



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

December 2003

Volume 3 No. 3

Celebrating Our Multicultural School

A lively debate took place last month between the Family Association Social Committee and the School Leader. Should the December family pot-luck social be called “multicultural,” as in “multicultural pot-luck social”? The committee and School Leader agreed to title the event “Winter Harvest Pot-Luck Social” with the tagline “Let’s come together to celebrate our multicultural school community!” Why the debate?

On the one hand, it is important to acknowledge the diverse cultures of our school population and to make all families feel welcome and included. “Diversity and Inclusion” is one of our design principles, and we should highlight and act upon it. On the other hand, *every* event hosted by the Genesee Community Charter School is a multicultural one. Our family events, expeditions, community circles, and professional development activities are all intended to be inclusive of a range of cultural traditions and perspectives. Labeling one event “multicultural” may imply that the others are not. It also may imply that making an event multicultural is something we do on occasion, with special effort, rather than a natural part of our existence. Language is a powerful tool, and the words we choose influence how others make meaning of our message. Subtleties matter, and we try to purposely select words and phrases that capture and convey the meaning we intend.

Noticeably absent from GCCS are holiday decorations, activities, and celebrations. The school has chosen not to celebrate religious and other culture-specific holidays. We prefer to use our valuable instructional time to focus on expeditions and other academic work. We let the curriculum drive our daily activities, rather than the calendar. However, holiday traditions do enter into classroom discussions during lunchtime and morning



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A Hearty Welcome and a Fond Farewell



Our staff, students, and families were saddened to learn that our two 3rd Grade teachers were resigning from their positions for family reasons. We wish Linda Lopata and Michele Brewer the best in their new endeavors, and thank them for their efforts on behalf of our students.

The staff of GCCS is concerned about the need for continuity and high-quality teaching for the 3rd Grade class. For this reason, Jean Hurst, one of our 1st Grade teachers, agreed to move to the 3rd Grade for the remainder of the year.

We welcome two new teachers to the GCCS staff. Peter Hilling will join the 3rd Grade team. Peter has a Master’s Degree in Education from Nazareth College. He has been long-term substitute teaching at School No. 58, which also uses the Expeditionary Learning model. Prior to entering the field of education, Peter worked with people with developmental disabilities at The Advocacy Center and as a youth counselor at Jefferson Middle School Family Wellness Center.

Becki Bishop will take Jean’s place for the remainder of the year in 1st Grade. Becki has a Master’s Degree in Education from Nazareth College and completed her student teaching in stellar fashion at the Genesee Community Charter School this fall. Becki worked in the communications field prior to entering teaching.

While it is difficult to make staffing changes in the middle of the year, we are striving to provide a smooth transition for all. We are confident that our new teaching teams will continue the quality educational program that our students deserve.

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)

Classroom 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)

**Time to Send in That Winter Outerwear!
Please Send in
hats, mittens, snowpants and boots to leave
at school for
Outdoor Recess!**



Upcoming Dates To Remember

- Dec. 17: Family Association
Winter Harvest Pot Luck Social
6:30-8 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Dec. 22-
Jan. 1: Winter Recess/School is Closed
Jan. 2: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Jan. 5: School Re-opens for Students
Jan. 12: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30-7:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Jan. 19: Martin Luther King Day
School is Closed
- Jan. 21: Family Association Meeting
6:30 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Jan. 23: Sibling Applications Due
Jan. 24: Saturday Parent Work Day
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Parent Information Session
1-3 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Jan. 29: ELOB Site Seminar Visitors Here
Jan. 30: ELOB Site Seminar
No School for Students
- Jan. 31: ELOB Site Seminar Special Session
Feb. 9: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30-7:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Feb. 10: Parent Information Session
7-9 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
Enrollment Applications Due
- Feb. 11: Enrollment Lottery
9-11 a.m. Computer Lab
- Feb. 16: Presidents Day
School is Closed
- Feb. 17: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Feb. 18-20: School is Open for Students
Feb. 18: Family Association Meeting
6:30 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium

Our Multicultural School

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meetings. Children enjoy, and benefit from, their classmates sharing their families' customs during social times of our day. Many families have chosen GCCS for their children based in part on our holiday policy.

Many families have also chosen GCCS because they want their children to be part of a diverse school. They don't want multiculturalism to be something celebrated at a festival or on a holiday, and ignored the remainder of the year.

The staff of GCCS is very sensitive to the diversity represented by our student population. We address cultures and contributions as we study local history. We plan a curriculum in which the music we sing, dances we learn, art we create, books we read, individuals we study, and historical events we investigate include many cultures. We intend to build one unified school culture with components that reflect our many different family cultures. If

you see opportunities for improvement, or know of resources that may be useful to us, please let us know.

