and it is important that all infested family members be treated simultaneously, and that all nits be removed with a lice comb. Since louse products (despite their claims) may not kill all the nits; and whatever remedy you select, it is critical that all the nits be removed. Any remaining nits will hatch within 7-10 days, so daily checks are advisable for at least 10 days following treatment; should new nits appear, re-treatment may be necessary. All washables that have been in contact with the infested person over the previous three days should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Items that cannot be washed, such as mattresses and stuffed animals, should be carefully vacuumed and /or isolated for 10 days in plastic bags. If you have limited time, the single most important thing you should do is comb out the nits from your child's hair, and keep a close watch for 7-10 days.

Because lice are so common and can easily become an intractable, frustrating and costly preoccupation if an epidemic gets established, we, as a community, have made a major time commitment to the prevention of an outbreak. The commitment involves regular checks both at home and in school, so it is a mutually shared burden. In the first week of every month from September to March, we do head checks here at school and at the middle of every month, we ask parents to do head checks at home. A single head check takes only a few minutes and most parents have just one to do—not a classroom full of heads. Whether this effort is the reason or not, we have had no major epidemics of lice ever since we became this vigilant. Everyone's cooperation is key.

Medications

Department of Public Health Regulations prohibit the Learning Project Staff from administering most medications. Neither prescription medications nor any over-the-counter medications such as Tylenol may be supplied by parents for staff administration. This can be extremely trying for parents if their child has been prescribed an antibiotic that has to be taken several times a day, and we wish it

were not necessary. We are working with our consulting school nurse to address this problem to the extent possible, but there will not be a quick solution. Independent schools are not required to have school nurses, and small schools like The Learning Project typically do not have a nurse present during the school day, the model the Department of Public Health anticipates in its medication regulations. Our consulting school nurse is working with them on finding a solution, but it is slow going.

Currently we allow certain emergency allergy medications (EpiPens and inhalers) to be supplied by parents and the relevant staff is trained in their administration.

Allergies

The parents and physicians of children with significant allergies provide the school with information about the child's allergies and their treatment plans. Our school nurse, Denise Tompkins, reviews all of these records, oversees the storage and distribution of any medications, and provides training on their administration.

Food allergy issues are in part addressed by our policy of having lunches and snacks provided from home, and a strict "no sharing or trading" rule for these foods. Parents of children with food allergies may provide an alternate snack for their child for those occasions when children bring in a birthday treat to share.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is necessary for several reasons. It helps children delineate good behavior from bad. It helps them learn that behavior has consequences. It helps them learn the concept of responsibility and it helps them learn to control impulses for the good of the community. Discipline is the foundation of orderliness, which in turn is the foundation of the necessary and occasional disorderliness of creative learning environments. Without discipline, both freedom and opportunity are lost.

On matters of deportment and conduct in class, and on matters of how people treat one another and the environment, we aim to run a "tight ship." Too many un-thoughtful variations or casual exceptions erode the underlying principles and are confusing to the children. If we seem, at times, strict, it is in order to build a community of caring, respectful, and kind children—and a place that can at times be zany without concern about being able to swiftly 'get back to business.'

The child's classroom teacher will handle most discipline. If an incident is serious, however, or a pattern of misbehavior is evident, the Academic Director and/or the Head will be involved, and the child's parents will be consulted.

At different age levels, there are slightly different ways of approaching discipline, but common to all is the insistence that children respect one another, their teachers and the environment of the school and that their conduct at all times—in or outside of the building—be civilized, polite, respectful, kind and obedient.

Children, like all of us, make mistakes. Mistakes, of course, vary in their import and in their utility as teachable moments, but, in general, we are not a school that routinely overlooks mistakes in the interests of just moving on. Such an approach is confusing to children and can further reinforce the less than desirable conduct.

Expectations do not have much meaning without the commensurate idea of accountability, and often with children, the matter of accountability traces back to us, the grown-ups. So, our initial response to poor behavior is always to re-clarify the expectation—to reiterate what the child should be doing, without dwelling on what they shouldn't be doing. Since some number of "mistakes" are the result of a child not knowing what to do or letting an impulse override their knowledge, step one is to review "What to do." In the course of clarifying that issue, we will often try to find something the

child did right, even while he or she was doing something wrong. This positive decision can become the first building block in the structure of changed behavior.

If the same behavior repeats itself, it is probably the case that a firmer and more pointed reminder about expected good behavior is required. And while we do, with sincerity, proclaim ourselves as a school “where it is okay to make mistakes,” we also add the proviso that “we do not expect children to make the same mistake repeatedly.” So if the initial, and possibly a second, correction are for naught, and if the problem repeats itself once more, then “trouble” is likely close at hand. Depending on the specifics of the “offense,” the child may have a “sit out,” may lose an upcoming privilege, may be sent to the office, may have his or her parents notified (this is getting “serious”—in their eyes!) or may be sent home (that *is* serious!). A “repeat offender” may be kept after school or required to attend a Saturday morning detention. Suspension or, ultimately, dismissal from the school are options that the school reserves .

As serious as this subject of ‘discipline’ is, keep in mind that we are not talking about felonies. We are talking about teaching young children who quite naturally want to do several things at once (e.g., talk *and* listen; fiddle around *and* produce), and who occasionally need a more serious reminder that there are limits on acceptable conduct in school. We are a school that does not shy from setting those limits, and standing by them firmly.

Parents are, in general, not notified about every small transgression, but will be informed about large ones and anytime there seems to be an increase in frequency. Many parents who receive a phone call about a behavioral matter are alarmed and distressed—at least the first time! Please keep a balanced perspective. All of us shape our understanding about how schools work based on our own experiences as students. In terms of its commitment to frequent and fairly intense school-home communications, The Learning Project is for most parents significantly different than the elementary schools that most of them attended. Parents probably heard much less thirty or forty years ago about the occasional poor conduct of their child than Learning Project parents hear, now. Part of that is our high bar for behavior, and part of it is our high bar for communication. Children, today, are probably no more or less naughty than you were a few decades ago.

As mentioned, we won’t tell you about every small transgression; we will deal with those ourselves. But, if and when your child has had a serious problem--keeping in mind, that ‘serious problem’ may mean being defiant, or uncooperative, or hitting, or sulking (none criminal conduct!)—we will call to tell you this. That call does not mean that your child is less well behaved than you were (perhaps yes, perhaps no and either way that’s irrelevant); it does mean your child has the misfortune of attending a school that sets a high standard for conduct and for school-to-parent communication.

Parents should know that, in general, we feel that the consequences we impose at school for poor behavior are sufficient and need not be added to at home. We will advise parents when we feel otherwise.

While fitting the consequence to the offense is a good idea, it is not always so easy to achieve. In general we try to follow the idea of imposing ‘logical consequences,’ or, at the very least, we attempt to make a connection in the child’s mind between the rewards of good behavior and the undesirable consequences of poor conduct. So, for example, a child who forgets homework, may be required to stay in at recess to complete their assignments—a logical consequence. The fact that recess is for many children their favorite ‘subject’ helps to make that consequence more memorable—which is a good thing since the objective of the consequence is to recalibrate the child’s thinking around subsequent choices.

Some people object to keeping children in for a recess because children, indeed, need exercise. Few people are more alert to that fact than teachers. To address that legitimate concern, we will offer a child who is in for recess the option of walking up and down the stairs a few times for exercise. I have yet to have a child decline that offer. They seem, in fact, to enjoy it, though they acknowledge that it is not as fun as recess.

We do not have a catalogue of consequences for every conceivable instance of misconduct, but here, if you're interested, are some examples of some of the logical consequences that we occasionally use: A child who disturbs a class may be required to leave and asked to apologize to the class before reentering; a child who violates the computer policy will lose computer privileges for a period of time; a child who marks in a book, will be asked to erase the marks in that book, and, perhaps, be asked to help to straighten up the book shelves afterschool; a child who behaves poorly on the stairs may be asked to practice walking up and down the stairs several times correctly; a child who insists on flopping on his or her desk may be given a chair without a desk in front to sit in for a while; a child who purposely breaks a pencil may be expected to bring a replacement pencil in the next day—and so forth. While the impact of such logical consequences in terms of altered behavior will vary between children—some may need the lesson several times—invariably, the change comes about as the child begins to do the cost-benefit calculus that in early years is typical of their stage of moral development. Eventually, of course, we expect them to be motivated by a commitment to doing what is right because they understand the value of upholding right over wrong—and most achieve that higher stage of moral thinking before they leave our care.

Regarding the consequence of being sent out of class—the first one mentioned above—this is serious, and in most instances (not all) the parents will be notified. Usually this action occurs after a number of corrective steps have already been tried in the classroom. Our practice is not to give warnings, but to provide 'What to do' guidance, and gradually to elevate the tone of our concern over the child's choices. 'I need you to . . . ' statements are used with increasing firmness. If these steps fail to produce the desired result, and especially if the child's conduct begins to disrupt the tranquility of the classroom and the learning of others, then removal is the only recourse. If this is more than just a 'bad day' and a 'one off,' parents can expect to be alerted, and may be called in any case.

