A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Our apologies for last month! Clara’s message was bounced back by an email demon. ~ ed.

Happy New Year to everyone. I hope that you have had a relaxing time with family and friends during the holiday season. During December students and staff treated us to many wonderful and exciting things, beginning with the middle school play, Much Ado About Nothing, directed by Todd Jamieson, and the winter concert put on by our music department: Sari Breznau, Charles Holmes, Jakob Brietbach, and Rachel Brumer. Our choir performed at the New School @South Shore, where Gary Tubbs is principal, December 12. Our two third grades performed plays also. Tracy’s class did Much Ado About Nothing, and Katie’s class performed As You Like It. We are so fortunate to have such a rich performing arts and music program at TOPS.

Our middle school students had their High School Choices Night. Several TOPS alumni students came and shared information about their high schools. Thanks to Mary Hardy for chairing the program and Jennifer Murray for assisting. The middle school ski program will begin on January 4, 2004. Janet Moore is the coordinator and has done a wonderful job of getting the buses and chaperones and coordinating the ski program.

I hope by now you have all received your festive red colored family directories. Many thanks to Ellen Markman, coordinator, and Eric Olsen, roster coordinator, for their hard work in getting the directories ready.

Thank you to Alesia Jessie, our family support worker, for coordinating our food and gift drives. Thanks to all the children, parents, and staff who shopped and shared their gifts. This is truly a testament of how the TOPS community comes together to support each other.

Our No-Bake totals continue to grow every week. As of December 12, we have $49,054. All principals were informed last week that we will have more reductions in our budgets next year. The money we raise through the No-Bake will help us to sustain our current programs. If you have not had an opportunity to contribute, it is not too late!

~ Clara Scott

MIX IT UP DAY

By Gerrit Kischner, Danforth intern

TOPS students felt a little out of place on November 18, when we participated in the third annual national Mix It Up Day, sponsored by the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance. The purpose of the project is to challenge students to look beyond the various social boundaries by which they separate themselves by “mixing up” the very space where social segregation is often most noticeable: the school cafeteria. Over 400,000 students participated nationwide.

For our first time participating, TOPS decided to keep our approach to Mix It Up Day simple with the idea that we would be laying the groundwork for exploring the issues more deeply in the future. Our objectives were simple as well. Rather than expecting students to forge new friendships through one artificial exercise, we aimed to start a conversation about the nature of student interaction and social boundaries at TOPS and in the greater society.

Many classrooms helped to lay the groundwork for these conversations. In Jill’s fifth grade class, students discussed social boundaries for a week and generated a thoughtful list of the many factors by which people separate themselves. Mary’s fourth grade class produced wonderful lists of “conversation starters,” questions that students could use during Mix It Up Day to get to know others better. Marianne’s seventh grade health class played a card game designed to simulate culture shock in which groups unknowingly learned different rules and then confronted issues of perception and misperception when they played with students from other groups but were not allowed to talk. Another group of seventh graders met several times to discuss the goals of Mix It Up Day, then helped to facilitate conversations during the elementary lunch period. Fifth through eighth graders filled out a survey about social Continued on page 3
TOPIC: “THE SUBJECT OF A DISCOURSE...THE EXTENDED EXPRESSION OF THOUGHT ON A SUBJECT” (Webster)

An invitation from Tracy Seefeld, third grade teacher

TOPICS are activities that provide:

- a choice of activities of special interest
- a wide range of enriching experiences
- small groups with more attention to each student (when we have eight or more parent- or student-led TOPICS each week)
- interaction with students from other classes

Students in grades 1 – 4 sign up in their classroom for the list of TOPICS for a given week. The TOPICS are scheduled for two consecutive days, Thursday and Friday, from 2:30 - 3:10. Group size varies. At the minimum we ask that parents work with at least eight students; one from each class is best, but it is also possible to teach particular grade levels.

Teach an academic subject or a passion you have! Former TOPICS include yoga, knitting, math games, chess, art, sign language, swing dance, publishing a story, poetry, science, and gingerbread houses. What would you like to share?

Remaining TOPICS dates:

- January 8, 9
- January 29, 30
- February 12, 13
- March 11, 12
- March 25, 26

Two special half-day TOPICS:

- January 16 (1:00 - 3:10)
- May 21 (1:00 - 3:10)

The theme for this half day is “city school” (using Seattle as a theme). Arts, transportation, history, Native Americans, settlers, government, etc...

Contact Tracy at seefeld@seattleschools.org, drop a note in her box in the office, or give your child a note to pass along to her.

