



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

August 2008

Volume 8 No. 1

Ode to Our Classrooms

As a year-end reflection in June, our staff members wrote odes to their teammates to celebrate their collaboration, creativity, and service to one another. Sixth grade teacher Steve Lee-Davis created this especially beautiful poem to honor his team, and to express the significant role these adults play in nurturing children's learning and growth.

The Three Trees by *Steven Lee-Davis*

Oh, I know a place where three trees grow
They rise from the dark dirt,
deep rooted and wise.
Together they embody a sacred grove –
a sanctuary of learning.

Blue shadows across the green lawn
fall from their frames.
The children rest there.
Strong arms twist into the sky
and interlink with the clouds.
The children climb there.
Deep roots dive into the earth
and nourish the trunk.
The children drink there.



Oh, I know a place where three trees grow
Where bees have a hive – honey flows freely.
Where the children come.

At first they came because it was
the only place they had.
Then they came because they could
climb the branches and see far away.
Then they came because of
the shade and the sweetness.
Then they came because it was their home.

Oh, I know a place where three trees grow.
A sanctuary of sustenance and shade,
a tapestry of wisdom and love
Where children have taken the fruit and moved on.
The trees have grown taller, and deeper, and strong.

As we begin another year, it is fitting to pay tribute our teachers and assistants who spend each day thoughtfully caring for our children and preparing a program and environment that will foster their intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development. Our teachers are committed to making this the best year yet for your children, and they look forward to working with you along the way.

Introducing our new staff

We welcome four new staff members to GCCS this year.

Jenny Elahi will be teaching kindergarten with Melissa Fredericks and Christy Khiosida. Mrs. Elahi has taught preschool at Strong Museum, Summerville Nursery School, the RMSC Preschool, the Rochester Preschool-Parent Program, and Irondequoit Cooperative Nursery School. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal

Arts from San Diego State University and a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education from Nazareth College.

Christy Burgess joins the second grade team as teaching assistant. Mrs. Burgess has substitute taught at GCCS for the past couple of years. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in

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Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

Diana Carter (473-1187), Wendy Quarles (647-1667),
New Representative to be Elected at October Family Association Meeting

Officers

Co-Chairs: Jamine Wilson (256-1566), Bill Gargan (461-0855)

Secretary: Jane Cherin (473-3481)

Treasurer: Andre Spenard (820-6639)

Family Association Committee Chairs

Family Social Activities

Nikki Hogan (621-8731)

Fund-Raising

Maria Kast (288-8449)

Legislative Issues

Eric Anderson (436-5136)

Outreach

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

Program

Diana Carter (473-1187)

Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Yvonne Villareale (Wendy Walsh (244-4996)

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. 27: First Day of School Grades 1-6
1:00 Dismissal
- Aug. 28: Sixth Grade Parent Orientation
6-7:30 p.m.
- Aug. 28-29: 1:00 Dismissal
- Sept. 1: Labor Day
School is Closed
- Sept. 2: Half Day for Kindergarten
- Sept. 3: First Full Day for Kindergarten
- Sept. 10: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Sept. 15: Chaperone Orientation
6:30-8:30 p.m.
- Sept. 16: Welcome Reception for New Parents
6:30-8 p.m.
- Sept. 18-19: School Pictures
- Oct. 2: School Pictures Make-up Day
- Oct. 8: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Oct. 9: Curriculum Night
- Oct. 10: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Oct. 13: Columbus Day
School is Closed
- Oct. 21: Family Association Meeting
6:30-8 p.m. Eisenhart Ballroom
- Oct. 23: Site Seminar
- Oct. 24: Site Seminar, 1:00 Dismissal

Village To City Exhibition Dates

Mon., Nov. 10: 4th Grade

Thurs., Nov. 13: K, 1st Grade

Mon., Nov. 17: 6th Grade

Tues., Nov. 18: 2nd, 5th Grades

Tues., Dec. 2: 3rd Grade

All students required to attend

Focus Areas Guide Staff Development Efforts



Each year, the GCCS staff examines student performance data, parent feedback, State Education Department comments, and our EL implementation review to determine areas of our practice to target for development. We have selected four focus areas for 08-09.