In extreme cases of persistent and/or serious disciplinary problems, when lesser consequences have not been adequately effective and other efforts to cause change have been unsuccessful, or, in an instance when a particular offense is considered extremely serious (e.g., a breach of trust), then that child may, at the discretion of the Head, be dismissed or suspended. Most often, suspensions are 'in school' and occasionally they have been extended to include essay writing on weekends. I am not sure that many elementary school Heads will suspend children for very serious breaches of trust; this one has on several occasions with errant sixth graders. I have done so because I am acutely mindful that our oldest students are about to enter middle school, and I would rather that they learn the importance of integrity and obedience from us—in a strict but kind and forgiving setting—before they come up against the social and emotional turbulence of adolescence.

While there is a time and place for punitive consequences—and we are ready and willing to call the issue and impose them—we initially follow a variety of techniques aimed at changing conduct without that recourse. We're very clear with children about our expectations; if they are failing them, we tell them what they need to do in precise, abbreviated language; we help upset children calm down and delay talking until they have; we use kindness and sometimes humor to break tension; we mix warmth with firmness; we focus on the positive and use that as a launching pad toward change; we offer choices and encouragement; we ignore provocations; we provide avenues for the child to repair hurt or apologize; we offer reminders of their strengths and inherent goodness, and we talk about what happened and how it could be differently handled 'the next time' (and there's always a 'next time.')

It seems that a similar approach to discipline is taken in the homes of many LP families and so what happens in school—though a tad stricter because this is school not home—is already familiar to most of our LP children.

If you have a question or a concern about a judgment involving discipline, we hope that you will seek to clarify the situation with the adults involved. For the benefit of the child, it is best if we can feel that we trust one another; otherwise the message to the child can become quite muddled. And 'trust' doesn't necessarily imply 'agreement' on an issue, but rather confidence in each other's good intentions.

The truth, of course, is that teachers don't always see the whole picture, even while we move carefully and cautiously toward conclusions and strive to find the truth of a matter and to be fair. When your child represents otherwise (and it is perfectly normal for children to find more fault in others than responsibility in themselves), we hope that you will give the adult in the situation the benefit of the doubt—and then inquire as needed. Certainly, if your doubts are serious, call immediately for clarification. We do not mind listening and explaining and listening again, and if, perchance, we've made an error, we would much rather remedy the mistake than let it stand.

Anti-Bullying Policy

The school's 'Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan' is available on the website.

Bullying runs against the grain of all that we stand for—our insistence, as stated elsewhere in the section on Discipline, "that children respect one another, their teachers and the environment of the school," together with our expectation that "their conduct at all times—in or outside of the building—be civilized, polite, respectful, kind and obedient." Bullying violates every one of those expectations and will be addressed as a serious disciplinary matter in the manner described in the Discipline section of this Handbook.

The characteristics of bullying are persistence, intentionality, hurtfulness (emotional or physical) and often an imbalance of power. While easy to define in this way, it is important to understand what constitutes bullying and what doesn't—otherwise we may respond, or not respond, inappropriately. It is not a simple matter to discern when teasing or persistent annoying conduct or just plain unpleasantness (all behaviors that adults must address with children) cross a line and begin to acquire the hallmarks of bullying. We are describing, essentially, a spectrum of disrespectful and hurtful behaviors, and the term bully, which is at the farther end of that spectrum, does not describe every behavior on the spectrum. The term 'bully' needs, therefore, to be used with precision and care and not tossed lightly about.

Nonetheless, most children have an image of a 'bully' and they are easily intimidated by the *idea* of bullies, and the fear of being victimized by a bully can silence them (and even parents!) well before a problem with another child even resembles actual bullying. This dynamic—and what we must do about it—is described under item #7 in the section entitled "Keeping a Healthy Perspective." It is an important point in itself, and relates directly to the prevention of a culture in which bullies can operate. Please read that comment carefully. You also can find the school's anti-bullying policy on our webpage. As mandated by state law in 2014 we recognize that certain students may be more vulnerable to becoming a target of bullying or harassment based on actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, including race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, socioeconomic status, homelessness, academic status, gender identity or expression, physical appearance, pregnant or parenting status, sexual orientation, mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.

COMMUNICATION

Home-School Communication

The development of a close and frank communication between parents and teachers is a vital part of your child's education. Even in the midst of a busy school year, time can always be scheduled to share observations and concerns, and you are encouraged to make an appointment for a conference with your child's teacher whenever you feel it is necessary. It is also important that you let us know about anything that might be upsetting your child—from a change in routine or domestic arrangements to a fight with a sibling at breakfast. The more we know the more helpful and supportive we can be. In turn, the school will keep you informed of changes in behavior, attitude or performance observed in school.

In general, parents should first contact the child's teacher about a concern in the child's classroom. Parents are welcome, however, to contact the Head of the School or the Director of Academics at any time, and are encouraged to do so sooner rather than later if a concern persists.

Keeping A Healthy Perspective

Parents should keep in mind the following points when evaluating a situation that is reported to them by their child:

1. A good school-home working relationship requires a large amount of trust between teachers and parents and a mutual willingness to be frank. Our underlying common interest is your child, and nothing should stand in the way of our working together to advance your child's best interests.

2. While children do not entirely "make up stories," they often have only a portion of the whole story. This is especially the case when the situation involves a conflict between children and when each, quite naturally, wishes to find the other at fault. Of course, hardly ever is one child totally "innocent" and the other child completely "guilty." This may happen—or approximately happen—but rarely.

We must, then, try to sort through typically complicated situations, which is a task that often requires huge amounts of time even for seemingly minor incidents. But the process of resolving conflict—and of teaching children to do it better for themselves the next time—is crucial, and because we care about behavior and character, and believe that children must be taught conflict resolution skills, Learning Project teachers spend considerable amounts of time doing exactly this type of "sorting through."

There are multiple steps to this process: information gathering; a determination of facts as well as of perceptions; the identification of the various points where alternative choices might have been made; and, as appropriate, the acknowledgement of different levels of responsibility. In the end, the process needs to feel fair to the children, and, if it works as intended, it will also inform the children about how they might more successfully manage conflict in the future. Depending on the varied circumstances and levels of seriousness as well as levels of culpability, there can be a variety of additional consequences, including formal apologies, specific plans to support changed behavior, and various non-fatal but designed-to-be "unpleasant" consequences, a.k.a. punishments.

Teachers in school have the advantage of being able fairly easily to gather information and to hear the multiple sides of any story. In contrast, a parent at home does not enjoy that advantage and is therefore reliant on one child's version of events. This is the main reason you must bring conflict situations to our attention—so that we might attempt to get a more complete picture, and move the issue toward resolution. It is never a good strategy to let ongoing problems fester; they inevitably get much worse.

3. Children in your child's class will have different levels of self-control and self-awareness—they are, after all, young children and they are still learning about these things. Our job is to teach them civility and standards, and to hold them accountable, and we do so. Let us all remember, however, that all of the children in this school are in an important way "our" children, and it is incumbent on all of us to never allow our child (or anyone) to demonize other people even when they might have occasion to feel legitimately put upon. Please do your best to turn annoyance in the direction of creative problem solving—such an approach is superior on many counts.

4. Good communication requires that all parties be generous of spirit, open to other viewpoints, and honest. We need to overcome hesitations or embarrassments and say to each other what needs to be said. For example, we want to know if your child thinks we have been terribly unfair, or insensitive, or negligent in some fashion, or if your child is having a problem with a peer, or with a classroom situation. Those feelings or those issues *are* your child's experience and that reality is what we must work with. We well know that we sometimes do make mistakes, or things happen that we don't see, and we would always want the benefit of a "second chance" to make things right. It is, therefore, often

essential that we hear about concerns or problems from the children, themselves—or from the parents. And sometimes those concerns about which we must hear are only mentioned at home.

We also know that those adjectives—“unfair,” “insensitive,” or “negligent”—do not describe either our intentions or our *modus operandi*. We know, too, that when something “bad” happens that we missed in a classroom, it isn’t because of lack of care, attention or professionalism. Still, your child’s reality is your child’s reality and, as the adults, it is our job to deal with that reality—with an adult perspective. If your child can’t or won’t tell us what is troubling them, then you must.

Just as you must allow us to know about concerning stories you hear at home, we also will let you know about any concerning stories we hear at school. We always “take with a grain of salt” much that we hear from children about their lives outside of school. We understand that their perspectives, and their reporting skills are skewed not by a lack of integrity but by a lack of perspective, maturity, and subtlety with language. Children see and explain things in child-like terms (e.g., “My mom is going to yell at me”), not as they will as adults. However, what children say to adults (at home or in school) needs to be heard and evaluated, and if we hear something at school that is concerning to us, we will share it with you.

5. In a similar vein, we will share with you *any* observations we have that we think might be useful for you to hear. Sometimes this feels a bit risky, but we will rely on the trust that good communication always builds.

From the school’s perspective, the element of risk derives from the fact that we do not always have the “whole story” but, instead, are working with a mix of observations, hunches, and instincts, combined with years of experience working with children the age or near the age of your child. Our willingness, on occasion, to take some risks on behalf of children and to share forthrightly our thoughts with parents does not mean that we believe that our perspective is the only one available or more right than anyone else’s. We will, however, tell you what we see, what we think, and what we feel, trusting you will understand our intent, and make use of the information as you deem correct.

6. In general, it is usually better to communicate a concern sooner rather than later; then, two sets of eyes—at home and school—can begin to be more watchful. There will be some concerns you will hear that are fairly incidental and not worthy of much attention, but anything serious must be brought to the school’s attention immediately.