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY

By Steve Haines, librarian

’Tis the good reader that makes the good book.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Nothing excites me more than a child who is looking for something to read and is led by me or by another student to a book he or she hasn’t read. The sparkle in the eye and the rush to check out the book helps make this job pleasurable. It even gets better when the student returns and wants to discuss what he or she has read. It has a snowball effect, as more children want to read the same book. Children’s literature has seen an explosion of quality stories for young people in the past several years. It is almost all I reach for, thanks in part to Lori Eickelberg, our middle school language arts teacher, who passes interesting tomes my way. One such new book this fall is Eragon. This is the first book of a fantasy trilogy written by Christopher Paolini when he was 15 years old. There is some fascinating information about him at www.alagaesia.com. This would be a good book to share with someone who likes action, dragons, and magic. True good vs. evil. As you might imagine, there are students waiting for our own copies to come back in. There’s that excitement again.

Thanks to those families that have donated books from the list that is on the TOPS web site (select Academics, scroll to Library). I will update the list, periodically sprinkled with new books that we would enjoy having. Even more excitement.

A reminder: the library is open both before and after school. After school the mood changes, as it is meant to be a calm place to do homework or read. Kids Company brings a group of students to do just that during this time. Games and “large motor” activities are very distracting. Please be sure that your children understand the expectations if they wish to stay after. Please also be aware that there may be times when the library must close early for meetings. (I wish I could say to curl up with a good book.)

Here is an interesting site for families to share, brought to you by Information Please Almanac: www.factmonster.com. Plenty of information, plus games and quizzes and a homework center.
boundaries in the school which they brought with them to share in the lunchroom during the actual event.

On Mix It Up Day itself, parents labeled lunchroom tables with a wide variety of animals, and volunteers then made the rounds to the classrooms to provide every student a hand stamp assigning them all to different animal tables. As per the recommendation of the seventh grade advisors, the older students were grouped only among two grade levels (seventh and eighth), fifth and sixth), whereas first through fourth graders were mixed up across the four grades. Kindergarteners had been talking for a week about getting to know different people, and they mixed up among themselves.

Finally, as students finished their table experiences, they were invited to participate in a Reflection Wall, intended to collect their reactions and suggestions toward ongoing discussion of the issues. For many, this became the real focus of the event as many students voiced discomfort, and anger at the event. Many of these comments were disturbing, and reflected a kind of mob negativity that is challenging as we think through how we might build on this experience in the future. In addition to the “on topic” comments, many comments were not connected. Besides many quotes from movies, there were a number of “For a good time call...” entries and other clearly fake comments in which students clearly signed the name of other students.

Being a school where most students spend a full nine years of their education, the forces that unite and separate, include and exclude, our students are critically important to consider. Students do know each other well, and many have long memories about interactions they have had over the course of their years at TOPS. The experience of Mix It Up Day provided us with insight into a number of social issues that are very real for students. The elementary students certainly enjoyed the experience more, and with many taking pride in their new table identities and having fun using the lists of questions prepared by Mary’s class. Fifth grade students were more skeptical, raising the possibility in discussions in Ilsa’s class later that the idea of social boundaries was really an adult problem imposed on them. Middle schoolers had the toughest time with the experience, clearly uncomfortable with the experience of being “forced” to try on new identities and relationships.

Our experience was typical of schools around the nation. One report from Oklahoma described it this way: “It was supposed to be a day for the nearly 1,000 students at Tahlequah High to meet new people and make new friends. Instead, it was a day that magnified all the reasons a program like Mix It Up exists — cliques, ostracism and exclusion.” On the other hand, Olympia High School here in Washington state participated for the second year in a row and reported a much more positive experience as students were more receptive to the experience and volunteered to participate in much greater numbers.

Our experience demonstrates the need for students to gain repeated practice of social decision-making skills, and the difficulties we experienced emphasized the importance that we strive to make these experiences safe for children. Students’ reflections on the comment wall suggest that it wasn’t safe for them to say something real. As we look to create experiences like this in the future, we’re challenged to clarify what our message is to children about how we function socially, how we address differences, how we communicate respectfully and how we regard others. Our theme for the year – respect – continues.

Several members of the TOPS community were instrumental in helping to think through ways to make the Mix It Up experience worthwhile and closely tied to our mission: Jennifer Murray, the counselor, Chris Drape, the assistant principal, and parents Kathy Barker, Xue-Qiao Zhao, and Valerie Tarico. For more information about how Mix It Up Day played nationally, see the website at www.mixitup.org.

