
TOPS NEWS

October 2003 ♦ Volume 7, Issue 2

The monthly newsletter of TOPS, a Seattle Public K-8 alternative school

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

School is in full swing. We had one of the smoothest openings to date. All of the buses arrived on time with our eager, smiling, excited TOPS students. They all appeared to have grown a couple of inches, boys had neat haircuts, girls had different hairstyles, and some of the middle school boys even had facial hair! We were all excited to see them and the classrooms were bursting with meaningful sharing, introductory activities, and seeing old friends and meeting new ones.

We welcome 36 new students to TOPS, our new two special education classes have 11 new students, and there are 3 new students in our Hearing Impaired classroom, totaling 50 new students in all to TOPS. This is the first time we have had that many openings at TOPS. Our students have done a great job "buddying" up with the new students and helping them become acclimated to TOPS.

We had wonderful curriculum nights and it was great to

see so many parents. We boast about a 96% turnout for parents. Many thanks to our staff who spend hours preparing. Our WASL scores for fourth grade have been mailed out to parents, and the seventh grade WASL scores will be mailed home with the mid-terms in mid-October. Our students did very well on the WASL and we are very proud of them!

The first Go-Home has been sent and posted on the web. Dates for future Go-Homes are on the web site. Helen spends a lot of time on it. Please read it!

Our No-Bake Carnival is coming up and it promises to be an exciting family event. I expect to see all of you on Saturday, October 4, from 12 to 4 p.m. Come and dunk the



Continued on page 2

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NEWSLETTER ONLINE

The TOPS newsletters are available online in PDF format, usually before the printed copy arrives in your mailbox! From the TOPS home page (<http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/tops>), click on *Latest Newsletter* in the *Quick Links* section.

A MESSAGE FROM THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

September was a month of new beginnings--new teachers, new programs, new families, new committees, new volunteer opportunities. I look forward to meeting and working with many of you this month.

VOLUNTEER HOURS

According to IndependentSector.com, the dollar value of volunteer time is \$16.54 per hour for 2002. The value of volunteer time is based on the average hourly earnings of all nonagricultural workers as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. IndependentSector takes this figure and increases it by 12 percent to estimate for fringe benefits. Each month, I will give an update of volunteer hours and approximate value of that time.

147 volunteer hours for August

114 volunteer hours for September as of 9/17/03

Dollar value of volunteer time: \$4316.94

Most of the volunteer hours in August were the result of hours of dedicated work from the newly formed 7/8s committee and the No-Bake committee. Site Council had its annual retreat, facilitated by Sue Feldman. We can look

forward to a more connected and positive TOPS community this year, thanks to the work done this summer.

In September, the information packets were assembled by parents and student Emma Framson. We were able to get those packets out in a timely fashion and we are getting them returned so quickly--thank you.

Many of our new kindergarten parents have helped with lunch and recess, making the transition so much easier for our youngest TOPS students. Thank you for all of your help.

THE COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

The communications committee is going through some very positive changes this year. The 7/8s committee created a more effective way to improve communication between middle school parents and teachers. Starting this year, middle school teachers will have teacher reps. These volunteers will focus on the needs of each middle school homeroom teacher and enlist the help of all middle school parents. This new change will get the teachers the help they need.

Continued on page 13



**SEATTLE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS TO STAFF LIST PUBLISHED LAST MONTH

ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the second newsletter of the 2003-04 school year. Teresa Nemeth and Dan Hurley work on the editorial side, Cindy Suzumura handles photos, design, and layout, and Toby Harris gets it mailed off to you. Don Zemke provides our sports photos. Last month's play photos were wrongly attributed: Chris Pfohl sent them in. (Thanks, Chris.)

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

Submit your contributions to the newsletter box in the main office or, preferably, by Word file or email to Teresa at zongora2@hotmail.com. Please send photos to csuzumura@mindspring.com.

Deadlines for 2003-04 are Wednesdays October 15, November 12, December 10, January 14, February 11, March 17, April 14, and May 12. If newsletters are to arrive the first week of the month, there can be no exceptions to these deadlines.

Kindergarten PEAK: Cheryl Pappy

Grade 1: Susan Mamlock is long-term sub for Margie Butcher, who is on maternity leave.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Alisha Townsend is long-term sub. Meredith McGahan up and left for Colorado! Hmm, an affair of the heart perhaps? We will miss her. Position closed September 22, interviews September 25. Check the next issue for an article on the DHH program.

Grade 5: Cheryl Mc Sorley is long-term sub. The teacher who had been hired ended up being able to return to his position at another school. Position closed September 22, interviews September 23.

Instrumental music: Charles Holmes. Randall Davidson was moved to a different school in a district reorganization.

Bilingual instructional assistant: Ngoc Huang, Vietnamese. Check next issue for an article on our ESL program.

Speech and language: Janet Thomson.

Occupational/physical therapy: Janet Morton.

Special ed (see article this issue): intermediate, Judy Holben; middle school, Doug Frazier. Instructional assistants are William Smith and Beth Engel.

Danforth principal interns: first semester, Gerrit Kischner; second semester, Kimberly Kinzer.

GREETINGS FROM THE NEW FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER

Hello everyone, my name is Alesia Jessie. This will be my first year working here, and I'm so excited! I will be working all day on Monday, Tuesday, and every other Friday. My office is located on the second floor at the south end of the hall in room B305.

Listed below are some of the support services that the program offers to students and families. Please feel free to contact me.

- ◆ Basic clothing resources and referrals
- ◆ Basic nutrition/food resources and referrals
- ◆ Childcare resources/referrals
- ◆ Housing stabilization referral services

- ◆ Parent education resources—ESL, GED, training, etc.
- ◆ Parent volunteer opportunities
- ◆ Medicaid information and application services
- ◆ Transportation problems (emergency)
- ◆ School intervention team—assisting families through process
- ◆ Community resource information
- ◆ Employment, education, vocational and non-traditional training resources and referrals.
- ◆ Understanding school district academic standards.

I look forward to meeting with you!

~ Alesia

Continued from page 1

teachers and spend time at my booth trying to win a prize.

Our fall sports have started with ultimate Frisbee and middle school girls' soccer. After-school sports for elementary students will begin in October.

Conferences will start in November, so stay tuned in for the dates.

Thanks to all the parents who have volunteered in the

classrooms and on the playground, stuffed packets, etc. You are all appreciated. A great big THANK YOU to Stacie Bonnelle, our fantastic volunteer coordinator, who has worked many hours to help with the coordination of packets and volunteers.

Cheers!

Clara

A CONVERSATION WITH JENNIFER MURRAY

By Annie Gage

During the 2002-03 school year, there were many discussions among adults at TOPS regarding the emotional climate at the school. As I understand it, people were concerned about who felt welcome and who didn't, who felt heard and who didn't, who felt they had power and who didn't.

I spoke with TOPS counselor Jennifer Murray early in September to learn some of the ways concerns were being addressed for the 2003-04 school year. She told me about what she does and what the staff is doing, and she gave me some suggestions for what parents can do.

Jennifer regularly makes the rounds to classrooms and leads discussions on topics related to the emotional climate of the school. Among other things, she and students talk about the following:

- ◆ Inclusion and how to help people feel like they belong, and what actions might leave others feeling like they *don't* belong.
- ◆ How everything we do during the day sends out messages about belonging; each of us is a powerful person who can have an impact on others around us.
- ◆ How to not be a victim.
- ◆ Bullying as multi-faceted. Bullying doesn't just mean physical contact: it can include persistent name calling, being laughed at, being excluded from games. Girls can be experts at the psychological art of making peers feel worthless and excluded.
- ◆ How to take care of yourself so you don't need to bully others in order to feel powerful.