There are different ways to do this: The most likely first step is to encourage your child to speak with the teacher the next day. If this works, you will accomplish two things: you will have advanced a resolution to the problem and you will have reinforced your child’s confidence in being an advocate for themselves. Depending on the problem and/or your child’s age, however, your child may want you present as support for that conversation. That is fine, but as much as possible encourage your child to “do the talking.”

If your child either won’t or cannot address the concern alone or together with you with the teacher, then you must do it on your child’s behalf. Sometimes bringing things forward is difficult as when, for example, it involves seeming to be critical of another child, or another parent, or perhaps even the teacher. Of course, there are times when we all let minor things pass, and that is probably fine, but serious matters must not be treated in that fashion. They must be brought forward, and handled appropriately.

Time and again those of us who work as educators with children and families have seen small manageable issues escalate into very complicated affairs because they were not well addressed in the early stages. Whatever perceived awkwardness there may be, whatever worries you or your child may have about “fall-out,” will pale in comparison to the problems that will occur if you allow a serious and ongoing issue to go unspoken and untreated.

7. The chief reason serious issues are often not properly addressed is this: A child tells the parent about something that happened in school and says, “But you cannot tell the teacher because then I’ll get into trouble”—meaning trouble either with the teacher or with a peer. This is one way “bullies” are born—no one wishes to stand up to them, so they get away with things they should not get away with. Parents, also, may feel that they run the risk of closing channels of communication if they do not honor the child’s wishes that nothing be said. Thus, fear closes the door.

There are two serious problems with these reactions: First, the looming image of the “bully” waiting to wreck retribution on your child is simply inconsistent with reality at this school. It doesn’t happen. Yes, of course, children have said mean and inappropriate things to one another, but in general this school is an overwhelmingly safe setting for children. (Indeed, to date I have only encountered one bully in 41 years in this community, and that bully was a parent.)

Second, the fear of breaking confidence with young children is over-exaggerated. Certainly, confidence and trust are not to be treated lightly. However, there is a difference between a confidence among equals, e.g. two adults, and the confidence that children should have in us which is based on our being prepared to take care of them.

Children should not control the conversation that involves their physical, social or psychological safety. They should not set the rules about what can be said and to whom. Parents should feel comfortable making superseding judgments in their child’s own best interests, and should not make promises of “silence.” And we all should have the confidence that the adult-child (parent/child or teacher/child) bonds are not so fragile that they will evaporate if and when we intervene on a young child’s behalf.

While it is difficult to step around a child’s strong desire that we “say nothing,” we must consider the alternative outcome. The result of complying with the child’s request to participate in the “conspiracy of silence” is two-fold: the child learns to control the dialogue with their parent (which is not a good lesson) and the child’s presenting problem is never addressed. These outcomes are probably far worse than any other.

In sum, please avoid the trap of the “don’t tell culture.” Trust your own best judgment, trust the strength of your relationship with your child, and trust the vast experience and expertise of the professionals at this school to handle difficult and sensitive situations skillfully. This is the correct course of action.

Communication with Faculty from 7:30-3:15

While close communication between home and school is essential to our mission, we ask that parents remain mindful that during the school day the top priority of teachers must be the children directly in front of them. This means that lengthy “spur of the moment” conversations between 7:30 and 3:15 are neither practical nor fair to the children in your child’s class and those important exchanges should be planned or scheduled accordingly.

The practice of a parent waylaying a teacher’s attention first thing in the morning seems particularly unfortunate, as this is precisely the time when we want our teachers to be greeting the children and helping them get started with another school day. If you feel it is important to inform your child’s teacher about your child’s sleepless night or about the battle you had that morning over the pickled beets you put in their lunchbox—in other words, about something that may impact on your child’s day in school—do so, but, out of respect to the other children and their morning, make your comments short and sweet—20 seconds would be a good target.

Teachers have breaks during the day when they are not directly in charge of a group, and they can return phone calls, emails, or personal requests for contact at that time. So, make the request for contact directly, or leave a message at the front desk or in our voice mail, and we will try to reach you as soon as possible.

Communication with Faculty at Home

As a general rule, faculty should not be called at home unless you have been asked to do so or unless it is an emergency that cannot wait until the next day.

Children can find out information about homework from their classmates and should not call faculty about homework at school or at home.

Please inform us if you prefer not to be called at home in the evening.

Phone Calls from Children to Parents

During the school day, children are not permitted to call home in general and may do so only with permission of their Head Teacher. Please do not tell your child to “call home” to get afternoon instructions. Those should be resolved in the morning.

Phone Calls from Parents to Children

Part of the socialization agenda for a school is to help children learn to function successfully away from their parents and, in general, parents should not expect to talk to their child during the school day. It can also be quite disruptive. We will take and convey a message to your child, but don't expect to talk directly to him or her during the school day other than in the case of a dire emergency of such nature that would receive clearance from the Head of School. (Changes in after school plans do not constitute a dire emergency. We will convey that information.)

Questionably Necessary Phone Calls to School

The importance that we attach to ease of communication is, in part, underscored by the fact that we are one of the few schools anywhere that has a person, not a voice mail system, answering the telephone between 7:30 and 5:30—and typically on either side of those ‘business hours.’

Undoubtedly, the telephone was a history changing invention and it is a huge convenience, but it can also be a source of questionably necessary communication. Please keep in mind that, almost categorically, phone calls are interruptions and roughly equivalent to showing up at someone's office unannounced and hoping to receive immediate attention, even though that person is in the midst of a conversation or concentrating hard on a project—a fact, of course, unknown to you, the caller.

A major category of questionably necessary phone calls that have come into our front office in recent years has concerned after school plans. Sometimes between six and ten calls a day have involved messages that could have been easily given to the child in the morning. Kindly spare us these interruptions by making plans in the morning and making sure your child knows what to do in the afternoon.

If Plan A is contingent on something (rainy weather canceling a Little League game in the spring), please make sure your child knows the Plan B. (FYI: In the spring, when many of our children are involved in Hill House sports, children can get the cancellation or postponement information from our front desk.)

While good communication should not take the place of good planning, we are also well aware that there will be occasional changes in the best laid plans, and in those rare circumstances, we will be happy, of course, to convey a message to your child.

Cell Phones: A Matter of Courtesy and Good Parenting

While cell phones offer immense convenience, they also present us all with significant new challenges around their proper use. It is their portability that makes them new and different and more prone than their old fashioned antecedents, the land lines, to interrupt and control our lives in new and troublesome ways. Eventually, we will get these matters sorted out and we will learn how to use this new technology properly— meaning in ways that are consistent with what we know about courtesy and civility. But for the time being, as a society and culture, we have not yet learned to manage cell phones particularly well.

Indeed, we sometimes permit cell phones to push us into rudeness and even into poor parenting choices. Here is an example. All of us have seen parents pick up children while talking on cell phones; probably we have done that ourselves. At dismissal time, we are often in a rush because of double parking or afternoon activities or the late hour, and, furthermore, one can't control when the phone might ring; so what's so wrong with 'multi-tasking?' When it is an occasional occurrence, nothing is wrong with it; when it is habitual, at least two things are wrong with it.

First, it is discourteous to fail to greet a child properly. Second, it is quite poor modeling. What children see us doing is what they themselves learn to do. What does this behavior then tell the child about how to greet people? It says that greetings are really not so important. What does it convey about our regard for their child—feelings or their child—thoughts—both of which are often just waiting, bottled up, for a parent to arrive? Again, it says that those things don't really matter. And what does it say to them—at a particularly important re-connecting moment in the day—about their relative importance in our lives? Implicitly it conveys that a phone conversation with an unseen person is of greater value than a conversation with them.

Children, of course, can understand the occasional interruption to our full attention, but when those interruptions are a routine experience, the child receives messages we truly may not intend to send.

While on the topic of cell phone usage, we ask that parents not approach the front desk at school to conduct any sort of business while still talking on a cell phone. Please complete your cell phone conversation, and then the person at the front desk will be most happy to help you.

Email

Email can be enormously useful for home-school/school-home communication, but we are mindful that it is important that we all have the same understanding of what we can and cannot accomplish with it as well.

All of us need to be aware that though we can advance our requests to one another more quickly than before, this does not necessarily mean that replies will be equally as quick. The phone message that took a few hours or a day to return may become an email that takes the same reply time. Our expectations about email differ little from those for phone communication. Email is useful for alerting each other to events or issues as they arise, for quick thoughts and certainly for making meeting arrangements. It should not, however, be seen as a substitute for face-to-face conversations when serious matters need to be discussed, and we will continue to encourage the setting up of appointments when the situation warrants.

Conferences and Reports

Evaluations of your child's attitudes, effort, performance and progress will be sent home in December, April and June. The form that we have used for many years is going to be changed in order to make it substantially less time consuming for teachers to prepare—and for parents to read. The goal will be to achieve a similar thoroughness of communication with parents but to do so in a more concise format—one that will draw less teacher time away from their primary work in the classroom, and still convey to parents a good sense of their child's progress.

Head teachers work hard preparing reports and we encourage parents to read the reports carefully and to let us know what they think. Evaluation should not be a one-sided process; we want to work closely with parents on their child's education and so we value hearing your comments, your insights, your concerns and your recommendations.

