



Handbook 2011-2012

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The McMahon School Of Irish Dance

History:

The McMahon School was established in 2001 by Champion Irish Dancer, Moira McMahon. In 2005 the school started competing in local Feiseanna and has brought home numerous awards in solo, team, and figuring dancing.

Moira: Moira McMahon TCRG is a product of the world famous Butler Academy of Irish Dance. She danced competitively and for exhibition since the age of four. Once the premier dancer of Rochester, she consistently placed in the top ten across America and Canada since the age of ten and also qualified five consecutive years for the World Competition. In 1994 she represented North America in Ireland for the World Competition. While assisting her teacher, Patrick Butler, in his studios throughout New York, Moira established a great passion for teaching the beautiful form of dance. She left the Butler Academy in 2000 and since now pursued her dream of teaching Irish dance across Western New York. In 2004 she became a registered Irish dance instructor by An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha in Dublin, Ireland; the Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America; and the Irish Dance Teachers Association - Mid Atlantic Region.

What does "T.C.R.G" mean?

T.C.R.G. is abbreviation for the Irish title that means "Teacher registered with An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha". An Coimisiun is the body that regulates Irish dancing and Irish Dancing teachers. A registered teacher has attempted and passed a series of examinations on music, dancing and teaching competence.

Why should I care if an Irish dancing teacher has a T.C.R.G?

Registered, qualified teachers offer students a guaranteed level of instructional and dance competence. Also, only students of qualified, registered teachers are eligible to compete in Local, Regional and National Feiseanna (competitions).

McMahon School Mission:

It is the McMahon School's goal to keep Irish culture alive through music and dance and to pass it on to new generations of dancers. The atmosphere in the McMahon School is one in which students are encouraged to develop their own individual talents as well as learn to work well with others. This is best accomplished when the student and teacher share a common goal: to learn as much as possible from each other and to have fun while doing so. The McMahon School gives the opportunity to dance recreationally or competitively while developing a sense of self worth and accomplishment. The school is dedicated to teaching students as individuals, instilling a positive self-confidence and helping them to achieve their highest level of Irish dance. The McMahon School strives to instill a sense of unity and friendship among the dancers and their families through a variety of Irish cultural events and opportunities at McMahon School of Irish Dance.

Benefits of Irish Dance

- Increased Physical Skills... Developing body control and coordination, great exercise.
- Increased Mental Skills... Listening, following directions, increasing attention span, memorizing steps.
- A Healthy Competitive Spirit... Increasing the child's desire to do well and to the best of his/her ability.
- Self-Esteem... Increasing the child's confidence, developing "stage presence".
- Lasting Friendships... Not only with classmates, but also through performing and competing, meeting children from all parts of the city, state, country, and world.
- Promoting Irish Culture... A revival of Irish identity and tradition began in the 1960s. While a young dancer may not comprehend this particular benefit while training, this revival continues!

Irish dance technique is not easy to master. It is the only form of ethnic dance depending solely on natural balance without the use of arms. The steps are generally more complicated than most forms of traditional or folk dance. Before they can go on to compete, students must master the basics of Irish dancing known as the "sevens and threes" i.e. The Sidestep followed by a 1, 2, 3 step.

The rigid upper body and intricate footwork make for an interesting contrast which long-time teacher Peggy Carty refers to in her book *My Irish Dance* as "the unusual style of the ice of body and fire of feet." The almost regimental discipline is rewarded with grace, beauty, and elegance of movement which are characteristics of Irish dancing. The colorful costumes feature ancient and modern Celtic designs and each dance school has its own.

CLASSES

Lesson Format

Formal lessons generally follow the academic calendar, beginning in September and ending in June. However do to high interest, classes will be running through the summer taking a two-three week break in August/September. New students may be accepted at any time during the year at an agreed fee schedule.

Parents should not expect to remain in the same room while lessons are in progress.

Like an academic setting, the teacher needs to be in control of the class and have the full attention of the students. However, the teacher may open certain lessons for parents to observe and question. These nights may be beneficial to the parent keeping abreast of the child's development thus being able to more closely monitor his/her practice at home.

Lessons are approximately 45 minutes to one hour for ages 4-10 or new beginners, one evening each week. Returning students will run for 1-1½ hours one evening each week. Additionally, the teacher may call for extra lessons, especially before an important performance or competition. These lessons may or may not require additional lesson fees depending on the circumstances. This **does not** happen usually but if such practice is needed, plenty of notice will be offered.

Class Locations:

(These location times may have changed since the printing of this handbook, please see the McMahan website "Locations" page for accurate times)

Monday's: Batavia (McMahan Studio, 8318 Park Rd, Batavia 14020)

Beginners: 5:30-6:15pm

Novice II/Prizewinner: 6:15-7:45pm

Prelim/Championship: 7:30-9:00pm

Tuesday's: Lockport (Trinity Lutheran Church, 67 Saxton St, Lockport 14094)

Beginners: 5:30-6:15pm

Adv. Beg/Novice I: 6:15-7:30pm

Novice II & Up: 7:30-9:00pm

Wednesday's: Batavia (McMahan Studio, 8318 Park Rd, Batavia 14020)

Adv. Beg/Novice I: 5:30-6:45pm

Novice II: 6:45-8:15pm

Prelim/Championship: 8:15-9:30pm

Saturday's: Rochester (MoDancing, 1694 Penfield Rd, Rochester 14625)