Along with her work in the classroom, Jennifer is available to meet one on one with students, or with any small grouping of students and parents. Students may be referred by parents or teachers or they may self-refer to Jennifer.

Before the school year began, the staff engaged in a retreat to talk about the issue of respect at TOPS. They developed the following list to practice and model for students:

I FEEL RESPECTED WHEN...

- ◆ I'm heard without interruption
- ◆ Someone says "thank you"
- ◆ People trust me to do my job
- ◆ I'm acknowledged
- ◆ People listen and consider what I have to say
- ◆ I am included or communicated with regarding issues that have an impact on me.

As a follow-up to this discussion, some teachers gave a list of five phrases of respect (i.e., please, thank you, excuse me) to their students. Each day, the teachers choose one of those phrases, not shared with the students, that they need to hear a certain number of times that day

in order for the students to earn a privilege. Reports so far are that people are having a good time with this approach and that there's a jovial mood as students go through many of the phrases trying to make sure they get in the "right" one.

Jennifer and I also talked about information parents can use and actions we can take that may help TOPS be the warm, welcoming, and academically successful place we all want it to be:

- ◆ Talk to our children at home about issues of respect and what's happening at school.
- ◆ Model respectful behavior at home and talk about your own slip-ups as well as your children's.
- ◆ Unless you are problem-solving, avoid discussing students you see as "problems" in front of your children.
- ◆ Avoid delivering birthday invitations at school unless everyone (i.e., the whole class, all the boys, all the girls) is invited, and remind your child about the etiquette regarding party-related conversations at school.
- ◆ A unique element of a K-8 school is the number of years students spend together. Jennifer has observed that by the time our children reach third grade, they have pretty much decided who they will and won't be friends with. Then puberty strikes. Hormone changes can bring a painful (and exciting) shift in friendships. After all those years together, classmates feel more like family than they might in other schools, and may treat each other with the contempt reserved for those with whom they are extremely familiar.

As my conversation with Jennifer came to an end, she was heading off to talk with the fourth graders about becoming "conflict managers" on the playground. As such, they will help younger students resolve disagreements, getting valuable leadership experience at the same time as they reinforce their own knowledge about how to keep TOPS a safe, respectful place for everybody.



HOW YOUR MONEY IS SPENT

(NEW EXCITING TOPSNEWS REGULAR FEATURE)

By Linda Korbus, drama co-chair

The drama group and all your children are thankful that drama is funded by the generous donations by the TOPS community. The middle school play will again be directed by the talented and inspiring Todd Jamieson. Performance times are December 5 (Friday) at 7 p.m. and December 6 (Saturday) at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. (The play has not yet been determined.) Save those dates and come and enjoy watching the middle school actors and actresses in what promises to be another wonderful production. We are planning to have the elementary children attend the final dress rehearsal.

The elementary play will also once again be directed by the amazing and gifted Julie Jamieson. Plus, David

Crandall has graciously agreed to write TOPS yet another play. He has written the play and music for the past several fantastic shows and we are truly thankful to him for his generosity and commitment. The elementary play will be held on the same nights as the Art Walk, May 21 and 22 (note calendar change). We are planning to invite other schools to attend a production of the play which will probably be held on May 24 (Monday).

The directors for the third grade mini-plays have been hired. Katie's and Tracy's classes will each do a Shakespearean play. These plays will be held in the third and fourth grade commons area sometime in December.

I hope to see all of you at these awe-inspiring and amazing productions.

2003-04 TOPS CALENDAR

Please check Wednesday Go-Homes and the web site for updates. Please note: no early-release February 26.

OCTOBER

- 1 (W)K-5 individual pictures
- 1 (W)2-hour early dismissal
- 1 (W)7 & 8th grade potluck dinner, TOPS cafeteria and gym, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
- 2 (Th)Middle school individual pictures
- 2 (Th)Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
- 4 (Sa)No-Bake kick-off carnival, 12-4 p.m.
- 7 (T)Grades 4-8 to SCT, *Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*
- 8 (W)Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
- 10 (F)Professional development day--no school
- 18 (Sa)NW Bookfest: TOPS students on the KidSpeak Stage
- 23 (Th)State of the School address, community forum, 7 p.m.
- 26 (Su)Daylight Savings Time ends
- 29 (W)2-hour early dismissal
- 30 (Th)Grades K-2 to SCT, *The Gingerbread Man*
- 31 (F)End of first quarter

NOVEMBER

- 4 (T)Election Day
- 6 (Th)CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
- 11 (T)Veterans Day--no school
- 12 (W)Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
- 17-25 (M-T)Elementary parent-teacher conferences
- 27-28 (Th-F)Thanksgiving Break

DECEMBER

- 4 (Th)CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
- 5 (F)Middle school play, 7 p.m.
- 6 (Sa)Middle school play, 2 and 7 p.m.
- 10 (W)Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
- 11 (Th)Third grade Shakespeare play, 1 and 7 p.m.
- 16 (T)Grades 1 and 2 to SCT, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*
- 18 (Th)Young Authors Conference
- 22 (M)Winter Break begins

JANUARY

- 5 (M)School resumes
- 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. assembly, 2:30 p.m.
- 19 (M)Martin Luther King Jr. Day--no school
- 23 (F)End of semester
- 26 (M)Day between semesters--no school

FEBRUARY

- 5 (Th)Grades 3-5 to SCT, *Tibet Through a Red Box*
- 5 (Th)CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
- 11 (W)Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
- 16-20 (M-F)Mid-Winter Break--no school

MARCH

- 3 (W)2-hour early dismissal
- 4 (Th)Taste of TOPS
- 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
- 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
- 14 (W)Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
- 15 (Th)Grades K-4 to SCT, *Mrs. Piggie Wiggle*
- 21 (W)Class pictures
- 24 (Sa)TOPS auction

MAY

- 6 (Th)CSJ meeting, 6-8 p.m., library
- 12 (W)Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m., library
- 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

- 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

SITE COUNCIL MEETING NOTES

SEPTEMBER 10, 2003

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

Clara Scott welcomed everyone back and introduced our new assistant principal, Chris Drape, and the new Danforth intern from the University of Washington, Gerrit Kischner. Clara reported a great opening, with thanks to the TOPS staff. TOPS has 525 students enrolled this year. There are two new special education classrooms, one a grade 3-5 intermediate special education classroom, with a maximum capacity of 13 students, and a grade 6-8 classroom with a capacity of 9. Currently there are 7 students in the intermediate classroom and 4 students in the middle school classroom.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing program had 8 students at the beginning of the school year, five students with cochlear implants. Gerrit Kischner, the Danforth intern, gave a report on the cochlear implants. [Look for an article next month on the DHH program and cochlear implants.] There were two unfilled teaching positions, the Deaf and Hard of Hearing teacher and a fifth grade teacher, at the start of the school year. The positions were posted September 8 and will close September 22, with the interviewing and hiring process to follow.

The TOPS school transformation focus this year is math and writing. The school climate focus is respect. Teachers are working with all classes on what respect looks like, how to give it, and how to receive it. Saying please and thank you and working on reducing running in the halls are part of the focus on respect.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAM

Lori Eickelberg, seventh and eighth grade language arts and homeroom teacher, gave a report on the Building Leadership Team. Building Leadership Teams were conferred upon all buildings (schools) in the Seattle School District when the Seattle School Board and the Seattle teachers union gave principals the responsibility for managing their school's budget. Under union contract, every school has a Building Leadership Team with responsibility for allocating the academic budget and deciding personnel issues. The Building Leadership Team consists of five elected Seattle Education Association staff members, three parent representatives, and the school principal. The staff represents a cross section of the school. The BLT serves only as an advisory body to the school principal. The primary function of the BLT is academic focus, professional development, and academic budget.

