WELCOME FROM YOUR CO-PRINCIPALS!

After a wonderful summer of family, friends, quiet and trips we’re anxious to see the smiling faces of the TOPS children once again! It’s going to be a wonderful year of learning, loving and living!!

For example, we will be learning to be Co-Principals and need your support in this. Below is a summary of key responsibilities for which each of us will assume leadership. Please communicate with the lead principal according to this plan whenever possible. This would be very helpful!

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TOPS MISSION STATEMENT

We are a relatively small, central city, K-8 public alternative school. A diverse range of Seattle families enroll here on a completely voluntary basis because they seek a balance between structure and nurtured independence for their children. While offering a strong, academically challenging program, we also enhance the personal, social and emotional growth of students by building skills of conflict resolution, social and personal responsibility, values, and self-esteem.

Our staff and faculty work with students and their families as partners in building an engaging, active, positive, and supportive school community. Working in cross-age groups, TOPS students have regular and important opportunities for decision making, innovation, and risk-taking.

NEWSLETTER ONLINE

The TOPS newsletters are available online in PDF format, usually before the printed copy arrives in your mailbox! From the TOPS home page (http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/tops), click on Hot News Spots, then TOPS Newsletters.
TOPS STATE OF THE SCHOOL ADDRESS
JUNE 13, 2001

About thirty-five people attended the State of the School Address at the end of the 2001-2002 school year. We were given a list of possible discussion topics to prioritize focused our conversation on those.

Site Council President Betsy Scott opened the conversation with a declaration of how lucky we are to have our children attend such a wonderful school. She then delineated the decisions made about how Site Council money will be spent in 2001-2002. Then many of us felt luck all over again!

The planned expenditures are as follows:

- Music and Dance programs will continue, and it is hoped that they will grow.
- Eileen Hynes has been hired to help coordinate multicultural assemblies
- Additional multicultural books will be purchased for the library
- We will have co-principals: Gary Tubbs and Clara Scott
- Jennifer Murray will continue as the school counselor
- Drama will continue
- Rogers Field will be upgraded. It will therefore not be available for play. Money from the site council and the auction will pay for a new playscape.

TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

The Gates Foundation awarded TOPS a $15,000 grant to begin a transformation process. Staff and parents completed surveys at the end of the 2000-2001 year. A group was to meet in the summer to identify areas of focus, and staff has worked on ways to implement those ideas. After this information is completed and turned into the Gates Foundation, due on September 10, TOPS should get another $55,000. The final plan, for which TOPS can be awarded another $55,000, is due in February.

In general, the money awarded to schools by the Gates Foundation is intended for generating and sustaining transformation at TOPS.

A distinction was made between improvement- the great things that already go on at TOPS and which can always be even better, and transformation - such as Attack the Gap.

Questions were raised about how we fit advocacy into the mission at TOPS, specifically in regard to standardized testing.

CURRICULUM

TOPS is very strong overall in basic skills, critical thinking skills, and having an integrated curriculum. The multicultural component is uneven, and the Diversity Issues committee will focus on this. An achievement gap is also clearly present in the school.

Assemblies are seen as improving and will be a focus in 2001-2002.

Clear areas of strength are drama, art and science, especially the middle school science curriculum. The staff is well-trained in science.

Kevin Crozier was cited as a strong lead in the technology curriculum.

Funding has increased so that curricula in music and dance will grow. We will have a choir!

It was asked whether sign language could continue after kindergarten. This is something that is up to teacher discretion. Parents are encouraged to give teachers input about such ideas. Mr. Tubbs also discussed some of the reasons PEAK is not offered every year.

World Languages will continue as a before-school activity.

Concern was expressed that World Languages are not offered during the regular part of the school day. TOPS has made deliberate choices about the curriculum. Mr. Tubbs pointed out that because it’s a smaller school, TOPS can’t fund the staff for small Spanish classes or have the flexibility to offer multi-grade classes. If a second language is of great importance to a student or a family, he recommends considering the John Stanford school.

TOPS is improving in the area of writing mechanics, but is still significantly lower through middle school. There is ongoing discussion about the need for balance between mechanics and creativity.

Topics is looked at every year. When there is less parent participation, student groups have to be larger. They are a good opportunity for cross-age interaction.

STUDY CIRCLE ON RACISM

This has been an exciting addition to TOPS. Another study circle is starting on Thursday, October 4th. There was discussion about various scheduling options for study circles (ie weekend sessions, holding them on an evening other than Thursday) in order to make them more inclusive.

ENROLLMENT AND CLASS SIZE

TOPS was overenrolled last year. We will not be oversubscribed for the 2001-2002 year. 109 children are on the waitlist for kindergarten! Initiative 728 should help with class size.
A QUICK GLOSSARY FOR THOSE NEW TO TOPS

(From the TOPS Handbook)

BOC (Bilingual Orientation Center)

TOPS BOC is a self-contained grade 1-5 transitional program for students with limited English who are new to the US. Students come from diverse cultures, language groups, and educational backgrounds. The program prepares these new students for entry into the Seattle Public Schools’ English as a Second Language (ESL) system. BOC students usually stay for one-half year and then move on to a school with ESL support. BOC students attend separate classes except for PE and some special projects, which they share with other TOPS students. TOPS is adding its own ESL program this year. See the next issue of the newsletter for details.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Leadership Team comprises elected representatives from the staff who, along with parent reps from Site Council, form an advisory governance body dealing with issues of staffing, budget, policies and procedures.

