

Four Rivers Currents

March 2016

From the Principal's Desk...

CAN WE ALL GET ALONG? CHARTER SCHOOL FINANCE AND POLITICS

In the midst of the charged politics of a national presidential election, there is proposed legislation and a possible ballot measure on charter schools have turned up the heat in our local area. Your friends or neighbors might want to know what you think, or ask you to address the issues. I thought I would take a shot at offering a primer on the issues being argued.

First and foremost, charter opponents say the funding of charters is unfair (check out [Citizens for Public Schools](#), an organization with a point of view). Here's what you need to know:

- When a student attends a charter school, the money the state would pay to educate that student is deducted from the amount the state pays the district and instead goes to the charter school. School choice also moves funds between districts and to regional Technical schools.
- With charters, the district is then reimbursed for a portion of that money. Currently, the district is supposed to get 100 percent of the cost the first year after a student leaves and 25 percent of the cost for each of the next five years. The point is to help school districts adjust to having fewer students.
- When a student opts to attend a charter school, only the funds earmarked for that student's education is sent to their new school.
- The Massachusetts legislature has funded the reimbursement line item in the state budget at more than 95% of the proposed cost in eight of the last ten years, though districts rightly complain that the reimbursement is not guaranteed.
- While district schools receive state subsidies for their facilities, charters are not eligible for school building assistance and must find alternative funds to create facilities.

Critics claim that charter schools do not serve high needs students, such as special education students, English Language Learners (ELL's), and low income students.

The department of education reports that statewide, "the percent of ELL's enrolled in Massachusetts charter schools has steadily increased and now surpasses statewide average enrollment, and "special education enrollment in charters (14%) is only slightly lower than districts (16.3%)."

For Four Rivers last year, 17.5% of our students are on an IEP compared to 12.6% of a composite index of our sending districts, 0% are ELLs compared to .1%, and 19.4% are low income compared to 19.6%. Overall, 35% are considered high need, compared to 30.7% in our sending districts.

Critics also say that charter schools are not accountable to their local communities, and although local dollars go into charter school tuition, local school committees have no authority over charters and no recourse if a charter school's practices have a negative impact on students who attend the district's public schools. Charter schools, though, can point out:

- Charters operate independently of the local school district.



Peter Garbus, Principal

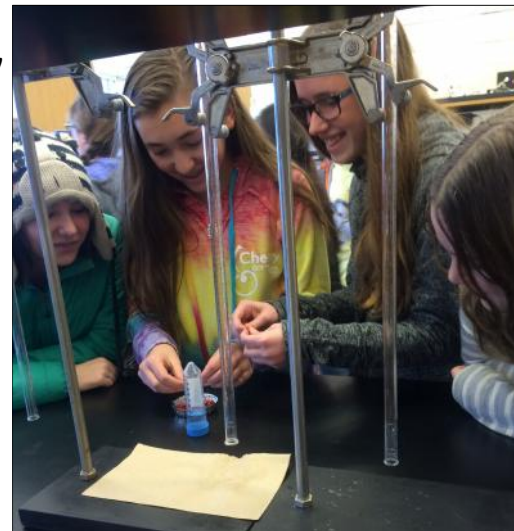
Continued on Page 6

Grade 7 News

SCIENCE FACT OR FICTION?

The Postcard Projects have returned from the Amherst College Museum of Natural History with a note that said "The postcards were viewed by many people. During the February break our daily attendance ran between 300 - 400 people, when we include the weekend that was nearly 2000 - great exposure for some excellent work." This project asked students to write some short science fiction, but recently the 7th graders have been more focused on reading science fiction. As 7th graders read Nancy Farmer's *THE HOUSE OF THE SCORPION* they focus on the Four Rivers essential question about the balance between Nature, Technology and Community. They look at the science and technology in the book and ask questions about whether it is closer to fact or closer to fiction. They consider how the technology used in the book affects the relationships between characters within their society and community. They wonder if the events or in the book could really happen?

In an effort to learn more about the polluted futuristic setting of the book and the cloning which is the main technology on which the book's plot depends, our 7th grade students headed off to UMASS to work with the Graduate Women in STEM (GWIS) who found 3 experts to present to the students on the topics of Air Pollution, Water Pollution and Cloning. They also invited students into a real laboratory to participate in a DNA extraction activity. Using strawberries or wheat germ, students carefully followed the instructions in hopes of seeing real DNA in their test tubes.



