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September 2004

From the Co-Directors:

All the Nursery School classrooms—the Playroom, for children two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half; the Homeroom, for children three to four, and the Schoolroom for children from four to five-and-a-half—have returned to their “school year” look. When teachers set up for the fall they remember to “down shift” the environments to match the developmental stage and abilities of the children entering the class, rather than return them to the way they were in June. Each classroom set-up will grow with the children’s interests and abilities as the year progresses, as each child becomes older and more able.

Unlike elementary school, the curriculum in the pre-school is individualized to each child’s needs. Sometimes it’s possible to pick up classroom themes that follow the seasons, such as pastel paint and gardening in the spring, but the true curriculum is what each child shows us that she needs to work on, and we see that by watching how she interacts with the other children and choose the activities from the developmentally appropriate core set up. Researchers call this “teaching to the zone of proximal development.” This means meeting the child where he is developmentally, and providing information and experiences that expand his thinking to the next developmental level. Here is an example: the teacher notices the children “reading” to each other in the book area, copying the way a teacher or parents read to them. However they are socially inept, demanding that the children being read to sit down and be quiet and obey their commands. Watching, the teacher can tell that the children are trying to be friends, and that looking at books and matching words to what they see in the pictures is a good pre-reading activity that should be encouraged. The problem is that the children, happy to tell others what to do, don’t like being told what to do. So the teacher puts dolls or teddy bears into the book area to be read to! Each child can “read,” and the toy bears don’t mind a bit being told what to do or which book they are listening to.

The major over-arching goals found in each classroom correspond with the developing areas of the whole child

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(physical development, social and emotional, language, and cognitive or intellectual development), knowing that all development is facilitated through caring relationships among children and teachers. Areas of development are interdependent; intellectual development is enhanced by the development of language skills which assist in organizing and ordering thought; cognition also grows with social and emotional competency. Physical development, while very important in the babies' world, evens out with the other areas of development when toilet training is complete...interestingly, just at the same time that social development really takes off. All areas of development progress; while the child's drive for large muscle mastery diminishes, small muscle development and articulation increases. Toys that stimulate language development, and play situations that develop the reciprocity of language are present in all groups, but the type of language they elicit differs. In Hedco language is about labels and commands (pointing to pictures and naming the objects, saying Mine! or More! or No!), so there are lots of things to talk about and opportunities to name, own, and demand. Language becomes more precise as the vocabulary grows—the two-year-old who says "I don't like that!" becomes the three-year-old whose teacher coaches him to define what he doesn't like, "I don't like it when you take my paint!" Nursery School children work to extend language to the abstract—how they feel, and harder still, how someone else feels. The ability to manipulate and control others with language, as well as the ability to be thoughtful and kind and understanding, come with repeated opportunities to play with other children and be coached through difficulties—the teacher deliberately sets up the classroom to elicit this kind of play.

On the afternoon of the Fall set-up we have a long staff meeting in which the needs of each child are discussed; teachers from one class pass along to the new teachers who eats what, and just how so-and-so likes to be patted at nap, and who it is best not to say a word to as she settles down. This child responds well when the teacher sets limits by offering her hand to hold, but that one prefers to re-center while looking at a book. All the details and discoveries about how to help the children feel successful in managing their world are shared, so teachers can be consistent from one classroom to the next. Then the set-up begins. Each class has basically the same frame-work; each class has a book area, a block play space, a "manipulative" area to help with small muscle coordination, dramatic play areas like a doll house and small people or animals, a nice art area for drawing, painting, and clay. There is usually some kind of calming, soothing sensory play like water or cornmeal, and of course the yards offer large muscle stimulation. In the classroom, each of these core play areas has room for at least two children to play together; bigger areas like blocks and the doll house areas provide space for three or four children to play together. In total, each classroom contains five or six core areas offering about twenty-two play spaces from which children may choose. The porch adds another fifteen or sixteen play choices, and the yard has play areas for twenty five or twenty six children (the slide alone can entertain six or seven children at a time as long as the teacher supervises and supports the play well). It should be noted that the yards are planned to be "outside classrooms"—unlike a park, each section of the yard is designed to stimulate interest in all

core areas for the specific group of children who will use it. All in all each class offers about 60 to 65 play choices for a class group of 16 to 18 children to use over a space of a two-and-a-half to three hours in the morning, and another three in the afternoon; there is little duplication of activities due to the teachers' careful coordination from classroom to classroom.

