



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

August 2003

Volume 3 No. 1

Welcome Back!

We've prepared for another productive year – academically and socially – and are looking forward to working with you to further your children's growth and learning.

You couldn't ask for a more dedicated, talented team of educators to accomplish this goal. Our staff is committed to the Expeditionary Learning model and is conscientious about creating a challenging, supportive learning environment for children. During our three weeks of summer professional development, staff members deepened their understanding of many of the foundations on which our school rests. Expedition planning, *Responsive Classroom*, *Investigations*, our writing curriculum, and data analysis were examined by staff. Our plans for the year reflect our continuing efforts to develop a school-wide cohesive and consistent approach to instruction. Our common language and emphasis on quality work help students and families understand more clearly what we are about and what is expected of them.

Parents have a critical role in our school, and we do not pretend that we can educate children to their fullest potential without family involvement and support. Our Family Association and school create a wide range of opportunities for you to be involved throughout the year. We welcome you to take an active interest in our curriculum and your children's progress.

To this end, we have designed informal mid-expedition curriculum nights so that we may share with you details about our daily educational program. We hope this enables you to see the small instructional steps that lead to the grand final products shown in each exhibition. We also hope these evenings help address parent questions and concerns related to curriculum and instruction on a more regular basis. Misconceptions may arise when parents don't see the typical worksheets and assignments coming home. We want to make our approach as transparent as possible so that you might understand how we help your children meet and exceed state standards.

We're looking forward to a great year! Join us often to see how it unfolds.



First Six Weeks Emphasize Classroom Procedures and Routines

What's the best way to accomplish a huge amount with a classroom full of eager, active learners? Spend sufficient time laying the foundation for a year of success! In keeping with our *Responsive Classroom* approach to classroom management, all our teachers will set aside time during the first six weeks of school to review proper use of materials, establish expectations for transitions and routines, and reinforce social guidelines. Even our eldest students benefit from careful attention to the details of working together in a classroom community. If your youngster excitedly reports, "We discovered the staplers today!," you'll know that special effort has been made to ensure that a common piece of classroom equipment is used safely and cared for responsibly by all. If you want to know more about the *Responsive Classroom* model, visit their website at www.responsiveclassroom.org.



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 zip-top bags
- ✓ 1 box gallon-sized zip-top bags
- ✓ 3 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!

Take a Leadership or Volunteer Role at GCCS!

The Family Association is an integral part of the Genesee Community Charter School – and your participation is both needed and valued! We have a need for Family Association officers and committee chairs, committee members, and room parent volunteer coordinators. Please consider serving the school by taking on one of these important roles.

More information will be available at the September 17 Family Association meeting. You

can meet with parents who have filled these roles in the past and find out more about the work and wonderful opportunities available to strengthen your involvement in the school.

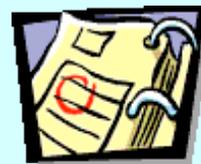


Join Us For Our September Family Association Meeting

Wednesday, September 17
6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
Eisenhart Auditorium

Help elect a representative to the Board of Trustees and set the agenda for this year's Family Association activities!

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- 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
- Oct. 15: Family Association Meeting
6:30 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Oct. 21: Curriculum Night
6:30 p.m.

Focus Areas for 2003-2004



The GCCS staff has reviewed our ELOB Implementation Check, the Parent Satisfaction Surveys, and our students' performance measures, and has determined our focus areas for the coming year. Focus areas provide a structure and direction for our work during the year.

Writing instruction will continue to be an area we emphasize. We have developed a set of common practices and have identified resources to help students become beautiful, skilled writers. We'll also continue to work on the alignment of expedition plans with state standards and assessments. We're adding a new vehicle to improve parent communication about classroom programs (see p. 1), and we'll focus on creating ways to communicate individual student performance more clearly and regularly. We're also continuing our work on implementing the Responsive Classroom model for classroom management and discipline.

New this year is an emphasis on strengthening our use of the *Investigations* math program. We remain committed to the philosophy and structure of the math program, but we want to ensure that we are implementing it well. We are working with a consultant from the University of Rochester to deepen our understanding of the program and related teaching strategies. Another new initiative is the creation of specific product descriptors for our expedition projects. We will determine clear expectations for student products to ensure that student work reflects progress toward social and academic goals.

Focus areas are emphasized during our extensive professional development throughout the year. Staff spends time working with consultants, sharing best practices, implementing new strategies, developing plans, and reviewing student work. We will appreciate your reflections on how we're doing! Please communicate your comments and suggestions to classroom teachers and to the School Leader.

Please, no wheeled backpacks!



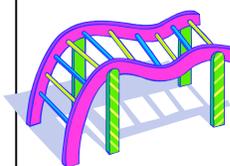
Last year, the great majority of our students carried regular, old-fashioned backpacks with no wheels, and our hallways and dismissals were much safer! We have found that wheeled backpacks pose several problems. They often don't fit in cubbies. Children either have to lift them overhead to store them 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.