Annika, Sage, Beth and Fiona get ready to extract DNA from strawberries

Upon our return to school, students wrote wonderful thank you notes to GWIS focused on the day's learning target: "I can use the information from our UMASS fieldwork to determine if the science in *HOUSE OF THE SCORPION* is closer to fact, or closer to fiction." Students were surprised to learn that cloning is possible. They were pushed to consider the ethics of what should be cloned as researcher Nele VanDiessel explained some of the current rules about cloning research. Students understood more deeply why clones would be desirable organ donors and why one species cannot be used in the gestation of another. They asked wonderful questions about the history and future of air and water pollution. Reading the thank you notes showed the day to be a true success!

"I learned a lot about cloning because the book doesn't really talk about the process."

"The experiment was cool too. It was interesting to watch the DNA come up out of the solution. I wonder why alcohol makes the DNA rise." – Aidan

"Our class had such a good time learning about everything you had to tell us. I am a person who doesn't ask that many questions about what I am learning, but you guys inspired me and everyone else to speak up and ask lots of question about what I was learning." – Melina

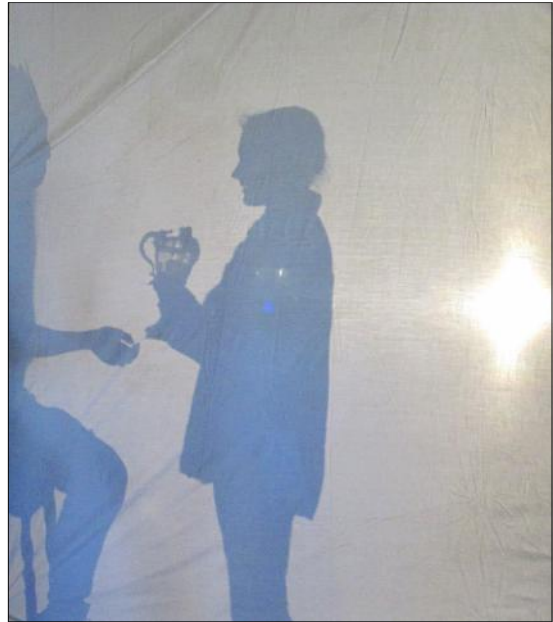


Carlito agitates the solution

Grade 8 News

HUMANITIES

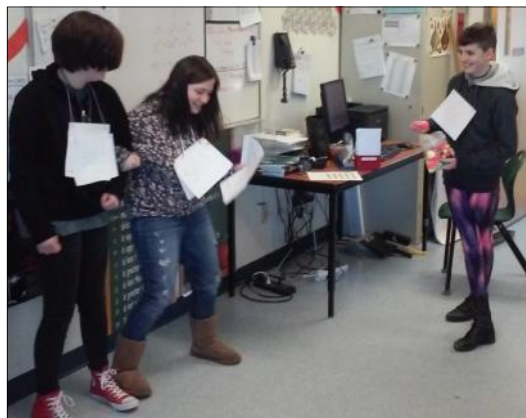
The 8th grade celebrated the conclusion of studying the medieval times with a Medieval Feast and Medieval Ballad Reader's Theatre Performances! Eighth graders helped to set up the great table, lay out wooden bowls of bread and cheese (we didn't have any authentic pottage, much to the students' relief!), hang the tapestries, and create a medieval atmosphere. They then performed their practiced and perfected medieval ballads, which were inventive, entertaining, clever, and amazing! A true celebration of all that was learned.



SCIENCE



Here are three pictures from 8th Grade Science. Students have been investigating concepts related to matter and energy. In this assignment, students created skits (or dances, secret handshakes, raps, and more) that showed how molecules are effected as heat is added. They explained the difference between heat and temperature, showed what happens during a phase change, and explained how heat is transferred.



DIVISION 2 NEWS

DO SOMETHING

On the Friday before February Break (Feb 12), the tenth graders presented their “Do Something” workshops to the entire school. They worked in groups of two, three, or four to facilitate workshops with titles such as “Guns: Stop the Violence,” “They Feel, Too: Prevent Animal Abuse,” “How to Create a Healthy Body Image,” and “ISIS is not Islamic.” Leading up the workshops, the students researched and wrote about their topics, practiced different facilitation techniques, and worked together to create interactive workshops in which Four Rivers students and teachers learned about important issues and how they could “do something” about them. Afterwards tenth graders studied effective media campaigns and action projects. They used what they learned and wrote campaign proposals to take their messages outside the walls of Four Rivers. They launched their own media campaigns with titles such as, “Welcome to the Dark Side: Cut Back on your Electric Bill,” “Elementree: Trees for Tots, Teens and Totally Grown Up People,” and “Save the Planet: End the Abuse.” Some tenth graders will be teaching a lesson and planting trees with fifth graders at Gill Elementary; some delivered informational flyers to schools, pediatricians, and daycares about the dangers of red dye #40; and some made homemade dog biscuits wrapped with information about animal abuse to sell at the local humane society. Tenth graders are definitely “doing something!”



