



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

February 2003

Volume 2 No. 3

Put to the Test

The mad frenzy of Fourth Grade testing is upon us. In many classrooms across the state, students and teachers have spent months neglecting their regular curriculum and have devoted long and tedious hours to drill and practice test preparation. They have eliminated what they consider to be “extra” experiences like fieldwork, hands-on projects, and performances to make way for more rote test training. They have held after-hours test preparation sessions. They have created “motivational” posters and held pep rallies to spur children on to peak performance. They have justified every instructional decision with “because it’s on the test.”

But not at GCCS. Instead, throughout the curriculum, our experienced Fourth Grade teachers have woven assignments that mirror the format and expectations of the exam. They have prepared children to do well on the reading and writing test by having them *read* and *write* extensively. The class undertook a “mini-expedition” in which children posed questions about the test, then investigated the style of the test, the manner in which it will be administered, the content and skills that will be addressed, and the way it will be scored. Their regular curriculum has continued throughout the fall and winter, with thoughtful instruction and additional tutoring geared toward helping children become skilled and literate, rather than simply good test-takers. More than a few parents expressed their relief and appreciation for this approach.

We don’t know what the results of the testing will be for our students. We are a new school, and this is our first group of fourth graders that will encounter the state exams. We were encouraged by the results of the Third Grade Test of New York State Standards that we administered to this class last spring. The class showed marked progress from Fall, 2001, and looked to be on track to perform well on this year’s exams. We believe that the test will yield information that will be useful to us, and we will use the results to inform our instructional decisions. This must be the function of *every* assessment – to improve student learning.

We know that there are a multitude of important outcomes that can never be assessed by a standardized test. These outcomes, such as character development, collaborative skills, research skills, and a thirst for learning, are some of the fundamentals of a good elementary education that we refuse to sacrifice. We don’t think the New York State ELA is a bad test. But we do think that bad things are done to prepare children for the test and to share the results. A single test is not an adequate measure of a school’s success, a child’s learning, or a teacher’s performance. GCCS’s approach to evaluation encompasses a broader view and a wider range of ongoing behaviors.



Regardless of the test scores for our students, we will continue to help each child move forward, and we will strive to continuously improve our program and instruction. There are no shortcuts to a good education, and we will persist in providing a well-rounded, rich learning experience for children.

John McCutcheon Returns!

Mark your calendars and join us for a wonderful evening – our second annual John McCutcheon concert! Mr. McCutcheon has graciously offered to return to Rochester to perform a benefit concert for GCCS. Proceeds will be used to add to our playground.

The concert will be held Friday, May 30, 2003 in the Eisenhart Auditorium. Tickets will be available at the end of March. Watch for more information in backpack mail.

The Family Association sure could use

your help planning this big event! If you would like to serve on the concert committee to assist with ticket sales, programs, transportation, refreshments, advertising, or other tasks, please call Maureen Milke at 271-4552 ext. 460.



John McCutcheon Concert
Friday, May 30, 2003
Eisenhart Auditorium

Family Association Directory

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Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)

Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

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

First Grade

James Carter (473-1187), Bill Howard (436-2573),
Kamaria Rivera (254-6598), Betsy Serapilio-Frank &
John Frank (654-5958)

Second Grade

Gina & Stuart Dodd (426-3356), Anne Lichtenstein
(244-7373), Holly Merrill (224-8491), Susan Proe
(224-0536), Anne Spaulding (461-5356)

Third Grade

Robin Dean (461-1438), Cheryl Marshall (671-2961),
Debbie Ortenzi (533-2428), Maggie Torres
(454-2659), Teddi Urriola (671-2961)

Fourth Grade

Mary Lavin (442-1277), Karen Schneider (288-4726),
Teresa Snell (527-0070)



Upcoming Dates To Remember



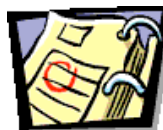
- Feb. 3: 2003-2004 Enrollment Lottery
9:00 a.m. Computer Lab
- Feb. 10: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Feb. 17: School is Closed
- Feb. 18-19: Professional Development Days
No School for Students
- Feb. 20-21: YES! Students DO have school!
- Feb. 26: Family Association Meeting
6:30 p.m. 4th Grade Classroom
- Feb. 28: Deadline for Enrollment Acceptance
for New Entrants
- Mar. 8: Saturday Work Day for Parents
- Mar. 11: Parent Conferences
11:30 a.m. Dismissal for Students
- Mar. 13: Kindergarten, 1st Grade, 2nd Grade
Exhibitions, 5 – 8 p.m. Eisenhart
Auditorium
Students Required to Attend
- Mar. 14: Intent to Return Deadline
- Mar. 17: 3rd & 4th Grade Exhibitions
5 – 8 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
Students Required to Attend
- Mar. 19: Family Association Social Event
6:00 p.m. Planetarium
- Mar. 20-21: Professional Development Days
No School for Students

City Grows Exhibitions

**Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd Grades –
Thursday, March 13, 2003, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.**

**3rd and 4th Grades –
Monday, March 17, 2003, 5:00 – 8:00 p.m.**

**Eisenhart Auditorium
Specific Times and Locations To Be Announced**



*All students are
required to attend.*

What did you do in school today?