The parent representatives on the BLT at TOPS are the chair and co-chair of the Site Council and one parent at large. Last year, Dave Sarju and Eileen Hynes were the chair and co-chair of Site Council serving on the BLT, and Marlies van Bergeijk served as the parent at large, appointed by the Site Council. Faculty representatives volunteer or are nominated. The decisions made by the BLT often intersect with the budgetary decisions of the Site Council, and for that reason it is important that the parent reps on BLT also be Site Council representatives. Site Council and BLT work well together, with the Site Council handling non-academic, discretionary portions of the school budget with monies raised by Friends of TOPS, and the BLT allocating the academic budget from the Seattle School District.

NO-BAKE BAKE SALE

Kirsten James reported on the No-Bake kick-off carnival on Saturday, October 4, 2003. The No-Bake committee has a goal of \$70,000 and 100% participation. The fundraising campaign starts October 4 and runs through January 16. A highlight of the carnival is a faculty dunk-tank with 16 faculty members signed up to dunk. There will be additional high visibility promotional items such as buttons and posters to encourage participation in the No-Bake.

DRAMA

Linda Korbus reported on the plans for the drama program for the coming year. (See article this page.)

RETREAT FOLLOW-UP

In the last part of the meeting, site council members broke into groups to explore further the key areas identified at the summer retreat. Those areas are leadership/governance at TOPS, school climate, communication, and the TOPS mission and vision. Group members will work further outside of meeting time, and report back with their plans and ideas at the next Site Council meeting.

HOW DOES THE NO-BAKE FEED ALL OUR CHILDREN?

By Ann Bergman, No-Bake Committee

Some of you may think that the No-Bake Bake Sale, our annual fall fundraiser, puts the icing on the cake and the sprinkles on the cookies—nice but not necessary. In fact, donations from parents, teachers, alumni, extended family, and other supporters of TOPS are absolutely essential if we want to give our kids a first-rate education. Below you'll see how the school day of each TOPS student is impacted by No-Bake dollars and why donating to the No-Bake is so important.

We all share a common goal at TOPS: to make every student successful both academically and socially. To get there, we need to ignite a spark of enthusiasm about learning in each student, so that they forge a positive connection with school that will last a lifetime. When my kids come home from school enthusiastic about one learning experience they've had that day, I consider it a successful day at school. I watch TOPS students walk out of the building at 3:20 humming the tune they learned in choir, proudly presenting their latest creation from art class, excited about their first instrument lesson, explaining an astounding science experiment, or reporting on the amazing TOPIC they had that day. Through these experiences — all made possible because of No-Bake donations — they've learned something new, but even more important, they've forged a positive connection with school that will make all their future learning challenges easier to surmount.

The Fall No-Bake and our spring auction provide the funding for Friends of TOPS, our non-profit organization that is managed by the Site Council. TOPS parents and staff, through the RFP process, decide how to spend the Friends of TOPS dollars to enrich and broaden learning at TOPS.

Unlike district dollars, which are strictly allocated, these Friends of TOPS funds give us an opportunity to put dollars where we believe they will be most effective for our children.

Here, grade-by-grade, are examples of how No-Bake donations play a vital role at TOPS. The following programs and services are partially or completely made possible by Friends of TOPS funds.

KINDERGARTEN

Weekly dance classes with Eric Johnson. Science supplies for the two-week introductory science class. Art Supplies. Weekly singing class taught by our choir director. Participation in the chorus of the elementary school play. No try-outs— everyone is guaranteed a part.

FIRST GRADE

Two part-time teachers teaching literacy blocks one hour each day. That means reading instruction using the most up-to-date research about teaching reading, taught in small groups divided by skill level. Science materials

for Mr. Bloedel's whiz bang exciting science classes. Artist-in-Residence teaches weekly visual art class. Weekly singing class taught by our choir director. Participation in the chorus of the elementary school play.

SECOND GRADE

Two part-time teachers leading literacy blocks one hour daily.

Artist-in-Residence weekly instruction in visual art. Science with Mr. Bloedel, supplies funded in part by Friends of TOPS. Participation in the Hummingbirds choir. Participation in chorus of the elementary school play.

THIRD GRADE

Third grade drama workshop: production of a play mid-year, Friends of TOPS funds the director. Weekly lessons in visual art from our Artist-in-Residence. Science with Mr. Bloedel, supplies partially come from Friends of TOPS funds. Participation in the Hummingbirds Choir. Participation in an acting role of the elementary school play, by audition, everyone is guaranteed a role.

FOURTH GRADE

Fourth and fifth grade instrumental music program, along with some district money; Friends of TOPS funds the instrumental music instructor and sheet music. Weekly lessons in visual art from our Artist-in-Residence. Science materials for science with Mr. Bloedel. Participation in the Inspire Choir. Participation in an acting role of the elementary school play, by audition, everyone is guaranteed a role.

FIFTH GRADE

Fifth grade project--Cell Portraits: Science through Art. Fourth and fifth grade instrumental music program. Along with some district money, Friends of TOPS funds the instrumental music instructor and sheet music. Science materials for science with Mr. Bloedel. Participation in the Inspire Choir. Participation in an acting role of the elementary school play, by audition, everyone is guaranteed a role.

SIXTH GRADE

Art supplies for art teacher Luzita Roll. Science with Mr. Bloedel, materials partially funded by Friends of Tops. Participation in the Inspire Choir. Participation in middle school play, Friends of TOPS provides a stipend for director, play rights, sets, and supplies.

SEVENTH GRADE

Supplies for the French language program. Art supplies for art with Luzita Roll. Science with Mr. Bloedel, materials partially funded by Friends of Tops. Participation in Inspire Choir. Participation in middle school play, Friends of TOPS provides a stipend for director, play rights, sets, and supplies.

Continued on page 7

THEME FOR THE YEAR: R E S P E C T

By Gerrit Kirscher, Danforth Principal Intern

While teachers planned in August to the strains of Aretha, the hallways of TOPS have started the year filled with a chorus of "Please" and "Thank you." Building on discussions at this summer's Site Council retreat, TOPS staff have decided to focus on the theme of "respect" throughout the building. This is a theme which fits nicely with the Civil Rights teachers worked with last year (and continue to use with their students). Focusing on respect has helped to provide students with a practical notion by which to interact with others in the building. It needs to guide how students respond to each other and to teachers, how they behave in the lunchroom and on the playground, and even how they walk through the halls.

We've started the year practicing the words and actions that create a respectful environment. In the middle school, this meant discussions among students in Ms. Eikelberg's class about how they responded to the prompt, "I feel respected when . . ." These discussions resulted in a list of phrases we can use and actions we can take to ensure that we all feel respected. Once these became the norms in the other middle school classrooms, teachers challenged students to use them with such frequency and enthusiasm. If teachers heard or saw a particular sign of respect from Ms. Eik's list (they did not say which it was) fifteen times over the week, the class would be rewarded with a treat. Luzita's classes also had discussions focused on respectful interaction. Just as artists try viewing the world through different lenses, middle schoolers often experiment with different roles and groups. One student

admitted this was difficult at TOPS because most of the class has been together since kindergarten, and Luzita noted that this required looking at people in a whole new way.

Elsewhere in the school, the same message can be heard. In fifth grade, Ilsa is expanding the discussion of individual responsibilities to base her social studies curriculum on world issues identified by her students as being of greatest concern to them. In the third/fourth grade hallway, colorful posters boast of "Random Acts of Kindness," and the second graders continue to spend time developing the idea of "civil rights" and the individual responsibilities that ensure those rights for everyone. First graders have held class meetings to discuss appropriate ways to respond to problems on the playground since they are joining with the rest of the elementary students for recess and lunch.