**SELECTION OF COMMENTS MADE ON THE MIX IT UP DAY REFLECTION WALL**

- If we sit with people that we don’t normally sit with, we just end up not talking to anybody.
- This wuz alright, but no one did actually talk to other ppl
- I hope we never do this again.
- This was pretty fun sitting with people, even though we didn’t really talk and we just left our group but that part was even better. I think it was nice to meet new friends.
- I’ve got friends.
- I sat by someone who I hate but is always sitting near me. This sucks!
- I hated mix it up day. You shouldn’t force someone to sit somewhere. Everyone ended up not sitting in their assigned seats. They sat with their friends.
- NEVER force us to eat with other kids again, we already have friends.
- It was very boring. I wouldn’t do it again.
- OK, this kinda didn’t work, cuz you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink, OK. That was really corny, but basically what I’m saying is that no one talked to anyone. The bright side is that no one was there to talk to, so I finished my lunch way quicker.
- I tasted some new and interesting foods that came from people I didn’t know.
- I like mix match lunch day a lot!
- I already know all the people in this school.
- Don’t do it again. Don’t put us through the misery!
- I knew everyone there! This was totally pointless.
- How was mixing it up going to help us make new friends? I’m confused.
- I learned a valuable lesson – if you sit next to someone you don’t know well, they will still give you food!
- It’s not like you’ll walk away as someone’s best friend just because you sat next to them for half an hour.
- Everyone cheated and this was lame!
- Personally, I like it and would enjoy having it done again. However to make it enjoyable for the rest of the school, I think that it should be optional.
- Lunch is supposed to be fun, but today nobody wanted to come. Don’t do it again!
- Wasn’t fun: friends still group to friends: TOPS is clicky: keep it that way: well, not clicky, just keep friends with friends! Don’t do this again.
GROWING OUR GARDEN

By Dave Sarju, Site Council chair

TOPS is a school for students ages 5-14. But every child comes with a parent or two. Hence the need for a parent-teacher relationship. The Seattle Public Schools web site states, “When families and educators work together, students are more likely to succeed in school and in life. Seattle Public Schools welcomes and encourages all families to become involved in the educational process. We need families at every level…” (http://www.seattleschools.org/area/fam/index.xml). At every turn, schools are asking that parents become more involved in their children’s education. “Read with your child.” “Volunteer at school.”

The December Site Council meeting was unique in that we dedicated the entire two hours to a single topic. During our Site Council retreat in August, Site Council members developed four goals for this year and beyond. One of the four was “Improving Our School Climate.” Toward that end, parents, administrators, and teachers on Site Council agreed that an important element of the school climate is the relationship between the teacher and parent. During our December meeting Site Council members began to understand the issues related to this topic and to chart a course for improving this relationship.

Many issues and solutions were identified. Some for parents to own, some for teachers, and others for administrators. Many for all of us. For an exhaustive list of issues identified and solutions brainstormed, please go to the Site Council link on our TOPS web site and look for the minutes to our 12/10/03 meeting. Here are a few:

◆ Clarity about expectations
◆ Teachers are the classroom experts / parents are their children’s experts
◆ Equity of parental access
◆ EMAIL!!!
◆ Students’ needs / Parents’ needs
◆ The middle school experience
◆ Time is finite
◆ The approach matters – (see All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten by Robert Fulghum)
◆ Getting closure on difficult issues – What is the process?
◆ A is for Alternative - What makes TOPS different?
◆ What (how many or who) makes an issue an “issue”?
◆ How do we channel parent energy to contribute to the mission and needs of the children?
◆ Parent “Cooperative” / Teacher “Cooperative”: both or neither?

In most healthy relationships contributions and needs are appreciated. While the Site Council conversation intentionally focused on needs, what we could do differently or better, one piece we did not build into the conversation was the discussion of contributions, what is working well. The precepts of Appreciative Inquiry (see The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry by Sue Annis Hammond) suggest that we attempt to do more of what works. Spend more time planting Swiss chard rather than pulling weeds in your vegetable garden. While the weeds do grow, planting more of what we want bears a more bountiful harvest. I believe that most of our solutions are already in our TOPS garden.

In talking with teachers and parents prior to the December Site Council meeting, I heard that examples of positive parental involvement and positive parent-teacher communication are plentiful. For example, in November, Ms. Scott clearly set expectations in her letter home to parents articulating how we could communicate and interact with Mr. J regarding his health. What a relief that was to know how we could express our love. It was thoughtful and clear. Had Clara not communicated expectations, perhaps many of us would have attempted to show our love by regularly inquiring of Willie regarding his health. In the context of the recent Site Council conversation, now that we are clearer about what we don’t want, perhaps we can attempt to plant more of what works and what we want. One teacher even suggested that we sow a new plant: teachers spending multiple years with students, instead of just one year.

Now what? Like pulling a child’s stuff out from under his bed and closet corners, we’ve got to do something with that big pile in the middle of the floor. Otherwise, pretty soon it all goes back into corners and crevices cluttering our lives again. Two routes forward occur to me: 1) Give others in the community the opportunity to contribute. 2) Prioritize and implement solutions. Please call or email me or your Site Council representative if you want to help plan the next steps.
DECEMBER SITE COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

By Lianne Sheppard, Site council secretary

The entire December Site Council meeting was devoted to dialogue. This work is an outgrowth of the Site Council’s goal to enhance the school climate. The process focused on the following two questions:

1. What are the challenges to the parent-teacher relationship?
2. What makes it difficult to navigate the boundaries between parent involvement and the teacher’s role?

