NEWS FROM SSA GROUP 3

By Ben Low and Michelle Pennylegion, Co-leaders

In the aftermath of the intense debate this past fall over proposed changes to the district’s school assignment policies, the TOPS Subcommittee on School Assignment (SSA) has continued to feel strongly that the assignment controversy over TOPS bears directly on the issue of quality seats in the entire Central Cluster (CC). We also feel strongly that equitable redress of the assignment problem requires remedies that will improve all CC schools, and thus provide greater educational opportunity to all families in the cluster. Within the SSA, a subgroup, “Group 3,” has taken on the task of getting outside the walls of TOPS to participate in strengthening CC schools.

With Principal Clara Scott’s strong support, TOPS recently entered into a collaboration with CC schools. In mid-December we met with Cluster Director Pauline Hill and her assistant, Christina Klein, to discuss ways we could help. We agreed on a two-part collaboration.

On one front, we have helped improve each school’s website outreach on the Internet. Two TOPS parents who are truly expert in the area of website design have stepped forward to contribute their expertise. Jack Lee and Keith Toussaint have just about completed their review of CC schools’ websites. They have evaluated websites with the following criteria in mind: (1) visual layout, (2) web content, (3) clarity of writing, and (4) parent/user-friendliness. Jack has provided detailed qualitative feedback about each website. Keith has developed and implemented a quantitative system for evaluating the websites. Their work may yield CC school administrators tools by which their websites can be optimally constructed and maintained, so that the “Internet welcome mat” will have the greatest impact on prospective families. Jack and Keith’s work for Group 3 can be found at http://geocities.com/tops_faces/WebSiteEval/WebSiteEval.html.

On the second front, we have worked with Pauline Hill and Christina Klein to develop and disseminate a Central Cluster newsletter informing prospective kindergarten families about each school’s strengths and specific offerings to families looking for the right school for their child. We firmly believe that there are many good things happening in Central Cluster schools, but that negative stereotyping, and perhaps even the unassailable success of highly visible programs such as Montlake and McGilvra, might obscure what these other schools have to offer. The prospective kindergarten public might very well not know of the growing and effective programs found in these schools.

SSA Group 3 firmly believes that public education at the grass roots level, beyond “scuttlebutt” and rumor, can help parents find the right program. We want to help CC schools put their best feet forward and share with the Central community the nurturing programs they have to offer.

Of particular interest to us—TOPS SSA and the CC office—is MLK Elementary School. We believe MLK has suffered greatly from a vicious cycle of negative perception, behavioral avoidance, and further negative stereotyping (self-fulfilling prophecy). Mr. Barry Dorsey, the new principal at MLK, came to the TOPS Coalition for Social Justice meeting in early December, and shared with attendees the positive steps that he and his mostly new faculty have taken at the school the past 16 months. We are impressed by the programmatic changes, emerging developments, and the intangible energy and vision that Mr. Dorsey and his staff are bringing to this overlooked school.

We want to help shed light on the heretofore-undiscovered strengths of MLK and the lesser-known Central Cluster schools. We want to help find committed parents who will venture to work with the committed staffs at these schools, to strengthen the educational process and improve measured performance.

Besides directly collaborating with CC schools, Group 3 is also maintaining a presence with the School Board. The Board vote was taken in November, but the issues underlying the assignment controversy continue to reverberate. We have thus felt it necessary and prudent to maintain a dialogue with the Board, through various channels, about TOPS SSA’s thoughts about the broader issues of equity and social justice underlying the assignment debate. Toward this end, Ben Low spoke at

Continued on page 5
ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the seventh monthly newsletter of the 2002-2003 school year. The newsletter is edited by Teresa Németh, designed by Cindy Suzumura, and mailed to you by Heather Burgess and Nancy Lambert. Don Zemke provides our sports photos.

We need your submissions: calendar additions, classroom news and news from the larger community, faculty notes, committee reports, opinions, profiles, compliments, congratulations, children's art, photos, and anything else significant to the TOPS community.