As this is our eighth year and many new staff members have joined us since 2001, we are revisiting our school's "roots." This includes rereading our charter, reexamining the principles of Expeditionary Learning and Outward Bound, and reevaluating the rituals, traditions, and practices that are in place at GCCS. We want to ensure that the decisions we make continue to be in line with our school's mission and vision, and we want to ground our newer staff members in the foundations on which our school is built.

Final products and performances drive the course of expedition instruction at every grade level. As another focus area, we will consider the design of final products. We want to build our repertoire of product ideas so that we can choose formats that are a strong fit with expeditions and adequately represent student learning. We also want to expand our skills for staging student performances.

We will continue our focus on the design of inquiry-based lessons. Inquiry lessons pose mysteries and problems that set in motion further research and discussion. We will expand our repertoire of strategies for structuring inquiry experiences. We are also strengthening our use of historic documents, artifacts, and photos in the process of inquiry.

We're also tackling spelling this year. We will research a range of effective practices in spelling instruction and then define a consistent, cohesive school-wide approach. We will also learn to diagnose and remediate children's spelling errors.

These focus areas provide structure for our professional development time and keep us on the cutting edge of Expeditionary Learning and other teaching practices.

GCCS Staff Finds Treasure

The GCCS staff made some amazing discoveries during our August professional development time – right in our own backyard. We wanted to find additional resources to use in inquiry lessons, so we dug into the Rochester Historical Society and the RMSC Library and turned up fabulous treasures.

At the RMSC Library, we learned how to access two websites chock full of historic maps, photos, business directories, and other documents (libraryweb.com/ and libcat.com). The Rochester Historical Society, which is a block down on East Avenue, is overflowing (think House of Guitars – the history version) with original deeds, diaries, letters, and other documents; huge oil paintings of Rochester's early settlers; quilts; clothing; furniture; and much, much more. Our new sixth graders would especially appreciate that we found Seth Green's diary and fishing tackle!

These documents and artifacts will enrich students' study of local history and their appreciation for the preservation of things that help tell the story of long ago.



Room Parents and Volunteers Needed

Room parents support classrooms in a multitude of ways each year – organizing parent chaperones, doing clerical work for teachers, and coordinating Saturday Parent Work Days, to name a few. 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 16 to find out how you can increase your involvement in your child's school.

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.”

At the same time, our community and nation struggled to define “freedom.” Rochester’s citizens played a significant role in fighting slavery and advocating for women’s rights. Fourth and fifth graders will use our museum’s and community’s resources to develop an understanding of this period in history and the remarkable people who endured – and overcame – forces of oppression.

Kindergarten – Let’s Work Together

Kindergarteners will begin the year by exploring their classroom community. Together, they will build the classroom community by discovering materials for play and work, establishing rules, and learning about each other. But, is a classroom community all there is? Kindergarteners will discover that all their needs cannot be met in the classroom. They will have to venture out into a new community, where they will explore the roles and responsibilities of the people there.

A surprising piece of information will lead us to uncover the Rochester community of long ago. Students will find out how members of Rochester’s early community worked together to build Rochester from a village to a city.

1st Grade – The Apprentice

During this expedition, first graders will quickly learn the importance of community. They will start the year developing rules and laws for their own classroom. They will look at the roles and responsibilities that each person has in our classroom and school community.

The big ideas of interdependence in a community, and roles and responsibilities of community members will then be transferred to the jobs in early Rochester. Students will work cooperatively with mentors to build a piece of furniture, highlighting the occupations and materials that were prevalent in the area, and the interdependence of craftspeople in early Rochester. Time spent with mentors will illustrate the importance of different specialists working together as they strive towards the final project. A village set up in our classroom will allow all the students to sample the jobs that are being mentored (blacksmith, carpenter, tilemaker, weaver).

