

Dear PFE Community Member,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you and your child(ren) to the 2012-13 school year. As I am writing this, we have 485 students registered for the coming year. Our general education staff with 22 homerooms are beginning to come in and prepare for an exciting school year. Teachers have "formal" inservice days on August 21st, 22nd and 23rd. During that time they will be engaged in professional meetings at the District, school and division level as well as getting their rooms ready for all of our students. Additionally, we will be hosting an Open House for all PFE families on August 23rd from 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM. I hope that many of you will be able to attend.

PFE prides itself in being "a caring community of learners that connects our learning with the world outside." We truly believe in active and engaging learning, whether it be doing projects related to things that we are studying, doing environmental projects that benefit our planet, connecting to nature through out many outside resources - wetlands, nature trail, gardens, etc., or engaging in service learning projects that benefit our school, local community or the world. We see our school's work through four different lenses - community, democracy, environment and inquiry. We are proud of our commitment to making that world a better place by engaging in those four lenses!

As the Lead Learner of our school, I am continually committed to learning. I am entering my 24th year as the Lead Learner at PFE. I absolutely love our school and am committed to making it an outstanding place for learning and a wonderful experience for everyone - students, parents, teachers, staff and community. As some of you may know, I am currently enrolled in a Ph. D. Program at PSU and will be writing my comprehensive exams this year(no small task). I am also learning many things along side our PFE teachers as we strive for literacy, equity and democracy. I am committed to supporting the learning of everyone and will work with you as we strive to bring out the best in your child(ren).

Many of you know that I was fortunate to have traveled to Rwanda this past June with a contingency of PSU - Altoona and University Park faculty and students. We were engaged in a partnership with the Star School in Kigali, Rwanda. I was able to connect with the principal and teachers of that school and establish a global connection for PFE through our school gardens. We built two greenhouses for the school that are similar to ours (that will be completed soon). PSU-Altoona is hoping to bring one of the teachers, Lamick, over to the US to spend some time at PFE and in our community. I am looking forward to the great learning experience it will be for all of us. If that works out, I will share more information about his trip to PFE as the time approaches.

For me, the trip was a great blend of service learning, personal learning and stewardship. In addition to the hands on experience of building the greenhouses, I was also able to observe and to teach in several of the classes. I also visited the Kigali Genocide Memorial (very sobering experience), went on a safari to experience the natural flora and fauna of Rwanda and checked something off of my bucket list - trekking to see the mountain gorillas in the Volcanoes National Park (of Dian Fossey

fame). Keep in mind that I was within three feet of those magnificent creatures most of the time without a wall/fence between us. I will share some of my experiences with our children at an All School Gathering sometime soon and anticipate being invited to classroom to share more personal details of my trip. If you are at all interested, I did keep a blog during my adventures (I still will be posting some of my further reflections) and the link for it is [www.dmstoicovytlio.blogspot.com](http://www.dmstoicovytlio.blogspot.com). Feel free to check it out and ask me anything about it.

Here are a few photos (out of my 1000+) of the mountain gorillas, our greenhouse, Lamick and me, giraffes and me on the safari and Emil the tailor who helped us with the stitching of the plastic for the greenhouses. Feel free to ask about my others.....



Over the years, PFE has been recognized for many things. Most recently, we were recognized by Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Center for Leadership and Citizenship (NCLC) as a School of Success for our efforts in reaching out to the community through service learning. Last year, our school was engaged in 22 service learning projects that ranged from serving our school community to our local community to reaching out to national organizations. A sample of community projects benefited our homeless community in State College, animals in shelters, soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, the American Red Cross through a student organized and run blood drive, the American Cancer Society through a school-wide learning experience, as well as many others too numerous to mention (check out our website). We were also recognized for our efforts as a Waste Watcher and our commitment to the environment by PROP (a recycling organization in PA) for the third year in a row. Our commitment to our learning with and from the community has benefited our school in many ways as tremendous partnerships have been forged. Additionally, our school led the efforts in SCASD to support service learning in other buildings. Our belief that the civic engagement of students is essential in our democracy. You will see this continue to manifest itself in any ways throughout your experiences at PFE.