Sue Feldman facilitated the meeting. She led the group in four rounds of dialogue in which every Site Council member was asked to speak briefly. During the first information-gathering round members were asked to help ensure that multiple points of view were expressed with respect to the questions, and that as much information as possible was put out for all to hear. The second round was intended to re-clarify the discussion. Members were asked to respond to what they heard and to get beyond their own point of view. The third round created a brief list of the main issues. These were not fully distilled in the brief meeting time, but they all had some aspect of lack of clarity at their core. Clarity is needed with respect to boundaries and processes, understanding the fundamental differences in the nature of the time and the power that can be devoted by parents versus staff, relationships, socialization of new members into the community, and what needs can be met in this community. Individuals then gave suggestions about how they thought we could improve the parent-teacher relationship in order to support learning at TOPS. As next steps the Site Council hopes to expand the dialogue, choose which ideas to focus on, and create an action plan.

2003-04 TOPS CALENDAR

Please check Wednesday Go-Homes and the web site for updates.

JANUARY

5 (M)..............School resumes
6 (T)..............Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m., LRC
8 (Th).............CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
14 (W).........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
15 (Th).........Martin Luther King Jr Jr. assembly, 2:30 p.m.
19 (M).........Martin Luther King Jr. Day--no school
21(W).........Volunteer orientation, 3-4 and 6-7 p.m., library
23 (F).........End of semester
26 (M).........Day between semesters--no school
31(Sa).........Kindergarten fair at John Stanford Center, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

FEBRUARY

3 (T).........Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
5 (Th).........Grades 3-5 to SCT, Tibet Through a Red Box
6 (F).........Speech tournament: storytelling
7 (Sa).........All-city tutoring training at Meany Middle School, 8:45 a.m.-1:05 p.m.
11 (W).........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
11 (W).........Communications committee, 7-8:30 p.m., conference room
13 (F).........Speech tournament: expository
13 (F).........Middle school dance, 6:30-9 p.m.
16-20 (M-F)....Mid-Winter Break--no school
25 (W).........Volunteer orientation, 3-4 and 6-7 p.m., library
27 (F).........Speech tournament: oral interpretation

MARCH

2 (T).........Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
3 (W).........2-hour early dismissal
4 (Th).........All-city tutoring training, Meany Middle School, 8:45-1:05
4 (Th).........Taste of TOPS, 6-9 p.m.
5 (F).........Speech tournament: editorial commentary
10 (W)........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
16 (T).........Grades 5-8 to SCT, Shape of a Girl
19 (F).........Professional development day--no school
20 (Sa).........TOPS chess tournament
24 (W).........Volunteer orientation, 3-4 and 6-7 p.m., library
31 (W).........Poetry festival

APRIL

1 (Th)..........Poetry festival
1 (Th)..........CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
2 (F)..........End of third quarter
4 (Su)..........Daylight Savings Time begins
5-9 (M-F)....Spring Break; chess camp at TOPS
13 (T).........Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
14 (W).........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
15 (Th).........Grades K-4 to SCT, Mrs. Piggle Wiggle
21 (W).........Class pictures
21 (W).........Volunteer orientation, 3-4 and 6-7 p.m., library

MAY

4 (T).........Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
6 (Th).........CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
8 (Sa).........TOPS auction
12 (W).......Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
12 (W).......Communications committee, 7-8:30 p.m.
19 (W).......2-hour early dismissal
21 (F).......Art Walk, elementary play
22 (Sa).......Elementary play, 2 and 7 p.m.
31 (M).......Memorial Day--no school

JUNE

1 (T).........Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
3 (Th).........Kindergarten puppet show
3 (Th).........CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
9 (W).........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
11 (F).........Eighth grade passage
15 (T).........Last student day, fifth grade passage
NOTAS AND NOTICIAS

By Maestra Rabbitt

¡PRÓSPERO AÑO NUEVO!

Music, song, and dance are very important to most Latin Americans. January and February are traditionally carnaval months in Latin America and the Caribbean. Carnaval is a time to celebrate with music, dance, song, food, drink, and laughter, often for days and weeks at a time. Mardi Gras in New Orleans, due to the strong African, Spanish, and French cultural traditions in that port city, is similar to carnaval in Latin America.

Próspero Año Nuevo-
Prosperous New Year

Carnaval-carnival

A HARD DECISION

By Margie Butcher, first grade teacher

Everyone warned me how hard it would be to leave a newborn at home and go back to work. They were so right. After much soul-searching, I have decided to stay home with Savannah. Having a baby was something Steve and I had been so looking forward to, and I just can’t see missing out on watching this miracle develop day by day.

