



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

August 2006

Volume 6 No. 1

Welcome To Our New Families!

It was painfully sad to say good-bye to our almost-seventh-graders at the conclusion of 2005-2006. June's 6th Grade Passage Reception was both joyful and tearful, and was chock full of fond and funny memories, thoughtful reflections, touching sentiments, and heartfelt gratitude. What a beautiful way to conclude children's years here at GCCS.

It was also hard to say good-bye to the few families who are making the move out of town. While it is so difficult to bid farewell, the process opens up a whole world of possibilities as we welcome a brand new kindergarten class and a few new students at other grade levels.

The upcoming year is full of promise, and we are delighted to continue to build our school culture with an array of fresh faces. Those who have left us carry with them the memories of a fledgling school still working out initial kinks (what's the little bag of cubed cheese on the lunch carts for??). Most of our new students have no other public school experience and have no conception of how GCCS differs from other programs. Although they won't experience our growing pains or be able to contrast the old with the new, we hope they will come to appreciate the caring, stimulating and very special learning community we nurture.

We try hard not to assume that new parents already know about our school's practices, policies, and philosophy. Classroom newsletters, the Family Open House, *Currents*, the Family Handbook, and Curriculum Night will provide lots of useful information. Our website might also give insight into GCCS.

Previous issues of *Currents* are available to download, which will give you a sense of the issues we have faced and accomplishments we have celebrated along the way.

As with entering any established group, it may be intimidating for new parents to jump right into Family Association activities. The Family Association has many active members, but please don't assume they are an exclusive group! You'll find warm smiles and open arms at every Family Association gathering. The Outreach Committee will be contacting new families to offer a personal welcome and invitation to get involved.

As you make your way through the first few months, please feel free to ask questions or offer suggestions for making the transition to a new school easier for families. Above all, please know that you are welcome, and that we are all glad you have chosen to make GCCS such a big part of your child's life.

You are cordially invited

To a "Welcome Parents"
reception

Sponsored by the
Family Association



Tuesday, September 19
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Eisenhart Ballroom

Babysitting is provided by the Family
Association (suggested donation \$2.00/child)

Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

John Bernunzio (256-0722), Jemeul Johnson (719-8610),
Betsy Serapilio-Frank (654-5958)

Officers

Co-Chairs: Jim Carter (473-1187), Greg Cutt (339-9940),
Lorraine Schild (244-1161)

Secretary: Alice Carli (527-9632)

Treasurer: Julie Schnepf (256-0722)

Family Association Committee Chairs

Family Social Activities

John Quitter (787-0332)

Babysitting & Transportation

Mary Carol Taylor (458-9809)

Fund-Raising

Allison McGrath (482-0052)

Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)

Outreach

Lorraine Schild (244-1161), Betsy Serapilio-Frank (654-5958)

Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

First Grade

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

Second Grade

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

Third Grade

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

Fourth Grade

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

Fifth Grade

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

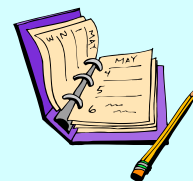
Sixth Grade

Volunteers Needed! Your Name Here!

Please contact your child's classroom teachers if you are interested in serving as a classroom parent volunteer coordinator.



Upcoming Dates To Remember



- Aug. 30: First Day of School Grades 1-6
1:00 Dismissal
- Aug. 31: 1:00 Dismissal
- Sept. 1: 1:00 Dismissal
- Sept. 4: Labor Day
School is Closed
- Sept. 5: Half Day for Kindergarten
- Sept. 6: First Full Day for Kindergarten
- Sept. 11: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Sept. 19: Welcome Reception for New
Parents 6:30-8 p.m.
- Sept. 27: Chaperone Orientation
- Sept. 28-29: School Pictures
- Oct. 6: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Oct. 9: Columbus Day
School is Closed
- Oct. 12: School Pictures Make-up Day
- Oct. 16: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Oct. 17: Family Association Meeting
6:30-8 p.m. Eisenhart Ballroom
- Oct. 24: ELOB Site Seminar
No School for Students
- Nov. 10: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Nov. 20-21: Professional Development Days
No School for Students
- Nov. 22-24: Thanksgiving Recess
School is Closed

Village to City Exhibition Dates



Wed., Nov. 15: K, 1st 2nd Grades

Tues., Nov. 28: 3rd, 5th Grades

Wed. Nov. 29: 4th, 6th Grades

GCCS Family Handbooks

Copies of the GCCS Family Handbook were sent home earlier this month. These handbooks explain our policies and procedures, which are designed to ensure the safety of our students and the smooth operation of the school. We greatly appreciate your compliance with these policies.