CURRICULUM NIGHT

An all-school event, Curriculum Night (October 4) gives parents the opportunity to meet their child’s teacher and hear about their plans for the school year.

KIDS COMPANY

Before- and after-school care is provided by The Kids Company, a program operated by Evergreen Children’s Association. Licensed to provide care for children 5-12 years old, Kids Company is open 7-9 a.m. and 3-6 p.m. The program is also available for winter and spring breaks, early dismissal periods, and staff in-service days. City and state subsidies accepted. For more information, call Lisa Stokell at 709-8487.

LRC (Learning Resource Center also known as the Library)

The LRC—staffed by our full-time librarian, Steve Haines—emphasizes learning through the use of a wide variety of resources that address children’s different learning styles. The library serves as a technology resource center where students can develop research, publishing, and multimedia authoring skills on its many computers and peripherals.

PEAK (Parent Enrichment Alternative Kindergarten)

A successful kindergarten experience can be the key to a positive attitude toward school. TOPS has developed an innovative kindergarten program that combines a tuition-based Parent Enrichment Alternative Kindergarten (PEAK, 1 FT teacher) and the School District’s funding for 1.5 teachers for kindergarten. This program allows TOPS to provide a full-day kindergarten for all families (100 percent of current kindergarten families participate). A team of three certified teachers provides a smaller student-teacher ratio during writing and reading time (18:1), and a curriculum designed to enhance the creative, social, and intellectual development of each student. Scholarships are available.

SITE COUNCIL

The 18-member Site Council serves as the advisory body for the TOPS community. Parents, teachers, the principal, support staff, and a community member serve on this body, which makes policy decisions along with the Building Leadership Team, composed of faculty and staff, about curriculum enhancement projects, community building, facilities planning, staffing, and strategic planning. Meetings are open to all members of the community and are held once a month.

TOPICS

This long-standing TOPS program is becoming a bit more structured with multi-week courses focusing on the arts and Spanish. In the past, parents, teachers, and students taught in small multi-age groups of first-fifth grade students a couple afternoons a week, covering everything from Ukrainian Easter eggs to card tricks. There is movement toward longer multi-week courses, some taught by artists-in-residence.

VOLUNTEERING AT TOPS—STRONG FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Parents, teachers, principal, and staff work closely together on all aspects of the TOPS program. In addition to providing classroom and tutoring assistance to teachers and students, parents help with curriculum support, communications, financial planning, and fundraising through the Site Council and the Friends of TOPS foundation. It is the strong commitment of the staff and parents that make TOPS so successful for its students. The Site Council’s policy is that we encourage each single-parent family to volunteer 15 hours and each two-parent family to volunteer 30 hours per year to TOPS. There are many ways for parents to become involved—pick something you enjoy and do it! Room reps are good people to ask about volunteer opportunities that fit your skills and schedule.

REMINDER

Please remember to inform the adults listed as your child’s emergency contacts that you have listed them. And be sure to photocopy your children’s emergency contact/medical sheet and give it to the adult(s) listed!
FROM THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Annie Gage for taking over as our newsletter editor. Since the Volunteer Coordinator, as chair of the communications Committee, oversees this endeavor, I was greatly relieved when Annie volunteered. She requests our patience while she gets her bearings.

Next I would like to welcome all new families to TOPS and to extend a warm welcome back to returning families. I am especially pleased to be able to call myself a Kindergarten parent once more and I look forward to getting to know a whole new group of families.

During the first week of school, every family will again receive that fat packet with lots of forms to be filled out and returned later in September. Please consider how you would like to contribute as a valued member of our community and let me know by returning the Parent Involvement Form. As I write this, many grades (except K, 5th and 8th) still need Room Reps. We would like to include all families in our Directory so please don’t overlook that form either. Having current e-mail addresses and phone numbers really helps us stay in close communication.

We will be adding the State Patrol Background check form as a standard form this year. Anyone who filled one out and returned it last year can disregard it, as the check is valid for 2 years and will remain on file.

Late last year I wrote about the probability that the City would not renew the grants that funded my position this past school year. This did indeed become a reality. As a result, only the $2000.00 the Site Council has committed is available to fund the VC position. Based on that I have agreed to start the school year as the VC and serve in this role for the first semester only, unless additional funds are found.

Very early in the school year, I will approach the Leadership Team with a formal request for additional funds. (The Leadership Team is a representative body made up of administrators, staff and parents. Among other things, it makes decisions related to the school budget) Because there is strong support at TOPS for the VC position, I am hopeful that a workable solution will be found. I’ll keep everyone informed in future issues of this newsletter.