Beginner: 8:15-9:00am

FEES

Fees differ between Beginner and Advanced Dancers. Here are the fees for dancers:

Beginner Dancer Rates

Monthly - \$40
Quarterly (3 months) - \$115, savings of \$5
6 months - \$225, savings of \$15
10 months - \$360, savings of \$40

Advanced Dancer Rates

Monthly - \$50
Quarterly (3 months) - \$145, savings of \$5
6 months - \$285, savings of \$15
10 months - \$460, savings of \$40

Advanced Dancer Rates (2 classes)

Monthly - \$60
3 months - \$175, savings of \$10
6 months - \$345, savings of \$30
10 months - \$560, savings of \$40

Summer Class Rates

Rates to be determined

After enrolling two or more students of the same immediate family, family rates are available. Paying the monthly price is expected at the beginning of that month. There are not weekly fees so students are encouraged to not miss classes. If they are unable to attend a class they are more than welcome to attend a class at another location. There is also a \$20 Registration fee at enrollment for the first family member and \$10 each additional.

At enrollment you will receive payment coupons; payments are to be mailed by the 5th of each month. Payments will incur a late fee if not received by the 5th. When paying by check please put the students name and the month the payment is for on the memo line.

No credit or make ups will be given for missed classes. When a child misses a lesson, additional individual time is given at the next lesson to catch up or, again, they are encouraged to attend another location. Credit will only be given for medical reasons only, with doctor's note, for an extended period of time.

Extra Classes: If students wish to attend extra classes there is an additional fee. Please contact the teacher before attending.

Any students that have unpaid balances will be unable to attend classes, performances, or Feiseanna. Attending classes are mandatory in order to attend such performances or Feiseanna.

There is a \$25 service charge for NSF checks. If two (2) NSF checks are received within one school year, all fees to the School will become due and payable immediately via cash or certified check only.

There will be additional lesson fees when preparing for major competitions such as Regionals &/or Nationals.

Referrals: Special offers are available when referring a new dancer. When recommending another student, you will receive one month of lessons for free after that student has been enrolled one month. Again, any unpaid balances will not be entitled to such discount.

SCHOOL POLICIES

Rules of the Class:

1. Be on time
2. Be prepared with shoes and appropriate attire.
3. When the instructor is talking be quiet and listen
4. No jeans. Sweatpants are allowed for the 1st 10 min. of class
5. No hats
6. No cell phones
7. Water bottles are allowed but No food/snacks
8. Respect your classmates & instructor
9. No gum chewing
10. Hair pulled back
11. Respect the facility, clean up after yourself.
12. Ask permission to leave for bathroom or fountain breaks
13. No leaving the dance hall until dismissed
14. Parents are not to approach the instructor during class

Rules of the School:

1. All dancers and parents will promote a positive team spirit supporting our dancers in class and in the community at all times.
2. All dancers must be ready to dance on time for their scheduled class or performance.
3. Parents will not be allowed to sit and watch the classes. There are several events throughout the year that new dancers are invited to participate in. These events are an opportunity for the students to "show off" their talents to family and friends.
4. When at performances or Feiseanna, our school will be represented with a positive respectful team that acts in a way that promotes our schools integrity.
5. All dancers will remain respectful to their instructor at all times
6. All dancers will attend class with proper attire. (Shorts, t-shirt/tank, poodle socks, dance shoes)
7. Students are expected to call or email if they are not attending class.
8. Absolutely NO GOSSIP or NEGATIVITY among dancers or parents. If a student or parent has any questions regarding the school, speak to the instructor with your concerns rather than speaking to others as negativity spreads fast!

WEATHER POLICY

Every effort will be made to maintain a normal class schedule provided that adverse weather conditions do not make doing so impossible or dangerous. Whether or not classes will be cancelled depends on an assessment of what the condition of the area roads is likely to be at the start of the day's classes.

There may be unusual circumstances where the school district is closed but the weather conditions are likely to improve substantially during the course of the day.

If you are unsure in any case, cancellations will be posted on:

1. School Message Board www.voy.com/199078/
2. TV: Buffalo Ch. 2 or www.wgrz.com, Rochester Ch. 10 or www.whec.com
3. School's voicemail system (Batavia/Rochester: 219-8913, Lockport: 837-4537)

YOU WILL NOT RECEIVE A PHONE CALL. Cancellations are typically not announced until 12:00 PM except in the worst conditions.

COMMUNICATIONS

The McMahon School has a number of classes on different days and at different times, making communication within the school vital. Every effort is made to keep everyone well informed on a timely basis. Due to the number of dancers and limited time before and after classes, parents are encouraged to use one of these several vehicles of communication.

WEBSITE

The school web site (www.mcmahonirishdance.com) will include information about the school, classes, upcoming events and more. Please check the "Events" page often so you are up to date. There also is a "For Sale" page to list used shoes and dance items.

MESSAGE BOARD

The McMahon School Message Board (www.voy.com/199078/) for McMahon Families only. Here you will find short notice changes to class due to weather; open discussions between parents, dancers, and the instructor. Info regarding events, meeting spots, what to wear, etc will be posted here. Please check the Message Board weekly and especially on days that the weather looks questionable.

E-MAIL

The best way to communicate with the instructor is through e-mail at mcmahondance@hotmail.com. Messages can be sent at any time and will be answered on a timely basis. E-mail also will be used by the instructor to contact or update dancers and families about dancing news.

