March and April have been busy months at TOPS. We had our Taste of TOPS, all-city chess tournament, and sixth grade camp at Moran State Park on Orcas Island.

Our middle school students are currently involved in volleyball, soccer, and track.

We had two more speech tournaments in March. Many community volunteers who were judges commented on how poised and well-spoken our students are.

During spring break, Mark Morales conducted a chess camp at TOPS.

Mark Ellis took our middle school math team to the Math Olympiad. Our team placed third overall and our eighth grade team was first. There were several individual second place winners.

Luzita helped prepare our students for the Narramore art contest. We had two of three first places. Nick Planert won overall 1st place and Ben Schmechel won 1st place in the technical category.

Thank you to the auction committee and the entire TOPS community for all the wonderful items and gift certificates for our auction, May 8, at the Asian Resource Center. It promises to be a very exciting and successful event. Please invite your friends and family.

Our elementary play is Friday, May 14, and Saturday, May 15.

Our Art Fest is Friday, May 14, and the students’ work will remain on display for ten days.

Our seventh graders will be going to camp in May at Mt. St. Helens.

We are getting ready for our WASL and DRA testing. Please be sure your student gets plenty of rest and eats breakfast.

The week of May 25-28 is Volunteer Appreciation Week. This has been another year of fantastic participation. We... Continued on page 5
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

By Dana C. Twight, TOPS parent and Washington State Board of Education member

What is “No Child Left Behind?” Signed by President George W. Bush in 2002, this is the most recent version of the reauthorization of the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Act) of 1965. This law is on everyone’s lips, from educators (Leave No Teacher Standing), to students (Leave No Child Untested), administrators (How to teach students the “skills” to get the “scores”), and even other professions (Leave No Dentist Behind). This may be the most parodied piece of federal legislation ever!

The goal of the law as stated in the legislation is laudable. The goal is to “provide all children with a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.” Very few people would argue with that idea. As is the case with many pieces of legislation, the arguments center on implementation of the goal.

The Act has ten sections or titles. Due to space limitations, each title is not reviewed in depth here, but the list follows:

Title I Part A - Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged
Title II - Preparing, Training, and Recruiting High Quality Teachers and Principals
Title III - Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students (formerly Title VII-Bilingual Program)
Title IV - 21st Century Schools
Title V – Promoting Parental Choice and Innovative Programs
Title VI – Flexibility and Accountability
Title VII – Indian, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native Education
Title VIII – Impact Aid
Title IX – General Provisions
Title X – Education of Homeless Children and Youths

The law also expands federal control with many new regulations, including areas which were formerly considered states’ issues (testing requirements, defining highly qualified teachers, labeling schools “failing”). There are a few sections that provide extra funds for Family Literacy programs and early reading, enhancing education through technology, the arts, economic education, and a rural education initiative.

In the space given this article, I have chosen to review AYP, probably the most familiar new acronym spawned by the legislation. This is the source of much concern across the country.

What is Adequate Yearly Progress and how is it calculated? AYP is the tool designed to get all students to 100% of achievement by the year 2014. Each state was required to review test (assessment) data for all individual students and rank the schools in order of proficiency. Then, a State Uniform Bar was calculated using a federally defined minimum percentage of progress for each year through 2014. A starting point was identified for the subjects of reading and math for grades 4, 7, and 10. For example, in fourth grade across the state, the annual incremental improvement needed in mathematics is 5.8%. This was calculated by beginning with the percentage of students meeting standard (30.3% in 2002) and extending the graph out to the year 2014. What this means is that every year, in mathematics, our state’s fourth graders must improve by at least 5.8%, in all identified subgroups. These subgroups (there are 37) include the categories of ethnic origin, gender, poverty, limited English proficiency (LEP), and students with disabilities. The bar for improvement in math is steeper than for reading. The annual improvement in reading is 3.85% in all groups.

How is this different than in the past? We have not had a regulation which specified that all children must be supported and educated to the same educational standards before. AYP calculations will spotlight areas in which states, districts, and buildings need improvement. Unlike in the past, education officials will have to support and educate all children. (Remember that we have only had a goal to educate all students to the same high standards in this country for two generations.)

If a district is deemed to be “failing AYP” (129 districts in Washington State in 2002), then a series of requirements comes into play. After two years in “improvement status,” a district must notify parents that “school choice “ is available within the district and must pay for transportation for any students who change schools. Schools will also receive technical assistance and must devote 10% of their funding to Professional Development. After three and four years, the school must continue to meet the conditions above, plus additional requirements.

Washington chose to accept the federal funding contained within NCLB, which means that as a state we do have to comply with the federal law. Due to our decade-plus of education reform (see the March TOPS newsletter for a brief history), our state is in good shape for compliance, unlike many other states. We have obtained additional flexibility for both the state and district (Seattle) levels. For example, Washington education officials have been very concerned that performance of English Language Learners (ELL, formerly known as English as a Second Language learners) and students with disabilities are included in the AYP numbers for all students. These students are included in the calculations for AYP even though their achievements need to be assessed separately from those of other students. This February, Washington State received some news about ELL students and their assessments. According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the following changes were approved by the Department of Education:

“… English language learners now will be exempted for their first year in a U.S. school from taking reading and math tests for purposes of NCLB accountability. They will only be required to take a language proficiency test; the WASL reading and math tests will be optional. Secondly, students who have mastered enough English to exit the ELL
program can now be considered ELL students in the appeal process for purposes of federal accountability for two years after exiting the program. This will better recognize and reward the progress these students make over time. These changes take effect immediately, and will be incorporated into 2004 federal accountability calculations from each school and district and for the state.”