The thing that made the decision so difficult was this school...these children...this community. In two short years I have been made to feel a part of this amazing “family.” Thank you to everyone for making me feel so welcome. The members of the TOPS community are so passionate, intelligent, and compassionate. It is inspirational. And it is hard to leave. So I am looking at this not as leaving, but taking a leave. I will be back...if I have anything to do with it!

In the meantime, I hope to still stay involved with TOPS in many ways. Once Savannah is taking a bottle, I plan to be back with CSJ. I also hope to stay involved in the Reading Block, and teach a TOPIC every once in a while. And in no time Savannah will be in Joan or Joby’s class!

Thank you to everyone for these first two years...and many more to come!

Margie has decided to start an after-school tutoring and enrichment business. A sort of “TOPS north.” She will offer private tutoring, not just to help your child if there is an area he or she is feeling challenged in, but for enrichment as well. She will also offer an after-school “homework club” so that your child can come home with homework done, and a “writing club,” where kids can get together to enjoy all kinds of writing. Children can take the bus after school from TOPS to her house in Wallingford, then they can be picked up at 5 or 6 p.m. If anyone is interested, they can call Margie (547-4293) or email her (margie@drizzle.com).
Lisa Love, Health Education Specialist for the Seattle School District, led a discussion this past month with interested TOPS members about how schools can affirm the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT, for short) youth and families in our community. The Seattle School District is committed to creating schools in which all children and their families feel respected, safe, and encouraged to learn and grow. This goal is made more urgent by data that show that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are at significant and disproportionate risk for many problems at home and at school, including bullying, abuse, family disruption, drug and/or alcohol abuse, homelessness, and dropping out of school.

The Seattle School District has initiated several measures to make our schools more welcoming places for GLBT youth and families. It recommends that schools take a variety of steps, such as challenging homophobia, including gay and lesbian history and role models in classroom curriculum, adopting anti-discrimination policies, and making visible the school’s embrace of GLBT families and students through posters, books, or flyers. Adults are asked to focus on behavior consistent with the goals of respect and care rather than personal beliefs. The School District has also encouraged high schools to establish and affirm support groups for GLBT students. And it has a declared policy “to prohibit harassment, intimidation, and bullying based upon race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, economic status, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, or sensory disability.” (Washington is one of nine states, plus Washington D.C., which have a law prohibiting harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in education, and a new “Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Act of 2002” went into effect in August 2003. Federal law, however, bars school districts from enforcing anti-discrimination policies when it comes to the Boy Scouts and military recruiters.)

The policy prohibiting harassment and bullying most effectively influences a school climate when adults in a school respond immediately and clearly when we witness such acts. Lisa Love introduced a model in which adults (or peers) step in immediately to stop the behavior and then explain why. We discussed words or reasons we might call upon, such as respect for others, school policy, or distinguishing between even a positive intention and a hurtful impact on the recipient. Adults also set the tone in providing information about people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. We discussed typical questions that an elementary, middle school, or high school student might ask about sexual orientation and gender identity, and explored possible answers that are respectful, accurate, and developmentally appropriate. Resources (both books and videos) to enhance our knowledge are available from the Seattle School District, and may also be acquired through TOPS’ multicultural resources fund.

This event will be followed by a panel of GLBT youth from the Safe Schools Coalition, who will be sharing their stories and perspectives with the middle school in January.

If you would like more information about Lisa Love’s presentation, or a copy of her extensive hand-out, please talk to one of us who attended: Clara Scott, Chris Drape, Bonnie Cech, Elizabeth Dickinson, Galen Goff, Lynne Goodrich, Gary Luke, Teresa Nemeth, Laurie Roth, Karen Stuhldrehar-Calcagno, Sheri Toussaint, Marlies van Bergeijk, and Beth Wheeler.

ACCORDING TO A 1999 SEATTLE TEEN HEALTH SURVEY:

- 41% of teens who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) were the targets of offensive comments or attacks about sexual orientation at or on the way to school, compared with 4% of teens who identified themselves as heterosexual
- Almost 61% of GLB teens and 34% of heterosexual teens were the target of offensive sexual comments or attacks (in general) at or on the way to school
- 49.4% of GLB youth report heavy drug use, compared with 24.4% of heterosexual respondents
- 32% of GLB teens said that they had attempted suicide at least once in the past 12 months, compared with 6% of heterosexual teens

The same Teen Health Survey suggested some good news about the role of adults in our schools:

- 81.5% of GLB youth and 84.3% of heterosexual respondents reported having one or more teachers who “encourage them to do their best”
- 62.4% of GLB and 59.7% of heterosexual teens had found at least one adult at school to whom s/he could talk about personal problems
SIXTH GRADE GREEK FESTIVAL

