

May 4, 2010

Dear Parents of Incoming 8th Grade Students,

The ocean is the most prominent feature on our planet, and humankind's relationship with it throughout history has been rich and varied. It has provided nourishment, recreation, inspiration, transportation and, sometimes, a place to discard unwanted material. Our future fortunes will likely continue to be tied to the ocean, and greater appreciation for the complexity and beauty of this great resource is a curriculum goal that we have for our students.

For many years, eighth graders at Amherst Middle School have participated in an interdisciplinary study of the ocean. We begin with a one-day whale watch, followed by a week-long experience at the ocean, to study first hand the ocean environment and our relationship with it. We have developed our current program in cooperation with Ferry Beach Ecology School in Saco, Maine, and Cape Ann Whale Watch in Gloucester, MA. The program is designed specifically to meet our curriculum goals and offers a varied, interdisciplinary, hands-on approach to the study of the ocean. In a small group setting, students will study and experience such things as salt marshes, tide pools, beach and dune habitats, coastal forests, whales, birds, seals, fish and the impact of human activities on ocean ecosystems.

Next fall's Ecology School trips are scheduled for the weeks of September 20 - 24, and September 27 - October 1, 2010. Weather permitting, the whale watches are tentatively scheduled for September 21 and 28. Please mark these dates on your family calendar to avoid conflicts.

The total cost of the trip, which includes the education program, room and board, all transportation and the whale watch, is estimated to be **\$346.00**. Though transportation cost quotes are not absolutely firm at this early date, we do not anticipate that the final cost will differ from this estimate by more than \$10.00. Since parents assume full responsibility for this amount, you and your son/daughter may need to begin developing a financial plan now. You can be assured that every effort is being made to keep costs to a minimum, especially given the current uncertain economic conditions. In order to secure a discounted rate, we must pay 50% of the tuition by July 1, so we will need to collect a **deposit of \$173.00 by June 14** from each student. The balance will be due at the end of the first week of school in September. **A reminder and registration form will be sent home in mid-May.**

Ferry Beach Ecology School has a very informative web site which we encourage you to visit at www.fbes.org. It has information about their program, facilities, staffing, supervision and a number of related topics. The Cape Ann Whale Watch web site is at www.caww.com and is also very informative. We have been working with both organizations for many years. They provide us with excellent service and preferential pricing.

Although the great majority of our students usually do participate in this program, you can be assured that a full program of 8th grade studies will be provided here at school for any student who does not accompany us. If serious **financial hardship** is the only reason your child will not attend, please contact one of us **as soon as possible**. Requests for aid will be held in strict confidence.

We look forward once again to a positive and worthwhile experience. Please feel free to contact any of us at school by email or phone (673-8944) if you have questions or concerns.

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Grade 8 Science Teachers