

# Four Rivers Currents

February 2010

## From the Principal's Desk...

WITH THE YEAR HALF OVER – WHAT'S THE STORY OF THE SEMESTER?

When a term ends, we ask our students to reflect on what they've learned, where they've grown, and what might lie ahead. So what's the story of the semester for the school?

This has been the first year that we've had semesters instead of trimesters. Many teachers have commented that they felt less rushed this year. They've also said that there seem to be fewer students who did not pass standards. There was time to figure out which students needed what kind of support to learn what they were supposed to learn. For Division 3, our new semesters lined up perfectly with GCC courses and online courses. Altogether, those are good results for a relatively simple change.

This was also the first time we've been able to give online access for parents and students to be able to see what assignments they've completed and how they did on them. We don't want either our students or their parents to become obsessed by grades. But we do want our students to take responsibility for their learning, which means completing their assignments and revising them towards better and better quality. Access through FOCUS just means we are all looking at the same record.

When you receive your student's progress reports for semester 1, you can see part of the story of their semester. If you look at each course standard, you see a description of understanding or skill that your child has acquired this term. We say, "Students can . . ." because they have demonstrated a specific capability. If you look at the HOWLs standards, you see a reflection of how he or she worked this semester. The course description gives you an overview of what students studied and the major projects they completed. Finally, you will see the Teacher Comment, where we try to capture significant strengths we witnessed and any key next steps we can identify from each student's work in our classes. Students will gather pieces of work from the term that they are proud of or that give evidence of their learning and we will be able to see that evidence along with their reflections on that learning during student led conferences in March or in their portfolios at the end of the year.

As a faculty, we set out at the beginning of this year to continue our progress with learning expeditions, to learn more and implement Differentiated Instruction (practices where we try to support or stretch students based on what each needs), to solidify our expectations for student behavior, and to streamline communication within the school and between home and school. We have a brief midyear survey to check in with you about how we're doing, so take a moment to give us feedback. For ourselves, we are feeling good about our work so far this year.

Finally, we have selected a mascot for the school. After an extensive process that started with crews generating ideas, the Student Leadership Committee narrowing the choices, the Administration eliminating options that it felt would not represent the school well for the long term, and finally the entire student body voting on 3 finalists, the vote is in. Go OTTERS! Playful, hardy, predatory but somehow not too threatening, the otter will serve as our symbolic identity – on the sports field and wherever else a mascot needs to be.

Peter Garbus



## 7th Grade News

### Photo Overview of the First Semester

From Wendell State Forest...to bicycling through Greenfield...to river labs and fieldwork... to Post Cards from the Past...to performing the Epic of Gilgamesh...to carving stones...to learning about and trying ancient foods...and meeting Karma the Goat... What a semester! It has been a whirlwind of adventures. What's next for seventh grade? Microscopes, molding bread, making yogurt, podcasting, beginning music and technology classes, and lots more.



*Clockwise from top left:*

*September river study; Maggie Tirrell and Abby Levesque carving stones; characters from "Gilgamesh"; meeting Karma, the goat.*

## 8th Grade News

### Medieval Villages Take Over Eighth Grade Floor!

Over the past two weeks, the eighth graders have undergone a drastic transformation. They have become medieval villagers from towns of Swindon, England, and Riddleham, Wales! First, after drawing a medieval character out of a hat, students researched what life in medieval society might have been like for their particular character. Then, after a two-day frenzy of fabric and hot glue, the room was overtaken by lords and ladies, knights and clergy, merchants and craftspeople, jesters and minstrels, and, of course, serfs.



*Above: The people of Swindon in front of their town.*

But where would they live? After more research, more hot glue, a whole bunch of cardboard, and a few close calls with exacto knives, the towns were finished, complete with a drawbridge and a guillotine. Now that their characters have a place to live, the students will learn about some of the major events from the Middle Ages through the eyes of their character. For example, students recently arrived at school to find that their towns were suddenly infested with rats. Rats? Middle Ages? That's right, the Bubonic Plague had hit. Luckily, all of their characters survived...but will they survive the Crusades?



*Above: The blacksmith, a bishop and a monk in front of Riddleham.*

*Right: The mason, a serf, the cloth merchant and the lady of the castle pose in front of Riddleham Castle.*



## DIV II NEWS

### SCIENCE

#### Environmental Science—Grade 9

For the second semester the students are looking at waste and decomposition. They have looked at the waste produced by the students at Four Rivers and discovered some ways that we could reduce our waste. They were able to examine the compost at 5 different stages of decay from Martins Farm. As they examine decomposition they are learning about soil food webs and the role that decomposition plays in an ecosystems.

