



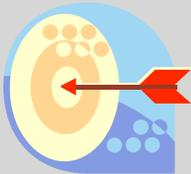
# Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

August 2007

Volume 7 No. 1

## Focus Areas Set Course for a Great Year



Our staff has been back at work since the beginning of August, and our time together has been well spent on new learning, expedition planning, and classroom preparations.

Every year, the content of our staff professional development time is determined by the Focus Areas we choose as a staff. There are so many things we would like to learn, try out, or improve, but dabbling in a lot of different topics doesn't help us create effective practices that we can sustain over time. So, we select a few areas each year to which we devote substantial time and direct professional development resources. Focus areas guide our work with our Expeditionary Learning School Designer, determine which conferences we attend, and provide a framework around which we build our professional development schedule. These areas are chosen based on information from classroom and state assessments, the parent satisfaction survey, and the EL implementation review.

We have selected three Focus Areas for 07-08. Our first focus area is Math. We have purchased the new edition of the *Investigations* Math program, which has been updated to address some of the gaps in the original edition. We are working toward an implementation of this program that better meets the needs of our strongest math students while still providing sufficient support for students who struggle with math. We will also be working toward a stronger integration of mathematics into expeditions where possible.

Our second Focus Area is inquiry-based lesson design. We are investigating ways to use questioning techniques and other protocols

in our lessons that increase students' problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. We also want to structure lessons within an expedition so that they build a sense of mystery and enhance students' "need to know."

For our third Focus Area, we will be exploring issues related to character development and bullying. We want to develop strategies for addressing relational aggression that are clear and consistent across grade levels. We also want to weave together the Caring Community Plan with the EL Design Principles and infuse the language of character traits throughout the day and across situations.

Our attention to these areas will help us to hone our practice so that new strategies become part of our routine. We look forward to sharing our progress with you during the course of the year.

*You are cordially invited*

To a "Welcome Parents"  
reception

Sponsored by the  
Family Association



Tuesday, September 18  
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), Wendy Quarles (647-1667),  
Betsy Serapilio-Frank (654-5958)

### *Officers*

**Co-Chairs:** Jamine Wilson (256-1566), Volunteer Needed!

**Secretary:** Jane Cherin (473-3481)

**Treasurer:** Julie Schnepf (256-0722)

### *Family Association Committee Chairs*

#### **Family Social Activities**

John Quitter (787-0332)

#### **Babysitting & Transportation**

Volunteer Needed! Your Name Here!

#### **Fund-Raising**

Anne Punzi (242-8902)

#### **Legislative Issues**

Nevada Schickling (329-5751)

#### **Outreach**

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

#### **Program**

Diana Carter (473-1187), Hugh Brantley (328-3288)

#### **Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators**

Karen Braden (473-5303), Nikki Hogan (621-8731), Yvonne Villareale (473-9318)

### *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. 29: First Day of School Grades 1-6  
1:00 Dismissal
- Aug. 30: Chaperone Orientation
- Aug. 30-31: 1:00 Dismissal
- Sept. 3: Labor Day  
School is Closed
- Sept. 4: Half Day for Kindergarten
- Sept. 5: First Full Day for Kindergarten
- Sept. 17: Board of Trustees Meeting  
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Sept. 18: Welcome Reception for New  
Parents 6:30-8 p.m.
- Sept. 27-28: School Pictures
- Oct. 4: Curriculum Night
- Oct. 5: Professional Development Day  
No School for Students
- Oct. 8: Columbus Day  
School is Closed
- Oct. 11: School Pictures Make-up Day
- Oct. 15: Board of Trustees Meeting  
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Oct. 16: Family Association Meeting  
6:30-8 p.m. Eisenhart Ballroom

**Please note EL Site Seminar Date  
Change and correction of Martin Luther  
King, Jr. holiday on enclosed calendar!**

## PREHISTORY EXHIBITION DATES

Tues., Nov. 13: 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> Grades

Wed., Nov. 14: 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

Tues., Nov. 27: 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grades

Wed., Nov. 28: K, 1<sup>st</sup> Grade

## Responding to Parent Feedback

Each May, GCCS sends out a Parent Satisfaction Survey to every parent in the GCCS community. Out of 160 surveys mailed last May, 51 were returned. Overall, parents express high satisfaction with their experiences at GCCS, which is affirmed by the very low number of withdrawals we experience each year.

On average, 99.28% of the responding parents were somewhat satisfied, satisfied, or very satisfied. 95.3% of the responding parents were satisfied or very satisfied. The areas of greatest satisfaction seemed to be the quality of expeditions and the quality of teaching, as well as the location and safety of our school building.