Each classroom set-up is tailored to the development of the children playing there; the

Playroom teacher carefully sets out two identical toys with only a few extra pieces to add on; the Schoolroom teacher sets out play for groups of three and four where children need to negotiate with each other and problem-solve—but also sets up some play sets for twosomes, and a play-alone spot for kids who need to rest or take a break from the pressures of their demanding social life! The classroom arrangement is the back-drop for the development of the curriculum.

Designing a classroom and yard is a multi-layered activity; in addition to the children's development and needs outlined above, the teacher thinks about things like traffic flow, light, air, and noise – Can children painting at the easel easily get to the sink to wash up? Will children in the blocks have room to build without worrying that their friends will pass by too close to their structures? Does the book area have good light, and sit somewhat buffered from noisy or wet play? When you look at a classroom that functions well for children and teachers, you see a dynamic environment that is planned down to the last inch...and will be re-planned over and over again as the year, and the children, move along.

-Lisa and Claire

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Hedco Surfacing Project

As you may recall, we mentioned in the August Banner that the Class Gift of 2004 will go towards installation of the resilient surfacing for the Hedco porches and Wobbly Walker's yard, which will be put in place late this month. The AOCs Building Committee offered to remove the deck and pour the cement that needs to go under the resilient surface, allowing us to stretch the dollars farther.

The Building Committee hopes to enlist a lot of help! There is a sign-up sheet in the office for anyone interested. The deck removal will take place on Friday, September 10th, at 2:00 pm, after the little ones awake from their naps. Depending on the amount of help we get, the deck removal could take as long as 4-6 hours. So, if you can't make it until you get off work, it's possible that they could still use your help after 5 pm. The cement pour will take place the following day, Saturday, September 11 from 9-3:30.

Unfortunately the cement needs to cure for a week before the poured-in-place product, "Play Bound", can be installed, meaning the children will have to play on cement—there will definitely be some minor inconveniences until the poured-in-place product is installed. That is scheduled for September 24th. As always, everything will be done to keep the children happy and safe.

In the meantime, we hope that we get enough people to help out with the Hedco Deck Replacement. See the sign-up sheet in the office. We really do appreciate everyone pitching in—what a wonderful gift for the children. And it's even better knowing that it came from the AOCS parents themselves.

—Liisa & Claire

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Workplace Solicitations Can Be Designated to AOCS!

If you work for a company that participates in an annual United Way campaign, or a similar sort of workplace campaign, you can designate your gift to come to AOCS! Generally you simply need to indicate the AOCS name and address on the form you complete for your payroll withholding:

Association of Children's Services
3021 Brookdale Avenue
Oakland, CA 94602

Note that, usually, a cut for overhead/processing is taken out of such designated funds before they come to AOCS. If you are most interested in supporting AOCS, you might just send your gift directly! However, in many organizations there is some pressure for every employee to participate in the company-wide giving program—if that is the case, then you can have it both ways by designating your gift to AOCS.

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The New World of Block Schedules!

Parents and staff are all easing into the new Block Schedule system this month, thanks to the many parents who agreed to move to the blocks a month before it was required! A few questions have come up which we'd like to clarify here.

First of all, the blocks are intended to give the children's programs a more stable schedule, with children and staffing well-synchronized and predictable, as well as to stabilize income for the school. However, that does not mean that children cannot arrive late or be picked up early! We seem to have made some parents think that if they are scheduled for 7:30 but come in at 7:45 they will be turned away, or if they try to pick up their child at 4:30 they'll be told to wait until 5. Of course we want to keep life predictable for the children, so we hope that most of the time the arrivals and pick-ups will occur within the scheduled windows, but we understand that life has its fluctuations. The bottom line is that we have the income to pay the teachers to be here during the hours you have contracted; if your child is not here for every minute that's ok. (Do note that in all but the Infant group there is a time after which late arrivals will be turned away; a child who arrives just before lunch will find it too hard to settle into a day that

puts him right to lunch and nap! If you anticipate a very late arrival, call to check in with the Head Teacher and see if it will work.)