PHONELIST

An updated list of all dancers in your base location will be provided to each family annually. This list is for SCHOOL USE only! At times, it is necessary to phone members to let them know of lesson changes, cancellations, practices, or any other last minute news. E-mail addresses will also be included on the list. Please use this list if car-pooling is needed.

CELL PHONE

Moira's cell phone can be used to reach her ONLY in case of a dancing emergency. Otherwise, calls should be made to Moira on the dance lines. How quickly calls are returned will be determined by the situation. Calls will be returned on the weekend or after 10pm on week days. Calls will NOT be answered during class. Please note that the school does not run an office or have an office support staff. Therefore, we ask your patience and cooperation as it may take a few days to return calls or e-mails.
Dance line (Moira) 716-837-4537 or 585-219-8913

Moira will NOT accept direct communication through Facebook, text message, Anyvite, or via Message Board; it is best to email her at mcmahondance@hotmail.com

DANCE COSTUMES

All certified schools of Irish Dance have a SCHOOL COSTUME that is unique to that school.

GIRLS:

The McMahon School FULL COSTUME is worn by dancers who **have been taking lessons for a few years** and who elect to participate in group performances or competitions. The dress is constructed from heavyweight red gabardine with white and teal satin. The dress is embroidered with the school's unique Celtic design that was once worn by our instructor in her final years of competition. The artwork reflects the influence on Celtic art of the Book of Kells.

The BEGINNER girl's costume is a black skirt with a red vest and shawl worn over a black long sleeved lycra turtleneck. This costume is also unique to the school and is worn by dancers in **their first few years** that elect to participate in group performances or competitions. The skirt is made of black gabardine; the vest is made of red gabardine and features a simpler embroidered design.

The shawl is pinned at the left shoulder and draped across the back and pinned again at the right hip. You may pin the shawl with safety pins or, as many students do, use decorative Celtic pins (Tara brooches) that can be bought from many Irish vendors.

Beginners can either wear the BEGINNER costume when competing in competition or they can wear a white peter-pan collared blouse, black skirt and shawl. This is appropriate only when competing in the beginner level.

A girl may order/purchase a FULL COSTUME whenever she wants, but because of the expense of the dress, many parents opt for the BEGINNER costume until they are sure their dancer is going to continue Irish Dance. For those who compete at Feiseanna, a school dress is usually not needed until the dancer reaches the 'Novice' level.

All girls wear black spankies/bloomers (what cheerleaders wear) under the dresses and skirts. These can be purchased at dance supply stores.

Poodle socks: All girls wear specific white socks called "popcorn" or "poodle" socks. These may be purchased at many of the same vendors as the shoes, and a group order may also be made through the school periodically.

Hair: Beginners are to curl their hair, not wear wigs. Directions on curling hair can be found in this handbook. A School headband is required for group performances and team dances. These are available for sale on the website.

BOYS:

The Boy's School Costume is the same for all dancers. It consists of black dress pants, black socks, a black long-sleeved collar shirt, and a red tie. The tie can be ordered through the school and the other items are purchased on your own.

Purchasing "Full" costumes:

Dancers must purchase their own costumes, however the Parents Organization does give a dress allotment whenever a brand new costume is made. A brand new costume will only be made if no existing dress for sale fits properly.

A deposit is required when you place the order, and the balance is due upon delivery. There usually is a several month wait to receive the school dresses. Instructions on the care of the costume will be given with the costume.

It may be possible to purchase a used costume from a dancer who has outgrown it or is no longer dancing with the school. Used costume information will be posted on the “For Sale” page of the website, as they become available. When purchasing a full costume there is a dress contract that must be signed before receiving the costume.

Values of used costumes are determined by the school’s dress manager and/or Parent Group.

Renting “Full” costumes:

Full school costume dress rentals are also available. A \$100 one-time deposit is required and a rental fee of \$100 per year.

Purchasing “Beginner” costumes:

Beginner vests & shawls can be purchased &/or made by the schools dressmakers or any outside seamstress. Embroidery is done only by the McMahon School’s contracted embroiderer.

SOLO COSTUMES

As dancers advance in competitive dancing, many wish to have their own *Solo Costume* in addition to the school costume. **The solo costume is a sign that a dancer has achieved a high level of skill in Irish Step Dancing after many years of hard work.** (Usually the dancer gets a solo costume when he/she reaches the level of Novice/Prizewinner/ in competitions.)

They are designed by the dancer, the parent, and the instructor, from the embroidery to the colors, and these usually reflect their personalities. These costumes are usually made in Ireland or England, take several months to produce, and are quite costly. You will see hundreds of different designs at the various competitions.

It is also possible to buy used solo costumes from girls who have outgrown them. These can be found at many Feiseanna from \$300-\$1200.

In recent years, many of the boys have gone from wearing the traditional kilt and jacket to wearing black pants. The boys will add a fancy shirt & vest for their solo costume.

Moira will talk with you when she feels it is appropriate to get a Full school costume or solo costume. NO Solo Costume is to be purchased without Moira’s consent.

WIGS

All Novice, Open, Prelim and Championship dancers must wear wigs for any solo/team/figure/Ceili dance competition or performance. Dancers are to purchase either “Mairead” or “Nicole” style wigs. Dancers under 12 –Maeve Junior, Dancers over 12- Maeve Senior or Tori. Links to purchase these wigs are available on our website. The color ring is available in class to match all colors of hair.