Reports are not for your child's eyes nor are they to be shared verbatim with your child. Certainly going over the report, even quoting a few positive lines, and talking through any concerns is important to do, but letting your child read the report (or hear it read) is unacceptable.

There are two chief reasons why we have this policy: First, we believe that children do not have adult understandings (however “adult” they at times might seem) and the report is intended as a communication from one adult to another; second, we want to write truthfully, with candor and clarity, and we may want to say things to you that we would express differently to a child. If reports are written for children’s eyes—as well as for the parents’—two things happen: candor plummets and teachers spend unnecessary time thinking about how words will be understood by two people of widely varying life experience.

Parent Conferences will be scheduled in September/October and again in January/February. The second set of conferences will include your child—above grade one.

Parents should feel entirely welcome to request a conference at *any time*. Specific days when conferences, unless urgent, should *not* be scheduled include: the preparation days before school, the days before school shows, major events or performances, the days before vacations, and the clean-up days at the end of the year. Please plan ahead and avoid these periods for the convenience of the faculty.

Sign-up times will be announced well in advance so that parents can arrange time off from work if necessary. Please try to keep to your scheduled conference appointment; it is a nuisance if you don’t. Conferences are scheduled to last 30 minutes. Please be mindful of this; don’t take advantage of the willingness of teachers always to do more. Also, please don’t save major concerns or questions until the very last minute. Bring up those matters early in the conversation.

Parents who are separated are expected to attend conferences together. It obviously is more time efficient, and it is helpful—ultimately to the teacher and the child—for the parents to hear the same information, and for all to hear each other’s perspectives. We understand that there are circumstances when this is not easy, or feasible, but we also believe that two parents involved in the life of a child should in due time be able to take this important step. Why not now?

Parent Bulletins and Notices

For the sake of speed, convenience and economy, printed school notices are regularly sent home with the children on Thursday. The weekly Bulletin is sent by email and is now ‘cell phone’ friendly. Parents can request a paper copy if they want it. This newsletter will keep you up-to-date on what’s going on in your child’s school life, and on our news as a community. Please make every effort to read the Bulletin on Thursday night; often there is news, attachments or forms that require your immediate attention.

Occasionally a teacher will send home a note asking for a reply or signature. This system allows us to confirm that the note was received. This is always the case with a disciplinary report—known fondly by the children as a ‘yellow card.’ It is not a catastrophe to receive one of these at home; it is an occasion for a talk. A yellow card is used only in a situation judged by a teacher as ‘beyond the pale’ so it should trigger a home conversation—and a signature. The signed sheet needs to be returned to the front office the following school day.

All notices that are sent home via “Backpack Mail” in a sealed envelope should be treated as confidential communications to parents and, as with Narrative Reports, should not be shared verbatim (if at all) with children. We once had a family who willfully disregarded the school’s request for confidentiality believing their child was mature enough to hear confidential information and discrete enough not to talk about it in school. They were, of course, wrong on both counts, and the negative consequences on the classroom of their bad judgment were exactly as anticipated.

Whether the request for confidentiality involves a concern or a benign secret (e.g., a surprise for someone in the community), it is a simple matter of respect for the community that such requests be honored by all.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising at The LP

We are proud of the financial support provided by families and friends through the school's fundraising efforts. Fundraised money accounts for 15% of the school's annual income. Each year we rely on continued and increased giving to sustain our work, and, while we rely on the dollars raised, most important is the enthusiastic *participation* by our current families, which, in turn, encourages others to contribute to the school. The most important (measurable) sign of participation levels is the Annual Fund and every adult in the community—Board Member, Parent or Faculty—is strongly encouraged to help with this highly visible effort at whatever level they select. In recent years, we have achieved 100% or near 100% participation levels in each of the above categories—a remarkable figure, one that is not lost on “outside” donors to the school, and one that is uplifting to everyone here.

While the realities of operating an independent school require that we raise money for the benefit of all, we also recognize that not all have the same financial resources at hand. We provide a variety of fundraising opportunities so that every family can be a part of strengthening the school we have now, and the school we leave behind for future generations of children and parents.

Some of the LP's opportunities for giving are:

The Annual Fund, which raised over \$300,000 in 2015-2016 (AMAZING!!), is supported by gifts from alumni, parents, parents of alumni, trustees, faculty, and friends. The Annual Fund helps cover expenses for classroom supplies, the building, teachers' salaries, faculty development and tuition assistance (scholarships). New donors and increased gifts help to bridge the gap of yearly increases in expenses to the school. Our goal is to have 100% participation by our parents as a demonstration of their belief in the school. While we appreciate donations of goods and services (gifts-in-kind), we cannot count those gifts toward our Annual Fund, and therefore ask all parents to make a monetary contribution to the fund in addition to other generous donations. The Annual Fund begins in November, and runs until June 30 each year.

At the conclusion of each year's Annual Fund, The Learning Project generates an Annual Report and publishes it online for the general public. Within this document, The Learning Project reports for each constituent the sum total of all monetary gifts made by them to The Learning Project. This includes donations to the Annual Fund, donations to endowment or specific funds, donor-directed matching gifts by corporations, Auction (or other event) sponsorships, monetary donations made during the Auction's paddle raise, as well as approved, receipted purchases made on the school's behalf. All gifts to the school as described above will be included in the Annual Report and be reflected in the categorization of donors into giving levels.

When it comes to items *purchased* at the Auction, The Learning Project adheres to the IRS principle governing tax deductibility when 'goods and services' are exchanged. The IRS does not allow inclusion of the value of the good or service in the calculation of deductibility. The Learning Project, accordingly, will credit toward a person's giving any donations *above and beyond* the stated value of an Auction item, where that stated value can be fairly established by the donor. That is, if a 'dinner for two' is valued at \$200, and a parent pays \$300 for the item, The Learning Project will credit the recipient parent with \$100 toward their donations this year.

Gifts-in-kind will be reported in a separate section of the Annual Report. Although these gifts are greatly appreciated by the school, gifts-in-kind cannot be assigned a specific value and counted within the annual levels of giving.

The Development Office will keep track of all monetary donations and agreed upon gifts-in-kind. If you incur any approved expenses on behalf of The Learning Project and would like to have those count as part of your reported annual giving as well, please submit the receipts (or copies) to the Development Office before the close of the school year. The school will include these in the total of

your annual giving, and may on request, with larger amounts, and at its discretion, provide a letter acknowledging the expense for tax-exempt purposes.

Business Incentives: we collect Boxtops for Education, and make several hundred dollars a year, and we also benefit from the educational programs at Target, Stop & Shop A+ Rewards and Amazon Smile. Contact the front office for more information.

Capital Giving includes gifts made to the school to support building improvements, teacher development, scholarship programs, and the vitally important general endowment. While the school is not in an active capital campaign in this current year, plans are underway to consider capital needs for the future of the school.

The Community Scholarship Program was established in 2004 when the school received its first full restricted scholarship gift, a seven-year commitment to fund a student who would otherwise not be able to attend. Our second restricted scholarship gift arrived in 2005, providing access for six years to yet another student, and our third started in 2006. Please contact the school if you would like to learn more about this giving opportunity. It can be done individually or in concert with others.

A Bequest Program, called *Long Time Friends*, was established in 2005. Borrowing its title from our cherished graduation song, the program provides opportunity for our friends and families to direct their sustainable giving to the school through their wills. Please contact the school for more information or to discuss your interest in becoming a Long Time Friend.

Parent Fundraising opportunities occur throughout the year. Starting with The Book Fair in the fall through the Auction in the spring, parents organize and plan several fundraising events intended to bring the community together for shared fun while meeting a common goal. Proceeds from our parent-organized fundraisers support the school's financial aid program. Parent fundraising events depend on our parent volunteers, and every parent is asked to sign up to work on at least one fundraising event each year. The "fun" in fundraising is further achieved by a high level of attendance at these events, and parents are urged to make every effort to attend all of the school's fundraising events.

The LP Book Fair is held in October, and brings the community together for a day of fun and fundraising. The Fair also serves as a "homecoming" of sorts, with many of our younger alumni gathering at the school that day. The success of our Book Fair depends on many volunteers, both in preparing for and in staffing the day-long event.

The Annual Auction is held in the spring and, like our Book Fair, requires many volunteers. The planning process takes several months as parents solicit donations and plan the event. The auction event takes place at a venue outside of school and parents are strongly encouraged to attend, whether they choose to bid or not. It is a fun evening that includes other supporters of the school: former parents and teachers, trustees, alumni, and friends.

A special note about our Annual Auction: This is a wonderful and fun evening and raises quite a lot of money for our school. There is something about our auction, however, that parents should understand in advance because it sets us a bit apart from many of our school peers.

Throughout the independent school world it is not uncommon for faculty members to contribute to the school's Annual Auction by offering services that are appealing to children. It is generous of teachers to make these services available, and these auction items are often significant revenue sources for the school. Wanting to be supportive of the LP Auction, our own faculty, for several years, did the same. Eventually, however, the faculty decided to discontinue this practice because it did not seem fair to the school's children—some got special time with teachers, but most did not, and the determination, moreover, was based on a family's ability to bid a large sum. In place of providing service at the time of the Auction and in response to their desire to do something of a fund-raising event for the school,

our faculty (back in the 90's) instead decided to offer their services to everyone through the Read-a-Thon and to help raise money for the school that way, rather than putting their services up for bid in the Auction, as they had done for many years.