Submit your contributions to the newsletter box in the main office or, preferably, by electronic file to Teresa Németh at zongora2@hotmail.com.

Deadlines for 2002-03 are Wednesdays March 12, April 16, and May 14. If newsletters are to arrive the first week of the month, there can be no exceptions to these deadlines.

Anyone interested in working on the newsletter should contact Teresa at 325-8320 or the above email address.

FORUM

ARE WE AS OPEN AS WE SAY WE ARE? CAN WE BE BETTER?

By Kathy Barker

Many at TOPS feel that they aren’t part of the larger TOPS community, despite their efforts to belong. They are suffering from a classic communication breakdown—they are caught in the discordance between the implied culture of the school, and the actual way people interact. They thought they were signing up for a culture of openness and inclusion, but find themselves out of the loop.

Having a recognizable and shared culture, especially for people from diverse backgrounds as at TOPS, serves to bind people together and unite them in pursuit of a common goal (in our case, the education of our children). Our shared customs help to make a “we.”

But the other side of a group culture is that once there is a “we,” there is also a “they.” Inclusive implies exclusive. And “they” can easily become anyone not only from outside the school, but from within, who doesn’t use the same jargon, or express exactly the same philosophy of the group.

It doesn’t take much to make a person feel like a “they.” Even a few unanswered requests for information or offers to help can make a parent feel excluded, somehow unworthy of a response.

A bigger problem at TOPS is that, often, dissenting opinions are actively ignored, preventing discussion of any kind. TOPS inherits from Seattle a culture that doesn’t want confrontation, and disagreement is often interpreted as a potential threat to the group. Many people are afraid to state something contrary to the current mainstream thought, for fear everyone will shun or hate them. Some worry that raising a controversial point will cause teachers, administration, and parents to treat their children differently.

Those who persist in trying to raise a controversial issue sometimes find more than silence: they are treated with disdain. Many TOPS people involved in the assignment issue last fall, for example, were shocked by the style of communication within TOPS. Disagreement with FACES policy was often met with hostility veiled in the language of moral righteousness. Instead of bringing the TOPS community together, the tone of the arguments has alienated some people and has discouraged them from further involvement in the school they love.

We have to find a way to have discussions and yes, even arguments, without making the dissenters the enemy, the “they.” If we aren’t civil and respectful of each other, it doesn’t matter how many mission statements we write, for our statements printed on paper don’t make us who we are. Our actions alone will do that.

Let’s be sure that communication is open, and responsive, and tolerant of differences of opinion, within our community and outside of it. Fairness and justice should be part of every decision we make, and inherent in every single interaction we have.

FROM THE EDITOR: ASKING FOR YOUR SUGGESTIONS...

Never having managed, my whole life, to become either a “we” or a “they,” I have to say this is one of the best communities I’ve ever found in which to be neither. The tolerance, engagement, and readiness to learn and change I perceive in people I’ve met at TOPS—the refined idealism, the unrestrained exercise of intelligence—these qualities drew me to this special school and continue to inspire me. The more I see, the more it amazes me that so many strong-willed, individualistic, aware, creative people can come together on anything at all—and particularly on the running of a school. And yet they do, and the result is a tremendously successful program.

Can we improve our communication? How can we express our differences better? Or is it each person’s responsibility to deal with a group’s reactions, and to look for different channels?

“In life we make progress by conflict and in mental life by argument and disputation....”

“If you care about the points of agreement and civility, then, you had better be well-equipped with points of argument and combativity, because if you are not then the ‘center’ will be occupied and defined without your having helped to decide it, or determine what and where it is.”

