



Currents

The Bi-monthly Newsletter of the Genesee Community Charter School

June 2006

Volume 5 No. 6

Stretching Our School, Stretching Our Students

GCCS has created many exemplary expeditions and our staff has a wide range of effective teaching practices. Our students perform well on teacher-created and standardized measures of performance, our return rate for students is excellent, and our parent satisfaction is high. At this point in the evolution of the school, it would be tempting to take a deep breath and simply go about sustaining what we have created. However, we know our students, parents, and staff deserve continuous attention to ever-higher standards of quality, deeper and more substantive learning experiences, and more knowledgeable and skillful teaching.

We have made many strides toward continued growth this year. We have pushed ourselves to closely examine our planning and implementation of expeditions, and we have pushed our students to greater heights of achievement.

Our sixth grade year-long expedition is one example. Our sixth graders took on the challenge of examining the merits of the Grasso-Zimmer plan to re-water the old Erie Canal bed in downtown Rochester. They researched the history and development of canals over time and investigated similar waterway development projects in other cities. They prepared and delivered a presentation to Mayor Duffy and the community, then received glowing feedback about their accomplishments and professionalism. We've experienced a flurry of media attention in the past week, in part because it is such a curiosity that sixth graders would (and *could*) assume such a vital role in their community.

We should settle for nothing less. Our students are capable of being thoughtful, skillful, knowledgeable, and active community members at all developmental levels. They thrive when presented with meaty, compelling material and worthwhile projects. It is our challenge to continue to find ways to design expeditions that make the most of children's burgeoning intellects while preparing them with the academic and social skills they need. We also want students to *experience* the history and science they are learning, not just to have a passing awareness of it. Another

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All Staff Returning Next Year!

We are pleased to announce that all of our current staff members will be returning to GCCS in the fall. Teams will remain the same also: Kindergarten – Becki Mason, Debbie McCoy, Christy Khiosida; First Grade – Melissa Fredericks, Keri Gonzalez, Sarah David; Second Grade – Melissa Conklin, Chris Dolgos, Maggie Torres; Third Grade – Tracie Fishman, Jean Hurst, Elizabeth Emerick; Fourth Grade – Mary Kay Bellwood, Spero Michailidis, Michelle Ericson; Fifth Grade – Stacey Cicero, Dan Walpole, Carol Aspenleiter; and Sixth Grade – Kate Daniels, Shannon Stoll, Carol Aspenleiter. Our Arts teachers are returning as well – Carrie Haymond, Sarah Morell, and Nancy Valle.

A stable staff allows us to build upon previous professional development and move forward on our school's focus areas. We can also continue to nurture our long-term relationships with students and families.

We look forward to working together again next year!



Family Association Directory

Board of Trustees Representatives

John Bernuzio (256-0722), Jemeul Johnson (719-8610),
Betsy Serapilio-Frank (654-5958)

Officers

Co-Chairs: Jim Carter (473-1187), Greg Cutt (339-9940),
Lorraine Schild (244-1161)

Secretary: Alice Carli (527-9632)

Treasurer: Julie Schnepf (256-0722)

Family Association Committee Chairs

Family Social Activities

John Quitter (787-0332)

Babysitting & Transportation

Mary Carol Taylor (458-9809)

Fund-Raising

Allison McGrath (482-0052)

Legislative Issues

Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373)

Outreach

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

Classroom Parent Volunteer Coordinators

Kindergarten

Denise Anderson (244-8202), Laura Brewer (241-3034),
Jennifer San Filippo (442-5420)

First Grade

Portia Chiarella (44-7048), Liz Conheady (44207048), Kate
Kressman-Kehoe (442-6942), John David Morgan (461-
4471), David & Mary Carol Taylor (458-9809), Yvonne
Villareale (473-9318), Amy Wulforst (654-5681)

Second Grade

Marcy Berger (271-3549), Blanche Fox (288-9313), Sekile
Nzinga-Johnson (328-9614), Karen Schneider (288-9313),
Margaret Velocci (647-0337), Nancy Weinstein (865-7714),
Eileen Wrona (288-3273)

Third Grade

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

Fourth Grade

Skip Bruzda (473-9736), Joanne DeMarle (328-5982),
Jeanne Eckl (377-8957), Kathryn Goldfeder (381-5083),
Kathy Grove (328-2621)

Fifth Grade

Teresa Gerchman (458-1845), Faye Henri (244-1831), Sue
Lederer (473-3929), Anne Lichtenstein (244-7373), Anne
Spaulding (256-1444)

Sixth Grade

Alicia Ainsworth (262-5482), Cheryl Marshall (671-2961)



Upcoming Dates To Remember



- June 15: Exhibition Night Grade 5
June 16: Exhibition Night Grade 4
June 17: Family Association Picnic
1-5 p.m. Camp Arrowhead
June 19: Exhibition Night Grades K, 1
June 20: 6th Grade Passage Reception
6:00 p.m. Eisenhart Auditorium
Tickets Required
June 21: Last Day of School for Students
11:00 a.m. Passage Ceremony
Tickets Required
June 22-23: Professional Development Days
June 26: School is Closed
Aug. 24: Family Open House 6-8 p.m.
Family Association Service Fair
6-8 p.m.
Aug. 30: First Day of School Grades 1-6
1:00 Dismissal
Aug. 31: 1:00 Dismissal
Sept. 1: 1:00 Dismissal
Sept. 4: Labor Day
School is Closed
Sept. 5: Half Day for Kindergarten
Sept. 6: First Full Day for Kindergarten
Sept. 19: Welcome Reception for New
Parents 6-8 p.m.