It is for similar reasons that at our auction we do not sell work by the school's children. While these items at school auctions often bring in enormous sums of money for a good cause, it is our sense that this practice, also, is inconsistent with the school's values and inclusive style.

The Auction has many attractive items available that avoid the above pitfalls, and parents are encouraged to bid on those items joyfully...and with reckless abandon.

Children's Fundraisers occur a few times during the year. At Halloween, children spend a few hours raising money for UNICEF. And, later in the year, children seek pledges to raise money for trees and for books through the school's Read-a-Thon. (In two recent years, the children decided to allocate their Read-a-Thon money in virtually its entirety for disaster relief—the tsunami in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and The One Fund in 2013.)

Teaching our children about philanthropy is aligned with the school's overall philosophy and values. They are the caretakers of the future and it is important that they participate, and observe, the importance of giving. In 2005 the sixth graders inaugurated a new tradition, the Sixth Grade Philanthropic Foundation, and each year the class decides how and to whom to allocate funds. The Class of 2011 gave all of the money—\$500—to the "It Gets Better Campaign" in support of gay youth. The *Book on Giving* in the sixth grade records, year by year, the process and the decisions.

OTHER MATTERS

Computer Protocols

During the 1999-2000 school year, the faculty worked on developing a set of computer use protocols to ensure that the computers and, in particular, the opportunities of Internet communication, are governed by the same ethical standards that should guide all communications between human beings. Parent and Student input was sought in the development of these protocols and the children in grades 4-6 are asked annually to sign a statement acknowledging that they fully understand the protocols, that they agree to abide by them, and that they are aware of the implications of a failure to do so.

Consultants

From time to time the school employs consultants on an as-needed basis to make recommendations to the staff about ways of better meeting the behavioral or academic needs of a particular child, or to advise us on matters of school curriculum and program. The school also stands ready to make outside referrals to specialists when it is felt that such referrals are in the best interest of the child.

Dress Code

School clothes should reflect the serious purpose of school and contribute to your child's sense that he or she is entering a special place where appearances and decorum matter more than at home. The children should wear clothing appropriate for school and which is neat, clean and in good repair—not torn at the knees or elbows or ragged at the seams (no "cut-offs") and of appropriate size. Clothing should not interfere with learning, and in the event that a child's clothing is doing so, he or she will be asked to remove or cover the offending article.

Our expectation is that clothing should not be fancy or expensive, nor should it reflect over attention to the latest designer fads, in the face of which parents need to stand firm. Hand-me-downs are terrific and clothing that has been mended and repaired can tell a good story about frugality and resourcefulness. We ask, however, that all school clothing be a cut above your child's weekend knock-about-the-house attire.

We think that children should have “school clothes” that distinguish the act of coming to school as something different than going to a friend’s house on Saturday morning—just as most adults have their “going to work clothes” which are different than what they might elect to wear around the house on a weekend. The differences might, in fact, be subtle, but the superficial differences help our children shift expectations for themselves as they change from the home environment to *their* place of work, this school.

Clothes that *are* permitted include skirts, dresses, T-shirts, polo shirts, jeans, khakis and other slacks and shorts. Some items that *are not* permitted include: anything that does not fit reasonably well—for example, oversized shirts that could not be easily tucked-in (not that we require they be worn tucked in); shirts with straps that don’t stay easily on the shoulder (at least two fingers wide is a good rule); military garb including anything in camouflage print; and overly short skirts or shorts. A degree of modesty is appropriate for school. Likewise, bare midriffs or clothing so skimpy it reveals underwear is also inappropriate.

Tonally, we are trying to draw a distinction between ‘inside attire’ and ‘outside attire’—similar to ‘inside voices’ and ‘outside voices.’ Children are not permitted to wear “outerwear” in class—unless the building is unusually chilly in the morning and the teacher grants permission. If they wear an extra-heavy sweatshirt, heavy jacket, or heavy sweater, it must be hung in the closet, otherwise children can become overheated and listless. Most hooded sweatshirts (LP type) may be worn inside, as long as the hood is not a distraction, and as long as the sweatshirt is not being also used for a winter coat substitute. Occasionally, girls have elected to wear a small headscarf and that is permitted, but more generally, children are not permitted to wear hats or other full head coverings (except to conform with religious practice) inside the school. Indeed, LP children are expected to remove their hats immediately upon entering the building. Clothing logos, pins or other adornments that are considered by us as vulgar, violent, inappropriate for this age, or containing “put downs” are not permitted, constitutional arguments notwithstanding. And children may be asked to leave at home, as children are with their toys, those items that are beyond the necessities of clothing which are sometimes worn by young people as a fashion statement, e.g., chains.

Parents of our older students are asked to be particularly careful about the attire of their child as they leave for school. Dressing-up—emulating rock stars, for instance—is an activity more suitable for the weekend than the school day. This will, no doubt, be disappointing for some pre-adolescents who will want to have the approval of peers for their well-chosen outfit, but costumes are worn only on Halloween.

If you believe that some attire is unsuitable for school, you may have to make that assertion even if you are told you’re being “stupid and old fashioned.” If the school thinks some attire is unsuitable, we will inform the child, first, and, if necessary, the parents. In some instances, we might ask the child to wear something from the lost and found box or we might request the parent to return to school with a more suitable item of clothing.

Although the Headmaster’s decision about clothing will be final, everyone’s vigilance around maintaining standards is much appreciated. Kindly don’t allow your child to test the limits.

Hair

As a general rule, hair should be kept clean, combed, and out of the face. Children with very long hair that is not tied back present an attractive home for lice, and a far larger challenge should they get lice. Long hair that falls into the eyes, whether on a boy or a girl, can be an unnecessary impediment to learning and the child may be asked to hold back their bangs with a hair pin.

Styles that appear to the Headmaster to be extreme in their attention-getting purpose—perhaps suitable for Halloween-- are not otherwise allowed. This includes spiky beyond a crew-cut length, and bizarrely colored. We are about education, not showmanship.

Outside Clothing/ Sneakers for Sports

All children should be dressed for outdoors every day; there are few recesses when we do not spend 25-30 minutes outside (on raw, windy days when the temperature is below 15 degrees we will stay in).

All outerwear—hats, coats, sweaters, gloves, etc.—should be clearly labeled. Children are expected to wear or take home what they bring each morning. We expect children to be responsible for personal items. Parents should send a note to school right away if a personal item has been misplaced. We will help conduct a search. After a point, we dispose of lost and unclaimed items to Goodwill.

In school children should wear shoes, sneakers or slippers. Shoelaces should be kept tied. Clogs, flip-flops or sandals without a heel strap are not permitted inside—too noisy! Crocs are also not allowed, due to our many stairs, and their inappropriateness for Physical Education class and the playground. We also discourage the wearing of rubber boots inside—they are often too hot and uncomfortable.

Your child should wear or bring a pair of sneakers on sports days.

Dress Occasions

We have each year a few “dress” occasions—The Winter Concert, Mayfest and Graduation. For these occasions, children should wear a white collared long sleeved dress shirt (tucked in), a necktie or bowtie (extra credit!), and khaki pants with a belt or they should wear a dress or skirt or pants with an appropriate shirt or blouse. At Graduation, members of the Graduating Class wear either khaki pants, a dark blue or black blazer, a white dress shirt and a tie, socks, dress shoes and a belt; or they wear a dress or skirt or pants with an appropriate shirt or blouse. Other students should wear “Mayfest attire.” Either gender can wear their preferred attire. We ask, however, that you inform the teacher in advance of any non-typical choice so we can be prepared and helpful.

On dress occasions, a child who is not appropriately attired will not be permitted to participate, which would be a most sad—and certainly avoidable—outcome. Please help your child dress according to the guidelines provided.

Some of our older children may enjoy wearing makeup, heels and other accessories of adulthood. These are not appropriate for school, with the single exception of Graduation Day for the graduates.

Clothing as a “Teachable Topic:” Marketing, Fads, Competitive Dressing and Values

Regrettably, the ascendancy of television, coupled with the ever more powerful impact of TV advertising that is aimed at the children’s clothing market, plus a rising tide of materialism and acquisitiveness in our culture, make it necessary for us to say something about competitive dressing. If your child is successful at somehow weaseling a pair of multi-million dollar sneakers or a designer dress out of you or a softhearted grandparent, please have the good sense not to permit the item to be worn to school. Children have been following fads forever, and that can’t be stopped. But the excesses of recent years are not healthy for children, and are an unwelcome influence in a community that strives to practice simplicity and to be accessible and comfortable to children and parents of varied economic backgrounds. Please be sensitive to the impact that such conspicuous consumption can have on our school community. Better still, avoid it.

As the children advance through the grades, it is in some measure a natural and age appropriate phenomenon for them to pay closer attention to their attire—and the attire of others. When this attention crosses certain lines—when it becomes overly distracting or when it sparks mean-spirited comments—then we have a problem.