SCHOOL APPAREL

Various items with the McMahon School logo, including T-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, and bags are available for sale in the Fall and Spring. It is always great to have dancers and parents at performances and Feiseanna showing school spirit and camaraderie in a McMahon shirt. The Beginners are to wear a McMahon shirt with black skirt/skort when performing in their first few public performances. In parades ALL dancers must wear McMahon apparel as well, St. Patrick’s Day – McMahon Sweatshirts; Summer parades – McMahon T-shirts.

DANCE PRACTICE & EXPECTATIONS

During different periods of the year beginners and advanced dancers will receive a practice card to mark down every night what they have practiced over the week. Dancers who remember to bring in their practice cards to class the following week will be rewarded. The practice card is to be signed by the parent, this is to assure that the expected time has been completed and get the parents involved in their dancers practice time.

The following practice time is what is expected of each dancer:

Beginners are to practice 10min per day, 5 days per week

Advanced Beginners are to practice 15min per day, 5 days per week

Novice & Up dancers are to practice 30+min per day, 5 days per week

It is encouraged that all young dancers practice at least 10 minutes a night which is not very much at all. Actually for the 1st year you will hardly be able to get them to stop dancing. They will constantly be skipping around the house, in the grocery store, off to the school bus etc. It is not Moira's fault if they get in trouble for skipping in school, she constantly tells them they should not, but unfortunately they just can't help it!

When practicing with your dancer please make sure they are going through all that they have learned. Dancers tend to spend most of their time practicing their favorite Reel step that they know and already do really well. Most dancers have several dances and should be practicing them all daily.

What to look for when your dancer practices...

POSTURE:

- Arms are always held tight to the side
- Hands in fists
- Shoulders pulled back
- Chest out and Chin up

FEET

- Toes are pointed out (right foot to the right, left foot to the left)
- Should be crossed at all times (one foot in front of the other)
- Should be able to see heel stickers in the mirror
- Up on toes
- Knees should be pulled up straight
- Point toes to the ground
- Straighten knees - Extend legs and ankles

DANCE MUSIC:

Having the appropriate dance music is extremely important! It is recommended that your first purchase for Irish dance be music. Unfortunately your favorite soundtrack to Riverdance or Lord of the Dance will not work. There is designated music with specific names and speeds that the dancers should be using. Two Cds that are recommended are Tempo or Tempo 2, these can be purchased through Moira for \$14 or individual tracks online. There is tons of music out there, especially at Feiseanna, for dancers to practice to. If you are unsure about a Cd you find please ask the instructor.

TYPES OF DANCES

REELS AND LIGHT JIGS: As the most popular of all Irish dances, dancers first learn the beginner reel followed by the beginner jig. The elements in these two dances are the foundation of all Irish dance steps. “Skip 2 3s” and the Sidestep or “7s” are the basics of Irish dancing. Your dancer will learn foot positions, correct posture that are unique to Irish dancing and how to count music.

SLIP JIGS: This dance is performed by girls only and known for its elements of grace and strength. It is usually taught during the second year of dance.

TREBLE JIGS AND HORNPIPES: As your dancer develops coordination and timing, usually in the 2nd or 3rd year, he/she will require another type of shoe known as the “hard shoe.” Hard shoes are fitted with a fiberglass toe and heel. Your dancer will learn to make rhythmic sounds using the toe, heel, and ball of the foot. Dancers begin with the “fast” or “Traditional” speed treble jig and hornpipe and progress to the more advanced “slow” treble jigs and hornpipes which are more intricate and put more beats to the music.

FIGURES: Figure dancing or team dancing, is typically introduced in the 2nd year of dancing. It allows your dancer to perform with other dancers, performing the same steps at the same time. Figure dancing involves both footwork and arm work as dancers work as a team to complete different movements created by the teacher. The teacher will match age and appearance with other dancers as they learn 2-, 3-, 4-, 6- and 8- hand figures with your dancer’s classmates.

CEILI DANCING: More advanced dancers may become part of a four- or eight- hand Ceili team. A Ceili dance is a figure not designed by the teacher, but done only one way “by the book” as allowed by the manual, Ar Rince Foinne. These are typically done at Feiseanna, Regional, or National competitions.

PERFORMANCES

Throughout the year, various organizations and/or individuals contact the School requesting dancers for a show at a variety of functions and occasions (church fairs, weddings, community festivals, parades, nursing homes, ect). Participating in performances is a great way to show others what all the practice and hard work has produced. For those dancers who compete, shows give them an opportunity to perform in a more relaxing environment. For all dancers, it is mostly just about having fun and sharing your talent!

-The eligibility of dancers to participate in the performances is determined by the proficiency required for the show, the type of show, venue, and the number of dancers needed. All dancers for any particular show are selected by the teacher. Dancers chosen to do performances are chosen for their overall capability to remember dances, having appropriate costumes, and cheerful but precise execution of the dances. When asked to perform for a particular performance, your quick response is necessary. Dances have to be arranged early by the instructor so please do not hesitate with your reply.

-If you have committed to be present at a performance, please be there and arrive on time. If you are unable to attend, please contact the person in charge quickly so a substitute dancer can be contacted.

