



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

October 2003

Volume 3 No. 2

Trusting Teachers

When you send your child to school each day, you put your faith in the adults in that school to protect the best interests of your child. This is a great honor for the school – to be entrusted with the social, academic, physical, and emotional well-being of each one of our students. It is a grave responsibility, and is one we take very seriously. This responsibility has led each of us to enter the field of education and has motivated us to excel in our undergraduate and graduate studies. It drives us to continue our professional learning, and guides every one of our professional decisions.

At times, the best interests of one child must be balanced with the best interests of another child, or with the needs of the class as a whole. These are simply the ongoing demands of teaching, and are the kinds of judgments teachers in every school make hundreds of times a day. Teachers bring to bear their knowledge of individual children, child development, school philosophy, and classroom expectations when they resolve the small and large issues that crop up throughout the day.

Teachers also have a wider perspective on classroom dynamics and events. Children may view incidents with magnified focus, screening out contextual information and making (developmentally appropriate!) egocentric interpretations. Children's reports of classroom happenings may be colored by assumptions, misunderstandings, and lack of background information. While children's perceptions provide us with valuable information, teachers have the ability to thoughtfully weigh all the circumstances and nuances of events and to act based on a fuller understanding of the situation.



(continued on p. 4)

Family Association Fund-Raising Committee Update



By now you've probably been hit up one way or another by the GCCS Family Association's fundraising committee. Its job is to make sure there is money for Family Association events and to continue to grow the school's playground account.

Here are some ways you can help without spending any actual money:

- Save your Box Tops for Education. Log onto boxtopsforeducation.com to see the various products that include this label. If you shop by internet, you can also contribute by stopping first at that website and then going to one of the 170 online stores, such as Barnes & Noble

(continued on p. 7)



Join Us For an Evening of Fun and Community!

Family Pot-Luck Supper
and

Community Circle
(led by Ms. Haymond!)

Wednesday, December 17

6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Eisenhart Auditorium

Watch for details
in backpack mail



Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

Sara Bruzda (473-9736) Teresa Snell (527-0070),
Maureen McDonald (527-0824)

Officers

Co-Chairs: Tracy Smith (544-0577), Anne Spaulding
(461-5356)

Secretary: Alice Carli (527-9632)

Treasurer: Julie Schnepf (256-0722)

Family Association Committee Chairs

Family Social Activities

John Quitter (787-0332), Annette Ramos (244-1378)

Babysitting & Transportation

Betsy Serapilio-Frank (654-5958)

Staff Appreciation Luncheon

Marcy Berger (271-3549)

Fund-Raising

Mary Lavin & Tom Slothower (442-1277), Diana &
Jim Carter (473-1187)

Communications

Holly Merrill (224-8491)

Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)

Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

Laura Brewer (241-3034), Blanche Fox (288-9313),
Jennifer SanFilippo (442-5420), Nancy Weinstein
(865-7714), Eileen Wrona (288-3273)

First Grade

Gina Dodd (426-3356), Annette Ramos (244-1378),
Marisa Stike (254-0403), Yvonne Villareale (473-
9318)

Second Grade

Joanne DeMarle (328-5982), Jeanne Eckl (377-
8957), Bill Howard (436-2573), Kamaria Rivera
(254-6598), Betsy Serapilio-Frank & John Frank
(654-5958)

Third Grade

Faye Henri (244-1831), Sue Lederer (473-3929),
Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373), Susan Proe (224-
0536), Anne Spaulding (461-5356)

Fourth Grade

Alicia Ainsworth (262-5482), Robyn Dean (461-
1438), Cheryl Marshall (671-2961),
Debbie Ortenzi (533-2428), Maggie Torres
(454-2659), Teddi Urriola (671-2961)

Fifth Grade

Paul Jonasse (461-1137), Mary Lavin (442-1277), Kit
Miller (244-4189), Karen Schneider (288-4726)

Disasters happen!

It's regrettable, but inevitable – some-
times milk or paint spills, bathrooms are a few
too many steps away, and mud puddles beckon.
We like to be prepared so that the unfortunate
victim can continue on with his or her day.

**Please send in a change of clothing for your
child**, including pants, shirt, socks, and
underwear. Label all items and enclose them in
a labeled zip-lock bag. We'll return the clothing
at the end of the year. Thank you!

