



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

October 2002

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What a Wonderful Start!

We have had a fabulous first month of school! Our staff and classrooms were organized and prepared, and our students arrived the very first day ready to pick up where they left off in the spring. Children clearly know our routines and expectations, and it has been an incredibly smooth transition to a new year. Because we have such consistent expectations, instructional programs, and approaches across grade levels, even the classes with different teachers this year have been able to settle in and get right to work with very little effort.

Expeditions are well underway. It is evident that children learned a great deal last year; they are bringing to bear their knowledge of the Genesee Valley and their skills in asking questions, conducting research, and working in a crew. It is positively delightful to walk through our halls and observe children in every classroom engaged in such thoughtful discussion, focused reading and writing, and collaborative projects.

The year ahead is full of promise. We look forward to sharing children's accomplishments with you each step of the way.



Sign In Please

Please sign in when you come to school to visit, to assist in classrooms, or to chaperone on field studies. There is a white notebook on Maureen's desk in the Main Office. We would appreciate it if you would sign in whenever you spend time at school (no need to sign in for Community Circle, however). Thank you!

Family Association Kicks Off an Eventful Year

We had more than 90 participants at our first meeting on September 18! Parents set three priorities for the year:



1. Build community among families and staff
2. Advocate for the school in political arenas
3. Support the educational mission of the school

The Family Association is led by the following officers:

Co Chairs: Dan DeMarle (1st) – 328-5982;

Stuart Dodd (K, 2nd) – 726-5953;

Dennis Peel (4th) – 223-4530

Secretary: Carol Bonnewell (2nd) – 647-1932

Treasurer: Julie Bernunzio (K) – 256-0722

This year's activities will include guest speakers, classroom teacher updates, social gatherings, and business meetings. Join us for our first social event on Wednesday, October 16. Fliers will come home in backpack mail to give you the details.

Much of the Family Association work will be conducted by committees. After school clubs, student-published books, family social events fund-raising, and more will be organized by committee members. See page 5 for committee chairs' names and phone numbers; call and join a committee today!

Family Social Event

Wednesday, October 16, 2002

6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Eisenhart Auditorium

From RMSC President Kate Bennett

In 1968 Monroe County created a *unique partnership* with the RMSC. This arrangement guaranteed funding to care for 1.2 million objects held in trust for the people of Monroe County, maintain the buildings and grounds on behalf of Monroe County, and provide educational services for the people of Monroe County.

Since then we have served much and dreamed of doing more. The potential loss of our long-standing foundation of partnership with the County jeopardizes our ability to serve. Yet, we don't anticipate that the resulting cuts in service will affect the Genesee Community Charter School's day-to-day operations. The partnership between the RMSC and the Genesee Community Charter School is solid and based on principles that make us great lifetime partners. The depth of service however will undoubtedly be affected in the areas that your children and their teachers depend on and have grown to love - the work with the Planetarium Star Show staff, our curators for the collections, and the Cumming Nature Center.

We need your help. If any funds are to be restored it will be through the action of our friends writing to their County Legislators.

Please contact your County Legislator and the County Executive's office if you feel the educational services we offer are important to you and your family. Information is also available on our website, www.rmsc.org, at our Welcome Centers on campus, or by phone at (585) 271-4552 x342.

Your letters demonstrate to the County government that voters do not want to lose the capacities of a strong museum and science center, especially one that partners well to help the community fulfill its dreams.

Thank you for your help.

Kate Bennett,
RMSC President



Problems with the bus?

If you have a question or concern about your child's bus transportation, please call the transportation office at 336-4000. The transportation folks will be able to help you with scheduling, routes, pick-up and drop off locations, and other issues.

**RCSD Transportation Office
336-4000**

Upcoming Dates To Remember



- Oct. 4: Picture Day
- Oct. 7: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Oct. 11: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Oct. 14: Columbus Day, School is Closed
- Oct. 16: Family Association Social Event
6:00 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
- Oct. 19: Saturday Work Day for Parents
- Oct. 29: Make-up Picture Day
- Nov. 4: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Nov. 11: Professional Development Day
No School for Students
- Nov. 20: Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd Grade
Exhibitions; students required to attend
- Nov. 25-26: Professional Development Days
No School for Students
- Nov. 27-29: Thanksgiving Recess
School is Closed
- Dec. 5: 4th Grade Exhibition
Students required to attend
- Dec. 9: Board of Trustees Meeting
5:30 p.m. Cunningham House
- Dec. 12: Parent Conferences
11:30 a.m. dismissal



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.

Professional Development: Time for teachers to learn new strategies, review student progress, and critique each other’s plans.