~Christopher Hitchens, Letters to a Young Contrarian
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

School students did a fantastic job performing Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Early last month, our middle school created a huge calendar in our entryway. Each date features a fact about Americans and their contributions. Mr. Jones created a huge calendar in our entryway. Each date features a fact about African American History. Early last month, our middle school students did a fantastic job performing Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Our speech tournament is in full swing. We have completed Storytelling, Expository, and Oral Interpretation, with Editorial Commentary and Eighth-Grade Oral Interpretation coming up soon. Last week we honored 132 of our middle school students who earned a 3.2 grade point average (or above) and made it on our Honor Roll. Students received a lunch and were presented with certificates at an assembly. We concluded the month with a great sixth-grade camp experience on Orcas Island.

We have had several early-release days in February and look forward to several more in March. We realize that a change in the schedule can be inconvenient. We want you to know how useful the time is and how much we appreciate it. The TOPS staff has been using the time to continue conversations about race and how it impacts education, especially at TOPS. The staff has divided into small study groups, each researching aspects of race and strategies for closing the achievement gap. At the end of the year, each team will present its findings and strategies to the rest of the staff. The early-release days have also given us time to plan in grade band teams and align our math curriculum. The aligned curriculum will ensure that students receive what they need in math, kindergarten through eighth grade, without gaps.

Several days ago we received our budget allocations from Seattle Public Schools. Our Building Leadership Team is busy budgeting and planning, ensuring that we are making the best use of our funds and meeting the needs of all students at TOPS. We are fortunate to have a solid Vision and Mission to guide us. You may have heard rumors that the Bilingual Orientation Center is leaving TOPS. Unfortunately, we have learned that the rumors are true. Seattle Public Schools is consolidating BOC programs in the south end. Although we are sad to see these classes go, we are glad to have a new opportunity. TOPS will be the home of a two new self-contained special education classes. We will have one class for intermediate students and another for middle school. Not only will TOPS be able to pull its weight in the district (we are the only middle school without a special education program beyond a resource room), we will add another dimension of diversity to our school while we meet the needs of these students who are historically underserved by the public school system. We know there may be challenges associated with the new programs, but are confident that the TOPS community will accommodate and welcome them, just as we have done for the BOC and deaf/hard of hearing program.

Cheers!

Bruce

THANK YOU!

By Clara Scott, Principal

I would like to thank the following students, parents, and staff members who contributed birthday money to our school and library. Thank you to Koji Pingry, Eli Davis, Ben Hirshberg, Susan Davis, and Louise Chacartegui. Between them, they contributed $277.00 to TOPS. Hooray! Eighth-grader Jesse Roe wrote this poem in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day. It was displayed in our hall, along with information on Dr. King compiled by Mary’s class. I wanted to share it with you in honor of Dr. King and African American History Month.

MIXED COLORS

By Jesse Roe, Grade 8

All different people walk this earth
All beautiful in their own way
Some dark, some light
But all created equally
Not treated so but some day
When everybody on earth is mixed with something
No one will be able to discriminate for the color of someone’s skin
But for who those people really are
Sadly none of us will live to see the day
But that’s the exact reason why we should teach our children
So maybe their kids will see the day
And when they do, I pray I’m in heaven looking down watching
How far we came

(Keep the ones you love close but keep your enemies even closer.)
A MESSAGE FROM THE SITE COUNCIL

By Elizabeth Dickinson and Eileen Hynes

The Site Council has adopted a revised purpose to guide its work. It reads:

“The purpose of the Site Council at TOPS is to promote students’ intellectual, social, physical, and emotional growth in collaboration with the Leadership Team. The Site Council will:

1. Advance the mission of TOPS
2. Support staff in their efforts to facilitate and enhance student learning
3. Enable families to become informed about and help shape the educational and extracurricular programs at TOPS
4. Build community and communication within TOPS, and between TOPS and the broader community of Seattle
5. Provide direction to the Friends of TOPS in allocating funds raised by TOPS families, consistent with the school mission and the Site Council strategic plan
6. Evaluate the state of the school and parent-funded programs
7. Advocate for the interests of TOPS with the Seattle School District and the City of Seattle
8. Attend to other issues, such as student safety or facility maintenance and improvement, as they arise.”