This should be good news for ELL students, their parents, and educators as it recognizes that testing these students in their first year in a U.S. school is not fair to them.

On the Dept. of Ed. web site (www.ed.gov) there is a list of “Ten Facts Every Parent Should Know About the NCLB Act,” or “Diez datos que cada padre debe saber la Ley Que Ningun Nino Se Quede Atras.” A quick review of the “Facts” reveals at least one surprise. Number 3 states that “principals and administrators will spend less time filling out forms…” (Who are they kidding?) Number 6 indicates that NCLB will provide more funds to help teachers (educators) become better at their jobs (Professional Development). This could drive extra funds to our educators in the Seattle school district. This web site also has an additional Spanish area called “Recursos en Espanol.”

What can parents do? These regulations will affect all of our children and our neighbors’ children. If there are information sessions (some may be offered by the Seattle School Board), try to attend. If your student ends up in a “failing” school or district, request that school personnel explain options to you clearly and in your home language. Your child may be eligible for free after-school tutoring or to receive transportation services to another building. If you feel the legislation is under funded, please contact your legislator or a state/local school board member. Public education with public funds is everybody’s business. A high school diploma will yield many opportunities and increased lifetime earnings for your student. Instead of relying only on these regulations, work with your student and their teachers to be sure they are getting the most out of their school experience.

NCLB is on the books and states are struggling to meet the accountability requirements. Not all areas that have accepted the federal funding are happy with their decision. While the regulations are federal, the standards and assessments used differ by state. Our achievement standards for students are higher than the standards in Texas, for example. So comparing states will still be like comparing apples and oranges (only with more computers). Another example of inconsistency within the law is that NCLB requires each state to calculate a dropout/graduation rate. However, it does not provide a uniform definition of a dropout! Inconsistencies such as these are disappointing, frustrating, and just plain wrong for students. Also, this was a big change for Congress; as some may recall, a previous (Republican) administration wanted to abolish the federal Department of Education. However, at the present, there has not been a strong movement to return the money! For the moment, NCLB is here to stay.

COMMENTS...

Thank you Amy Hagopian [“What’s Wrong with Nickle-Bee”? April TOPSNews] for exposing the NCLB law for the sham that it is. This bureaucratic straightjacket should not be allowed in a school that espouses antibias and the creation of a stimulating environment, and should therefore be boycotted.

Suzanne Oelke, TOPS parent

A READER

I wanted to provide some commentary in response to Amy Hagopian’s piece last month. She made some excellent points. The one I would agree with the most was the one in which she stated that “marketplace reforms” are replacing local control and turning parents into consumers rather than citizens. Indeed, some would argue that the business community’s involvement in education reform is geared toward turning out consumers, baristas, and data entry workers, rather than educated, involved citizens of the world. Her first point about testing dulling the teaching environment may be true in some states and in some classrooms. However, the discussion about how testing, measurement, and classroom-based assessments are used is a much bigger one than NCLB. Many in the education

Continued on page 7
SITE COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

APRIL 14, 2004

By Ellen Markman

SPECIAL AUCTION ITEM SELECTION

Jennifer Shaw, fund development chair, and the special auction item selection committee have chosen sound improvements to the TOPS gym for this year’s special auction item. Improvements will include both sound abatement (absorbing the excess sound with acoustical tiles and curtains) and sound enhancement with improved sound equipment. Sound abatement will be a huge improvement for Don and Eric and anyone in the gym living with the cacophony of noise that exceeds OSHA standards. Sound system improvement will allow our performing arts programs to actually be heard by all in the gym, not just those in the front rows. Two important pieces of the TOPS program will be immeasurably improved by these physical enhancements to the gym.

CLIMATE CONVERSATION

The climate committee, formed after last December’s site council meeting devoted to the parent/teacher relationship, is planning to communicate in a multimedia format the “TOPS way” in the fall to both new and existing families. Concluding that parents’ assumptions about interacting with teachers is not always correct, the climate committee will communicate how to interact with teachers and respect their boundaries, and illuminate appropriate avenues for addressing concerns.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Both the Building Leadership Team (BLT) and the site council have open positions this spring.

The BLT parent representatives, Holly Morris and Glen Tamura, started their terms in December. They are just getting their feet wet, and although these are only one-year terms, both are interested in continuing on for another year to complete their year-long responsibility. Going forward, in the quest for sustainability, the nominating committee would like to have one vacant parent BLT position every year, creating two-year terms where there will always be one returning parent and one new parent serving. After next year, either Holly or Glen will stay on for one more year, and a new parent rep will be elected to serve. This idea was agreeable to the site council.

There are five open site council positions. Two positions are open in the K-2 grade band, two in the 3-5 grade band, and one in the 6-8 grade band. Currently there are just enough people running to fill each position. Others are encouraged to run. For information, please contact Kathy Cox-Czosnyka.

SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVE

Kathryn Wickward, a kindergarten parent, has volunteered to be school board representative for the site council. In this position, Kathryn will attend school board meetings and report at site council meetings any information relevant to the TOPS community.