"It's all about practice," explained Ms. Eik, and throughout the year students will be expected to help each other keep practicing R-E-S-P-E-C-T.



How does the No-Bake feed all our children continued from page 6

EIGHTH GRADE

Eighth grade: Oral History project: students write and produce radio scripts. Celebration of Eighth Grade Passage. Science with Mr. Bloedel, materials partially funded by Friends of Tops. Participation in Inspire Choir. Participation in middle school play, Friends of TOPS provides a stipend for director, play rights, sets, and supplies.

THE ENTIRE SCHOOL

All of us benefit greatly by these support services and resources, all possible because of Friends of TOPS, funded by No-Bake donations and the Spring Auction. We communicate with each other with the **school directory** and the **monthly newsletter** you're holding in your hand or reading on the web site. Both funded by Friends of TOPS.

Technology and Curriculum Integration: maintain and upgrade technology in our building.

Library is open before and after school.

Spanish after-school program scholarships.

Multicultural enrichment programs.

TOPICS supplies. Learning materials

Volunteer coordinator position.

Inclusive strategies to give all families access.

Emergency assistance.

Translation assistance.

Lunchroom loans.

Just look at the richness added by No-Bake! Your donation dollars ensure that every day every student at TOPS finds an interesting lesson on the menu that adds spice and flavoring to learning. No-Bake donations are one of the key ingredients to making sure all 544 of our children are successful learners!

REBECCA RABBITT JOINS TOPS AS SPANISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INSTRUCTOR

By Sharon Mentyka

Starting in October, the TOPS Spanish classes will be starting up again—with some exciting changes in place for this year. In addition to opening the classes to middle school students, we will introduce Rebecca Rabbitt to the TOPS community as our Spanish Language and Culture instructor for all of the classes, which will again be offered before and after the school day. This change came about last year when the Spanish committee decided to seek a candidate whom we could hire directly, to bring greater structure and continuity to the program. The goal was to find someone who could potentially begin a long-term relationship with TOPS and develop an ongoing relationship with students. In late spring, an evaluation and hiring committee was formed that included Mrs. Scott, Nicole Titus, and several Spanish-speaking parents. The committee felt strongly that Rebecca, who has taught two prior Spanish classes at TOPS, had many great ideas that could enable the program to grow, and was a good fit for the TOPS school culture.

Rebecca grew up both in the United States and in Cuba. She is fluent in Spanish and English and considers neither her second language. In addition to language instruction, Rebecca also teaches nutrition K-12 through Washington State University, family nutrition education to at-risk youth, and basic computer and Internet in Spanish through the King County Library System. She is also a practicing artist. She is certified in cross-cultural interpreter training and is a certified Washington State medical interpreter.

Rebecca is excited to be working with the TOPS community with its commitment to educating children by using an anti-bias, multicultural approach. In her teaching, she tries to impart an appreciation and respect for the beauty

of diversity to her students as well as the language and culture of Latin America and Spain. "I have been impressed by the TOPS students' desire to learn and do their best and by the school's emphasis on teamwork and self-worth," she says. "It greatly eases my task."

Rebecca teaches through the total language immersion approach. She does not speak English in the classroom unless there is an issue of safety. This is often a shock for students and they do undergo a period of cultural acclimation. But, Rebecca says, "In my opinion, it is the only way to teach language as a communication tool. This is what a child or adult encounters when they are learning in a real life situation, this is what people coming to America undergo. It's a process that can ultimately open the child's mind to new possibilities and to greater empowerment." She adds, "One of my main goals in language teaching is that children, while they are still developing their personalities, become accustomed to other cultures and languages and feel able to move in more than one culture and language...to begin to see themselves as part of the greater world."

Please welcome Rebecca to the TOPS community!

The Spanish program will offer three levels of classes this year:

- 1) Beginning Spanish Language and Culture for students (grades 1-3) with little or no prior Spanish experience
- 2) Continuing Spanish Language and Culture for students (grades 3-5) who have 1-2 years prior experience
- 3) Spanish for middle school students (grades 6-8) who are interested in an introduction to the language and culture.

We anticipate offering three to four classes (based on enrollment) which would meet twice a week for 45 minutes for a period of 20 weeks. Class times will be Monday - Thursday and Tuesday - Friday before and after school, and classes will be grouped by grade and level.

If you are interested in enrolling your child, please contact Sharon Mentyka at 223-0681 or email sharon@pidseattle.com by October 15. Space is limited, especially for the middle school class. Cost is approximately \$225 per student. Partial scholarships are available.

NOTAS AND NOTICIAS

By Maestra Rabbitt

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

R. Rabbitt is an artist who relies heavily on her multicultural background and on symbolism to inspire her works. R. Rabbit has been creating traditional and artistic altars since she was a child. Her CALAVERITAS, candy skulls, are hand made and unique and available for purchase.

Many cultures celebrate the epoch of DIA DE LOS MUERTOS, Day of the Dead, such as those in Ireland and Japan. This is the time when the veil separating the living and the passed thins.

In Mexico, the combining of the rich and varied indigenous cultures with the European cultures during the time of the CONQUISTA gave rise to traditions that are mystical and beautiful.

In Mexico, graves are adorned with food and other offerings arranged for the dead. Houses and churches may have ALTARES. Certain items are essential and symbolic, such as PAN DE MUERTOS, CALAVERITAS, candles, special foods and flowers, many flowers. Families may strew flowers from the graveyard to their doorsteps to guide the way for the departed. The abundant bloom and heady scent of the Mexican marigold, ZEMPASUCHIL, is present everywhere during the DIA DE LOS MUERTOS celebrations.

In Mexico, this is a time to rejoice in the love and remembrance of those dearly departed. The famous and humorous Mexican CALACAS, dressed and posed as though participating in all manner of normal daily activities of the living, remind us to respect death but to enjoy life.

In Mexico, the first of November is for commemorating children who have passed. Often their ALTARES are decorated all in white and their favorite toys are displayed. The second of November is all inclusive.

There will be public DIA DE LOS MUERTOS celebrations around Seattle during this time, including at the Seattle Center and the Seattle Art Museum.

If you are interested in learning more about DIA DE LOS MUERTOS activities or where you can purchase DIA DE LOS MUERTOS art and OFRENDAS, please contact Maestra Rabbitt.

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS-day of the dead

CALAVERITAS-little candy skulls

CONQUISTA-conquest, the Spanish conquest

ALTARES-altars

PAN DE MUERTOS-bread for the dead, special bread made for this epoch

CALACAS-skeleton figures

OFRENDAS -offerings

DIA DE LOS MUERTOS

R. Rabbitt es artista que ha creado altares artisticas desde niña. Sus calaveritas son hechas a mano, sin molde y están a la venta.

El Dia de los Muertos se celebra en muchas culturas, como la irlandesa y la japonesa. Esta es la epoca en que la seperación entre los vivos y los muetros se hace menos apreciable.

En Mexico, la combinación de las culturas de los indigenas y la cultura europea durante la conquista dio nacimiento a tradiciones bellas y místicas.

Durante las celebraciones del Dia de los Muertos en Mexico se adornan las tumbas de los muertos con comida y otras ofrendas. Puede haber altares en casas e iglesias. Hay ofrendas importantes y simbólicas tales como el pan de muertos, las calaveritas, velas, comida y flores, muchas flores. Hay familias que adornan el camino desde el pántano a sus casas con petalos de flores para que los difuntos no pierdan el camino. El zempasuchil, con su rica perfume, esta presente en todos lados durante esta epoca.