#### Biology—Grade 10

The students have been learning about DNA and how DNA can change in the presence of a mutagenic substance. Students learned how to use sterile technique to culture the bacteria *Serratia marcescens*. They exposed the bacteria to a variety of substances such as tobacco, aspartame, and creosote. The students will be observing the growth of the bacteria to see if these substances were able to mutate the DNA. Ask any 10th grader how they were able to tell if a substance was a mutagen to the *Serratia marcescens*.

### ENGLISH

Ninth grade English is exploring creative thinking and expression through a writing unit focused on narratives, fiction and poetry. Students are working to improve their skills as writers by looking specifically at 6 traits of writing: ideas, voice, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. We are using these traits to help students develop a sense of their strengths and challenges as writers and to improve their revision skills. We are also reading *The Secret Life of Bees*, analyzing its content, exploring symbols, and evaluating Sue Monk Kidd as a writer.

Tenth grade English is in the midst of a unit on social commentary. We are exploring the ways writers have used fiction to make statements about human nature and have just finished a dramatic reading of *The Crucible*.

After a brief interlude exploring the voices of HIV/AIDS as part of a 10th grade interdisciplinary expedition, we will read *Ender's Game*, a science fiction text. In addition to exploring how this text is social commentary, we will be focusing on analyzing its themes.

### RECRUITING SEASON

#### WINDING UP

**As the recruiting season winds up, we want to encourage all of our families to spread the word about Four Rivers. Your testimonials with your friends and families are the best recruiting tool we could ask for. The final Admissions Information Sessions are on Saturday, January 30th at 10:00 am and Wednesday, February 10th at 7:00 pm, with an application deadline of February 25th.**

**We especially want to encourage potential 11th graders to consider Four Rivers. We have a great program in Division 3 that builds confidence and independence, and effective preparation over two years for getting ready to go to college.**

**Spread the word!**

## DIV III NEWS

### ADVANCED SPANISH

This class wrapped up the Conversation and Literature course with a special presentation. Students wrote and performed an original play loosely based on the 16th century picaresque novel Lazarillo of Tormes. Their "Lazarillo of Turners Falls" was a modern take on the story in which the main character tried to climb the social ladder by taking on jobs as a babysitter, dog walker, and circus employee. The play was a success. Lazarillo's life is another story.

### SOCIAL STUDIES

#### **Envisioning Greenfield Design Projects presented to community leaders of Greenfield.**

Eleventh and twelfth grade students in Ray Neal's History of Community class were given the task last semester of choosing a site in the Greenfield community to re-imagine and redesign. They had to think for themselves what kind of community they would want to create for our future, and to use architectural and landscape drawing techniques as a way of making their ideas concrete.

Through this process, students envisioned parts of Greenfield through youthful eyes. Some examples of their designs include:

- Restoring the historic dimensions to the Town Common
- Redesigned walkways, sidewalk, nature areas in and around GCC
- Monuments, sculpture installations, and a Japanese rock garden
- Redesigns of local parks for a site on Conway Street and one for Wedgewood Gardens
- Proposals for the redesign and reuse of the Davis Street School and town building

Presentations were shared at an evening Expo in the Common Room, including an informal walk-through in the style of an art show, followed by a few featured presenters. The Greenfield planning Board was well represented, as well as developers of the current building renovation projects on Bank Row. Thanks to all who made the evening possible. Maybe we have some budding developers and city planners in our midst. Presenters and audience alike came away with a better sense of our community and a real appreciation for Greenfield's potential.

### SOCCKER NEWS

After consultations with some varsity players, coaches, and the administration, Four Rivers has made a decision to leave the PVIAC and thus the public school varsity soccer league for both boys and girls teams. The main reason is that our school is too small to be competitive against schools that are much bigger than ours.

We have helped form a new small school league that will begin play this coming fall. It is called the River Valley Athletic League. This league will have 8 teams, both boys and girls, from the area that are similar in size to ours. There will be a league schedule and a championship tournament at the end of the season. We are excited about this new endeavor and how it will enhance our program. The middle school teams will remain in the public school league.

