

# The Barnstable Patriot

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## School, or make that Szkola, is in session

Written by Kathleen Szmit



Kathleen Szmit photos

Studentka – Julia Milczanowski opens her Polish grammar book during class Nov. 7 as part of the Polish Language School of Cape Cod. Children of Polish-speaking parents attend the weekly school to become more familiar and comfortable speaking Polish.

## Polish Language School keeps traditions alive on Cape Cod

It's Saturday afternoon. In a room at the West Barnstable Community Center a small group of young children wave their arms like trees. Across the hall, older kids read stories and show off their cursive, smiling proudly as their instructor nods her approval.

"Dobrze," she says. "Good."

School on Saturday? Tak (yes), for children taking part in Polska Szkoła na Cape Cod, the Polish Language School of Cape Cod.

Each Saturday children from across Cape Cod gather at the Center where they break into two classes, preschool and ages 6-8, and spend a portion of the afternoon learning to converse in Polish.

The school, affiliated with the John Paul II Polish Language School of Boston, is a way for these children to immerse themselves more fully in their parents' native language.

According to Maria McCauley of Centerville, whose sons, Łukasz and Mateusz, attend, the school came about as the result of a conversation between herself and Julia Esteves, both young Polish mothers and at one time summer workers on Cape Cod who made their homes here.

McCauley, Esteves and other Polish families wanted to give their children a platform for speaking Polish that went beyond the home.

"The kids were growing up knowing each other," said McCauley. "Their parents speak Polish to them, but because they are here they speak English back. They needed more than us just speaking Polish to them."

The problem was that the closest Polish language school for children was the John Paul II School in Boston.

McCauley and Esteves contacted the school, asking if the school might work with them in establishing some type of program on the Cape.

The result was an extension of the Polish Language School on Cape Cod, with classes taught by Beate Pupczyk and Zuzanna Fedus-Kosky.

According to McCauley, Pupczyk, a teacher with the Boston school, makes the trip down from Boston each Saturday to teach the 6-8-year-old class.

"She is a very motivated teacher," said McCauley. "She is one of those teachers that does it because that's her passion."

When the Cape school first began, there was just one class. As word of the school spread, however, the demand grew, with parents bringing their children from Centerville, Hyannis, Harwich, Mashpee, Marstons Mills and Falmouth.

To better suit the needs of the students, two classes were created, one for young children and one for older, and children attend for a nominal fee used mainly to cover the teachers' pay.

Each class is conducted entirely in Polish, a language the children understand but may have difficulty speaking. Using age-appropriate lessons, Pupczyk and Fedus-Kosky work with the children in learning the basics of the language in order to help them become more comfortable and more conversational.

“The classes are geared toward kids who grow up in Polish-American families,” said McCauley.

Not only do the classes teach the children their parents’ language, but it also introduces them to Polish holidays, customs and traditions.

For example, on St. Andrews Day the children poured melted hot wax into a bowl of cold water in a divination ritual dating back centuries. Other events have included a puppet show all in Polish by puppeteer Jacek Zuzanski, and children learned and recited poems in Polish, presenting them at a special show attended by the principal and vice principal of the John Paul II School.

Roma Bartuzi-Stecei, whose 4 1/2-year-old daughter Stella attends the Cape school, appreciates the classes for the bonds they’re helping her daughter form within her cultural community.

“I like that the kids interact with each other while trying to speak Polish,” she said. “They get to see other kids speaking Polish. It’s important for her to see that.”

With the Polish community on Cape Cod growing, McCauley hopes to have even more children attend the school in the future.

“It’s not just about learning a language,” said McCauley. “It’s about culture and keeping up the traditions.”

For more information about the Polish School of Cape Cod visit [www.psboston.org](http://www.psboston.org)