And secondly, remember that requests for additional hours will now be requests for Extra Blocks. Thus if your usual pick-up time is 3:30, the minimum additional time you can request is until 5 pm. By the same token, if you just run late and pick up at 4:00 instead of the scheduled 3:30, you will be charged for an extra block until 5 pm at the unscheduled overtime rate. Here is the fee schedule:

Extra Block Fees	Approved 24 hours Ahead		Unscheduled		After 6:05 PM
	Under 3	Over 3	Under 3	Over 3	All Ages
Extra .5 hour block (7:30-8)	\$6	\$4	\$9	\$6	\$30
Extra 1 hour block (8-9, 5-6)	\$12	\$8	\$18	\$12	
	\$18	\$12	\$27	\$18	

We anticipate that because block enrollment will result in tighter ratios (meaning that the number of children will more exactly fit the optimal number of teachers) there will be blocks in some groups that can rarely accept a child for extra time. As always, the Head Teacher has the final authority to decide whether there is room to approve extra hours.

Requests for a change in schedule will continue to be accepted until the 25th of the preceding month, but approval may need to be deferred until there is an opening for that change. For example, a family which would like to extend care from the 5 pm block to the 6 pm block may have to wait for an opening in the 6 pm block if the ratios are at their maximum.

-Lisa

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A Note of Thanks...

Dear AOCS family,

Ameena sends her thanks for the cards and generous support. This is such a devastating time for Ameena and her children, and the loving kindness reaching out from the AOCS community means so much. Once again Liisa and I are touched by the outpouring of this AOCS family.

We thank you for it.

-Claire and Liisa

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Office Reorganization

Those of you who read the Board Report have read about the Board's plan to increase administrative support for AOCS through an office reorganization. The goals of this effort are to enable the Co-Directors to spend more of their time on strategic planning, as well as to strengthen the capacity of the agency to manage its increasingly-complex finances and fund-raising efforts.

The most visible change is in the front office, where Tanya M. resides as the new Office Manager. This position consolidated those of two part-time Administrative Assistants, and includes more support tasks for the Co-Directors (compiling statistics, arranging for facility maintenance, database management, etc.). Tanya works from 10 am to 6 pm daily, and is staying very busy! We are grateful to have her enthusiasm and expertise in the office.

Bruce K., Nicco's dad, is working with AOCS as a Finance Consultant. He is providing the support for Frances that we have been needing for awhile, figuring out how to more effectively track and provide more meaningful reports on AOCS finances.

Abby E. re-joined AOCS "temporarily" after completing her MA in Early Childhood in 2002. Originally hired as a sub for the NAC Program Director, we are now re-organizing her position as well. Though the title is still somewhat under discussion, we are calling her a "Program Coordinator." Along with the now-smaller NAC job, Abby is managing personnel areas, working with the Program Directors on evaluation and supervision, staff overage, etc., and of course currently also Acting Program Director for Hedco. She also continues to sub in the children's programs when her leadership there is needed.

The Board continues its search for a part-time/consulting Fund Development expert to assist us in planning long-term fundraising strategies for AOCS. That person will fill out the roster for the re-organization.

-Liisa

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STAFF PROFILE: SETH C.

By: John E. (Sahaas' dad)

Seth likes working with AOCS children because he's a social person. "I'm intrigued when I watch a group of people interact. Surprising things can happen," Seth says. Watching children interact is not unlike watching adults get together, he says. The energy of adults and children may be different, but many of

the same motivations are present.

Six years ago, Seth decided to teach in Berkeley. He found out about child development classes at AOCS and eventually took four. "They taught me the theory upstairs and they connected that with the real world of kids."

Seth spent time teaching at various levels from sixth to kindergarten. "The more time I spent in schools, the more frustrated I got with how teaching is done these days," he says. More often than not, he saw that children had to sit at desks and concentrate on workbooks hour after hour. "It was somewhat depressing," says Seth, who eventually earned a master's degree in education. "There's a place for that, but I think that when young kids learn through play they get excited about school."

One year ago Seth started teaching at AOCS because he was attracted to the structure of space and the teaching philosophy. "I've been to a lot of places where they are permissive and less structured. Some places have a mob of kids running around, which leaves no space for quiet kids or the ones trying to focus on something," Seth says. "I don't get overwhelmed here because this school is structured so well and the staff is on the same page."

"Of course, there's danger around every corner, so we have to stay on our toes. But a lot of the day we spend standing back and observing," Seth says. "The children have some freedom to choose what they want to do. We're not entertainers or clowns."

The routine, structure, environment of the school provides a good experience for every child, Seth says. Within each routine, there is freedom, he says. There are only a few times that teachers actually need children to do exactly what they want them to do: lunch, washing hands, and moving from inside to outside. Otherwise, children can structure their days.