Here are some of the messages—in addition to the general expectations and standards described above—that we promote at school about clothing, and which can certainly be well reinforced at home:

- “Put-downs” of any sort are bad, including negative comments about a person’s clothing.
- Some people may not choose to wear what you wear and that is their choice, not yours. It is not your place to make judgments about those choices. (Unless, of course, you are the Head of School setting out expectations for the community)
- Some people cannot afford to spend a lot of money on clothes; others elect not to do so.
- Clothes are not just about style; there are many practical considerations that enter into clothing choices—comfort, ease of care, availability, durability, usefulness to the next generation (the hand-me-down factor) and cost.
- Clothes that are heavily advertised are likely to cost more for that reason alone. They may not be any better than those without brand labels. (Children need to be armed with information and healthy attitudes to withstand the constant assaults of advertising, the pressures of the consumer culture, and the temptations toward ostentatious consumption).
- Not every new style needs to be purchased. Most clothing purchases should be based on *needs* rather than wants.
- Clothing should not become a focus of undue concern or interest because what really matters is a person’s character, not their attire.

While many of these messages may seem to fall on deaf ears, their repetition helps to create a “framework” in which our children learn to operate and to make their own decisions. Our children do not *really* want to ignore us completely, even though they may give every indication to the contrary. They do want to please people—including their parents. They do want approval—including yours. And while our guidance will not completely eliminate certain obnoxious behaviors, our words can moderate choices and conduct, and any improvement—even marginal—is well worth the effort.

Toys

Toys are wonderful and all children should have toys, but they should be kept at home and not brought to school.

Unlike most elementary school programs, we do not allow children to bring items from home to share. Exceptions to this rule are made if the item is a book, or something the child has made, something pertaining to a current classroom study, or a news article or picture (any of which children may share without prior permission). Otherwise, the correct answer to your child asking to bring in something is, “No,” unless the teacher has granted specific permission—and in Kindergarten that is more commonly granted, particularly for helpful ‘transition objects’ at the beginning of the year. Some of the older classes may have an occasional hobby day, a collection day, and so forth, and students may bring things from home for those.

Please note that pocket-sized trinkets and elaborations on standard school equipment (pencils, pens, etc.) are likewise contraband. This means no pencils with objects on top instead of eraser tips, pencils that twist into knots, vibrating pens, sharpeners disguised as animals, complicated pencil boxes, stickers, note pads, small jewelry items, special markers or crayons and so forth. Actually, the children need none of this at school; we provide pencils and erasers and the other tools of the classroom (including quill pens for the sixth graders!)

As for playground items, children are permitted to bring in baseball gloves (no hard balls), but nothing else. We provide balls of appropriate softness for safety reasons. Children are not permitted to bring pocketknives to school, and if they do, they (the knives) may be permanently confiscated.

Library Books

Children have access both to classroom libraries and to books from the Boston Public Library. The former are ‘checked out’ informally, and parents are asked to be attentive to school books being returned. The latter—BPL books—checked out formally on a BPL card for the whole class, and fines are imposed if books are late, or lost. If children take BPL books home and either lose them or do not

return them to school in time for the regularly scheduled library trip, parents are asked to pay the costs. If the mistake is ours at school, we will absorb the cost.

As a general rule, *any* library book—whether LP or BPL—that is taken home by a child one evening should come back the next school day for use during that day. Books taken home over weekends provide an extra challenge and we request that parents be extra mindful of this and help their child remember their obligation to return the book on Monday morning.

The loss of a book is not just a financial one; it means that the book is longer available to another child.

Observations, Research, Etc.

Not infrequently the school receives requests from students in education programs to do observations in the classroom. We accommodate a few of these requests each year at the discretion of the Head. If papers are written, we ask that names be changed to protect the innocent—or the guilty. Very occasionally, we have allowed some interviews of students to occur. In these cases, the purposes, goals and questions are reviewed in advance by the Head and a release form is sent to parents.

Because of our location, and because all children are beautiful and photogenic, we occasionally have people (often Emerson students) asking to videotape children at the playground or news photographers asking if they can take photographs. Within limits, we allow this (some of it we can't control), and if asked we will provide the name of the school. However, we will not provide the name of a particular student without explicit permission from a parent or guardian.

Extra Help

With two adults regularly in each classroom (three in Kindergarten), and *occasionally more* in the classrooms at 107, the school is able to provide fairly extensive 'extra help' for children who may need it. That said, what we can do should not be confused as the equivalent of a one-on-one tutoring session as those are typically understood. A more apt description is that we have the ability to provide a comparatively high level of personal attention within a general classroom context for *everyone*, and we have the capacity to provide some extra help for children at widely different levels of learning—whether advanced or in need of advancement.

The '*occasionally more*' help we add into the mix—usually first thing in the morning—is done with the Subject Teachers, who do not have classes before 9:30 and who have the skill set and knowledge to help in our classrooms. The Subject Teachers will work with the entire mix of students—enhancing the student : teacher ratio—and, as needed, providing 'extra help' along with the other teachers in the room.

The Subject Teachers are assigned by the Director of Academics to classrooms on a need basis, and may rotate between classrooms over the course of the year.

Some students may need even more help than the school can provide and, over the years, parents of those children have arranged private tutoring outside of school. Consultation, and coordination with the school, of course, is helpful to the success of this added effort by the child and the school is happy to meet with a child's parents and tutor to coordinate our work.

Parents are responsible for making tutoring arrangements and for payment. For tutoring sessions directly after school, the Public Library is a convenient venue, and allows the child a brief walk to a fresh space before getting back to work. We do not have tutoring occur here at the school.

Many teachers, here and elsewhere, do tutoring in the summer and sometimes during the school year to supplement their incomes. To avoid even the appearance of conflict of interests, the school has a policy that prohibits its teachers from tutoring their current students. We ask parents to respect this well thought through policy.

Tutoring used to be thought of as something that was done almost exclusively for children who were having considerable difficulty in school. In recent years, however—perhaps in response to the pressures of testing and/or of independent school admissions, and certainly encouraged by the bottomless sense that most parents have that they could always “do more” for their children—many more children are being tutored. This may not always be a necessary or wise use of resources, and it can foster unnecessary dependency on the part of the student. The costs of outside tutoring—in terms of time, energy and anxiety, as well as dollars—can be substantial, and those costs need to be weighed carefully against the ostensible benefits.

Of course, there are many instances when tutoring outside school is absolutely the correct choice and parents are always welcome to seek our advice on this matter, whether they elect to follow it or not.

Visitors to School

Parents are welcome at school at any time, but should call first. In general, while classes are in session, it is not a good idea for your child to bring friends, cousins or other visitors to the school for more than a brief time. Parents should not request the school to accommodate out-of-town guests in the classroom. Ex-LP students are always welcome to return and spend some time with their old classmates.

Parents Helping with Field Trips: Some Guidelines

Parents often attend Learning Project field trips and, not infrequently, it is their participation that makes the field trip possible because they provide the necessary transportation. Parents, also, have been helpful with supervision, and, on occasions they have enabled the school to deal more flexibly with unusual needs. We are enormously grateful for the help that parents over the years have provided to the community and to our students in this regard and we hope that support will continue to benefit future generations of children. In one important sense, all of the children in the school “belong” to all of us (and to none of us!) and helping to make a group activity happen—as with a field trip—is one way of giving that important idea a lively, tangible expression.

A parent’s responsibilities on a field trip with the school are fundamentally different than their responsibilities on an excursion with their own child. It is important, therefore, that parents understand fully their proper role on a school field trip and toward that end we ask careful consideration of the following points:

- Field trips are lead by the school’s teachers. The responsibility of supervising a large number of students on a field trip is huge and the attention of a teacher needs to be fully and continuously on the children. Parents must understand that a teacher’s first and foremost responsibility is for the care and happiness of the children and for the furtherance of the goals of the field trip, and a field trip is not a good time to talk to a teacher about matters off the subject of the field trip. Even if a teacher may appear to be “doing nothing” at the moment, that teacher is “on duty” and interruptions to the teacher’s primary focus should be carefully considered first, and limited to matters germane to the trip. As a practical matter, this will mean that even casual conversation with teachers (such that might normally happen in different circumstances) will not be possible at times when teachers are working 110% to oversee the children.
- Field trips, including our Adventure Trips, are designed, in part, to provide our children with a social opportunity to interact with their peers during a shared and purposeful time together. This social/group interactive dimension is a *critical*, experience that all children need to have and that’s one of the opportunities that this school provides and supports. Parent-child time, together, is also critically important, but field trips are not intended to be that time. Parents, therefore, need to think of field trips as *school* events, not as *family* events and work to encourage, if necessary, their child to participate as fully as he or she might were a parent not

there. This can be tricky business, but if the distinction is not clearly made (by you, the parent), your child will not derive from the trip all the benefit that it offers.