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- Oct. 21: New Parent Orientation
5-6 p.m. in the Ballroom
Curriculum Night
6-7 p.m. Grades K-2
7-8 p.m. Grades 3-5
- Oct. 25: Saturday Work Day for Parents
- Nov. 10: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Nov. 11: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Nov. 17: Exhibition Night
Grades K, 1, 5, Times TBA
- Nov. 18: Exhibition Night
Grade 4, Time TBA
- Nov. 19: Exhibition Night
Grades 2, 3, Time TBA
- Nov. 24-25: Professional Development Days
No School for Students
- Nov. 26-28: Thanksgiving Recess
School is Closed
- Dec. 8: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Dec. 11: Parent-Teacher Conferences
11:30 Dismissal for Students
Parent Information Session
7-9 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Dec. 17: Family Association Pot Luck Social
- Dec. 22-
Jan 1: Winter Recess
School is Closed

Healing the Homework Headaches



Homework – you love it or hate it, you want more of it or you wish it would just go away, you think it enhances your child’s learning or you think it gets in the way. Let’s agree on one thing – there is no way we can please every student and parent with our approach to homework.

GCCS staff took on the controversial issue of homework this month, debated all sides, and formulated a common position based on what we value. We feel strongly that learning extends beyond the classroom doors, and we believe that family participation in children’s education is essential. We believe that making connections between home and school is important, and we strive for the activities we provide to be meaningful and connected.

At GCCS, homework is intended to reinforce what is learned at school. We provide a variety of assignments that complement in-class work throughout the week, including rote computation or handwriting practice, expedition research, math games, and journal-writing. Teachers make decisions about the content and duration of homework that are developmentally appropriate for children’s ages and grade levels.

Some homework assignments may take longer than others, and you might find that occasional homework assignments are too easy or difficult for your child. We intend that homework serve as another avenue for communication

between home and school. If it’s too difficult or lengthy, just jot a note on the assignment and send it in to school the next day. No assignment should turn a pleasant evening at home into torture!

We all agree that reading to children or independent reading is a most beneficial home learning activity. Independent reading may be assigned as homework along with, or in lieu of, other assignments.

We also believe that pretend play, physical play, sports, family games (e.g. Sorry, Uno, Monopoly) and after-school lessons are important parts of a child’s education. So are age-appropriate chores and family tasks like cooking and cleaning. Children learn many math and reading skills, develop social relationships, and maintain physical fitness by engaging in non-academic activities.

If you’d like more homework for your children, you may easily extend their assignments. Add on silent reading, flashcard practice, or journal-writing. These activities can be supervised by parents without difficulty and can be tailored to meet individual children’s needs. Feel free to make these or other activities part of your child’s homework routine. Don’t forget that your child has a longer school day and school year than in the typical school, so he or she is already putting in extra learning time.

If you have questions about your child’s homework program, please contact his or her teachers. They will be happy to discuss their goals and expectations with you.

Winter Weather Is Coming!

And the need for boots and warm outerwear will soon be upon us! Please be sure your child is equipped with boots, hats, mittens, and snowpants every day. We request that a hat and a spare pair of boots, mittens and snowpants be left at school for the winter season. Children need to be well-prepared for outdoor recess and field studies every day.

Please send into school labeled with your child’s name:

- ✓ **Boots**
- ✓ **Hat**
- ✓ **Mittens**
- ✓ **Snowpants**



Trusting Teachers (continued from p. 1)

At GCCS, teachers place great importance on creating a positive and nurturing classroom community. We invest heavily in helping children learn to treat one another with social justice and develop skills in advocating for themselves. While some problems may be solved quickly with teacher intervention, the quick fix does not always result in the best outcome. It is often more appropriate – and better for the children – to help them think through issues and arrive at solutions. Rather than simply controlling children, we teach them to control themselves. It is a long but worthwhile process.

Parents are a vital part of our teaching teams, and we value their involvement. We encourage parents to listen to children's reflections about their school day. When doing so, it is important for parents to remember that they receive only a sliver of the context in which events have

happened. Parents can validate their children's feelings, but also help children understand that many incidents happen within a much broader context. Parents can also help children value the experience and knowledge that teachers bring to their positions. Children will benefit from knowing that teachers and parents trust one another and respect each other's roles and decisions.

Emphasize the positive with your children, and let them know that you appreciate all the wonderful things they do and learn at school. If your child has a bad day, feel free to communicate directly via note, phone call, or e-mail with the teachers for a fuller explanation. Demonstrating trust in teachers will strengthen the parent-teacher relationship and will help children feel secure in knowing that their best interests are also ours.

Pitch In During Saturday Work Days!