Some comments that conveyed parents' dissatisfaction warrant attention and comment. Here are a selection of those comments and the school's reply:

***"We would like to know ahead of time what the expeditions are..." "We need more advance notice for field studies."***

Expeditions (12-week units of study) are planned during professional development days at three points during the year: August, November, and February. Some expedition plans are based on those done previously and others are newly developed. As soon as plans are developed, parents are notified about the content of the upcoming expedition either in the weekly classroom newsletter or in *Currents*, whichever comes first. If parents would like a rough idea about the topics that will be studied in each expedition, they can refer to the GCCS Curriculum Framework on our website.

Field studies are planned either at the same time as the expedition or when a need or opportunity arises. One of the nice things about our program is our ability to take advantage of community resources at a moment's notice. However, that is also a frustration for parents who must rearrange work schedules in order to participate. We will continue to let parents know about field studies as soon as they are scheduled via each classroom's weekly newsletter, but please understand that it is not always possible to provide a lot of advance notice.

***"I am not positive about the Investigations math program..." "We can always use more rote mathematics."***

Math seems to be the area of least satisfaction among parents every year. It may be that the *Investigations* math program and math homework are different enough from a traditional approach that parents are unsure how their children are learning math. We have just purchased the newest edition of *Investigations*, which has addressed some of the issues related to gaps and a lack of rote practice. In addition, the staff has designated math as one of our focus areas this year, so we will be using professional development time to examine our teaching of the math curriculum and ensuring alignment with the NYS standards. We will plan to focus on math during our upcoming Curriculum Night, so have your questions ready!

***"I have some concerns about discipline..."***

Discipline is a tricky business in every school, but perhaps more so at GCCS because so much of the management of student behavior is conducted in private. We acknowledge that our students are not all perfectly behaved all of the time. There are instances of classroom interruptions, teasing, defiance, and other misconduct. While none of these behaviors is acceptable to us, there are circumstances that contribute to misbehavior that we must take into account when we determine courses of action – special needs, individual personalities, stress at home, etc. We also recognize that for many students, changing negative behaviors is an ongoing learning process, not a quick fix. There may be situations in which parents would like to see or hear about more public demonstrations of discipline or consequences, but that generally not the most effective way to achieve a long-term resolution to the problem.

As part of our professional development, the staff will be examining issues of character development and relational aggression this year, and we'll share new practices and policies as they are developed. Our goal will continue to be refraining from shame children into behaving, and we will continue to put forth the highest expectations for student conduct while dealing with transgressions confidentially.

-To be continued in the October issue of *Currents*



## PREHISTORY

Our two-year curriculum cycle begins with a study of earth's earliest times. Each loop will explore a different aspect of early earth – living things, the formation of our planet and solar system, and the origin of rocks and rivers.

This expedition has a heavy science emphasis, with students exploring the disciplines of astronomy, geology, and paleontology. We've designed our expeditions to unfold with a sense of mystery and to help students experience "aha" moments as they uncover new ideas and information. Along with learning science content, students will learn how scientists make discoveries, form theories, and communicate their findings with others. They'll also become familiar with the tools scientists use and how math and language arts help scientists do their work.

### Kindergarten – Tell Me A Story

Kindergarteners will begin their journey into prehistory immersed in stories. They will experience stories that are written and oral as well as tales told through music and movement. The read-aloud *The Secret History of Tom Trueheart* will come to life when students are sent a letter inviting them to partake in a story mission. When a gold box arrives with a mystery object enclosed, students will begin their quest to discover what the object is and who it once belonged to. They will spend the expedition researching (through books, museum visits, and meetings with experts) the parts of prehistory that will help them tell the story of the mystery object and its owner. Students will document their findings in their research journals and participate in shared writing to record the information they find. Students' drawings and shared writing will be compiled into a book which



will be presented to the "story bureau," a panel of local experts, on exhibition night. Students will present the story through the various types of storytelling they have been exploring, such as words, pictures, music, and movement.

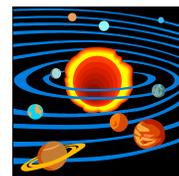
### 1<sup>st</sup> Grade – Get a Clue

Shhh. The unfolding of this expedition is meant to create a sense of mystery for our young scientists. The first grade team is hoping that parents will honor the scientific process of making inferences and allow the children to make their own discoveries. Please don't let the cat (or dinosaurs) out of the bag!

