



Small Steps Towards a Big Difference

Something Good in the World, Inc. • 624 Croton Avenue • Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567
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September 9, 2009

Dear Parents,

Thank you so much for participating in Earth School at Hilltop Hanover Farm for the 2009/2010 school year. We are so proud to be pioneering these programs with you and your children!

Towards having a really successful experience together at the Farm, we'd like to present some information, offer suggestions, and make some important requests for everyone's safety and well being. If you have any questions about the following information, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Telephone

In case of emergencies, you can reach teachers HH Farm on their cell phones during school hours. We may not always be able to pick up the phone right at that moment, but we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Barbara: 914-217-9249

Ridvan: 914-325-1053

Holly: 914-714-2281

Kani: 845-265-3469

There is a phone in the main office at the Farm, but it would not be a good idea to leave messages on the voicemail there, unless it is a major emergency: 914-962-2368. The farm manager's name is Lucille Munz and the farm caretaker is Maryellen Sheehan. One of them is usually on site, but not always available to answer the phone or get messages to us.

On Site

If you would like to stay around the Farm for any reason, we would recommend hiking the trails across the street. We have found through experience that it is often distracting for children to have their parents in the building while we have class. Another suggestion would be to travel a mile up Hanover St. where you will find the center of Yorktown, with Starbucks, Mrs. Green's, and other stores, as well as a really nice bike trailway.

Clothing and Equipment

Please be sure that your child has adequate clothes for the weather, since we will be spending lots of time outdoors: jackets, sweaters, long pants, socks, raingear, waterproof boots, and a pair of indoor slippers are all strongly recommended. Also, we have found that all children need an extra set of clothes on hand. This way, if your child happens to get wet or muddy, they have something at the Farm to change into. Extra clothes and shoes can be kept in cubbies or closets. We have experienced that a cold, wet child is an unhappy child, and it would help the teachers a lot if parents could make sure that children have what they need for the weather.

Snacks and Lunch

Children will need to bring a lunch and a snack with them each day. You may keep your child's snack or lunch in the fridge if you wish. We would ask that parents pack only healthy foods, and we would suggest packing even a little more than you think your child might need, because if they are hungry, this can cause distress for everyone. It is our policy not to allow candy of any kind (including gum), and we would greatly appreciate it if you would not send your child with sugary treats. There are children with special diets and it can become uncomfortable when someone is sharing a snack that others cannot eat. If it is a birthday celebration, we recommend sharing fruit, or to try to find cookies or cakes that are not overly sweet.

Volunteering

While at the Farm, volunteer assistance is always needed. Please do feel free to take up any task that you see needs doing at any time, especially at the end of the school day: help with washing dishes, cleaning, taking out the garbage, weeding or watering the gardens, are all welcome!

Also, if you have a special skill, profession, or hobby that you would like to share with our students, please let us know, because we love to have visiting educators to share their expertise.

Drop Off and Pick Up

This is the one area where parents can help us out the most! Please be on time to bring your children to school and to pick them up. When children arrive late, they feel out of sorts and it can be hard for them to make the transition into an ongoing class. We suggest arriving even a little bit early, so they have time to play outdoors before class begins.

However, please do not drop children off early without supervision. The staff is very busy in the mornings getting set up for the day and cannot supervise children who arrive earlier than 10:15 a.m.

At the end of the day, it is very important to your child that you arrive on time. Students may have work they want to share with you, or a new skill to show you, and it can be hard for young children when parents are late or rushed.

Equally important at the end of the day, if your child wishes to continue to play, that you are supervising this play outdoors. Barbara, Ridvan, Holly, and Kani have a lot to do to clean up and close up at the end of the day, and they cannot supervise the children after classes end for the day. Also, we have found that young children are often tired by the end of the day, and it would be better to leave the Farm. So many times, we have seen that emotional upsets and physical injuries tend to happen after school, when children are tired. If you pick them up on time and leave soon after, they will end what may have been a very happy day in a harmonious way.

Please do not drop your child off by letting them out of the car. We ask that you park and walk your child all the way into the front door. In case we are out in the field, we never want your child to be left alone. Similarly, at the end of the day, please park and walk into the building to pick your child up (or find us around back in the garden). We never want to allow children to run into the road to find you, and we have seen children tempted to do just this.

Children are never permitted to walk around the property without an adult to accompany them. There are too many other people who may be visiting or working on the Farm who we are not acquainted with.

Thank you for your help and understanding!

Parking

When parking, please be mindful of all the other groups that use the Farm and be sure not to block anyone in. It is suggested to park uphill by the barns, where there is plenty of space, rather than in front of the Main Residence. There is a small parking area in front of the farmhouse, but we don't want to take up all the space there as it is for all the farm visitors.

