

Four Rivers Currents

May 2009

THE PRIVILEGE OF SEEING OUR STUDENTS AND THEIR WORK

As the year winds down – there are but weeks remaining – we are about to have several opportunities to see our students present, perform, and otherwise demonstrate to us what they have learned this year. For grades 7, 8, and 10, May is the month of MCAS. For all of our students, it is also the month of our two Expo Nights (Div 1 and 2 on Thursday, May 7 and Div 3 next Wednesday, May 13). Among our sibling schools that are part of the Coalition of Essential Schools, it is National Exhibitions Month. Our Juniors will be presenting their Internships and Junior Projects, while our Seniors this week will present their Senior Expeditions. And all of our students will be completing portfolios for the end of the year, with significant Passage Presentations for grades 8 and 10.

Each of these moments gives us a chance to see our students perform. Similar to watching them play sports or give a recital or simply interact with their siblings, these moments reveal to us how much they've grown and how much they still have ahead. For the Seniors presenting their expeditions, they are demonstrating the results of our overall program. Each senior worked throughout the year on a topic of their choosing. They researched the topic, perhaps interviewed experts, some engaged in fieldwork, and all created a product and this week a presentation to capture their learning. To see each one of them stand in front as an expert, to hear of how they pursued their topics, how they handled obstacles, what resources they marshalled, and to experience a product they've created through that learning – this is a moment to witness the significant skills they had to use. What's more is that they demonstrate through a project like this that they are ready to go out into the world capable of independent inquiry.

The rest of our students show us the steps they're taking toward that eventual culminating step. Their accomplishments are on a path towards that kind of independence and depth of thought and investigation. Through their portfolios, students are supposed to pull together pieces of work they've done this year and explain what they show about them as learners. How have they been strong thinkers this year? How have they been strong communicators, strong problem-solvers, or strong investigators? When have they demonstrated attention to quality and craftsmanship? When have they shown strong character? And through which experiences or explorations have they figured something out about sustainability – the core essential question at the heart of our mission?

MCAS might pale in comparison as it shows us what our students are capable of, yet we see some measure of their abilities to read, write, compute, and think, as well as their specific knowledge of science and social studies.

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From the Executive Director's Desk...

Last Wednesday, April 29, seven of us from Four Rivers journeyed to the State House in Boston to advocate for our school and other charters across the state. Our group was four parents—Jacqui Boyden, Joanne Kretzenger, Ruth Witty, Dan Woodward--plus grandparent Joe Landry and 11th grade student Eileen Trumble. We joined a rousing rally of 500 parents, students and charter leaders, filling State House's largest auditorium, at which business leaders and legislators spoke in support of raising the cap on the number of charters allowed in underperforming urban districts and maintaining adequate funding. Then members of our group met with state representatives Christopher Donelan and Denis Guyer, and also with staff representing Rep. Steven Kulik and Senator Stan Rosenberg. I was deeply impressed and grateful to each member of our group for the clarity and passion with which they spoke from their experience on behalf of our school. All of us at Four Rivers owe them thanks!

Looking ahead, we have our second Graduation Ceremony on June 6, 4 pm., in a big white tent at the school. Seating is reserved for the invited guests of the graduates, but everyone is welcome. Friday, June 19, will be our Stepping Up Ceremony for all other grades, and the last day of school. Then, before we know it, classes will resume on Wednesday, September 2, 2009 (with meetings with each student's advisor scheduled on August 30 and Sept. 1). A draft calendar for the full school year 2009-10 will be issued in June.

~ Ed Blatchford

7th Grade News

The FRCPS Olympics! *by Riley Phelps*

In Wellness we have just begun our Greek Games expedition combined with Social Studies. The expedition is about the Greek Olympics, which we are talking about in Social Studies. We have been divided into groups of 4-5 people and have been given an ancient city-state of Greece and a fitness component of muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, or cardiovascular fitness. Our groups then create a banner that represents our city-state; we create an Olympic event that uses our fitness component, and at the end of the expedition, we will hold and compete in our own Olympics!



In Honor of Dionysus *by Emi Link*

This month has been crazy! The seventh grade went places, started projects, continued projects, began new units, and more. We even started off April with the MCAS! One Wednesday, we went to the theatre to watch the short stories that we read earlier this year. The plays being performed were “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Monkey’s Paw,” “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” “The Necklace,” and “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.” All of us read three of these, but it was a choice to read the others. It was pretty cool to watch another person’s opinion on how the story was told and compare it to how we pictured it in our heads.

