

# Four Rivers Currents

September/ October 2018

## From the Principal's Desk...

### THE BIG PICTURE: NEXT CHARTER/POLITICS/ACCOUNTABILITY

We fill the day to day of school with lessons, learning experiences, and other concrete activities. There is a larger context, however, which can affect our day to day. While it is still somewhat early in the year, I'd like to share a few big picture items that affect this year ahead and beyond. Follow any links provided if you really want dig into the details.

Last year, the school successfully applied for and received the renewal of its charter, allowing the school to continue operations from 2018-2023. In a brief ceremony October 19, I received the actual piece of paper for our charter from Deputy Commissioner, Jeff Wulfson, and state Secretary of Education, James Peyser. The charter embodies the school's commitment to meet obligations of all charter schools in the commonwealth, plus any key design elements that define this school's particular mission.



The school's successful renewal is best captured in the department's [SUMMARY OF REVIEW](#) which lists its findings and evidence. A team in the charter school of-fice examined all aspects of the school's operations, from school culture to finance to instructional practices to the functioning of our board. This summary and our renewal affirm that the school has met its primary obligations as a charter school: academic success, organizational viability, and faithfulness to our charter.

With our charter renewed, we move next into the first year of a new state accountability system. From No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, the new federal education mandates live under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The new law gives states more flexibility, as long as it has some system in place for holding schools accountable and ensuring that the worst performing schools receive intervention and support. Massachusetts will continue to use MCAS results for achievement and growth, as well as data on attendance, graduation, and students' access to advanced coursework. This last component is an issue for us. Here are slides describing the [NEXT-GENERATION ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM](#) with a few more details.

These changes take place in a political environment for charter schools that was significantly reshaped by the failed Ballot Measure #2, which sought to expand the number of charter schools in the Commonwealth. The Massachusetts Charter Public School Association represents our interests in the state legislature and helps our schools develop effective communications and public relations. As public opinion about charters is now split right down the middle and with little appetite for expansion, what is our message? We continue to argue that charter schools deserve adequate funding, but we should advocate that all public schools in the Commonwealth deserve adequate and improved funding. More on this ahead.

Closer to home, our Trustees are in the process of identifying its priorities for this next charter term. They

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## Grade 7 News

### DELVING INTO THE PAST—Ms. Dunnington & Ms. Locke

To kick off our new expedition, *Pieces of the Past*, students hiked Mount Sugarloaf to get a good view of the natural and human features of our Valley. At the top of Sugarloaf, we were joined by Judy Dow, an Abenaki educator, storyteller, and artist, who told us the story of the Beaver Tail Hill People. What did that story have to do with the mountain we were on? “We’re standing on top of the beaver,” students exclaimed!



### BEING OF SERVICE

At the other end of the week, 7th graders took part in the Green River Clean up as both a service project and an exercise in archaeology. After cleaning up several local creeks students returned to the classroom to consider the question WHAT STORY DOES TRASH TELL?



## Grade 8 News

### SCIENCE—*Mr. Guillaume*

It was great to see so many parents at the 8th grade Back-to-School Night. You likely noticed the boxes by the windows. These are model sustainable houses ; students have finished construction and we are now running the first test to measure the effectiveness of the houses. Currently, we are seeing a range of energy usage from less than 1.0 kilowatt hours to as high as 4.0 kilowatt hours. This energy has been used to keep the model house at 90 degrees Fahrenheit for one week. When we finish our Barriletes expedition (see below) students will return to this project and evaluate data, redesign their houses and see if they are able to create a quality, energy efficient Sustainable House.

Eighth grade has started our annual Barriletes expedition. Barriletes are kites traditionally used during All Saints Day celebrations in Guatemala and the 8th grade is creating their own versions of these kites as a way to make connections between Spanish, math, humanities and science. Specifically in science, we are extending our understanding of particle motion to look at how the actions of trillions of tiny particles of air allow for large constructions of sticks and tissue paper to fly.



Students are also following the Engineering Design process to create kite tails that will help their kites fly. By creating multiple prototypes, collecting and evaluating the data, then redesigning and re-flying the kites, students use the iterative design process to ensure their kites are sky-worthy!