EASTLAKE RELATIONSHIP

Chair Dave Sarju continued the conversation site council has been having regarding the relationship between TOPS and the Eastlake community, and specifically whether site council endorses a subcommittee to continue the conversation with Eastlake, including addressing the assignment issue. Dave suggested the end product of such a discussion could be a proposal to the Seattle School Board. Because there is not a consensus among site council members regarding this issue, a subcommittee was formed to clarify the issues. (See related article on page 5.)

WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE ON AN INTERVIEW TEAM?

By Chris Drape, assistant principal

We are creating a pool of people interested in participating on interview teams for open teaching positions we may have this spring. We try to create balanced interviewing teams that include parent representatives. When we assemble a team, we consider the following:

◆ The team includes parent representation of students in the grade with the opening
◆ The interview team represents the diversity of our school
◆ All interview team members must have done the required SPS/SEA training (see box left).

If you are interested in being available for an interview team, please contact Clara Scott or Chris Drape.

Please be aware that ALL persons involved in the site-based screening and interviewing must have attended this training. Sessions are open to all administrators, certified, and classified employees, as well as parents, students, and community representatives. If you know staff or community members who might be interested, please alert them.

You do not have to register to attend; sign up sheets will be available at the training.

2003 - 04 REMAINING JOINT INTERVIEW TRAINING DATES:

May 18, 4-5 p.m.,
Seattle Education Association,
720 Nob Hill North

June 10, 4-5 p.m.,
Rainier View Elementary School,
11650 Beacon Avenue South

Summer training dates will be determined at a later time.
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

By Dave Sarju

For some of us answers seem very clear—black and white. For others, in trying to find an answer we only discover more questions. For example, “What is the role of the TOPS community in speaking to our school district’s assignment plan—an assignment plan that in turn defines who TOPS is?” If we start by asking what kind of school families that chose TOPS were looking for, we get the following answers:

◆ A school committed to multicultural education
◆ A school more racially diverse than my neighborhood school
◆ A school with highly involved parents
◆ A school committed to arts
◆ A school committed to more holistic education
◆ A nurturing school
◆ A K-8 program (where children don’t have to do the middle school dance)
◆ A high-performing public school (good test scores)
◆ An alternative school (Ask parents what makes us alternative and we get responses just as varied.)

One answer we’re unlikely to get is, “We were looking for an opportunity to spend more time shuttling our children to friends’ homes.”

While we come to TOPS for many reasons, what became clear almost two years ago is that we are willing to fight to keep it. In nine years, I don’t recall seeing TOPS parents expending as much energy on a single topic as we did on the assignment plan two years ago. But, what were we fighting to preserve, or to build?

Why do we feel so patriotic towards this twenty-something-year-old institution? Most of us consider ourselves fortunate to have gotten into TOPS. After enduring a two-month wait between when we applied and when we received our first assignment, many of us have made significant investments here.

Even though none of us were at risk of being displaced, it felt like something that we fought hard to achieve was at risk of being taken away. Why?

◆ Were we fighting to preserve democracy? Or perhaps speaking for the voiceless?
◆ David and Goliath: Did we believe that our district was trying to exterminate the vestiges of alternative schools—so that they could eliminate challenges to testing?
◆ The step-child feeling: Had our district chosen to sacrifice TOPS, an alternative program that values many types of learners, instead of the favored APP program at Lowell?

Once again, your site council, which led the challenge two years ago, is struggling with questions such as:

◆ Could our district’s assignment plan better address TOPS’ interests? (Which interests?)
◆ Does the TOPS community desire to participate in a discussion with the other constituents in the district’s central cluster regarding the assignment plan?
◆ In a matrix as complex and dynamic as our district’s assignment plan, could we craft a solution that addresses TOPS’ needs and the needs of the community surrounding TOPS?

All this does not even begin to answer the question of how to be neighborly in the community in which our building resides.

If you have an answer, or even just more questions, please contact one of your site council representatives. A list can be found on the TOPS web site and in the September 2003 newsletter.

2003-04 TOPS Calendar

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

MAY
4 (T) .......... Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
6 (Th)......... TOPICS, 2:30
6 (Th)......... Open CSJ discussion meeting; Race and Culture in a School Setting, 6-8 p.m., library
7 (F)......... TOPICS, 2:30
8 (Sa)......... TOPS auction
11 (T)......... Spring music concert, 2 and 7 p.m.
12 (W)....... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
12 (W)....... Communications committee, 7-8:30 p.m.
13 (Th)....... TOPICS, 2:30
14 (F)......... TOPICS, 2:30
14 (F)......... Art Fest
14 (F)......... Elementary play, 7 p.m.
15 (Sa)........ Elementary play, 2 and 7 p.m.
19 (W)......... 2-hour early dismissal
19 (W)......... Volunteer orientation, 3-4 and 6-7 p.m., library
19-21 (W-F).. Grade 7 to Mt. St. Helens
21 (F)......... Half-day TOPICS, 1-3:10
28 (F)......... Grade 4 science fair
31 (M)......... Memorial Day—no school

JUNE
1 (T) ......... Grades K-2 and DHH to Camp Long
1 (T) ......... Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
1-4 (T-F) .... Grade 8 to Deception Pass
2-4 (W-F) .. Grade 5 to Camp Kirby
3 (Th) ....... Kindergarten puppet show
3 (Th) ....... CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
3-4 (Th-F) . Grades 3 and 4 to Camp Arnold
9 (W) ......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
10 (Th) ...... Kindergarten play
11 (F) ....... Eighth grade passage
15 (T) ....... Fifth grade passage
17 (Th) ....... Last student day, one hour early dismissal
18 (F) ....... Professional development day for teachers

A Message from the Principal continued from page 1

invite you to stop in to the office conference room any morning that week for coffee, tea, and refreshments!

