



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School
an Expeditionary Learning School

October 2011

Volume 11 No. 2

The Story of Our Beginnings (Part II)

In early fall of 1999, the deadline for our “intent to submit” was quickly approaching, and the December due date for the entire charter application loomed. The planning team continued to research effective practices, become familiar with applicable state and federal laws, and develop curriculum. We learned more than we thought possible about all of the things teachers generally don’t have to deal with – insurance, food service, budgeting, transportation, and the like. The charter application rightfully demanded that we address every aspect of the business side of schooling in addition to the instructional side.

In September 1999, Lisa Wing and planning team members Jennie DeBree and Winnifred Chiarella had the opportunity to travel to Denver to visit two well-established and successful Expeditionary Learning charter schools – the Odyssey School and the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning (RMSEL). We saw truly impressive implementations of the EL model. We were especially drawn to the Odyssey School, which served elementary-age children and was a living, breathing exemplar of the type of school we had envisioned during our early stages of planning (it still is!). We were also fortunate that the President of Expeditionary Learning, Greg Farrell, and two key EL staff members, Barbara Waxman and Scott Dolquist, happened to be in Denver that week. They made time to have dinner with us and we enjoyed an evening of learning more about the model and the organization. Seeing these schools in action and meeting with these EL representatives confirmed that we were headed in the right direction and that we had made some great decisions early on, especially the decision to partner with Expeditionary Learning.

As the fall progressed, we struggled to write the portion of our application that described Expeditionary Learning. The EL folks made a great suggestion. One of their staff members, writer/editor Amy Mednick, had recently moved from Boston to Rochester where her husband had just been hired as a professor at RIT. Amy had edited a number of EL books and other publications. Amy and Lisa met and Amy agreed to draft the EL-related section of the charter application.

The team worked diligently right up until the December 15 submission deadline. Many late nights and weekends were spent researching, word-smithing, and compiling every component of the application. When completed, the narrative and appendices filled two large binders.

Many serendipitous events happened during the planning stage. The week before the deadline, planning team members Lisa Wing and Winnifred Chiarella hauled several boxes containing the charter application to Kinko’s to mail to the State Education Department. While there, they ran into Nancy Valle, a SOTA visual arts

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Recovering from Our Flood (still)

Things are looking up! The carpeting has been installed in the office and all of the furniture and materials have been replaced. We have rearranged the River Room to create a separate workspace for our Curriculum Specialist and have taken the opportunity to reorganize our resources and donate outdated and underutilized materials. The classroom area rugs will be delivered in the next couple weeks. We are very much enjoying our sparkling fresh lower level.

Many thanks to parents Nikki Hogan, Wendy Walsh, Jason Morris, and Lara Sipols for scrambling to get the office painted in the few short hours between furniture removal and carpet laying. It’s heartening to see how responsive our parents are to requests – these parents didn’t hesitate to snatch up a roller when the School Leader gave them a desperate look in the hallway before Community Circle.

Be sure to stop down and see our cleaned-up space next time you’re in the school!



Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

Dan Bell (544-0577, dbell@rochester.rr.com)
 Kimberly Schafer (271-7329, Kimberly.Schafer@cbre.com)
 Jenny Sutherland (355-8262, jjsuther@gmail.com)

Officers

Co-Chairs: Andre Spenard (820-6639, hammerheadconsulting@earthlink.net);
 Wendy Walsh (244-4996 wendypphoto@hotmail.com)
Secretary: Becca Haak (703-2959, rhaak@rochester.rr.com)
Treasurer: Kimberly Schafer (271-7329, Kimberly.Schafer@cbre.com)

Family Association Event Chairs

Saturday Cleaning Days: Chris & Heather Gernon (865-6207, gernons@gmail.com)

November Program: Stefan Cohen & Michael Peter (244-6513, mpeter@rochester.rr.com)

Service Auction: Laura & Kevin Stam (473-9233, lstam4@frontiernet.net)

