



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

June 2003

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Strides Toward Excellence

It was really something to see. One hundred and fifty students filled the chapel at Third Presbyterian Church to overflowing. All eyes were on Ms. Haymond, who stood at the front with her arms raised, poised to lead the group in wonderful, magical song. You could have heard a pin drop. Then, upon Ms. Haymond's signal, the students' rich voices filled the room, just as beautiful and inspiring as any professional chorus. This was the sixth take of "Swinging Along." Each previous take was marred by a cough, a thump on a pew bench, a whispered voice, out-of-synch timing. After each take, students took a deep breath, pulled together, and tried again. They had already learned that good is not always good enough.

We strive to convey this message to students in individually appropriate ways in all academic, social, and artistic activities. This is what higher standards are all about. Pushing students onward to higher quality work is not a punitive act, rather it is accomplished in a spirit of encouragement and a community expectation of excellence. It is also a highly personal act, which necessitates a knowledgeable teacher and a relationship of trust and respect between teacher and child. Our aim is to develop in children inner motivation – a desire to work hard and improve because doing so is a satisfying experience.

Both quantitative and qualitative measurements indicate that we are succeeding in our efforts. Our ELOB Field Director offered high praise indeed when she said, "You aren't just *doing* EL, you *are* an EL school!" Our standardized test scores and NY State Education Department Comprehensive Review also provide evidence.

An emphasis on quality infuses all of our endeavors and is woven through the 10 design principles that guide our work. We appreciate your support in achieving excellence with your child. We encourage you to communicate your expectations for determined effort and positive results as you prepare to embark upon the next school year.

Introducing Our Newest Colleagues

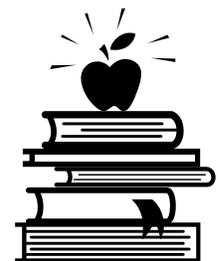
Welcome to our new faculty members! We have selected terrific people to fill our vacancies, and are confident that they will be an asset to our school. Their determination and persistence was clear during the interview process – each candidate survived several interviews, wrote a sample expedition plan, conducted a demonstration lesson, and spent time observing at the school. They bring a wealth of experience and talent to their positions at GCCS.

Melissa Conklin will be teaching 2nd Grade. Melissa has a Master's Degree in Education and a Bachelor's in Studio Art. Melissa has been an honorary member of our staff for the past two years; she has worked as a substitute teacher extensively at GCCS.

Elizabeth Emerick will join the 4th Grade team as Teaching Assistant. Elizabeth has many years experience as a library and classroom aide.

Linda Lopata will teach 3rd Grade. Linda has over 10 years of teaching experience at the elementary and middle school levels. We tried to recruit Linda to teach at GCCS two years ago, but she decided to take time to stay home with her young children. Her son will enter GCCS's kindergarten this fall! Linda is certified in special education and is completing a second Master's degree in history.

Spero Michialidis will join the 5th Grade team. Spero has a Master's degree in Elementary Education and a Bachelor's in Environmental Science. He has traveled
(continued on p. 4)



Family Association Needs New Leaders!

We are so grateful to the parents who have led the Family Association in its infancy during the past two years, and we are sorry to see some of them step down from their positions. However, this is your grand opportunity! We need several new officers and committee chairs to pick up where our previous leaders left off.

Please consider volunteering for Co-chair or Secretary of the Family Association, or signing up to lead one of its committees. More information and sign-up sheets will be available at the August 21 Family Open House.

School CD Coming Soon

Watch for the August release of our School CD "Back on the Misty Track of Time," featuring musical favorites from GCCS expeditions and Community Circle. Selections include "These are Hands That Work For Peace," "Somos El Barco," "The Song That Nature Sings," and "Hi Yo."

Ms. Haymond put extraordinary effort into selecting the music, arranging instrumentation, rehearsing with classes, and working with the sound technician. Thanks to her musical gifts, and the magnificent voices of your children, we have produced a wonderful keepsake that will help children and families celebrate the richness of music and the importance of song in all periods of history and all parts of daily life.