By Abby Chin-Martin, Grade 6

As some of you may know, both of the sixth grade classes had a Greek festival on Friday, November 21, in Marianne Trangen’s sixth grade classroom. The classes had been studying ancient Greece and had the unit all end in one big festival. There was Greek food that the wonderful dedicated parents made and brought in, which was very good and very Greek. All of the kids were supposed to come in chitons (Greek toga) and parents could wear costumes if they wanted. The entertainment in the middle of all this was everybody’s project on ancient Greece. The projects ranged from reenacting a myth to a plain timeline of important events. Some ways people showed these projects were from a movie they made, a PowerPoint presentation, posters, and sculptures. To add on to all of this there was also a contest going on. There had been temples made by groups of five or six kids from paper, paper clips, one marker, tacks, and two feet of tape. The temples were judged on the beauty, balance, clarity, symmetry, and proportion. Believe it or not the judges were our very own Mrs. Scott and our middle school art teacher Luzita Roll! Overall this was a very fun experience!

Photos provided by Don Zemke
Primm ABC Childcare Center has been chosen as the childcare provider to replace the YMCA program at Martin Luther King School. Primm was established in the 1970s and is a non-profit, NAYEAC-accredited childcare center. A representative from Primm met with the MLK community at their Winter Festival program on December 11. The YMCA childcare contract will terminate January 1, 2004, and Primm will begin their program at MLK January 6, 2004. Principal Barry Dorsey, faculty, and the entire school community are excited and relieved that the “after-school childcare crisis at MLK Elementary” is no longer a crisis.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MADISON VALLEY AND MARTIN LUTHER KING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

William Grose, Seattle’s second African-American resident, was the first to settle in Madison Valley. He bought 12 acres from Henry Yesler in 1882. Martin Luther King School is situated on about two acres in the heart of the Madison Valley and is a small school, with only twelve classrooms.

The first building, which had six classrooms, was built around 1913 and was named after Benjamin Harrison, the twenty-third president of the United States. The school site was expanded in 1942. Then in 1958 there was a major remodel and the Harrison Early Childhood Center was added next to the Harrison Elementary School. In 1974 the students voted to change the Center’s name to Martin Luther King Early Childhood Center. Later the students from Harrison Elementary School petitioned the Seattle School District to rename the school. Another school-wide poll resulted in the entire school being renamed Martin Luther King Elementary School. During the summer of 2002 MLK was renovated; this included new wiring for electricity, computers, and seismic upgrades to help protect the students in case of an earthquake.

Today MLK School fights to regain the prominence it once held in the seventies and eighties. With academic achievement on a steep rise, the school continues to improve while serving some of the most adversely impacted students in Seattle. One newspaper reporter used the words “The Little School That Could - If Only It Could Get a Break” to describe this small, nurturing educational environment.

MLK school web site:
http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/mlking/

Principal: Barry Dorsey
Phone: (206) 252-2900
Address: 3201 E. Republican,
Seattle, WA 98112

The School Board approved resolutions to place two renewal levies—a $338 million operating levy and a $178 million capital levy—on the February 3, 2004, ballot. The operating levy represents nearly 23% of the District’s annual general fund budget. The capital levy would fund 600 projects including seismic upgrades, facility improvement and technology upgrades across the district. These are renewals of levies – not tax increases.

Overview information about both levies is contained in a presentation (PDF format) at http://www.seattleschools.org/area/levy-info/Levies%20Powerpoint.pdf. The presentation includes a review of the District’s 10-year levy plan, a chart that shows levy rates per $1,000 of assessed value, and a graph that compares Seattle Public Schools levy rates with other districts.

The Operating Levy (to replace the 2001 LEVY) provides nearly one-quarter of the Seattle School District’s operating funds. These are dollars that go directly into the classroom. They’re used for teacher salaries, supplies, and other day-to-day requirements. Seattle has passed this levy every three years since 1976.

The Capital Levy provides funds for critical building improvements and technology.

This allows the district to renovate buildings at virtually every school in the district. Moneys from this levy go to replacing worn out playgrounds, updating computers and systems, fixing leaky roofs, enhancing science labs, and many other physical improvements in the schools. It continues the work of the Buildings, Technology, and Athletic Fields levy, passed by voters in 1998.

The District’s levy information publication will be available the first week of January 2004 by contacting the District’s Office of Public Affairs at 252-0200. Copies will be distributed to all schools, and to every employee. Levy information will also be available on the District web site: www.seattleschools.org.
FIFTH GRADERS SHINE AT CHESS MATES TOURNAMENT

By Laura Henry

A core of talented fifth graders led the TOPS chess club to a third place trophy in the fifth through eighth grade section at the Chess Mates tournament November 22 at TOPS. With Jack Yates and Joe Markman each winning four out of five matches and Eli Davis and Timur Maraghe each winning three and a half, the combined total of the TOPS team including Derek Nelson and Eugene Son outmatched many middle school competitors.

