Dear Children’s School Community,

It’s hard to believe it is October already and we have completed five weeks of school, change of seasons, change of routines. As I visit each classroom I am amazed by the lively interactions and learning that is occurring in each room and the sense of group that is developing which is unique to each classroom each year. Many of you have remarked to me how smoothly the school year has begun. I am reminded of Ruth Charney and Marlynn Clayton's work on the responsive classroom. They cite a responsive classroom as one which brings together both an academic curriculum based on developmentally appropriate practices and a social curriculum that builds a caring respectful community. Establishing such a classroom during the beginning weeks of school must be a slow and deliberate process that involves specific strategies and phases that delicately balance the emphasis between academic and social goals.

As an adult community, both teachers and families also had several events to get to know each other during this first month of school. We had an excellent turnout at the first morning forum on transitions and the parent orientations during the first week of school. It was also wonderful to see so many people at our first Parent Teacher Advisory Board (PTAB) meeting on Monday, September 24. We had lively discussions about the Eliot-Pearson Children’s School core principles. Notes from the discussion are posted on the EPCS letters on the window in the Lobby. Curriculum Night on October 4 was very well attended. It was another opportunity for families to come together and learn more about the classroom’s curriculum. Friday, October 5 we had our annual staff retreat on Dual Language Learners. Having a full day of professional development allows the staff to discuss in-depth pertinent issues, learn, and reflect together. We were fortunate to have Dr. Calvin Gidney and Dr. Cynthia Ballenger, colleagues in our Dept. of Child Development, join us for the day.

PARENT TEACHER LEARNING GROUPS

We are preparing to launch six parent–teacher learning groups for the 2012-13 year. We have some really interesting topics this year! Parent-teacher learning groups provide an opportunity for teachers/staff and parents from across the school community to explore a topic of mutual interest together. It is a chance for parents and teachers to be learners together, and where the teacher is not viewed as the sole “expert.” Each group is facilitated by a parent and an EPCS staff person. Once established the two become co-facilitators of their group and are responsible for coordinating the meetings and efforts of the group. Based on initial input from staff and parents we have six exciting group ideas planned for this year. The first group meeting will be at the November 5th Parent Teacher Advisory Board (PTAB) meeting, from 5:00-7:00 PM. Childcare and food will be provided at this meeting. Childcare is for children ages 2.9 and up. Please sign up at the front desk to reserve your spot. It is recommended that groups meet a minimum of two and a maximum of four times during the course of the year. (The March PTAB meeting will also be for parent teacher learning groups to meet.)
### Diversity Dialogues
**Co-facilitators: Janel Apuna (parent), Debbie LeeKeenan (staff)**

How do we define diversity? Why is diversity important and how does it affect our children and us? How do we support children and adults in a diverse world? Over the years this group has taken many forms—as a book group, a support group, action group, even a research group. Come find out more and share your ideas. This group is open to anyone who is interested in diversity in its many forms.

### Social Media, Technology and Children
**Co-Facilitators: Yuko Handa (parent), Tara Beardsley (parent), Colin Johnson (staff)**

Social media and technology are all around us everywhere. What is developmentally appropriate for young children? How to control media streaming into our children (and us) and how to disconnect at times for the sanity of our families! Come join the conversation.

### Mindful Living, Mindful Parenting
**Co-facilitators: Jen Moffit (parent), Allegra Horne (staff)**

Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness is: *Simply put, mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness. It is cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment’s thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacities for relaxation, paying attention, awareness, and insight.* *(Full Catastrophe Living, Fifteenth Anniversary Edition, 2005, p. 2)*

Research has shown profound effects of mindfulness on health, and on parenting. In this group, we will cultivate our own nonjudgmental moment-to-moment awareness through practice (meditation, mindful movement, breathing, loving-kindness meditation), reading, and discussion. We are all beginners when it comes to mindfulness, so please come even if you have never heard of mindfulness before.

