



# Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

April 2003

Volume 2 No. 5

## Evaluating Exhibitions

As part of our ongoing reflection process, staff members spent a recent Wednesday afternoon considering the role of Exhibition nights at GCCS. Each three-month learning expedition culminates in an evening exhibition of student work. During the past two years, our exhibitions have taken many forms – a sky show, book signings, musical productions, craft demonstrations, student docent tours, powerpoint presentations, and project displays.

Exhibitions serve many purposes for our school community. The events give students a real deadline to work toward and a real audience to whom they are accountable for their performance. Students are honored – and a little anxious – to share their work in a public forum. Exhibitions allow teachers to present student learning to parents and community members. Teachers use exhibitions not only to show student work, but to illuminate the process that led to the final products. Teachers also use the exhibition night to evaluate some aspects of students' learning. Parents appreciate seeing their children perform and observing the growth in knowledge and skills that children demonstrate. The days leading up to exhibition nights are among the most exciting and strenuous of the year, which contribute greatly to the spirit of the school.

The staff identified the strengths, weaknesses, and key features of each of our previous exhibitions, then distilled them into a list of elements that lead to especially effective exhibitions. We determined that every exhibition should:

- ❖ Be a celebration!
- ❖ Have a sense of student excitement and investment
- ❖ Show connections to the Guiding Questions
- ❖ Capture the richness and depth of the content studied

- ❖ Showcase the skills students learned
- ❖ Demonstrate accountability to the audience for students' knowledge
- ❖ Show the process of getting to the final product in an accessible way
- ❖ Have well-thought out logistics, e.g. invitations, space, time, flow of people
- ❖ Be polished representations of student work

Exhibitions may also:

- ❖ Have a cohesive feel across crews/grade levels
- ❖ Be interactive
- ❖ Present learning in more than one way
- ❖ Integrate art, music and physical expedition
- ❖ Have a clear link to assessment
- ❖ Showcase real-world, purposeful products
- ❖ Highlight a service component
- ❖ Include members of the community as part of the audience
- ❖ Be hosted during the day or on weekends as well as evenings for other classes and audiences
- ❖ Recognize "key players" and volunteers
- ❖ Provide an opportunity for participants and guests to give feedback
- ❖ Incorporate students' voices in how the exhibition will work

What do you think? What is it about exhibitions that communicates your child's progress most effectively? Watch for the parent survey, which will be sent home mid-May. Each expedition culminates a three-month investment of student work, and we're eager to hear your point of view about this important aspect of our educational program.

### *Today & Tomorrow Exhibitions*

#### **Kindergarten & 1<sup>st</sup> Grade:**

*Monday, June 16, 2003, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.*

#### **2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Grades:**

*Tuesday, June 17, 2003, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.*

#### **Eisenhart Auditorium**

**Specific Times and Locations To Be Announced**

## Family Association Directory

### *Board of Trustees*

#### *Representatives*

Sara Bruzda (473-9736) Paul  
Holloway (224-0044), Tom Klein  
(388-8818)

#### *Officers*

**Co-Chairs:** Dan DeMarle (328-5982), Stuart Dodd  
(726-5953), Dennis Peel (223-4530)

**Secretary:** Carol Bonnewell (647-1932)

**Treasurer:** Julie Bernunzio (256-0722)

### *Family Association Committee Chairs*

#### **Family Social Activities**

Erin Kohler (254-3815)

#### **School Extra-curricular Activities**

Liz Cope (352-9733)

#### **Babysitting & Transportation**

Kit Miller (244-4189), Betsy Serapilio-Frank  
(654-5958)

#### **Staff Appreciation Luncheon**

Marcy Berger (271-3549)

#### **Food Service**

Peter Keenan (271-7406)

#### **Fund-Raising**

Barb & Tom Klein (388-8818)

#### **Communications**

Holly Merrill (224-8491)

#### **Legislative Issues**

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)

### *Classroom Parent Volunteer*

#### *Coordinators*

#### **Kindergarten**

Gina Dodd (426-3356), Annette Ramos  
(244-1378),

Yvonne Villareale (473-9318)

#### **First Grade**

James Carter (473-1187), Bill Howard  
(436-2573),

Kamaria Rivera (254-6598), Betsy  
Serapilio-Frank &

John Frank (654-5958)

