



Currents

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

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A Successful Start

The staff of the Genesee Community Charter School is delighted with the accomplishments of our inaugural year. We have gone from a construction site teeming with plaster dust and cardboard boxes to a smoothly operating, joyful and reflective place for learning.

Staff and students have embraced the vision on which GCCS was founded, and have created an environment in which that vision is realized in hundreds of small ways each day.

We look back in wonder at all we have achieved. We designed, furnished and equipped new classroom spaces. We found the most skillful and dedicated staff possible. We established procedures for all the minutia of schooling from attendance to fire drills to pencil-sharpening. We figured out how to feed 120 children breakfast and lunch each day. We firmed up our classroom management practices and discipline policies. We set the Family Association in motion. We devised our own progress reports. We learned how to teach new math, language arts, and other instructional programs. We formed productive relationships with the museum and many other community institutions. And most importantly, we took children and adults from a wide range of backgrounds and created a strong, positive school culture. While accomplishing all these things, we stayed true to the design principles and core practices of Expeditionary Learning.

Our Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound annual "Implementation Check" indicates that we have made great progress on the ELOB Benchmarks. Our School Designer, Steven Levy, and Regional Director, Katrina Abbott, visited the school, observed in classrooms, and conversed with the School Leader and staff. They collected data

about the school's implementation of the five core practices of Expeditionary Learning: Learning Expeditions, Reflection and Critique, School Culture, School Structures, and School Review.

The results demonstrate that GCCS

has made tremendous strides toward becoming an exemplary ELOB school. According to Steven and Katrina, our report was better than 80% of the 120 existing ELOB schools, and was the best first-year report ever written. Greg Farrell, President of ELOB, visited the school in May, and confirmed this finding.

The day after his visit, he called and said he was "still glowing."

There are still, of course, many things to work on. We want to improve our communication with families, include more service and adventure in expeditions, align our expedition plans more closely with standards and assessment, implement an ambitious student portfolio process, and deepen the ways in which we incorporate ELOB's ten design principles in our daily practices. Each of these emphases will help us to ensure that our students are challenged to reach beyond their comfort zones, and exceed our social and academic expectations.

We couldn't have launched GCCS so successfully without the incredible support of parents, the RMSC, our ELOB School Designer, and the Rochester community. We extend our sincerest thanks to the many responsive people who cared for our children and helped us find answers to our never-ending questions.

Now on to Year 2! We look forward to taking the next steps toward our vision, and are honored that you have joined us in this worthy endeavor.

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A Dress Code Reminder

The weather has finally warmed up, and children are able to don their summer gear. Please ensure that children are appropriately dressed for school. We expect that all shirts have sleeves, and we ask that children refrain from wearing cut-off shorts. We also expect that t-shirts have no offensive language or graphics on them. Thank you!

Waiting Games

You're in a restaurant, they're out of crayons, and the meal is taking forever. What to do? Try out these language games:

Animal Criss-Cross:

Help your children learn to break words apart by playing "What do you get when you cross..." What do you get when you cross a giraffe and a hippopotamus? A hipporaffe! Try it another way – a giropotamus! What do you get when you cross a polar bear with a penguin? A polarguin! Try it another way – a penglar bear! A rattle snake and a kangaroo? A zebra and an antelope? Have fun trying out lots of different animal combinations.

Three Clues:

See if your child can solve a riddle with three simple clues. Choose any object or person, provide three identifying details, and let them puzzle it over. "I'm thinking of something that has four legs, a flat top, and no arms. What is it? (A table)." "I'm thinking of something that is round like a donut, black, and made of rubber. What is it? (A tire)." Clues can be more obscure to stretch the minds of older children. "I'm thinking of something that rolls, stretches, and twists. What is it?" "I'm thinking of something that has holes, handles, and feet. What is it?" You don't even need to know the answer before you pose the

Before You Buy Next Year's Backpack...

Might you consider NOT purchasing a backpack with wheels? We have found that these backpacks pose several problems. They often don't fit in cubbies. Children either have to lift them overhead to store them on top of the cubbies, or leave them blocking the hallway. Classmates frequently step on and trip over the straps that trail on the floor behind the backpacks. We've had regular unfriendly exchanges as one classmate rams a wheeled backpack into the shins of another. As they clunk the backpacks up and down the stairways, children catch the wheeled backpacks on the edges of the steps, sometimes causing them to lose their grip and send the backpack bouncing down the stairs into the classmate behind.

Please help us ensure our children's safety by sticking with the old-fashioned over-the-shoulders kind!

Thank You Parents!

GCCS staff members wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to our students' devoted parents. Thanks to you, we have been able to accomplish some of the most ambitious elements of our program: field studies, in-depth project work, family-style food service, evening exhibitions, narrative progress reports, fund-raising, and family social events. You have also been tremendously responsive to our phone calls and requests for conferences. We are so grateful for your ongoing support and your tireless and gracious assistance.

Children who do best in school have committed, involved parents. Research on parent involvement indicates this, and it has been clearly demonstrated at GCCS this year. Remember to make time in your schedule next year to attend school events, meet with your child's teacher, and volunteer in the classroom. Your children's social and academic progress will surely reflect your dedication to their education.



