



Birchwood School of Hawken

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the 2017-2018 school year, and welcome to our first full year as Birchwood School of Hawken. I hope you have had a refreshing summer and are looking forward to this school year as much as we are.

Summer at school has been busy. Hawken School has given Birchwood a goodwill gift that has allowed us to do important facility upgrades. The purpose has been twofold. First is improvements for functionality. We have formalized our breakout rooms to accommodate a growing student population, and we have made improvements to the classrooms to enhance use of space. In addition, there will be much needed upgrades to administrative offices to improve our staff efficiency. Second is improvements for aesthetics. From renovated bathrooms to individual classroom improvements, we have significantly improved the appearance of the school.

Open House to View School Improvements

On **Sunday, September 24 from 2 to 4 pm** we will have a school open house for current parents and friends to celebrate our first full school year as Birchwood School of Hawken. This will provide an opportunity for everyone to tour the campus and view the improvements made possible through Hawken's gift. In addition, Mr. Scott Looney, Head of Hawken School, will speak at 3 pm about the merger and the opportunities for our students at Hawken School.

New Programming for the 2017-2018 School Year

As always, we have been working to improve our academic programming. This year's improvements are a result of extended research and study during the past few years.

Technology Electives and Extensions in 6th, 7th, and 8th Grades

New and expanded course offerings will continue Logo programming, programming in Scratch and Python, and programming for apps. In addition, the seventh and eighth grade IT electives will include video creations. Details forthcoming.

Enhanced Creative Problem Solving Curriculum

For 30 years, Birchwood has maintained a focus on the creative problem solving process and has taught it formally and informally across grade levels. We believe this skill is critically important to 21st century citizens, and therefore we are making some exciting enhancements to the program:

1. After an 18-month period of study and research, our early childhood program will begin ***Loose Parts Play***. In preschool this is an object-based (often natural objects) framework for nurturing fluency, flexibility, and problem-solving in very young children. In kindergarten, open ended play, loose parts and problem-solving/design-thinking are integrated in a yearlong study of the concept of change. Students explore "change" through concrete objects and materials as well as the dynamics of scientific phenomenon and human experience and community.

2. The *Creative Problem Solving (CPS) curriculum* is also expanding in first through fourth grades. Each Friday, we have scheduled a one and a half hour block of time during which students will be immersed in the creative thinking process, learning creative thinking skills through maker/builder projects or real-world problems which stem from issues in science and social studies.

Extending Experiential Learning in Science and Social Studies

After two years of study, research, and preparation, we will enrich and deepen our approach to experiential education in social studies and science for first through fourth grade students. We have made space and time adjustments in order to accommodate this wonderful opportunity for our students. Students will learn the habits of mind professionals use to question, collect data, organize findings, and draw conclusions. They will model real-world inquiry and research that professionals do in these fields.

Continuing to Pilot the Galilean Learning Project for 8th Graders

The first year of this partnership with SoulCraft Woodshop during 2016-2017 was a great success and we will continue the program with our eighth grade students. There will be two sessions one in the fall and one in the spring. The purpose of these projects is to use concrete construction projects as a means to teach students the natural learning process which applies to any domain of knowledge.

Staffing Changes and Additions

Medical Leave of Absence

Mrs. Hannah Bontje will be taking a medical leave of absence for the 2017-2018 school year. In July she was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma and has already begun chemotherapy treatments which will last at least through December. The prognosis is very good, but due to the effects of the treatments, she needs to avoid environments that expose her to illnesses. We wish her all the best for a complete recovery.

New Staff Members

Shulamite Konopinski

Mrs. Shulamite Konopinski will become our third and fourth grade language arts and reading teacher together with Ms. West. Both will be working as a team together with Mrs. Debelak's support. Mrs. Konopinski holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Bachelor of Music degree in piano performance from Oberlin College and Conservatory. While at Oberlin, she studied methodologies of teaching and tutoring English, and broadened her experience by working one-on-one with college students in the Writing Associates Program.

Her passion for words began when she started first grade at Birchwood and continued throughout her high school years at Hawken's Upper School. Returning to Birchwood this year as a reading and language arts teacher, she is eager to continue the school's tradition of an atmosphere that makes learning exciting and a unique care for each individual student. Apart from her passion for teaching English, she has taught piano for the past eight years and helped students compete and win state and international competitions, including the American Protégé International Piano and Strings Competition and several categories of the Great Composers Competition.

Rana Bottino

Mrs. Rana Bottino will partner with Mrs. Gregory and Miss Bottini to develop our experiential science program in grades 1-4. Mrs. Bottino received her Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in environmental science from Rutgers University and the New Jersey Institute of Technology, respectively.

After graduating, she set out to make a difference in protecting our natural world by becoming a scientist and project manager in the environmental consulting field. For seven years, she sampled contaminated sites and was a driving force in their remediation. With a seemingly endless number of sites to clean up, Mrs. Bottino eventually realized that any future work she did had to be greater. She believed that educating others about science, the environment, and instilling an appreciation for the world around us would be more impactful.

