

Four Rivers Currents

February 2007

BIG PLANS

As Four Rivers grows, the upper grades become the new part of the school, even though most of the new students come into the middle school. The 11th grade, seasoned ice-breakers that they are, have once again found themselves doing another “first”. They are planning internships that will take them out of the school and into the work place for a week in March. We have students working in health care, sound recording, education and environmental science. Some students are traveling for their internships: to a recording studio in Nashville, to a glass-blowing studio at the Corning Glass Museum in upstate New York, and to a hospital in Brattleboro. Students are interning with artists, bakers, musicians, mechanics, and cosmetologists. They are going into the community in Greenfield and two are headed for U-Mass: one to work in the renewable energy lab in the engineering dept, another to work with the athletic trainers in the main gym. It is really exciting to see students exploring their interests and going out on interviews to talk with profession-



Ninth graders Tess Grogan, Alex Herchenreder and Wesley Johnson conduct emissions tests for Environmental Science

als in the fields they want to explore. It will be better still to report back to the Four Rivers community when the internships are over and share with everyone what our intrepid 11th graders have done! So, stay tuned—

From the Director's Desk...

With the second round of mid-trimester conferences behind us, the school year is officially half over and admissions activities for next year are in full swing. As I visit classrooms with applying families—or with other educators—what I often hear is, “Four Rivers looks and feels like a school much older than three and one-half years!” While still a work in progress, holding ourselves to the same standards of revision and improvement that we expect of our students, Four Rivers strikes visitors, our Expeditionary Learning consultants, and other educators as a school more mature than its years, with a staff of extraordinary talent and energy, a strong program, and a whole-hearted commitment to our mission of “educating young people for lives of learning and service.”

Later this winter, four of our faculty will have the honor of presenting learning expeditions and investigations they have developed here to other educators. Seventh grade teachers Mandy Locke and Matt Leaf, as well as high school English teacher Leif Riddington, are all giving “master class” workshops at the Expeditionary Learning National Conference in Portland, Maine. Laura Stamas, high school biology and environmental science teacher, is presenting a workshop at the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association’s annual showcase of best practices. These are examples of the kind of dissemination of effective teaching methods that is expected of charter public schools in the Commonwealth.

Our final admissions information session is February 14, 7-8:30 pm, and the deadline for applications is February 26th. Please remind anyone you know is interested in our school to be sure not to miss our deadline. The first three information sessions have been well attended, and our faculty, the student admissions team, and the Family Council have all been wonderfully articulate and supportive — our thanks to all!

In the coming week all current parents will be receiving a letter asking that they express their intentions for continued enrollment at Four Rivers next year. We need to have an accurate sense of our current students’ plans for 2007-08 by the Feb. 28 lottery, including those who are uncertain of return, so that we can know how many spaces are available for new students in the upcoming 8th, 9th, and 10th grades.

Ed Blatchford

7th Grade News

Humanities News

The seventh grade English room has been abuzz lately with interesting literary discussions. The students chose books to read based on their personal interests and worked in groups to make daily reading assignments. These readings are discussed twice each week and are followed by reflections on what it means to be an active reader. The less formal setting of these literature groups coupled with the high stakes of being able to make meaningful contributions to the discussion have led to great conversations. The seventh graders also worked on persuasive writing skills as they took on interesting topics and tried to convince their readers of their points of view.

Work in social studies was centered on ancient Egypt. The students explored the geography of the Nile River valley and how this mighty river made life possible for ancient settlers in the area. They worked to craft poems that gave voice to the different sources of the river. Some of those pieces were shared at a recent Community Meeting.

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Basketball Team shows Defensive Intensity *(say THAT three times fast!)*

The boys varsity basketball team won its recent game against Eagle Hill JV 51-24. The most satisfying aspect of the game was that the scoring was spread out amongst all the players. Although the team has had its ups and downs this season, the defensive intensity that the team brings is stronger with each passing game and that has turned our team into a tough unit, and we are having fun doing it.

The boys middle school basketball team has had an energetic and exciting season to date. The lightening fast trio of seventh graders Dan Boyden, Crispin Driver-Schroder (both of whom also play on the Varsity), and Marty Jaffe led the charge with their defensive intensity and all-out effort. The highlight of the year to date was the January 18th victory over the Greenfield Center School, avenging an earlier loss. It was a nip and tuck battle, with the crowd intently cheering both teams on until the final score, 39-34. There has been dramatic improvement in team play from the beginning of the season until now.