-Some of the shows are done without the instructor being present. There will be parents there who know how to run the show. Please offer help with announcing, back-stage, & equipment.

-It is important that you attend as many performances as possible. This is how we raise money for our School's fund. Once you have acquired the ability to perform, it is your responsibility to do so.

We perform throughout WNY all year round, our busiest seasons being the month of March and the Summer. The following is a list of venues that are either annual events or where we have performed:

Rochester St. Patrick's Day Parade, Rochester Irish Festival, Niagara Celtic Festival, St. Joe's Parade, Genesee County Fair, Jackson Square, Apple-Umpkin Festival, Niagara County Fair, various schools, nursing homes, private parties.

All dancers wear their costumes and hair curled/wig when performing publicly. If it is an outdoor performance, and it starts to rain, and the stage is not covered we will not perform. If the temperature is above 80 degrees all dancers are to wear McMahan apparel and not their costumes. It is important to watch the McMahan School Message Board for these changes before the show.

Parades: These are the most fun for the dancers. In the 2007 & 2008 St. Patrick's Day Parade our school won "High Spirited Dance School" Award. In 2010 the McMahan School won the overall St. Patrick's Day Parade.

All dancers wear McMahan School sweatshirt, black pants, hair curled/wigs, and sneakers in the St. Patrick's Day Parade or any other winter parades. Red gloves, headbands, and boys hats are provided. In summer parades all dancers are to wear McMahan shirt, black shorts, poodle socks, hair curled/wigs, and sneakers.

Dance Competitions (THE FEIS)

Feis (pronounced fesh) or Feiseanna (plural for Feis), is the Irish word for festival and, in its pure form, puts emphasis on language, singing, dancing, story telling, essay writing, and other aspects of Irish culture. Although Irish dancing as we know it today has its roots in the late 18th century, the first Feis was held in Ireland in 1897.

In the solo dancing events, the children compete in one of five levels, depending upon their abilities as evidenced by awards won at earlier competitions. Within each of these five levels competitions are further broken down into age brackets. The score is from an independent, certified judge's evaluation of the dancer's **Timing** (rhythm), **Carriage** (deportment), **Construction of Steps** (complexity), **Execution** (presentation), and **Appearance**.

Non-competitive/non performance students

Some parents may wish to enroll their child in Irish dance lessons and that's it! They do **not** want the child in public performances and/or they do **not** want the child in competitions. This should not be a problem for either but you should discuss these intentions with the teacher immediately **before** enrolling (and continuing reminders will not hurt, either) because, understandably, as your dancer's skills develop, the teacher will want the child to be part of team dances. Who knows? You may change your mind regarding your original intentions as your dancer becomes more and more involved. Nevertheless, your wishes (to not compete nor dance in public) will be respected by the teacher.

PREPARING FOR YOUR 1ST FEIS

So you're preparing for your 1st Feis! Here is a guide of what to expect, what to bring, rules, history, and checklist. If you have any questions please feel free to contact Moira or ask any of the experienced "Feis Moms & Dads".

What Is A Feis?

Newcomers to a Feis must be forgiven for being confused by what they see and hear. Jigs, Treble Jigs, Slip Jigs, Reels, and Hornpipes -- what's the difference? Step, figure, set, Ceili dances -- are they variations on a theme? What follows is a beginner's guide to traditional Irish music and dance as presented at a Feis. We also have a McMahon School Only Practice Feis in the Spring to prepare new dancers for the real thing.

The **Beginner** level is open to boys and girls who have never competed before at a Feis and have started dancing since September of 2007. Most dancers will perform a Light Jig which is set in 6/8 time and a reel, which is set in 2/4 or 4/4 time. Some dancers will also perform Slip Jig and/or Single Jig, this depends if they have learned and mastered the material in class by the time of their 1st Feis. They wear soft shoes for these dances. Although the children appear on stage in twos, they do not necessarily dance in unison nor do they compete solely against each other.

The **Advanced Beginner** level is for dancers that have been taking dance lessons longer than 1 class year. Three more dances (a Slip Jig, Treble Jig and a Hornpipe) are added to this class for the girls, while only a Treble Jig and Hornpipe is added to the boys competition (the Slip Jig is a ladies-only dance). The hornpipe, like the reel, is set in 2/4 or 4/4 time, however dancers wear hard shoes made in part with fiberglass in order to display the rhythmic sounds using the toes, heels, and balls of the feet. The slip jig, set in the unusual and unique-to-Irish-dance 9/8 time, is performed in soft shoes and is perhaps the most graceful of the step dances; consisting of light hopping and sliding actions.

The **Novice** level is for dancers that have placed 1st, 2nd, or 3rd in their dance in Advanced Beginner. Dancers must place 1st at the Novice level in order for that particular dance to move up to the next level. At the novice level of Jig competition, it's sometimes an option for the dancer to perform in either soft shoes (Light Jig) or hard shoes (Treble Jig).

The **Prizewinner** (sometimes called simply Open) level is a step up for boys and girls who no longer qualify as a beginner or novice dancer.

The last two categories are champion level groups, saved for only the more seriously competitive and talented dancers. It is not unusual for a champion level dancer to devote 1000+ hours a year to Irish dancing if you add up the time spent on formal lessons, home practice, performances, and competing at Feiseanna. Normally, depending on the talent level and quality of teachers, champion level dancers make up only about 10-15% of the total active student dancers in any given area.

