



## CALENDAR

### January

**21st - Kindergarten Night,** 7-8:30 p.m., Library

**22nd - Parents On Board: Free Parenting Class,** 6-8 p.m. Sign up with Ann Callegari at 510-644-6939. Dinner and childcare provided.

**26th - Staff Development Day,** No School

**27th - African American Unity Group Meeting,** Library. Dinner at 5:45 p.m., meeting at 6:00 p.m., childcare provided.

**29th - Culture Night,** 6-8 p.m., Cafetorium. Partake in ethnic foods, performances, arts and crafts activities, and more!

### February

**2nd - Community meeting on air quality,** 7 p.m., Berkwood Hedge School

**7th - AAUG Pancake Breakfast,** details TBA

**10th - PTA Meeting,** Cafetorium, Dinner at 6 p.m., meeting at 6:30 p.m. Childcare Provided

**13th- Lincoln's Birthday holiday -** No school

**16th - Presidents' Day Holiday -** No school

### Black History Month

Throughout February, Monday assemblies will honor Black History Month. There will also be a special Black History Month celebration on Friday, Feb. 27. More details to come next month.

## Closing the achievement gap now!

By Ramona I. Coates, Ph.D., African American Unity Group Co-president

Happy new year, Washington families! The new year brings new possibilities for our children. In 2009, closing the achievement gap between students of different backgrounds is a goal for both Washington School and Berkeley Unified School District.

On November 18, 2008, the PTA and African American Unity Group hosted a joint meeting on closing the achievement gap. Patti Martel, former principal of San Francisco's George Moscone Elementary School, described the tools, techniques, and solutions she used to transform her low-performing school (once in the bottom third of 77 San Francisco schools) into a school with top scores and keep it there for more than 10 years. Principal Martel sums up her prescription for creating over-

achievers among predominately low-income Latino, Asian, and African American students with her motto:

"Success breeds success-never lower your standards for non-achieving students. You keep [standards] high and bring all students to the high level by teaching to their strengths!"

Every elementary school needs three things to be successful:

- 1) **Post school standards** in multiple languages in large, easy, and readable poster board format in all the classrooms. All parents, students, teachers, administrators, and staff should know the school's plan for promoting academic success.

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### Yard Art Committee update

## Work day makes Washington shine

By Sara Zimmerman, PTA President



Photo by Lauren Schiller

**"Huge thanks to everyone who came out to the school work/art day! The day was fun and we got to see concrete results from our work!"**

Huge thanks to everyone who came out to the school work/art day on Saturday, December 6. The day was fun and we got to see concrete results from our work!

We had 25 or 30 adults over the course of the day, and untold numbers of paint-covered children. We got a ton done, including:

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**SURVIVING WINTER**

*Professional tips for cold and flu season*

**SQUASH GERMS**

When you cough or sneeze, do it so that you don't spray viruses on the person you are near. Because the most common way to transfer a virus is with your hands—either touching someone directly or touching an object that someone else touches—cough into your elbow, not your hand. (And teach your kids to do the same!) And of course, hand washing is the single best way to prevent spreading disease.

**TREAT SYMPTOMS**

When your child has a cold or flu, there are very few medicines to stop the virus. The illness will usually run its course in 7 to 10 days. Zinc lozenges may help shorten the duration if taken as soon as symptoms show up. Airborne doesn't prevent or treat the cold, but it may make you feel better if you are vitamin deficient. For influenza, elderberry extract can do the same. The jury is out on Oscilloccinum for the flu—clinical trails are inconclusive. Some over-the-counter remedies will treat symptoms of the cold or flu, including ibuprofen for fever and aches, Sudafed for congestion, and anti-histamines for runny noses.

Kids under five should not take Sudafed, but they can take antihistamines.

Honey is also a very good cough suppressant. A teaspoonful of honey is a good therapy for kids over 1 year old.

*Information provided by Peter Koshland, Pharm D, (and director of pharmacy) at Elephant Pharm.*

**Closing the achievement gap**

*Continued from page 1...*

- 2) **Promote and support literacy programs** such as Reading Recovery and Quick Reads. Train room parents in guided reading techniques; Send home brochures to parents with literacy program information (Washington currently needs 40 volunteers for its Quick Reads program). Principal Martel says that “if children can read, math and reading scores will go up.”
- 3) **Provide parents, students, teachers, and staff with the discipline policy.** We have a parent and guardian handbook. However, a one-page explanation of the discipline policy could be disseminated to all parents and students to reinforce it as a contract between parents, students, teachers, staff, and administrators.