“Oh, nothing.” If you had a nickel for every time you heard that! Regardless of the level of challenge, the amount of stimulation, and the variety of tasks your child experiences each day, if yours is a typical child, you’re bound to receive this non-answer on a regular basis.



Be assured that there is NEVER a day at GCCS during which your child does nothing. From the time they enter in the morning until they leave at dismissal, children are reading, playing, discussing, building, planning, experimenting, singing, and so on – both in the classroom and out. Unfocused moments and time-filling activities are rare indeed. Every endeavor is characterized by a sense of purpose, responsibility for learning, and drive for quality. GCCS staff continually helps children make connections between daily tasks and the long-term projects or skills children are working toward.

Perhaps trying specific questions will help open the floodgates of information for you:

- Who did you play with today? What did you play?
- Did you build anything? What materials did you use?
- Who read to you today? What did he/she read?
- What did you do on your expedition project?
- Did you have a field study? A guest speaker? What was it about?
- What did you do in music/art/P.E.?
- What did you read? What did you write in your journal?
- What did you sing?
- What was challenging today? funny? surprising? exciting? noisy? peaceful?

One parent suggest having a high-low conversation at dinner. Each family member reports the high and low point of his/her day, which leads to interesting follow-up discussion.

Parent interest and involvement in school is a key to children’s success. Regardless of the answer, keep asking! And be sure to schedule a visit to your child’s classroom if you’d like to experience first-hand the active, learning-filled day we provide.

Welcome to our newest staff member!

We were sorry to say goodbye to our 4th Grade Teaching Assistant, Jerome Johnson, who found it necessary to resign at the end of January due to family issues. Jerome’s easy-going rapport and dedication to the children will be missed.

We are fortunate to have found a wonderful person to take Jerome’s place, and she may be a familiar fact to many of you! Carol Aspenleiter has been a substitute teacher and assistant for us since the school opened. She is retired from the travel industry, and has a special interest in – and knack for – working with children. Welcome to GCCS Carol!

A gentle reminder about driving around school buses...

RMSC security staff has noted that parents regularly drive past the school buses during arrival and dismissal when the buses have their red flashers on. Please note that it is illegal to pass school buses displaying their red flashers, and it poses safety issues for our students and parents.

We also request that you do not park along the sidewalk at or near dismissal time.



Please stop behind the buses or park in one of the RMSC lots when buses are present. Thank you!

Announcing GCCS's first after-school club!

Thanks to our Family Association's Extra-curricular activities committee, a "Community Service Club" will be forming for children in all grades. Liz Cope, committee chair, will speak to each class about the opportunity to join with peers to work on an ambitious service project of their choosing.

Volunteers are needed to co-lead small groups, supervise service projects, and assist with monthly club meetings. Please call Liz Cope at 352-9733 if you are able to help – even in some small way.

The first meeting will be held Monday, February 24 from 3:00 – 4:30 p.m. at the school. Subsequent meetings will be scheduled for the 4th Monday of every month.

The idea of a service club fits well with the curriculum and design principles of the school. Help us make it a success! Watch for more information to come home in backpack mail.

GCCS staff members attend ELOB Site Seminar

In mid-January, Melissa Fredericks, Carrie Haymond, Debbie McCoy, MaryLee Miller, and Lisa O'Malley had the wonderful opportunity to attend the Denver area Site Seminar for teachers and administrators. They visited classrooms at the Odyssey School and the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning, and spoke with students and teachers about their programs. They took part in seminars with ELOB teachers, administrators, and school designers. Topics included fostering independent learning, portfolio assessment, peer critique, fieldwork, and adventure.

Debbie McCoy commented, "It was inspiring to meet such committed teachers who are working in schools that have a few years more experience in implementing the EL model. At the same time, we were gratified to see that there are so many things that we're doing well!"



Family Association news



The GCCS Family Association is going strong in 2003! Every committee is working hard for our children and their teachers. Mark your calendars for the upcoming events, get involved and have some fun!

The Communications Committee will be working to update the beautiful redesigned GCCS website with Family Association News. Please remember that it is a responsibility of this Committee to prepare all flyers that get sent out about any Family Association business, so please send what you would like to have communicated to Holly Merrill, Communications Chair, at hmerrill36@earthlink.net or call 752-3108.

Don't forget – it's NEVER too late to join a committee! EVERY parent of a child at GCCS is a member of the Family Association – this is our community and it runs on our power and creative energy!

The recurring lunch plea...

We need your help! As you know, children eat breakfast and lunch each day family-style in their classrooms. Mealtimes provide a wonderful forum for building classroom community and social skills – without the racket and pandemonium of the traditional school cafeteria.

In order to create a pleasant and efficient lunch period, we rely heavily on parent volunteers. We are striving to have **every family assist with at least one lunch period per month**. We need help from 11:45–12:30 each day (11:20-12:10 on Wednesdays).