Students had a hand in the production as well. They wrote to songwriters requesting permission to record the songs, designed the CD cover, wrote the liner notes, and of course, contributed their beautiful voices.



More information will be available about the purchase of CD's at the August 21 Family Open House.

Join Us For Our Family Open House

Thursday, August 21
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Come meet our staff, visit with old friends and new, and see our school all polished and ready for fall!

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- July 27: School forms due
- Aug. 21: Family Open House 6:00-7:30 p.m.
- Aug. 27: First Day of School Grades 1-5
1:00 p.m. dismissal
- Aug. 28: Grades 1-5 1:00 p.m. dismissal
- Aug. 29: Grades 1-5 1:00 p.m. dismissal
- Sept. 1: Labor Day, School is Closed
- Sept. 2: Grades 1-5 3:00 p.m. dismissal
Kindergarten half-day sessions
- Sept. 3: 1st Full Day for Kindergarten
Community Circle 12:20-12:50 p.m.
1:00 p.m. dismissal (Every Wednesday)
- Sept. 8: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Sept. 17: Family Association Meeting
6:30 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Sept. 26: PEP Conference Day
No School for Students
- Oct. 6: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Oct. 10: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Oct. 13: Columbus Day
School is Closed

GCCS plans 6th Grade

At its June meeting, the GCCS Board of Trustees approved a proposal to extend our school to 6th Grade beginning in 2004-2005. This was welcome news for the many parents of our incoming 5th Grade students, who are pleased to hold off the middle school decision for another year. We still need to receive approval from the State Education Department and Board of Regents, and we need to receive final word from RMSC about the space we will need. However, we have received encouragement from both groups.

The curriculum is currently under construction. We intend that the 6th Grade year will require students to synthesize and extend what they have learned during their years at GCCS, and capture that learning in a 6-8 chapter book written by each student.

Information meetings will be held in the fall for parents of prospective 6th Graders. Watch for more details to come!

New Classroom Undergoes Renovation

As our student population grows, we are expanding our classroom space as well. Our newest classroom will be used for our 4th or 5th Graders in the coming year. The new room is the former Inquiry Room on the second floor of our building. It is two floors above the current 3rd Grade classroom, and has the same footprint.

The RMSC facilities staff will complete renovations to the space this summer. They are moving the Inquiry Room into the main museum building. They will add a bathroom to our classroom, redo the ceiling and floor, and paint. We'll add white boards and bulletin boards, new furniture, and lots of new materials and books. A Phonic Ear amplification system will be installed so that children and teachers can be heard by the whole group more easily.

Be sure to stop by to see the new room during our Family Open House on August 21st.

Exhibition dates set for the year

At the conclusion of each Learning Expedition, classes present their accomplishments through writing, drama, music, art, dance, and oral presentations. **All students are required to attend the evening exhibition for their class.** Exhibitions are a team effort in every class, and teachers evaluate student learning through student demonstrations. So, it is critical that all our students attend.

The dates for next year's three exhibitions are:

Prehistory:

K, 1 – November 17

2, 3, 4, 5 – November 18

Early People/Woodland Peoples:

K, 1, 2 – March 15

3, 4, 5 – March 16

Indians/Explorers/Settlers:

K, 1, 2 – June 17

3, 4, 5 – June 21



Back-to-School Supply List

We would greatly appreciate it if each student could donate the following items to his/her classroom community:

- ✓ 2 boxes of Puffs or Kleenex
- ✓ 2 bottles of Softsoap (pump kind)
- ✓ 1 box sandwich-sized Hefty one-zip bags
- ✓ 1 box gallon-sized Hefty one-zip bags
- ✓ 2 large packages graham crackers, animal crackers, goldfish crackers, or pretzels (we will request additional snacks throughout the year as the need arises)
- ✓ 1 dozen No. 2 pencils
- ✓ 1 box Dixie cups
- ✓ 3 glue sticks or bottles of Elmer's glue

Pencils and snacks present the greatest ongoing need for classrooms throughout the year, so if you have room in your shopping cart and wallet, please keep us in mind!