In 2011, Mrs. Bottino accepted a position as an environmental educator at the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes and discovered her true passion, teaching. Over the next six years, she taught and developed a variety of science and environmental curriculum designed to educate and inspire students in pre-kindergarten through grade 6. In 2015, she decided to transition to a formal teaching career with the hopes of becoming an elementary school science or STEM teacher. While still working at the nature center, she completed the Intensive Pedagogical Training Institute through the Ohio Department of Education and received her certification in integrated science and earth science for grades K-12. Mrs. Bottino is thrilled to join the Birchwood community where she can share her love for science and the environment, as well as encourage her students to always explore, ask questions, and think like a scientist.

Elyse Anderson

Miss Elyse Anderson will be teaming up with Dr. Neider, Mr. Parrino, and Mrs. Kufahl to establish our new grades 1-4 social studies program focusing on experiential education. Miss Anderson is excited to be stepping into this role. She became acquainted with Birchwood during the last three months of the 2016-2017 school year as a long-term substitute kindergarten teacher and has since grown ever more eager and motivated to work as part of the full-time faculty.

Miss Anderson received a Bachelor of Arts in international studies with a focus on peace, conflict, and diplomacy from Miami University in 2010. Her studies encompassed the fields of history, geography, political science, anthropology, and foreign language. After undergrad, Miss Anderson served as a full-time AmeriCorps volunteer in Cleveland, teaching English as a second language to refugee and immigrant adults. This experience struck the perfect balance between challenging and gratifying; she was highly motivated to improve as an educator. She was ecstatic when she found out she was accepted to the DePaul University Master of Education program in bilingual-bicultural education.

During her first year, she taught in a pre-kindergarten classroom during the day, attending graduate courses in the evenings. In her second year she was selected to work as the graduate research assistant in the Department of Leadership, Language and Curriculum in the College of Education, conducting literature reviews and assisting professors on their research projects. Miss Anderson graduated from DePaul with a 4.0 and was awarded distinction for her thesis work on the application of bilingual education methods in classrooms for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Following graduate school, Miss Anderson was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to teach English in Germany for one school year. As her Fulbright year came to a close, Miss Anderson decided to stay in Germany a bit longer, to improve her proficiency in the language, continue studying, and further immerse herself in the culture. She worked for two years as a bilingual kindergarten teacher and completed courses on gender studies in German at the University of Freiburg before returning to Cleveland in 2016. In her free time, Miss Anderson enjoys traveling both within and outside of the U.S., reading books in coffee shops, particularly biographies and historical period pieces, continuing to learn German as well as Spanish, and climbing rocks!

Amy Kohut

Ms. Amy Kohut will be working with Mrs. Chen and Mrs. Hallett in our kindergarten program. Ms. Kohut is a Birchwood parent alum. Her son Cameron attended Birchwood for eight years and graduated in 2015. She spent many years volunteering within the Birchwood community, both as treasurer of the Parent Committee and as a homeroom parent. She immediately felt a connection to the school and the unique sense of community that exists among the parents and staff.

Ms. Kohut was honored to join the Birchwood staff as a substitute teacher and after school aide in 2015. For the 2016-2017 school year, she also served as music aide for first through third grade students. For the 2017-2018 school year, her role has expanded to full-time kindergarten aide. She is excited to be a part of an environment that nurtures students and helps them achieve their learning goals, and to witness the incredible growth within each child during the school year.

Ms. Kohut holds a Bachelor of Arts from Cleveland State University and a Master of Arts in sociology with a focus on collective behavior, culture, and social movements. She previously worked at Cleveland State as a tutor and teaching research assistant.

Jessica Hotz

Ms. Jessica Hotz will be working with the teachers in the Seedlings and Sprouts classes. She will also help guide the preschool After School Care program.

Ms. Hotz's entire career has been focused on working with young children. She is passionate about education and learning, and its importance in the early years. She started her career 22 years ago in a Montessori school where she earned her Montessori assistant certificate. She also established a summer camp program while there. Ms. Hotz has also worked as a nanny, an in-home care provider, with Head Start, and other child care centers serving children, birth through 12 years old. Ms. Hotz has her early childhood education degree and is excited to be working with the preschool program at Birchwood.

She has lived and worked in Cleveland her entire life, and lives in Cleveland, "the place we love" with her husband and daughter. Ms. Hotz embraces art and her love of nature as her hobbies. But above all, her love for her students and her commitment to their learning is the focus of her life's work.

Sally Ann Higginbotham

Mrs. Sally Ann Higginbotham will be working with Mrs. Brady in the Seedlings class. Mrs. Higginbotham graduated cum laude from Cleveland State University with a Bachelor of Science in early childhood education and then earned a master's degree in education focused on reading and literacy instruction: a perfect fit for our blossoming Seedlings. Mrs. Higginbotham has also taught third grade, first grade, and with Head Start at various private inner city Cleveland schools.

Mrs. Higginbotham is excited to be a part of Birchwood's Early Childhood educational program. She believes the first five years of a child's life can supply children with a lifelong love of learning and a can-do-attitude toward life. Her educational philosophy emphasizes hands-on learning, the importance of play-based learning, and the importance of making and being a friend. When not teaching, Mrs. Higginbotham enjoys reading mystery novels, taking leisurely walks, and spending time with her family.

Working together with you for every child's success,

Charles Debelak
Head of School