Sixteen TOPS students participated in the event, sponsored by the TOPS chess club and the Chess Mates Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to promoting chess in the public schools. The tiny two-person team of first graders Margot Maraghe and Carmelita Palagi also snatched a team trophy by winning two and a half and three and a half games, respectively. Benji Oh, Asa Palagi, Jackson White, Mariana White, Rachel Blazevic, Sarah Blazevic, Hensel Albright, and Owen Anderson all competed on the second through fourth grade team. Jack Yates took first place in fifth grade and Benji Oh took second place in fourth grade after the ten individual all-round trophies were distributed for each section.

For many of our students, it was the first time they had participated in a scholastic tournament, which can be an exciting moment. Three hundred and forty-five students and their families from all over the city squeezed into the cafeteria for concessions served by cheerful TOPS chess club parents or else roamed the play area in between rounds of chess in the gym. Assistant Principal Drape surprised the chess club when he brought his son to play. As boisterous as all this sounds, inside the gym during rounds, forty rows of children faced off against each other in silence interrupted only by the clicking of pieces and shuffling feet of the pacing judges.

The TOPS chess club is open to all and meets each Tuesday in the third floor commons from 3:30 to 4:45. The Chess Mates tournament is one of two all-city scholastic events hosted by TOPS this year. The next one, the annual TOPS Tournament, will take place on March 20. Complete information about the chess club can be found on the TOPS web site at (http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/tops/extracurricular/chess.html).

By winning at least three matches at this tournament, many students were pleased to have already qualified for the state tournament, which will take place in April at Bellevue Community College this year. Good luck, chess players!

CHESS INSTRUCTOR WANTED

Paid position to teach one of three chess club groups at TOPS after school on Tuesdays, 3:20 to 4:50 p.m. Students are in kindergarten through fourth grade. Looking for someone who likes kids and chess—the successful candidate will have references in these areas. This is an opportunity for people high school age and up through retirement. Contact Gene at topschess03@yahoo.com.
MUCH ADO

By Miriam Schwartz, Grade 8

Mid-October, twenty-four anxious middle school students reported to the library loft with members of their grade, silently hoping that the few nights they had spent preparing their monologue would pay off. One by one, they displayed their talent, which in the end, all contributed to the wonder of this year’s play, *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Under the masterful direction of Todd Jamieson, the next several weeks were spent decoding the complicated language of Shakespeare (as well as the turns and potholes in the story itself), memorizing lines (“Is it ‘Dost thou not love me’, or ‘Dost not thou love me?’”), staging the play, and delving deeper into the character each of us had been assigned to portray.

Todd’s style had many of the actors questioning, but we soon learned the benefits. His scheme was to have chairs on the set, rather than have actors entering and exiting from backstage. “Great,” we all thought. “So now I have to sit and watch a forty-five minute play that I’ve seen a million times while I’m not even acting. And I have to look interested.” Reflecting, I assume I can say for every participant and audience member, that the play wouldn’t have been what it was without the people in the chairs and their keen involvement in the plot.

The night before opening rushed up to us, with a lot of work remaining to do. Once the spell of the audience’s watching eyes was upon us, however, a new kind of adrenaline pumped through our stage-fright stricken bodies, and everything worked. Not only did it work, we did well. And what’s more, we were proud of it. The three performances passed all too quickly, and we all had a blast.
**What I Like To Do In PE**

*By Isabella Fabens, grade 5*

I like to juggle in PE because I know that it will be fun to know how to juggle by the end of the year. I also enjoy practicing handstands and riding a unicycle around the gym. It took me about three months to learn how to ride around the gym on a unicycle. I started practicing handstands at home, and learned that every time you do handstands for a while, all your muscles will hurt!

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**TOPS Family Ski Weekend, February 19 – 22, 2004**

*By Julie Braybrooks*

If you haven’t tried this TOPS tradition before, try it this winter. The latter part of Mid-Winter Break leaves the Mission Ridge slopes uncrowded with plenty of dry snow, bright sun, and a smashing view of the Columbia River. Ask fifth graders Ankober Yawondwosen and Zach Simon about last year’s experience. It’s easy to caravan or carpool with other families. Bring a student friend or two.

The Mission Ridge ski area, only twelve miles from accommodations in the town of Wenatchee, offers alpine skiing and snowboarding lessons, as well as tubing and crosscountry skiing nearby on weekends. Non-skiers have also found snowshoeing can be great fun on trails alongside the ski slopes. (See missionridge.com for information.)

The Cedars Inn in Wenatchee has set aside a block of rooms for TOPS families to reserve. The deadline for reservations is January 31, 2004. Rooms cost $61 plus tax.

Kids 18 and under stay free. The Cedars Inn is just 20 minutes from Mission Ridge. They offer continental breakfast, indoor pool, and outdoor hot tub.