All donations are voluntary. Thank you so much for your generosity!

Passage Ceremony brings our year to a close

Our annual Passage Ceremony, held on the last day of school, gathered students, families, and staff together in reflection and celebration. We enjoyed several dance and musical performances by our 3rd and 4th Grade students, a Powerpoint presentation featuring each student and a sample of his or her artwork, and a reflection rap written and performed by 4th Graders Jordan Smith and Sterling Johnson. Each class presented a meaningful gift to the grade level below, for example, the 3rd Graders bestowed their beloved hamster, Zippity, upon the incoming 3rd Grade class and the 4th Graders gave the incoming 4th Grade class a brochure they had created about how to tackle the 4th Grade State Exams. Teachers who would not be looping with their classes next year presented their classes to next year's teachers, complete with wise words of advice based on their experiences!

The ceremony was a poignant event, and a terrific opportunity for our school community to look back with fond memories and look forward in anticipation.

GCCS earns status as ELOB Demonstration Site

In January, 2004, GCCS faculty will host Expeditionary Learning teachers from around the country at a Demonstration Site Seminar. ELOB invites a limited number of schools each year to serve as exemplars of the model's implementation.

Several aspects of GCCS's program will be featured at the site seminar: the integration of art, music, and P.E., early literacy methods, expedition planning and student outcomes, and the use of the museum's vast resources.

We are honored to have our work recognized as exemplary by other educators, and we look forward to sharing what we've learned with our colleagues in the ELOB network.

Slight change in 2003-2004 calendar

We have made a slight revision in the calendar for next year. The Demonstration Site Seminar for ELOB will be held January 29-30, 2004. Participants will visit the school to see us in action on Thursday, January 29. Our faculty will lead professional development workshops on Friday, January 30. Consequently, we need to close school for students on Friday, January 30.

To compensate, there will be one fewer day off in February. School will be open for students on Wednesday, February 18. Please mark your family calendars accordingly!



New Staff (continued from p. 1)

extensively in the U.S. and abroad, and worked as an English teacher in Seoul, Korea. Spero has substitute taught in West Irondequoit and at Cobblestone.

Sarah Morell will teach Physical Expedition. She is certified in dance education, and has many years' experience teaching dance to children of all ages. Sarah also has played on many organized sports teams.

Please be sure to greet our new staff and join us in welcoming them to the school.

Family Handbook Enclosed

For families who receive this issue of Currents through the mail, enclosed you will find our 2003-2004 Family Handbook. The Handbook has been updated, and includes crucial information about school policies, parent involvement, student discipline, and other aspects of our school's operation. The Handbook also contains a new copy of the 2003-2004 School Calendar. Please feel free to call the school if you have any questions.

GCCS teachers challenge their minds and bodies this summer



The GCCS office resembled a travel agency last month, as flights and hotels were arranged for a wide variety of professional development opportunities.

Many teachers are attending Expeditionary Learning summits and Outward Bound trips. Spero Michailidis is learning about the process of writing and implementing expeditions as attends the Children's Books summit in Boston. Linda Lopata and Sarah Morell are attending the Physiology and Fitness summit in Denver. Michelle Haydanek is braving the white water of the Colorado River, while Nancy Valle is kayaking on Lake Superior. Stacey Cicero and Jenna Morales are going longboat sailing off the coast of the Pacific Northwest, and Ann Looby is setting sail off the coast of Maine. Lisa O'Malley and Lisa Wing are attending the Data Institute in Denver, and Debbie McCoy, Melissa Fredericks, and Keri Kijowski are traveling to Seattle for the Early Literacy summit.

In addition, Chris Dolgos, Melissa Conklin, and Allison Nichols are attending *Responsive Classroom* training in Vermont. Melissa Fredericks, Jean Hurst, and Melissa Conklin are heading to San Antonio for Guided Reading training. Staying right here in Rochester, Ann Looby, Spero Michailidis, and Keri Kijowski are attending a week-long *Investigations* institute, and Carrie Haymond is attending a course at the Eastman School of Music. Finally, Jenna Morales is traveling to Indonesia to assist local teachers with curriculum development.