Clockwise from left:

Kieron Schweitzer, Eren Lewis and Henry Worden facilitate “Is ISIS Islamic?”

An activity from the workshop “Tiny Houses for the Homeless.”

Angie Lindop, Micah Goldstein (and Lars Wonkka, out of picture) facilitate a workshop called “Underrepresentation of Minorities in the Media.”



DIVISION 3 NEWS

On February 11th, Four Rivers Seniors and guests filled the Greenfield Garden Cinema for the red carpet premiere of their documentary **Renewable, Redoable: Burlington, VT**. This documentary was the final product of the seniors' energy expedition and the culmination of many months of work.

The following is an excerpt from the article in the Greenfield Recorder about the project:

The documentary, incorporating interviews by students of the city's mayor, operators of the wind turbines, biomass plants, and University of Vermont professors about how the city of 42,000 people overcame the political, economic and technical obstacles to run totally on renewable energy sources in the fall of 2014, runs 25 minutes. The finished product makes use not only of footage from their trip, including reactions from Burlington residents on the city's all-pedestrian Church Street Marketplace, but also animated drawings of how the hydro, solar and biomass technologies work.

"A precedent has been set for the rest of the world," the documentary concludes. Burlington, which gets its power from a wood-fired power plant generating electricity almost entirely from wood bark, shavings or clean wood waste, a 7.4-megawatt Winooski River hydroelectric station, a 500-kilowatt photovoltaic array atop the Burlington International Airport's parking garage, and a wind turbine at the offices of the Burlington Electric Department.

The premiere included displays of student work related to the expedition, a compilation of one-minute mathematical animations about energy, and the "making of" the film. Afterward, students answered questions from the audience about the content of the film and their filmmaking process. The culmination itself was a rousing success, and the film will soon be available for viewing on the school website.

Photos clockwise from right: Students visit the McNeill Biomass Generating Station in Burlington, VT; at the premier at Garden Cinema, division 3 teachers Mr. Plath, Mr. Hornick, Mr. Patari and Mr. Wilson; students tour a solar installation on the roof of the Burlington Airport parking garage.



Continued from page 1— **CAN WE ALL GET ALONG?**

- Charter schools are subject to rigorous annual reviews by the state, and can be closed for not meeting performance goals. Annual reports are posted by DESE, sent to districts, and available on our website.
- Charters must abide by all the laws and regulations that traditional district schools abide by.
- Charters are subject to open meeting laws and their finances are public.

Some argue that charter school attrition (the percent of students enrolled who do not return the following year) suggests that charters push out students, using strict disciplinary codes or rigorous academic standards, while district schools have to take any student who shows up at any point in the year.

- Statewide attrition rates at charters (7.5%) are virtually identical to district schools (7.2%) (see another organization with a point of view: [Fact Check](#) or www.charterfactsma.org)
- Four Rivers' attrition rate for last year was 6.1%.

There are many proposals for what to do about many of these issues; here are some of the main ones:

1. Governor Baker's proposal would change the funding formula to districts to only provide reimbursement for three years, rather than six years, while adding \$20 million to ensure it's covered. The formula would give a 100 percent reimbursement the first year, 50 percent the second year and 25 percent the third year. However, the second and third year funding would be reserved for districts that are low-performing and have high numbers of charter school students.
2. Senator Rosenberg has convened a group of senators to craft legislation that includes a moderate lift of the cap on new charters, with comprehensive charter school reform: "We are going to move ahead in an effort to assemble a bill that'll be focused on reform of charter schools and so we'll be talking about finance, admissions, retention, governance, the cap. Everything will be on the table, even some things maybe that don't have directly to do with charter schools because the whole point is that every child in Massachusetts get a quality education," Rosenberg said.
3. Mohawk superintendent Michael Buoniconti has invited 45 school superintendents of 65 rural school districts which all have small school populations in large rural areas to discuss forming a Massachusetts Rural Schools Association. The association is to address issues that school systems in densely populated regions don't face.
4. A proposed ballot measure will be in front of voters next November (unless successful legislation leads its proponents to withdraw the measure) which proposes the creation or expansion of 12 charter schools per year, with a preference for proposals in the lowest-performing districts.