The school and Family Association have made many efforts to be inclusive of all our families. One of our ongoing goals is to increasingly diversify the attendance at Family Association meetings and other school events. It is the hope of the school, the Board of Trustees, and the Family Association leaders that every family in our school will feel valued as members of the GCCS community. If you haven't attended a Family Association meeting or event yet, mark your calendar and drop in! It's awkward to be the newcomer to a previously established group, but please know that you are needed and welcome.

As always, we care about your perspective and want to carefully consider different points of view. Please feel free to contact your classroom teachers or the School Leader to express your ideas about the important issues of diversity and multiculturalism.

A gentle reminder about our school hours

We look forward to seeing your child each and every morning – promptly at 8:00 a.m. We have no before-school child care, so we admit children to school when our teachers come out to greet the buses at 8:00 a.m. We want to ensure the safety and continual supervision of children, and to provide our staff sufficient time to prepare for the day ahead, so please refrain from bringing children into school prior to our arrival time of 8:00 a.m.

We also need your child in school on time. The first hour of school is an important one. Children build social relationships, meet individually with teachers, work on projects and activities of special interest, and attend to building a strong classroom community. Morning choice and morning meeting set the tone for the day and establish a positive working relationship among children.



Dismissal takes place at 3:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and 1:00 p.m. Wednesday. We know of a couple of options for after-school care that coordinates with our schedule and calendar. Please call Maureen at 271-4552 ext. 460 for contact information.

We appreciate your efforts to get your children to school promptly at our arrival time and to arrange their pick-up promptly at our dismissal time.

GCCS School Hours

Arrival:	8:00 a.m.
Dismissal:	3:00 p.m. M, T, Th, F 1:00 p.m. Wednesday

Help Wanted for Site Seminar Cleaning Brigade Jan. 24

Our guests from around the country will be arriving January 29 to see our Expeditionary Learning School in action. We want to put our best foot forward, so Anne Lichtenstein, Chair of the Parent Volunteer Coordinators, has scheduled a Saturday Parent Work Day for January 24, 2004 from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Please come out and help shine up our lovely school. We'll need cleaning, painting, light carpentry, sorting, organizing, and maybe a little laundry done. A crew of 10 parents per classroom would be great. Pizza will be served and babysitting will be provided. A flier will be sent home via backpack mail in January.



Help Wanted

Parent Volunteers to
Clean, Paint, and Tidy Up School
No Experience Necessary
Please Come on
Saturday, January 24, 2004
9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.
Babysitting Provided
Watch Backpack Mail for Sign-Up Info

You're Invited to the Site Seminar Reception

Many thanks to Julie Schnepf and John Bernunzio for opening their home to our staff and site seminar guests. Parents will host a reception for our visitors on Thursday, January 29 from 5:30-7 p.m. We're eager to have our colleagues from around the country hear about our school from the parents' perspective as they mingle at the reception. Would you like to attend this adults-only event? Please watch backpack mail in January for an invitation. Due to space limitations, the first five responses from each grade level will be accepted. If you have questions, please contact Jean Hurst at school or Teresa Snell at 527-0070.

Sibling Applications Due January 23

January's going to be a busy month at GCCS! Sibling applications will be sent to our current families through the mail in early January, and will be due on January 23, 2004 (please note date change). If you have a child entering kindergarten or another grade level, please submit the sibling application in order to ensure him or her a space. Late applications will be entered in our regular lottery, which will be held February 11.



Early People/Woodland Peoples Expedition Begins

With the help of the RMSC, Ganondagan, 1st Grade parents Carmelo and Annette Ramos, and other area archeologists and experts, GCCS students have embarked on their study of early people and native people who made the Genesee Valley their home. Our approach may differ from the typical elementary school study. We are careful to dispel stereotypes and to teach content in consultation with the Native American community. Our aim is to promote a deeper understanding of our community's history as well as cultural respect, sensitivity, and understanding.



Fifth Grade – Humans, Time, & Dead Bodies

How are we connected to early people? How do we know about early people? How did human achievements help early people overcome obstacles? To answer our guiding questions, we will examine various sources of scientific evidence and theories, as well as personal beliefs, about the history and movement of early humans. Respect of individual beliefs and ideas will be stressed throughout.

We will focus our expedition through the lens of several human archaeological finds. We'll begin with the 5,300 year old Iceman found in Europe and use this example to look at the many ways archaeologists uncover and interpret information. We'll also look at how early humans met their basic human needs and what kinds of achievements (making tools, controlling fire) helped them to learn and grow.