Principal Martel stressed that all teachers, parents, and staff should deliver a consistent message and that students should be made to believe that they are capable and rewarded for their academic efforts.

So why should we re-tool our efforts to promote literacy at Washington? Our Academic Performance Index (API) is a stark indicator of the widening achievement gap at Washington. For seven years, white students have scored in the high 850's and above ('proficient and above') while African American and Latino students have consistently scored in the mid-600s. (The median API score is 800 on a 200-1000 scale.)

We can also see the gap in our annual state testing outcomes. African American and Latino students here at Washington score 'at basic or below or far below basic' on English Language Arts and Math—below the passing standard of 'proficient or above.' Washington, however, is not alone. The achievement gap has also widened recently for the Berkeley Unified School District and the State of California, according to our state superintendent Jack O'Connell.

But change *is* possible. Malcolm X Arts & Academic Magnet in Berkeley was honored for closing the achievement gap with a

Title One Academic Achievement award for 2008-2009. (Malcom X's API score was above its median for one of its socioeconomically disadvantaged subgroups.) One of Malcom X School's strategies required parents to attend Saturday workshops to learn how to help their students can become successful in school.

What can we do here at Washington to close the gap? We must all begin with:

- 1) Helping our children develop a love and mastery of reading by helping them read each day using guided reading techniques from literacy coaches at Washington.
- 2) Reading to our children or having our children read to using books on tape and incorporating story prompts to develop reading comprehension and critical thinking.
- 3) Becoming involved in current programs that specifically target closing the achievement gap this year. Become a Quick Reads or Reading Recovery trained volunteer.
- 4) Ask questions and demand results! Hold our school accountable.

We are all—parents, students, teachers, staff, and administrators—in this boat together. According to prominent African-American psychologist Dr. Thomas Parham, “circumstances are places we come from, not who we are.” All students need visions of possibility, places to nurture their dreams, and places to affirm rather than assault their humanity.

One student performing at basic or below is one too many. We should adopt the United Negro College Fund's mantra: “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” This is a historic year of Hope and Change—let's be willing to re-invent ourselves at each level of our social responsibility. We need transparent buy-in from administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students to work collaboratively and to promote academic excellence at Washington. My husband Derek and I are ready. Are you?

*Food for Thought*

## New system sells school lunches online

The Berkeley Unified School District is pleased to announce a new payment service over the internet. Your child's school now accepts payments for school meals through the mySchoolBucks.com online payment service. mySchoolBucks.com offers a secure transaction gateway that accepts VISA or MasterCard as a means of adding money to your child's meal account. Credit or debit cards can be used.

Here are a few reasons to register now and begin using mySchoolBucks.com:

- **Safety** - Virtually eliminates worries about your child carrying money to school.
- **Convenience** - Make payments when it's convenient for you, from the comfort of your own home, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.
- **Control** - If you are using mySchoolBucks to pay for your child's meal purchases, you will be able to view your child's meal purchases at the school cafeteria. Also, you can set up an automatic email reminder to alert you when a payment is needed for your child's account, or set up an automatic payment for any other items available on the mySchoolBucks site.
- **Efficiency** - Make payments for all your children in one step, even if they attend different schools in our district.

To get started, all you need is a computer, internet access, and an email account.

There is a fee to set up the account. You may choose to pay either a 3% Service fee for each transaction or pay a one-time membership or subscription fee.

For example, if you select the 3% Service fee, a parent who puts \$20 into a child's meal account is charged \$20.60.

If you choose the one-time membership or subscription fee, the fee varies according to the length of time you choose to use the service:

12 months: \$14.80	9 months: \$12.90
6 months: \$9.90	3 months: \$4.95

The service automatically deposits the money into the student's meal account at school within one to two business days.

The Service or Membership Fee you pay does not go to the school district. All fees go directly to mySchoolBucks.com to cover the vendor's costs of operating the online service. Refunds will be handled through the District Office using usual procedures.

Just remember to select the payment option which works best for you.

**To Register Online:**

Visit the website at [www.mySchoolBucks.com](http://www.mySchoolBucks.com). Follow the instructions on the screen and provide the required information in order to register. You can register each child using their date of birth and/or student identification number; and be sure to enter your child's name exactly as you did when you registered them at school. You will receive notification by email of successful registration. For this reason, a valid email address is required when you sign up for the service.

