Attributes 6 and 7: Flexible Structure and Learning Partnerships

Every school in our district has created a School Transformation Plan. These plans are based on seven attributes that are meant to guide reflection on and analysis of the school. This month, Clara Scott and administrative intern Jeanne Kuban continue their monthly discussion of how TOPS addresses the attributes by looking at how the school provides flexible structure and learning partnerships.

By Clara Scott and Jeanne Kuban

Flexible structure of schedules and the calendar is a hallmark of a quality school. TOPS frequently adjusts the daily schedule to accommodate enrichment activities that nurture many kinds of learning in all grades. Artists-In-Residence integrate our curriculum with the visual arts, dance and movement, and storytelling. Flexible daily schedules occur for students involved in music and drama programs and performances. The TOPICS program engages elementary students in small group learning events, taught by diverse members of our school community about a variety of interests. Zero hour Spanish classes were held this year for interested students. Frequent field trips are an integral and valued component of the TOPS instructional program.

What all of these wonderfully varied activities say about our school is that we value flexible teaching, a flexible setting for learning, and a flexible curriculum that honors academic rigor in content areas, but also celebrates the arts, community service, and the irreplaceable experience of stimulating field trips.

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This Year’s TOPS Auction Was The Best Yet!

What a fantastic event! Once again, everybody’s hard work has paid off — big-time. Although the results aren’t quite final, it’s looking like we’ve cleared nearly $65,000 — or about $20,000 more than last year. The TOPS music program, the evening’s “special item,” netted $11,000 from our generous, enthusiastic bidders. And it was very exciting to see how well some of this year’s innovations turned out. Our first raffle made about $1000.

The dessert dash, bringing in close to $5,000, actually exceeded last year’s total — and everyone had a great dessert! The checkout process at evening’s end was handled seamlessly by our new auction software, which, besides providing receipts with tax donation information, also allows us to see what kinds of items did best. That will be very helpful for next year. This year, thank-you notes are being sent out to all businesses who donated items or services to the auction, letting them know how successful the auction was — and how grateful TOPS is for their support. Speaking of grateful, the Auction Committee and the entire TOPS community offer thanks again to all donors, volunteers, and attendees. Let’s plan to come back next spring with great ideas and big donations. Go, TOPS!

Illustration by Quy and Ryan
SITE COUNCIL MEETING

MAY 8, 2002

By Monica Hinckley

David Shields, parent of a 3rd-grader and professor of English at the UW, reported on a meeting he had with Ms. Scott to discuss how to reduce the student-teacher ratio at TOPS. It is not as simple as just limiting enrollment. Each student brings in $3,300; therefore, the loss of three would cut down funds by $9,900, yet the teacher salary, of course, remains the same. The focus would be on the 1st – 5th grades. The following are his recommendations: (1) to encourage parents to make contributing in the classroom their first volunteer priority — and to discuss this necessity during the curriculum night at the beginning of the school year; (2) to form a grant-writing committee to seek grants from the school district and other sources to help pay for intern posts; and (3) for parents who have connections with local universities to approach the departments of education in the hopes of making TOPS the destination school for elementary education majors seeking a student-teacher post. Teachers need to be included in discussions about class size reduction, because they know what works best for them. What works best for the kids is of course what we are all after. Since student teachers are typically in the classroom to practice and learn, and are not in the classroom for a full year, the internship program appears to be the way to go. This, however, will be a more appealing idea if some sort of stipend can be included in the offer. It was decided that it would be advantageous to the Site Council to have a member who can contribute a monthly report on issues that can have an impact on our school coming from the District level, the School Board meetings, and Olympia.

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT

Ms. Scott began by thanking everyone who worked hard to make the auction such a success. On behalf of the students and staff she thanked the parents who served on the auction committee and all those who made financial contributions to the general auction fund and our music program. It has been decided that next year’s 5th-grade class will be self-contained so that teachers can have better contact with each student and family. Later this month we will be interviewing for a teacher for our new Hearing-Impaired program. We hope to have made a decision by May 28. Luzita Roll has asked for volunteers to help frame artwork for the art fair. Any amount of time that can be donated would be helpful.