This new purpose reflects some changes in decision-making roles at TOPS. A Site Council was established as the governing structure for the school in 1991; it advised the principal on issues such as budget, curriculum, communication, diversity, and facilities. In the fall of 1997, an additional—and smaller—governing structure, the Leadership Team, was established to guide instructional and curriculum decisions, professional development, and how the money received from the school district will be spent. The Site Council, with primary responsibilities as defined above, will work closely with the Leadership Team to share information, vision, and strategies to enhance student learning and community at TOPS.

Your energy and input are needed! Please consider whether you would be willing to join the Site Council next year.

The Site Council meeting report was not available this month (something about a mid winter break...). Please check the TOPS website.

FIRST-GRADERS ENJOY VIETNAMESE TET “MINI-TOPICS”

In celebration of the Vietnamese New Year in February, first-graders made Vietnamese flags, played Vietnamese Jacks (see related article this issue), made Vietnamese rice, compared and contrasted Vietnamese and American culture, worked on a peace promise, and learned about zodiac animals. Afterwards, they enjoyed the rice they had made, and also sampled the shrimp rolls Liane Wong had brought—for everyone in the school! (Thanks, Liane.)

How are others exploring Vietnamese culture? Let us know…

2002-2003 TOPS CALENDAR

MARCH

4 (T)..............Middle school parent forum, Focus on Boys, 7-8:30 p.m.
5 (W) ..........2-hour early dismissal
12 (W) ..........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
21 (F) ..........Professional development day, No school
22 (Sa) ..........8 a.m. TOPS K-6 chess tournament, TOPS gym
26 (W) ..........Nicky Somewhere Else at SCT, grades 1-3
26 (W) ..........2-hour early dismissal

APRIL

1 (T) ..............Middle school parent forum, Focus on Girls, 7-8:30 p.m.
4 (F) ..............End of third quarter
7-11 (M-F) ......Spring Break
16 (W) ..........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
26 (Sa) ..........TOPS 2003 Auction

MAY

6 (T) ..............Middle school parent forum, Parents and Kids, 7-8:30 p.m.
7 (W) ..............2-hour early dismissal
14 (W) ..........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
21 (W) ..........The Shakespeare Stealer at SCT, grades 2-6
26 (M) ..........Memorial Day, No school
30 (F) ..........Art Walk and elementary school play
31 (Sa) ..........Elementary school play

JUNE

10 (T) .............Middle school parent forum, 8th Grade Transition, 7-8:30 p.m.
11 (W) ..........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
16 (W) ..........Last student day, 1-hour early dismissal

Site council meetings now start at 4:45, not 5:00.

Prof. Development day cancelled to make up for June 14 rally.


**AN INVITATION TO THE TOPS CHESS TOURNAMENT**

*By Gene Nelson*

TOPS is hosting a city-wide chess tournament on March 29. If you’ve ever thought of encouraging your K–8 student to play chess on a regular basis, this is the perfect opportunity. Familiar, convenient surroundings, more fun with all the TOPS kids involved, a team room (the third floor commons) to congregate in—and it’s FREE for TOPS students! Players are divided into sections according to grade (K–3, 4–6, 7–8), and game results are considered in each new pairing of players, as we are striving to make this a positive experience for novices. Generous trophies are given out to each section, and all players will receive an award.

Email your entry information to TOPS parent Traci Palagi at pulagi@attbi.com, or take it to the office, including the student’s name (last, first), grade, school, parent’s name, address, telephone, and whether it is your player’s first time participating in a chess tournament. Complete details are at www.seattleschools.org/schools/tops/activities/chess.html. The download .pdf form is for players from other schools, so tell your friends!

This annual TOPS Chess Club event is also a fundraiser, with proceeds ensuring the continuation of quality chess instruction at TOPS. If you would like to volunteer some time during the tournament, please contact Gene at TOPSchess03@yahoo.com.