December Potluck: *Could be you...*

Family Game Night: Cynthia Popinko (224-3979, cjdanceballet@gmail.com)

Family Skating Party: Mary Staropoli (461-0034, marystaropoli@yahoo.com)

Family Talent Show: Nikki Hogan (621-8731, nhogan13@hotmail.com)

Applebee's Fundraiser: Elvis Reyes (338-9012, elvis.reyes@twcable.com)

Family Dance Party: Lynn Mazzeo (298-5215, lynnmazzeo@rocketmail.com)

Staff Appreciation Lunch: *Maybe you?*

End of Year Picnic: Nicole Meyer (690-0886, nicolem@rochesterymca.org)

Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

Amy Vitkus (354-2222, amy@vitk.us)

First Grade

Rebecca Gargan (461-0855, bgargan@frontiernet.net)

Second Grade

Jessica Wilcox (241-9638, jandjwilcox@yahoo.com)

Third Grade

Stephanie Niggli (244-9703, steph.niggli@yahoo.com)

Fourth Grade

Nikki Hogan (621-8731, nhogan13@hotmail.com)

Fifth Grade

Allison Bosworth (820-6639, abosworth@sjfc.edu)

Sixth Grade

Karen Braden (615-5200, karen@mikaren.com)

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- Oct. 12: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Oct. 20: Family Association Meeting
6:30-8 p.m. Eisenhart Ballroom
- Oct. 26: Chaperone/Volunteer
Orientation 6:30-8:30 p.m.
- Oct. 29: Saturday Parent Work Day
9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
- Nov. 9: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Nov. 10: Family Association Meeting
6:30-8 p.m. Eisenhart Ballroom
- Nov. 11: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Nov. 21-22: Professional Development Days
No School for Students
- Nov. 23-25: Thanksgiving Recess
School is Closed
- Dec. 8: Parent-Teacher Conferences
11:30 a.m. Dismissal
- Dec. 14: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Dec. 15: Family Association Potluck
Supper and Service Auction
6:00 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Dec. 21-30: Winter Recess
School is Closed



PREHISTORY EXHIBITION DATES



- Tues., Nov. 15:** 1st Grade (5:45-6:45 p.m.)
4th Grade (7:00-8:00 p.m.)
- Fri., Nov. 18:** 6th Grade (6-9 p.m.)
Barnes & Noble Pittsford
- Wed., Nov. 30:** K (5:45-6:45 p.m.)
5th Grade (7:00-8:00 p.m.)
- Thurs., Dec. 1:** 2nd Grade (5:45-6:45 p.m.)
3rd Grade (7:00-8:00 p.m.)

Beginnings (cont'd from p. 1)

teacher with whom Lisa and Winnie had worked years earlier at School No. 6.

They chatted about the charter application and Nancy expressed her interest in coming onboard as the art teacher. Nancy, who retired from GCCS in 2007, was instrumental in establishing the strong arts culture that we have at our school. She laid the foundation of artistic excellence that sets our program apart, and she helped our staff and students think creatively about how the visual arts can be integrated into the content of our expeditions.

Lisa continued to work with as the Rochester Teachers Association's Professional Development Specialist during the charter planning stage. At a meeting with the Children's School's professional development work group, Lisa met Jean Hurst. Jean was just the kind of passionate, accomplished teacher that GCCS needed, and Lisa was intent on luring her to join our staff. When they worked together on another union-related project, Lisa spirited Jean into her office and gave her the hard sell. We continue to be grateful that Jean took a chance on us!

In another serendipitous turn of events, Lisa encountered Carrie Haymond in the lobby of the union building. Lisa was returning to her office from a meeting and Carrie was leaving from an eye appointment. Lisa and Carrie had worked together for a brief time at School No. 6 several years earlier. Once again, Lisa knew that Carrie was just the right person to take a key position at GCCS. Can you imagine our school if Lisa had been delayed at a traffic light or Carrie had cancelled her eye exam?