Many congratulations are due this month: Hanna Repass (5th) was selected to be a part of this year’s Common Cents Youth Board. TOPS’ Double Dutch team competed in the 20th annual Double Dutch challenge. This was their first competition and they walked away with 4th place. Karen Hart took 14 middle school students to the regional National History Day competition. Four students, Kristof Krum, Brendon Griffin, Daniel Neill, and Nat Schacht advanced from regional to state level and presented their social studies projects in Ellensburg. They all made it to the finalist stage. In the K-3rd-grade Chess Competition TOPS students reached the 4th level.

HISTORY PROJECT

Debra Walker explained that this is the 25th anniversary of TOPS School. (It was started in 1977 as “The Garfield Area Option Program at Stevens.”) There are many families who were involved in the beginning of TOPS but have moved on, and so now is the time to begin compiling all the odds and ends which make up the history of our school. Toby Harris has done research at the archives and has found information on Seward but nothing on TOPS. There are two aspects to this project: one, to compile and organize the information, and two, to devise projects that could be generated from this information. There is also a desire to begin an ongoing archive whereby a packet from each class would be collected at the end of every year.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Treasurer Peggy Riehle presented the July–April budget. This past month, “Friends of TOPS” paid for art supplies ($1,200), tutors ($1,404), and the counselor position ($7,500). The $1,200 left over in the multi-cultural assemblies budget has been reallocated for tutoring ($1,100) and a pianist for the choir assembly ($100.00).

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fund Development - Sheri Toussaint reported on the auction. This was the first year the items up for auction were on the TOPS website, which improved responses. We were able to get seven teachers to auction up themselves and since this is always one of most popular items, it was a big money earner. There were only 41 items up for the live auction (compared to last year’s 57) so the evening ended at a more reasonable time with most people still in attendance. The $5.00 raffle tickets sold well. Total revenues from the auction are $81,000, including the $11,000 for the music program. The No-Bake contributions are still coming in, with a $46,000 balance thus far.

Facilities - The Rogers Field Playground will officially open to the community on May 22. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the school will be on the 24th. The middle school band will play and the Choir will sing. There will be a drawing for being the first to go down the slide. “Welcome” will be said in many languages, a poem will be read, a speech given, and then perhaps a treasure hunt and an obstacle course will take place.

Communication - Marlies van Bergeijk was pleased to announce that the April edition of TOPS News arrived in mailboxes on Monday, and congratulated the efforts of the editor, Annie Gage, the layout and design team of Cindy Suzumura and Margie Slovan, and Bruce Pulmano.

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A MESSAGE FROM CLARA SCOTT

As you probably have heard, our auction was a huge success. Thank you to all who contributed or participated. We were overwhelmed by the excitement and generosity we witnessed that evening. You had heard that our 4th- and 5th-grade music program was in jeopardy, but thanks to such great support of the special auction item, we know it will continue. Mr. Denton and I donated a slumber party at school, so a few weeks ago we got to have ten wonderful TOPS students spend the night at school. We’re looking forward to another great sleepover next year!

The recent ruling regarding I-200 complicated matters at the district level, as school assignments were being prepared. Fortunately, they regrouped quickly and sent assignments out in a timely manner. At TOPS we shared the same concerns as the rest of the district, wondering if our school would be able to maintain its diversity, or if we would see a more homogeneous kindergarten class. Kindergarten assignments were mailed a few days ago, and we were pleased to find out that the class is a diverse one.

A few weeks ago we hired a teacher for our new Hard of Hearing class for students with cochlear implants. We are excited about this great addition to the TOPS community.

TOPS has turned into a rumor mill this spring, as people speculated on the future of some of our teaching staff. A few weeks ago, Tabitha Beaupain announced that she would be leaving TOPS to join Gary Tubbs at the New School at South Shore, where she will be teaching kindergarten. She knows that all children deserve a great school like TOPS, so she is taking action to work towards that. While we are sad to see Tabitha go, we applaud her for modeling our school’s commitment to social justice.

Our 5th-grade program will experience changes as well. Ilsa and Kevin have put a lot of thought into their program and what will be most beneficial for their students. We have decided that they will each teach all subjects to a single class. This arrangement will allow them to integrate subjects more, get to know individual students better, and communicate with families on a more consistent basis.

