

### Director's Corner

April 2018

Dear Fraser Families,

What a difference a few hours can make! I sent the March newsletter out stating that the Hennepin County respite program will be ending on June 30, 2018 and that we are awaiting an RFP (Request for Proposals) to provide further respite services. Literally hours after I sent the newsletter, we were informed that Hennepin County is extending the program through December 31, 2018 because they are not ready for the RFP process. All affected families have been notified. That is great news for Fraser School and for the families involved!

I want to apologize for the frustrations of the families that did not realize that Fraser School closed on March 5 due to the anticipation of inclement weather. We followed our published procedure of making the decision in the morning and advertising it on Fraser's Facebook and Twitter and on the local TV stations. This policy is in the Parent Handbook and a reminder of the policy was in the November 2017 Parent Newsletter.

We do not have the capability to push out a personal message to all families. Since a closed school day for weather happens so rarely (twice in the past 10 years), we have chosen not to purchase the software technology to send a message blast to all families. Hopefully, winter will be over soon and this situation will not happen again for another 5 years.

As we look towards our summer enrollments, we are continuing to be extremely full in all of our classrooms. As we account for all of our current children moving into the next age group, we realized that we are at capacity in almost every

room. Therefore, we have decided to enroll a very limited number of children from now until September 2018. We will continue to provide tours for interested families with the understanding that they would enroll in September 2018, if we have room.

We will try to accommodate families' requests for schedule changes, but please be aware that we may not have room for those changes either. DHS licensing dictates the number of children that we can have in each classroom based upon the square footage of the room. We do not have the flexibility to add any more children to an already full room, even for a few hours. Thanks so much for your understanding.

Thanks for sharing your children with us,

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*"There are two ways to get enough; one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less."*  
-G.K. Chesterton

## Tuition Increases

Traditionally, tuition increases have been announced in the spring of the year and take effect the Tuesday after Labor Day. This has proven difficult for Fraser School budgeting. Fraser, as a whole, runs our fiscal year as the calendar year. In other words, Fraser School's budget runs from January to December but our tuition runs from September to August.

To remedy this situation, we will **NOT** have our traditional tuition increase effective in September 2018. Instead, our tuition increase will be announced in the fall and will take effect on January 2, 2019. The current tuition rates will be stable throughout the rest of 2018. Moving forward, tuition rates will be announced in the fall of each year and will take effect in the following January.

As we look at the budget and at tuition increases, we will also streamline some of the other charges. For example, in 2018, we expanded the use of the retainer fee. Historically, the retainer fee was only offered to families that wanted the entire summer off. We have expanded the options to include a leave for up to 60 days and a leave for up to 90 days. We have also allowed families to use it at any time during the year.

As with any new policy, families have asked questions about the use of the retainer fee that we never imagined including in the policy. Therefore, we will tweak the language of the use of the retainer fee when we announce the new tuition rates.

Please let me know if you have any questions about the new timing.

## Developing Empathy in Young Children

At Fraser School, we do not make children say, "I'm sorry" when they do something unkind to someone, whether that is physical or emotional. Saying, "I'm sorry" can become an automatic response that has little meaning to a child. It can also be an outright lie. When children are angry and lash out, they may not be sorry for what they did. In fact, forcing an apology can spur the child to further anger.

Instead, we try to help the child see what the other child is feeling. We may emphasize that the hurt child is crying or sad. We will point out the hurt child's face and label the feelings. We will have the instigator check on the other child by saying, "Are you OK?" Then, depending upon the response, we may have the child give the hurt child a hug or a high five to make amends. If the child is physically hurt, we may also have the angry child get an ice pack or a Band-Aid and help to apply them. Our goal is to teach that actions and words can hurt and to see the injury (physical or emotional) that someone can cause. In most cases, both children can learn from the interaction.

Of course, we also have children that hurt others for reasons other than anger. At that point, we need to determine why a child is hurting others. For example, if a child hurts others to get attention, we are going to minimize our reactions and ignore the instigator. At this time, we will pour all of our attention onto the hurt child.

Of course, we have children of all abilities here at Fraser School so we have to individualize our responses to each child. However we are reacting, we do not insist that a child say, "I'm sorry."

## Client/Consumer Surveys

All families that were active Fraser clients in any part of 2017 received a client/consumer survey in January 2018. The survey ended on February 2, 2018 and I have been given results to share. Thank you to all Fraser School families that responded!

