

FALL 2003

Volume 7, No. 1

A Message from the Director

Once upon a time, not so very long ago or far away, the teachers of the Concord Children's Center gathered in the big room to listen to the stories of Joey Talbert. Joey, a professional storyteller had come to the Center during our professional development days to help us learn the craft and value of telling stories. As I listened to Joey read, then tell a story, I was truly amazed at the powerful difference between reading and telling the same story. Although the book she used to demonstrate the difference had beautiful illustrations that she carefully displayed for all to see, my mind wandered as I listened. Once Joey told the story without the book, my imagination took off and the images in my mind were much more fluid and active and engaging. The experience was revealing. Reading and telling stories are two different activities!

Joey will be coming to the Children's Center on Saturday, October 4th at 10:00 a.m. for a family storytelling event. You are all invited to come and listen to the magic of her stories.

At the Children's Center there are wonderful stories taking place every day. I'd like to share a brief one that is typical of the beginning of the year. As I was sitting in my office this week (neither long ago, nor far away) I overheard a young girl's conversation with her mother, "Mom, see that girl over there. She's my best friend. I met her today"

Yesterday, an alumni parent told me that her daughter was sharing an apartment in Manhattan with her friend from the Toddler Room. They met and became friends twenty years ago. Although they had gone to different colleges in different states, that early friendship from the Toddler Room still lasted!

This issue of the Children's Journal is all about the value of stories both told and read. It includes an article about storytelling, one on current children's literature and one on storytelling at our Ripley site. I hope that you enjoy it and that it will inspire you to tell stories.

Sincerely, Kathy Reticker



A Message from the Board

After a busy summer of hiking, swimming, visiting grandparents and driving to summer camp, it is nice to settle into the school-year routine!

At the initial Board meeting of the year, we conducted an informal brainstorming session to invigorate our thinking and to plan for committee work. Each Board committee formulated specific goals and presented ideas for the upcoming year and in the long term. Subsequently, all Board members and other participants had a chance to indicate their highest priorities among all the possibilities.

Many of the "winning" priorities reflect an ongoing effort by the Board of Directors to enhance the community environment at the Children's Center. The goal of the Communications Committee is to bring together children, parents, teachers, and alumni - using room parents, the web site, and the newsletter. The Fundraising Committee aims to establish a thoughtful planned sequence of events annually that promote community and raise funds for special items or the operating budget. In addition, the committee wants to establish standing members and to set annual and event goals.

The Board also plans to focus on several priorities that reinforce our commitment to our staff and our need to plan for the future. The goal of the Personnel Committee is to make Concord Children's Center a place where professional staff can spend their careers. This aim is accomplished by assessing and maintaining appropriate benefits, salaries, teacher appreciation and staff development. The Long Range Planning Committee intends to concentrate on the Ripley and Emerson sites and to conduct an overall needs assessment of the Center. The committee also wants to develop alumni programs, along with encouraging and appreciating volunteerism at the Children's Center.

continued on page 2

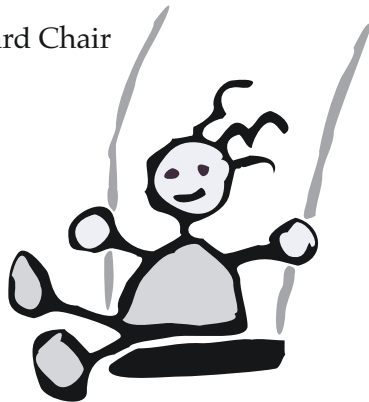
Message from the Board, cont'd from page 1

The Capital Campaign Committee has been working hard to raise significant funding to defray the cost of the new building at 1300 Main Street and to provide for the long term financial health and flexibility of the Children's Center. A successful capital campaign is essential to maintain program quality and affordability. The Campaign Committee plans to clarify the compelling message of the campaign and to encourage more involvement from the Children's Center and local community. In addition, the committee hopes to identify additional leadership donors and grants. We hope that all families will join us in making the campaign a success!

Many dedicated and talented parents and community members contribute to the well-being and excellence of Concord Children's Center. We are enormously grateful for their support. We urge everyone to find a way to get involved this year - by working on a committee, hosting an alumni event, serving as a room parent, becoming involved in the capital campaign, or participating in the annual auction or other events.

Please do not hesitate to speak to any member of the Board if you have questions or concerns. We look forward to another great year!