This was one of the larger events in April, but there was another one that involved acting as well. After studying the Greek gods and reading myths about them, we were put into groups to perform the myths. We learned many myths and, in honor of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and theatre, we drank grape juice before we performed our plays and puppet shows. They all went well and were enjoyed.

Kids Everywhere *by Lea Sweeney and Genlyne Fisk-White*

Ms. Locke took the seventh grade students outside during science class one day. She dropped kids off at different spots around the whole school campus. The spots had orange or pink ribbons marking the area (color depended on the class). As we sat in our “sit-spots,” we had three assignments: 1) We had to make a map of our area that could be either round or square. 2) We had to make the map with as much detail as possible and labels. 3) We had to find a way to remember where our sit-spot was so we could find it next time. Then when all the time we had was over, she rang a bell, and we all grabbed our ribbons and went inside. The seventh grade students will return to their spots throughout the trimester to notice the changes that have occurred and to see what we can learn about plants, insects, and ecology.

8th Grade News

In Eighth Grade English, we finished a reading of *The Old Man and the Sea*, and kicked off a season of essay writing with a reflection on the themes of the book. Our essay writing is currently in use in an expedition that will culminate in activities, workshops, and publications to be displayed this month at the Four Rivers Environmental Extravaganza. A class-wide briefing paper comparing wind power with fossil fuel energy is giving students research and writing experience that will be applied more independently by pairs working on separate topics for the F.R.E.E. Ultimately, each pair will be able to give visitors a pamphlet and a user-friendly tool for understanding issues of environmental sustainability at the fair. In social studies, we have moved to the Americas, where students are comparing South American with Central American civilizations. Some, posing as Aztecs, are writing postcards home from a visit to the Inca capital at Machu Picchu, while others are writing as Incas visiting the Aztec capital at Tenochtitlan. Next, we'll be folding history into F.R.E.E. themes as we examine environmental reasons for the collapse of the Maya.



Eighth grade students visit the Green Mountain Power Wind Facility at Searsburg, Vermont.

TREES PLEASE!

Team Funk, one of the 8th Grade crews, is hoping to plant a few small groups of trees to beautify the campus and add shade, including up to:

8 to 10 ornamentals (crabapples, dogwoods, hawthorns, etc)

3 to 4 shade trees (maples, ashes, locusts, etc)

1 to 3 evergreen trees (pines, spruces, firs, etc)

If you happen to be doing any garden revision this spring and have any of these of transportable size that you'd be willing to donate, please call Mike Bukowick at the school (413) 775-4577. Many Thanks!

DIV II NEWS

ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE ~ 9th Grade

The students have been preparing their workshops for the Four Rivers Environmental Extravaganza. They also have been continuing their study of aquatic ecology and wetlands. They have each developed a research question about the stream health in our watershed. They have started to collect data on macro invertebrates, dissolved oxygen, nitrate, and velocity.

In June their research will be shared with Environmental Science students at the Springfield Renaissance School.

BIOLOGY ~ 10th Grade

The 10th grade students have been studying evolution. They have looked at the controversy around teaching evolution and are looking at the evidence for evolution and learning about Charles Darwin and natural selection. The students will be attending a free workshop for high school students on Botany at UMASS on Friday May 5th. This will help them gain a better understanding of evolutionary ecology. We also will be continuing to review for the MCAS in Biology which is on June 4th and 5th.

9th grade Math

In 9th grade math this month we began a study of quadratic equations. First we learned how they were different than linear equations and also how to translate them around the coordinate plane by changing numbers or making terms negative. Next we looked at quadratics from an algebraic angle, learning to find the values of the vertex and the roots just by using algebra. And, following along our school's theme of technology, we learned to find the exact roots and vertex values using a graphing calculator. For our writing standard, we were faced with a POW, although we had a choice of three different ones. One was based on using logic, one was an analysis of a game, and the third choice was a problem about bales of hay and trying to determine how much they weigh.

10th grade Math

In 10th grade math we took some time to review quadratic equations and how they differ from linear equations. We learned how to factor trinomials into a product of two binomials and then find the roots from this point. Soon after this, we began a study of polygons which morphed into 3-dimensional figures. We now know the difference between lateral area, surface area, and volume. As mid-May draws near we will spend some time reviewing some concepts from 9th grade to make sure we are ready to take the 10th grade math MCAS.