Playground plans move forward

We have a few obstacles to overcome before we can schedule the installation of our new playground, but we are making progress! In July, we made it over the first hurdle. Lyle Beach, RMSC Vice-President and GCCS Board member, presented the plans to the city's Preservation Board. We received a favorable response, and will now request a set-back variance from the zoning board. Then we need to receive final approval from the Preservation Board.

We are hopeful that we can schedule installation for October. Please watch backpack mail for more information. We may request your support at upcoming meetings, and we'll certainly need your help with the construction of the playground!



We're still about \$15,000 short of our goal, so fundraising will continue this year. Many thanks to all the families who have helped us get this far!

Prehistory

We'll be turning back the clock again as we begin our two-year curriculum loop with the study of prehistoric time. This time period focuses on earth science for our 4th and 5th Graders, astronomy for our 2nd and 3rd Graders, and prehistoric life for our Kindergarten and 1st Graders. Students' research will take them to the museum, planetarium, Seth Green Trail, Letchworth State Park, and beyond. Projects will emphasize quality writing and collaborative crew work. Watch for demonstrations of our accomplishments at our November exhibitions!

Kindergarten – Stories and Prehistory

What is a story? What is the story of our earth and its living creatures? How do we know? These are the guiding questions that will lead the Kindergarten class as our students journey through our first expedition.

Students will begin the year immersed in literature. They will discover exciting characters and places as they examine many types of stories.

Students will then explore stories of the earth and its first living creatures. As they unearth fossils, they will discover how we know about the earth's story and its living creatures from long ago. In addition, students will investigate how creatures of the past are related to animals that are alive today.

This expedition will culminate in a performance in which students dramatically and artistically relate the story of the earth and creatures from long ago. Each student will also

learn about one creature in-depth, and will create a book which tells its story. Join us on Monday, November 17 for our very first exhibition!



1st Grade – What Lived Here Long Ago? How Do We Know?



1st Graders will be looking for the answers to these questions as they study Prehistory through the lens of "the life of a rock." They will study fossil formation and rock layers. They will use fossils from the local region

to discover the sequence of prehistoric plant and animal development. Our investigations will focus on the time when this region was covered by a warm sea, on the dinosaurs whose remains have been discovered elsewhere, and on the Mastodon which roamed this area during the Ice Age. Field studies will include a fossil dig and work at the RMSC with docents and George McIntosh, the resident paleontologist. The students will use what they have learned to design interactive displays that will accompany exhibits at the RMSC. Students will also serve as museum docents for our new kindergarten class.

2nd Grade – Looking at Luna

How do we know what we know about the night sky? What is our responsibility in sharing that information? This expedition will introduce students to the steps of the scientific method by studying the moon through three in-depth investigations. The first will introduce students to scientific inquiry. Next, students will observe the moon and apply their scientific thinking and observational skills to examining the lunar phases and features and properties of the moon. The third will explain how the earth-moon system functions. We will connect this knowledge to the workings of our solar system and the 90 plus moons that share our place in space. Throughout the expedition, we will use the arts to examine how the moon and the rhythms of day and night impact our lives through the lullabies we sing, the stories we tell and the dreams we visualize in painting and sculpture.

Student projects will build skills throughout the expedition which will lead up to the exhibition, a Sky Show at the Strassenburgh Planetarium, that will teach second and third graders from local schools about the moon and the role of scientist in sharing knowledge. The family "dress rehearsal" will be held Tuesday, November 18th.



3rd Grade – Here Comes the Sun

The sun captivates and inspires – people flock to beaches, songs are written, forecasts watched vigilantly, awaiting its arrival. Astronomically the sun, a star, is the life-giving center of our solar system. How did we discover this?

Students will engage in an in-depth study of the sun. They will investigate the cause and effect relationship between matter and energy that created our universe and ultimately our solar system. Students will explore how we know about things we can't touch and how and why scientific theory has changed over time. They will learn to interpret data, draw conclusions, and present findings for educational purposes.

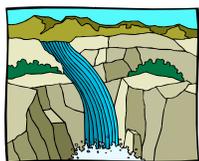
Student work will culminate in a sky show in the Strasenburgh Planetarium, with the intended audience of schoolchildren from around Rochester.



4th Grade – The Path of Least Resistance

While researching the Genesee River Valley, 4th Graders will inquire, “Has the earth changed over time? What evidence tells us about the earth’s past?” In partnership with the Geology department at the University of Rochester, the class will study the land formations that make our area unique. They will participate in a Rock Lab at the U of R, explore weathering at Mount Hope Cemetery, and invite research scientists to share their expertise.