The fences finally came down around the Eastlake play area. Cathy Rutherford, our principal intern, worked with a group of students in planning an opening celebration. The celebration, held May 24, included a performance by the choir and a poetry reading. A drawing determined who would cut the ribbon to the park and the first child down the slide. Mostly, we were all excited to have the area open up after we’d waited sooooo long! The only downside is the difficulty in keeping all of our students safe. We need your help supervising kids both before school and during recess times. If you can volunteer for a recess each week, it would be a big help. Please contact Marlies, our volunteer coordinator, at 252-3541.

Eighth Grade Passage will be held on June 18 at 7:00 in the TOPS gym. We are looking forward to celebrating our 8th-graders’ nine years at TOPS and their transition to high school.

Thank you to the many volunteers who have given so much of their time to support TOPS this year. As we continue to close the achievement gap we will need more parent support in the classroom. It may be late to get started this year, but it is time to start thinking about September. An hour or two each week will make a big difference to the kids in the class. If you are unable to work here during the school day, there are always jobs that can be done at home. There’s always more to do!

Thanks for the great support you’ve given Bruce and me this year at TOPS. We are excited about the upcoming year and have already started making plans. We’ll continue our work through the summer. We hope that you have a great summer too!

Cheers!

Clara

Site Council Meeting continued

for mailing. There was some concern expressed regarding the report on the Site Council meeting. All the issues discussed at the meetings should be included in the final edit despite the fact that some of these might be reported on in another article or that some events are over and done with by the time the News is received. It is important for those who are not able to attend the meetings to have access to them through this report.

The biweekly “Wednesday Go-Home” has saved an enormous amount of paper and will continue to be sent out every other week. Future plans are to have it sent out electronically for those interested. Kevin Crozier reminded us that any key information could be sent to him to be posted on the website. The Site Council meeting report will be posted there too.

Art Committee - There is no committee specifically geared towards our art program so it was suggested that one be formed made up of parents representing the 5th through 8th grades.

Site Council meetings are open to everyone. They are held on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, from 5:00-7:00 p.m., in the school library. The next meeting is Wednesday, June 12, 2002.
**Family Passage: Fifteen Years Celebrated with a Gift**

By Claudia Bach and Phil Smart (parents of Gregory Smart, 8th-grader, and Amanda Smart, 1996 TOPS graduate)

In 1987 we started the adventure of kindergarten with TOPS—the only Seattle Public School that made us excited about sending our firstborn, Amanda, off on a big yellow bus every day. Fifteen years later our second and youngest child, Gregory, is graduating from TOPS and we will be saying goodbye to a large part of our lives.

We have had a chance to be part of the growth of the school from scruffy portables at Stevens to a gracious renovated building at Seward. TOPS has changed from a program fighting for district recognition to one of the district’s exemplars and most desired schools. We’ve also watched the school culture shift. A focus on Seattle as an urban learning environment and the centrality of TOPICS has changed: increased stability is sometimes a challenge to the flexibility that characterized the fledgling, dynamic alternative program we first encountered.

We’ve also seen a more homogeneous and affluent community emerge at TOPS. This brings both new resources and new challenges to the mission of the school as an alternative program that values the rich mix that public urban education can provide. To that end, it is commendable to see teachers and parents continuing to explore what this might mean in the future through such programs as the Coalition for Social Justice.

Over the years our involvement has ebbed and flowed, but it has been well worth the effort to make connections to the school. As parents we have learned and grown through our involvement at TOPS. We’ve had the fun of classroom and field trip participation with kids at all stages. We have also learned to wrestle with very difficult situations related to change, inequity, and divergent viewpoints with a committed group of parents from all over the city. How fortunate to have felt like partners with the talented and extraordinarily committed teachers who provide the core of what makes a TOPS education a gift to all our students.

We have chosen to celebrate our passage from TOPS with a gift. We hope our gift of African masks and crafts will be used by current and future TOPS teachers and students as a source of information and inspiration. It is a chance to say THANK YOU to the teachers, staff, parents, and students who have made the last fifteen years an invaluable learning experience for our whole family.

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**From the New Editor**

Many thanks to Annie Gage for her year of editing work. We all appreciated the high quality of the newsletter, and Annie’s enthusiasm and openness was primarily what encouraged me, and doubtless many others, to contribute. Now she is on to other literary ventures. I don’t want to give away any secrets, but her name just might be turning up in some fun places!