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**WHO ARE THE LITTLE DOLLS IN THE DISPLAY CASE?**

*By Sheri Toussaint*

The little dolls represent the four girls who were killed on September 15, 1963, while attending church in Birmingham, Alabama. Between 1947 and 1965, over fifty bombings occurred in Birmingham, resulting in the city becoming known as “Bombingham.”

On a quiet Sunday morning, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, and Carole Robertson prepared their Sunday school lessons in the basement of their church. In the same basement sat a bomb placed by segregationists, designed to kill and maim in protest of the forced integration of Birmingham’s public schools. The four little girls were killed. Angry blacks rioted and the civil authorities responded with great violence. During the rest of the day, other black youths were murdered by police and civilians alike, compounding the desperation.

City authorities, never sympathetic to blacks, did very little to bring the bombers to justice. Not until 1977 was one of the bombers convicted.

Kristine Ann, grandmother of a TOPS sixth-grader and the owner of Kristine Ann’s Doll Shop, 3200 Harvard Avenue East, has created and donated this set of dolls to TOPS School. They are on display in the main hallway by the office, along with brief biographies of the girls.

“I was so young, I never realized someone would hate you so much that they would go to that extent. In a way, that was sort of the death of my own innocence.”

~Claude Wesley, Cynthia’s mom

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*News from SSA Group 3 continued from page 1*

The January Board meeting, describing SSA Group 3’s early-stage collaboration with CC schools. Lionel Halvorsen spoke at the February meeting, setting the stage for more discussion about the broad issue of access for all Seattle students to quality public schools. At the March meeting, Sheri Toussaint will offer an update on the initial “finished products” of the collaboration described above. Other members of TOPS SSA will continue dialogue with the Board in whatever formats are available.

We hope that our collaboration with the CC—via the website review project, the newsletter, and whatever other joint ventures we come up with—and our ongoing dialogue with the School Board will contribute to increased educational opportunities for all families and their children in the Central Cluster.

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ATTACK THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP II

FEATURING DR. ED TAYLOR

Co-Director of the Center for Education Leadership and
Associate Professor in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies,
University of Washington

Thursday, March 20, 2003
7 – 9 PM
TOPS GYMNASIUM
2500 Franklin Ave E Seattle, WA 98102
*Childcare will be provided – call 206-252-3510

Dr. Taylor is a respected educator nationally acclaimed for his research on closing the achievement gap in public education. His areas of teaching and research include the history of higher education, policies and programs servicing disenfranchised groups in secondary and post-secondary settings, and the construction of race-based policy. Dr. Taylor has authored and co-authored numerous articles, including “Crossing the Color Line: African American and Predominantly White Universities” in College Student Journal (1996).

Dr. Taylor has a forthcoming article on Critical Race Theory and Initiative 200 in Washington state.

Attack the Gap 2001 was the kick-off for the TOPS Transformation Plan, the new TOPS mission & vision statement, and the TOPS anti-bias goals.

Main points at the Attack the Gap 2001 presentation:

1. Historical phenomena: Since its beginning, public education in the U.S. has served only a narrow segment of the population. Democracy won’t work without a broadly educated population. Segregation was successfully challenged and integrated schools reduced the achievement gap. Fifty years later we still need novel and ambitious ideas to make schools work for all kids.

2. National phenomena: Over three million children enter kindergarten each year. White children are twice as likely to enter college as blacks and they are three times as likely to enter college as Latino and Native American youth; this will have a profound impact on their income and lifestyle. Black students in 12th grade tested at the 8th-grade level. Aspirations for black students do not measure up to those of white students.

3. Structural phenomena: Inner city schools are impacted by the plethora of first and second year teachers. Experienced teachers often work in the suburbs. Kids of color often do not take college entrance exams.

4. Belief (a way of thinking and understanding): Are we convinced that kids of color are intellectual equals of white classmates? Have we disabused ourselves of the thinking that dark-skinned people are less intelligent than whites, and have we gone far enough with ourselves and other people?