Coach Plotkin

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**NURSE'S NOTES**

A healthy diet is essential to learning. Recently there seems to be an increase in students reporting having no breakfast or nothing to eat for lunch, due to eating their lunch mid morning because they were hungry. As time allows I do individual teaching with each child. Often the student reports "not enough time". This prompts me to discuss the student's responsibility in resolving the issues. Some suggestions for busy mornings:

**Toast with peanut butter**

**Granola/Energy bar**

**Hard boiled egg**

**Apple with peanut butter**

**Whole grain bread/bagel/muffin w/peanut butter**

**Milk or 100% fruit juice every morning**

**Slice of cheese with crackers, fruit, or bread**

These are easily prepared and can be eaten by the student en route to school. The protein will provide energy for a longer time. Students should carry water and have a light snack with them all through the school year. Allow specific foods only.

Take a MINUTE and ask your child what foods they ate at school today, The response might surprise you

Jeanne Milton, R.N.

**YEARBOOKS**

Yearbook Forms are in the office.

**Cost: \$35 after January 31st**

**YEARBOOK ADS**

**Prices:** Range from \$20.00 for a business card size to \$100 for a full page.  
More information in the school office.

**Ad Deadline extended to February 12th.**

**WINTER WEATHER and  
SCHOOL CANCELLATION**

Four Rivers will follow the lead of Greenfield Public Schools in determining when school should be cancelled, delayed, or dismissed early due to harsh weather conditions. Information about cancellation or delayed opening will also be recorded as early as possible on the school's telephone, 775-4577. The school uses an automated calling system to notify families of cancellations due to weather or other emergencies. Information is also listed on local radio and TV stations. When Greenfield has not cancelled or delayed opening, but weather in other parts of Franklin County presents dangerous driving conditions, parents should use their own discretion about sending their students to school.

From *Four Rivers Student and Family Handbook*

**REVIEW OF ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Excerpted from page 27 of the *Four Rivers Student and Family Handbook*.

A student's absence is excused only when the student's family has contacted the school regarding student illness, testing or evaluations, family emergency, religious or cultural observances or other special circumstances approved by the principal. All other absences will be considered *unexcused*....

When a student has 5 unexcused absences in a semester, the student and parents will be required to meet with the Principal. If a student has 15 unexcused absences, over the course of a year, the student risks not being granted credit for the year.

**MURDER FOR RENT**

**a play by Giovanna and Charles Knox Robinson**

Presented by

The Four Rivers Drama Club

**February 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 pm**

**Shea Theater**

Tickets are \$7.00 in advance and \$9.00 at the door and will be available later in the month at the school office.

## COLLEGE AND CAREER COUNSELING

FEBRUARY and MARCH DATES –Take Note:

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Thursday, Feb. 4 | Registration Deadline for <b>March 13 SAT</b>  |
| Saturday, Feb 6  | ACT —if you are registered to take the ACT or SAT, remember to arrive by 7:45 am. Bring acceptable photo I.D. and your Admission Ticket, and two #2 pencils with erasers. <i>(If you do not have a photo ID, see Ms. Taylor as soon as possible).</i>  |
| Sunday March 7   | <b>COLLEGE FAIR, 12:00—4:00 pm at the Big E in W. Springfield.</b> This is a great opportunity for Juniors and their parents to explore and learn about many colleges all in one day. For more information, visit <a href="http://www.nationalcollegefairs.org">www.nationalcollegefairs.org</a> . Online student registration recommended. The event is FREE. |

**SENIORS:** Keep track of college application deadlines. Notify Ms. Taylor of any additions or deletions to your college list. Check out scholarship information.

**JUNIORS:** See Ms. Taylor or Ms. Durkee to set up a college advising appointment with Mr. Itterly or email him directly. He will be making appointments on Tuesdays after school. Juniors! Attend the National College Fair on March 7 in Springfield—see above.

### COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS:

**Seniors, NEW SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES are coming in all the time. Be sure to check out the Scholarship Resource Files in the Gardner Room of the Farmhouse. Ask Ms. Taylor or Ms. Durkee for a quick orientation.**

## FUNDRAISING FOR A SPANISH TRIP TO NICARAGUA

This spring, from April 15-24, 12 students will travel to Nicaragua for a language immersion/community service project complete with home-stays and numerous opportunities for cross-cultural learning. For this purpose, our group will be holding several fund-raisers:

**Dining to Donate**—Applebee's in Greenfield has agreed to donate a portion of their sales on the evening of **Wednesday, February 10** to our trip. So check it out and don't forget to mention that you are there to help Four Rivers.