Throughout their "Get a Clue" expedition, the first grade class will investigate the answers to the following questions: What lived here (around Rochester) long ago? How do we know? How can fossils be clues to the past? The Expedition will consist of in-depth investigation of living and non-living things in prehistory using fossil evidence, including specific local fossil finds. These investigations will focus on three time periods of prehistory: Warm Seas, Dinosaur Times, and Ice Age. Children will work with a partner to research a living or non-living thing from prehistory and write and illustrate a book page highlighting their topic and scientific evidence of its existence. Their final product will include their research in a book on tape format.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade – Is Pluto a Planet?

How do astronomers know what they know? What makes a planet a planet? What are all those objects in space and how are they connected to one another? During this expedition, students will investigate the mysteries of space as they search for answers to these questions.



Students will also dive into the recent controversy over Pluto's "demotion" from planet status. Using the Earth as a starting point, students will explore the characteristics of the planets in our solar system, and will develop their own theories on what makes a planet a planet. Students will use their blossoming knowledge to revise their theories and offer their own perspective on Pluto's rightful place in our solar system.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade – What’s Up?

What’s up? The first expedition for the 3rd graders this year will tackle some of the many meanings of this question. What’s up there in the nighttime sky? What does “up” really mean? What’s up with patterns on the earth including day and night and the seasons? In order to uncover the answer to these questions, students will grapple with content and concepts including the solar system, gravity, light, and the origin of the universe, among others.



A major focus in this expedition is on the use of questions as a way to get to larger understandings. Students will find themselves faced with a series of mysteries and will use models, articles, experiments, fieldwork and other resources to solve them. They may even find themselves questioning their preconceptions along the way! As they become immersed in the content, students will be guided to research one of the questions they find particularly compelling and will create an entry for a class created FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document to be offered to children visiting the Strasenburgh Planetarium. Exhibition Night will include a performance that illustrates what they have learned.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Grade – The Great Old Genesee River

During the Prehistory expedition, fourth graders will embark on a journey of more than 150 miles from the source of the Genesee River in Gold, Pennsylvania to the mouth of the river in Charlotte. Over the course of their expedition, students will gather data, record observations, make inferences, and engage in scientific dialogue about the Genesee River to understand the forces of nature that shaped the region we live in. Fourth graders will use the local geology as a virtual time travel machine to imagine the area thousands of years ago. The fourth grade scientists and authors will compose a class book of descriptive free verse poetry along with expository writing to share their journey.



## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade – Like a Rock

We think of rock as solid, stable and never changing, but we can find evidence of a changing earth if we know where to look: fossils in the Genesee River gorge, glacial rock in our parks, and valleys cut and re-cut by moving water. During this expedition students will discover how our region has been transformed by forces from deep within the earth and by the Genesee River. Students will follow the course of the Genesee River, which will provide us with the “cut away view” needed to study the geology of our region. Students will collect rocks at each field visit and craft theories about the composition and location of these rocks. After learning how to classify and test rock samples, students will revise their theories and present their information in a reflective written piece. With this knowledge of rock, the fifth grade class will design a semi-permanent installation piece that represents their experience of the expedition.



## 6<sup>th</sup> Grade – It’s Up To You

For the past two years, the sixth grade class investigated the merits of the Grasso-Zimmer proposal to re-water the Erie Canal downtown. The proposal, in part due to the attention our students drew to it, is being actively studied by the City of Rochester and is closer than ever to becoming a reality.

So, this year’s sixth grade will prepare to take on *another* hot topic that may have a major impact on Rochester’s environmental and economic future. Their first expedition will actually be a quest to uncover their year’s topic of study. By gathering data from a wide variety of sources, the class will form a structured understanding of their natural and built environments, and the many factors that affect them. Moving further into the expedition, they will interview community members, take city observation walks, learn about active citizenship, and dive into comparative history case studies in an attempt to define the world around them. They will learn about the rise of cities and the issues past and present that have challenged city officials and residents. By the end of the expedition, sixth graders will be prepared to present a portfolio of hot topics to a panel of school and community members, who will help the class determine its course of study for the remainder of the year.

## 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. Children arriving after 8:15 a.m. are marked tardy.
- come into the office to sign your child in if you arrive after 8:15 a.m.
- pick up your child 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. Please allow your child to be delivered to you outside rather than coming to the classroom at dismissal time (a few classrooms invite parents in for closing circle. Please check with your child's teachers.). If you need to pick your child up early, we ask that you do so by 2:45.
- 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, children will be dismissed with their classes, even if their parents attend Community Circle.
- notify your child's teachers if there is a change in drop-off or pick-up arrangements.

Thank you for your cooperation!