#### **Second Grade**

Gina & Stuart Dodd (426-3356), Anne  
Lichtenstein

(244-7373), Holly Merrill (224-8491),  
Susan Proe



## Upcoming Dates To Remember



- Apr. 28: Community Service Club  
3:00–4:00 p.m. Eisenhart Basement
- May 10: Saturday Work Day for Parents
- May 12: Board of Trustees Meeting  
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- May 19: Community Service Club  
3:00–4:00 p.m. Eisenhart Basement
- May 21: Family Association Meeting  
6:30 p.m. 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Classroom
- May 26: Memorial Day – School is Closed
- May 30: John McCutcheon  
Playground Benefit Concert  
7:30 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- June 9: Board of Trustees Meeting  
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- June 12: Parent Conferences  
11:30 a.m. Dismissal for Students
- June 16: Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade  
Exhibitions, 5–8 p.m. Eisenhart  
Auditorium  
Students Required to Attend
- June 17: 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Exhibitions,  
5–8 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium  
Students Required to Attend
- June 20: Passage Ceremony 1:00 p.m.  
Tickets Required  
Last day of School
- June 21: Saturday Work Day for Parents

## Tickets On Sale Now!

John McCutcheon  
Playground Benefit Concert  
Friday, May 30, 2003  
7:30 p.m.



Tickets available at  
RMSC main desk

## Investigations: Moving Math Beyond the Textbook

Christopher Dolgos, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher

If you walk into a math lesson at GCCS, chances are you will find students talking to each other about problem solving strategies, recording their work in logs or journals, and using manipulatives to create mathematical models of their understanding. Like most teaching at GCCS, math instruction is student-centered and uses research-based, best professional practices to help students learn. “Where’s the textbook?” was a common question during the school’s first year with the *Investigations* math program, and many families (and even this teacher!) were skeptical that students were learning all they needed to know in mathematics.

A year later, students, families, and teachers are more familiar with *Investigations* and are seeing the benefits of the program in children’s mathematical thinking. That is not to say that *Investigations* alone is meeting the needs of all students. Just as learning to read requires a balanced literacy program, learning to compute requires a balanced approach to teaching mathematics. That’s where the talents of the classroom teacher come in. Some things, like multiplication facts, need to be memorized, and we tap additional resources to help students. Other concepts, such as “borrowing” and “carrying” can be taught, but if the student does not understand the “why?” behind these algorithms, it can be an exercise in meaningless memorization and frustration. Meeting the needs of the individual student often means supplementing *Investigations* with more traditional materials.

However, few traditional math programs allow for student interaction or ask for multiple

perspectives on problem solving.

In fact, the pace of most math programs does not give students enough time to understand the logic behind many of the most important mathematical principles, such as place value and number sense.

*Investigations*, by comparison, provides students with opportunities for practice and application of the skills and ideas that are the foundation of mathematical thinking. It also provides exposure to the kinds of open-ended response questions that are a large part of today’s standardized tests. Students are often challenged to find more than one way to solve a problem or to use words and pictures to support their numerical representations. All of these strategies help immerse children in the symbolic and literal language of mathematics.

You can support your child’s mathematical thinking in a variety of ways. Ask what he is learning in math and look at the *Investigations* homework when it comes home. Read the parent letters that accompany each Investigation or ask your child’s teacher for more information about the “big ideas” being learned. Find math in everyday moments, counting change at the supermarket checkout, charting the growth of a pet or plant on a graph, using a clock or calendar to track time, or finding fractions in a bag of candy or a glass of milk. Finally, share your own ideas about math with your child and be open to her explanations (even if it isn’t how you learned to do it!). Together we can make math meaningful for our children and move it beyond the pages of a textbook.



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## Welcome to our newest staff member!

Maggie Torres, parent of Mark (3<sup>rd</sup>) and Mariely (K), has joined the staff as the Teaching Assistant in 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade. Maggie has substituted at GCCS since fall. She is committed to the curriculum and philosophy of GCCS, and has a wonderfully gentle, calm way with children. The classroom teachers, Jenna Morales and Stacey Cicero, are positively delighted to have the support of such a skillful, dedicated, and reliable assistant. Welcome Maggie!

## Boy and Girl Scouts are an After-School Possibility

Several parents have expressed an interest in having Boy and Girl Scout troops formed at GCCS, with meetings held as an after-school extracurricular activity. Sue Lederer, parent of Julian (2<sup>nd</sup>) met with representatives from the Scouting organizations, and is preparing to get at least one boy and one girl group up and running by next fall.



Information about Boy and Girl Scouts will be sent home via backpack mail. In order to form the troops, we must solicit enough parent volunteers to lead and facilitate the groups' activities.

Please consider taking an active role in this endeavor. Call Sue Lederer (473-3929) to volunteer or if you have questions. The more parent volunteers we have, the more students will be able to take advantage of this great opportunity!

## Applications for Prospective Staff Pour In!

Because we are adding a new grade level, we anticipate a few openings on our staff for 2003-2004. We have received over 100 applications for Teachers, and approximately 50 for Teaching Assistants. We have conducted more than 25 interviews and are in the process of whittling down our list of highly qualified candidates.