5. Identity (Claude Steele calls it domain identification): Case studies indicate that when black males reach high school they face a huge learning gap and they perform differently in sports than they do in the classroom. One youngster told Ed that perhaps black people are supposed to be better in sports and not in those things that require intellect.

6. Moral phenomena: You belong in several domains. We must intervene quickly or the gap gets bigger. There is a moral contract in the classroom to close the gap.
**Auction Procurement Deadline Is March 26**

*By the Auction Committee*

There are only a few more weeks left to procure for the 11th annual TOPS Spring Auction. If you haven’t already found your three items, here’s some inspiration. The top five most successful offerings, besides class art projects and teacher events, are restaurant gift certificates, sports tickets, gardening-related supplies and activities, home-cooked dinners, and hotels/getaways.

Be creative. Auction items don’t always have to be “things.” Are you a good cook? Get together with a friend and donate a dinner. Do you have a green thumb? How about a couple of hours of consultation or work in someone’s garden. Are you a great golfer? Know how to knit? Play an instrument? Can you share your technical expertise and help someone set up a new computer? There are so many possibilities.

Additional auction donation forms are available in the office.

We already have some wonderful live auction items donated by our very generous principals and teachers. Clara Scott and Bruce Denton will be hosting their popular sleepover at the school. Katie Waters will bake at your home, Dan Bloedel is offering a kayaking trip, Ilsa Govan will take you backpacking overnight, Karen Hart will teach you how to crew at Mount Baker, and Steve Haines will take you to his favorite bookstore and out for ice cream. Several classes are supporting their teachers’ events with theme baskets.

Just to whet your appetite, so far we’ve received gift certificates from Hales’ Brewery and Restaurant, Wild Ginger, Jazz Alley, Tango, and Dick’s Drive-In. We’d love to get a whole section of just restaurant gift certificates. There’s also wine tasting at the EB Foote Winery, a billiards party, museum memberships, a home-cooked Indonesian dinner, Mariners tickets, dream consultations, landscape-design consultation, haircuts and massages, a sailboat ride, lessons at Kung Fu Kids, and San Juan Island Youth Adventure Camp.

Based on last year’s success, we’ll be raffling off another great getaway. Tickets will be for sale during Ed Taylor’s “Attack the Gap II” event, the TOPS Chess Tournament, Friday afternoons throughout April and, of course, the night of the auction.

Invitations are in the mail, so please send in your RSVP as soon as possible. If you can’t attend, please consider sending in a check to support the auction. Teachers and staff are always invited as our guests, so by adding a few dollars to your total we can easily cover this cost. This year you will also be able to indicate a dinner choice and reserve a whole table — no more dashing in to find a place to sit with your friends!

If you’re interested in volunteering to set up on auction day, please call auction volunteer coordinator Tammy Luthy at 322-3784.

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**Vietnamese Jacks**

*By Quan Huang (Grade 4) and Don Zemke*

As part of our all-school focus on Vietnam this year, in P.E. we learned how to play a game called Truyen-Truyen, or Vietnamese Jacks. To play the game you use a ball and 10 chopsticks for each small group. In P.E. we used a tennis ball and 10 drinking straws. The object is to drop the ball and pick up one straw at a time until they are all picked up. If you miss, you put your straws back and it becomes the next person’s turn. The object is to pick up all 10 straws one at a time without missing. Next you pick up the straws two at a time, and then three at time, etc. until you’ve picked up all ten at a time to win the game.

Quan Hoang from Joe’s fourth-grade class shared that when he was in Vietnam they played a similar game called Choi da. When playing this version you use six stones. To start the game you pick up one stone and throw that stone up into the air. Before it lands you pick up another stone and then catch the original stone before it hits the ground. With both stones in your hand you throw one stone up again, and with the same hand you pick up another stone and catch the stone again before it hits the ground. You repeat this until all five stones are picked up for round one. When picking up the stones you may not touch any stone other then the one you are picking up. If you do it becomes the next person’s turn.