Please note new sections in our handbook. We have included our new Chaperone Policy, which was developed after considering parent input and consulting with other schools. We have also included a section on Communicating Concerns. These guidelines are intended to create open, positive lines of communication that build trusting relationships between home and school.

Worth reviewing are the sections on Dress Code, Holidays and Special Events, Toys, and Recess. Helping your child comply with these policies will reduce lost instructional time.

As always, please contact your child's teachers or the School Leader with questions or concerns related to school policies and practices.

Come to Community Circle!



Need a boost in the middle of each week? Nothing will warm your heart and lift your spirits as much as our weekly Community Circle. Community Circle takes place each **Wednesday from 12:20-12:50**, usually in the Eisenhart Auditorium. Parents and friends are welcome! Community Circle brings our entire school together in song, movement, and celebration.

Children enjoy sitting with their parents during Community Circle. However, to reduce disruptions, we'll keep students seated with their class once Community Circle begins.

Because the content of Community Circle depends upon what classes are studying at any given time, the agenda is carefully planned just a few days ahead. So, you will not receive a schedule of Community Circle topics in advance but we will notify parents if their children will be performing. Rest assured, regardless of the agenda, Community Circle is worth the effort to attend. Hope to see you there!

Oops!



Spills, muddy fieldwork, bloody noses and other accidents happen at all grade levels, and children sail right through them when they have a fresh change of clothing close at hand. Please send in a shirt, pants, socks, and underwear in a zip top bag labeled with your child's name as soon as possible.



You're Invited to Learn More About Our Instructional Program



At Our Annual Curriculum Night

Thursday, October 5

5:30-7:00 p.m. — Kindergarten, 1st, 4th, 6th Grades

7:15-8:45 p.m. — 2nd, 3rd, 5th Grades



Village to City

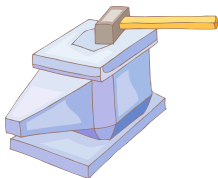
During this time period, we explore Rochester as it explodes from a small village to a booming city. The fertile land and the development of mills along the river allowed wheat to be grown locally and transformed into flour. By taming the land and the river, the settlers produced a surplus of flour. Students will learn the role of the Erie Canal in carrying the flour out of the area – resulting in a population and production boom that transformed Rochester from a small frontier town to “The Young Lion of the West.”

The curriculum of our Sixth Grade is slightly different from the local history-based curriculum of Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. Sixth Graders will continue the work of last year’s class by examining the Grasso-Zimmer proposal to re-water the original Erie Canal bed in downtown Rochester. See the following page for a description of their first expedition.

Kindergarten – The Apprentice

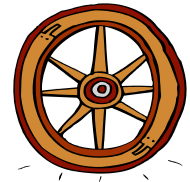
Throughout this expedition, students will explore answers to the following questions: “Why do people live in communities?” “What jobs did people do when Rochester first started?” “How did kids learn to be grown-ups then, and how do they now?” The class will begin by exploring its classroom community. Students will learn to use materials, develop classroom rules, and establish routines. They will work with 4th Grade mentors to become familiar with the expectations of our school, and will take part in experiences to learn about school life long ago and compare it with school life today.

Students will become apprentices to mentors outside of school to learn about a job that was performed long ago and is still performed today. Through the apprentice program, each child will develop a display about his or her particular job and how it has changed over time.



1st Grade – Cart Wheels

First Graders will quickly learn the importance of community during this expedition. They will start the year by developing the rules and laws for their own classroom, and will look at the roles and responsibilities that each person has in their classroom community. These big ideas will then be transferred to the farm, one of Rochester’s earliest occupations. As the expedition unfolds, students will learn that as Rochester changed from a village to a city, people with specialized jobs such as doctors, lawyers, carpenters, millers, and many others came to live here. Students will work with mentors who have jobs similar to those of long ago. Together, the specialists will each do their own part to build a cart which will be used to transport lunches and clipboards when a class is working outside or going on a field study. Each 1st Grader will also be responsible for a page in the class book All About Our Cart.



2nd Grade – The Flour City

Subtitled “Following the Life Of a Wheat Berry as it Interacts with Simple Machines,” the 2nd grade expedition will explore the big idea that a combination of wheat, mills, and the Erie Canal caused Rochester to grow.