Many thanks to Cindy Suzumura and Margie Slovan for helping me learn my new job, and to Marlies van Bergeijk for her support. Now I’m putting out the call: writers new and old, send me your articles and ideas! Let me know if you are willing to write on assignment here and there (or just one time?) next year.

Call me at 325-8320 or email me at zongora2@hotmail.com.

I’ll just say it: I love this place.

~Teresa Nemeth

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**From the Volunteer Coordinator**

By Marlies van Bergeijk

It has been a busy year at TOPS with some big transitions, much talk about school transformation, and a lot of time and energy spent by teachers and many volunteers in the classroom, at home, and elsewhere to put our transformation plan into action. I want to thank you all for your efforts on behalf of the students in our school. That includes the help you gave at home with homework and the effort it took to get your children to school on time in the first place.

Once again, I enjoyed meeting new parents and being able to count on so many in the entire parent body to make things happen. Knowing what is being done already makes it hard at times to ask for more. I also think it is important to stay in dialogue about this as a community: when are we truly maxed out; how could we rethink what we do and how it is done, and how can we include parents who are simply not able to do a weekly in-class writing group? Do we need to rethink the very meaning of involvement?

Even though many of you might be focused on making it to the end of this school year in one piece, I invite you to also take a moment to think ahead about next year. Have you been thinking you might want to give being a Room Rep a try? Take a chance and sign up for it. It takes all sorts of energy and talents to make it work at each grade level. Is your passion that all kids become good readers? Volunteer to be a reader with one child. Are you good at researching and writing grants? Sandy Green would love to hear from you. Are you concerned about keeping our building and grounds in good shape? The facilities committee can use your energy and ideas. Did you enjoy teaching a TOPIC and do you have some ideas for next year? Put them down before you forget, or, better yet: become the TOPICS coordinator. Have some thoughts you want to share with a big audience? Write an article for the newsletter.

But please get it to Teresa Nemeth by the deadline. (Thanks, Marlies. -ed.)
One of our challenges is finding enough time in our busy year for all of the enriching opportunities that become available to our students. TOPS students are particularly blessed with a wide and varied curriculum due to high parent involvement and interest. Many of our students’ enrichment opportunities are made possible because of parents’ expertise, planning, and commitment.

TOPS teachers model flexibility for their students every day. This necessary life skill is important at school, at work, and at home.

Learning Partnerships are another attribute of quality schools. TOPS has a variety of strong partnerships for the purpose of sustaining a vibrant community of learners. A sense of “Us” is built around a spirit of trust and community. Site Council, comprised of parents, staff, and community members, meets regularly. Decision-making about fundraising, extracurricular activities, and the goals of the Coalition for Social Justice are all a part of the work of Site Council. The Coalition for Social Justice focuses on the issues of race in education, seeking to gain deeper understanding and communication for improved student learning. The Leadership Team has a representative membership that deals with budget, staffing, and instruction.

Many community members and Eastlake neighbors volunteer in our school as tutors. Basic Skills Tutoring, an Eastlake community agency, is contracted to support selected students and close our academic achievement gap. University of Washington students frequently elect to come to TOPS as tutors through the Pipeline Project.

Connecting students to tutors is a challenge because of schedules and transportation. Achieving the maximum benefit from tutoring with a minimum impact on a student’s regular school day requires consistent monitoring and adjustment. We have found the effort to be worthwhile as we work to close the achievement gap and work for the benefit of all students at TOPS.
TOPS IS TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD!

By Debrah Walker (parent of Josie Baldner, 5th-grader, and Erin Baldner, 1997 TOPS graduate)

Did you know that this school year is TOPS’ 25th anniversary? Committed and active Seattle parents first developed the plan for a new alternative elementary program in the mid-1970s and looked for a school location in the Central District. TOPS, originally known as the Garfield Area Option Program, began in the 1976-77 school year at Stevens Elementary School and spent many years in portables there.

From the beginning TOPS has been an innovative, creative, and community-building school, developing programs to engage children’s many learning styles and interests. The City School program (initiated in 1979), Children and Architecture, exceptional drama productions, and the Underground Railroad Project are just a few examples of the educational opportunities teachers and parents have created for TOPS students.

