



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

June 2005

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A Series of Unremarkable Events

When company comes, don't you suddenly notice all your familiar clutter and previously invisible cobwebs? The fingerprints parade across your walls and windows, and the tiny rip in the couch cushion becomes a gaping hole. It's like that at school too. When visitors come to school, it gives us a chance to see our familiar surroundings – and activities – through new eyes.

Last Friday afternoon, an acquaintance unexpectedly stopped by to deliver a message. Because she hadn't seen the school yet, she was given a quick walk-through and an opportunity to glimpse each classroom in action. These brief walks through the school are revealing about what happens at GCCS on any given day. It's like flipping through channels to see what's on t.v. Here's a series of snapshots of what our guest saw on that Friday afternoon:

We started in 2nd Grade. The class had been back for about an hour from a fishing trip to Powder Mills Park. The field study was related to their study of Seth Green and the fish hatchery business. The class was circled up on the carpet. Each child was holding his/her journal. One child was reading his entry aloud into the classroom microphone while the other students paid rapt attention. "What words did he use to help you make mental images of catching a fish?" asked the teacher.

In 3rd Grade, one of the students had just rung the chime when we walked in. Thirty pairs of eyes were fixed on him to listen to his announcement. "I just wanted to tell you that we're having a problem with pencils, so we're not getting up to use the pencil sharpener any

Introducing Our Newest Colleagues

Welcome to our new faculty members! After conducting more than 50 interviews, we have selected two highly qualified people to fill our vacancies. Our selection process is quite rigorous; each finalist participates in several interviews, writes a sample expedition plan, conducts a demonstration lesson, and spends time observing at the school. We are delighted to have chosen these two teachers to join our staff.

Dan Walpole will join Stacey Cicero in teaching 4th Grade next year. It's a homecoming for Dan – he was a student teacher here this past winter. His teaching skills and warm, collegial demeanor made quite a positive impression on our staff and we invited him to apply for a position (a rare event; we generally hire experienced teachers). Dan has a Master's Degree in Inclusive Childhood Education from Nazareth College and a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Allegheny College.

Shannon Stoll will join Kate Daniels in teaching 6th Grade next year. Shannon has taught both elementary school and preschool. She has a Master's Degree in Inclusive Childhood Education from Nazareth College and a Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Elementary Education from Wells College.

Shannon and Dan will be well-prepared by attending a variety of professional development institutes this summer (see p. 4), and will be well-supported by our veteran teachers this fall.



Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

Sara Bruzda (473-9736) Jemeul Johnson (719-8610), Teresa Snell (527-0070)

Officers

Co-Chairs: Tracy Smith (544-0577), Anne Spaulding (256-1444)

Secretary: Alice Carli (527-9632)

Treasurer: Julie Schnepf (256-0722)

Family Association Committee Chairs

Family Social Activities

John Quitter (787-0332)

Babysitting & Transportation

Mary Haberberger ((473-0394), Mary Carol Taylor (458-9809)

Fund-Raising

Mary Lavin & Tom Slothower (442-1277)

Jim & Diana Carter (473-1187)

Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)



Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

Pamela Black-Colton (244-5097), Diana Carter (473-1187), John Morgan (461-4471), Susan Proe (224-0536), Marisa Stike (254-0403), Yvonne Villareale (473-9318)

First Grade

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

Second Grade

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

Third Grade

Joanne DeMarle (328-5982), Jeanne Eckl (377-8957), Betsy Serapilio-Frank & John Frank (654-5958), Bill Howard (264-0253)

Fourth Grade

Faye Henri (244-1831), Sue Lederer (473-3929), Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373), Susan Proe (224-0536), Anne Spaulding (256-1444)

Fifth Grade

Alicia Ainsworth (262-5482), Cheryl Marshall (671-2961), Debbie Ortenzi (533-2428), Jim Shook (461-1438), Teddi Urriola (671-2961)

Sixth Grade

Paul Jonasse (461-1137), Mary Lavin (442-1277), Karen Schneider (288-4726), Mary Terziani (328-3744)

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- June 21: Passage Reception for 6th Graders 6:00 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium (Tickets Required)
- June 22: Last Day of School
Passage Ceremony 11:00 a.m. (Tickets Required)
- June 23-24: Professional Development Days
Aug. 8-30: Professional Development Days
Aug. 25: Family Open House & Service Fair
- Aug. 31: First Day of School for 1st – 6th Graders; 1:00 p.m. Dismissal
- Sept. 1: 1:00 Dismissal
Sept. 2: 1:00 Dismissal
Aug. 31 – Kindergarten Screening/
Sept. 2: Orientation (by appointment)
Sept. 5: Labor Day, School is Closed
Sept. 6: Half day sessions for K
Sept. 7: First full day for K (1:00 Dismissal)
Sept. 8: 3:00 Dismissal (Whole School)

Family Association Seeks New Leaders

Our wonderful Family Association needs parents to step up to assume leadership roles for 2005-2006. Please consider serving as a Family Association officer, leading or co-leading a committee, coordinating classroom parent volunteers, or running for a seat on the GCCS Board of Trustees. The Family Association will select officers, committee chairs, and Board members in October. Interested parents can learn more about these important positions at the Service Fair, which will be held during the Family Open House on August 25.

