

# What's Brewing

Winter 2009-2010:  
Volume 6, Issue 3



Donna  
Kennedy

## A Message from Our Head of School

### *"A Focus on Children's Health"*

At Gillen Brewer we strive to create an educational setting that not only meets the academic and learning needs of our children but that promotes a healthy lifestyle as well. Our commitment to exercise through our sports program at Asphalt Green, as well as our community snack program and active family outings, are just a few ways in which we do this. Exercise and nutrition are extremely important but only if children are learning and living in a healthy environment.

About two years ago, I attended a conference at Mt. Sinai on the environmental health concerns of children. This is how I was introduced to Dr. Philip Landrigan and the Children's Environmental Health Center (CEHC). Dr. Landrigan, the Department Chair of Mt. Sinai's Department of Community and Preventive Medicine, is an international leader in public health and preventive medicine. I sat down with him and was most impressed with his mission to bring awareness to the environmental issues which our children face. With a rise in obesity, asthma and allergies, we need to pay closer attention to what we are exposing our children to. Last summer I invited the Mt. Sinai Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU) to Gillen Brewer to conduct an overall analysis of the "health" of our building. We were thrilled with the response from the team and were given wonderful suggestions as to how we can improve our building "health." The following was the PEHSU response after their visit: ***"The PEHSU commends the Gillen Brewer School's proactive approach to promoting a healthy school environment for children. The well-established protocol of promoting a safe and greener school that is already in existence at the Gillen Brewer School serves as a model for other schools."***

We are proud of our efforts and excited about our partnership with the CEHC. We have dedicated a section of this newsletter to bringing awareness of environmental health concerns to all of you. We applaud the efforts of the CEHC and will do our part in creating an optimal learning environment for our children.

Healthy environments also include the health of our relationships. Working with families has been a cornerstone of our program since its inception. We support these relationships through our Parents' Association, parent support groups and workshops, Grandparents' and Alumni Associations and sibling workshops. After sitting with a few grandparents to discuss ways in which we could enhance our Grandparents' Association, the topic of supporting the parent and grandparent relationship kept resurfacing. I remembered a conversation I had with one of our grandparents during our Grandparents' Day celebration and thought, who better to write about this topic than one of our grandparents who has a wealth of knowledge in this area. We are pleased to dedicate a section of this issue to building stronger parent and grandparent relationships and we thank Dr. Jeffrey Brown for graciously offering to write about such an important topic.

Executive Director  
Head of School  
Donna Kennedy

Assistant Head of School  
Milt Sleeter

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## Note from the Parents' Association Co-Chairs

Greetings parents, caregivers and the Gillen Brewer community!

It's been a busy winter here at GBS! In December we, along with our boys, had the privilege of handing out the holiday gifts to the staff. Everyone was especially grateful and it was a wonderful way to start the holidays. On February 5<sup>th</sup> the whole school took an ice skating trip to City Ice Pavilion in Long Island City. It was a fun-filled, fantastic event and we thank alumni parent and City Ice Pavilion Director of Community Outreach, Stacey Batchker, for making it possible! Then, on February 12<sup>th</sup> the GBS community continued a long-standing tradition by celebrating Bus Driver and Matron Appreciation Day. Parents and students passed out coffee and donuts as the buses safely dropped off their charges. The kids also made cards with art teacher Kate Gugliotta to give to the drivers and matrons.



Our big news is that we have a date for our annual Spring Benefit! Thursday, May 20<sup>th</sup> will be a Starry Night at Phillips de Pury & Company and we hope to see you all there. Check your email for auction updates as new items come in. We anticipate another stellar event and we rely upon the support of our whole community to make it happen. We have a terrific cast of parent volunteers working hard already, but there is always a need for more help. If you would like to get involved, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Visit [www.gillenbrewer.com](http://www.gillenbrewer.com) for more information about all things GBS!