Teaching candidates are selected by a committee of staff, board members, and parents. We use a careful process to choose staff members to work with your children. We interview candidates twice, and ask them to write and defend an expedition plan about a topic we specify. Final candidates spend a day at the school so that we (and they) may determine if the school is a good fit for their skills and beliefs. We screen references, and each successful candidate undergoes fingerprinting and a background check (per NYS law).

Our thorough process is designed to identify individuals who have the talent, knowledge, and temperament to make a significant contribution to GCCS. We were very impressed with this year's batch of applications, and it has been a difficult process to narrow the field.

Watch for the introduction of our new teachers and assistants in the June issue of Currents.

## GCCS Staff Members Present at ELOB National Conference

Seven GCCS teachers shared their expertise with other Expeditionary Learning teachers from around the country March 20-21. Carrie Haymond presented techniques to classroom teachers for incorporating music throughout the elementary school day. Jean Hurst and Joe Saia trained teachers to conduct running reading records as a way of assessing students' reading. Michele Brewer and Ann Looby conveyed strategies and structures for using literature circles in reading instruction. Jenna Morales and Stacey Cicero demonstrated the power of students' questions in driving forward the course of an expedition.

All our staff members' presentations received great reviews. We were honored to be able to contribute to the knowledge and skill base of Expeditionary Learning.

We also learned many new instructional practices that will further our teaching and student learning. We're looking forward to next year's conference in Seattle.

## Emergency Preparedness at GCCS

As part of our efforts to be prepared in the event of severe weather or other emergency, the staff of GCCS has revisited and refined our emergency plans. We clarified our procedures for communication, evacuation, and reunification with parents. Each staff member is assigned specific roles to ensure smooth transitions. We have identified several alternate sheltering sites in the event of a school evacuation, and have equipped each classroom with emergency supplies.

We consulted with RMSC Security staff and reviewed several sample plans in the process of refining our own. We are well-prepared to move quickly and ensure the safety of our students during an emergency.



## Trek to Albany With Other Charter School Parents on Lobby Day!

Parents and staff will raise their voices in support of charter schools on Tuesday, May 20 in Albany. The New York State Charter Schools Association (NYSCSA) is arranging this opportunity for concerned individuals to advocate for the protection and continuation of charter schools with their state legislators. NYSCSA will provide a cushy bus and meals for participants. Interested in coming along? Please call Ann Lichtenstein (244-7373) to reserve a space. Ann attended last year's event and had a great time, in addition to communicating with legislators about the value and importance of charter schools.



# Save the Date and join us at our Spring Family Picnic!



Tentative Date: June  
14, 2003

## Two More Saturday Parent Work Days!

Mark your calendar now to reserve the dates! Saturday Work Days are a great way to meet other parents and to perform valuable service for the school. Teachers identify tasks for parents that help maintain the school and prepare for classroom activities. Jobs include cleaning, light carpentry, sorting and straightening, stuffing envelopes, and other clerical tasks. The June date will be used to close down classrooms for the summer. We'd love to see you there!

### Saturday Parent Work Days

May 10

June 21

9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.



## Election to be held for Parent Rep on Board of Trustees

One parent representative will be elected to the GCCS Board of Trustees by members of the Family Association at the May 21<sup>st</sup> meeting. This seat is currently held by Paul Holloway.

Nominations will be solicited in early May. Watch backpack mail for the nomination form, and feel free to nominate yourself or another parent.

The Board of Trustees adopts the school's budget, monitors finances, approves staff hiring, and ensures the school's faithful adherence to the charter. Meetings are held from 5:30–7:30 p.m. the second Monday of each month.

If you have questions about the responsibilities of a Board member, please feel free to call one of the parent representatives listed on page 2.

## Today & Tomorrow

We have embarked on the last expedition of our curriculum framework – the sixth historical time period we study in each two-year cycle. During the Today & Tomorrow time period, we examine life in Rochester from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, and we consider our community's future as well.

The kindergarten through third grade curriculum emphasizes the natural world and the impact of humans upon it. The fourth grade curriculum focuses on city planning and leadership in shaping the culture, resources, built environment, and economics of a community. We look forward to sharing our achievements with you at our June exhibitions.

## Kindergarten – Animals Up Close



Today & Tomorrow is the historical context for the kindergarten study of animals and their needs. The class will use Turning Point Park as an outdoor lab to learn about the multitude of animals that thrive right here in our own city. Students will observe and take notes that will help them determine the types of animals that live here, what they eat, and what environmental features support them. They will analyze the information they gather and use it to draw conclusions about the type of animal life best suited to our city.

