

FAQ'S ABOUT CROCKER FARM

January 7th, 2010

What are some of the major events/traditions that Crocker Farm has?

We start each year with a "Welcome Back Assembly", which will be a great introduction for our new students to some of our traditions (such as each grade level's banner and common songs that our students know and love to sing together). Another major event is our celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in January, which involves a whole-school assembly, connections between students in different grade levels, and activities that span a variety of academic areas. Our Wednesday Afternoon Enrichment Clubs program in the winter is entering its second year and has been a hit with our students and families. We have "Family Math Night" each winter, which is an opportunity to bring your child(ren) and have them teach you what they know and have learned over the course of the year as well as learn activities that you can use at home to further develop and support their learning. Crocker Press is an annual PGO-supported project in which students' writing is published and bound into book form to honor the creativity and success of our students. We have both a "Goodbye Assembly" and a 6th grade graduation event in the spring, as well as band, orchestra, and chorus concerts. In addition, we have started a tradition this year of having students learn recorders in third grade to support instrumental music acquisition as early as possible.

Is the curriculum the same as the other elementary schools in Amherst?

Yes, and we have very high standards for our students. In math and science, the curriculum is consistent district-wide. Our district is working this spring on developing a consistent district-wide K-6 literacy curriculum. We have been working with LitLife, a national literacy professional development and consulting group, for the past year to develop a spiraling and rigorous reading program, and they are leading this district-wide work this year. Many of our staff members are also using the Teachers' College/Lucy Calkins curriculum in writing. In addition, 40% of our classroom teachers are currently being trained in the Renzulli Learning Differentiation System, which is an on-line tool to help students receive content and explore curriculum at a variety of skill levels.

How do I get in touch with staff at Crocker Farm?

The office phone number is 362-1600. Some teachers prefer email communication; others prefer phone calls. They will let you know this at the beginning of the year. My email is morrism@arps.org and Joseph Smith's is smithj@arps.org.

What events are planned to support students who are new to Crocker Farm next year?

Many district-wide efforts are being planned and have been described by Dr. Marta Guevara at the events held in December in each school. In addition, we are planning (along with the Crocker Farm PGO) a student-led tour for our new students in the late summer, followed by some social time. We feel that it is essential to have new Crocker Farm students connecting directly with their peers close to the beginning of the next school year to contribute to easing any concerns about being in a new building. More information will be coming about that event.

Is technology going to be used to support the students' transition during this school year?

Yes! To help support the transition to other schools, the district's Instructional Technology teachers, Joan Gallinaro and Liz Breen, have begun projects that will connect schools and classrooms. They are using SKYPE, a software application, where groups of students will be able to talk and see each other. Students will be able to take a "tour" of each of the schools with students from the other school acting as tour guides. This project will be in "real time" so children will be able to ask questions and see all parts of the schools. The other project will be a Photo Story show that will involve students taking digital photos of the school (cafeteria, recess playgrounds, classrooms, etc.) and then the tour will be narrated by students. Each grade level will create and then record their scripts. What we feel is exciting about this is that it will be student centered – third graders talking to other third graders, for example, and giving their perspectives of the school.

How does the day start for students at Crocker Farm?

Weather permitting, students start the day outside on the playground until the morning bell rings (around 8:30). Students can arrive starting at 8:15, which is also when the cafeteria opens for breakfast. In inclement weather, students go to their assigned locations based on grade level. The students are supervised by staff members on a rotating basis.

I pick up my child after school each day; what is the procedure at Crocker Farm?

Parents wait outside our Community Room, where the children are waiting for them. Staff members supervise the parent pick-up process, including a sign-out form.

How many classrooms will there be at Crocker Farm next year?

We anticipate having seventeen K-6 classrooms at Crocker Farm. There would be three classrooms each in grades one, two, and six, and two classrooms each in grades three, four, and five, as well as Kindergarten. In addition, we are fortunate to host the district's preschool program, which is projected to have six classrooms next year.

Will having about seventy more students than are currently at Crocker Farm be problematic?

The building has been "under capacity" for quite some time, and we are well-equipped to handle each and every one of the three hundred and thirty students (K-6) that we are expecting in the fall. We have worked with our excellent head custodian, Terry Stedman, as well as others to ensure that this was the case. He was on the planning committee for the renovation of Crocker Farm in 2002 and we have walked through the building to identify any potential issues that would come up. In addition, we are projected to have an additional half-time custodian to handle the additional work that will be created by having more students in the building.

Is there after-school child care at Crocker Farm? How can I get in touch with that program?

Yes, the program is called “Crocker Care” and the director is Kathy Edgell. Her phone number is 256-0693.

Is anyone working to improve the playground space in front (for older students)?

Yes, our PGO is fund-raising right now to update and expand that playground space. In addition, a few parts from the Mark’s Meadow playground will be moved to Crocker Farm to expand this area for children. Please see one of our PGO co-chairs (Becky Demling or Lucy McMurrer) for more information on this exciting project.

When can I come and visit my child's classroom?

Crocker Farm has a day of the week that is specifically offered for visiting classrooms (it rotates each month to accommodate the complex schedules of our parents/guardians). Most classroom teachers are welcoming of other visits; families are encouraged to be in contact with their child’s teacher about this.

My child has specific health needs. How will that information be communicated to Crocker Farm?

Once the staffing for nurses is settled, they will be communicating the health needs of students who will attend new schools to each other this spring. At Crocker Farm, I have already met with our nurse to go over the students who will be attending Fort River and Wildwood next fall and she is documenting their needs in advance of their transition; similar work is being done at all the buildings.

Will similar communication occur in the academic realm?

Yes, and that process has already started. I have met with each of the other three principals to go over students who are coming to and leaving from Crocker Farm due to the redistricting. Once staffing rosters are in place, the staff will be communicating about

the different learning styles of each student transitioning so that we can plan for a smooth transition for each student.

Which staff members will be at Crocker Farm next year?

Tentative assignments will be given to many staff this month and released publicly shortly after that date (by February vacation).

Why are the assignments considered “tentative”?

They are tentative because the budget picture is still not certain and even small fluctuations in the final budgeting picture could impact staffing. Both the state budget and the town budget do not get finalized until much later in the spring, and this could impact staffing.

I would like to be involved in the school; what opportunities are there at Crocker Farm?

There are many! Our School Governance Council meets monthly and is involved in policy matters. Our Parent-Guardian Organization supports the school in a myriad of important ways. We have “class parents” who assist teachers and students in a specific space. We also have a Diversity Committee, comprised of parents, teachers, and principals, who is working to advance social justice goals at Crocker Farm. In addition, there are a variety of volunteer opportunities in the school. If you have other ways that you’d like to be involved, please let us know!

What is the main communication tool that the administration uses for a “general audience”?

The *Crocker Chronicles* is sent out three times a month. In this newsletter, a letter from the principal or assistant principal is included, as well as from the PGO and many of our specialist areas. Most of our families receive the newsletter electronically, but a paper copy is available for those without internet access at their home.