Aside from Jenna's trip to Indonesia, all these opportunities are sponsored by GCCS, and are funded with Charter School start-up grant monies. GCCS is rich with well-rounded, highly trained faculty, which contributes greatly to your child's educational experience and success.

Please, no wheeled backpacks!



This past year, the great majority of our students carried regular, old-fashioned backpacks with no wheels, and our hallways and dismissals were much safer! We have found that wheeled backpacks pose several problems. They often don't fit in cubbies. Children either have to lift them overhead to store them on top of the cubbies, or leave them blocking the hallway. Classmates frequently step on and trip over the straps that trail on the floor behind the backpacks. Wheeled backpacks regularly find themselves jammed into the shins of another student. Children also catch the wheeled backpacks on the edges of the steps, sometimes causing them to lose their grip and send the backpack bouncing down the stairs into the classmate behind.

We appreciate your cooperation and ask that you select the old-fashioned low-tech backpack again for the coming year.

Note Different Schedule First Two Weeks of School!

First through Fifth Grades - 1:00 Dismissal
August 27, 28, and 29!

Kindergarten Students begin with screening and orientation on August 27, 28, and 29.

September 2 first through fifth grades will dismiss at 3:00. Kindergarteners have a half-day of school on September 2. Kindergarten parents should call Maureen at 271-4552 ext. 460 for scheduling.

September 3 all classes will begin the regular Wednesday schedule, with a 1:00 dismissal.

September 4 and 5 all classes will have 3:00 dismissal.

Our regular weekly schedule will begin the week of September 8. School will dismiss at 3:00 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. School dismisses at 1:00 each Wednesday.



GCCS teams with RMSC to apply for “Teaching American History” grant



We couldn't pass up an opportunity to strengthen and share cutting-edge techniques for teaching history content to elementary-age students, so when the US Dept. of Education offered a three-year grant for that purpose, we set to work. Our proposal, *Touching American History – A Community Partnership* involves collaboration with RMSC, University of Rochester, and Nazareth College.

If we receive the grant, we will create a professional development model in which teachers will have the opportunity to study local exemplars – regional people, places and events that are documented in artifacts, photographs, manuscripts, documents and other primary source materials in regional repositories and historic sites - that illuminate significant issues, principles, events, people and turning points in our nation's history. We will focus on in three interwoven themes: (1) American industrialization, (2) ethnicity and migrations of people, and (3) the responses to change embodied in Western New York religious revivals and social reform movements. We hope to improve our own knowledge and teaching methods, and then to disseminate what we've learned to teachers in the Rochester City School District and around the country.

Keep your fingers crossed that we receive good news about the awarding of the grant!

Playground vision turns to reality!

The staff and students of GCCS offer their heartfelt gratitude to the parents who have organized the John McCutcheon concerts and other fund-raisers the past two years. Thanks to their hard work and a grant from the State Education Department, the GCCS playground will be installed in September. We're still about \$15,000 short of our total goal, but we have sufficient funds to prepare the site and purchase more than half the equipment. Fall will be an active, happy time outside the school, and mud-free (we hope) on the inside!



We're aiming for a September 6th installation date. Please save the date, as parents do the lion's share of the work, supervised by the playground company. More details will be sent home in late August.

4th Grade test results are in

We're pleased to report that our 4th Graders scored well on the required New York State English Language Arts and Mathematics Exams. 65% of our students received passing scores on the ELA exam, with three more students just a point or two away from a passing score. 68% of our students passed the Math exam.

These are excellent results. According to our State Education Department supervisor, these scores “put you in the upper echelon of elementary schools in New York State!”



PLEASE NOTE

**Grades 1-5
1:00 Dismissal
Wednesday, Thursday, Friday
August 27-29**