**Can and Bottle Drive** — For the month of February, please drop off your redeemable cans and bottles in cardboard boxes provided in the high school and middle school hallways.

**Seed Sale** — Also in February, we will be collaborating with FEDCO Co-op Garden Supplies for a spring seed sale of 25 easy-to-grow varieties. Families can get order forms at school or online at [www.fedcoseeds.com/form/fourrivers.pdf](http://www.fedcoseeds.com/form/fourrivers.pdf). All completed forms should be returned to Ms. Wood in the school office by February 26.

**Scrap Metal Drive** — Finally, we will organize a scrap metal drive from now through the end of March. If you think you have scrap metal to give, please contact Señor McDonnell or Señorita Beardslee to be sure it is on the "acceptable" list of metals. Thanks so much for your support.

## Artspace

### Annual Teen Art Exhibit

Four Rivers Students are among the many artists from area high schools who are featured in the Annual Teen Art Exhibit at

### Artspace

**15 Mill Street, Greenfield.**

### Gallery Hours:

**Monday—Friday, 1—6 pm**

*Reception and Awards Ceremony on  
Friday, January 29, 5—7 pm  
Awards made at 6 pm*

## ADMISSIONS

### INFORMATION SESSIONS

Saturday, Jan. 30, 10:00-11:30 am

Wednesday, February 10, 7:00-8:30 pm

***SIBLINGS of Four Rivers Students who wish to attend the school next year must submit an application by the deadline, February 25!***

The school's best advertising is ***Word of Mouth***, so we urge you to let your friends and neighbors know we are accepting applications until the deadline of February 25, 2010 for FALL ENROLLMENT.

**Applications are being accepted for grades  
7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.**

*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.*



Four Rivers Charter Public School  
248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301

# WANTED CLASS PARENTS

We are looking Class Parents: one or two parent volunteers for each grade, to help teachers with logistics around expeditions, trips, projects or day-to-day classroom needs.

A class parent might be asked to line up chaperones for a trip, do some telephoning to help a teacher plan an expedition, or round up supplies for a classroom project. Of course we hope these parents would call on all the resources at their disposal, including other parents.

If you have any interest in serving in

## Blue Slip Updates Available on FOCUS

Parents, in addition to monthly academic updates, discipline information is entered into FOCUS each week.

You can view your student's dis-



## FAMILY COUNCIL NEWS

### HILLSIDE PIZZA UPDATE:

Please note that the Pizza Order due date has changed!! The new dates are: **Orders Due Monday, Feb. 22, Pickup Friday Feb. 26.** Remember, if you are not able to pick up on the designated Friday but would like to support the school, then.....

### *Consider a Gift Certificate!*

The school will still make some money, and you can pick up a pizza directly from Hillside Pizza in Deerfield when it's convenient for YOU! It's an easy way to help the school and it's GREAT pizza!

TEEN HEALTH SURVEY TO BE ADMINISTERED

The Community Coalition for Teens is conducting the 8<sup>th</sup> annual regional Teen Health Survey on February 8, 2010. The 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades have been selected to participate. The survey will ask questions about nutrition, physical activity, injuries, tobacco, alcohol and other drug use. It will also ask about sexual behaviors that cause AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

The purpose of the study is to gather the information needed to plan important prevention and intervention programs to combat such problems as alcohol and other drug use and violence in our schools and communities. It will also help us judge the effectiveness of our current prevention and intervention efforts. I have a copy of the questionnaire in my office, if you wish to stop by and review it.

The survey is entirely anonymous. Students will not put their names or any other identifying information on the survey booklet. All results from the study will be presented only in group summary form, like many opinion polls.

Additionally, your child's participation in the survey is completely voluntary. Each child will be given the option of leaving blank any question that he or she prefers not to answer.

Four Rivers  
Parent Advisory Council  
Meeting

March 3, 2010 at 6:00 P.M.

A Presentation by Dr. William Fogel on

***Learning and  
Executive Functioning***

*Do you know someone who has the academic skills and abilities but always seems to not get the work done? Timeliness, task completion, organization, getting it started and finishing and letting*

Four Rivers  
PARENT  
EDUCATION SERIES

**Thursday, February 25**

**at 7:00 pm**

**Gardner Rm. Farmhouse**

A representative from Tapestry Health will be holding an evening of questions, answers, discussions and education about how to engage in dialogue with your children about sexuality. This event will be held in the Gardner