



Unatego Elementary School

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Dear Elementary Parent or Guardian:

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Welcome Back

I hope you and your family are enjoying the remainder of the summer break.

On September 8th, we start a brand-new school year that represents new beginnings, provides new opportunities, and allows us to resume friendships, make new friends, and continue the activities that make school special for each of us. I am also hoping that this new school year is a return to normalcy. For example, we have scheduled parent-guardian luncheons in the fall and plan to resume evening events throughout the year starting with our September 1st Back to School Blast from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at the Elementary school, sponsored by the Elementary PTO. Please see page 2 of this letter for all upcoming events in September and October.

Understanding your brain to help you learn better

There is a website for kids called [Frontiers for Young Minds](#) that publishes science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) articles for kids. I stumbled across an interesting article entitled *Understanding your brain to help you learn better* (by Sarrasin, Foisy, Allataire-Duquette, Masson).

Our brains are fascinating. Understanding how the brain learns can help us be more successful in all of our endeavors. We can also practice learning strategies based on brain research. Here are some of the highpoints of the article including two ways for students and families to take advantage of this research every school day.

- Each brain is composed on 85 billion neurons (more than the number of stars you can see with the naked eye in the night sky). A neuron is the cell that acts like a messenger and sends nerve impulses (like electrical signals) to other neurons.
- When you are learning, your brain changes and new connections form between your neurons. This is called neuroplasticity.
- The more you practice something the stronger these connections become and the faster they are transmitted. They often say “practice makes perfect” but practice actually makes your neurons faster and increases the connections and the strength of the connections.
- The authors describe connections among neurons like a hiking trail in the forest. Where a trail exists in the forest, it is easy to walk. As the trail is used more and more, it becomes easier and easier to walk on it. The trail compacts, vegetation is moved away, and we can also walk faster on these trails. On the other hand, it is very difficult to walk through a forest without a trail. Additionally, if people stop using the trail, the vegetation grows back and covers the trail eventually. The same thing happens with our brains. When we practice things like reading, we are grooming the neuron “hiking trail” and reading becomes easier and easier over time. If we stop practicing reading, the neural links weaken and the trail gets overrun with vegetation. Hiking the trail becomes harder again.
- Learning rewires your neurons and your brain changes. This is neuroplasticity.

Learning Strategy #1: Repeatedly activate your neurons

This involves practicing / studying often and retrieving the information from your memory. Explain what you are learning to a family member / friend or ask the family member / friend to quiz you so you have to recall the information. Testing / recall is an important part of this strategy.

Learning Strategy #2: Space out the activation of neurons

Practice schoolwork more often but for shorter periods of time. This gives your brain frequent breaks. This also helps you remember information for a longer period of time. Instead of working for an hour straight, try four 15-minute study sessions with breaks in between each study session. You are still working for an hour, but you give your neurons a chance to strengthen in-between each study session. Use brain science to improve your learning.

School Safety – Route 7 – No Drop off or Pickup in front of the Elementary School

As many of you have already noticed, the front of Unatego Elementary School looks a bit different. The front of the school is now a fire lane marked with red paint on the curb the entire length of the school's border with Route 7. The Village of Unadilla has posted signs that say, "No Parking - Fire Lane" along with additional signage that says, "No Stopping, Standing, Parking." This means that no one can stop to unload or pick-up students in front of the Elementary School. Instead, we ask that everyone park in the Bishop's Lot across from the Kwik Fill / Red Apple Store during arrival and departure from school each day. Students and parents/guardians can then cross Depot Street and students can use the sidewalk to enter the front of the Elementary School from 7:30 – 8:00 AM each morning and exit the front of the Elementary School at 2:50 PM during dismissal. Based on availability, the Village is trying to hire a crossing guard during the arrival and departure time for students. However, we cannot ensure that a crossing guard will be available. The Village will make sure Bishop's Lot is plowed during the winter, and we will plow the sidewalk all the way to Depot Street.

We want to ensure the safety of our school community. The traffic congestion in front of the Elementary school during drop-off and pick-up resulted in an unsafe and dangerous environment for students and families. We have had many close calls over the years in front of the school as cars blocked lanes or opened car doors into the street. To be honest, we have probably been very lucky that no one has been severely injured. Prohibiting stopping, standing, or parking in front of the Elementary School will facilitate better traffic flow on Route 7 and create a safer environment for our students and families. Thanks for your understanding. I would like to give a special thanks to Mayor Cotten and Dr. Richards for their help with this process.

September and October Events or Important Dates

- September 1 - UPK and Kindergarten Family Meet and Greet – 5:00 – 5:30 pm
- September 1 - PTO-sponsored BACK TO SCHOOL BLAST – 5:30 – 7:30 pm – see enclosed flyer
- September 8 - First Day of School for Students – Doors open at 7:30 AM – Breakfast and Lunch are free
- September 27 - UPK through Second Grade – School Photos
- September 28 - Third through Fifth Grade – School Photos
- September 28 - Unatego Elementary Open House – 5:30 – 7:00 pm
- October 7 - NO SCHOOL – Staff Development Day
- October 10 - NO SCHOOL – Columbus and Indigenous Peoples Day
- October 13 - Kindergarten Parent-Guardian Luncheon
- October 14 - Early Dismissal Drill – School dismisses 15 minutes early
- October 27 - Fifth Grade Parent-Guardian Luncheon
- October 31 - Halloween Costumes and Festivities

I am excited to welcome our students and families back to school in September. Please don't hesitate to call or email me if you have questions, concerns or would just like to chat about education.

Sincerely,

Mike Snider
Principal

