

September 19th, 2011

Dear Houghton Families,

I am writing to invite you to join us for our annual ***Peace Pole celebration on the morning of Wednesday, October 12th at 9:30***, and to share information regarding our plans for this amazing event! Since the installation of the Peace Pole in 2002 it has become an important fixture of our school, a reflection of our Houghton values and a daily reminder of a message most needed in our world. It's inscription; "May Peace Prevail on Earth" has served as an inspiration for many beautiful celebrations and we are confident this year's activities will live up to this legacy.

As I began thinking of this year's program I was struck by the simple beauty of "This Little Light of Mine" and the beautiful message it could convey to Houghton's children. This song will become the anthem for our 2011 celebration. As you may recall in the past few years we have included a small service project for our Peace Pole celebration, inspiring the children to act globally for causes far and wide. Reflecting on the theme of spreading our light I came to believe it was time for our school to act locally and began to actively seek out a cause where we could make a real difference.

The answer to my search came on the rainy and windy Sunday Tropical Storm Irene marched up the coast. Before coming to Houghton, I taught at a very small school nestled in the beautiful Berkshire Mountains. I consider my experiences as a young teacher at the Hawlemont Regional Elementary School among the most influential of my life and was so lucky to grow under the wings of amazing teachers who taught me what it meant to care for children. Irene dumped nearly 10 inches of rain on the Massachusetts/Vermont border and the Deerfield River rose to historic levels flooding the Hawlemont playing fields and eventually getting into the building, taking out their boiler and possibly contaminating the school's wells. They are in need of our help!

With the help of Mrs. Greene and the Houghton PTO each child in our school will construct a small doll to represent their own personal "light". These dolls will be taken outside for the Peace Pole ceremony as a symbol of the power of good our school community can create. ***This year for a donation of one dollar we will ask the children to take the doll home and put it in a special place that will remind them of how their light can help others.*** We would like to ask for your help in providing children the opportunity to earn this dollar by being a light for someone else. Perhaps they could pick up sticks in the yard of an elderly neighbor or play a game with a sibling. All proceeds of this project will be sent directly to the Hawlemont Playground Relief Fund, I will actively seek communication with the school to ensure that our Houghton children are able to see how their donation has effected the tragedy at Hawlemont. ***During the week of October 3rd we will construct the dolls and children will bring home an envelope in which their donation may be placed and returned to school.***

I will be sharing a short picture book with your children to help them understand the full impact of the project. If you would like to view the picture book it is available on our school website:

<http://www.wrsd.net/houghton/> Thank you for your support of this project, I am looking forward to what promises to be an amazing celebration and a most inspirational connection between two amazing schools. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at jessica_wilke@wrsd.net.

Yours in Peace and Friendship,

Jess Wilke
Houghton Music Teacher