We look forward to our many camps and other year-end activities.

INTERVIEW COMMITTEE

We will be interviewing for two fifth grade positions and a .5 DHH (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) teacher, and for an instructional aide for DHH.

When we assemble the interview committee it will consist of:
2 classroom teachers
2 administrators
2 parents
1 support staff member

We strive for gender balance and representation of the diversity of our school. All team members must have the interview training provided by the Seattle Education Association and Seattle Public Schools. Please see the related article on p. 4, or contact your room rep for dates and times.

Cheers!!!

Clara
NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY AND BEYOND

By Steve Haines, librarian

Students who score higher on tests “tend to come from schools which have more library resource staff and more books, periodicals and videos, and where the instructional role of the teacher-librarian and involvement in cooperative program planning and teaching is more prominent.”

~Keith Curry Lance, et al. The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement.

March 26 saw the end of this year’s TOPS speech tournament when the eighth graders took to the podium and recited speeches from famous people. Social studies teacher Karen Hart assigned the speeches to the students. This year the winners included Miriam Schwartz, 1st place, for a speech by Sojourner Truth; Adlai Pappy, 2nd place, for a speech by Nelson Mandela; and Ben Schmechel, 3rd place, for a speech originally given by Chief Red Eagle.

Here are all of this year’s winners:

**STORYTELLING, FEB. 6**
1st Jackson White, *How I Became a Pirate*
2nd Tova Steele, *The Paper Bag Princess*
3rd Tatum Hardy, *The Spider and the Fly*
4th Jane Markman, *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle’s Won’t Pick Up Toys Cure*

**EXPOSITORY, FEB. 13**
Natalie Shields, “How to make Snickerdoodles”
Adrienne Remijan, “Playing the Trumpet”
Michael Haruta, “Marbling Paper”
Timur Maraghe, “Gerbils”

**ORAL INTERPRETATION, FEB. 27**
1st tie Sam Heft-Luthy, “The Perils of Indifference”
2nd Isabella Fabens, “Cinderella”
3rd Georgia Jamieson, “Ghost” speech from *Hamlet,* “The Epilogue” from *As You Like It*
4th Jonah Ury, poems by Jack Prelutsky

**EDITORIAL COMMENTARY, MARCH 5**
1st Abby Chin-Martin, “Mars Exploration”
2nd Nick Thompson, “R-rated Movies at School”
3rd Esther Magasis, “Pollution”

Hearty congratulations to all of the 75 contestants plus 14 alternates for a rewarding experience in this year’s tournament. Special thanks go to all of those supportive parents, staff, judges, speech tournament committee members, and administrators who help make this a “valuable and enriching experience” that we get to look forward to every year. Next year we will expand to include a special speech category for the seventh graders.

This year a “Writers in the Schools” (WITS) residency came to our middle school students thanks to the efforts of Lori Eickelberg, our language arts teacher. Seattle Arts and Lectures sponsors this program. Our writer-in-residence is Stokley Towles, who works with the students on the writing process during the seventh and eighth grade language arts classes. An added bonus to this residency is that WITS is donating $500 in books for TOPS. Lori and I have been busily selecting books for our library that are suited to the middle school audience.

“Oh, are you kidding?” said my son as we were heading north on 4th Avenue late one night and we approached what looked like a huge angular boxy contraption that is to be the new central library. I will have to admit, on paper I wasn’t too impressed with this design for a library, but seeing it in person really made an impression on the senses, especially at night when all of the lights are on. I am looking forward to the grand opening on May 23. Check out www.SPL.org for all the information plus an interesting slide show about the new central library. Seattle is experiencing a renaissance of its libraries, what with all of the library construction going on in the city. We are quite fortunate.

Please check out the library book wish list on our TOPS web site. The library is linked under Academics. Thanks to those who have donated books from the list. Your child has helped catalog the book, including attaching a “donated bookplate” with his or her name on it.

What is yellow, long or short, and seems to have legs? That’s right, pencils. You can never have enough of those pesky but important implements. They always seem to disappear. We could use your old, somewhat shortened and even chewed on pencils that you have in the junk drawer or under the washing machine for the library. Nothing new, please. We could also use Kleenex. Only new please.

Thanks.

Every so often I get queries from parents on what is the best typing software for children. As a graduate of the old manual typewriter school of learning, I am at times at a loss as what to recommend. Thanks to the web it’s a snap to find the right program. Check this site out at www.superkids.com/aweb/pages/reviews/typing for a great review of all of the available programs for different age levels. SuperKids specializes in educational-software reviews of all types of programs.
RACE AND CULTURE IN A SCHOOL SETTING: THE DISCUSSION CONTINUES

You are invited to join the CSJ and others on Thursday, May 6, at the regular Coalition for Social Justice meeting for a continuation of the discussion begun at the (well-attended) April 1 meeting. We are fortunate to have Lisa Love, Seattle Public Schools Health Education Specialist, returning to facilitate. Some of the questions we began to explore last time:

How are we affected at TOPS?
Why do we sometimes find ourselves at odds working on seemingly common goals?

What can we learn about each other’s perspectives?
How might we better understand each other’s perceptions?
How does undoing racism fit into the larger context of multicultural education?
Where is the productive intersection of ideology and personal relationships?