Save the Date!  
Starry Night  
Thursday,  
May 20, 2010



### Starry Night Auction Committee

#### Auction Co-Chairs

Marlea Bookstein and Fern Robles

#### Ads Co-Chairs

Trish Minskoff-Breede & Elizabeth Uzzo    Jennifer Choi, Anne Edelson & Alex Reichl

#### Design Chair

Margaret Ruden

#### Display Co-Chairs

Nadia Coen & Glenda Gil

#### Food Co-Chairs

Louise Maschi & Marcela Salomon

#### Item Coordinator

Alison De Noia

#### Journal Co-Chairs

#### Logistics Co-Chairs

Franca Gioia & Elizabeth Uzzo

#### Portraits & Invitations Chair

Dawn Kellman

#### Raffle & Grab Bag Co-Chairs

Dawn Kellman & Nazira Lyrio

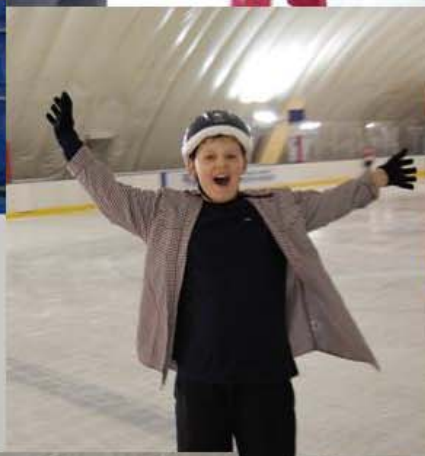
#### Solicitation Co-Chairs

Holly Berfield & Graciela Meltzer

### Mark Your Calendars!

- |                  |                                    |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| March 11         | Noon Dismissal (Staff Development) |
| March 18         | Noon Dismissal (Staff Development) |
| March 19         | VIP Day                            |
| March 29-April 2 | Spring Break                       |
| April 5          | School Resumes                     |
| April 12-16      | TV Turnoff Week                    |
| April 13         | Noon Dismissal (Staff Development) |
| April 14         | NBA/Autism Speaks Fundraiser       |
| April 19-30      | Parent Conferences                 |
| May 14           | No School (Staff Development)      |
| May 20           | Auction                            |
| May 31           | No School (Memorial Day)           |





Ice Skating Trip  
February 6, 2010



## Happenings around School



*Adam's Aunt Marilyn reads to the Moons*



*Ben's Grandma Phyllis reads to the Comets*



*Satchel helps hand out holiday gifts from the Parents' Association to teachers Kate Lloyd and Leeann Gennaro*



*Alumnus Aaron visits with brother Jacob when Jacob was a Star Student in the Quasars*



*Mothers Nazira and Catherine gave out coffee and doughnuts plus cards made by the students on Bus Driver and Matron Appreciation Day.*

*"You guys are the best. I have been doing this for 26 years and this is the first time any school has done anything like this. It makes me want to cry. Thank you!" said one Bus Matron.*

## Parents, Grandparents, and Special Needs Children

By Jeffrey L. Brown, M.D., Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, New York Medical College

During the many years I have practiced pediatrics, I have seen just how complicated relationships between parents and grandparents can be—especially when the child has special needs. A common issue raised by parents is that they find it difficult to maintain independence at the very same time that they are seeking the help and approval of their own parents. Some secretly worry that a grandparent will be disappointed that their child is different from other children, and they might even fear that they are being blamed unfairly for their child's problems because of their parenting style. If this is not difficult enough, they may also have to navigate through complex family relationships when there are multiple sets of grandparents because of divorce, loss of a spouse or remarriage.

Grandparents complain that they don't fully understand the nature of their grandchild's problems because the parents aren't always straightforward about it. They say that they have difficulty making decisions about how or whether to get involved in the child's affairs with regard to time, money and advice. And when they do try to help, they sometimes feel unappreciated or overextended as they advance into older age. Unfortunately, some grandparents also misinterpret a grandchild's inability to socialize easily as a sign that the child doesn't love them.

The good news is that most of these problems seem to sort themselves out over time. Those grandparents who can help out usually do; those who can't or choose not to usually don't. And the child's parents learn by trial and error who to call on and when to make the call. Over time, each individual grandparent participates in the child's upbringing differently depending on the circumstances.

Grandparents who disagree with parenting strategies and discipline often don't acknowledge that their own experiences raising children did not include many of the problems that the parents are facing. They may also not realize that they are only seeing a snapshot of the total parent-child interaction and it does not reflect on the child's whole day or week. So it is prudent for them to reserve judgment about parenting style and to offer critical opinions tactfully and only when they are asked for. Also, complimenting the parents' hard work and successes goes a long way toward helping parents cope with the difficulties that lie ahead.