Progress Report: Our term for “report card.” We use a narrative format and don’t assign letter grades.

So What Does the Staff Do on Wednesday Afternoons?

It may not be easy for you to arrange your Wednesday schedule and child care to accommodate a 1:00 dismissal time each week. Is it worth it?

The staff answers with a resounding YES! In more traditional schools, teachers work in virtual isolation, with very little opportunity to share ideas, reflect together, and provide each other with suggestions. This just wouldn’t work at GCCS!

The time set aside for professional development has been critical to our ability to implement our ambitious and unique instructional program. We have embraced our roles as life-long learners, and have incorporated ELOB practices of critique and revision in all of our professional development efforts. The time we spend sharpening our skills, deepening our understandings, and improving our plans has a direct impact on the quality of education your child receives.

Expedition planning is a major focus of our professional development. We work together to design exemplary expeditions. We critique one another’s expedition plans prior to and in the middle of each expedition.

We use a Looking at Student Work protocol 2-times per month. During LASW sessions, teachers review samples of student work, discuss lessons, and give each other feedback about the quality of instruction and student performance.

We have strengthened our understanding of our math, language arts, classroom management, and assessment programs. We regularly review the foundations of these programs and discuss our implementation school-wide. We also work with content-area experts to learn more about local history, science, technology, the museum’s collections, and other topics.

One of the most important benefits of our professional development time is the fact that it helps keep the whole staff moving in the same direction. We have built a very strong school culture already at GCCS, and the opportunities we have to learn, reflect, and plan together keep that culture in full bloom!



GCCS Students Featured in Professional Development Video



Our fourth graders played a starring role in a film that's sure to reach a wide audience. Led by our ELOB School Designer, Steven Levy, the fourth grade took part in a new professional development strategy called the "teaching and learning lab." Four teachers observed Mr. Levy teach a lesson. Throughout the session, the teachers and Mr. Levy stopped the lesson to ask each other questions or give feedback about how the lesson was going. The purpose of this model of professional development is to help teachers improve their teaching by providing them feedback during the course of the lesson.

The video is being produced by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). ASCD is a huge international professional organization which specializes in helping teachers and administrators improve their skills and knowledge. ASCD publishes the prominent journal *Educational Leadership* along with a wide variety of educational books for educators. The association also produces videotapes for training educators in new instructional strategies and teacher education methods.

The folks from ASCD were extremely impressed by the quality of teaching and learning they saw at GCCS. They commented that both students and teachers were incredibly thoughtful and caring about their work. They pointed out that they visit schools around the country, and that GCCS is one of the most positive and productive schools they've seen.

The edited video will be 15 minutes long and will be released in January. We'll schedule a showing for parents as soon as we receive a copy.

Parents Pitch In During Saturday Work Days

Family involvement is an important part of helping children to do well in school. One way to communicate to children that you care about their education is to perform service for the school. This year, we have a new opportunity for families to fulfill their 20 hour service commitment. The Room Parent Volunteer Coordinators have scheduled Saturday Work Days throughout the year. Staff members will identify tasks they would love to have you perform – for example, cleaning, organizing, and costume-making. Come to school between 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on the designated Saturdays, and we'll put you to work! Pizza will be served at noon. This is a great way to meet other parents and help us maintain our beautiful learning environment. For more information, please call your Room Parent (see page 5 for contact information). Thanks in advance for your help!

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

- October 19
- December 7
- January 25
- March 8
- May 10



Defibrillator on Board

In accordance with a new NYS regulation, GCCS has purchased a defibrillator. 8-10 staff members will receive training in its use and in CPR. We'll be well-equipped and prepared in the unlikely event that an adult or older child has a health emergency.



GCCS Nurtures Future Teachers

GCCS is pleased to have been asked to host student teachers from Nazareth College and other area universities. This fall, we have student teachers in kindergarten, 1st Grade, and 2nd Grade. Our staff works closely with these new professionals and their college supervisors to provide them with the very best possible model of fine teaching.

Save These Important Exhibition Dates

At the conclusion of each Learning Expedition, classes present their accomplishments through writing, drama, music, art, dance, and oral presentations. **All students are required to attend the evening exhibition for their class.** Exhibitions are a team effort in every class, and teachers evaluate student learning through student demonstrations. So, it is critical that all our students attend.

The dates for the Village to City Exhibitions are as follows:

Wednesday, November 20, 5-8 p.m. –
Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd Grades

Thursday, December 5, 6:00 p.m. – 4th Grade

More information about times and locations will be sent home later this month.

Introducing Your Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators!