In Fraser School, we had a total of 109 respondents. Here are some of the results:

To the comment, "Overall, Fraser's programs met or exceeded my expectations," 86.3% of respondents either noted that Fraser School met or exceeded their expectations. Another 10.8% responded neutrally.

To the comment, "I would recommend Fraser services to others," 93.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed while another 3.9% remained neutral.

To the comment, "Overall, my family benefited from being connected to Fraser services," 93.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Another 6.9% answered neutrally.

In addition to the strong showing in the numeric portion of the survey, there were multiple pages of written feedback that I have read through. There were a couple themes that we will work on throughout the upcoming year.

First and foremost, families are concerned with staff turnover. I am also concerned with staff turnover. In fact, in 2017, I worked closely with Fraser's Human Resources Department to implement some changes to try to reduce staff turnover. We provided an anonymous survey to staff members to ask what changes would help them stay at Fraser School long-term and responded to their requests.

Some of the changes included, increasing the starting pay of new hires and, subsequently, giving other staff market adjustment raises to balance the equity. This was above and beyond the annual raises that staff members can receive. We created new promotional opportunities to value the staff members that stay at Fraser School. We also created a new teacher prep space away from the children so that staff members had a comfortable place to write lesson plans and work on conferences. As a whole, staff turnover has decreased in Fraser School. That fact, of course, does not help the families that have had turnover in their child's classroom. Please know that we are working on creative ideas to help reduce staff turnover even further.

Second, several families desired more communication from their children's teachers. Several families requested more daily updates, either at the end of the day or throughout the day. Of course we want to serve our clients, but we will need to see how we can balance the communication requests with the direct care of the children. We are still awaiting further technology upgrades that will allow us to use PreciouStatus.

Finally, several families noted that the planned construction did not occur in summer 2017, as planned. I apologize for that. The plan was to have Fraser School undergo upgrades and remodeling but other Fraser projects were more critical to our mission, as a whole. We are looking towards some major construction and remodeling in the near future, which would occur in 3 phases. The first and second phases would be the most extensive within Fraser School, with the third phase not affecting the school as much. At this point, no timeline has been solidified. We will let families know as we make firm decisions. At this point, we are still making final decisions on the architectural drawings so should know more very soon. Thank you for your patience!

### Upcoming events

> **School Open**

April 4, 2018  
Parent/Teacher conference day canceled

> **No School**

April 5, 2018  
Parent/Teacher Conferences

> **No School**

April 6, 2018  
Spring Break

### Upcoming events

> **Family Fun Night**

May 17, 2018  
6:30-7:30 PM

> **No School**

May 24-25, 2018  
Staff Development

> **No School**

May 28, 2018  
Memorial Day

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## SPARK Research Study

SPARK is a free online study with a simple mission: to speed up research and advance the understanding of autism.

SPARK aims to be the largest study of its kind with the goal of building a community of 50,000 individuals with autism and their families across the nation.

The entire autism community is encouraged to participate, including adults and children diagnosed with autism, as well as their biological parents and siblings. By dramatically increasing the number of research participants, SPARK aims to help facilitate research that has not yet been possible.

An important part of SPARK is the collection of DNA so it can be analyzed to expand our understanding of the role of specific genes in the development of autism. SPARK will ask you to share basic information about your medical and family history, and if you choose, a DNA sample using a saliva collection kit.

SPARK is sponsored by the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative (SFARI), a scientific initiative of the Simons Foundation.

While we are making significant progress learning about autism, we simply don't know enough. By joining SPARK, you're helping accelerate research to find causes and treatments for autism.

To learn more about SPARK and register online via a secure portal, visit [www.SPARKforAutism.org/UMinnesota](http://www.SPARKforAutism.org/UMinnesota). All data provided to SPARK will be stored without any identifying information and kept confidential. Individuals with autism will receive gift cards valued at up to a total of \$50 for participation.

After you register, a saliva kit will be shipped directly to your home with clear instructions for collection and return shipping. The kit includes a tube for collecting saliva, as well as an absorbent sponge that can be used for any child who is not able to spit. If you prefer, you can provide a saliva sample in-person by scheduling an appointment at your local clinical site or hospital participating in SPARK.