Marlies van Bergeijk

THINK SNOW!!

The ski season will be here before we know it. The TOPS middle school ski program will again go to Summit Central. We looked into going to Stevens Pass but were unable to be assured of enough instructors. We will have great fun at Summit Central. The dates we are looking at are January 18th and 25th, February 1st and 8th, and March 8th and 15th. These dates include four evening and two day time ski trips. We thought we would try to use the off days and take advantage of the daylight and smaller crowds.

Now is the time to look for deals on equipment. So visit your local ski store or second hand sporting goods store for great bargains. This is also a good time to buy a season pass if you think you will make other ski trips.

Think lots of snow and watch for ski updates.

MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND MUSIC PROGRAM GOING STRONGER

The music program for middle school band will continue this year with an expanded schedule!

This is the place to play fun music and have the opportunity to perform as a group at school events. Here students can gain important experience if they later want to play in a high school marching band, jazz band, or orchestra.

Jennifer Winslow, our new band director, encourages everyone who plays a woodwind, brass, or percussion instrument and has at least one year of experience to join the band.

Band starts on September 12 and will meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 8am-9am. Students can also join the band after September 12.

Interested students should come to the music room in the middle school building on Wednesday, Sept.12 at 8a.m. equipped with instrument, a ready mind, a notebook, and a sharp pencil.

Any questions? Call Karin Krumm at (206) 547-6216.
INTRODUCING MARGIE BUTCHER

by Annie Gage

If Margie Butcher’s energy level in the classroom is anything like the energy she maintained during our two and a half hour conversation, she should be a fine match for her room full of first graders here at TOPS.

While Margie was doing some career exploration, having decided she was ready to make a change from sales and marketing in the recreation industry, three different fields attracted her: marine biology, veterinary medicine, and teaching. Walking home from her first day of volunteering at B. F. Day, her husband told her she was bouncing, with a huge smile on her face. The world had found itself a new teacher.

Margie is excited to join the TOPS faculty. She admires the effort the school makes toward community building and feels committed to using community service projects as a learning tool. However, she says that her approach to teaching “begins and ends with the kids.” Her priority is to be responsive to their interests and needs. So if an interest of hers, such as community service, just does not seem to be a good learning tool for a whole lot of her students, she intends to explore further to find a better-fitting way to teach some of the same ideas.

One of Margie’s passions is books. She has one room just for books in her house and goes to the Bellevue Public Library (the second busiest library in the country, she informed me) every week. Her students will certainly benefit from her love of books as they delve more deeply into reading during the first grade.

A graduate of the University of Indiana with a B.S. in Business, Margie received her Masters degree in Education from U.W. and did her student teaching in a K-1 classroom at Newport Heights Elementary in Bellevue.

ANOTHER TOPS PARENT RUNS FOR SEATTLE SCHOOL BOARD

In previous years, TOPS parents Amy Hagopian and Scott Barhardt served on the Seattle School Board. This year, TOPS parent Dana Twight is running for Seattle School Board director, District 5. This is the seat held since 1981 by Michael Preston. Mr. Preston is moving on to run for City Council.

There are six candidates in the race, including Twight, Juan Cotto, Rev. Patrinell Wright, Mary E. Bass, Tyson Vo and David Barfield.

Two of the six candidates will advance to the primary on September 18th. Voting for School Board is by District in the primary, then city-wide in the general election.
The Fifth grade end of the school year trip to Camp Kirby was a total success. Everyone enjoyed the natural surroundings, topics, and good friends. Thanks to all the hard work from teachers, volunteers and students, memories were created that will last a lifetime.
ATTENDANCE POLICY

From Linda Downing, Attendance Secretary

If your child has an unplanned absence (personal illness/injury or family emergency), please telephone the Main Office as early in the school day as possible. Notifying the school of your child’s absence helps us crosscheck absences to be sure a student is indeed missing from school. New this year is “Attendance Office” voice mail: 252-3518 — for leaving messages outside of school hours.

Notification of planned absences (family trip, dentist or doctor appointment, or religious or special event) should be sent to the Main Office in writing or telephoned to the Attendance Office number prior to the absence. Please do not assume your notification to the teacher will be forwarded to the office. Requests for planned absences longer than three days should be made in writing to Mr. Tubbs.

SCHOOL PRIDE

Big, shiny brass letters that spell out SEWARD PUBLIC SCHOOL were returned to the Franklin Avenue entrance of the TOPS building on May 31, 2001 by TOPS Custodial Engineer Saream Dy. Four Eastlake neighbors, Dick Arnold, KC McNeil, Peter Mertel, and Jules James (who is also a TOP’s Parent), restored the 1905 handcrafted letters to the building, which is a City of Seattle Historic Landmark.

A sampling of artwork from Artfest 2001
KINDergarten AND FIFTh GraDĖ BUDDIES AT KUBOTA GARDEN

The Kindergarten and Fifth grade buddies enjoyed their last outing together on a field trip to Kubota Garden in June. Throughout the school year the buddies learned valuable lessons from each other. And they had a lot of fun doing it!