The **Preliminary Championship** level is for those who have placed first at the prizewinner (open) level in both a soft shoe (reel, slip jig) and a hard shoe (hornpipe, treble jig, set dance) at a previous Feis. Dancers must perform one soft shoe dance and one dance in hard shoes. A set dance is added to the competition at this level. A set dance is "set" to certain music and carries the name of the tune to which it is choreographed, such as *The Blackthorn Stick*, *The Hunt*, or *The Three Sea Captains*. This is performed in hard shoes and at the dancer's own chosen speed. Set dances should always reflect the rhythm of the music in the movement of the feet.

The **Open Championship** level, the most advanced of solo competition, is for those who had previously won two first place awards in the Preliminary level.

Before the Feis

1. Print a map & directions to where you are going to.
2. Print a stage schedule if available. Highlight your dancer(s) competition numbers

FEIS DAY

On arrival of a Feis you will 1st need to pick up your entry card or it may be emailed to you. Punch 2 holes at the top side of this card, lace the ribbon through it, and tie it around your dancer's waist with a double knot. At most Feis you can purchase a cardholder that ties around their waist. Punch a hole in the card where the holes in the plastic cardholder are and leave the ribbon through both the card and the plastic. That way the number will not fall out while dancing.

2nd: Check that the correct competitions are listed on your entry card.

3rd: Obtain a Feis program that will list all the dances and number of events and the stages they will dance on.

It is your responsibility to be at your stage on time. Be sure to always check-in with the stage monitor at least 1 competition ahead of yours. Sometimes dances come up quicker on different stages, don't sweat, just notify the stage monitor that your dancer is performing on another stage and they will wait. After you have completed all of your dances you would then go check the scoreboard to see if you placed. Results are posted by event number and entry number, not by name. If your dancer's entry card number appears on the posted results, bring the dancer and the entry card to the award table to pick up their medals. **Be sure** to always get your Marks at a Feis. Marks tell your points and feedback from the adjudicator which is important to know. Then always bring them to class for your teacher to have a look.

A Feis can be a bit overwhelming at first but you need to just do your best and roll with it. It is important that you treat all staff, competitors, and teachers with respect and courtesy. How you treat them will reflect on your school good or bad, please be patient at the trying times. Always feel free to ask experienced parents, stage monitors, dancers, or your teachers if you have any questions.

FEIS ETIQUETTE

- Do not approach judges or musicians. Don't ask them about your dance pick up your comment sheet for pointers!
- Obey the Feis rules. Every Feis is at a different venue and the rules may be different at each.
- Be on time for your dances – the judges will not wait for you.
- Be polite to Feis staff! They are all volunteers and they are trying their best to make things run smoothly.
- Clean up your act! Don't leave garbage lying around.
- No flash photography – it can be dangerous for dancers on stage.
- No camcorders are allowed – this is an official N.A.F.C. (North American Feis Commission) rule. You will be asked to leave & forgo your recording.
- Respect other people's space and possessions. Everyone is camped out for the day – sometimes in very cramped quarters. Make the best of it!
- Coolers, blankets, and lawn chairs are prohibited at many Feiseanna to keep floors and aisles clear. Check with Feis organizers or their syllabus before packing your car trunk.
- Feis changing rooms are provided for you to change in. It is inappropriate to change in the main dancing area.
- It is a national rule that dancers are to be fully clothed at all times. Dancers are not permitted to walk around the venues in bloomers and undergarments.

- Be nice to your fellow competitors. Just because you are competing, that does not mean you can't be friends. It is better to make friends than enemies!
Congratulate – don't criticize.
- Lookout for your fellow McMahon dancers. Support each other and if you can, be there for each other at the stages.
- Remember that you are attending Feiseanna to have fun, improve yourself and winning is not everything. Just because you don't win, does not mean that you are not a good dancer.
- Dancers, remember your parents – they have sacrificed a lot for you. The art of Irish Dancing has many expenses and they do this for you. So the greatest way to thank them is to see you enjoying yourself on stage and dancing your hearts out while smiling and laughing.

Other useful information

- There are usually vendors at dance competitions selling dance shoes, brooches, music, and many Irish-themed articles. **(Warning to parents: WALLETS BEWARE!)** If you wish to purchase shoes but are not sure on the size, please find one of your teachers, and ask for help. Most shoe vendors are very experienced at fitting shoes.
- Usually Moira is at local competitions trying to catch as many competitions as she can. Because of the nature of the Feis, she cannot see everyone in every competition, but she does try. Please find her when you know the results of your competitions.
- As stated in the Feis syllabus, **absolutely NO VIDEOTAPING OF DANCING COMPETITIONS IS ALLOWED**. Each teacher's Irish dance steps are considered proprietary material. If you wish to film your child in costume dancing on the big day, do it outside! Still photography is allowed but PLEASE, don't even think about video.

Final reminders for beginner dancers

- Check your shoelaces before going on stage! Double knots are MANDATORY!
- Keep your chin up. Look for something on the wall up above to stare at, NOT THE FLOOR!
- Ignore the other dancer! Do your steps as you know them; if the other dancer starts or ends differently; just continue your dances as you know them.
- If you make a mistake, or bump the other dancer, keep going. The judge may not have seen your mistake. Try not to make an "Oh no" face.
- Make good use of the stage. Be confident that you belong there, because you're prepared.
- After your bow, look out for the other dancers as you go back to line.
- SMILE! You've worked hard, and everyone wants to see you do well and look your best!