It is never permitted to park along the driveway, as trucks are often busy entering and exiting, and during our pick up and drop off times, the area is likely to be quite busy. Please do not double-park other parents' cars either, as this can be stressful for those who need to leave quickly. Thank you for your care with this matter.

The Buildings

All of our classes meet in the Main Residence, which is Building "A," also known as the Children's Environmental Education Center.

The "Farmers of Confidence," "Finders of Knowledge," and "Seekers of Cohesion" will have their primary entrance and exit through the kitchen door.

The "Adopters of Respect" will enter and exit through the left front door of the house.

Using the different doors will help with traffic flow at the start and end of each day.

Emergency Plans

If there is a weather emergency at the Farm, such as high winds and heavy rains, the children will all be inside of Building A, the Main Residence, as this building is considered to be safest in such conditions.

Of course, if severe weather is predicted in advance, we would cancel school. But if a storm were to come up unexpectedly at the end of a school day, we would recommend that children and parents stay safely inside of the buildings, and that parents not attempt to drive until the storm has passed.

Snow Days

For the most part, we will follow the local Yorktown school district in terms of determining school closings. Sometimes, if there is an early dismissal, we will still finish out our day, because public schools tend to close early for busing reasons. Similarly, if there is a delayed start to the day, we might not follow this, since often their delay is one or two hours, and we don't begin our day until 10:30 a.m. anyway.

In our minds, it is always up to the individual families to decide if they wish to travel to and from school when snow is predicted. We will always err on the side of caution.

If there is a storm predicted, and schools are planning to close in advance, we will send out both phone and email messages in advance to let you know. If you are unsure on a given day whether to travel to school or not, please feel free to call us. However, if the Yorktown School District is announced as closed, and you see this on their website or on the news, you can be sure Earth School will be closed as well.

Health Concerns

Please do not send your child to school if s/he is showing signs of illness. This is especially true for contagious illnesses such as conjunctivitis (pink eye) or head lice or stomach viruses. We want to keep everyone as healthy as possible, children and teachers alike, and we firmly believe that the best place for a child to get well is at home.

Please be aware that teachers are not allowed to give children any medications, including homeopathic remedies, nor are we permitted to apply insect repellent or sunscreen. We are only able to conduct basic first aid (i.e., band-aids, cold packs). If we are concerned that your child may be unwell or has been severely injured, we will immediately contact you to come and pick up your child. In a medical emergency, we are required to call 911, and we will then contact the parents. All of the main teaching staff for Earth School has had CPR and First Aid training.

Lateness or Absence

Please be sure to call us in advance if you are going to be late or if your child will be missing school.

About the Earth School Staff

We'd like to introduce you to this year's staff of amazing educators. One thing they all have in common is that they do a LOT besides teaching Earth School.

Barbara Sarbin is the Director of Educational Programs for Something Good in the World at Hilltop Hanover Farm. What this means is that she is responsible for the overall running of educational programs, including not only the Earth School programs for homeschoolers, but also those for public schools, for afterschool, and all of the other SGITW projects that take place at the farm: the Blue Star Youth Movement, the Children's Peaceful Garden, the Sounds Good Music for Families workshops, the Turtle Island Summer Camp, and the Backyard Farmer.

Barbara is the main teacher for the Adopters of Respect. She is also teaching Words in Color for the Finders of Knowledge and Seekers of Cohesion, and is overseeing the curriculum for these age groups. Barbara will also visit the Farmers of Confidence to work with them on special occasions.

Barbara has a BA in Theatre Arts with Honors from Brown University. She performed extensively as a professional actress and movement theatre artist, and has worked as an Artist-in-Residence in New York area public and private schools for over 20 years. For the past seven years, she developed the Golden Education Template (GET) curriculum for Elementary grades, and has been teaching homeschooled children inside of an "Earth School" environment since 1999.

Ridvan Foxhall is the main teacher for the Seekers of Cohesion. She has two children who have attended Earth School, and she is also a homeschooling parent. Ridvan has a Bachelors Degree in Art and Photography with Honors from City University of NYC . She worked as a graphic designer for over 12 years, and as the program director and administrator for New Era Elementary School in Nigeria. For over 15 years she has developed and taught virtues programs to children ages 4-15 and more recently, African dance, art and drama. Ridvan taught the Virtuous Company in 2008/2009, the Finders of Knowledge (K-1) in 2007/2008, assisted Barbara for two years with the Virtuous Company and Seekers of Cohesion classes, and has participated in numerous GET teacher training seminars and workshops. Ridvan is currently engaged in training to become an occupational therapist, she is a certified Handwriting Without Tears instructor, and she is one of the founders of the Children's Theater Company in Peekskill.