Indians/Explorers/Settlers

Exhibitions

Tuesday, June 13
Grades 2, 3

Thursday, June 15
Grade 5

Friday, June 16
Grade 4

Monday, June 19
Grades K, 1



Specific Times and Locations
To Be Announced

*All students are
required to attend.*

Stretching Our School & Students

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example of a stretch for us this year was the first and third grade settler camping simulations. In order to have children truly understand the lives of the Genesee Valley settlers, children participated in a camping experience filled with the same types of chores and recreational activities that would have characterized the settlers' day. They re-enacted the journey from Connecticut by loading all their gear on wagons and hiking a mile into the woods. There they constructed a bridge, built a working mill, planted crops, cooked over a fire, hauled water, created games, and held a settler dance. The experience was layered with readings and reflection-writing.

Kindergarteners learning opera, second graders comparing landscape paintings with classical music, and fifth graders learning the Minuet are examples of our teachers and students extending themselves in the arts as well.

We have evaluated our progress toward our 2005-2006 focus areas, and have begun a discussion about what will be the focus of our professional development efforts next year.

GCCS Connects with Springfield Schools

Springfield, Massachusetts is home to several Expeditionary Learning Schools; several of their staff members have attended our Site Seminars in the past two years. Beal Elementary School in Springfield has contracted with GCCS to provide two days of professional development training for their staff members. Mary Kay Bellwood, Melissa Fredericks, Keri Gonzalez, Spero Michailidis, Lisa O'Malley, Dan Walpole, and Lisa Wing will travel to Springfield in late June. Our work will focus on expedition planning – choosing compelling topics, defining guiding questions and learning targets, designing final products and product descriptors, and planning the flow of expedition activities.

We hope that this is just the beginning of long and fruitful partnership with our colleagues in Springfield.

Based on our Parent Satisfaction Surveys and feedback from our Expeditionary Learning School Designer, we have determined that we will closely examine our assessment, feedback, and progress reporting mechanisms during the 2006-2007 school year. We want to continue our emphasis on providing clear, targeted feedback to students, and we will develop strategies for helping children more effectively incorporate feedback into successive drafts of their work. We want to design a more seamless system of evaluating and documenting student learning and sharing student progress with parents. We plan to create a new system for the portfolio that puts students at the center of ownership and accountability for their learning. We also want to implement student-led conferences school-wide so that students are more directly involved with communicating their progress to parents.

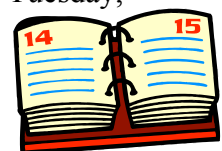
Lots of growth still to happen! Look for details in next year's six issues of *Currents*.



Please Note Changes in 2006-2007 Calendar

We found a couple goofs and made a change in next year's calendar. Please discard your old copy and replace it with the one inserted into this issue of *Currents*.

Of special note are the date changes for April break and our October Expeditionary Learning Demonstration Site Seminar. This annual event will be held Monday-Wednesday October 23-25. Students will have no school on Tuesday, October 24 so that our staff may work with visiting educators.



Upcoming Family Association Events! Mark Your Calendars!

- August 24: **Family Association Service Fair** (During Family Open House) – Learn about committees and other parent involvement opportunities at GCCS
- September 19 (tentative) – **Welcome Reception for New Parents**

Lots more details to follow! Volunteers needed!



Staff Summer Plans

Many of our staff members use the month of July to attend professional learning institutes hosted by Expeditionary Learning and other organizations. This summer will also find our teachers honing their knowledge and skills as they travel to sites around the world.

With grants from the Fund for Teachers, Melissa Conklin will study radio astronomy in Australia. Chris Dolgos will travel to Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania and Cape May, New Jersey to study raptor migration patterns. Keri Gonzalez is heading off to Montana to dig dinosaur fossils with a team of paleontologists. Shannon Stoll is doing a whirlwind tour of the canals of Europe.

Mary Kay Bellwood, Stacey Cicero, Melissa Fredericks, Spero Michailidis, and Dan Walpole will attend Expeditionary Learning Writing Institutes. Dan Walpole will attend the Expeditionary Learning Assessment Institute. Carrie Haymond will complete Level III Orff Certification in San Francisco. Debbie McCoy will help facilitate the Expeditionary Learning Primary Institute.

These teachers will bring their new skills, knowledge, and passions back to work with them in August. They look forward to sharing with colleagues and students!

A Word to the Wise About Backpacks



This is our annual appeal for families to consider during their back-to-school shopping: Please select regular, old fashioned, wheel-less backpacks for your children. We have found that wheeled backpacks pose several safety and storage problems, and we are trying to eliminate these backpacks from use at GCCS.

We would also appreciate if you would select a backpack that is more modest in size. Some backpacks resemble overnight luggage more than they do book bags! A smaller backpack is more than adequate for your child to carry necessary items to and from school.

Back-to-School Supply List

We would greatly appreciate it if each student could donate the following items to his/her classroom community next year:

- ✓ 2 boxes of Puffs or Kleenex
- ✓ 2 bottles of Softsoap (pump kind)
- ✓ 1 box sandwich-sized Hefty one-zip bags
- ✓ 1 box gallon-sized Hefty one-zip bags
- ✓ 3 large packages graham crackers, animal crackers, goldfish crackers, or pretzels (teachers will request additional snacks throughout the year as the need arises)
- ✓ 1 dozen No. 2 pencils
- ✓ 1 box Dixie cups
- ✓ 3 glue sticks



All donations are voluntary. Thank you so much for your generosity!