The girls basketball team is having a very successful season, thanks to the teamwork, commitment and "fuego" of this small, but mighty group. The team is currently 6-2. Please check the schedule for dates and times of their remaining games. **They appreciate their fans!**

In other athletic news, we will be asking students to commit soon to deciding to play on our spring Ultimate Frisbee team. The interest is high, and we will be adding a girls team this year. Practices and games will be after school, three to four afternoons a week, and there will be a few tournaments on weekends.

Physical Education classes are taking place at Indoor Action for the winter. There are lots of choices offered in the huge space and most everyone has found a way to participate and get something good out of it. We are lucky to have Andy Rothschild join us as a teacher for the winter, and he has been offering indoor tennis to the high school students. The middle school will get their chance for tennis later, once the middle school basketball team finishes their season.

8th Grade News

MATH AND SCIENCE

In wrapping up their energy investigation, 8th graders held an “energy investors conference” where each student researched what might be an important energy idea for the future to potential investors (including fake checks). As part of this energy investigation, students also completed kinetic sculptures, and put them on display for the entire Four Rivers community.

In Math class we have are adding a new feature called Independent Study in Math — one day a week working on individual skills. The entire class will soon learn about and work with the Pythagoreum Theorem.

ENGLISH AND SOCIAL STUDIES

In English, we’ve just finished an investigation into poetry, which started with a Poetry Safari, in which students discovered poems around the building and reflected on them in new and unusual situations. After reading and analyzing lots of poems, we wrote some of our own—about kinetic sculptures and other matters — and concluded with a cozy reading to each other as a class.

In Social Studies, we are wrapping up a long exploration of the major religions of the world, their origins, ideas, and impacts. Our recent investigation into monotheism involved a look at changes in culture and religion as the Roman Empire collapsed. Students created and performed skits illustrating likely experiences and consequences of The Fall of Greenfield.



Above, Max Perham reads a poem aloud to his classmates. At right, Ayla Daniels, Grace Gregory and Tim Allman pose beneath a large kinetic sculpture hanging from their classroom ceiling. Created by Lizzy Canedy and Dara Rivers, the sculpture is called “The Planets and Pluto.”



High School News

SCIENCE

9th Environmental Science:

We have now launched into our expedition on renewable and nonrenewable fuels, focusing on alternative fueled vehicles. The students are busy conducting initial research on different types of fuels. They will be using this research as well as conversations with experts to create advertisements for different alternative fueled vehicles. The 9th grade students can be seen out in the parking lot taking air samples from car emissions as they compare the sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide emissions of gasoline, diesel, bio-diesel and grease cars. This information will help us answer questions about what exactly is the most sustainable form of transportation.

10th Biology:

The students are just finishing their lab reports on the corn experiment, where they examined a genetic disorder in corn plants by comparing germination rates between a farmer's corn and Agway corn. They are now starting to look at human genetic disorders. Each student will be conducting research on a specific genetic disorder in order to create a pedigree which shows how traits can be inherited from one generation to another.

11th Physics:

Right now in physics we're immersed in an energy policy assignment. Each student is selecting a form of energy, such as solar, wind, nuclear, geothermal, or cow manure, and writing a policy briefing for their senator. They need to describe the form of energy, argue for a specific policy change, and create arguments and visuals that incorporate quantitative data. Later they will be making presentations on their findings. We also just completed a unit on work and energy, and are beginning to study heat transfer and thermodynamics.

SOCIAL STUDIES

10th— Students are working on an investigation of the Bill of Rights— they have read the Bill of Rights and have written their own version, which they have shared with one another via skits, videos and other presentations. In early February, they will be meeting with a representative of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee to hear more about the work that group does.

11th—Students are preparing a trial simulation to explore rights and responsibility in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Individuals are doing research on contemporary issues of economic justice and will be presenting their work in class.



Sela Kenen and Nicolas Borcy discover a piece of art on their treasure hunt in Spanish at the Worcester Art Museum.

MATH

9th We have begun work in a unit called "The Pit and the Pendulum". At the center of the unit is an exploration into the pendulum in Edgar Allan Poe's famous story. We aim to find out whether or not the prisoner's escape is mathematically feasible. To do this we are conducting controlled experiments so that we can determine which factors have an effect on the period of the pendulum. We are analyzing class results in terms of mean and standard deviation to determine if a result is significantly different.

10th We are examining statistical research in a unit called "Is There Really a Difference?" Students have been analyzing research methods and arguments and have learned some important things about data collection methods. They have begun to look at a few methods of data analysis and statistical testing - mean, median, mode, range, standard deviation and the chi-squared statistic. This analysis will lead to the students' own research investigations and statistical analyses in the end of this month.