En Mexico, esta es una epoca para recordar a los difuntos queridos y celebrar su amor por ellos. Las calacas famosas y chistosas mexicanas, en poses que representan actividades cotidianas, nos hace acordar que aunque hay que respetar a la muerte, hay que gozar la vida.

El dia primero de Noviembre es el dia de los niños muertos y muchas veces se adornan sus altares todo de blanco y se incluye a sus jugetes favoritos. El dia dos de Noviembre es para acordar a todos los difuntos.

Habrà celebraciones durante la epoca de Dia de los Muertos en Seattle, incluyendo en el Seattle Center y en el Museo de Arte de Seattle.

Si quiere saber más sobre estas actividades o saber en donde se pueden comprar arte y ofrendas de Dia de los Muertos, pongase en contacto con Maestra Rabbitt.



Rebecca is a professional artist as well, and among her works are artistic *altares*. She has displayed *altares* in galleries around Seattle and she is the only artist in the area to create hand-formed *calavaritas*.

INTRODUCING: OUR NEW SPECIAL ED PROGRAM

By Dan Hurley

An exciting addition to TOPS this year is the new special education program. The program is self-contained and serves a population of developmentally delayed students in both the elementary and middle school grades. The



program emphasizes academic and social skills in a larger community setting. Heading this new challenge are Doug Frazier and Judy Holben.

Doug Frazier teaches the portion of the program that serves learning disabled middle school students. Right now his classroom has four students, all with different learning disabilities. Doug says one of his main goals is to "socialize the kids with the mainstream population to advance them academically." He feels that "special ed is challenging overall because often students have unorthodox styles of learning."

Doug is originally from Huntsville, Alabama, and was educated at Howard University and West Virginia University. He has previously worked

for NASA and as a political consultant, but because he didn't feel he was "making a change" he decided to go back to graduate school and become a teacher. He is brand new to Seattle, but has taught since 1996 in both Atlanta, Georgia, and Austin, Texas.

Outgoing, engaging, and self-assured, Doug is already a familiar face to our students. He would like to encourage the greater TOPS community ask questions and get to know special ed program.

Judy Holben is Doug Frazier's counterpart in TOPS special education, as she teaches students at the intermediate elementary level (grades 3,4, and 5). Her classroom is set up for seven to fourteen students, and there are seven students in the program now. Judy claims that the "ultimate goal of the program is to get kids into regular classrooms." She notes that mainstreaming is critical because in this way special ed students can "model behavior and then see what other kids do."

Judy is clearly proud of her students and excited about how the program is evolving.

"This new program leaves it open to be creative as many students don't fit into other programs," she claims. An opportunity to "design a program around the kids" is a challenge she welcomes. Although her students learn most of their lessons together in their self-contained classroom, they are also mainstreamed into PE classes, library, lunch, and recess.

Not only are her students part of the greater TOPS community, but Judy works to include outside students into her classroom. Her class welcomes seven fifth grade students into her class every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to study history or science. Once the lesson is completed, these fifth graders then serve as tutors to her special ed students. Judy claims that this has become a successful learning experience for all involved.

Judy is originally from Idaho, where she grew up on a wheat farm. She lived in Philadelphia for 23 years, and spent 10 years teaching in the public schools in and around Philadelphia. After moving back to the Seattle area 10 years ago she taught in the Kent school district before coming to TOPS.

Please feel free to stop by and welcome these two wonderful new teachers as valuable assets to TOPS. We are fortunate such dedicated and eminently qualified teachers head this new program.



THE COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE'S FIRST MEETING, SEPTEMBER 17

By Teresa Nemeth

OK, I know I'm risking being called a ra-ra cheerleader here, but the image is so funny (me as a ra-ra cheerleader) it's probably worth it anyway. The first CSJ meeting was quite inspiring! (In case you're wondering, I found the first Site Council meeting quite inspiring, too. I'll spare you that here.) I'm only writing this because the meeting participants were too busy involving themselves with the issues at hand to come up with a suitable report to everyone else. So here goes. By the way, THEY WANT YOU. They want you involved, they want to reach you, so for goodness sake WORK WITH THEM HERE! More on that later.

It seems there are some issues with communication and reaching people.

They went around the circle brainstorming, sharing hopes and ideas. One faculty member was present (often there are more), and our principal Clara was there, and there were some regular heavy-lifters and some new parents. One of the first things that came up was holidays. How do we all celebrate? Do we feel other people's celebrations forced on us? (Well, yes, some of us do.) How can we allow for variety, even celebrate variety, and what can we learn from the differences? What opportunities might there be to learn about those families we don't hear much from, who celebrate quite differently? It seems there has been a lot of talk for a number of years and little action. These people are ready for action. (Would you like to join them? Meeting are first Thursdays, 6-8 p.m.)

How can we reach those who don't feel included? What core factors separate us? Class, race or ethnicity, privilege, language, neighborhood—and how do we make our events and our resources more accessible? What don't we understand about the dynamics involved? Sometimes our best intentions fail—people still don't show up or don't feel included—and that is perplexing. We need to learn more. And once we understand more about the different families we have, we will be better able to understand the children, and how we might help them and embrace them as learners in our community. The idea is to *narrow* the gap, after all.

(Did I mention childcare is provided? Just call ahead at the TOPS office.)

Study circles and guest speakers, to the extent that they can be made accessible and welcoming to *all* TOPS families, are still a big hit. Now to be included is the issue of homophobia or heterosexism—and should it be put in the context of bullying, or somewhere else? There was agreement that outside speakers are called for. The kids experience it on a *feeling* level, says Clara—we need to really be *talking* about it. The middle schoolers get to hear some guest speakers, in the context of health education, who share their own experiences growing up gay, for example. We all need to learn about the subject.

There were lots of practical welcoming ideas. Personalized cards to new families, phone calls, prompt inclusive emails. Brochures and booths at fall school events, a TOPS "ABC's" list packed with info. It would be nice just to get more families of color at TOPS, to get a certain "critical mass," as one CSJ member called it. How could we do that? Pounding the pavement—why not?—getting the info out: how do I register, how do I immunize my child, how could you maybe help me get through this paper maze by February?

There was a lot of support for the idea of examining, and possibly "parroting," the code of conduct recently explored by the teachers. How do we treat each other with respect? How do we build trust and a real feeling of community? And perhaps equally significant: how can we learn to facilitate discussions outside the CSJ—with school friends, or at the workplace? How can we model our own ideals in our relations with others?

As you can see, it's an idealistic group. There's usually just enough dissent to give the air a nice crackle. Aren't most of you these dreamy world-bettering types, anyway? Isn't that mostly what this school is about?? First Thursdays, 6-8 p.m. in the library, childcare provided—call ahead.

(RE)INTRODUCING KAREN WONG, FIRST GRADE TEACHER

By Teresa Nemeth

We are sad to lose the BOC (Bilingual Orientation Center) this year. Word from the district is, they had to consolidate sites because of operation costs. And as Clara says, the BOC parents wanted to have the same cluster choices as others, and not have to send their kids on a long bus ride. The good news is, we get to retain Karen Wong,



former BOC teacher, as our new mainstream first grade teacher. She brings a wealth of experience.

Born in China, she moved with her family to Hong Kong at age 4, then to Canada at age 9. Most of her schooling was in Canada, but she finished high school here in Seattle at Cleveland High. She went on to the University of Washington, and by her final year was already teaching in an elementary classroom.