We’ve also been able to successfully adapt to changing circumstances and respond to external struggles: the struggle to exist at all, to expand into a K–8 program as our popularity grew, and then to find and work for a better, safer facility to house our growing school.

TOPS HISTORY PROJECT

With TOPS’ 25th anniversary on our minds, several staff members and parents have been meeting to discuss a TOPS History Project. We all agree TOPS has had a rich array of experiences that have influenced its evolution, and we believe they need to be documented so that we know where we’ve been as a community and a school. Project ideas have been plentiful and exciting, but we have come to realize that before we can develop any projects we need to build an archive.

TOPS history has never been collected or saved. Each year we lose staff and families who played key roles in TOPS’ past. Many of them have boxes of materials about TOPS stored away in their homes. Toby Harris and I visited the Seattle School District’s archives and found (1) an early pamphlet advertising TOPS, (2) two middle school year books from ’96 and ’97, and (3) one newspaper article about our middle school expansion. It is clear to us it is time to create a TOPS History Archive.

This project will be a two-phase process. Next fall we will begin Phase I, involving three tasks:

1. Set up archive standards and guidelines.
2. Solicit, review, and compile materials for the Archive.
3. Define curriculum-based projects for the following year, as well as funding sources.

Our goal for these archives is that they be well organized, with information easy to manage, recover, and display. It should be a community resource. We also hope to establish a “historian” for every classroom, who will be responsible for collecting class photos, the class list, and information about activities or projects that represent the year.

Phase II we hope will begin in the 2003-04 school year and perhaps continue into subsequent years. It will consist of the development of actual projects using the archives as resource material. We expect projects will involve students within the curriculum, and will have the potential to teach skills in research, conducting interviews to create oral history, collecting and interpreting documents, and developing data into projects to be shared and archived. Project outcomes may be written down, or they may take an audio, video, art, or other format. We’ve also discussed designing a website and forming a TOPS alumni group. We expect the archive to eventually be expanded to include some of Seward School’s history.

In the end we hope that all our students and community members understand they are part of a place with a rich history, and that they each play a part in its continuing story.

Next fall we will be calling for volunteers to work with us on very specific tasks. We’re hoping to have at least one representative from every grade. Look for more information in October and think about joining us.
SERVICE LEARNING ROCKS AT TOPS

By Annie Gage

Did you know that while your children learn the three Rs at TOPS they also have opportunities to learn the two Cs and one A: Compassion, Community, and Activism? Throughout this school year, TOPS students participated in a variety of service learning projects. What follows is an overview of some of the service learning activities that have taken place over the past nine months.

When is a cereal box not a cereal box? When it’s a spaceship or a robot or a book or any of the other amazing inventions created by kindergartners in their Inventor Center. Using boxes and cartons that might otherwise have become garbage, kindergartners designed whatever they could imagine. In the process, they got a non-didactic lesson on recycling and the value in being creative instead of just tossing stuff away.

In Margie Butcher’s 1st-grade class, service learning was a part of the weekly curriculum. Every Wednesday morning, members of the “Dogs Action Network” met in one of five groups: Environment, Animals, Human Rights, Health and Happiness, and Homeless and Poor. Their activities included making canvas shopping bags with which they raised money for environmental causes, organizing a pet-supply drive for the Seattle Animal Shelter, developing relationships with “elderbuddies” at a local nursing home, and running the school-wide Common Cents campaign, which raises money for homeless children. When asked to write about their experiences in the Dogs Action Network, here is what some of them had to say:

♦ Hi my name is Tova and I am on the homeless team and this is what I learned. I learned that paper is made from trees and trees make oxygen so when a tree is cut down an animal PROBABLY loses its home. I learned that homeless families have to live outside most of the time because they do not have a home. I also learned that homeless kids don’t have any telephone so they can’t call ANYONE!!!

♦ I learned in D.A.N. that helping animals is fun. I like animals, they are smart and they’re very warm and fluffy. ~Obadiah

♦ Hi my name is Tere and I learned that there are about 800 kids that are homeless right now and each night in Seattle and even kids that are 6 years old. p.s. even today.

Both Margie’s class and Mrs. Beaupain’s 1st-grade class responded to the events of September 11 with acts of service. Margie’s students “adopted” a 1st-grade class near Ground Zero, while Mrs. B’s students responded closer to home with a poster of support to the North Seattle mosque that was a target of violence.