6 - 8 p.m. in the TOPS library
Childcare is available — please call the office at 252-3510 to reserve a spot.

A Message from the Principal continued from page 1

world feel that additional testing may have the effect of diluting the curriculum and encouraging educators to focus only on the tested subjects. This is where our state requirements may be of assistance, as we have standards in subjects besides math and reading, including science, the arts, health and fitness, and social studies. There are state and local graduation requirements that bring in other subjects, including career and technical education classes and electives. Another group heard from feels that we should wait until the resources are available and appropriated. This could take awhile. In several other states, once the state requirements were firmly implemented, some additional resources came from the state level. If “it will take a generation to fix,” as has been commonly heard at Seattle task force meetings for at least one generation now, there has to be a fixed starting point. Remember Superintendent Olschefske’s goal of eliminating disproportionality in the Seattle schools by 2005? Others feel that high standards and accountability by school, district, and state may be the only way to “encourage” unwilling legislators, parents, educators, and administrators to educate all children, to give all children the “opportunity to learn” during all the years of their K-12 experience (not just in testing years). This is a very tough balancing act, but the fact is that educating all children and requiring them to get to similar standards is still a very new idea in this country (post Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954). Was there funding attached to that Supreme Court decision? As I stated at the State Board of Education’s Equity Summit in 2003, this may “require an inequitable distribution of resources.” Unless the pie is increased or reallocated, this will make many people upset, and the question about how to keep people with resources from leaving public education altogether should not be ignored. We can do it with policy and legislation, resources used properly, accountability for all people in schools—not just students—and high expectations for all children. Above all, we need to go beyond Brown vs. Board of Education and provide an equitable (not equal) opportunity to learn.
SPANISH CLASS: REFLECTIONS ON THE YEAR

By Sharon Mentyka

The TOPS before- and after-school Spanish classes are coming to a close. By all accounts, it has been a great year. In addition to opening the classes to middle school students and hiring Rebecca Rabbit as our Spanish language and culture instructor for all three of the classes, here are some additional activities that we were able to implement this year:

◆ Funding additional hours for Rebecca to visit the kindergarten classes during the school days and spend some time with the children, introducing them to the Spanish language and cultures
◆ Posting a permanent area on the TOPS web site under Academics>Language where interested parents can read and learn about the Spanish program
◆ Rebecca contributed a short article on Spanish cultural topics to the TOPS newsletter each month, which was written in both Spanish and English, benefiting the entire TOPS community and generating interest in the program.
◆ Participating in the Taste of TOPS by dancing a conga line from the cafeteria to the gym, with the older students baking Spanish cookies for the event
◆ Initiating conversations with Nicole Titus to brainstorm ways that the TOPS Spanish-speaking ESL students can crossover in activities with Rebecca’s students
◆ Creating a rainforest mural, currently on display in the library
◆ Providing partial scholarships to nine students through site council funding

If you are interested in participating in the Spanish program next year, please email your interest to Sharon Mentyka, parent coordinator, at sharon@pdisaattle.com. We are planning two after-school classes (M, F) and (T, Th) for grades 1-5 and one before-school class (T, Th) for grades 4-8.

The students say:
“I like the way the teacher did different projects to teach us Spanish.”
“I liked that we would cook in class and make things and I liked thinking about Spanish things outside of school. Once we had to make a list of all the places in the world where people spoke Spanish.”
“We got to pick whatever name we wanted to be called in Spanish class, as long as it was nice. It was kind of like being a different person!”
“We don’t want Spanish to end. We’re going to try to have it continue until the end of the year!”
“Me gusta mucha la classe de Espanol por que it’s awesome! Maestra Rabbit is cool and me gusta la comida tambien.”

LEARNING SPANISH AT TOPS

By Jasmine Beverly, Grade 4

Maestra Rabbit is a very funny, kind, caring person who teaches people Spanish. I have had her for two years. She has taught our class a lot of Spanish. She has been very nice and helped us individually when we needed help.

We do a variety of things in Spanish. We do lots of arts and crafts in Spanish. For example we made “God’s Eyes,” which are made by weaving yarn around two sticks. We play lots of games like “duck, duck, goose,” which is “pato, pato, ganso,” or Simon says, which is “Simon dice.” When we play Simon dice, she doesn’t trick us, but makes sure that we get it right.

We learn lots of things in Spanish. We have learned about foods that are eaten by Spanish people and foods that we eat around here. We have learned about different countries that speak español. My favorite part was learning new words in Spanish that I had not learned before. My brother’s (Jason from first grade) favorite part is playing pato, pato, ganso and learning lots of new words.

If a kid asked me about why they should take Spanish, I would tell them that you get to learn something new. It’s very helpful if you are planning to take a trip to a Spanish-speaking country. It’s also helpful to understand people who speak Spanish who live here. It is very fun learning about other cultures and what they do in those cultures.

My friend’s mom bought ice cream that was called “dulce de leche,” which means candy made out of milk. That is also known as caramel and vanilla. I looked at the container and said, “I know that phrase. That means candy of milk!” and everybody was surprised. It is fun to see Spanish words and know what they mean.

Take Spanish next year because it is a lot of fun! I would also like to thank Maestra Rabbit for helping me with my Spanish. Adios amigos!
March 4, 2004 Taste of Tops

(An all-school multicultural event including a potluck and entertainment)

By Sheri Toussaint, Stacie Bonnelle, and Helen Hundley

The Taste of TOPS was started about five years ago by the Coalition for Social Justice; Cheryl Pappy and Tilman Smith were the instrumental organizers. This is an event for the entire TOPS community and their extended family and friends.