Parents are sometimes oblivious to the degree of worry and concern that grandparents have about them and their special grandchild. And, when incomplete information about the child is given to "protect" grandparents from unpleasant news, it can lead to serious misunderstandings and errors in judgment. Parents do have the right to keep medical and psychological information confidential, and there are certainly times when they should do so. But when personalities are compatible, there may be some real advantages to allowing grandparents to speak *directly* with the child's doctors, therapists and teachers. These meetings can be arranged with the parents present so that grandparents get unfiltered information and parents know exactly what was said. As the result of knowing the child's problems better, a grandparent's fresh insight will often raise issues and lead to considerations that had never been discussed before. There is very little risk to having these conferences. If the meeting does not go well, it does not have to be repeated. But more often than not, everyone is pleasantly surprised by the results.

Good communication has to go both ways. Grandparents should be honest with the parents, too, and must be prepared to state clearly what they think their role should be, what their limitations are and what they are prepared to offer. This helps to avoid situations where a parent overestimates a grandparent's ability to cope with the issues at hand, and then becomes disappointed if unrealistic expectations were not met.

When these special children are fortunate enough to have an extended family that includes loving parents and grandparents, the child can be the recipient of many different kinds of unique support. Respecting the individual perspectives of those involved and maintaining open communication between them helps everyone stay focused on doing what is best for the child.

*Dr. Brown is Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at the New York Medical College and practices in Rye Brook, New York. He is the grandfather of a Gillen Brewer student. He can be reached at [jlbrown@mail.com](mailto:jlbrown@mail.com).*

## The FDA's Risk Assessment on Lead in Women's and Children's Vitamins Is Based on Outdated Assumptions

By Amir Miodovnik and Philip J. Landrigan, the Mount Sinai Children's Health Environmental Center

In August of 2008, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released a report describing a nationwide survey of the lead content in 324 multivitamin/mineral products labeled for use by women and children. FDA suggested—under the previous administration—that the levels of lead found in these vitamins posed no threat to health. They based this recommendation on the fact that the lead levels in the vitamins were below an FDA guideline developed in 1992, termed the provisional total tolerable intake (PTTI) level.

We decided in the CEHC to investigate FDA's conclusions and to perform our own independent evaluation of the safety of lead in vitamins.

We found that FDA had assumed a blood lead level (BLL) of 10 µg/dL to be safe. FDA considered this level to be a threshold below which there are no adverse effects on children's health. Unfortunately, that assumption is badly outdated. A series of recent, high-quality studies have repeatedly linked BLLs below 10 µg/dL with impairments in cognitive function and behavior in young children. The FDA analysis also assumed that food is the only source of exposure to lead. This assumption is clearly wrong, and it ignores children's exposures to lead in paint, dust, soil and air.

On the basis of our analysis, we concluded that the FDA's conclusions are incorrect. FDA's recommendations are unduly reassuring. They need to be carefully re-examined. To read our full article in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, please go to: <http://www.ehponline.org/members/2009/0900573/0900573.pdf>.

To view the FDA's original report as well as the list of 324 vitamins/mineral products FDA investigated, go to: [FDA Survey Data on Lead in Women's and Children's Vitamins](#)

For more information, please contact us at [www.cehcenter.org](http://www.cehcenter.org), [info@cehcenter.org](mailto:info@cehcenter.org) or 212-824-7125.

## Student Volunteers at Gillen Brewer

"Starting in November, I began volunteering at Gillen Brewer. I join two classrooms in their Friday afternoon activities, whether it is counting games, reviewing multiplication or story time. The non-educational ones are also very entertaining ranging from mimicking animal sounds to dancing to Michael Jackson's music and using Play-Doh. Yet despite all the fun in the classrooms, the most rewarding thing is walking in every week and watching students run towards me with outstretched arms."—Sara, student volunteer from the Ramaz School



Student volunteers from the Packer-Collegiate Institute, left to right: Alumnus Alex, Alison, Sydney, Sara, Darrian, Tyler



Student volunteers from Regis High School, from left to right: James, Thomas, Chris, Kenny, Ray



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*The 2009-2010 Annual Appeal ends June 30, 2010.  
 Thank you for your generosity!*

**I wish to support Gillen Brewer in the following capacity:**

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- 15+ Association:** \$15,000 to \$24,999
- Mattie Gillen & Virginia Brewer Sponsors:** \$10,000 to 14,999
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The Gillen Brewer School is exempt from taxation pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and contributions to it are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. In the event of questions, please contact Penny Arnold at 212-831-3667 x207 or [penny@gillenbrewer.com](mailto:penny@gillenbrewer.com).



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Please think of the environment and contact us at development@gillenbrewer.com  
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