## Introducing our Newest Staff Member

Please join us in welcoming Mandy Kralj, our new teaching assistant in 4<sup>th</sup> Grade. Mandy has just moved here from Meadville, PA, where she worked as a therapeutic support service provider with children with emotional and behavioral challenges. Mandy holds a Bachelor's Degree in Communications from Allegheny College.

## Room Parents and Volunteers Needed

The Room Parent Volunteer Coordinators support classrooms in a multitude of ways each year. We would be grateful for your help! If you would like to serve as a Room Parent, please notify your classroom teachers. They will fill you in on the current plans for the year, and will be happy to solicit your ideas for family events and service!

The Family Association also needs volunteers to lead and serve on its committees. Come to the Welcome Reception on September 18 to find out how you can increase your involvement in your child's school.



## Site Seminar Date Change

This will be GCCS's 5<sup>th</sup> Expeditionary Learning Demonstration Site Seminar. EL selects a few schools each year to host educators from around the country to model EL practices and philosophy. We typically have about 120 guests each year, and we provide them with a combination of classroom observations, teacher-led workshops, and student tours and performances.

Due to an EL scheduling error, we have had to move our Site Seminar to January 30-February 1. This changes our school calendar. **Students will be in school on October 26, but will not have school on February 1.** Please see the revised calendar enclosed. In addition, we corrected an error we made with the date of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.



## GCCS Lingo Quiz

GCCS sure has a lot of lingo! For new families (and old), here is a quiz designed to make sure you can survive any GCCS-related conversation:

1. **Expeditionary Learning is:**
  - a. the same thing as a field trip, but better
  - b. a school-wide model for curriculum and instruction based on Outward Bound principles
  - c. a way to learn without leaving your computer
2. **“EL” stands for:**
  - a. Elementary Level
  - b. Excellent Location
  - c. Expeditionary Learning
3. **A “School Designer” is:**
  - a. a master teacher who visits GCCS more than 20 days per year to help us implement EL.
  - b. the person who picks out our paint colors, furniture, and carpet
  - c. the same thing as the Principal
4. **The term “expedition” refers to:**
  - a. A long-term (12 weeks) in-depth investigation on a theme or topic
  - b. the same thing as a field trip, but better
  - c. a vacation
5. **GCCS does \_\_\_ expeditions per year:**
  - a. five
  - b. two
  - c. three
6. **A “field study” is:**
  - a. the same thing as a field trip
  - b. a scientific examination of a meadow
  - c. a purposeful, focused, information-gathering excursion outside of the classroom
7. **An “exhibition” is:**
  - a. the culminating demonstration of student learning and projects at the end of each expedition
  - b. something that happens at an art gallery
  - c. illegal
8. **Design Principles are:**
  - a. guidelines for student artwork
  - b. values that guide our student and teacher work
  - c. fashion do’s and don’ts
9. **“Crew” refers to:**
  - a. the Board of Trustees
  - b. the GCCS staff
  - c. groups in which students work
10. **GCCS’s curriculum focuses on:**
  - a. the social and natural history of the Rochester area
  - b. ocean ecology
  - c. robotics and technology
11. **“Time Periods” at GCCS refers to:**
  - a. seasons
  - b. segments of history around which our curriculum is organized
  - c. separate sessions for math, reading, writing, social studies, and science
12. **“Zero Tolerance” refers to:**
  - a. GCCS’s policy toward aggressive physical contact between students
  - b. GCCS’s policy toward all behavioral misconduct
  - c. Our ability to withstand cold temperatures
13. **A “Site Seminar” is:**
  - a. a design charrette where architectural plans are discussed
  - b. professional development held off campus
  - c. a 3-day event in which educators from around the country come to observe and learn at GCCS
14. **The Family Association is:**
  - a. composed of GCCS parents, guardians, and other interested family members
  - b. a way to help parents become involved in the life of the school
  - c. a great way to spend one night a month
  - d. welcoming and grateful to new participants
  - e. all of the above!

Answers: 1. b, 2. c, 3. a, 4.a, 5. c, 6. c, 7. a, 8. b, 9. c, 10. a, 11. b, 12. a, 13. c, 14. e

## 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.

Worth reviewing are the sections on the Chaperone Policy, Communicating Concerns, Dress Code, Holidays and Special Events, Toys, and Recess. Following these guidelines will facilitate positive communication and will help 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  
With a special focus on Math *Investigations*

At Our Annual  
Curriculum Night



Thursday, October 4

5:30-7:00 pm — Kindergarten, 1st, 4th, 6th Grades

7:15-8:45 pm — 2nd, 3rd, 5th Grades