The classroom will be an indoor lab in which students will look more closely at some of the animals they identify outdoors. Children will observe ants, worms, goldfish, guppies, tadpoles, chicks, and butterflies, and will graph and chart information about them. An “Animals Up Close” journal will help organize the data collected in both the indoor and outdoor labs.

The culminating project will involve scripting and performing for a video that will inform the public about the animal life in Turning Point Park. Our goal is to distribute the video to the City Parks Department, the Public Library, and our own River Room.

## First Grade – Where Does Our Lunch Go?



During this expedition, students will be sorting, tracking and recording the garbage they produce in the classroom and at home, and its effects on the environment. They will be exploring our relationship to the natural world and searching for ways to decrease the negative impact on local habitats through a comparison of the Seneca way of life with our lives today.

Students will investigate answers to the following questions: What is garbage? What's in it and why do we have it? What happens to our garbage? How does garbage affect the natural world? The class will explore local habitats and research the effects of garbage on the habitat as well as the creatures that live there. Students will be exploring packaging materials, recycling, and planning a “leave no trace” picnic for the class and families. They may perform a service project at a park. Field studies will include visiting a landfill, recycling center and a home compost pile.

The class will create a presentation for the school about ways and reasons we at GCCS can take care of our natural world. They will also create pamphlets for the community about ways to conserve when out and about this summer.

## Second Grade – Through the Eyes of a Frog

The second graders are hopping into the next expedition with excitement! They will be studying various habitats around the world and the animals within those habitats. From a frog's perspective, they will learn about the food chain, life cycles, animal adaptations (e.g. skin coverings, beaks/teeth, legs, tails) and the effects that humans have on habitats. The class will go on many field studies to observe animals in their natural world.

Students will use their research and observations to create hands-on museum exhibit prototypes. Watch for the demonstrations at the June Exhibition!



## Representing Today & Tomorrow Through the Visual Arts

Our expedition work in the time period "Today and Tomorrow" will provide our students with rich opportunities to take a look at Rochester's natural and built environments and ask, "Who cares about our community and the challenges we face?" The visual arts will illuminate our curriculum, enable our students to express ideas about life in Rochester today, and help us to imagine and shape our community in the future.

The kindergarten expedition will provide students opportunities to observe, draw and sculpt birds, fish, and other animals along the river and in our community. The students will learn to document their own expedition with video imaging.

First grade will examine the effects of growing population and development in Rochester. Through the visual arts component students will learn about archeology, and compare the artifacts left behind by ancient cultures with what we leave behind as a contemporary culture. Artists love to reuse and recycle discarded objects to create something new, and in this expedition students will look at trash through a different lens.

In second grade, the frog will represent our investigations about animal habitats, classification, adaptations, and the concept of endangered species. Look for the artistic construction of a really big frog as our mascot. Students will employ drawing, painting, and 3-D modeling to document animal studies.

In the third grade expedition, students will focus on the effects we are having on our surroundings and the relationship between people and the environment. Animals, parks, nature preserves, and wildlife will be the subjects for artistic expression including posters and the creation of a naturalist's journal. The study of how other cultures view their place in the natural world will inspire our artwork.

In the fourth grade expedition, students will examine images of the people and places that make up our community. They'll become engaged in learning the art of narrative portraiture. Portraits of family members and friends by the fourth grade students will tell stories such as "How has life in Rochester changed for its residents?" Self-portraits by students will represent who we are as a school community, and public sculpture and landmarks in Rochester will help tell the story of our larger community. Designing new public spaces will help students to predict future trends in our city.



## Back on the Misty Track of Time

This is the title of the CD that GCCS students will be producing throughout the next few months. The CD will be a compilation of songs that have become meaningful in the life of our school. Some are hello and goodbye tunes, and others are songs that have been purposeful throughout the expeditions.

Writing is an important piece of this musical project. Students are writing letters to composers for permission to record, and a booklet with information about the songs will accompany the CD.

Recording will take place in early June, and we hope everyone will have a copy by the end of the school year!

## Physical Expedition

During the current expedition, P.E. will focus more on traditional P.E. activities such as soccer, track and field, baseball, and volleyball, in addition to some dance classes. Students will work hard to boost endurance levels and agility as well as flexibility and agility.

Second, third, and fourth graders will study a Brazilian martial arts/dance form known as Capoeira. Third grade will also work on a dance piece for the Passage Ceremony in June.

Because the natural world is a focus of our expeditions, classes may also go hiking at Durand Eastman Park and Mendon Ponds Park. Parent volunteers will be needed, so watch for announcements in backpack mail!

We have also rescheduled Kindergarten's Camp Arrowhead day.

Please feel free to come in during your child's P.E. class to participate and help out! Call Ms. Miller at 271-4552 ext. 460 to make these arrangements.