- Parents who are helping out will need to follow faithfully the directions of the faculty. Any concerns about how the field trip is unfolding, any suggestions that might make it go better, or any information that might be helpful for a teacher to know in order to further the goals of the field trip and the happiness of the children should be brought to the attention of the Head Teacher in charge and in a timely yet appropriate manner. This may mean that if the information is not urgent in nature, its delivery can wait for a time when the teacher has a moment to briefly divide his or her attention. Comments should be brought forward not only at an appropriate time, but also in a private and confidential manner.
- Teachers will make the car assignments that might be different than what a particular child wishes. Parents are asked to understand that and to be sure that students in their care have appropriate conversations, are nice to one another, and include everyone in the experience.
- Decisions made by a Head Teacher for the group should be considered final and supported as such.
- In the event of a dispute between children, the parent will intervene if necessary on an emergency basis and seek the aid of a teacher as quickly as possible and allow the issue to be resolved by the children with the teacher's help.
- A parent will work to avoid any favoritism or appearance of favoritism with regard to his or her child or particular children under their immediate supervision. Favoritism of any sort quickly erodes the trust of children and undermines the healthy dynamics of a group.
- Special treats for the children will not be provided at any time. This has, in part, to do with the sense of unfairness that children easily feel, and we do not need to have children in one classroom begrudging the treats the children in another classroom received on a field trip. It is an unnecessary distraction.
- Issues or concerns that a parent has about any trip should be discussed well in advance of the trip with the trip leaders, and not on the day of the trip.
- Recommendations on how a field trip might be improved in the future are most welcome but should be shared directly with the Head of School or with the Head Teacher after the field trip is completed and at a mutually convenient time when the Head Teacher is no longer responsible for the direct oversight of the children.
- It is the responsibility of the teachers, not the parent(s) to define for the children the purposes of the trip and to set the tone. It is the responsibility of a parent on a trip to support both.

Religious Holidays and our Nonsectarian Tradition

The Learning Project is a nonsectarian school and is very careful not to give the appearance of a sectarian bias. We do not celebrate religious holidays, although we do talk about them and learn about different traditions. We encourage parents to celebrate religious holidays at home, and to take time off from school when necessary for religious observance. The expectation, of course, is that the time away is necessary for the observance and not a "day off."

The Class Fund

In the fall of each year, parents are invited to contribute to a "Class Fund" that is maintained by the Class Parent Coordinators and used, at the end of the year, to buy a gift for the Head Teacher and Intern, and usually one of the Subject Teachers, as a "thank-you" from the class parents.

Gift Giving Guidelines

Around Winter Break, and sometimes at the end of the year, individual children sometimes wish to make a small gift to a schoolmate, or make a gift to a teacher, in addition to the gift that comes from all of the children in the class through the Class Fund at the end of the year (see above). The guidelines that follow are meant to suggest what this extra gift giving might look like.

The challenge, of course, is to find the right balance between the wonderful impulse that some children have to give special gifts and the need of their teachers to make sure feelings don't get hurt in the group and to help the children in school feel that things are "fair." The key words in meeting this challenge are 'discretion, 'balance' and 'simplicity.'

Matters of "fairness" and "equity" are never far in the background with elementary aged children—as those of you with several children at home know full well. We know it too, with our family of 118 children. So, as we have done for years, we ask children who wish to give a gift to a classmate, pencil pal or other schoolmate to make that presentation privately and discretely outside of school. If that's not possible, perhaps the gift could be mailed.

As for small gifts to teachers, some of the same worries about hurt feelings among the children obtain here as well, and certainly there is the same operative principle—discretion and simplicity. We are aware that there is a long and lovely tradition of children honoring their teachers in some small way with a simple, but heartfelt remembrance—which can, of course, occur at any time in the year. If your child *really* wants to do something special for a teacher, may we suggest both keeping it simple, and preferably "homemade," e.g., a card, a picture, a cookie, a poem or a simple crafts project, and also making the presentation discrete. These simple remembrances can mean quite a lot to the recipient, and also be a meaningful moment for the child.

Class Parties

Class parties must always be coordinated with the Head Teacher and the school's External Relations and Events Coordinator. The Class Parent Coordinators will do the planning and implementation of class parties, with attention to the school's guidelines and with support, if needed, from the Head Teacher and the External Relations and Events Coordinator.

At the end of each year (sometimes mid-year when a teacher departs on maternity leave), each grade will have a Farewell Class Party. These are occasions, always, for a special snack and some gift giving. At the June Farewell Gathering, the Class Parent Coordinators present the class gift to the teachers on behalf of all the class parents. All parents are most welcome to join that celebration.

Class parties are primarily about giving our children the opportunity to celebrate their relationships and to acknowledge transitions such as the departure of a teacher or the departure of a student from the class. We want the parties to be fun, but we also want them to be more simple than elaborate. The gift-giving element should also be kept fairly simple and will be arranged by the Class Parent Coordinators in consultation with the External Relations and Events Coordinator. End-of-the year gifts to members of the faculty are provided for out of the class funds that are collected at the beginning of the year. These gifts are collective gifts from everyone and individual gifts from parents or children are not expected and while we appreciate the gesture, not encouraged.

In general, we want to encourage our children to think less about material gifts and to remember the power of sentiments—and of gratitude, in particular. These are easily, simply, and often powerfully expressed verbally or in a thoughtfully done "homemade" card.

Birthdays at School

Starting in 2013-2014, we began a new practice of *not* sending any treats (food or otherwise) in celebration of a child's birthday. I understood that the impulse to do so came from a generous place—to share in the joy of the birth of a child—but I prefer that we do that in a much 'lower key' fashion and

without adornment. Teachers were asked to find very simple and easy ways to acknowledge those birthdays that occur on a school day. We also briefly acknowledged birthdays at our Monday Morning Assembly.

Weekend or Vacation Birthday Parties at School

For parents who wish to have a class birthday party on a weekend, the school's ballroom and kitchen are available. Interested parents should schedule dates with the External Relations and Events Coordinator who will also provide instructions about using the building. Parents who use the building will be expected to assume full responsibility for letting themselves in, carefully managing the party, cleaning up, and securing the building on departure. Before the party, the sponsoring parent should also talk with the Head of School.

We hope that the availability of this space makes for more festive and inclusive parties. There is no charge for using the space, although parents are welcome to make a donation to our Facility Fund.

Some Thoughts on Birthday Parties in General

Birthday parties, and large ones in particular, require substantial adult support, vigilant monitoring, and virtually minute-to-minute planning. Many parents do not recognize this until it is too late. Over the years, we have been made aware of more than a few parties in the ballroom or elsewhere that were poorly planned and poorly supervised—and, not surprisingly, the children behaved poorly, and adults were frustrated.

Inevitably, these unsuccessful events had their own fallout the next Monday (and for days after) for the children in school (hurt feelings, unresolved conflict, etc.) and, in addition, some parents extrapolated—erroneously—that the children at the party must behave the same way in school. Such a conclusion, of course, completely ignores the fact that most schools (this one included) are expertly supervised by teachers who are skilled professionals and who know how to manage groups of children—even excited children. All of this was also entirely avoidable. As a result, we ask that anyone wishing to use the ballroom for a party to have a good minute by minute plan in hand and to review that plan with the Head of School before permission to use the ballroom is granted. Suggestions will, undoubtedly, be made!

Birthday Parties at the Playground on a School Day

The Clarendon Street Playground is a public space, and parents are entitled to use it as they see fit. Although the playground may seem like a good venue for a class party—it is convenient, familiar, and fun—it poses two real problems if used on a school day afternoon. First, it is often quite crowded after school with many children and caregivers. This makes supervision of a large group difficult. Second, there are typically a large number of LP students in the playground after school—up until around 4:00—and the mere presence of other schoolmates can become a problem, particularly when it is time to pass out refreshments. These other schoolmates aren't necessarily going to understand the complicated dynamics of a semi-private party in a public space; neither are other non-LP children. That can also become a hard situation for the birthday child to navigate, let alone the adults in charge.

For these reasons, I would urge parents planning such a gathering to consider less complicated venues that are also close by, for example, the Public Garden, the Esplanade, and the Boston Common—all with more open space and not the problems mentioned above.

Guidelines for Birthday Parties and Other Social Gatherings of Class Members

The previous four sections are about birthday parties, because they are the most common out-of-school gathering, and often quite *charged* with emotion. Other gatherings, however, can also be impactful on the social dynamics of the group, so parents should read this section for the school's important guidelines for any social gathering involving several members from any one class.

1. The Invitation List: Parties or 'gatherings' are fun for the children who get invited, but they can be enormously painful for those who feel left out. Moreover, the repercussions in the classroom—where we are working daily to build a sense of community and group identity—can be profound and

very discouraging to children and teachers. So, while children's parties—birthday or otherwise—are a private family matter, please understand they also have very broad implications in the classroom. Life is never simple—not even (or most especially) the social life of a six year old or of a twelve year old!

We ask that parents of children in all grades be extremely sensitive to this matter of invitations. A while ago a parent failed to pay adequate attention to this request and it was only because of the fast thinking of a teacher at dismissal time that it was never known to three children that they were uninvited to an exciting afternoon adventure. Had they known, it would have been devastating to them, and very disruptive to the cooperative spirit of the classroom.

Here are several useful rules of thumb about the dicey issue of who gets invited, who doesn't: If you cannot invite the whole group (and most families cannot), then invite all the boys, or all the girls. If the whole group of boys or the whole group of girls is still too large, then invite less than half of the class. Once the group or sub-group approaches 50%, those who are excluded will have hurt feelings. If those who are excluded, however, are in the majority, then feelings are not so easily bruised. Also, if you are inviting less than the whole group, please coach your children to be sensitive to those not invited and to remember that they should not discuss the upcoming party at school.

We work very hard all year to make the classroom a cooperative, inclusive unit, and a single party or outing that is not thoughtfully and sensitively organized can seriously jeopardize these efforts. While we understand it is not always practical or affordable or desirable to invite a whole class for a party, parental sensitivity about invitations is crucial. For many children, birthday parties, in particular, are inordinately important, and the failure to receive an invitation can cause a degree of hurt that is hard for many of us to remember or to imagine. Over the years, I have sat and held in my lap a number of weeping children who discovered suddenly in school that they were "left-out" and that most everyone was invited. That's a horrible place for a child to be, and it is completely avoidable.