Sincerely,
Pamela Gannon, Board Chair

**From the Editors**

There was a spirited discussion the other day at an Editorial committee meeting concerning the pro's and con's of Television, and its affect on Storytelling. Several thought that TV was a negative force, stifling a child's ability to invent for themselves. Others took the view that lack of TV was a needless social/ cultural handicap. Another pointed out that your first trip to the therapist's couch never begins with the question "Tell me about your television shows," and that some committee members might benefit from learning this fact first hand.

This was my introduction to the newly formed Newsletter Editorial Committee, and at once I knew I was in the right place. In all honesty, I feared joining any group that would have me, and I secretly harbored a high school prejudice that all editors were passive / aggressive grammarians who suffered unresolved control issues. To my great surprise, I found myself in a room full of people whose only common trait was that they were just plain jazzed by the last issue of the Newsletter. While the topic of proofreading occasionally makes a presence, committee meetings have been more akin to a salon of All Things Early Childhood. This issue's theme of **Storytelling** is the outcome of one such session, with subsequent issues to be similarly built around a central theme. If this strikes a chord, I invite you to join us; a full-time or part-time editor is still needed, and new contributors are always welcome.

Also included in this issue are a few statistics called *CCC By the Numbers*. Some are fun, some pointed, all of which are meant to provoke a conversation. To my great surprise in making up (uh, I mean compiling) these facts, I was amazed to learn the distribution of this Newsletter is over 2000 copies. Clearly we have a readership far beyond the current families. To paraphrase the Center's motto, we are Launching a Newsletter, Creating Community. We hope you will feel welcome.

Jonathan Campbell on behalf of Connie Johnson, co-editor, and Editorial Committee members Matt Johnson, Kathy Reticker, Meighan Matthews, Paula Ojemann, and Graphic Designer, Gretchen Hollworth.

RIPLEY'S Believe it or Not!

Meighan Matthews, Ripley 3-4s parent

Assuming storytelling is an integral part of the lives of every child and educator, I talked with Ripley's Program Director and teacher, Penni Hensley Wagner about storytelling in her school's classrooms of 3-5 year olds. She agreed that storytelling is a daily exercise and offered many examples.

Reading books is, naturally, storytelling. I often see teachers or parents reading to the class when I drop off or pick up my son from school. It's obvious that the children love to listen to the stories and look at the pictures. They are always calmly sitting bunched up together on the one couch in the room with intent looks on their faces. I've been impressed to hear the teachers asking the children frequent questions as they read to help with comprehension and attention. Penni is impressed with one of the 4-5s teachers, Matt Boynton, who has a degree in drama. As he reads a story, he creates different voices for the various characters in the book. Doing this helps form wonderful pictures in the children's heads.

Penni also said that the teachers had attended a workshop in which they were encouraged to read a book to themselves first, and then retell it to the children in their own words in a way that makes it an effective story for the group. Penni said this technique can be freeing for some, but scary for others!