Please remember that Moira *must* be your ultimate authority on all matters pertaining to your participation in Irish dance competitions. You must have her permission before entering any Feis.

MAJOR COMPETITIONS

Oireachtas – (pronounced A-rock-tass) also known as the Regionals or the Qualifiers, is perhaps, the most important of the "major" competitions. This is because the majority of a school's dancers at novice level and higher can participate, and, more importantly, because it is the qualifying competition for the World Championships. 2000 dancers from New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania go to Philadelphia, PA over Thanksgiving weekend to compete in solo and team dancing.

The solo competitions are for preliminary and open championship dancers, although Moira may permit a qualified prizewinner dancer to compete in solos. The ages range from Under 8 to 21 and over, for both boys and girls. The specific dances depend on what age the competitors are. About half of the competitors, solos and team, are placed and receive medals, and about the top 15% of the solo competitors, qualify for the worlds.

If picked to compete in team dancing at the Oireachtas, extra practices are required. These practices run from August up until the week of the Oireachtas. Dancers that can not attend all practices will be replaced by a substitute dancer. Being such an intense competition, 100% commitment is needed from the dancers and missing classes will not be tolerated.

Usually teams of 4 and 8 dancers is what the McMahon School takes to the Oireachtas but there are also Figure dance (16 dancers) and Dance Dramas that can be done there as well.

Nationals - The nationals held for this country and Canada are called the North American Irish Dance Championships. The location rotates each year; each region has an opportunity to host the competition. Typically it is held in Boston, Orlando, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, Philadelphia, or Nashville.

Solo dancing, 8-Hand Ceili's, Figure Dancing, and Dance Dramas are the events held at the Nationals. Just like the Oireachtas, dancers are from the Preliminary and Open Championship level but they are able to come from all areas of the world to compete, not just North America.

Worlds – The best of the best dance here! Usually it is held in Ireland but has also been held in Galway and Scotland. In 2009 the Worlds will be held in Philadelphia, PA; this will be the first time that the Worlds have been held in North America.

Same dances are offered here as the Nationals but soloists and teams have more dances to prepare and are told the day of the competition what they are to compete with.

FEIS CHECKLIST

- o Tie & tack / black pants / black dress shirt / black socks - boys
- o Full Costume / Bloomers / Undershirt or Vest / Skirt / Leotard / Shawl – girls
- o Poodle socks & extra pair
- o Wig/ Headband
- o Sock glue
- o Makeup
- o Safety pins & sewing kit
- o Highlighter & Pen
- o Cards/ Books/ DS
- o Water / Clear Drinks / Snacks
- o MP3 player / iPod with Irish dance music
- o Ghillies/ Hard Shoes - polished
- o McMahon shirt
- o Button Earrings
- o Hairspray
- o Shoe polish, rag
- o Chairs / Blanket / Towel
- o Camera
- o Paper towels / napkins
- o Positive Attitude!!!!

HAIRCURLING

[Boys! Don't rush to another page – read through this and be very glad you only have to get your hair cut once in awhile!]

Materials needed:

- Sponge rollers or Soft Spikes. The amount of curlers depends on your child's hair. If she has super thick hair, you may need quite a lot.
- Spray gel & Hairspray
- Ponytail holders
- Bobby pins
- End papers
- Brush/Comb

According to 'standard', girls' hair is worn in curls. The top section of hair is tied up in a ponytail and curled to match the rest. We have tested several ways of preparing hair and have found the following procedure works best:

- 1.) Prepare your child's hair 24 hours in advance.
- 2.) Wash your child's hair (avoid using conditioner) and dry it thoroughly - the slightest dampness can cause curls to droop immediately!
- 3.) Pull the top section of hair into a ponytail. This will be curled last.
- 4.) Separate the hair into small sections and spray with gel. (the smaller the piece of hair, the tighter the curl)
- 5.) Secure the end of hair with an end paper then wrap the section of hair vertically around the roller and secure.
- 6.) Curl the ponytail; you want to use quite a few curlers so that it looks in proportion with the rest of the hair.
- 7.) When all hair is wrapped (typically an hour or so later), cover curlers with a hair net and let your child sleep on them.
- 8.) The morning of the event remove the rollers gently starting at the bottom row of curlers. Separate the curl into at least 3 pieces, winding each around your finger. Do NOT brush the curls.
- 9.) Spray curls with tons of hair spray, place in headband, & cover with hair net until it's time to dance. (Remember to pull the net off before your child gets on stage!!).

IRISH DANCE TERMINOLOGY

A.D.C.R.G. – Gaelic Commission Registered Irish Dance Adjudicator

Adjudicator -- They judge competitors at Feiseanna.

An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha-- The Commission in Ireland. This governs all accredited teachers, judges, and Feiseanna.

Advanced Beginner -- An advanced beginner who wins 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place will advance to the Novice category in that particular dance.

Beginner -- A competitor who has not taken a full year of Irish Dance lessons. A Beginner must move into the Advanced Beginner category the next year.

Ceili -- A fun Irish party kind of like a school dance but Irish style.

Ceili dance – Team dances not created by the teacher, traditional dances in Ar Rinci Foirne book.

Marks -- These are the marks (numbers and comments) you receive from the judge based on timing, posture, steps etc....