2. Supervision: All parties, birthday parties especially, can be highly charged events and very difficult for some children to manage with their best behavior. Repeatedly, we have heard about parties where children behaved poorly, and leave the parents wondering if that is what the classroom looks like. It doesn't, of course, because teachers plan every minute of a school day and are well seasoned at managing a group of children. Most birthday parties, to be successful, need also to be planned minute to minute and any large group of children, especially confined inside, will require huge amounts of engaging activity as well as huge amounts of adult supervision. We urge parents to plan carefully and to hire extra supervisory help if required. It has been our observation that adequate supervision requires constant vigilance, and that even a large number of adults, who are primarily chatting with one another and watching casually, does not begin to constitute 'adequate supervision.' (Our sixth graders, eager to raise money for their D.C. Trip, can be excellent party assistants.)

Here are some additional guidelines to keep in mind when planning your child's party: Invitations to birthday parties should be mailed, not distributed in school. If the party is to occur directly after school, unless everyone in the group is invited (meaning at least all the children of the same gender), then the reconnoitering for the party should not occur immediately after school in front of the uninvited class member(s). Instead, the invitees should disperse and regroup elsewhere. This may seem burdensome, but it is very important. If the invitation list is partial, then birthday gifts should *not* be brought to school for presentation. This is another important courtesy to the sensitivities of anyone who has been excluded.

Talk with your child about the importance of being sensitive to the feelings of classmates. Keep in mind that birthday parties, by nature, tend to be very challenging for some children and they can behave poorly in response to their anxiety. No child sets out deliberately to be miserable or to try to disrupt a party, but it does happen. So, be prepared to manage the "out-of-sorts" guest, and to keep an unfortunate episode from getting out of hand. And—following logically—*parents* whose child may have difficulty in stressful social situations should accompany the child at the party or, at least, have a discussion in advance with the hosting parents about possible challenges and helpful responses.

While a birthday party focuses quite a lot of attention on a single person, it is also a moment to remember that everyone entered the world similarly, that every birthday is an occasion for joy, that everyone is important and that every life is worthy of celebration. *All* children in our community, we hope, will be cared for and respected, as we would want the child or children in our home to be cared for and respected by others. And no one should feel embarrassed if the child we are raising needs a bit more attention or help than his or her peers. We're "in this together" and our goal is to raise healthy, competent and happy children, each in his or her own way and each in his or her own time.

Snow Day and Cancellation Policy

Beginning in 2010, the school changed its long-standing snow closing policy (which had been to follow the Boston Public Schools) and replaced it with a policy based on independent assessment of the situation and announcements on television, radio and the web. The outlets that will be used, until further notice, are:

- **WBZ:** News Radio 1030; Channel 4 (CBS); wbz.com; wbztv.com; boston.com
- **WCVB:** Channel 5 (ABC); wcvb.com; thebostonchannel.com
- **7 News:** Channel 7 (NBC); Channel 56 (CW); whdh.com
- **FOX25:** myfoxboston.com.

We also subscribe to **First Alert**, which allows us to send emails and phone messages to parents which we do in cases of school closure.

Our new policy allows us to have school at times when the BPS decision does not make sense for us. The public school closings are often tied to bus accessibility on little traveled side streets and we will always defer to individual parents' judgment about the safety of travel to and from their homes.

Safety comes first, and, when we choose to have the school open on snowy mornings, we are trusting that each of us, whether parent, teacher, or staff, will make our own, individual assessment about the safety of travel. Such a decision will, of necessity, be an individual one. We all live in different locales. Storm and road conditions can vary considerably within 10 miles. Our access to different modes of transportation is different depending on our location, and we may, for various personal reasons (e.g. our own current physical condition) be less able than others to travel through snow. There are many variables in this equation and we do not mark people late on these unusually difficult winter days, and we understand if safety considerations keep them at home.

While we fully recognize that everyone's situation is different and we respect the decisions each person has to make about safety of travel, at the same time, we are a school that strives to encourage grit in our students—not recklessness or stupidity—but a willingness to tolerate a measure of discomfort or inconvenience. While safety concerns might, indeed, require an absence on a snowy day, a bit of discomfort or inconvenience (or a desire to build a snow fort in the back yard) should not keep children out of school. We're New Englanders!

If a severe snowstorm develops during the school day, The Learning Project will use the First Alert system to notify parents in the event of an early closing. Parents, of course, are welcome to make their own decisions regarding the safety of travel and may pick up their child early even if the school has elected to remain open.

And When Our Children Are Not Caring Enough (Reprinted from a 2009-10 Parent Bulletin)

Mostly our children in this school are amazingly kind, respectful and caring of one another—in the classrooms, on the playground, at our all school assemblies, in the hallways and in the lobby in the morning. They are not perfect, for sure, but overall we are constantly amazed, sometimes even surprised, and occasionally even 'caught short' between our own eagerness for them to be caring, and their own funny ways of manifesting that virtue. Just today, for example, a child on the way to playground was heard saying to her walking-mate, "I can't be your best friend..."—an opening that

perked our ears in fearful anticipation of a clumsy finish, but then the sentence was completed—“because *everybody* at LP is my best friend!”

So, how do we handle situations when our children are not caring enough? First, it is well for us to recognize that serious breaches of caring by a child can easily inflame in adults feelings of anger or guilt precisely because we want so much for our children to grow up as caring people. Important to hang on to, of course, is the idea that we are *always* modeling for our children what it means to be honest, respectful, determined, responsible, fair-minded, calm...and caring. And in those moments when our children need us the most—when they have, for example, behaved in an appallingly uncaring fashion—that’s when we need to model better than ever what it is to be a caring person. Here, quickly are three things that we can do:

First, we should keep a cool head and not allow our own disappointment or annoyance, our feelings of anger or embarrassment or guilt to factor into our action. None of those feelings is particularly helpful to us at that moment, and certainly none is relevant to solving the mini-crisis the child has presented us with. Caring is ‘other directed,’ and it is the child and that child’s poor choice of behaviors—not our own feelings about the choices—that need to be our total focus.

Second, we should remind ourselves (and the child) that an instance of poor judgment or uncaring behavior is not descriptive of a person or predictive of a lifetime. We should tell the child that despite their poor thought through decision and uncaring conduct, we believe *and know* that they are a good person (‘lovable and capable’ is the LP mantra), and that their bad conduct, their uncaring behavior, is *not* reflective of who they are and that it surely falls short of what we know they aspire to for themselves.

Third, our most critical task is to help the child bring about the necessary change by sending a clear message about the wrongness of their action and that is done through discussion and perhaps, by imposing a consequence. The message of adult disapproval needs to be unequivocal and prompt. This is the way children learn about boundaries—by bumping up against them, and discovering they are real, they are firm, and they have meaning. Sometimes that ‘bump’ translates into a ‘consequence.’ With or without a ‘consequence,’ however, the essence of the message to the child should be about expressing our confidence in them as a ‘good person,’ and about encouraging them to draw on their own innate and overarching desire to be good in their conduct, to be approved of by adults and by friends, and to be the sort of person who receives as a matter of course the bountiful rewards that come from caring about others. Locating the motivation for caring within the child—rooted in their own hopes, in their own aspirations, in their own desired ‘self-image’—is the key to lasting change.

A final comment: Patience is critical in all matters involving children. We, as adults, must be patient in our teaching and parenting, and we must also help our children to learn the virtue of patience. One way that we do that, especially midst this process of teaching good and caring behavior, is by helping children understand the wisdom that, “To become gentle, first be patient with your own faults” (St. Francis de Sales). Until a child can do that, it will be very difficult for them to be consistently gentle or caring with others.

A FINAL WORD: A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

In the end, what is most important to many of us about this school is the sense of caring and of community that flows in many directions and which gives support to all of us—to the children, teachers and staff, parents, alumni, Board and friends. It begins with the school feeling like a welcoming and friendly place when strangers first walk through the door; and it develops, we hope, over time into something very special as children and adults connect with the values and goals of this community and deepen their ties with one another.

Parenting is not an easy job. Educating children is not an easy job. Working and running a household are not easy jobs. And living in a city, living in these stressful times—neither of these makes our daily rounds any easier. What always seems to help, however, is knowing that you are not alone, and that there are other people who have shared similar experiences and that these are people you can trust to talk to and, perhaps, to ask for help.

Every time in our community that someone helps another, the community itself is strengthened. And it happens, regularly and often without any fanfare, in a variety of ways—when someone offers a ride to a parent without a car; or bakes a casserole when someone's been sick; or invites a child who is far away, or perhaps not usually included, over for a Saturday play date, or takes time to listen to a parent who needs a chance to talk...the possibilities are endless.

In the year ahead I hope that each of us will make a point of reaching out in some extra way to someone or to some part of our community. It is a satisfying thing to do, it is the right thing to do, and it is a way of giving back to the community some piece of what it gives to you, to your child, and to all of us. One thing, for sure, is true: This sense of community which we all so highly value is not created magically by some external force, it is formed and nurtured by each of us. And we are fortunate to be part of a school family that invites us to participate in the critical task of community building. No edifice is more worthy of our time and effort.