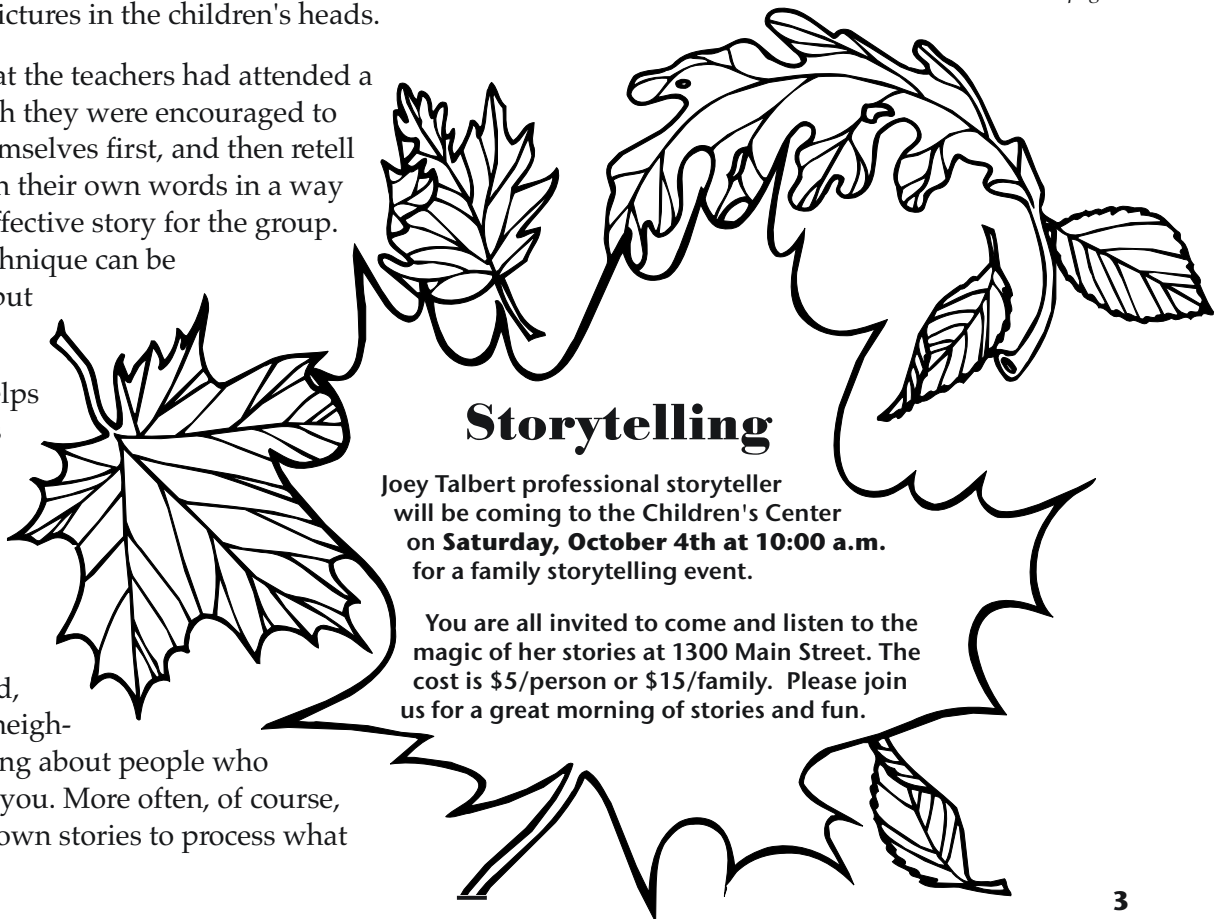
Hearing stories helps develop children's imaginations, and also aids them in processing issues in their lives. There are books about bad dreams, being mad, moving to a new neighborhood, or learning about people who are different from you. More often, of course, children tell their own stories to process what

they are experiencing in their lives, both the bad and the good.

Penni said they usually have snack and lunchtime conversations asking the children what they did last weekend or what they are going to do later on. Both during these more structured conversation times or just anytime during the day, Penni said children will tell stories about issues they need to process from either their school or home lives.

Storytelling by children at this age is, in large part, also about learning what is and isn't true. Children will listen to each other's stories during the day, and try to figure out what is real about what they are hearing. There are always a few children who will tell "tales," e.g., I went to Disney Land this weekend! (And the child says this every Monday...) When the tall tale tellers start spinning their yarns and other children perk up their ears, the listeners will inevitably say, "that's not true!" and the teller will say, "yes it is!" The tellers often don't think they are telling a "tale" and the line between fantasy and reality is blurred.

continued on page 4



Storytelling

Joey Talbert professional storyteller will be coming to the Children's Center on **Saturday, October 4th at 10:00 a.m.** for a family storytelling event.

You are all invited to come and listen to the magic of her stories at 1300 Main Street. The cost is \$5/person or \$15/family. Please join us for a great morning of stories and fun.

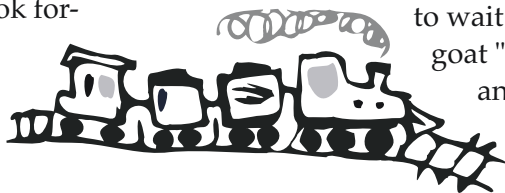
RIPLEY'S, cont'd from page 3

Personally, I often wonder about this fuzzy line as I listen in the car-ride home about my son's day at school! I try to ask specific questions to help lead him to describe a part of his day, such as, "What did you sing in Meeting today?" or "What did you choose at Choice Time?" Sometimes I'll hear about something that actually happened a few days ago, or I'll hear something that obviously made a big impression on him. What I really love to hear are recountings of conversations with other kids in the class who have told him a story from their lives: "A friend told me that she has a Thomas train at home that runs all by itself!" Also wonderful is to hear his version of an event that a teacher already told me about. They often reveal the unique perspective of a three-year-old!