Students will individually create a page in a classroom village directory highlighting him or herself as the craftsman whose role they take on. The directory page will include a personal photograph with a description of their job, photos and diagrams of tools used by their craft, as well as a process-writing piece about the steps needed to build the final product. The Arts will be integrated into the expedition content to highlight how, just as individuals come together to form a community, individual media can be combined to make a whole.



2nd Grade – Boom!

A Second Grade Expedition into Rochester's Boomtown History



Rochester grew quickly because farmers could grow wheat, millers could grind the wheat, and canal boats could transport and sell surplus flour along the Erie Canal to other cities for profit. Additionally, the tools used in growing, milling, and transporting wheat all come from simple machines that make work easier and more efficient. These are the big ideas that will guide students as they experiment with and explore how simple machines work and as they apply this knowledge when following the path of a wheat berry from the farm to the canal. Hands-on experiences and research, local field studies, guest experts, descriptive writing, and the creative arts will ground content learning and facilitate student ownership and engagement. Exhibition Night will combine a creative performance followed by learning stations. Learning stations will involve students demonstrating to families the use of a simple machine, while also explaining how their machine was used on the farms, in the mills, or along the canal.

4th Grade – Speaking Of Change

The signing of the U.S. Constitution created “equality” in the newly established United States but some of the issues that plagued the Founding Fathers, particularly slavery, now threatened to tear the country in two. As Rochester thrives as America’s first “boomtown,” western territories are being settled, new states are joining the union and women are seeking the equality guaranteed in spirit by the constitution, but not yet in its laws. Beginning with a review of our rights under the U.S. Constitution, students will follow two similar yet separate movements that demanded “liberty and justice for all” and took different paths in attaining their goals. Fourth graders will examine how rhetoric, the art of persuasive speaking and writing, played a role in the dramatic social changes of 19th century America. By investigating the abolitionists and suffragists of Rochester and New York State, students will understand that rules can be changed through persuasion and perseverance. Students will have opportunities to connect the changes of the past to the upcoming U.S. Presidential election, looking closely at the media’s role both then and now in shaping public opinion.

3rd Grade – Low Bridge, Everybody Downtown

During this expedition third graders will examine a variety of primary source documents, including photographs, letters, and songs. The documents will unfold the story of daily life during the time of the Erie Canal. They will go back in time to understand how the idea to construct a human made waterway became a reality. The students will research how the canal was constructed, how it worked, how it affected the lives of the people who built it, and the challenges people faced along the way. Students will discover how the canal helped the seven early settlements, which they researched during our last expedition, were transformed into Rochester – “America’s first boomtown.”



5th Grade – We the People???

Fifth grade will focus on the rich history of the Rochester area, examining local figures who courageously fought oppression in the 19th century. This study of oppression will focus on the movements for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. People who lived in or near Rochester, 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 provide students with an opportunity to examine strategies that brought about change. Fieldwork will take the class to historically significant locations in Rochester, as well as Auburn and Seneca Falls, and students will become experts at sharing a local resource as their final product.



6th Grade – E Pluribus Unum



This year, the sixth grade class has a rare opportunity have a direct impact on Rochester's physical environment. Through a year-long study of public art, the class will move from the ancient roots of symbolic representation to contemporary site-specific works. The fall expedition will take students to ancient Rome where they will embark on a comprehensive study of symbolism in public art and how it intersects with authority.

As they establish ancient connections to public art, the sixth grade will learn about Latin, Greek and Roman mythology, the early Republic government as well as the built environment. The class will culminate this expedition with an interpretation of student learning through an artistic performance that holds threads of ancient expression.

Chaperone Orientation Sept. 15

Fieldwork is a critical part of each students' learning at GCCS, and parent chaperones make fieldwork possible and productive. In order to prepare parents for the roles and responsibilities of chaperoning, we will once again provide a chaperone orientation. The orientation will address ways to support student learning, interpret exhibits, assist with note-taking, manage behavior, and keep students safe on field studies.

The session will be held

Monday, September 15

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.