Competitor number -- This is worn by the competitor during competition. This is how the judge knows who you are. When you are looking to see if you have won anything listen or look for your number!

Feis (Feiseanna) – where dancers go to compete

Figure dance -- a team dance created by the teacher

Hard shoe -- shoes with fiberglass tips & heels used to beat out different rhythms to the music.

Heavy shoe -- another word for hard shoe

Hornpipe -- a dance danced in hard shoes at 4/4 time

I.D.T.A.N.A. – Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America

Light Jig -- a soft shoe dance danced at 6/8 time

M.A.R. – Mid-Atlantic Region of North America

N.A.F.C. – North American Feis Committee

Nationals – North American Irish Dance Championships

Novice – A novice who wins a 1st place will advance to the Open (Prizewinner) category in that particular dance.

Oireachtas -- regional competitions

Open Championships -- Highest level of competition in Irish Dance

Performance – where dancers go to perform for an audience, not a competition

Poodle socks -- white socks with "bubbles" worn during competition and shows

Prizewinner/Open -- A competitor who does not qualify as a Beginner, Advanced Beginner or as a Novice

Preliminary Championships -- second highest level of competition

Reel -- soft-shoe dance danced by both girls & boys in 4/4 time

Reel shoes -- these are the soft shoes which are worn by boys they are different from that which are worn by girls. A jazz shoe with fiberglass heel

Set dance -- a hard shoe dance where the music is the same for everyone, but the steps are created by the teacher.

Single jig -- soft shoe dance danced at 6/8 time

Slip Jig -- soft shoe dance danced at 9/8 time, only performed by girls.

Ghillie -- soft shoes worn by girls

Solo dress (Opens costume) -- bought when a dancer reaches a high level

T.C.R.G. -- Gaelic Commission Registered Irish Dancing Teacher

T.M.R.F. – Gaelic Commission Registered Ceili Teacher, can not teach solo dancing

Tir na Nog -- a competition level for young pre-beginner dancers

Traditional set -- hard shoe dances where the steps and music stay the same from school to school

Treble -- used to describe the most basic hard shoe step

Treble jig -- a hard shoe dance danced at 6/8 time

Worlds – The “Olympics” of Irish dance

The McMahon School Parent Group

The McMahon School of Irish Dance has a non-profit parents committee to help organize fundraisers and coordinate donations:

The mission of the **McMahon School of Irish Dance Parent Group** is to enhance the promotion of the history and heritage of the Irish culture by the McMahon School of Irish Dance.

We will accomplish our mission by securing funding and support for the purpose of promoting Irish dance, Irish culture, language, music, and traditions throughout the community.

Sources of funding and support:

- Paid performances (donations)
- Donations from individuals and community members
- Fundraising

Help needed:

- All parents are welcome to suggest performance venues
- All parents and community members are welcome to donate to the Parents Organization at any time. Donations can be monetary or in the form of goods and/or services.
- All parents are urged to assist with fundraising activities, which may include:
 - Parades
 - Car washes
 - Candy bar sales
 - Booth sales at festivals
 - Irish Night or similar events

Funds raised by the Parent Organization are used for equipment for shows, fabric for costumes, flags, banners, hats, gloves, music, and other items necessary for the students' performances. The Parent Organization also raises funds for travel expenses and competition fees for Major competitions.

All McMahon parents are encouraged to attend Parent Organization meetings, which are announced via email and McMahon Message Board.

All McMahon parents will be sent meeting minutes via email following the meetings.

All McMahon parents are welcome to view Financial Statements pertaining to the Parent Organization as a whole and to their individual dancer.

McMahon School Permission Form 2011-2012

Dancer(s) Name: _____

Please Initial:

_____ I agree not to hold Moira McMahon, The McMahon School of Irish Dance, The McMahon School Parent Group, Holy Cross School, Trinity Lutheran Church and/or any of its affiliates responsible for any loss, accident, or injury incurred on these and any other premises while my child is participating in dance lessons, shows, competitions, etc.

_____ It is understood and agreed that the participant is physically fit and prepared for participation in the activities which will be undertaken, and that the participant has not been advised by any doctor or other medical person that participation in these activities should be avoided and/or limited.

_____ I understand that my personal health insurance is responsible for any costs incurred if my dancer becomes ill or injured at the studio or at a dance-related event and requires medical attention or services.

_____ I agree to pay my tuition on time or incur a late fee.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Please check:

_____ I would like to be included in the McMahon School directory

_____ I **give permission** for my dancers' pictures to appear on the McMahon School of Irish Dance website, to be used in press releases, and be used for advertising & promotional purposes without compensation to my child or myself.

_____ I **do not give permission** for my dancers' pictures to appear on the McMahon School of Irish Dance website, to be used in press releases, and/or be used for advertising & promotional purposes.

How often do you check your email?

_____ Daily _____ Weekly _____ Monthly _____ Other

*This form must be turned in with the Registration Form in order to enroll in the 2010-2011 dance year of the McMahon School of Irish Dance.

PLEASE LEAVE THIS PORTION BLANK. YOU WILL BE ASKED TO SIGN AFTER YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR PARENT HANDBOOK.

I, _____ whose child is enrolled for the 2011-2012 dance year at the McMahon School of Irish Dance, have received a copy of the Parents' Handbook. I read and understand the policies and guidelines as described in the handbook and I agree to abide by them.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

(This copy is for your records)