Finally, Ripley students also have opportunities to act out stories. Penni said the teachers had another workshop last year which gave them the idea to ask children (one-on-one) to make up their own stories. Then, the teachers wrote the stories down verbatim and read them aloud to the group. The children chose parts and acted them out!

A big hit for my son last year was Julie, who came every Thursday to conduct a movement class. According to him, Julie often had the kids act out familiar stories using words, songs, hand gestures and movement. A favorite of my son's was "Bear Hunt" when they hunted for a bear (but "I'm not scared!") through swishing grass, up a tree, over a river, and through the mud. After discovering the big scary bear, they ran all the way back through the same obstacles to safety. This may have been particularly pleasing to my son who tends to be physically cautious (and loves stories and songs), to be able to imagine himself doing all those daring things, and using his body to pretend.

As a parent I am thrilled with the Ripley staff's imagination and creativity to incorporate various storytelling techniques into the children's days for fun and growth. I look forward to hearing many more stories (and tales) from my son this year!



Storytelling with a Preschooler - A Lasting Experience

by Joan Kimball, CCC Grandparent

Hearing stories read aloud expands a child's world. Hearing a story told is a deeper, even more lasting experience for the child --- and for the parent. Whether you decide to tell your child a tale that you adapt from a book or draw one from your own experience, don't memorize it, but put in plenty of action and dialogue. Here's one of my favorites.

The Little Red Hen finds a wheat seed and waves it about, saying, "Who will help me plant this seed?" The cat, the dog and the mouse all say, "Not I." So she plants it herself. The hen's lazy companions repeatedly say, "Not I," when she asks for help, and she has to plant, harvest and mill the wheat and bake the bread herself. Finally, she takes the bread from the oven and asks, "Who will help me eat this bread?" The three say, "I will," but she says, "No, you won't! By myself I did the work and by myself I'll eat it."

The story of the Little Red Hen works for children ages three to five because it has constant action and dialogue, repetition of problems with predictable solutions, and a surprise ending. Many other folktales appeal to this age because of these elements of action, repetition, and surprise.

What's behind this pattern? Preschoolers are just beginning to be able to put the world together with words. Story actions connect language with concrete images, while repetition helps preschoolers learn more abstract concepts. The story of the Little Red Hen teaches kids the concrete steps of breadmaking. Repetitions in the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," give solid shape to "small, medium and large." In the story of "The Three Little Pigs," kids learn about durability. And take the fate of the troll in "The Three Billy Goats Gruff"-- he was greedy enough to wait again and again until the biggest, juiciest goat "poked the troll's eyes out with his horns, and crushed him to bits, body and bones."

Storytelling, cont'd from page 4

There are subtle lessons, too, in these stories about selfishness, and standing up to bullies, and not entering strange houses. These vivid stories are more persuasive than parents' lectures.



Artwork by Leslie Koplow, Ripley parent

It's best to avoid stories that are too sad or scary, however. Preschoolers need to be reassured that there are no boy-eating giants or fire-breathing dragons any more. Those monsters were "once upon a time," long ago and far away. For young children the good guys must always win, because three to five year-olds generally believe the story could happen to them. They can't tell fact from fiction. Parents may worry about a story with a violent ending for the villain, but their children need to know that the bad guy loses. Children grapple -- sometimes alone -- with fears of evil and death, and they need to be told that wickedness is punished. If you don't kill off the wolf and the troll, as far as your preschool listener is concerned, the monster is still wandering the world and is a tangible threat.

Not all good stories are serious. Children love the story of "Lazy Jack," who is a numbskull. He pours milk into his pocket, drags meat in the dust, and hoists a donkey onto his back, making the rich man's daughter laugh, and thereby winning a fortune. The children chuckle at Jack's bumbling and wonder at his luck.

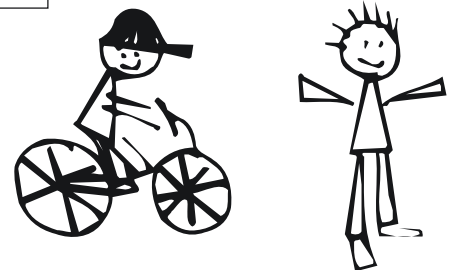
You and your listeners can add sounds and gestures to stories. Because language is so new to preschoolers, the more they are part of the storytelling, the better. When the cat, dog and mouse say, "Not I," you can point to yourself and vary your voice. When the billy goats' bridge goes "trip, trap," you can slap your knee. If your listeners don't copy you, make larger gestures, or briefly say, "Can you help me tell it?" You can use props, such as a flannel board or costumes or puppets and act out stories together.