Arrival and Dismissal Reminders



School begins each day at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. (1:00 p.m. on Wednesdays). Please observe these procedures to help our school days start and end smoothly:

- Children are **marked tardy** and must be signed in if they arrive **after 8:15 a.m.** Please come directly to the office to sign children in after 8:15 a.m.
- Children who must **leave school early** must be signed out in the office. Please come directly to the office, and we will call the classroom for the child.
- If possible, **please avoid coming to the office to sign children out between 2:45-3:00 p.m.** This is a very hectic time of day. If your child has an appointment immediately after school, please pick him or her up before 2:45 p.m. Otherwise, we ask that parents please wait for their children to be dismissed with the class.

New Staff Members (continued from p. 1)

Childhood Education and a Master's Degree in Literacy Education from SUNY Geneseo (yes, like many of our TA's, she's a bit overqualified).

Marla Kleinman joins us as a part-time special education coordinator. She has worked in this role at the Rochester Leadership Academy and at Cobblestone School. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology and Psychology from SUNY Buffalo and a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Rochester.

Miranda Bradshaw is long-term substitute teaching for Becki Mason while Mrs. Mason is on maternity leave. Ms. Bradshaw just retired from teaching in the City School District. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from SUNY Brockport and a Master's Degree in Reading from Nazareth College.

Retreat and Reflect

Sixth graders will embark on a special retreat later this month. A retreat is designed as a non-academic field study that focuses on skills of leadership and crew work.

This year's sixth graders will camp at Green Lakes State Park and will participate in low ropes course activities at SUNY IT.

At the campground, students will be divided into crews, and will participate in a series of "initiatives" that require leadership, teamwork, planning, problem-solving, and compromise. Initiatives include tent set-up and take-down, meals preparation, and other outdoor activities. Following each initiative, students reflect upon and debrief their own contributions as leader or crew member.

SUNY IT trainers lead students through activities in which they confront personal and team challenges. Once again, students reflect upon and debrief their roles and contributions in achieving crew success.

Because the retreat is an intense personal experience for children, we conduct the retreat with non-parent chaperones. School staff and occasionally former GCCS parents serve as chaperones for retreats.

The retreat serves as a foundation for students throughout their sixth grade year. As students prepare for their sixth grade passage reflection and middle school, the retreat is an



important step in helping students evaluate and set direction for building their own leadership and crew skills.

Please help make our school shine for Site Seminar!

Saturday Parent Work Day

Saturday, October 18

9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Child Care Provided

Please bring extra rags and buckets if you have them.



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.

Site Seminar: A 3-day event in which educators from around the country come to observe and learn about Expeditionary Learning practices at GCCS.

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

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.

Where's *Strata*?

Many of you are probably wondering where your copies of our fundraising yearbooks, *Strata*, have gotten to. Here's the answer: They're mostly not done yet. There's a cadre of volunteer parents putting them together. The parents have found the technical challenges of these yearbooks greater than anticipated. So, they are still in process. The fourth grade books ARE complete, and we'll distribute them as soon as school starts, but unfortunately everyone else will have to wait.

In the meantime, if you haven't already ordered *Strata*, you still have a chance to do so. Just contact Diana Carter at 473-1187, or blueloon@rochester.rr.com. Any questions about your order? Call or email Diana.

You may remember that these books are a fundraiser for the sixth graders' (now seventh grade alumni!) gift of art to GCCS. The bird sculpture is completed and installed – just look up when you enter the lobby by the elevator. The piece was created by our students with the support and guidance of Nancy Valle, our former art teacher. The sculpture is reminiscent of that class's intensive study of birds, and symbolizes sixth graders leaving the roost and taking flight.

Many thanks to these student artists for this lasting tribute to our first class to go all the way from kindergarten through sixth grade, and to their parents, especially Diana Carter, and teachers for their support of the project.

You're Invited
to Learn More About Our Instructional Program

At Our Annual
Curriculum Night



Thursday, October 9

5:30-7:00 pm – Kindergarten, 1st, 3rd, 6th Grades

7:15-8:45 pm – 2nd, 4th, 5th Grades

You are cordially invited

To a "Welcome Parents"
Reception

Sponsored by the
Family Association



Tuesday, September 16
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Eisenhart Ballroom

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