This year we had a wonderful gathering and maybe the biggest turn-out thus far. Every family brought enough food for its own members and some to share. The fabulous feast was set up buffet-style in the lunchroom.

Stacie Bonnelle, volunteer coordinator, did an outstanding job organizing and being a part of this very successful event. Helen Hundley arranged the building permits and parking and many TOPS volunteers helped organize making posters for publicity, lunchroom set-up/cleanup, potluck coordination, and soliciting talent performances from the TOPS community.

Sheri Toussaint was the talent showcase coordinator and MC for the show. The showcase was outstanding, with performers ranging from kindergartners to adults. There were several piano performances, tumbling, drumming, dancing, stories, poems, singing, stand-up comedy, guitar rhythm and blues, a student standing on his head, and much more! Joan O’Connor, Joby Moore, and the kindergartners sang a few songs, accompanied by TOPS parents Johnny Calcagno (on guitar) and Paul Shannon (on banjo).

The Talent Showcase Performers Were:


Tops Scores at Math Olympiad

By Mark Ellis, math teacher

On Tuesday, March 30, 18 middle schoolers took part in the 28th annual Seattle School District Math Olympiad. They did an excellent job, working hard and having a good time. Please congratulate them when you see them. TOPS placed third overall in the district out of 14 participating middle schools, and the eighth graders placed first in their grade level. The participants are listed below. They were selected by their classmates to represent TOPS based on three qualities: 1) is an excellent math student, 2) works well in a group situation, and 3) would be a good representative of TOPS.

2004 Math Olympiad Participants

Grade 8: Adlai Pappy, Alex Price, Catherine Means, Max Rennebohm, Miriam Schwartz, Nathan Weizenbaum

Grade 7: Abigail Roth, Ben Titialii, Gus Hoffmann, Katherine Ehlers, Miles Kubota, Ross Holzworth

Grade 6: Abby Chin-Martin, Eliza Cohn, Emma Framson, Max Miner, Michael Haruta, Rikki George
EXTRACURRICULAR MATH ENRICHMENT FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

By Jack Lee

No one is surprised to hear about middle school kids spending lots of time on extracurricular activities like sports, plays, music, and snowboarding. But algebra?? Believe it or not, almost two dozen of this year’s eighth graders have chosen to spend one afternoon a week (and as many as eight homework hours on the weekends) learning about high school algebra. The results were on display for all to see when the TOPS eighth grade Math Olympiad team placed first among all the eighth grade teams in the city.

How did this come about? It all started last fall, when I heard my own son and a couple of other eighth graders wishing that they had a chance to grapple with more diverse and challenging mathematical ideas. They even claimed—I am not making this up!—that they’d love to learn more algebra. I knew that math teacher Mark Ellis was maxed out with two eighth grade and two seventh grade classes, and I had had a bit of experience teaching eighth grade algebra (back in a previous lifetime, before I decided to go to math grad school), so I decided to offer an informal after-school enrichment program.

My original vision was to meet weekly with about half a dozen kids who loved math and were committed to working independently, and see how much of a traditional Algebra I and Geometry curriculum we could get through. I knew my limited program couldn’t possibly replace all of the topics covered in the eighth grade curriculum, so I set it up as an addition to Mr. Ellis’s regular classes. I knew that Algebra I and a good-sized chunk of Geometry, combined with the regular eighth-grade curriculum, would be roughly equivalent to Integrated 1 and 2. For most of the students, this won’t change their high school placement—which would probably have been Honors Math 2 in any case—but it will give them a much more solid and confident base from which to approach the honors course. And for a few kids who learn extraordinarily quickly, I thought this program might give them an opportunity to place into Honors 3 in high school.

To my astonishment, two dozen eighth graders signed up for the program—nearly half of the entire eighth grade class! Mr. Ellis and I had to scurry around to find a way to accommodate all the students who were interested. Because we were caught off guard by the high level of interest, we didn’t do a very good job of communicating with the families involved and sadly ended up hurting some feelings; but in the end, with volunteer help from Mr. Ellis and two math grad students (Grete Einsiedler and Tracey Marsh), we managed to create enough groups to accommodate everyone who wanted to participate in the program. Almost all of the students have stuck with the program throughout the school year and learned a truly amazing amount of math. One of the groups finished the Algebra I book and has started high school Geometry, and the others are well on the way toward finishing Algebra I.

Because the response to this program has been so enthusiastic, we are trying to find some way to continue it for next year’s middle school students. A preliminary survey has already turned up more than 30 rising seventh and eighth grade families interested in participating. Although we were lucky enough to run this year’s program with volunteer teachers, it’s clear that the only way to keep the program going in a stable way will be to hire paid teachers, much as the Spanish program does.

So now the plans are starting to take shape: A seventh/eighth grade parent group led by Jennifer Shaw, with assistance from Mr. Ellis and me, is organizing an extracurricular math enrichment program for next year based on this year’s program. It will consist of several classes meeting at TOPS one afternoon each week for 1½ hours. There will be two differently paced programs, to accommodate a variety of students:

1. “Standard” classes, open to all seventh and eighth graders, covering a traditional Algebra 1 course during the school year. Students who complete this class will be extremely well prepared for starting Honors 2 in ninth grade. For the seventh graders in this group, we expect to follow up the next year with Geometry, thus giving them the opportunity to place into Honors 3 in ninth grade. This class would expect roughly 1½–3 hours of homework each week.