The planning team anxiously awaited word from the State Education Department. Was it the

thick envelope they wanted or the thin envelope? They received the thick envelope in February, 2000 – fifteen pages of single-spaced, multi-part questions that required further research, revisions, or clarifications in the charter. Another two months passed with the team frantically addressing SED's questions.

Then the team faced another hurdle – the group interview at SED. Ask the School Leader about the scariest moment in her life, and she won't tell you it was a car accident, childbirth, or the time she got off the ski lift at the top of Whiteface Mountain and realized she didn't really know how to ski. Hands down, it was that interview.

After the interview came another thick envelope with several more items requiring revision. The team fired off the responses and the charter was placed on the Regent's June, 2000 agenda for approval.

But wait! The day before the Regent's June meeting, Lisa received a call from SED. The Charter Office pulled the item from the agenda because the Special Education office needed clarification on some language. The celebratory dinner at Winnie's house the next night was a little less festive than anticipated. But we cleared that last obstacle and on July 1, 2000 the NYS Board of Regents granted a charter to the Genesee Community Charter School.

Coming in December – Renovation of the Gannett School Building begins, GCCS Opens!

Family Association Restructures Volunteer Opportunities

Inspired by the crew structure in the classrooms, Family Association co-chairs Andre Spenard and Wendy Walsh opted to reorganize the former committees to instead handle individual events throughout the school year. Running events this way should provide many opportunities for families to get involved and serve their twenty hour volunteer commitments. It's also a great opportunity to meet families and model for our children an important GCCS motto: "We are crew, not passengers."

Instead of having one overworked social chair, the Family Association is offering the annual events you've all come to love to folks interested in gathering friends together to make them happen. Want to be the caller for a Twister game for fifty? Family Game Night's in January. Have some down time in February? The Skating Party crew could use your help. Want to feed the masses? We need a Potluck chair and crew for December.



Just as the school is created by the work of many, so is the Family Association. We want your help; we need your help. It's easy to join in either by contacting an event chair or either of the FA co-chairs. Or grab your posse and volunteer to chair an unclaimed event. You'll get lots of support along the way from FA officers and have a great time in the process.

Sixth Grade Fundraiser At the Pittsford Barnes & Noble, Friday, November 18



Help the Sixth Graders pay for their big field study and get your holiday shopping done at the same time! Attend sixth grade's exhibition night and book fair at Barnes & Noble in Pittsford 6-9 p.m. Friday, November 18. Sixth grade has a performance, crafts and activities planned as part of their exhibition night. GCCS students will also perform at Barnes & Noble that afternoon and evening, so come join the fun!

A percentage of your Barnes & Noble purchase – whether it's a cup of coffee, a game, a CD, a book or a Nook – will go to the sixth grade.

Can't make it or want to include out-of-town family members? Shop online at www.bn.com/bookfairs November 18-25, and your purchase can still count. Watch backpack mail and e-mail for more details to come.



Tracking Volunteer Hours

We're trying to do a better job tracking parent volunteer hours! Please help by recording your hours in each classroom's volunteer log. And don't forget to sign in and out in the office!

Saturday Parent Work Day

Saturday, October 29

9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

COME HELP get OUR SCHOOL in SHAPE!



PLEASE BRING Buckets and Rags IF you have them

(BABYSITTING PROVIDED)

Come Help Our New Family Association Co-Chairs and Event Organizers Get the Year Underway!

Family Association Meeting
Thursday, October 20

(please note date correction from August Currents)

Schedule Change

6th Grade Classroom

Last Chance this year for Parent Volunteer/Chaperone Training

Reminder!

Wednesday, October 26
6:30-8:30 p.m.

Eisenhart Auditorium

Chaperone and Volunteer Training are required every three years for parents wishing to volunteer in classrooms or chaperone day or overnight fieldwork.

Save the Date!

Special Family Association Program

Thurs., November 10
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.
Eisenhart Auditorium

Watch backpack mail and e-mail for details.

NEW