Students’ work during the first half of the expedition will lay the foundation for a 3-day field study to the source of the Genesee River and Letchworth State Park. This field study will help answer the question “How did the Genesee River get here?” Throughout the field study, the class will gather data, collect evidence, and make observations of the effect that water has on the geology of the river valley.



The goal is to share what students discover by publishing and marketing a chapter book that details the story of the formation and geology of the Genesee River Valley! The challenge will be to find a local publishing company and vendors to support the production and sale of the book. The teachers are hoping that our book can further the recent public interest in the Genesee River and foster an awareness of its importance to our community.

5th Grade – The Changing Earth

How has the Earth changed over time? What gave Rochester its unique geologic features? How has life responded to geologic and environmental change? These questions will be guiding 5th Grade’s first expedition this year, as they explore the prehistory period of our curriculum.

The Rochester area is rich with geologic features, evidence, and local experts. All of which will be utilized as students examine the Earth’s ancient history. Through various forms of inquiry, local field studies, research, and collaboration, they will explore the glaciers of the last ice age and other aspects of Rochester’s fascinating geologic history over the last 12,000 years. The concept of geologic time will be introduced as students learn about plate tectonics, the origins of local rocks and minerals, life’s response to change, and other processes that occur over millions of years.

Students will document their learning by creating a field guide to local geology. They will also investigate ways to create public teaching stations at various points along the river’s edge.



Visual Arts

“What were the beginnings of our universe, our planet, and its living things? How do we know?” These questions will form the foundation of our first expedition of the school year. Through visual arts activities, our students will be able to explore and represent their ideas about the origins of our sun and solar system, pre-historic life on earth, fossil formation, dinosaurs and paleontology, geology, land and river transformation, climate, gravity, energy, and changing life.

Our students in Kindergarten and 1st Grade will explore the question, “What is the earth’s story?” Students will illustrate their own “Why” tales to explain natural phenomena. As we learn about pre-historic life and wonder, “How do scientists know what dinosaurs look like?” our students will represent their own ideas through drawing, painting, and sculpting. Kindergartners will personify early life with puppets, masks, and costumes in preparation for a performance. 1st Graders will share their areas of expertise as docents at the RMSC with interactive displays.

Students in 2nd and 3rd Grade will be looking up to the sky to wonder and learn about the earth’s origins. The art of observation will bridge scientific and imaginative art activities involving the sun and solar system. Experiments involving the sun’s luminosity, the color spectrum and optics will lead to applications of color in art. Students will learn how the scientific process can

parallel their artistic creative process. Our students will learn how the moon has been the subject of myth, theory, and fact. We’ll learn to interpret visual phenomena from different perspectives. The natural design systems of the solar system will inspire our work in art. In preparation for a planetarium sky show, students will create images to document their expedition.

4th and 5th graders will be exploring the origins of the earth and landforms. The 4th grade will investigate the formation of the Genesee River in its expedition “The Path of Least Resistance.” In art, we’ll experiment with the effects of weathering, time, and heat on materials traditionally used by artists. To prepare for a companion book to “Discovering the Genesee,” students will create drawings, paintings, and photographs. In 5th Grade, students will create interpretive signs to teach others in Rochester about the geological highlights of the river.

All of our students will have basic art activities in common. Because recording information on field studies is such an integral part of expedition work, we’ll learn ways to write and sketch from observation. The Notebooks of Da’Vinci have been an ongoing inspiration for many of our students. Journals filled with “wonderings”, drawings, facts, and ideas are powerful documents, which lead to quality work. Field studies to area art galleries and museums will inspire and reinforce the role of the artist in the study of our earth’s origins.

Physical Expedition – Body Movin’

In this expedition, students will explore the elements of movement in the natural environment and make connections with the elements of movement in the human body. The elements of movement are time, weight, space, and flow. Many of these elements are present in the various concepts and topics that each class will address.



Along with exploring the quality of movement in nature and the human body, students will examine the structures of the human body. This study will help children grasp how the body operates and moves. Students will do, know, and understand these concepts through games, movement activities, and creative dance. Students will keep body journals to collect data and reflect on personal physical progress and observations.

Music – The Sounds of Science

Music time for the next three months may more closely resemble a scientist's laboratory than a music classroom. Students will explore the nature of sound and acoustics. Every classroom, regardless of the path they will take towards understanding, will investigate the concepts of waves, frequency, echo, resonance, and vibration.

The RMSC will be an integral part of this sound expedition. Timing is everything, some say, and as good fortune would have it, the museum currently has an exhibit in Explora-Zone called, "Good Vibrations." The exhibit contains wonderful experiments that will aid children in their understanding of the concepts. Just when we thought it could not get any better, another exhibit entitled "Hear Here" will visit RMSC in October. Calvin Uzelmeier, the museum's physics expert, is looking forward to leading sound experiments with our students. Calvin has some wild things in store for the kids to experience! Your children will come home eager to tell you how telephones, speakers, and microphones work.