At least one individual student was also moved to activism by September 11. While listening to news reports that day, TOPS 5th-grader Abigail Roth got the idea to raise money for the Red Cross. With the help of friends, she designed and distributed posters throughout the school that publicized a donation box by the main office. Every week, she counted the money. By January, her grassroots efforts had netted $241.33 for the Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. “I got a lot of help from my friends,” says Abigail. “They helped me with the posters and asked the bus to wait for me when I had to put the collection box in the office at the end of the day. Everyone helped, and I liked it that I started it.”

Students in Mr. Jones’ class also took initiative in providing service. In December, Mr. J. asked that instead of giving him a material gift, they do some kind of community service and write about it for him on a card. Their “Winter Projects” included tutoring, volunteering at service locations such as food banks, recycling unwanted items back into the community to people who needed them, donating money out of their allowance — and giving items through projects such as Giving Trees — or in one case to a library that is being built in Mexico. Many of the 2nd-graders wrote to Mr. J. about how good it made them feel to participate in this assignment.

Since 1st grade, TOPS 3rd-graders have collected money for UNICEF every Halloween while trick-or-treating. Both 3rd-grade teachers, Tracy Seefeld and Katie Waters, used materials from the UNICEF education packet to give students inspiring information about how the money they collected would help others. For example, $1.00 will buy polio vaccines for two children. The students counted what they collected — a grand total of $251.55! That would be enough to vaccinate almost the entire student body of TOPS.

Incorporating service into the curriculum took Lana Fuller and her 6th-grade math/science class to Greenlake, where they removed invasive plants in the Habitat area. “The kids loved it,” says Lana, “and the master gardener was thrilled with the kids’ work.”

Isn’t it encouraging to know that our children are learning how to be stewards of the planet in so many different ways?
**SUMMER FUN AT KIDS COMPANY**

Kids Company is still accepting enrollment for summer. We are a safe, secure, fun place for children. We offer a summer program that will provide lifelong memories of friendship, fun, and excitement. Our caring and well-trained staff develop a curriculum that inspires curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. Your child will have the opportunity to learn new skills and rediscover old talents through arts and crafts, sports, cooking, science, field trips, and trips to local beaches and parks. Please call Tonja Davis, Program Director, at 206-709-8487 for more information.

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**CHILDREN’S IDENTITY AND CULTURAL INCLUSION: A TOPS FAMILY LOOKS AT EIGHT YEARS**

*By Sally Buckley*

We came to TOPS with some idea that its classes afforded kids a broad world perspective, appreciation of various cultures, and a supportive community for our quite mixed family of two 50-year-old Anglo lesbian Aunties who had adopted the 6- and 8-year-old children of a very close Native American friend.

Eager to support them in their new school and to be part of its active parent corps, I dived in as many do, chaperoning plays and camping trips, helping individual children and groups with reading and writing skills, correcting papers. We felt generally comfortable socially with parents and found good teacher and administration support for our kids’ big transition from a very small-town school on a Montana reservation to a big-city school.

Knowing from the outset that our children needed support for and positive recognition of their Native identity, we went to wonderful weekly Native American Culture Nights run by Hoochusedah, the District’s Title IX Indian Education Act Program. Our children ate frybread and Indian tacos, did art in Coast Salish themes, met other Indian kids and elders, and were soothed by the big Pow Wow drums. As a family we got to make our own hand drums, try our hand at moccasin making, and learn how intricate a job it is to make woven baskets!

With courage and validation from Hoochusedah, after being at TOPS for only five months I got support from then-principal Karen Kodama and teachers to write a Seattle Arts Commission Grant for Harvest Moon, a Quinault basket-maker, to come in Fall 1996 and work with grades K–5 on cattail mats, Coast Salish hats, and small cedar and spruce baskets. Although class schedules had to be remolded, students and families were excited and deeply moved by the combination of Harvest’s warmth, traditional storytelling, and the excitement of showing their work at the concluding Potlatch gathering. I witnessed a really diverse group of kids feeling affirmed and so involved that, six years later, kids now so grown-up that I hardly recognize them ask if I ever see Harvest or can she come back to TOPS.