Once you complete level one you move on to level two, where you pick up two stones at a time, then three at a time, then four at a time and then all five. To score points, after grabbing all five at once you put all of the stones on the back of your hand, toss them all up into the air, and catch as many as you can. The number of stones you catch is the number of points you get.

Try it at home. It’s a fun way to improve hand-eye coordination!  

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**Top 5 Auction Items:**

- Restaurant Gift Certificates
- Sports Tickets
- Gardening-Related Items
- Home Cooked Dinners
- Hotels and Getaways

Bring items and forms to office by March 26

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Photo provided by Don Zemke
VISION IN CARLA’S CLASS

By Chris Drape, interim assistant principal/administrative intern

We are creating a school that empowers students to be active participants, leaders, learners, and contributors to social justice.

Each month we have presented different images of the TOPS vision and mission in action – and the consistent message has been the importance of understanding what it means for us all to be part of the TOPS community. In Carla Fetterley’s second-grade class, not only do students understand they are part of the TOPS community, they are also learning what it’s like to be part of a community beyond the walls of the school.

When you enter Carla’s room, you will see the TOPS vision in action as you walk into a community all its own. There’s a mural on the wall of Puget Sound, and students are creating (and becoming) the creatures in and around the Sound, human and otherwise.

This is “Storypath,” an integrated approach to learning that engages students deeply in the process of community decision-making and problem-solving. Understanding how we are intimately connected to each other is an essential component of the TOPS mission – Storypath helps students develop that understanding in a highly engaging way. The Storypath approach takes an issue and involves the students directly by having them take on the identity of someone involved in the issue firsthand. Students set the context of the issue by creating a mural in class that lays out the physical setting. The teacher then introduces “critical incidents,” events in the life of the created community that the students must respond to in character. They must make decisions and solve problems as a community, with diverse interests and perspectives represented.

“We’re trying to build life-long learners and leaders,” says Carla, and Storypath “allows students to take responsibility and role-play leadership opportunities.”

As Storypath continues, the teacher introduces guest characters – community members whom students interview, ask questions, and otherwise engage in dialogue around the issue. Ultimately the students must decide as a group what to do about the issue they face.

During the first part of the year, Carla and her students focused on community-building, and they used that as a jumping-off point to explore key elements of the Seattle community – integrating field trips to Uwajimaya, the Pike Place Market, and El Centro de la Raza into their routine. In the process, students had to wrestle with the dilemma of how to deal with garbage in the neighborhood. Their solutions included organizing clean-up committees and holding their own community service meetings to teach people about recycling.

Continuing their focus on the marine world of Puget Sound, Carla’s students plan to adopt a whale, among other things. As they engage in Storypath activities, the students are building their own sense of community and caring at the same time they get a sense of the bigger community and how to care for it.

“We want students to know the richness of our own city and neighborhoods,” Carla says. “We validate kids when we connect to their experiences outside of school.”

This is the TOPS vision in action.

Thanks to Todd Jamieson and the cast and crew of A Midsummer Night’s Dream for a super-fun and super-funny performance. What an inspiring display of talent and energy!

Photo provided by Jeff Heft
FIRST-GRADERS CELEBRATE THEIR ELDERS

By Steve Havas and Sheila Gilligan

This past fall, our TOPS first-graders spent much of their time learning about the elders in their lives. Through studying about their family and their traditions, their background and sometimes their cultural heritage, the kids learned that their elders had plenty of knowledge and experience to share.

The children discussed who they felt were the elders in their lives. They made a list of all their elders – lists included everyone from parents, older siblings, and grandparents to teachers, coaches, and next-door neighbors. They also crafted pilgrim dolls that wore the traditional clothing of their ancestors, and they gathered recipes to create a first-grade family recipe book.

Eventually, the kids focused on one or two particular elders. The students selected a wide range of people, from grandparents, to parents, to good friends. Some elders were teenagers and some were, as Haleigh Knutsen said, “special because they are older than everyone else in my family.” Some elders lived nearby, and some lived across the country.