Assisting with lunch is a great way to fulfill some or all of your 20-hour family service commitment. It allows you to get to know your child's peers in a relaxed atmosphere, and demonstrates to your child your involvement in his or her education. Your help also provides teachers with much-needed extra hands.

Please look for the sign up sheet in your child's backpack and let us know when you can join us for lunch.



Family Association upcoming meeting

The Legislative Issues Committee would like all parents to be aware of the latest development on the political front. On January 29th Governor Pataki unveiled his proposed 2003-2004 Executive Budget, which contains six million dollars in funding for the Charter Schools Stimulus Fund. This is good news for Charter Schools and a victory for all of us. However, we are anticipating great pressure from the Legislature to eliminate this funding. The Legislature has made repeated attempts to put an end to charter schools in previous years and this year will be no exception, especially since overall school aid is proposed to be reduced this year.

In an effort to inform our GCCS families about political issues surrounding charter schools, the Legislative committee has invited Bill Phillips, who is the president of the New York Charter Schools Association (NYCSA), to speak at our next February 26th Family Association Meeting. NYCSA provides management and technical assistance to charter schools, monitors legislative and regulatory activity that affects charter schools, and educates the public about charter schools. Bill will bring us up to date about the political climate in Albany, and how we can support school choices for our children and the children of our community. Please plan to attend this very important meeting.

Mark your calendars for February 26th!

GCCS teachers to present at ELOB National Conference

Each year, Expeditionary Learning hosts a national conference to provide professional development and networking opportunities for staff in ELOB schools and other interested colleagues from around the country. The conference typically features 90-minute master classes delivered by master teachers, administrators, and school designers from the 120 ELOB schools. Keynote speeches and small group discussions are also planned.

We are proud to announce that seven teachers from GCCS submitted proposals to present master classes at the national conference – and all were selected! This year's theme is "Effective Instructional Practices in the Expeditionary Learning Classroom." Our staff will share their expertise in the following areas:

Michele Brewer and Ann Looby: Literature Circles – Reading and Writing with Purpose

Stacey Cicero and Jenna Morales: Good Questions Inspire Good Projects

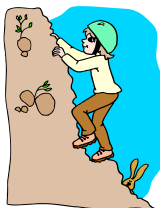
Jean Hurst and Joe Saia: Running Reading Records in the Primary Classroom

Carrie Haymond: Musical Strategies for the Expeditionary Classroom Teacher

Also attending the conference will be Lisa Wing, Debbie McCoy, Keri Kijowski, Lisa O'Malley, and Nancy Valle. The conference will take during our professional development days March 20-22.

Rock Ventures provides challenges...

Time to get those 1st through 4th Graders back up on the wall! As part of their Physical Expedition class, children in Grades 1-4 will be testing their limits on the rock wall and high ropes course on Feb. 24-25, March 17-18, and April 10-11. We need more adults to be trained to assist! Please call the school to add your name to the list of adventurous souls, and watch backpack mail for more information.



and helps us meet our goals!

The Family Association Fundraising Committee is planning a rock climbing adventure fundraiser at Rock Ventures SOON... watch your child's backpack mail for more information!!

School sparkles after Saturday parent work day

Our second Saturday Work Day was held on January 25, and was another great success! Again organized by Anne Lichtenstein (thank you Anne!), twenty-five parents tackled such tasks as washing cubbies, wiping down tables and chairs, sorting classroom libraries, creating picture files, stamping River Room books, making copies, and assembling a dollhouse.

Join us for the next Saturday Work Day on March 8 between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. It's a great way to fulfill your family's 20 hour school service obligation! Pizza will be served at noon, and child care is provided by some of the parent volunteers. For more information, please call your Room Parent (see page 3 for contact information).



Saturday Work Days for Parents 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

- March 8
- May 10

A review of school closing procedures

We've now encountered our first "snow days," and the experience warrants a review of our severe weather policies. Due to the fact that the Rochester City School District transports the majority of our students, we must close when the City School district closes. The district will not provide transportation for our students when the RCSD is closed, even if we'd like to open (we checked).

We inform the major television stations, WXXI, and WHAM when we close, but please be aware that they may not list us separately from RCSD. So just remember – if the City School District is closed, so are we!

Intent to Return Due March 14

The deadline for **INTENT TO RETURN** forms is **Friday, March 14**. All current students who plan to attend GCCS next year must return a form to school in order to hold their spaces. Forms will be sent home in the mail in late February. If you don't receive a form by March 1, please call Maureen Milke at 271-4552 ext. 460.

We have many anxious families of children at all grade levels on our waiting list. Unreserved spaces will be offered to new families. Please note that in order to be fair to all our families and applicants, we strictly observe deadlines.

Don't lose your child's space! Be sure to send your **INTENT TO RETURN** form back to school before the deadline.



And finally...

Join us for another wonderful

Family Social Event!

Wednesday, March 19, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Strasenburgh Planetarium

Watch for details in backpack mail!