Harvest Moon’s impact on our children, parents, and staff encouraged me to talk to teachers, proposing other smaller visits from Native artists such as Roger Fernandes and Jamestown S’Klallam. I noted the positive impact on all the kids, especially those of color: they saw themselves reflected by the guest’s discussion of a non-English language, of a non-dominant group’s history, art, and social ways. Clarice Young, Lummi elder and beadworker, met Nani and Tal’s 5th grade at Camp Warm Beach and, as they all sat near the beach, told the kids the history of North Puget tribes.

Middle school Language Arts teacher Lori Eikelberg invited me to develop a unit on Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce. It was done in 1999, culminating in a class visit by Allen Pinkham Sr., former tribal chair and a tribal historian. Art teacher Luzita Roll and a parent led students in making their own beautiful beaded leather medicine pouches.

Floris and I wanted to work with the Diversity and Disproportionality Committee but at that time it needed to focus primarily on bringing in and supporting African American families. We understood this, and hoped also that school discussions and classroom inclusion of the full range of American ethnic cultures—from First Peoples to African-Americans, Chinese-, Japanese-, and Filipino-Americans, VietNamease- and Cambodian-Americans, Latinos and Hawaiians, Scandinavian- and Jewish-Americans—would not only cause our children to feel themselves as citizens of the world but also enhance each child’s self-identity so that she saw herself as fully able to learn as her classmates.

Thus, I supported teachers in having role-model guests or taking field trips to show children successful, walking-talking artists from our many cultural groups, mathematicians of color, female scientists whose implicit and explicit message is “You too have the ability to do this art, math, creative writing, science, public speaking...”.

There was the African actress from Zimbabwe, the Hispanic playwright/director...

We felt hope and solidarity in 1997-98 when Cheryl Pappy, then Garry Owens, Cathy Chunn, Sandra Hinojosa, Tillman Smith, and others, emphasized the crucial links between student self-identity and teachers’ unconscious messages regarding success/failure and academic achievement. The Diversity/Disproportionality Committee became the Diversity Coalition, where a spectrum of parents focused on high achievement for all students, supported by a multicultural curriculum and teachers’ professional development.

The TOPS Site Council provided generous grants of $6000 (2000) and $3000 (2001) to the Library for Multicultural Books, to supplement our small but growing general collection. Did you know that the District allots us only $2000 a year, much of which goes to repair or replace lost volumes? Librarian Steve Haines has spent many evening hours leading the Multicultural Library Committee.

The Race Circles in Education Discussion groups have met in 2000 and 2001, and the leadership of Gary Tubbs, Clara Scott, and the Diversity Coalition (which became the Social Justice Coalition in 2001) worked to transform
TOPS Students Successful at History Day Contest

By Leo Griffin

TOPS joined 71 other schools from across the state in traveling to Central Washington University (CWU) to compete in the History Day Contest on May 3 and 4. Daniel Heller, Nat Schacht, Brendan Griffin, and Christoph Krumm joined Sarah Ryer, a former student of Ms. Hart’s who now attends Franklin High School, in experiencing Washington State’s biggest history gig—one that seemed to refute the recent Seattle Times article entitled “Test shows youths lack grasp of U.S. History.”

Buses, vans, and school district autos transporting more than 634 students, as well as carloads of exhibits, clogged I-90 and CWU. Students from Pasco to Poulbo, from Mt. Spokane to Mt. Baker, took up seemingly every meeting table, corner, and available step practicing for this year’s topic: “Revolution, Reaction and Reform.” The American, French, and Russian Revolutions were in great evidence, as well as revolutions in jazz, sports, industry, and science. The event wasn’t all papers and pressure, though. Our heroes managed to enjoy their dorm room, the TV with 94 channels, dorm food, and playing pool and foosball in the Student Union Building.

On Friday evening, May 3, we found out that all our entrants had made it into the finals! Time for more pool and foosball. Saturday morning, the pressure starting to show a little bit, Nat, Brendan and Christoph gave a second performance on the 1968 Olympics. We went to see Sarah’s second performance on Nathan Hale and Dr. Benjamin Church entitled “Resistance and Independence in America’s Revolution.” Saturday afternoon the award results came in: Daniel was sixth in the Junior Historical Paper category with his report entitled “The American Witchhunt: McCarthyism,” and we watched as Sarah took first place in the Senior Individual Performance category. We packed up Sarah’s jail cell prop (which makes for an interesting conversation piece to have secured to the top of your car) and headed out, wishing Sarah well at the upcoming National History Day at the University of Maryland in June. As our cars headed over the pass, it was hard not to find ourselves thinking about next year’s theme: “Rights and Responsibilities.”