A Series of Unremarkable Events

(continued from p. 1)

more today. Just keep using the pencil you have.” “What if your pencil breaks?” asked an inquiring classmate. “Then you put it in the ‘broken pencils’ bin and come here and get a fresh pencil. There are plenty of sharp pencils in this cup.” The student fielded a couple of other “what if” questions, but then received one that stumped him. “What if it’s a colored pencil?” another child asked, “My colored pencil is worn down to the nub.” The student announcer turned to the teacher. “I don’t know. What’s the protocol for that?”

In the kindergarten class, the children were seated at tables celebrating a classmate’s birthday with the most violently colored pink- and blue-frosted cupcakes you’ve ever seen (what must they put in the frosting to make it that color?) Each table group was chatting and laughing, and they were eager to show us their sticky fingers and colored tongues when we popped in the room.

First grade was dark and silent. The children were over at the museum recording their part of the school CD. The CD will contain student-composed instrumental music and songs that relate to classroom learning expeditions.

Fourth graders were all seated on the carpet looking at the easel, where the teacher was recording students’ ideas during a discussion about community activism. “Say more about how that person used her voice to change the way things were done,” prompted the teacher.

The 6th Graders were spread all around the room, working individually and in small groups. Some were working on their wireless laptops, others were gathered around a teacher for feedback on their writing. Several students were constructing posters depicting block diagrams of energy transfers in automobiles for their upcoming exhibition.

Half of 5th Grade was seated on the carpet. The teacher was explaining the circulatory system while students took notes in their expedition notebooks. The other half of the class was in the

computer lab. These students were working on their HyperStudio projects about the development and expansion of the Seneca Park Zoo. Several students waved us over to show us what they had done. They deftly navigated to different parts of their program, showing the text, images, and graphics they had incorporated. “Ms. Ericson, I need an image of Frederick Law Olmsted!” called out one young programmer.

None of these snapshots is particularly striking (except perhaps the frosting), but when combined, they show a pretty typical slice of the remarkable level of engagement in learning of GCCS students. In fact, that’s what the visitor commented on. She may have noticed the ragged edges of the bulletin board paper and the cluttered shelf tops in most classrooms. But it was the picture of a school full of children engrossed in their work on a hot June Friday afternoon that made an impression. Each lesson we observed was clearly connected to an ongoing endeavor that children found stimulating. There was meaning for adults and students in each conversation and activity that we saw. What was happening in those classrooms was not only preparing children with necessary skills, but was also building in children the disposition to be active learners.

The common language, consistent approach, and shared expectations at our school immerse children in an environment that values creativity, achievement, and quality. At any time, on any given day, a stroll through our hallways and classrooms will provide plenty of evidence that unremarkable events add up to create a truly remarkable school.



Upcoming Family Association Events! Mark Your Calendars!

- August 25: **Family Association Service Fair** (During Family Open House) – Learn about committees and other parent involvement opportunities at GCCS
- September 21 (tentative) – **Welcome Reception for New Parents**
- November 10 – **Odds Bodkin Storyteller**
- March 31 – **GCCS Fundraiser Concert Featuring John McCutcheon**

Lots more details to follow! Volunteers needed!

Summer Learning, Summer Fun

In keeping with our desire to be lifelong learners, many of our staff members are taking the opportunity to learn new teaching skills this summer. Melissa Fredericks will attend *Investigations* math training offered by the U of R. Peter Hilling and Jean Hurst, with a grant from Expeditionary Learning, will travel to Alaska to study salmon. Spero Michailidis, Dan Walpole, Kate Daniels, Shannon Stoll, and Sarah David will attend *Responsive Classroom* training in Laconia, New Hampshire. Mary Kay Bellwood and Spero Michailidis are traveling to Portland, Oregon for the ELOB Assessment Institute. Becki Mason will attend the ELOB Early Literacy Institute in Seattle, which Debbie McCoy is helping to facilitate. Shannon Stoll and Dan Walpole will go to Boston for the ELOB New Teachers Institute. These staff members will have plenty of time to share their new skills when the staff re-convenes for three weeks of professional development prior to the start of school. We'll be ready and waiting, equipped with new strategies and knowledge, when our students cross the threshold at the end of August.

A Word to the Wise About Backpacks



This is our annual appeal for families to consider during their back-to-school shopping: Please select regular, old fashioned, wheel-less backpacks for your children. We have found that wheeled backpacks pose several safety and storage problems, and we are trying to eliminate these backpacks from use at GCCS.

We would also appreciate if you would select a backpack that is more modest in size. Some backpacks resemble overnight luggage more than they do book bags! A smaller backpack is more than adequate for your child to carry necessary items to and from school.

Back-to-School Supply List

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

- ✓ 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 (teachers 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

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