She has taught in the Seattle Public Schools a total of 26 years, with 12 of

those years at TOPS. At first, she gained experience teaching a variety of grades, from kindergarten through eighth, at the open-concept schools Beacon Hill and Kimball Elementary. I asked her how that was. "There was a lot of planning time involved," she said, "but it was well worth it. There was a lot of integration across grade levels, a lot of team-teaching, and we could build on individual teachers' expertise. You can really teach to the needs of the students when they are grouped with other students at the same level." She added that she sees a lot of collaboration at TOPS, too—in such programs as the literacy block, TOPICS, and enrichment activities that bring in parent and community talent.

After several years teaching, she decided to go to China to "really experience what it was like to be Chinese." She went to the Guangdong Province, about a three-hour train ride from Hong Kong, to spend a year training

future secondary-school English teachers. She says she looked forward to the chance to live and work among Chinese colleagues. Instead, with a personal chauffeur, and special food, salary, and living quarters, she found it pretty difficult to feel like just another Chinese teacher. "I was treated like a VIP," she said, slightly embarrassed. "I was a so-called foreign expert. That wasn't what I wanted at all!"

On returning, she joined the TOPS staff as a BOC teacher. I asked her how her experience teaching new immigrants compares with teaching in a mainstream classroom. She clearly loved the BOC, and misses it, but commented, "My time teaching in the BOC was so compressed—we had just a few short months (BOC students are exited at semester break) to give these students all the language and learning skills they needed, to give them a brand new world of learning, before we had to send them out into a regular classroom. I always felt rushed. Teaching in the mainstream, I feel a little more relaxed about the time factor because I have the same kids for the whole year. And the students come in all at once, at the beginning of the year." She also appreciates the new luxury of not having to use interpreters. "I love the immediate response," she says. "I know whether I'm getting through."

In her free time, Karen enjoys playing Chinese folk music with a local ensemble, and has danced in a Chinese folk dance class. Two years ago, she shared her string-playing at the Taste of TOPS talent show. She also practices Tai Chi. I asked her if she has ever tried it with her students. "To the young ones, Tai Chi exercise is just too slow!"

Karen says she loves the fact that her first graders are not afraid to respond and share their opinions. "Even if I get just a little too much sometimes," she laughs. In many cultures, she says, parents shy away from the school, because they regard teachers as educational experts and schools do not tend to get parental involvement as we do here. She appreciates, by contrast, the active parent involvement in local schools. "That's what education is all about. Teachers can't do it all alone, they have to get families involved."



JUDY BADENHOOP, 1947-2003

FIRST LIBRARIAN AT TOPS/SEWARD

By Steve Haines, TOPS librarian

Judy helped usher in a new era at the TOPS library and school. The early 1990s saw the Seattle Public Schools adopting an automated library system as well as installing the first generation of computers in all of the schools. Judy was instrumental in the successful integration of those systems at TOPS, while at the same time building the collection and the library program. In 1997 Blaine school in Magnolia started a K-8 program, which drew Judy there.

Judy started her teaching career after attending the University of North Carolina and Duke University, where she studied English and communications. She taught students of all ages, kindergarten through college, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Bellevue, and Seattle. She died late this summer after a courageous battle with cancer.

Susan Mamlock, first grade teacher, and I are working on a memorial for the library to honor Judy. If anyone would like to contribute ideas or funds for the memorial, please forward them to Susan or to me.

A Message from the Volunteer Coordinator continued from page 1

Here are the names of the room reps for K-5 grades as of September 19, 2003:

- JobySheri Toussaint
- JoanEric Bittenbender
- SusanAlex Johnston and Jody Fuentes
- KarenEllen Levi, Andrea Miller, Elizabeth Dekker
- Mr. JNaoko Magasis, Betsy Scott, Ruth Frowein
- CarlaRandi Niemer, Janet Morrison
- KatieSheri Toussaint (temporarily)
- TracyCarolyn Hughes, Pam Van Dalfsen
- Joenot yet filled
- Marynot yet filled
- Ilsanot yet filled
- CherylMolly LaPatra, Christine Clarke

The room rep volunteer description and communications committee meeting dates are on the TOPS web site.

TOPICS

Several Thursday and Friday afternoons each month, small, mixed-aged groups of students in grades 1 - 4 gather together to learn about topics of special interest. Parents, teachers, middle school students, and community resource people teach TOPICS. Students may also present a TOPIC, which allows them to gain skills in planning, organization, and leadership. This year Ms. Hart's eighth grade class has been working with the parents in developing TOPICS around aspects of community. It's very exciting.

The Site Council awarded monies to offset the cost of materials and training for parents to teach TOPICS. Parents can download reimbursement forms from the web site or pick them up in the main office. Attach receipts to the form and return all to the volunteer coordinator. The total dollar limit is \$20.

There are many opportunities in Seattle to get ideas and supplies. With a little planning, TOPICS can be an easy and fun way to help TOPS.

Pacific Science Center Community Education

Carolyn Malone 206-443-2383
Do it yourself science kits
up to 14 kits

Bellevue Art Museum Art SMARTS training workshops

www.bellevueart.org 425-519-0776
call for dates and times
From September -January
\$20-\$30 depending on workshop
registration forms/flyer are available
in the main office

Burke Museum Educators Open House

(available for parent volunteers)
RSVP 206-543-5591
www.burkemuseum.org
October 4, 2003
10 a.m. -5 p.m.

VC Tip:

Stay on TOP of all the goings-on at TOPS--set your homepage to www.seattleschools.org/schools/tops.

October Volunteer Opportunities

Vision and hearing screening: contact Ann Uomoto 252-3521 Thursday and Friday.

TOPS directory proofreading through November.

New eighth grade passage committee: anyone interested in planning or serving as chair, please contact Lori Eickelberg.

Keep an eye out for committee meeting dates and times.

Stacie Bonnelle, Volunteer Coordinator 206-252-3541
Wednesdays 10 a.m. -4 p.m. Topsvlntr@aol.com

The Frye Art Museum Art Docent Training

www.fryeart.org 206-622-9250
October 7, 2003 (no docent experience)
October 14, 2003 (some experience)
10 a.m.-1 p.m. \$15

Seattle Asian Art Museum Learning Library

www.seattleartmuseum.org 206-654-3185
Thursday 2 p.m. -8 p.m.
Friday 2 p.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday 1 p.m.-5 p.m.

A BITE OF PEACE AND THE 7/8s COMMUNITY GROUP

By Arthur Dorros

Something big, besides the ever-increasing size of some of our student bodies, is happening in the TOPS eighth grade (and seventh, too). For our eighth graders, it all started in last year's seventh grade, or maybe sixth, or maybe it was a few tens of thousands of years ago, depending on your point of view.

For those who have already been here—this teen phase of moon and life—including a few parents who remember,



Peacemakers Kevin Courtney, Ben Schmechel, and Cheryl Pappy doing serious research.

there are the inevitable adjustments of shifting from childhood to "yeah, I can do it my way" independence, kind of adult. Then there is the shift in school structure that began for the current eighth graders under the gentle sixth grade guidance of Marianne Trangen and Lana Fuller (now at home guiding her own very pre teen). The structural shift is even greater in the seventh grade, with six or more teachers and classes

per day, and likely many more hormones at play. Show of hands?