## DIVISION 2 NEWS

### BEGINNINGS ~ Ms. Hobbs

The 9th grade kicked off the year with a fabulous orientation with 2 major learning targets: to build a compassionate, cozy community and to learn the guiding questions and build some background knowledge for their first expedition: **Food and Farming**. First students collaborated in crew to complete a version of CHOPPED. Each crew was given a bag of food items (\$20 worth) from either Big Y, Circle K snack store or Greenfields Market. They then worked together to make dishes from food in the bag. A follow up reflection included considering questions like: Who has access to what kinds of foods? What did you notice about how your ingredients were packaged? Do we have choices about our food?

Orientation day 2 brought us to Berkshire East's low ropes and the Mountain Coaster: challenge by choice! Orientation day 3 began with gleaning at Harlow's farm in Putney, Vermont. Led by Emily Falta, students gleaned over 1000 pounds of carrots which will go to feed people both at the Food Bank and through Harlow's Farm. In pairs, students discussed the following prompts: Do you believe that technology is the answer to feeding our growing population? Have you ever been to a farmer's market? If you could get all of your nourishment from taking one pill a day would you do this instead of eating food? Students will continue to wrestle with these questions and consider these guiding questions for this expedition: Do my food choices matter? Have profits become more important than human rights or animal rights? What actions should we take to improve our food systems to feed the most people healthy and nutritious food? Stay tuned!!



### 9th GRADE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE - Ms. Beardslee

Students have been spending time in Environmental Science class learning about different types of agriculture that exist in Franklin County. They have also been investigating some common pests (cabbage butterfly) and creating their own pesticides from organic ingredients based on research. They have been learning about the benefits of buying and eating local food and the quality of soil based on mono crop or diversity of plants. With questions they wrote themselves, students visited farms and interviewed eight local farmers to gain more insight into the stories and experiences of the farmers that live in our area. Students took photographs to document the life of the farms that they visited. These photographs and interviews will be used to create an exhibit at Four Rivers. Students would love for you to join them on the evening of Thursday, November 15th, from 5:30-7:00 pm, to share a potluck meal and view the exhibit of the final products that they create from their study of local agriculture!

## DIVISION 3 NEWS

### GRADE 11

The Juniors started their year with orientation which included a trip to the Noble View Appalachian Mountain Club retreat center in Russell, MA. There, they had time for reflection, bonding with classmates and getting to know their new division 3 teachers.

In classes, they have been hard at work already. In Modern World History, students read the graphic novel, Abina and the Important Men, as a core text for their study of Imperialism. It also served as an introduction to the work of historians and how they create a narrative from a primary document. In English, students have been reading Women Warrior, by Maxine Hong Kingston. The book blends autobiography and Chinese stories in an exploration of identity by a Chinese-American woman. The students are now completing essays on the book.

In Chemistry, students delivered an elevator speech on elements, electron configuration, atoms, and the chemical compositions of flames. In Math, students started the year studying triangle trigonometry. They also examined a unit circle and are now about to start applying trig functions to real-life phenomena.

### GRADE 12 at Star Island



The senior class tradition of starting the school year on Star Island, off the New Hampshire coast, continued (*see photos*). Students did service work, set intentions for their senior year and started a post-Four Rivers life plan.

Once back at school, the Energy Expedition began right away. Students were taken to the movies where they met local filmmaker, Steve Alves, who screened some of his films, giving commentary and answering questions throughout. The seniors will now set off on the journey to create their own documentary on a regional energy issue.

In order to build background knowledge on energy, students have been using Systems Thinking in Civics to gain an overarching view of the topic. In Physics, they participated in an "energy draft" where they were pressed to create their own perfect energy source.

In English, students have been writing college essays and have begun work on their senior expedition research papers.



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brainstormed ideas envisioning what our school could be like 5 or 10 years down the road. Those ideas were then grouped into four categories: Academic Program, Finance and Facilities, The Board of Trustees, and Community. The board is a few steps from refining this list further into a form of strategic plan, but there is some unity around a central theme: Same School, Improved. We remain focused on the original mission as our destination, with EL Education at the center of how we intend to get there.