Div III ENVIRONMENTAL

In environmental science we have been researching a variety of different types of environmental activism so that student can find a voice that best suits them. We have also been gearing up for the Four Rivers Environmental Extravaganza (F.R.E.E.), a celebration and demonstration of human and environmentally sustainable lifestyle choices hosted by Four Rivers students for middle and high school students, Four Rivers families, and the Greenfield community.

This festival grew out of a 9th grade idea to educate others, in a fun way, about environmental issues like global warming and lifestyle choices that can help sustain people, our communities, and our environment. We have also teamed up with Greening Greenfield, a local organization working to make Greenfield a more sustainable and vibrant place to live. It is scheduled to take place on May 22 during the school day with additional sessions taking place from 4-6 in the evening. The festival's mission is to inform and to inspire people to join Greening Greenfield's 10% Challenge: to make a 10% change toward increased energy-efficiency and decreased waste.

Their booth project will be an opportunity for them to use their activism skills to help revitalize Greenfield by using "greening" as an inspirational engine that will build a sustainable Greenfield, so that current and future generations can enjoy life in this beautiful and abundant valley. Hope to see everyone there.

DIV III NEWS

IMP-3 and IMP-4

Students in IMP-3 have just spent a few weeks studying the derivative -- the first step in most introductory calculus courses -- as a way of understanding rates of change of phenomena such as falling objects and growing populations. Now we are turning to a study of exponential and logarithmic functions as part of an ongoing problem about population growth. For the 12th graders we have moved away from IMP-4 for the final six weeks of the course and are doing a rapid introduction to the main topics of calculus -- limits, derivatives, and integrals. We are deliberately using a college textbook as our primary resource, to help them get more experience with one of the main types of resources they'll be using in September!

PSYCHOLOGY

After completing our work on prejudice, students investigated conformity, obedience, and research methods in social psychology. We looked at several approaches to qualitative and quantitative research, and the issues of correlation vs. causality, which is so relevant to interpreting the daily news! For the last part of the trimester, students are carrying out a research, writing, and teaching project related to a social psychology topic they have chosen -- including aggression, interpersonal attraction, interrogation, nonverbal communication, and others.

POETRY of SOCIAL CHANGE

Students have been leading presentations on and analyzing the work of various social change poets throughout the trimester, and are now beginning to craft their own poems. We were fortunate enough to have a group of mentor poets come to Four Rivers to lead small-group poetry critique and writing sessions, wherein students received professional feedback on their work and next steps for revision. A special thanks to Haesong Kim, David Bartone, Ben Koppel and Kyle McCord for their great work as mentor poets. From here, we're hoping to lead an Open Mic of social change poetry toward the end of May, and there will be a publication forthcoming.

CHARACTER STUDY: Literature to Life

Students have just written their first analytical essay for this course on character virtues in *The Kite Runner*, and we've had many discussions on how character virtues influence a person's life. To investigate further case studies, students have chosen biographies to read and analyze for this very topic. The subjects are as varied as the students themselves, but each will provide information on the way character virtues and circumstances intersect to inform the course of a person's life. After this point, students will be evaluating their own values and priorities and trying to apply these lessons to their own lives.

PHYSICS

April was a busy month for us in Physics. Students finished writing their own electrostatics lab which was derived from a set of "less than clear" operating instructions. This process went through several drafts and involved a formal peer review component. We have recently started investigating circuits and electrical current. Using an inquiry based protocol called CASTLE, students are performing a series of hands on experiments to gain an in depth understanding of the subject matter.

The students have also started working on designs for their final project. This trimester individuals or small groups will construct a device that will, at the very least, produce enough electricity to light a single flashlight bulb bright enough to read twelve point text, three feet away, using renewable energy. They will also be responsible for, as both an individual and as a group, explaining in detail how their energy source is converted to light. There has been much excitement and creative brainstorming involved with this project.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SPORTS UPDATE

ULTIMATE SEASON IN FULL SWING

Tournament season has begun and we want to especially invite everyone to come to GCC on May 9 for our home tournament. We have 24 teams coming in three different divisions including 4 teams from Four Rivers. The boys varsity is seeded second in the A Div and the girls varsity and boys jv are seeded third in their divisions so all should compete for the championship. The girls jv will also make a strong showing in the girls division.