There are many books and tapes that offer great stories, songs and finger plays for preschoolers. The picture book and folktale sections of the public library (JJ and J398.2) are good places to look. But the stories you tell don't have to come from books. No doubt you have family stories to pass on to your children. They would love to hear even fragments of tales about the people they know. Perhaps you remember your first day of school, or when you fell off your bike, or when you won a toy at the fair. Tell them about it.

You don't have to be a great storyteller. Your children will love anything you care to spin out - - on car rides, at bedtime, or waiting at the doctor's. Your children will never forget the stories you share. You create an intimacy even closer than reading aloud. And your stories can pass on values, stretch children's minds, and give them a sense of tradition and history... Go for it!

Joan Kimball has told stories to the children in the Diamond and Star rooms. She has also recently edited and co-authored a storyteller's handbook for the National Storytelling Network.

.....
 Concord
 Children's Center



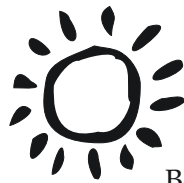
What Makes a Classic? Who Writes 'Em?

Fiona Feinstein, After-K parent

There are too many children's books that are deemed 'classics' by overeager publishers and reviewers. Don't blindly trust the Caldecott Medal, awarded to the year's "best" picture book after being chosen by a committee of librarians. That title is automatically anointed as a classic and guaranteed immortality. This year's winner, *My Friend Rabbit*, by Eric Rohmann, beat out several titles that had excited a tremendous amount of excitement and praise in the world of children's books--*When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson* by Pam Munoz Ryan, illustrated by Brian Selznick and *Action Jackson, a life of Jackson Pollock*, by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan, illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker. Both were gorgeous and moving picture book biographies, a genre that is fast producing some of the most beautiful, original and educational books of our time (like the amazingly original *Frida*, by Jonah Winter, illustrated by Ana Juan.) Then there was *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey* by Maira Kalman, which tackled the events of 9/11 with great courage and humanity, on a scale easily comprehensible to children. All appear to be the closest thing to 'classics' that were published last year and all, I suspect, will become beloved, by children and adults.

Keep in mind that medals are not everything, and everyone should have their own list of favorites. Here are some of my family's, with five can't-miss authors.

- Anything by Kevin Henkes, but if I had to pick one...I can't. There is no better author for describing everyday child anxieties and triumphs-and his color sense is the best.
- Anything illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman-is there a more lyrical, consistent artist working today? Her newest book, *Sense Pass King: A Story from Cameroon* written by Katrin Tchana (her daughter), is one of her best.



- The amazing work of John Steptoe-an all too soon lost to us author, whose *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* set the standard for rediscovering African folktales and for raising the bar in children's book illustration.
- Lauren Child-one of the most exciting and entertaining children's book authors around-British, funky and an amazing sense of mixed-media design. Try the Clarice Bean series, or the ones about siblings Lola and Charlie, and you and your child will become addicted to Child's world.
- Barbara McClintock-an illustrator worthy of Dickens or Austen, who makes delightfully complex, brilliantly drawn pictures and now is an author-illustrator with her *Dahlia*-our copy has already been read to tatters.

20 Top 10 Favorites

Since a personal Top Ten List is irresistible to make when one gets started thinking about children's stories, here is my list of New Classics ...

- ◆ *How Georgina Drove the Car Very Carefully From Boston to New York* by Lucy Bates
- ◆ *Hurry, Hurry, Mary Dear* by N. M. Bodecker, illustrated by Erik Blevgad
- ◆ *Big Red Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown
- ◆ *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type and Giggle, Giggle, Quack* by Doreen Cronin, illustrated by Betsy Levin
- ◆ *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson
- ◆ *Corduroy* by Don Freeman
- ◆ *Polly's Puffin* by Sarah Garland
- ◆ *Benny: An Adventure Story* by Bob Graham
- ◆ *Horace and Morris But Mostly Dolores* by James Howe illustrated by Amy Walrod
- ◆ *Dogger* by Shirley Hughes
- ◆ *Five Creatures* by Emily Jenkins, illustrated by Tomek Bogacki
- ◆ *Emily's New Hat* by Ezra Jack Keats
- ◆ *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* by Judith Kerr
- ◆ *Lily's Walk* by Satoshi Kitamura
- ◆ *The Paper Princess* by Elisa Kleven