Our faculty is an outstanding and talented group of educators, who are committed to making the learning experience of your child(ren) engaging. They seek to be your partner in education and will involve you in many ways. There are some opportunities for volunteering in our school - classroom, readers, field trips helpers, guest speakers, project helpers, etc. Teachers will share those opportunities with you. If you have a talent to share, please make it known to us. The experience in our building ranges from some relatively new staff members to a number of well-seasoned staff members who work collaboratively with each other to continue learning and leading learning in our school. Our new faculty members include Katie Tittmann (Reading Interventionist), Dani McIntyre (Speech and Language Therapist), Matt Cosgrove (Art Teacher), as well as seven new PDS elementary education interns in various classroom and 1 school psychologist intern. We anticipate hiring a special education paraprofessional shortly after school starts. We are excited to have all of them joining our PFE community and hope that you will join us in welcoming them.

We will be focusing on some SCASD instructional strategies goals for this coming year. These include:

- Setting objectives, providing feedback and using formative assessments.
- Assigning homework and providing practice.
- Community building - connect to one aspect of cooperative learning - interpersonal and small group skills

Our PFE goals include:

- Continuing to working towards being a democratic school through educational renewal in all areas of the Agenda for Education in a Democracy (John Goodlad), developing a School-wide Positive Behavior Plan, and connecting with our local community in multiple ways.
- Continuing to work on creating a community of learning that celebrates the inclusion of all at PFE through our efforts in Membership, Participation and Learning.
- Enhancing our efforts in Literacy through our PFE's Incredible Adventure in Reading.
- Engaging all learners through service learning, civic engagement, project-based learning, inquiry, etc.

I will describe more about these at Back to School night in my presentation and share any others that our PFE faculty and staff decide upon during our inservice days.

In keeping with the Literacy theme our school is continuing this fall, here are some of the books that I read this summer (in addition to the magazines that I regularly read - The New Yorker, Orion, the Week, Yes! and other educational magazines). Feel free to ask me about them and to share ones that you think I might be interested in reading:

*Strength In What Remains* by Tracey Kidder (prior to my Rwanda trip)

*Eco Literate* by Daniel Goleman, Lisa Bennett and Zenobia Barlow

*Wild Scholars* by Darrell Velegol (one of our PFE parents)

*Schools that Work* by George Wood

*Meaningful Student Involvement* by Adam Fletcher

*Healing the Heart of Democracy* by Parker Palmer

*Classroom Instruction that Works*, 2nd Edition by Ceri Dean, Elizabeth Hubbell, and Howard Pitler (read by all SCASD Administrators)

Also, be prepared, as I may ask you and your children: What are you reading (or have you read recently)?

Finally, earlier this month I sent a few questions to you for your child to come prepared to discuss at our Town Hall meeting (during our first All School Gathering) where we will start our work at establishing our norms for School-Wide Positive Behavior Plan. We will be constructing those with everyone's voices being heard. I asked the children to think about some ground rules that we might have when large groups come together to share (2 ideas), their wishes, hopes or dreams for PFE for this year, what an ideal school would be like and what are they most excited about for this year. Please help your child to complete that survey and bring their ideas to school the first day. It will help us do our good work. Thanks for helping them with this.



We are looking forward to a wonderful school year. Please help us make it that way by being involved and engaged with us.

All the Best!

*Donnan*

Donnan Stoicovy  
Lead Learner  
Park Forest Elementary School

**Some important dates for your calendar:**

August 23, 2012	Open House from 11:00 AM - Noon
August 28, 2012	First Day of School for 1st - 5th grades Kindergarten Orientation (1 hour sessions)
August 29, 2012	First full day of school for Kindergarten
September 13, 2012	Back to School Night for 3rd - 5th grade from 7:00 - 8:30 PM Starts in All Purpose Room
September 18, 2012	Back to School Night for K - 2nd grade from 7:00 - 8:30 PM Starts in All Purpose Room
September 18, 2012	School Pictures

Other dates are accessible on our school's website.

Please know that parents have an open invitation to have lunch with your child(ren). Just let your child(ren)'s teacher know that you are coming and sign in in the office. If you want to order a lunch, we will need to know before 9:00 AM

Additionally, we have a weekly All School Gathering at 2:00 PM that parents and community members are welcome to attend every week except the first Tuesday of the month when we have Small School Gathering. Please sign in at the office and come to the All Purpose Room.

Thank you!