"If these kids were fresh from home, it would be a lot more work," Seth says. "They are already into the routine of the school. The routines and boundaries are predictable. So by the time they get here, they know what they can and can't do. And if it were all routine, they would go nuts and I would go nuts, too. It's the combination of routine and freedom that keeps us all sane."

On the weekends, Seth likes to travel, particularly to visit his family. One of his favorite outdoor activities is bike camping. He generally will camp for a night or two, but has gone as long as two months. Most of his free time, he says, he spends socializing with friends—cooking, eating, bowling, and playing cards...

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Board Report

A summary of the meeting July 29, 2004

Finance Committee: Rik H. and Liisa H. provided continued good news, with tuition revenue high because of higher average enrollment this year. Bruce K. also noted that

enrollment and tuition revenue decline during the summer months as students leave for kindergarten, so it's appropriate to have a little carry-over from the year as we enter summer. There was general agreement that there needs to be further discussion around financial goals (i.e., operating reserve of 2 months' expenses, raising teacher's salaries, reducing rate increases). This will be included in the discussion about cost allocation and scholarship philosophy as part of 2005-2006 budget planning.

Refinance: AOCS was approved by Bank of the West for a \$400,000 loan at the current rate of 6% contingent on the bank's property appraisal (pending). The existing loans are for \$215,000 at 8%. If we take the \$400,000 loan it will give us \$185,000 cash towards the Phase I construction project. There is no pre-payment penalty, so if Shiree Teng finds that the ABCD (Low Income Investment fund loans for child care centers) is an option we can refinance again.

Administrative Hiring

The Finance Committee continues the evaluation and hiring process for a Finance consultant, and Shiree and the Development Committee continue the interviewing and hiring process for a Development Director.

Taproot Grant

Brett S. announced the good news that AOCS has received a Taproot grant for a marketing services project which will start in January. While we originally applied for a Branding and Identity grant (marketing message), Taproot suggested that we may want to change it to a Naming grant (name, tagline, logo). Taproot gave the impression that we could do the Naming project and then apply for a Branding grant as the next phase. The discussion encompassed the naming process, and that at the end of the analysis we can decide to change the name or not. A strong name could help with branding. For example, instead of "NAC" and "GWM", we might have the "AOCS adult program" and the "AOCS community program". A concern was raised about whether a name change might cause confusion, delay or adversely impact the capital campaign. Lynn Price felt that a name change would not hurt the campaign during the current major donor silent phase and getting the Taproot grant might even be a plus with major donors. Taproot would provide guidance on how to successfully introduce a new name. Brett will do some additional research and the Board will vote on whether to ask for a Naming grant or Branding grant at the next Board meeting so Brett can inform Taproot.

Request for block schedule exception

A parent submitted a letter requesting an exception to the Block Schedule requirements; the consensus was that the circumstances did not warrant an exception.

AGAIN Restructuring

Glendora P. is leaving the area sooner than she had anticipated, to follow a wonderful personal opportunity, so the Board task force that has been planning for the future of AGAIN presented options for the program. Shiree presented the group's recommendation of keeping AGAIN as an AOCS program, but contracting the support group facilitation to KSSP, the state funded Alameda County kinship care program. Under this option the support group

is maintained with a well qualified counselor, continuity is provided by Patricia G. who has been working part-time at AGAIN, oversight is provided by Liisa and Claire, and the AOCS philosophy and expertise is provided to the caregivers with Head Teacher Janice H. has the liaison attending the support group meetings. This option is not the perfect solution (ie, replacing Glendora with all her expertise and knowledge), but is a good interim solution and does not place a heavy burden on Liisa and Claire. This option also maintains the close ties with the KSSP program which Glendora helped establish, and preserves the aspects of the support group program that participants identified as important via a recent phone survey by Glendora:

- Accessible location, the majority of participants live within 1-2 miles of AOCS and all are low income families
- AOCS provides a safe, child focused environment for the kids
- Support group participants know each other (2-8 grandparents usually attend the meetings with a mailing list of 40 families)
- Convenient evening time; most support groups meet during the day.