- ◆ The Shy Little Girl by Phyllis Krasilovsky, illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman
- ◆ Joseph Had a Little Overcoat by Simms Taback
- ◆ More, More, More: Said The Baby by Vera Williams
- ◆ Zoom at Sea and Zoom Away by Tim Wynne-Jones, illustrated by Eric Beddows
- ◆ Officer Buckle and Gloria by Peggy Rathman



Fiona Feinstein is an alumnae parent of an After K. She is currently pursuing an advanced degree in Children's Literature from Simmons College.

Stories of Their Own

Jonathan Campbell, Diamond Room parent

The need for -and joy of- storytelling exists throughout the day for our children. Unlike the static, oft repeated bedtime stories I tell my son each night, I find the stories he tells me are active, evolving amalgamations of his day's stimuli. I have frequently noticed the need in my child to just tell a story for the sake of telling a story. Hidden meanings or messages are not required. Come to think of it, structured beginnings and endings are also optional. Most of his stories are just the middle part. There seems to be something satisfying in just relating to another human. Why do we adults limit our stories to pedigreed tales told to us again and again? Why not relate the adventures of a Power Rangers show that your lunch buddy's older brother saw two years ago? A good yarn is a good yarn, and don't we always press our kids to share? So seems to be the lesson promoted by a group of 3-4's with whom I come into contact. Moreover this gaggle of 1300 Mainers have gone beyond re-inventing stories to an all out hijacking of language. This proto-posse hails those in the know as Pozo, while those not in the loop (i.e. me) are Floppy. Serious breaches of preschool etiquette and other faux pax committed by unsuspecting parents will label you a Marshmallow.

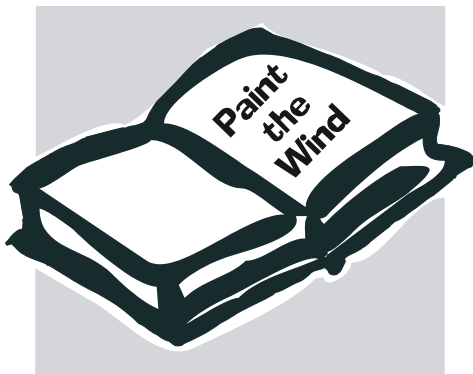
No parent I have polled knows the basis for this language co-option, but it is on the way to becoming some sort of CCC Esperanto. I make no

pretense to fully understand all this, but I take it to be a manifestation of our children's need to create something of their own. If the story is about something they don't understand, then simply add a few examples of the things they do. Parents, who usually control story content, can now be kept at bay by the use of a new language that belongs to child. There was a great work a while back called *Our Stories Ourselves*, in which Afro-American identity was examined from the point of view of the stories passed on from generation to generation. It seems equally applicable on the peer-to peer level of our own youngsters; by shaping their stories (and words) our kids can shape their worlds and own selves. With a bit of luck, they can pass on some of this insight to their Floppy parents as well.

CCC BY THE NUMBERS

- Number of children enrolled: 229
- Number of 2003 CCC Families: 205
- Ratio of staff members to families: 1:4.6
- Average number of hours enrolled: 22.83
- Number of "alumnae" families: 20
- Number of staff grandchildren enrolled: 1
- Number of twins enrolled: 5
- Number of triplets: 1
- Number of new families: 65
- Most frequently used boys name: Nicholas
- Most frequently used girls name: Margaret
- Average teacher tenure: 7 years
- Number of new staff: 3
- Year CCC founded: 1975
- Rank, by cost, of CCC in a survey of 9 local Preschool options: 7th
- Percent of income spent on teacher salaries: 78%
- Percent of families who requested tuition assistance: 8%
- Rank of the CCC as a fundraising participant in 2003 Community Chest Triathalon: 1





DID YOU KNOW?

Looking for the next great children's classic? Then look no further than the CCC! After- K teacher Emily Charest has just published (with her mom Jane Yolen) her first book this past spring. The book is called *Paint the Wind*, and the author is available for signings daily. Congratulations Emily!



CCC Website

www.concordchildrenscenter.org

The website is an information resource for current parents and prospective parents. The site includes CCC news, calendar events, parent resources, general program information and CCC Board information.