2. An “accelerated” class, open only to eighth graders, which would move roughly twice as fast and would attempt to cover both Algebra 1 and Geometry over the school year. Students who complete this class will be well prepared for starting Honors 2 in ninth grade. For the seventh graders in this group, we expect to follow up the next year with Geometry, thus giving them the opportunity to place into Honors 3 in ninth grade. This class would expect roughly 3–6 hours of homework each week.

Learning from the mistakes we made last fall, we will design a much better process for signing students up this time around. We are committed to providing enough spaces so that all seventh and eighth grade students who wish to participate...
will be able to do so. We plan to hire UW math grad students or postgraduate math instructors to teach the classes. The teachers' salaries will be paid by parent contributions, and we expect the classes to cost approximately $250–$300 for the standard classes (only a bit more than Spanish class) and $312–375 for the accelerated class. In keeping with the TOPS policy of ensuring that no child is prevented from participating in a program because of inability to pay, we have applied to the site council for funding for partial scholarships for those families who can't afford the tuition.

Here are a few questions that frequently come up in connection with this program:

**Why do we need extracurricular math enrichment? Can't teachers design their regular classes to challenge students at all levels?**

Yes, teachers can challenge all students, to some extent. Mr. Ellis's math program allows students to choose whether to do the “challenge modules” and thereby qualify for honors math in high school. But in mathematics more than any other subject, students learn at vastly different paces. A school as small as TOPS simply doesn’t have the resources to provide appropriate challenges for all the students who are already achieving at a high level in math without overwhelming those who are struggling to learn the basics. The TOPS community has a strong consensus that our scarce and precious district-supplied resources must be devoted first and foremost to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to meet the standards; this is why we are counting primarily on parent contributions and fundraising to support the enrichment program.

**Is it wise to add yet another after-school activity to middle schoolers’ already busy schedules?**

Making more opportunities available always means that more choices need to be made. Some students might choose to decrease their involvement in other activities in order to participate in this math enrichment program; others may decide that their other activities are too important for them and they would prefer not to devote after-school time to math; still others might decide that they want it all. And, of course, nobody has to participate in this program—it will still be perfectly possible to qualify for honors high school math by doing the challenge modules.

**Is this “tracking”?**

Insofar as different options are being provided to students who are willing and able to learn at a faster pace, there are some similarities between this program and “tracked” math programs in other schools. But the main objection to tracking—that it diminishes the opportunities available to some students by confining them to the “slow track”—doesn’t apply to this program, because we are making an enriched math program available to all students who want to participate, and because nobody has to participate in this program in order to prepare successfully for high school math, at either the honors or the standard level.

**Will this program widen the achievement gap?**

As a matter of fact, if anything, this program contributes to narrowing the gap. Why? It’s vitally important to remember that the gap we are all concerned about is not the gap between the highest-achieving and the lowest-achieving students—it’s the gap between the average achievement levels of white students and students of color.

When you imagine a world without an achievement gap, what does it look like? I don’t think any of us would imagine a world in which everyone has the same interests and strengths and weaknesses, and everyone gets the same score on every test in every subject; instead, we imagine a world in which each ethnic group shows the same diversity of interests, talents, and achievement levels as every other. A critical ingredient in the effort to close the gap is providing opportunities for all students to achieve the highest levels of excellence that they’re capable of, and making sure those opportunities are fully available to students of color. The public school system has a special responsibility in this effort. There are at least four students of color in this year’s eighth grade math enrichment program, and they and their families are deeply grateful for this opportunity to nurture the best that’s in them.

**Is this program consistent with the TOPS mission?**

Yes. Our mission statement says, among other things, that “we help all students to … achieve a high level of academic excellence.”
CHESS CLUB HOSTS TOURNAMENT

By Gene Nelson

On Saturday, March 20, 360 students representing 100 schools converged on TOPS for a day of chess. Among the players were 26 TOPS students grades K–5, with 10 of them playing in a tournament for the first time! There were five rounds of chess, and sunshine in between while the kids waited for the next round to begin. There is usually a lot of time for running around and playing outside—it is a chess tournament and a play date at the same time!

WE LOVE CHESS!

By Kimberly Kinzer, Danforth Administrative Intern

When was the last time you checked out the TOPS chess club? Well, if it has been a while, it is time for you to familiarize yourself with these motivated youngsters again. TOPS’ chess team recently attended a tournament in March that was quite successful. Not only did students win trophies and compete against some challenging opponents, one of our kindergartners, Milo Adams, qualified for the state tournament in April!

“I like chess because it is a sport. Not one where you run around or anything, but one where you can concentrate,” says Carmelita Palagi, first grader at TOPS. Currently TOPS has three official chess instructors, William Schill, Adres Asmus, and Allen Holtzman. There are three different levels: kindergartners, beginning, and advanced. Students meet on Tuesday afternoons throughout the school year and then compete in tournaments a couple times a year. “Chess is really fun. It’s especially fun when the teacher plays us—he even does chess for a living,” exclaimed Isle Raftery, kindergartner.