Children’s Identity continued

TOPS’ official mission to the Anti-Bias Curriculum published in Fall 2001.

In future I hope we will support classroom teachers with hands-on multicultural curriculum consultants and accessible history books such as the ten-volume Oxford History of the United States, edited by Joy Hakkim. This work, written for children in the 5th grade and up, finally includes African Americans, First People, women, and the many other previously unmentioned peoples of North America. My children’s comments on a few other students’ mimicry of “Indian War Whoops” when a Native History topic is addressed, as well as their proud appreciation when their culture is mentioned, keep me working in this long task. As a community of parents, teachers, and children we really need to learn to give respect to each voice, to take the time to show our hearts as we welcome new families at all grade levels. How about small in-home potlucks of five or six families for lower grades, with some “older” families to welcome the younger ones and tell about the school? We might learn compassionate listening as spoken of by VietNamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Han and bring that practice to our busy school meetings.

Many thanks to so many parents, teachers, and staff who have laughed, cried, opened their hearts, and together expanded our boundaries and horizons — not enough space to mention all. There are many more steps to go, but we have begun the long walk toward an inclusive curriculum and a school environment where all our kids feel joy in who they are and can feel empowered to succeed.
Track

By Megan Chapin, 6th Grade

Lightning speed people running, these descriptions are about track! The TOPS track team has had a pretty good reputation this year. It has been really fun and nerve-racking for me. I am Megan, a TOPS track member. I am in 6th grade and I can tell you these meets are really freaky, because TOPS doesn’t have a very big track team. Some of the other schools can be pretty intimidating. They always come in either one or two school buses. We come in two vans.

This week we are going to the City track meet! I am really nervous. I will be running in the 400-meter. Which I hope to win. Catherine and Erin of 6th grade will be representing us in the 800-meter. We also have Max, 8th grade, running the mile and Danielle, 7th grade, running the 400-meter. Daniella, 7th grade, will also be running the 400-meter. Sylvie will be running the 100 and the 200. Logan, 8th grade, will also be running the 100 and 200. I hope that we do well. This season we have done pretty well because we have been getting coached by two great people, our gym teacher Eric and a college student, Carmon.

Well, I hope that we win the City.

Last Minute Update: We Have City Track Tournament Results!

Catherine Means, 6th grade, 1st in the 800m
Erin Jones, 6th grade, 5th in the mile run
Megan Chapin, 6th grade, 1st in the 400m and 4th in the 50m
Sylvie Kovnat, 7th grade, 6th in the 200m
Daniella Welsh, 7th grade, 5th in the 100m semifinal and 4th in the 200m
Logan Powers, 8th grade, 5th in the 100m semifinal and 4th in the 200m
Max Wilbert, 8th grade, 6th in the 800m

Congratulations!
TOPS Double Dutch

By Cleo, Maya, and Jessica, 3rd Grade

Three times a week, the TOPS FALCONS got together to practice Double Dutch. Though it was hard work, it all paid off to hear we got 4th place. Since we had a wonderful and determined coach “Don”, we were eager to compete in the competition. Don encouraged us to do harder tricks and better turning.

Here are some things kids say about Double Dutch:

Chanda: It’s good because you use skill.
Jaime: It is really fun once you get the hang of it.
Isabella: It is complicated but no matter what, it’s fun.
Maya: We get lots of exercise and it is good for you.
Maddy: We do fun things and neat tricks.
Jessica: It is good for your strength in your arms and legs.
PASSAGES

By Laurie Black

Best wishes to the TOPS 8th-grade class of 2002! The Passage Ceremony will be June 18 at 7PM in the TOPS gym. A reception in the cafeteria will immediately follow. The class will go bowling on the last day of school in the morning and then celebrate with a Year End party at the Woodland Park Zoo park in the afternoon.

In the TOPS tradition, we are looking for 7th-grade parents to help with the evening of Passage. We need help setting up, during the ceremony, and to clean up. Please contact Lorie Shaffer at 322-0300 or Laurie Black at 285-7079.

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