Fourth Grade – Can You Dig It?



We began the year studying the formation of the earth and prehistoric life. We concentrated on geology but also touched on fossils and fossil formation. We are moving forward in

time from Prehistory to the earliest people in this part of the world, Early People/Woodland People. The 4th graders will investigate the origins of the earliest people in North America. We will be studying Kennewick Man, the Clovis theories and comparing them to try to draw some of our own conclusions about "Who Came First?" We will also focus on the job of an archaeologist and the process of an excavation.

The "Big Ideas" we want the kids to come away with during this expedition include: Every community has a distinct culture. Scientists like anthropologists and archaeologists interpret artifacts and collect data to reconstruct cultures that no longer exist. Scientists use multiple sources to test theories.

Culture develops from a common people's perceived needs. The study of a culture includes understanding the shelter, tools, food, social organization and belief systems of a people. The development of a culture is affected by its environment.

Our culminating exhibition will include a dig simulation. The students will take their families through the process of a dig and share what they have learned through an interactive role-play.

Second Grade – Exhibiting Culture

Artifacts are carefully selected, studied, and placed in a museum. But whose story is being told and who's the storyteller? During this expedition, students will learn about the many elements of culture by first looking at our classroom environment. We will determine what matters most to us: our stories, our traditions, our symbols and artifacts, and our place in the larger community of GCCS. We will select classroom artifacts to send to other schools to see how they view us based on these objects.

We will then learn how museums interpret artifacts in order to tell the story of how Native Americans lived 500 years ago. This will help us understand how anthropologists and historians have interpreted the Native cultures of North America. Students will select a Native American artifact from the RMSC collection and study it to learn more about the people who created it. We will contact contemporary representatives from the Native American nations we study to learn how they view the artifact today.

Our final project will be to create two exhibits. Students will serve as curators of our own classroom culture, selecting the artifacts, writing the label copy, designing the display and creating other interpretive materials. The other exhibit will showcase their work based on the Native American artifact they selected, telling the story of the artifact from the perspective of the anthropologist and museum, from the Native culture, and from the visitor.

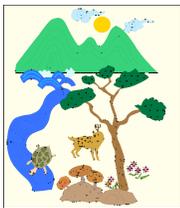


Third Grade – Survivors

The early people of North America thought of themselves as a part of nature. How did they co-exist with nature? How did they survive using only the materials they found and made? How were natural resources used and how did these resources influence where and how early North Americans lived?

Students will study various Indian nations across North America to find the answers to these questions. They will use the information they learn to plan and experience an overnight field study in which they only use nature to survive.

Students will write a survival guide contrasting their experience with the lives of Native Peoples. The guide will include



information about how Native People lived with each other in different ways in order to survive, and how their cultures were influenced by and connected to the natural world.

First Grade – The Seneca Story: Keepers of the Earth

The first graders will examine Seneca traditions and beliefs through oral stories and artifacts. They will develop questions about how Seneca people lived long ago and will answer their questions through discussions and storytelling circles with guest expert from Ganondagan, Ronnie Reitter. Students will travel to the museum and other field study sites, examine artifacts, and read related literature. Our final project will be to conduct a storytelling circle in the Planetarium during which crews will dramatize traditional Seneca stories.

Come see our budding dramatists at our March exhibition.

Kindergarten – Seneca Story Then and Now

Our expedition focuses on three guiding questions: What was life like for the Senecas of long ago? What is life like for the Seneca today? How do we know?

The guiding questions will be answered through in-depth investigations of three aspects of Seneca life – food and shelter, family roles, and beliefs. Students will be immersed in literature that tells the story of the Seneca then and now, and oral stories that have been passed through the generations of Seneca people. Students will also use the dioramas at the RMSC as a way to gather information. A modern Seneca woman, Ronnie Reitter, will be an important resource for the students. She will help students to understand Seneca life of long ago and how Seneca people of today maintain their culture in a changing world. The final project will include making an exhibit to be displayed in the RMSC which portrays how Seneca people live today.

The Arts – Celebrating the Circle

Celebrating the Circle is an arts-based expedition working in concert with individual classroom expeditions and our school culture as a whole. This time period provides us with a unique opportunity to study the relationship between our school community beliefs (i.e. design principles) and those of early peoples and native cultures. Through movement, music, and the visual arts, we'll create symbols which represent GCCS. We'll discover how to use our bodies to make circles in movement and dance, how circles take shape in music, and how to use various media to make circles in the visual arts.