Each classroom at GCCS has several parents who have come forward to help coordinate family volunteers. We need volunteers on a regular basis to assist with lunch service, classroom projects, field studies, newsletters, and other tasks. Many thanks for the parents who have offered to lead the way in each classroom:

Kindergarten: Gina Dodd (426-3356), Annette Ramo (244-1378), Yvonne Villareale (473-9318)

First Grade: James Carter (473-1187), Bill Howard (436-2573), Kamaria Rivera (254-659), 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 Marsil (671-2961), Debbie Ortenzi (482-7642), Maggie Torres (454-2659), Teddi Urriola (671-2961)

Fourth Grade: Mary Lavin (442-1277), Karen Schnei (288-4726), Teresa Snell (527-0070)

Please feel free to call your Room Parent to share your ideas or to volunteer your time and services.

Introducing Family Association Committee Chairs!

Family Social Activities

Erin Kohler – 254-3815

School Extra-curricular Activities

Liz Cope – 352-9733

Babysitting & Transportation

Kit Miller – 244-4189 & Betsy Serapilio-Frank – 654-5958

Student Book Publishing

Marcy Berger – 271-3549

Food Service

Peter Keenan – 271-7406

Fund-Raising

Barb & Tom Klein – 315-986-8887

Communications

Holly Merrill – 224-8491

Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein – 244-7373

Kid Language for Our ELOB Design Principles

During a visit to an Expeditionary Learning school in Baltimore last spring, we saw a terrific example of the Design Principles defined in clear language for children. Perhaps these simple phrases will help you too:

Primacy of Self Discovery: “I am here to discover what I can do.”

Intimacy & Caring: “I care for others; others care for me.”

The Natural World: “Nature is our teacher.”

Solitude & Reflection: “I need time to be with myself.”

Diversity & Inclusivity: “Our differences make us stronger.”

Collaboration & Competition: “We work together as friends; I compete with myself.”

Responsibility for Learning: “I am responsible for my learning, and I help others learn.”

The Having of Wonderful Ideas: “I have wonderful ideas.”

Service & Compassion: “We do excellent things for others.”

Success & Failure: “Success is sweet, but failure is good food.”



Check Out Our New Website!

Many thanks to Javier Morales, with the assistance of his wife, 2nd Grade teacher Jenna Morales, for reconstructing our website. They have made the website easy to navigate and maintain. There are sections for curriculum and program information, the Family Association, a school calendar, the Board of Trustees, and an archive of previous expeditions. Each classroom has its own section with staff bios, expedition descriptions, and a calendar of events. There are photos galore featuring our children and staff in action.

We still have some holes to fill, but we think you will enjoy looking at our revised and updated content. Eventually, we'll have links to Powerpoint presentations, music clips, samples of student work, and galleries of photos. Let us know what you think!

New GCCS Website:

www.GCCSchool.org

4th Graders Perform Service at Regional History Conference

Our 4th Graders have turned their expedition on "Freedom" into a real community service project. GCCS received a call from our regional archivist requesting that we have students role play historical figures for an audience of about 75 conference participants. The purpose is to demonstrate how children can use historical documents in order to learn about the past. Our 4th grade sprang into action! About 15 students volunteered to take on this extra research. They chose to investigate local people from the 1800's who had a role in the quest for freedom. On October 9th, students will perform as their characters at the Documentary Heritage Program's conference. Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Austin Steward, Harriet Tubman, and other lesser known figures will offer their interpretations of visual images related to the theme of "Freedom."

GCCS Expeditions Hum Along

The "Village to City" expeditions are in full swing in every classroom. Students are engaged in research and projects about a variety of topics, including the Erie Canal, simple machines, jobs in early Rochester, names, the Underground Railroad, and women's rights. Students have visited the New York Museum of Transportation, Erie Canal Village in Rome, Susan B. Anthony House, High Falls, Seneca Park Zoo, the RMSC (of course!), and many other sites. The experts they have heard from include the City Historian, RMSC's physical scientist, RMSC's research librarian, a transportation historian, and Dr. David Anderson. They have read maps, autobiographies, diaries, non-fiction books, and historical fiction novels. In addition to journal and essay writing, they have taken notes, formulated questions, written letters, researched on the internet and composed poetry. All this activity will culminate in the exhibitions in November and December. Stay tuned!

How Has Our Communication Been?

One of our major focus areas this year is communication with parents. We are striving to communicate more clearly and frequently with you about our program, school events, and children's progress. Please let us know how we're doing. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please e-mail them to Lisa Wing at Lwing@GCCSchool.org.