BIRTH OF 7/8s COMMUNITY GROUP AND PEACEMAKERS

For a variety of reasons, perhaps including but not limited to the above, a number of now eighth grade class parents realized last spring that as a group they had dissipated (individuals may still feel that way), and began talking informally, at first in passing in twos or threes, or in somewhat larger groups. Soon it was apparent that some kind of get-together of all of the parents might be desirable and beneficial. A few parents took the initiative both to organize a meeting and to try to invite all parents to attend. With group effort, emails were sent out to all possible parents in the class, phone calls were made. Around thirty parents showed up at the first meeting early last spring, discussing recent events, voicing praise and concerns, searching for ways to communicate, assist, and interface well with the school and each other; bringing ideas that simmered further. One idea that immediately caught fire, captivating broad interest and excitement as it seemed to incorporate many of the aforementioned threads, was the suggestion for collaboration in a year-long eighth grade community service project (now known as the Peacemakers program) with which parents could assist an already heavily worked staff by providing much of the adult energies required.

Over time, consistent themes voiced by students, parents, teachers, staff—in areas such as respect, tolerance, communications--were apparent as interests often shared by

our community, with desires to work on further together. Throw into the bubbling pot more parent meetings, meetings with staff and teachers, a few hundred more hours of volunteer work, and presto-chango, a Community Group emerged, incorporating the Peacemakers program along with additional community initiatives.

Realizing too that the seventh grade class has many similar interests, and that positive outgrowths of these initiatives could be readily perpetuated, the seventh grade was invited to and avidly joined the group this summer. The large working group got a name: The 7/8s Community Group, and directions crystallized into five sub-groups working under the new, hardly-needed-this-summer, umbrella. A very brief description of these sub-groups (see Holly Morris Jacobson's article, this issue, for additional details):

- 1) Social Climate—for enhancement of positive interactions and activities, as well as addressing recurrent concerns such as bullying, disrespect.
- 2) Communications/News—among the now substantially realized goals—creation of a central communications link (currently on the TOPS web site) to a 7/8s Community Group bulletin board, where teachers, staff, students, and parents can post news, needs, announcements; additional outreach with phone calls and mailings.
- 3) Peacemakers—offer eighth grade yearlong visions and practice of peace (see below), interface both with Karen Hart's and Lori Eickelberg's already existing studies in this area and community service program.
- 4) Teacher reps—a proposed shift in the "class rep" position, to one who would be in contact with the teacher to determine needs, and pass those on as well as other communications to the appropriate groups above.

By the time you read this more work will have transpired, and it is hoped even more seventh and eighth grade volunteers will have joined the specific efforts fitting his or her own passions via the October 1 7/8s dinner. These initiatives are built on an ongoing base of volunteerism by parents. If you feel left out, contact the 7/8s Community Group!

PEACEMAKERS IN ACTION

Meanwhile, the Peacemakers initiative was integrated enthusiastically by Karen Hart into her program almost immediately at the start of the school year. With some of the broad goals of Peacemakers being the development of understanding, respect, skills, and proactive projects in three areas,

- 1) the immediate community of school and family,
- 2) the local area community (Seattle/US), and
- 3) the international community,

one of the ideas that had evolved over the preceding months was to have the eighth graders teach TOPICS involving peacemaking activities to the grade 1-4 students through the TOPICS program. On Monday, September 8, at the beginning of the first full week of class, Peacemakers kicked jauntily into gear with eighth graders in Ms. Hart's sixth period.

A vision of peace was offered by a Peacemakers parent in an eloquent talk that included four principles of Gandhi's (a local peace favorite) *satyagraha*—to paraphrase again—way to peace:

- 1) Know yourself
- 2) Understand your world
- 3) Share a skill
- 4) Bring truth, justice, beauty, and goodness into every day.

With these premises in mind, students next got an overview of what was ahead of them: deciding on what TOPICS subjects to teach based on personal enthusiasms, then developing an action plan and details for teaching. In twos or at most threesomes, the first class of eighth graders will teach TOPICS in two-day (two 55-minute-period) sessions, repeating this again with a different TOPIC later in the quarter (so teaching two different TOPICS related to peacemaking during the first quarter). The second class of eighth graders will go through this same process when they have sixth period with Ms. Hart next quarter.

Eighth graders chose among six broad areas of interest such as "environment" and the very popular "food and nutrition," and began discussions. With the help of an advisory adult for each group of six or so students, they thought through the possibilities and then the mechanics for teaching their TOPICS. Expressive smiles and enthusiastic talk carried the day as students came up with



Peacemakers Bonnie Morita, Lili Rodriguez, and Krissy Myles toss around ideas.

project ideas, researched background information on their topics, thought about how they would relate to peacemaking, and prepared their teaching action plans. The many TOPICS, with titles like "Food Fun," "Pay It-Forward—Baking Cookies," seem certain to attract the interest of the first through fourth graders, and similarly have the peacemaking intent of TOPICS such as "Peace Garden and Stepping Stones," and the sure-to-be-heard at least 'round the school "Playing Music from Around the World," with information that aims at building intercultural understanding.

Students thoughtfully delineated process and goals, while not losing sight of attracting an audience. In "Heroes, Banners, and Candy," students said, "the heroes we are introducing were peacemakers themselves. Hopefully the kids will learn from this and become active peacemakers." "You Can Be a Peacemaker" aims to put those skills to use, first involving participants in a skit about bullying. Some projects aimed to inform, as to "give local and world facts on malnutrition," and focus peacemaking energies in direct action like "start a food drive and hopefully send it to a shelter where children our own age and younger can eat good, healthy, nutritious food." Food for body and thought.

The exuberance of the eighth grade students was matched by the energies of seventeen parent volunteers who came in during sixth period to work with the class. Staff members stopped in to see what was happening. Excitement about this project was such that even more parents were ready to come in if needed. No aging vegetables were being tossed among the crowd, and the number of volunteers enabled small group work with students and adults (roughly six students or fewer per adult at any given moment). Ms. Hart voiced pleasure with that arrangement—"A luxury. Something we usually can't do, with so many students"—and with the student process: each teaching team produced a written outline for their topic, used at the end of the week to set up a teaching schedule.

The above processes and activities have brought many of us into contact in new ways or roles. Students as teachers, hmmm, new understanding of our own teachers, parents similarly, different looks into each other while we journey.

As the human body is over sixty percent water, liquid anyway (check with Dan

Bloedel on this), and with millions of inhalations as we go to help reformulate those little liquid molecules, we are not separate from what nourishes us—it is part of us and us of it. A few bites of peace, anyone?

7/8s COMMUNITY GROUP

Q&A

By Holly Morris Jacobson

What is the 7/8s Community Group? The 7/8s Community Group's primary mission is to help create more positive community for the seventh and eighth grade students, teachers, parents/guardians, and staff. It was initiated last spring by a group of parents who wanted to provide more support for the teachers and students, become more connected, and provide more opportunities for parental involvement and support. It is building off of and working with many strong and existing foundations and traditions such as the middle school grant, the guest artist series, and the ski program.

Why is the sixth grade not included? Aren't they part of the middle school too? Yes, the sixth grade is part of the middle school and it is also a bridge to the elementary school. The idea has always been to incorporate sixth grade at some point. But because seventh and eighth grade are structured so differently than sixth and the students share more teachers and hall time together, it was decided it would be good to get a solid footing on how to structure the seventh and eighth grade piece of this first, and then figure out the best way to incorporate sixth grade based on input and lessons learned along the way.

How does the 7/8s Community Group plan on achieving its objectives? There are two supporting goals for the group: 1) Be as inclusive and transparent as possible. All members of the community are invited to participate at every level at any time and communication should flow freely. 2) Involve kid participation as often as possible where appropriate. We have also broken up tasks into "sub-groups" which each focus on a particular area. The sub-groups include:

- ◆ The communications team, tasked with making sure information flows freely and to all within the community.
- ◆ The social climate team, comprised of :
 - community events team
 - anti-bullying or climate group
 - Middle School Grant-- working with this group to help integrate middle school grant activities and ideas
- ◆ Peacemakers (also referenced in Arthur Dorros' article, this issue)
- ◆ middle school Site Council involvement through our Site Council reps
- ◆ teacher rep--a proposed shift in the "room rep" position, to one who would be in contact with the teacher to determine needs.