Kindergarten and 1st Grade's musical expedition "Do You Hear What I Hear?" will focus on beat and patterns of sound. "Sound Travels" is the title of 2nd and 3rd Grades' expedition, and will toss around the notion of how astronauts can talk with people on earth from outer space. "Letgo My Echo" will take the 4th and 5th Graders down the road of measuring the longest echo. These children will be asked, "What properties of matter provide the best condition for which sound to live?" It will be great if the students are confused at first by this question, and respond, "What do property, matter, and condition mean?" These investigations all require the students to contemplate how sound is generated and what needs to exist for sound to travel.

It is going to be a thrilling couple of months in music class. You welcome to join us for some of these wacky and educational "sound" experiments!



You won't want to miss the day the kids learn how to make speakers out of a magnet, paper cup, and copper wire!



Defining Our Terms

GCCS sure has a lot of lingo! For new families (and old), here are some of our commonly used terms:

Expeditionary Learning (also called EL, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, and ELOB): A proven model for teaching and learning that emphasizes learning by doing, character growth, teamwork, and challenge. GCCS pays a fee to this national organization for its services, which take the form of professional development, national networking, and other assistance.

School Designer: Our gift from Expeditionary Learning! Steven Levy, a master teacher, works with GCCS more than 20 days per year to help us implement Expeditionary Learning.

Expedition: A long-term (12 weeks) in-depth investigation on a theme or topic that engages students through authentic research, projects, field studies, and service. GCCS conducts three expeditions per year.

Field Study: An excursion to a museum, park, historic home, or other site for purposes of observation and research.

Exhibition: The culminating demonstration of student projects at the end of each expedition.

Design Principles: Ten values that guide our student and teacher work.

Crew: The Expeditionary Learning term for "group." We are crew, not passengers. Each student is expected to contribute to the group's efforts rather than letting others do the work for him/her.

Time Periods: Segments of history around which our curriculum is organized, for example "Village To City" and "City Grows."

Notices & Wonders: Our way of helping children learn to give each other compliments and constructive criticism.

Professional Development: Time for teachers to learn new strategies, review student progress, and critique each other's plans.

Progress Report: Our term for "report card." We use a narrative format and don't assign letter grades.

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures Reviewed



- In order to ensure children's continual supervision and safety, we ask that you please:
- be sure that your child arrives at school promptly at 8:00 a.m. and is picked up promptly at 3:00 p.m. (1:00 p.m. on Wednesdays)
 - park in one of the RMSC lots and **not** on the driveway in front of the school building
 - leave your child at the Eisenhart patio or at the classroom door if you escort your child to school
 - pick up your child from the Eisenhart patio if you escort your child home
 - notify your child's teachers **in writing** if there is a change in drop-off or pick-up arrangements (we cannot alter pick-up arrangements without written notification)
 - meet your child on the Eisenhart patio if you attend Community Circle on Wednesdays. Parents will exit Community Circle through the side exit of the Eisenhart Auditorium. For your child's safety, and our teachers' sanity, we sincerely request that you allow your child to be dismissed with his or her class.



Problems with the bus?

If you have a question or concern about your child's bus transportation, please call the transportation office at 336-4000. The transportation folks will be able to help you with scheduling, routes, pick-up and drop off locations, and other issues.

RCSD Transportation Office
336-4000

Dollars For Doers granted by Kodak

Thanks to Kodak employee and 1st/3rd Grade parent Stuart Dodd, GCCS has been awarded a \$500 grant from Eastman Kodak Co. The grant is intended to support parent involvement in the school. It will be used to purchase a dishwasher to facilitate parent volunteer assistance at lunchtime. Please contact your child's teachers or your classroom parent volunteer coordinator to set up a time to help with lunch and see the dishwasher put to work!

Outward Bound courses challenge GCCS staff

A few parents have remarked about the large number of staff attending Outward Bound courses this past summer, including whitewater rafting, longboat sailing, sea kayaking. The school sending staff members on vacation?! Outrageous!

Outward Bound trips are anything but a vacation, and they illuminate some critical aspects of ELOB's philosophy and design principles that can only be understood through first-hand experience. Outward Bound gives educators the experience of having to do something they've never done before, don't know how to do, and are afraid of. Participants are taken out of their comfort zones and have to work cooperatively with different types of people with one group goal in mind. What better way to understand what we put children through every day? Accomplishing the demands of Outward Bound courses helps educators understand how to carefully craft and facilitate experiences that require children to work in crews, tackle significant challenges, and contribute to a culture of high expectations.

We consider this type of professional development to be essential for GCCS to implement Expeditionary Learning. We are certain that these staff experiences translate into a higher quality education for your children.