Every year, our Faculty takes a similar approach of heading in the same direction while learning something together that leads to steady improvement of student results. Faculty objectives for this year focus on Curriculum:

1. I can design/implement curriculum enhancements that increase opportunities for student engagement and learning towards attributes of quality work, through strategic revisions to guiding questions, case studies, field work, etc.
2. I can bring the School-Wide Learning Targets to life for students. This means:
  - I can vertically and horizontally align SWLTs.
  - I can support students to include evidence of meeting SWLTs in their portfolios and passages.
  - I can include the language of SWLTs in project rubrics and in daily learning targets.

You might listen for reference to these big targets at upcoming Student-Led Conferences. You might also listen for whether your students are engaged by the case studies, investigations, projects, and expeditions our curriculum presents.

From the renewal of our charter to a year of curriculum improvement, Four Rivers heads into our 16th year of operation full of intention and hope. To a good year ahead.

***Peter Garbus ~ Principal***

**AFTER-SCHOOL SPORTS NEWS**

The Boys Varsity Soccer team has gone undefeated so far this season with wins over Putney, Charlemont, Dublin, White Oak, and Hartsbrook. We lost to Eagle Hill in the RVAL finals last year by a score of 2 to 1 and are hoping for a rematch this year. The boys are highly skilled, with our strength being in our passing skills. The playoffs begin Tuesday, October 30. Come on out and watch.

We will have Junior Varsity and Varsity coed competitive basketball teams this winter. Practice will take place four afternoons a week. Sign ups begin in early November and practice starts right after the Thanksgiving break.

Intramural ultimate signups will begin in early November. Play will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school at Indoor Action starting after Thanksgiving. This is a fun way to get some exercise in the winter, learn skills, and prepare for the spring competitive season.

NOTE: You cannot sign up for both intramural ultimate and basketball as they run at similar times. However, neither program interferes with ski club, which takes place on Wednesday afternoons.

Also, We are looking for a basketball coach (and an ultimate coach for the spring). If you are interested, or if you know someone else who is, please contact Terry Plotkin at [tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org).

COLLEGE ADVISING  
**FINANCIAL AID EVENING  
COMING SOON**

Wednesday, November 7<sup>th</sup>  
6:00 – 8:00 pm  
Four Rivers Common Room

Michael Ireland, Associate Director of Student Financial Services, Smith College and Andy Stenson, Four Rivers College Counselor will offer a presentation on the ins and outs of college financial aid. There will be ample time for discussion and to answer your questions.

Topics covered will include:

- Financing a College Education
  - Tools for future planning—Net Price Calculators and EFC forecasters
  - How financial aid is calculated—the impact on income and savings
- Detailed instructions regarding submission and timelines for the FAFSA and the CSS Profile forms
- Need-based financial aid packages and their component parts, i.e. grants, loans and work study
  - Need blind and need “aware” school practices
  - Merit aid and scholarships

Although some of the evening will focus on information most pertinent to senior families, other families interested in learning about college financing, are welcome to attend.

**SENIORS—LAST CHANCE FOR SATs**

There is one more opportunity for seniors to take the SAT's:

**TEST DATE:** December 1

**REGISTRATION DEADLINE:** November 2

You can register at <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>

## NURSE'S NOTES

### CONCUSSIONS

### PROPER FOOTWEAR

Every student who sustains a concussion heals differently. If you have been told by your child that they hit their head during sports **PLEASE** have them seen by a doctor for assessment and appropriate activity schedule. This information is necessary for accommodations to be established. For more information go to <https://www.cdc.gov/headsup/youthsports/training/index.html>. Upon return to school a student will come to my office daily for a symptom assessment. A doctor's note is required to return to sports.

Recently I have had students see me due to injury while wearing improper footwear during sports, wellness or recess. Flip Flops are NOT for sports. Coaches will be removing students from activities when inappropriate shoes are worn, ie: flip flops; higher heeled shoes, boots that don't tie. Please make sure your child has sneakers available when needed. ~ **Jeanne Milton, RN**



Scene from the 7th grade hallway

"This institution is an equal opportunity provider. To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20294"

Four Rivers Charter Public School  
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Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade the teaching and learning at the school. Four Rivers works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.