We are excited to be able to offer this new service to our families in the school district. We hope you will find it to be not only convenient, but a great timesaver!

**WASHINGTON WONDERS**

*School mysteries solved!*

*Have a question?*

*Please contact Lauren Schiller ([laschiller@sbcglobal.net](mailto:laschiller@sbcglobal.net)) or Lindsey Turrentine ([lturrentine@yahoo.com](mailto:lturrentine@yahoo.com)). We will publish a selection of answers each month.*

**Q.** My son wants to know why his class has to eat a snack. Can they save the snack until they are actually hungry for it?

**A.** Snack is offered to all students and has to be accounted for by the nutritional services department.

The children do not have to eat snack, but because the teachers need all students to stay seated for snack time until it is recess time, students sometimes think they must eat snack.

Some teachers allow students to save snack for later; others do not. Check with your child's teacher for more details.

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**Q.** What happens when it rains? Do the kids stay inside or go outside and get wet?

**A.** We have a rainy day schedule. In the mornings, teachers on duty patrol the hallways and students sit outside their classrooms until teachers arrive.

Students also return to their classrooms rather than have lunch recess. They are supervised and allowed to play games and have free time. They do not go outside to get wet.

If it's raining during PE, students usually have PE on the stage.

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### Local meeting scheduled to address air-quality concerns

A recent article in USA Today called attention to a study of air quality at schools across the nation. According to the data provided by the article, Washington's air quality (as well as the air quality at many Berkeley schools) ranks worse than 92 percent of the nation's schools.

There will be a public meeting to discuss the issue on February 2, 2009 at 7 p.m. at the Berkwood Hedge School, just across the street from Washington.

Read the USA Today article here:

<http://content.usatoday.com/news/nation/environment/smokestack/index>

**PTA OFFICERS**

Please contact any one of the officers if you have ideas, questions or concerns.

**Sara Zimmerman**,  
President  
phone: 883-1020  
email: sarazi@gmail.com

**Brian Mohr**,  
Parliamentarian  
phone: 644-9388  
email: bhmohr@gmail.com

**Eli Cochran**, Secretary  
phone: 544-1820  
email: elicochran@mac.com

**Dana Arkinzadeh**,  
Treasurer  
phone: 525-6805  
email: dana@dmaorganizing.com

**Ramona Coates, AAUG**  
phone: 204-9193  
email: rcoates@ccsf.edu

**Acorn Co-editors:**

**Lauren Schiller**  
phone: 798-6005  
email: laschiller@sbcglobal.net

**Lindsey Turrentine**  
phone: 649-8522  
email: lturrentine@yahoo.com

Ideas, information, and articles for *The Acorn* are welcome!

**We're on the Web!**  
washington.berkeleyppta.org

**Washington Elementary**

2300 Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Way, Berkeley, CA 94704  
phone: 644-6310  
fax: 644-7718

**Rita Kimball**, Principal  
email: rita\_kimball@berkeley.k12.ca.us

**Paula Shoemaker**,  
Secretary  
email: paula\_shoemaker@berkeley.k12.ca.us

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**Making Washington shine**

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- Priming, sanding, painting, and hanging all the brightly colored wooden cutouts now adorning the chain link fences.
- Digging up and replanting the plant strips outside the classrooms on the north side of the playground (thanks to Kathryn Moriarty, who researched and directed this whole planting operation).
- Getting three loads of mulch to put around the base of all the trees and plants around the yard; thinning the plants in the big planters at the front of the school.
- Picking up tons of trash from the playground and wooded area.
- Clearing the clogged gutters running around the edge of the garden.
- Trimming and weeding in the garden.
- Reorganizing the garden shed.
- Cleaning the solar panels on the roof.

Special thanks to Kory Worley, who designed and cut out almost all of the cute flowers, geckos, snails, etc. before the work day!

Thanks also to Laila Solaris, our MOCHA art teacher, who came and helped direct the painting efforts, assisted the kids in painting really beautiful designs, and controlled the chaos.

Crushed because you didn't get to come? Don't despair—we have two more work/art days scheduled. The first is **February 21 from 9:30 to 1** and the second is on **April 25 from 9:30 to 1**. We look forward to seeing everyone then.



*Editors' note:* Special thanks to Ecohome Improvement for donating paint for all our lovely plywood works of art. Thanks also to Urban Ore for supplying much of the plywood for this project.



Happy plywood flowers after a long day of sanding, priming, and painting

*Photo by Lauren Schiller*