Second Graders will take on the role of wheat berries as they are planted, harvested, and transported to and within the mill, ground into flour, and transported to and on the Erie Canal. As they move through this “life experience” of a wheat berry, they will analyze their interaction with the simple machines they meet along the way. Students will keep a science journal recording their observations, data collection, and conclusions. Fieldwork will include farmwork, a tour of the High Falls area, and time on a canal boat.

The class’s final products will be an artistic representation of the life of the wheat berry, displays of student learning, and a song book about the time period.



3rd Grade – Canal Connections



How did flour sacks, mosquitoes, and horseshoes alter the course of New York State history? Third graders will make sense of history one artifact at a time during this expedition. They will examine how seemingly unrelated artifacts tell the story of Rochester's "Flour City" days and how the construction of the canal propelled it to become America's first boomtown. The artifacts will help guide students' investigations of the milling industry, the construction challenges presented by geography (and the clever engineering solutions), and how communities thrived with the arrival of the canal. Mirroring the canal study, students will be collecting artifacts that tell the story of their learning and how the connections they made along the way help them understand how they think and learn.

4th Grade – 1853: A Snapshot in Time

Fourth Grade's first expedition of the year will examine a very painful and yet inspiring time in our country's history. Using this date as a lens, the class will explore the topics of slavery, the Underground Railroad, women's suffrage, and Rochester's unique role in the fight for freedom. What does it mean to be free? What shapes a person's identity? These are some of the questions that will guide the class's investigations, readings, field studies, and interactions with local experts. Students will also explore the lives of such noteworthy figures as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and many others whose courageous acts of service and words of inspiration led countless people to freedom.



5th Grade – We The People???

Fifth Graders will focus on the rich history of the Rochester area, examining local figures who courageously fought oppression in the 19th century. Our study of oppression will emphasize movements for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. Local figures, including Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriett Tubman, Isaac and Amy Post, and Austin Steward, will provide lenses into the lives of those affected by oppression and will give students with an opportunity to examine strategies that brought about change. The class will embark on a number of field studies in Rochester, Seneca Falls and Auburn. Their learning will be shared with the entire world via a website that will highlight significant people and places in our community that were connected to fighting oppression.



6th Grade – Learning From the World: The Nuts and Bolts of Canals

In this expedition, students will research the reason for building canals as well as the design and engineering challenges of canals. Students will kick off the expedition by traveling to Bethlehem, PA to take part in the World Canals Conference. There they will gather information about how the uses of canals have changed over time, and they will explore ways Rochester might learn from canal successes all over the world.

The expedition will continue with an investigation of the special features of canals in Europe (making great use of Mrs. Hillman's summer learning adventure!) and how such features might be used in a revitalization project in Rochester.

For its final product, the class will create an educational brochure to distribute to the Rochester community. The brochure will contain information about the changes in canals in Europe. Also included will be information about fundamental physics principles involved in building and maintaining canals.



New Strides in P.E.

Our 6th Grade class is taking a slightly different approach to Physical Expedition this year – one that is sure to challenge and stretch them. Students will work on a yearlong expedition that will culminate in a student-organized 5K race. GCCS students will work with city officials to plan and host the race, and all GCCS students will be prepared to complete the run. The proceeds from the race will help with the efforts of the re-watering of the Erie Canal.

Throughout the year students will be training for the 5K by building strength, endurance, and overall awareness of health. Examples such as strength training, yoga, endurance training, as well as studying healthy diets will aid in the preparation for the race. Students will incorporate their training while sports are being played during P.E.

For cross-training, students will also build body control, flexibility, and agility by studying classical ballet. While connecting with their experiences in music, students will study one historic dance performance through which they will learn multiple aspects of ballet.



Chaperone Orientation Sept. 27

Parents' desire for a chaperone orientation and training session was one of the most consistent messages we received when we requested parent input on our chaperone policy. A committee of GCCS teachers is drawing upon our years of field study experience to develop an orientation session for all parents wishing to chaperone day and overnight fieldwork this year. The session will be held

Wednesday, September 27

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Please note that this session is mandatory for all parents wishing to chaperone overnight fieldwork, and preferred for parents wishing to chaperone day fieldwork. Please contact your child's classroom teachers if you have questions.



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.

Orff Schulwerk: An approach to teaching music that actively engages children in the music making process through movement, rhythmic language, instruments, and song.

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