Holly Stagliano is the main teacher for the Finders of Knowledge, for a second year in a row. Since 2003, Holly was an assistant teacher for ages 2-6 for a variety of GET programs, including for the Discoverers of the Ways of the Planet and as the ongoing substitute teacher for the Finders of Knowledge and the Makers of the Mosaic in 2007/2008, and the Virtuous Company in 2008/2009. Holly also has two children enrolled in Earth School, and is a homeschool mom. She graduated from Bowling Green State University with a degree in Arts and Science, and continued her studies at FIT in NYC, for a degree in fashion and merchandising. She has her own hand-made children's clothing company called "Nolly Designs." Holly has attended numerous GET teacher training seminars and workshops, and she is a certified Handwriting Without Tears instructor.

Kani Bynoe is the main teacher for the Farmers of Confidence for a second year, and the assistant teacher for the Finders of Knowledge. She taught the "Life on the Farm" pre-school programs in 2007/2008, and was the main educator for 3-4 year olds for Turtle Island Summer Camp from 2007 through 2009. Kani has been a GET teacher and assistant for ages 3-5 since 2001, and was Barbara's assistant for Earth School for homeschoolers starting in 1999. She has attended numerous GET teacher training seminars and workshops, as well as in the HANDLE method and Waldorf approaches to early childhood education.

Gayle Lamb is the art teacher for the Adopters of Respect, as well as for the Seekers of Cohesion classes on Wednesday mornings. All classes will be aligned to the age and curriculum needs of the students, integrated with their "lump-learning" themes. Gayle has a Bachelors of Science degree in Textile Design, and over 17 years experiences as Design Director for textile corporations in NYC. Gayle works as the Executive Director at the Croton/Cortlandt Center for the Arts, teaching art classes as part of their in-house programs, as well as in public and private schools. She has been teaching inside of the GET school environment for the past seven years, for ages 4-12.

Margaret Von Der Meden is our farm-based handicrafts teacher on Monday mornings for a third year. Many of you may know her from our "Life on the Farm" afterschool programs and our Turtle Island summer camp. Margaret graduated from Cologne University in Germany, and is known for her work with "2 Hands 2 Learn," which are arts-integrated programs in the public schools. She is extremely knowledgeable about organic gardening, composting, foraging, bee-keeping, chickens, etc., and we are delighted to have her working with us.

In addition to our regular, weekly staff, we have a whole host of consultants and helpers on hand with special skills. **Sara Garcia** has been our educational consultant since the beginning of SGITW, holding teaching certifications in regular, special education, and bi-lingual education in Spanish, with her special expertise in the area of children with learning differences. We hope that **Arthur Powell**, a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University, will be training our staff again this year in the Gattegno math method. We also hope to work with **Shakti Gattegno** at the Bronx Charter School for Better Learning, for training in the area of Words in Color, our reading method. **William Geise** will visit the Farmers of Confidence classes for workshops, as well as **Jo-Ellen Bosson** for music, and **Laurie Gershgor**n for cooking. We expect **Conrad de la Cruz**, **Judy Flanders**, and **Jean McGee** to return this year to lead workshops for the Adopters of Respect and Seekers of Cohesion classes on Friday mornings in basket-weaving, wood-working, bread-baking, and more. Other homeschooling parents and local teachers and professionals will likely volunteer throughout the year, whenever help is needed, and when they have a special skill to share.

We really have a special and talented staff and community of volunteers, and we hope you will get to know them all!

Communications

Barbara, Ridvan, Holly, and Kani will each produce twice-monthly reports for parents that will be sent out by email, and are intended to help homeschooling families to follow-up or supplement the curriculum at home. If you have any questions or concerns about the work being done in school, or your child's progress, we are always open to communicating. There are two required parent-teacher conference days that will be held during the school year, one on Monday, November 30, 2009 and one on Monday, April 5, 2010. Please be sure to mark these dates on your calendar!

We ask that you please try to understand if sometimes the teachers are very busy and can't talk, or aren't able to give parents their full attention at the end of the school day. We recommend communicating with teachers by emailing, or calling them at home after 5 p.m., but not later than 9 p.m. If there is a serious matter to discuss, it's always best to set up a private meeting in person.

Thank you all for your participation and support. We're looking forward to yet another great new chapter in our adventure together!...

Warmly,

☺ Barbara, Ridvan, Holly, and Kani