Reservations: 1-800-358-2074 or 509-886-8000 (tell them you are with TOPS school).

Traditionally we have held a family potluck Friday night (6:30) in a large meeting room the Cedars Inn provides. Plan on bringing a dish to feed six to eight people and a beverage to share. Lots of families drive over on Thursday in order to get a full day of skiing in on Friday.

Mission Ridge has a discount program called the “Three-0 Club” for students in grades six through twelve who have earned a 3.0 grade average or better. However, with their new $10 membership fee it is only a discount if you buy lift tickets on three different days. Check out the requirements on their web site (missionridge.com) under “rates” and “3-0 Club.”

If someone would like to organize a group purchase of tickets (15 or more), look on the web site at group sales. If you have a Summit at Snoqualmie season pass, bring it along; last year we were given a 20% discount for showing it.

For more information contact Julie Braybrooks at 324-6090 or jab.ges@earthlink.net.
WITHOUT A BALL

By Adlai Pappy, grade 8

In the world of televised sports, all of them consist of balls. From football to bowling, the focus of the game is on the ball. Though this is true, sports in the shadow of the ball are rising. One of these more prolific sports without a ball is wrestling.

Matt Pedersen, a student teacher in math and art, has another side not many knew about till Tuesday at PE. Mr. Pedersen started wrestling in the sixth grade. He joined the school team in seventh grade and everything rolled on from then. In high school he lettered all four years, was captain of his team, and was All-State through high school. He also wrestled in college. He’s been involved in wrestling for twenty years. His favorite part about it is teaching and after college while he taught art in Nashville he coached the wrestling team. He coached them to state champions twice and second in the state once.

There are many different types of wrestling. One of them that I thought was interesting was freestyle. Whereas regular wrestling requires that the wrestler only use his arms, freestyle allows the wrestler to use his arms and legs. Mr. Pedersen uses the regular kind of wrestling just using your upper half to take down your opponent.

The rules in wrestling require that the wrestler must have both shoulder blades of the opponent on the ground in order to pin. A pin ends the match. A take down, when an opponent is off his feet, is worth two points. An escape, worth one point, is when the wrestler gets out from under the opponent when you’re trying to pin them. A reversal is when the wrestler is about to take the other wrestler down and you flip him, then you take him down—that is worth two points. There are three periods in a wrestling match with two minutes in each period. After a take down the wrestlers can take one of two positions. One of them is the neutral position you would take at the beginning of the match where you would stand opposite each other on the rectangle. The other is, the person who was taken down has their knees behind the width-wise line of the rectangle and the hands above the other width-wise line of the rectangle. The other person puts their arm on the other’s chest and the other arm holding the other’s elbow. The person on the bottom is trying to get out for an escape with one point. The match takes place inside a circle; once you go out of bounds you have to take the starting position again. In the middle of the circle is a rectangle where all the begging action takes place.

Wrestling is more than just a sport of tackling; it consists of different movement, coordination, reflexes, and strength. Sports without a ball are coming out of the shadows everywhere, from wrestling to even swimming; these sports are making their way to the spotlight of the sports world.
AS OF DECEMBER 10, WE ARE IN OUR TENTH WEEK AND WE HAVE RAISED $49,054.15.

Our goals are 100% participation and $70,000 raised. No-Bake appeal letters, brochures, and envelopes are available in the TOPS office and on the TOPS web site No-Bake page. http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/tops/helping/nobake.html

Thank you, TOPS families, friends, faculty, and alumni parents who have made financial contributions and pledges to the No-Bake Bake Sale. Thank you to everyone who has volunteered their time to the No-Bake and carnival because time equals money$ If you have not had a chance to send in your dough-nation please remember:

$ WE KNEAD YOUR DOUGH TO REACH OUR GOAL $

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Pre/Post Holiday Book Roundup

By Catherine Remijan

Hello, fellow TOPS parents. Before Thanksgiving I was culling from our shelves at home for books my children had finished reading. I decided to try and give these books to a Seattle public school other than TOPS. The librarian at the school I visited was eager to have my four grocery bags of books, and ten days later I received a truly lovely note from her expressing how she had put these books to good use. Here is an excerpt from her letter.

“I immediately processed the books for the library and it never ceases to impress me that students will find the ‘new’ books within a few hours. The teachers put the books they chose out on the shelves in their room that afternoon and students were choosing from the rest the next day. When I have enough books for giving away, then once a week each student may take one book home to keep.”

Seattle public schools are full of bright students who love to read. I encourage you to give your quality new or used books to one of the Seattle public schools. The librarian I spoke with said her kids are particularly interested in picture books, nonfiction, zoo book magazines, and the best of chapter books. If you would like to send a book to school with your child, Steve will have a box in the library during December and January for collection. I will deliver these books throughout the month.