Family involvement is an important part of helping children to do well in school. One way to communicate to children that you care about their education is to perform service for the school. This year, we will continue to offer a weekend opportunity for families to fulfill their 20-hour service commitment. Staff members will identify tasks they would love to have you perform – for example, cleaning, organizing, and costume-making. Come to school between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on the designated Saturdays, and we'll put you to work! Pizza will be served at noon. This is a great way to meet other parents and help us maintain our beautiful learning environment. A sign-up sheet has been sent home in backpack mail for our first weekend work day this Saturday. Thanks in advance for your help!

Saturday Work Days for Parents 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

- October 25
- December 7
- January 25
- March 8
- May 10



Parent Information Sessions Scheduled for New Families

Three sessions will give prospective families an overview of the philosophy and educational program at GCCS – December 11 from 7-9 p.m., January 24 from 1-3 p.m., and February 10 from 7-9 p.m. Spread the word if you know families who might be interested in enrolling their kindergarten-5th grade children in GCCS. Applications and written information will be available at these sessions.



Applications for enrollment are due in the main GCCS office by the conclusion of the February 10 parent information session. The lottery for admission will be held Wednesday, February 11 at 9:00 a.m. in the Computer Lab.

Sibling applications will be sent to our current families through the mail in early January, and will be due on February 6.

What's on your child's bookshelf?



We have over 100 books from our River Room that are missing in action! Might they be tucked on one of your shelves? We're hoping that some of our young researchers inadvertently left some of our books at home, and that you can help us locate them. Please look through your child's book collection to see if you find any stamped "River Room." Our books are both hard and soft covered.

We really need to recover our missing resources so that we have them to use in our future expeditions. If you find any, please return them to school. Thank you for your help.

Fourth Graders Head Off to Gold

Next week our 4th Grade class will trek to Gold, Pennsylvania in search of the source of the Genesee River. Students will conduct research on the geology of the Genesee River. The crew will follow the river northward - sketching, taking notes, conducting experiments, and interviewing experts along the way.

The class will spend two nights in cabins at Letchworth State Park, and will spend one day visiting the Mount Morris Dam and hiking through the gorge. The three-day excursion will produce a wealth of information for students to use in the writing of their book.

In addition to their academic preparations, students have worked hard to develop their physical fitness. Our P.E. teacher has pushed students to improve their endurance so they'll be ready for the long hikes. Each child has kept a physical fitness log and has noted improvement in stamina, strength, and flexibility.

We look forward to seeing the results of all the students' efforts at their Exhibition in November.



Playground Update

Looks like our playground installation will have to take place this spring. We're still working with the City of Rochester's Planning and Preservation Boards to receive the necessary variance and approvals. The process is going well, but takes time. We appreciate your continued support and your patience. It will be worth the wait when we greet the warm breezes of spring on our new playground.



Note Exhibition Date Changes!

We're well into our Prehistory expeditions at this point, and the preparations for exhibitions have begun. Kindergarten is planning a performance featuring prehistoric sea creatures. First Grade is designing activities to teach kindergarteners about prehistoric warm seas, dinosaurs, and mastodons. Second and Third Grades are preparing a star show to be shown in the Strasenburgh Planetarium. Fourth Grade is deeply into the research for the Genesee geology book they plan to publish. Fifth Grade is creating their local geology field guide and an informational kiosk for High Falls.

Our Exhibition Nights will demonstrate for you how much students have learned and how well they have worked collaboratively with their crew. Because Exhibition Nights are central to our assessment of student performance, all students are required to attend. Prehistory Exhibition dates are:

Monday, November 17:
Kindergarten, 1st Grade, 5th Grade

Tuesday, November 18:
4th Grade

Wednesday, November 19:
2nd and 3rd Grades



Company's coming... and we're getting ready!

We've begun planning for our demonstration site seminar; we'll host up to 50 educators from around the country and share what we've learned about nurturing quality teacher and student work in an Expeditionary Learning school. Our guests will be here for two days at the end of January.



In preparation, we have designed the agenda to include classroom observations, teacher-led workshops, group discussions, and demonstrations of our expedition planning. We'll also create a gallery of student work for visitors to peruse.

We have 34 new student tour guides gearing up for the event. This year, our seasoned 4th and 5th Grade guides took responsibility for training our newer guides. Ten tour guide trainers planned the training sessions and led their trainees in learning the basics – firm handshakes, eye contact, organized notes, and clear speaking. Our 2nd-5th Grade guides will serve as ambassadors to our guests during the site seminar. They will also guide visitors at many other points during the year.

Parents will play an important role in the site seminar – the Family Association will host a reception for our guests and will converse with guests about the school from the parents' perspective. If you would like more information, contact Teresa Snell at 527-0070.