11th In math, we completed our Orchard Hideout unit, ending with a surprising finding about how large our trees would have to grow before the last sight line out of the orchard was blocked. Our focus was geometry, particularly lines and circles. Now we are launching a study of rates of growth, based on a long-term problem about human population growth. As part of this unit, we will study linear growth, exponential growth and decay, logarithmic functions, and the derivative (the first topic in most calculus courses).

SPANISH

Spanish 1--Students recently completed sports surveys to find out what sport their classmates enjoy most. They are studying the weather in Puerto Rico...and students will design a travel brochure that details some interesting aspects of the island. For grammar they are studying direct object pronouns and the present progressive tense.

Spanish 2--Students are writing short stories for children in order to review the preterite and imperfect tenses (past tense). They are also designing illustrations to accompany the text. The class has been studying Puerto Rico. On a recent trip to the Worcester Art Museum, students were invited to see an exhibit displaying the artwork of three major Puerto Rican artists. They were also sent on a scavenger hunt using instructions written in Spanish to learn about various pieces of art throughout the museum.

Spanish 3—Students are exploring the subjunctive mood in Spanish and using it to have conversations about ecology and the natural world. They are learning new vocabulary pertaining to animals, plants, camping, and outdoor sporting activities. As the students learn about natural reserves in Central America, they are discussing the importance of conservation and protecting the environment. Students have also started a series of oral presentations during which each student describes a topic of interest to the class. Some recent topics have included: the music of Colombian rock star Juanes, tennis superstars, koalas, reggaeton music, and the movie Grease.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LOST and FOUND is GROWING!

Fall and winter clothing is in the Lobby of the Farmhouse and in the Common Room and Entry of the High School. Please reclaim items before they are removed and **given to charity**, and remember to mark all clothing with students' names!!

TRIPODS NEEDED

Four Rivers Charter Public School has the need for some rugged but used tripods, if anyone has a spare.

COACH NEEDED

We are looking for someone to help coach one of our Ultimate Frisbee teams in the Spring. If you are interested or know someone who would be good, please contact Terry Plotkin at 773-3259 or leave word at the school office. This is a paid position.

Stop & Shop BONUS BUCKS

You can still sign up to designate Four Rivers to receive a CASH donation every time you spend money at Stop & Shop. Pick up a designation card from Mr. Taylor in the school office. OR go to Www.stopandshop.com/aplus.

Our School ID number is: **05436**

MANY THANKS to the Textile Co. in Greenfield, for donating fabric and other very useful materials for us to use in art!

COLLEGE & CAREER COUNSELING NEWS

Ms. McKenna

Attention juniors and parents or guardians of juniors:

All Massachusetts four year state colleges require SAT scores from applicants, with the exception of students who have disclosed approved IEP accommodations (please contact the schools for specific information). Most other colleges still require SAT or ACT scores for admission. Juniors are encouraged to take the SAT in May or June, so they have a chance to retake the test in the fall if they are unhappy with their scores. Spring '07 junior test takers will also be prepared for early application options. The SAT is not offered at smaller schools such as Four Rivers; instead students choose a local test center (often a larger high school).

Registration deadline for the May 5th SAT is on April 3rd. Registration deadline for the June test is on April 27th. On-line registration is available at: <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about.html>. Registering on-line allows students the most flexibility and choice about date and location for the test. I do have registration packets for students who need to register by mail. The cost of registration is \$41.50 for the SAT. Many students may wish to take the SAT II or subject tests for admission into some selective schools. A list of SAT subject tests is available at the college board website, as well. These tests are \$18.00 per subject. Students should plan to take the SAT and SAT II exams on separate dates - one in May and one in June, for instance.

For those families who receive free or reduced cost lunch, we have SAT and SAT II registration fee waivers available in the office. For students who have not applied for the lunch program, but are eligible, now is a good time to apply. You may be eligible for the fee waiver *and* some college application fee waivers. Ms. Taylor has applications in her office. Students who are wondering whether to take the SAT should visit : www.fairtest.org for a list of SAT optional schools.

SNAPSHOTS



Tenth graders visited the seventh grade **Cell Gallery** as experts. The older students used their knowledge of cells to award "best of show" awards to different cell organelles in the 7th grade models for the best representations of different cell parts.





As part of their research into the most sustainable form of transportation, ninth graders take air samples from car emissions in the parking lot at school.

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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.