The varsity girls are 6-3 this year. They played a good tournament at NMH. They had a disappointing loss to Amherst jv in the first game before coming back strong to defeat Longmeadow and PVPA. The boys varsity has compiled an 8-1 record this season and finished second in the NMH tournament. They have a strong contingent of seniors and their experience has lifted their play to a high level. They have had some impressive wins against NMH, Northampton, and Longmeadow. The jv boys team is 8-3. They came close to winning the Andover Tournament, dropping a close game to St. Johns in the semi-finals.

The jv girls record is 2- 2. They have a strong 7th grade contingent, and 12 returning players from 8th and 9th grade. They also have great parent fans! The middle school boys are 2-2. They have wins against The Academy of Charlemont and Eaglebrook and 2 loses by strong teams from Amherst and Hartsbrook. The coed team won their first game against The Academy of Charlemont and improved their record to 1-3. The coach reports that his team plays with the determination of a beaver and the heart of a lion. Their opponents have uniformly praised them for having the best post-game cheer in the league.

~~ Terry Plotkin, Athletic Director

NURSE'S NOTES

H1Ni Flu has been the top headline in the news. State and local health professionals are providing frequent updates to school health offices.

Important facts: Franklin County is at low risk for the disease. Signs and symptoms include pronounced body ache and cough; fever (101 to 102).

Prevention: Wash hands frequently, especially after coughing or sneezing. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or into the inside of your elbow, not into your bare hands. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Stay home if you are sick, especially with a fever:

For more Information:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health website on influenza:
<http://www.mass.gov/dph/flu>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website on Swine Flu: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>

Swine Flu Information Hot Line: Dial 211

The last week of April has been a perfect reminder that ALL students need to bring a filled water bottle with them each day to help control dehydration. Thank you for your cooperation.

~~ Jeanne Milton, RN, School Nurse ~~

COLLEGE COUNSELING NEWS

College and Technical School Acceptances

University of Massachusetts, Lowell; Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts; Suffolk University; Humboldt State University; University of Montana, Missoula; Ithaca College; Hallmark Institute; Alfred University; Michigan Technological University; New England College; University of Vermont; Champlain College; Rochester Institute of Technology; University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Northeastern University; Paul Smith's College; Greenfield Community College; Edison State College; Unity College; The Hartt School – University of Hartford; SUNY Oneonta; Sage College of Albany

Students and Families, please inform Ms. Childress about any acceptances and scholarship offers

Seniors

**Regardless of where you are attending school or training next year, file the FAFSA. This is the only mechanism for institutions to distribute state and federal monies. www.fafsa.ed.gov

**Scholarship search at www.fastweb.org

Juniors

Plan to take the SAT and ACT with Writing at least once during your junior year. If you are applying to highly selective/competitive colleges you will need to take the SAT Subject tests. Check the individual college's admissions requirements for SAT Subject test information

ACT with Writing – www.act.org

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Registration Deadline
	REGULAR	LATE
June 13, 2009	May 8, 2009	May 9-22, 2009

SAT Reasoning and SAT Subject – www.collegeboard.com

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Registration Deadline
	REGULAR	LATE
June 6, 2009	May 5, 2009	May 6-19, 2009

**Search for colleges at www.connectedu.net and www.mefacounselor.org

Four Rivers Environmental Extravaganza

The community is invited to attend workshops from 4:00 to 6:00 pm on **Friday, May 22nd**. The workshops will be conducted by students in the 8th, 9th, 11th and 12th grades. These student-designed workshops will focus on the ways that we can reduce carbon emis-

Summer School Opportunities at Four Rivers

Four Rivers will once again offer an opportunity for free individualized instruction in Math and English to students who need improvement. It is grant-funded and has been scheduled flexibly around summer vacation schedules of students and their families. This one-on-one tutoring has been popular as it is focused on the specific needs of each student to help strengthen their preparation for next year's course work. It may also satisfy incomplete standards work in Math and English for Division I students, depending on each student's situation. More information coming in late May and June.

Students and Their Work *cont. from page 1*

Not everything that is important to learn can be measured and not everything that can be measured is important to learn. If we can, let's use all of this information that we will get over the next weeks (and months when the test scores arrive) to see what new powers our students have gained, and to think with them about their next steps.

Peter Garbus, Principal

Right ~ Eighth grade students visit the Green Mountain Power Wind Facility at Searsburg, Vermont.



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
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