The first-graders performed a variety of activities that helped them learn about their elders, including becoming pen pals, conducting interview sessions, and soliciting advice on life. Being a pen pal helped many children get closer to their elders. One notable example was Rose Yasukochi, whose grandmother lives in Bellevue but is unable to travel often to see her.

The culmination of this work was an Elders Day celebration, held on December 20. The children’s special elders were invited to class, given a personal tour of the school, and presented with a special elders box, painted and decorated by the kids. The box contained poems, artwork, the pilgrim doll, the recipe book, and a handmade candleholder, all prepared by the kids. The elders all brought in one of their favorite foods (some were dishes included in the recipe book), and the first-graders and their special elders enjoyed an incredible lunch.

After lunch, the kids put on a performance in the lunchroom. Through their unique poetry, songs, and dancing, the children acknowledged how important their elders are in their lives. Margie was very proud of and impressed by the children’s composure during the performance, and by the original nature of their performances.

Ms. Anna said that the project enabled the kids to think about different people who are important in their lives and to realize that there are many elders beyond parents. Whether through the letters, reading Harry Potter books together, or having a game of catch, every child and elder was able to tell many stories about what they had learned about each other.


**SK8 KING**

**A FIELD TRIP REVIEW**

By Esra Comert-Morishige and Carrie McConnell, Grade 5

On January 24, 2003, the elementary part of TOPS went on a field trip to Skate King for the day. Everyone was anxious during the semi-long bus ride. When we got there kids grabbed their skates and headed out onto the rink. The fifth-graders took their kindergarten buddies around the rink while teaching them how to skate. It was an excellent first-time experience for most of the kindergarteners, and a fun time for practically everyone else. There were games, snacks, and toy machines that everyone wasted their quarters on. There was a DJ that played the music and some songs by request. Not all of the music was very good but it was fun to request songs. There were different lights, including a black light that a lot of people dressed in white for. There was an equal amount of people in the rink as there were just playing around outside of the rink. Overall it was a very fun experience.

Photos provided by Don Zemke
NIGERIAN TEXTILE ART AT TOPS

By Cindy Suzumura

On February 10, 11, and 12 Luzita Roll’s seventh-grade art classes participated in a three-day workshop of traditional Nigerian textile art. Two sisters from Lagos, Nigeria worked alongside the students. Toyin Ajayi gave the presentation, and her sister Yemesi Ayaj led the workshop.

Students tried their hands at traditional Nigerian tie-dye and batik with indigo dyes, and they also did painting on silk. The students produced an incredible amount of work in just three days. It was a good exercise in working with geometric patterns and using negative and positive space in their art.

Stop by Luzita’s classroom to see the final finished pieces and see firsthand the wonderful, rich, and diverse learning going on in the art program at TOPS.

Photos provided by Cindy Suzumura
Dear TOPS families and staff,

The New School @ SouthShore is operating smoothly and has met all my dreams in becoming a “loving community of purposeful learning that honors the whole child: body, mind and spirit.” We have 100 beautiful pre-K and kindergarten students this year. The families are involved and supportive—and the Rainier Beach community is now truly embracing us as a valuable option for its children. We are very blessed.

I think back on the TOPS community and remember the love, support, and encouragement you gave to me when I accepted this project. For this I am so grateful! Please know that you have an open invitation to visit The New School—no appointment necessary. I will be happy to show you around if I have time. If not, simply get a visitor’s badge from the office staff, and enjoy! A great time to visit is Friday at 9:30 a.m. because we have our weekly Spirit Gathering with all the children. You never know what you’ll see—singing, dancing, poetry, jokes. We also enjoy silent/stillness time each morning at 9:30 a.m. Yoga is taught Monday and Tuesday mornings, which is also pretty cool!

It was wonderful to have the TOPS fifth-graders here recently to perform for us in celebration of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A few parents dropped in then. It would be great to see a lot more parents, students, and staff from TOPS...so please know you’re very welcome to come visit! You will be my honored guest!

Love,
Mr. Tubbs

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