“Chess Makes Kids Smart,” a slogan coined by the United States Chess Federation, is a statement parents may want to consider. Despite chess’s image as a pastime for “brains,” it is easy to learn. Kids seem to soak it up quickly, and before you know it they want to take on the instructor! Dr. Stuart Margulies, a noted educational psychologist, conducted two studies of reading score changes with children in New York and Los Angeles. The studies showed statistically significant greater gains in reading on a nationally standardized achievement test than did the control group. According to Dr. Margulies, the cognitive processes used in chess and reading are

Students are divided into sections by grades K-3, 4-6, and 7-8. The TOPS chess players made a good showing, with these results:

K-3 section (*first-ever tournament):
• K: Milo Adams*, 4th place; Leo Shannon*, 10th place
• 1st grade: Carmelita Palagi, 9th place

4-6 section:
• 4th grade: Asa Palagi, 10th place; Benji Oh, 13th place
• 5th grade: Timur Maraghe 5th place

The day’s activities ran very smoothly thanks to all of the wonderful chess club parents who came forward to help. Special thanks to tournament director Mark Morales, to master chess instructors Bill Schill and Alan Holzman, and to Jack Lee for web site support. The chess club players meet every Tuesday after school in the third floor commons area from 3:30 to 4:45. Three classes are organized by skill and experience level. If you are interested in enrolling your child in the chess club and classes next year, pick up an entry form. Then your child can be ready for next year’s TOPS chess tournament!
very similar. They both involve processes of decoding, comprehending, analyzing, and thinking. Chess masters believe chess playing helps to enhance ego strength as chess competence increases. They believe that students who feel confident and good about themselves naturally learn to read better.

Recently William Schill, a Washington State Chess Champion and TOPS chess instructor, presented a class for parents to support their improving chess players.

We Love Chess! continued from page 12

William also offered a one-week chess camp during spring break. Students in the TOPS chess club have a range of experience. Benji Oh, a fourth-year chess participant, wins a lot of trophies. “There really isn’t any favorite part about chess. I just really like it. A lot.”

So next time you are looking for something fun, interesting, and a good learning experience for your child, be sure to check out TOPS’ chess club. You will be glad you did.
TOPS Track 2004

By Megan Chapin, Grade 8

The TOPS track season of 2004 has started off with a blast. I experienced the nerves you get during the beginning of a race like you are about to faint, but once you begin to run it is like you've left your insides behind and all that is on your mind is... “Make it to the finish line!”

In our first meet on April 15 against all of the north-end middle schools TOPS took first in five events: Alex Keo in the seventh grade 100; Justin Bennet in the sixth grade 50; Mikaela Winter in the eighth grade 200; Claire Simon, Mikaela Winter, Lida Bilokur, and Megan Chapin in the eighth grade 400 meter relay; and Ava Ames, Zak Luke, Annika Kounts, and Justin Bennet in the sixth grade 400 meter relay.

Second-place finishers were Kazu Nakahara in the seventh-grade 200; Ryan Zemke in the sixth grade 200; Zak Luke in the other sixth grade 200; Megan Chapin in the eighth grade 200; and Kazu, Malik Owens, Gabe Welsh, and Alex Keo in the seventh grade 100 meter relay.

Third place finishers were Kate Macklin in a close one in the seventh grade 100 meter and Jon Kaimer in the sixth grade 200. Taizo Pingry took third in the shot put.

After the eighth grade girls relay team won we had huge smiles on our faces and were ready to RUN AGAIN! I can’t wait to compete in the rest of the meets!
MIDDLE SCHOOL SPRING VOLLEYBALL

By Marlies van Bergeijk

While lots of other students at TOPS have started playing their spring sports, a growing group of sixth grade girls has been working hard at learning how to serve, set, bump, hit, and spike. They have been doing this during twice-weekly practices, under the very capable guidance of volleyball coach Carolyn Papineau and assistant coach Don Zemke. These girls really get a workout! They also have been guided by seventh and eighth grade students on the team, who may be on their second or third year as members. Together, they represent TOPS in an inter-scholastic spring league on Saturdays.

In addition, they are benefitting from the encouragement of several alumnae, real-life big sisters Amanda and Lilly, who played on the team in years past. At least one of them is hoping to play volleyball in college in another year.

Yesterday was the first time the girls got to play a match at TOPS. While they didn’t win, the home-court advantage did seem to spark additional effort. It is clear that, mid-way through the season, they all have grown tremendously as players and as a team, and that is exciting to watch. If you want to come see for yourself, the remaining games are May 1 at TOPS at 10:30 a.m. and May 8 at Eckstein at 11:30 a.m.

Meanwhile, hats off to this entire group of talented, hard-working and committed young women:

Natalie, Andrea, Gabbi, Molly, Erin, Essentia, Vanessa, Camille, Emma, Isabel, Reilly, Georgia, Shannon, Emma, Nikki, Eliza, Carrie, Finley, and Sarah. And of course to coaches Carolyn and Don!

By showing great sportsmanship on and off the court and a positive attitude, they represent our school very well!
THE ELEMENTARY PLAY!
FIRST DAY: A MIDDLE SCHOOL NIGHTMARE

By Todd Moore and Max Moore

Friday, May 14 at 7 P.M.
Saturday, May 15, at 2 and 7 P.M.

By an anonymous third grade thespian

Do you remember anxiously preparing for your first day of middle school? Did you think your teacher would be a witch, a vampire, or even a goblin—or at least that scary? And if you were new, didn’t the students strangely resemble wild animals? You weren’t the only one. This play is a theatrical nightmare of the first day of middle school. Come to First Day to meet and laugh at the three-headed principal, the chicken students, poor Tori (just how many of her are there?), and many more wacky characters.

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