2nd and 3rd grades launch "Lunar Lunches"

Scientists have a responsibility to share their knowledge and discoveries with others. In that spirit, the 2nd and 3rd Grades have instituted regular "Lunar Lunch" periods. Children switch classes during lunchtime and eat with new friends from other grade levels. They converse about what they have learned during their expeditions. 2nd and 3rd Graders had lively conversations about the sun and moon, and 1st graders impressed 2nd graders with their knowledge of fossils and prehistoric life. This



cross-age collaboration is one way we cultivate community at GCCS. Join us! Your child's teachers can provide you with the upcoming Lunar Lunch dates.

New Parent Orientation and Curriculum Night

Unsure of GCCS policies? Wondering what some of our traditions and events are? Curious about our curriculum and assessment? Parents new to GCCS this year are invited to attend an orientation so they may become familiar with some of the finer points of life at our school. The session will be held Tuesday, October 21 from 5-6 p.m.

Curriculum Night will follow the New Parent Orientation. Each classroom will host a one-hour session designed to inform parents about daily routines and instructional practices at that grade level. K, 1, and 2 will meet from 6-7 p.m. and 3, 4, and 5 will meet from 7-8 p.m. on October 21. Babysitting will be provided by the Family Association.

School policy regarding medications

Following the County Health Department's lead, GCCS has strict guidelines about the administration of medications at school. All prescribed and over-the-counter medications require a doctor's orders. The policy extends to salves, throat lozenges, eye drops, and pain relievers. Parents must supply written doctor's orders for children to receive or self-administer any of these items at school. Our school fax number is 271-5904. Please have your doctor's office supply us with proper documentation before you send medications of any kind to school.

Fundraising Committee (continued from p. 1)

and L.L.Bean. A percentage of your sale will go to our school. Boxtops earn us money.

- Save your Campbells Soup labels. Log onto labelsforeducation.com to see the list of products (Pepperidge Farm goldfish, for example) that participate. Labels earn us classroom equipment and supplies.
- Save your Tops Friendly Markets receipt. Every \$20,000 in purchases (that could be a three or four families' annual grocery bills) gets us \$40 in cash.

You can drop any of these off at school with Maureen Milke, or send them in a marked envelope by way of backpack mail.

Stay tuned for news about logo merchandise you can order, and the results of our Rock Ventures climbing party!

Questions or ideas? Contact Diana and Jim Carter at 473-1187, or Mary Lavin and Tom Slothower at 442-1277.

Parents Engage in Mini-Expedition



Our October Family Association meeting was a lively learning experience for parents. Rather than the traditional business meeting, parents embarked on a mini learning expedition – complete with fieldwork!

During the September meeting, parents expressed a desire to become more familiar with our Expeditionary Learning design principles. In response, co-chairs Tracy Smith and Anne Spaulding arranged an evening of teamwork and fun for the October meeting. Parents formed crews and set out on a field study into GCCS classrooms and hallways to look for evidence of the design principles in class rules, student work, daily routines, and displays. Parents shared their findings with the whole group and were interested to see that the school abounds with good examples.

This year's Family Association meetings will combine informational presentations and committee work with active learning initiatives for parents and social events for families. Join us! Family Association meetings are a great way to get to know other GCCS families and participate in the life of the school. Babysitting is provided by the Family Association.

The November meeting date is yet to be determined. Our legislative issues committee, led by Anne Lichtenstein, is trying coordinate a date with Bill Phillips, chair of the New York Charter Schools Association. Watch backpack mail for details.

Rock Ventures Helps Family Association Climb Toward Fundraising Goal

We had a rockin' good time at Rock Ventures with over 125 attendees at our climbing fundraiser. Parents and children scaled the walls, socialized, and enjoyed pizza and snacks. It is clear that we have many expert climbers in our midst!



Many thanks to our Fundraising Chairs Diana and Jim Carter, Mary Lavin, and Tom Slothower and all the parents who volunteered to take tickets, sell snacks, and hold ropes. Proceeds from the event will benefit the GCCS playground.

Join Us For an Evening of Fun and Community!

Family Pot-Luck Supper and Community Circle

(led by Ms. Haymond!)

Wednesday, December 17

6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Eisenhart Auditorium



Watch for details
in backpack mail



Remember



Curriculum Night

Tuesday, October 21

6:00 – 7:00 p.m. K, 1, 2

7:00 – 8:00 p.m. 3, 4, 5

Babysitting provided by the Family Association