Can we all just get along? I tend to be an optimistic person, but these issues are especially challenging in areas with declining enrollments. Any loss of students for schools in this area creates serious consequences. With so much at stake, it makes it harder for traditional districts to partner or collaborate with a charter school on educational matters. We do all share concern for and commitment to excellent public schools, and we can be unified in calling for adequate funding of all public schools. I'm afraid, however, that is not exactly what's on the table this year. I hope you feel informed and open to dialogue with your friends and neighbors.

~ Peter Garbus ~ ~ Principal ~

COLLEGE ADVISING

COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

The following colleges have already said YES! to the class of 2016: Allegheny, Baldwin Wallace, Clark, Colby-Sawyer, Columbia College Chicago, Evergreen State College, Franklin Pierce, GCC, Hartwick, Keene State, Lesley, MassArt, MCLA, New England College, New Hampshire Institute of Art, Smith College, SOKA University of America, University of Hartford, University of New Hampshire, University of Vermont, Ursinus, Wheaton, Westfield State University. **Congratulations to our Seniors!**

FINANCIAL AID

We encourage all families to apply for federal financial aid by filing the FAFSA form. The FAFSA for the 2016/17 school year is now available at www.fafsa.gov.

JUNIORS AND TEST PREPARATION

Scores for all juniors who took the PSAT's in October are now available by logging on to the student's College Board account. Our plan is for all juniors to take the SAT's this coming June (Saturday, June 4th). We will be providing some test preparation in English and math class. Juniors are encouraged to complete some test prep independently. An excellent source of FREE test prep is the Kahn Academy and their resources which can be accessed directly from the College Board site.

<https://www.khanacademy.org/sat>

**Questions regarding the college application process?
Contact Andy Stenson – astenson@frcps.org.**

College Admissions Information Evening for Juniors

with Karen Kristof, Smith College Admissions Office and

Andy Stenson, Four Rivers College Counselor

Wednesday, April 6th from 6:30 to 8:00 pm in the Common Room

SPRING ULTIMATE

The competitive ultimate season begins with practice on March 21. Please get your paperwork to the school office before that. We have 3 boys teams and 2 girls teams. The Middle School teams do not practice on Wednesdays, but if your child wishes to play more, they can join the older team's practice that day. The middle school boys are quite strong this year so the decision was made to put them in the B Division of some high school tournaments. I am confident they will do fine there. All five teams will be playing in our home tournament at GCC on the weekend of May 14 and 15. All the games and tournaments can be found on the school calendar on our website.

In addition, sign-ups are ongoing for the Four Rivers Summer Ultimate Intensive the week of June 27 - July 1. All the information is at fourriverscharter.org - click on Our Programs and then Summer Ultimate Intensive. See you on the field!

~ Terry Plotkin, Athletic Director and Varsity Boys Coach ~

NURSE'S NOTES

March 2016

State mandated health screenings will be held at school on March 21st. GCC nursing students will be performing the various assessments under my direction. It is important to remember these are basic observations and any abnormal finding must have a follow-up by the students' regular physician. I will notify you in writing if there is a need to follow-up with your child's doctor. If you wish your child to not participate, a waiver form can be obtained from me.

Remember: if your child contacts you to come get them because they are not feeling well, verify that the nurse has seen them. If they have not seen the nurse, please have them do so and I will contact you with my findings. Thank you for your support of this school policy. HAPPY SPRING!

~ Jeanne Milton, RN ~

COMING SOON!

Grease, March 11-12

Drama Club present **Grease** at the Shea Theater. Tickets still available for Saturday 2 pm matinee. Call the school office.

Annual Variety Show, April 1

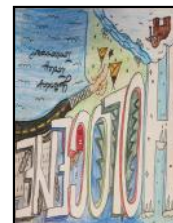
Friday, April 1st at the Shea Theater. Tickets available in advance at the school office.

3rd Annual Otter Soirée, April 15

Adults only event includes entertainment, pot-luck hors d'oeuvres, raffles. BYOB, all at the Common Room in the high school. Note: this is a new date to move the Soirée away from Good Friday and Easter weekend.

"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
248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301



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.