Family Association Fundraisers

The efforts of the Family Association's fundraising were quite

Due to the support of the GCCS community and the unrelenting hard work of Barb and Tom Klein, T-shirt Chairs. Thank you all! Through the incredible leadership of Tom Slothower and Mary Lavin, our Playground fundraising concert with John McCutcheon raised over \$5000. Our 50/50 raffles, logo merchandise sales, vendor proceeds and box tops for education program have raised about \$1,100, which will go into the Family Association's general fund to support its activities. Our Campbell's Labels for Education program brought in a total of 1500 labels with which we are getting four playground balls and a container to collect labels next year. We are about \$9,000 short of Tops receipts to meet the \$20,000 minimum to redeem them for cash.

Please remember to save your Box Tops for Education, Tops Receipts, and Campbell's Labels for Education items over the summer so that we can have a full year of collection toward next year's goals. At boxtops4education.com, you can also register with the Box Tops Marketplace (we're listed as "Genesee Cmty Charter School") and make purchases with some proceeds going to our school - they have an incredible selection of eligible shops! And, last but not least, you can designate Genesee Community Charter School as the recipient of your Target purchase proceeds when you shop there with your Target card or Target VISA - check out www.target.com to register.

Thanks again for your support!

With Gratitude to a Stellar Staff

Take a large measure of talent, mix in a heap of stamina, add a lot of dedication, and season it liberally with caring and teamwork, and what do you get? The staff of the Genesee Community Charter School! Only the staff of GCCS could achieve the kind of progress and success we experienced this year. The teachers, teaching assistants, and clerical staff have regularly gone beyond the call of duty in order to provide a first-class education for our students. Their commitment to our vision and philosophy are evident in their daily planning and interactions with children, as well as in their long-range goals for GCCS's future.

Thanks to all of you for creating a wonderful place to learn, work, and grow!

Parent represents GCCS at State Events

Anne Lichtenstein, parent of a 1st grader, has worked hard to connect GCCS families and staff with the political landscape of charter schools in New York State. We are grateful that she represented GCCS at the Western New York Charter Schools Conference and at the charter schools Lobby Day in Albany.

The Charter Schools Act of 1998 was one of the most significant educational reforms to pass in New York in decades. However, a number of legislators have derided charter schools as ineffective, and blamed charter schools for the difficulties of traditional public education. Legislators have introduced numerous bills that would limit and harm charter schools.

Parents are urged to contact their state representatives to express support for charter schools and strong opposition to this potentially damaging legislation. It is critical for parents to advocate for charter schools and for the options they provide families within the public school arena.

The Family Association will add a Legislative Issues Committee in the Fall to address political issues and keep us informed. If you would like more information or to serve on the committee, please call Anne Lichtenstein at 244-7373.

Forms Due August 9th



Watch your mailbox for a new set of permission and information forms for 2002-2003. We need updated permission slips, emergency numbers, family service commitments, parent support forms prior to the start of school next year. In addition, all Kindergarteners, 1st Graders, 3rd Graders and 4th Graders need physical examination forms. Please return all completed forms by Friday, August 9th. Thank you!

Third Graders Discover Gold... And More

On a truly glorious adventure, the 3rd graders and their chaperones discovered the headwaters of the Genesee River in Gold, PA. This 3-day field study was part of the 3rd grade expedition on settlement along the Genesee. Students collected water samples, took photographs, tested water clarity and movement, interviewed local historians, sketched, and took notes during this, the centerpiece field study, of their three-month book project. They made their way north along the Genesee River, spending two nights in cabins at Letchworth Park. Highlights of the trip included

- ✓ Straddling the river at its beginning
- ✓ Watching Mr. Morales don hip waders and walk across the river at each stop to measure its width
- ✓ Measuring the rate of flow with an apple, a string, and a stopwatch
- ✓ Talking with the Alleghany County Historian in Wellsville
- ✓ Seeing a water snake in Belmont
- ✓ Singing around the campfire with Ms. Haymond
- ✓ Creating model rivers in the sand on the shores of the Genesee in Fillmore
- ✓ Impressing the museum docent with thoughtful questions at the Letchworth History Museum

- ✓ Spotting tributaries with binoculars
- ✓ Oohing and ahing about the colors of stone in the gorge at Letchworth
- ✓ Having an art lesson overlooking the gorge in Letchworth with Ms. Valle
- ✓ Creating an art show in Cabin A-7
- ✓ Playing laser tag with flashlights
- ✓ Drinking hot chocolate and eating s'mores around the campfire
- ✓ Spotting deer, woodchucks, and chipmunks

The purpose of the trip was to gather information for a text students are writing about the Genesee River for fourth graders in Long Island. The book will be printed by Xerox Corporation as a means of testing one of their new book printing/binding machines.

"It has taken the collaboration of so many people to make this project possible," Livingston County Historian, the Genesee Historian, and of course, the parents!" "The museum's librarian, geologist, and water specialist were always available to answer children's questions about erosion, settlement, anything!" added 3rd Grade teacher Stacey Cohen, "And the parents really pitched in to help students edit their writing. We would never have finished without them!"

Come see the finished product and meet the authors at their book-signing ceremony, June 25 at 6:30 p.m. in the Eisenhart Auditorium.