### Book Group: *Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv*
**Co-facilitators: Cathy Hinton (parent), Amanda Vellali (staff), Sally Pfitzer (staff)**

Many of us remember fondly our experiences with nature as children. Some of us were of the generation when one came home from school and played outside with siblings and friends until dinnertime. We climbed trees, built forts and tree houses, caught salamanders and frogs, or just lay in the grass looking up at the sky. Today's children are less likely to experience nature in this way. In this group we will discuss the book, "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder" by Richard Louv, who argues forcefully that unstructured outdoor play is beneficial to children's health, cognition, and confidence, and that the lack of connection to nature and unstructured play among today's children is causing extensive damage. At the first meeting we will preview the book and discuss the following articles, so read what you can and, if possible, come prepared with one discussion question.

[http://www.grist.org/article/louv](http://www.grist.org/article/louv)

### Knitting: Creative Centering
**Co-facilitators: Carrie Cross (parent), Natalie Kleefeld (staff)**

Please join us for some creative centering through the medium of knitting. Beginner and guru alike are all welcome. Bring your needles, yarn, and ideas on November 5 @ 5-7pm. We will share and learn from each other.

### Topics in Special Education
**Co-facilitators: Kim Hernandez (parent), and Devanshi Unadkat (staff)**

Possible topics for discussion: social skills/personal development, children’s friendships, assessment and IEPs, speech and language and intellectual development, explaining learning differences. We will also have some meetings outside of regular PTAB times.
This year I am happy to announce the school will have three presentations at the annual NAEYC conference, Nov. 5-9 in Atlanta, Georgia. This conference attracts over 30,000 early childhood educators from around the country and world. It is a stimulating way to network, share and learn about current ideas in our field. The first presentation is: Professional learning communities in multiple contexts: Using the Critical Friends Group process to support teacher growth, (presenters: Lisa Kuh, University of New Hampshire, Debbie LeeKeenan and Heidi Given, EPCS, Catherine Tighe, Somerville Public Schools, Polly Smith, and Robert Dowling, Tufts Educational Day Care Center) The second presentation is: Behind the Scenes: How teachers develop and document culturally responsive and relevant curriculum, (Presenters: Debbie LeeKeenan and Heidi Given, EPCS). Additionally, Allegra Horne (GTA in Preschool East) will present for the Children of Incarcerated Parents (CHIPS) Interest Forum on Ages and Stages: The impact of incarceration on children from the developmental perspective. Providing a guide and resources for early childhood teachers.

NAEYC Accreditation: We are waiting for our NAEYC accreditation visit. It will occur between Oct. 9-26. We will keep you posted when it is completed!

Upcoming fall events:

- **Family Math Day:** Saturday, October 20 1:00-3:00 PM EPCS Classrooms. Spend an afternoon as a family engaging in math activities. Reserve your spot at the front desk by Oct. 18

- **Fall/Winter Children’s Clothing Swap, Saturday, October 20, 1:00-3:30 PM in the Atrium.** Please bring clean children’s clothing in a bag, labeled with size and type of clothing and drop off in the Atrium. Bring if you’d like, take what you want. If you are interested in helping with the clothing swap, please contact margaret.kurth@tufts.edu (parent in the first/second grade).

- **Special Guided Observation for Parents:** Tuesday Oct. 30, 9:00-11:00 AM. Please join us for this unique opportunity to observe in different classrooms around a particular focus and then discuss your observations with me in a debriefing session afterward. This is a wonderful way to learn about developmental education in practice. Please sign up at the front desk if you would like to participate. Limited to 15 participants.

- **Friends and Families of Children with Special Rights Group meeting will be Wednesday, November 7** from 8:45-10:15 in the EP Library. Topic: “Supporting Each Other through Life Challenges"

- **ZUMBA fundraiser: Hold the date- more information coming: Saturday, November 17.** Join the Zumba party with certified Zumba instructor, Becky Merino Gray, former EPCS first/second grade teacher! Proceeds to benefit our scholarship fund.

- **The PTAB hosted Community coffee/tea** is every Wednesday from 8:30-9:30 AM in the lobby. Coffee and Tea is available for $1.00 to support our scholarship fund.

- **PTAB volunteers:** We are still looking for another Extended Day Class parent and a second co-chair for the Marionette Performance in February. If you are interested, please contact PTAB co-chairs: Vonda Wright or Jen Averill.

Thank you again for your ongoing support to the school! Best, Debbie LeeKeenan