--Noelle P's Minutes summarized by Liisa

AOCS Board of Directors

Melba Wu—President

Seth Rosen—Vice President

Noelle Pillsbury—Secretary

Rik Hansen—Treasurer

Shiree Teng—At-Large Consultant

Liisa Hale or Claire Bainer—AOCS Administration

Parent Representatives:

Brett Stineman

Meredith Brown

Amy Clough

Bruce Kariya

Gail Myers

Lynn Cerda Price

Linda Gardner

AOCS Senior Staff

Claire Bainer—Co-Director

Liisa Hale—Co-Director

Abby Eichberg—NAC Program

Director

Ameena Muhammed—Hedco Program

Director

Janice Haywood—Ellen Sherwood Nursery School Program

Director

Ma Leong—Director of Support Services

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Parent Education Announcements

-by the Parents Services Committee

The Parent Services Committee invites you to attend two upcoming and highly informative parent education events: “Choosing Kindergarten” on Thursday, October 14 and “Discipline, Development and Daily Life” on Thursday, November 4.

In the “Choosing Kindergarten” session, Claire Bainer and a panel of alumni parents will discuss and answer questions about their experiences in choosing private/public schools as well as kindergarten readiness.

“Discipline, Development and Daily Life” will feature Claire and Liisa in this always popular question and answer session about anything related to children and the above issues.

Both events will be held from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at AOCS with childcare and dinner provided for a nominal cost, and payable at the time you sign up. Please watch for sign-up sheets at the front office prior to event.

Other parent ed events planned for early 2005 include “Financial Planning/Estate Planning”, “Gender/Sexual Expression”, “Raising a Spiritual and Ethical Child”, and “Discipline Development and Daily Life Continued: Eating and Sleeping Habits of Toddlers and Infants”. Details and dates will follow.

If you have any parent education topics that might be of interest to the community, you’re welcome to drop a note with your suggestion to Joy V. (Eleanor Wikstrom’s mom) or Abby E. (Parent Services Staff Liaison). Or, if you would like to plan parent-related events such as the above sessions and summer potlucks as well as the Staff Appreciation Dinner, you are welcome to join the Parent Services Committee. Please watch for flyers announcing the committee meetings at the front office.

We hope to see you at these events!

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What to say, what to say?

Sometimes it helps to have the words on the tip of your tongue when guiding your children out the door at the end of the day...in response to a parent’s request, we offer the following:

When...	Say this:
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Your toddler runs to the "big kids" trike as you walk past	"That looks so fun! But we'd better leave that for the big kids. Did you ride a trike in your group today, or should we go home and ride?"
Your pre-schooler wants to run ahead of you and hide	"Let's walk together through the school so everyone will be safe; we can play hide-and-seek in the front yard."
Your child wants to read all the birthday books, or play with all the toys in the front office	"The office is just where we sign out, and sometimes we play for a minute when you're waiting for me. But this is a room for office work, so we'll go home to play."
You want to talk to another adult but your child is tugging and yelling "let's go!" "You are really ready to go, aren't you?"	I'm going to finish up just as quick as I can so I can hear all about your news!" (and then do it).

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AOCS Anniversaries

We celebrate the following anniversaries for our staff in September:

Paulina V. since 1984 —20 years!

Guillermina H. since 1985 —19 years!

Choeurt C. since 1985 —19 years!

Liisa H. since 1990 — 14 years!

Esther L. since 1990 —14 years!

Rosa T. since 2000 — 4 years!

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Comings and Goings

Welcome!

Laura C., new afternoon Head Teacher in the Infant group.

Ezra M., parents Kristine M. (Hedco teacher) and Darren M., joins the Wobbly-Walkers group.

Colm C.y, parents Elaine and Patrick C., joins the Homeroom. Baby brother Cahal is in the Infant group.

Tobias ., parents Jill and Derek Y., joins the Infan. Big

brother Alex is in the Homeroom.

Cabral C., parents Jana Cr and Van J., joins the Infant group.

Sarah Frida I., born to parents Liz O. and Joh I on August 18th! Big brother Jonah is in the Playroom.

Ann "Annie" Beatrice C., born to parents Marianna and Alex C on August 21! Big brother John is in the Playroom.

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Birthday Books

Will I have a friend? from Sahaas E. for his 4th Birthday.

Earthmovers and Fire Trucks from Stephen S. for his 1st Birthday.

The Carrot Seed and Jamaica's Find from Margaret S. for her 4th Birthday.

Squirrels & Chipmunks and Sing-Along Songs from Mara W. for her 5th Birthday.

Books you can purchase for AOCS in honor of your child's birthday or other special occasions are displayed in the front office.

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