How does the communications group work? You know those Wednesday Go-Homes... the ones that arrive in shreds, surface a week or two late, or never make it home at all (also lovingly referred to by Ms. Eickelberg as the "Stay-Heres")? We're trying something a little different to

support communications about TOPS 7/8s needs and activities. Jack Lee and Keith Toussaint have set up a moderated group email using Yahoo Groups. This functions as an electronic email newsletter -- it is sent out to everyone who has subscribed. We will primarily utilize this newsletter to communicate events as well as needs and requests of the teachers/TOPS. Anyone can submit items/info. for inclusion in the newsletter by replying. This group has been set up so that replies go to the moderators of the group rather than to the whole group. The moderators will compile "news items" and send out the newsletter once or twice a week as needed. Pending a TOPS email policy, an email discussion group has also been proposed. This group would include anyone from the TOPS middle school community who subscribed. Unlike the newsletter group, this group would not be moderated and subscribers would be able to "reply to all."

What function does the social climate group have? The social climate group will work to create positive social atmosphere among all members of the 7/8s (and middle school) community by organizing community activities to be inclusive and fun. This group will also work to support TOPS Middle School Grant activities and the "anti-bullying task force" goals. The focus will be on empowering middle schoolers by teaching them positive tools for identifying and standing up against bullying, be it directed at themselves or others.

What are the goals of the anti-bullying task force? Bullying is a problem not only for the students involved, but for the entire class and community, outside the school as well as inside. As parents, and in conjunction with the students, we would like to set up social venues to discuss our values and communication styles to understand how they fit in with (and sometimes support!) bullying, and to make a community in which parents and students feel free and safe to deal directly with each other on interpersonal problems (for example, negative instant messaging) that take place outside of school. We will work with the teachers, Jennifer, and the Middle School Grant wherever they need support: for example, by providing parents to monitor playgrounds or fields trips or to act as mentors, and by researching and helping to implement training for conflict mediation, peer counseling, anger control, and/or leadership.

How do these efforts interact with the Middle School Grant? The Middle School Grant has been working on many of the social issues for years, but there is only one year left on the grant. We want our sixth, seventh, and eighth grade parents to continue the work of this grant, so that the efforts and successes can continue after grant monies are gone. We would like to use a variety of social interactions to bring more people into the community, using as common ground our interest in maximizing the social and emotional lives of our children.

Continued on page 19

MIDDLE SCHOOL STRINGS

By Rachel Brumer and Noah Cohn

This year, the middle school string orchestra will be taking a new approach. Eighth grade students will take leadership roles in determining the course of the group. Chamber music, without a conductor, requires individuals to communicate with each other. This will give our middle school string musicians an opportunity for self-motivation and self-direction of their group, true to the spirit of this art form.

This project will enable students to meet the community service objectives of our school by arranging to perform for a variety of venues throughout our city. Students will select

and contact facilities of their choosing for performances.

Once a month, a different professional guest coach will be invited to provide critique and guidance. There will also be two parents at each session to offer support.

Middle School Strings will be meeting Tuesday mornings, from 7:45-8:45. If you are an intermediate/advanced string player, please consider joining.

Please contact Rachel Brumer at 328 7007, or rbrumer@comcast.net, with any comments or suggestions you may have.

THE EMOTIONAL TONE WITHIN, THE EMOTIONAL TONE WITHOUT

By Annie Gage

This story is a little embarrassing to put out in a public forum. But I'm sure I'm not the only TOPS parent who has experienced this. And I think what I am describing is an important, and seldom addressed, aspect of life in a school.

It happened first at the auction during my son's first grade year. Then it happened again at last year's auction, and again at a school play. That's when I turned to my partner and said, "I'm having one of those elementary school emotional flashbacks again. I hate this."

Because, as sneakily as the pounds creep onto a middle-aged body, I was filled with many of the feelings I recall too well from my grade school days.

I felt like I wasn't "okay." I became acutely aware of who was sitting together and talking together and imagined that all the other parents liked each other and knew each other and I was just a weirdo. I felt self-conscious and worried that I said inappropriate and offensive things.

For a variety of reasons, I am usually able to tell when unpleasant emotional states are due to something outside

of me or are "all in my head," and this one was definitely the latter. It got me wondering how often other parents go through a similar feeling of being excluded and not liked and attribute it to someone else's treatment of them. It's certainly easy to do.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to pathologize feelings of exclusion or suggest that every time anyone feels slighted at TOPS, it is all in their head. But we each come here with our own school and psychological histories. And unless we are more perfect than most, those aspects of our lives get played out at school and elsewhere and many times we may not even know it. It's all part of the soup we call the emotional atmosphere.

I think this stuff is interesting to think about. I offer you my personal story as an invitation to think about your own and how it affects the way you feel at and about TOPS.

TOPS PE 2003-04

By Don Herndon and Eric Zemke

Our physical education goal for TOPS students is to teach physical education in a success-oriented fashion. We strive to provide our students with a positive program in which activities are organized in ways that are non-threatening, sex-equitable, and keep students active. Our students have a variety of different interests, so we hope to encourage lifelong involvement in sport and activity by exposing them to many different ways to stay physically fit.

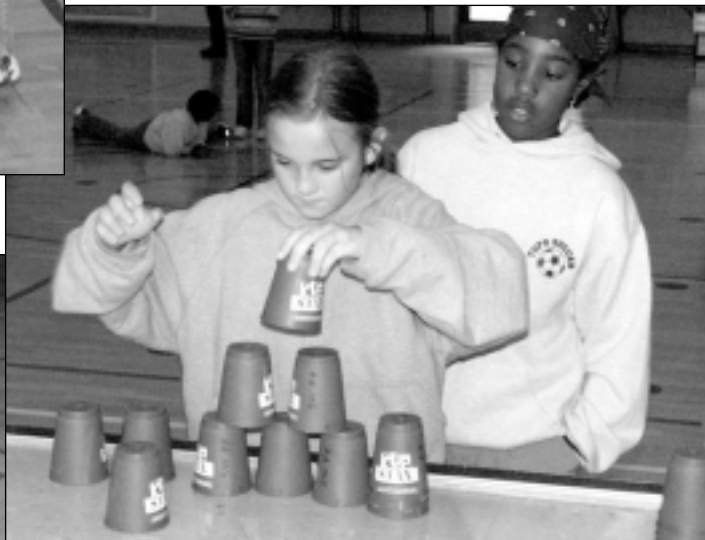


The TOPS PE school year got off to a great start with an emphasis on cooperation, sportsmanship, and what respect looks like in our PE setting. TOPS students have had opportunities to practice these positive social skills during the course of our class time. They have been helpful and welcoming to our new students.

We started out the year doing cooperative activities where groups of students had to problem-solve and work together as a team to accomplish a variety of tasks. Next we did a unit on disc sports. Disc activities included spinjammer skills, throwing and catching, ultimate baseball, ultimate Frisbee, and Frisbee golf.

Every year we do the President's Physical Fitness Test battery so that we can get a beginning-of-the-year baseline score for each student's flexibility, endurance, quickness, arm strength, and abdominal strength. We use this baseline score for students to set personal improvement goals and then to check progress over the course of the year. Students can also use this information to see how they compare to other students across the nation.

Eric and I look forward to working with your kids. If you have any questions or concerns don't hesitate to contact us at 252-3516.



TOPS PE 2003-04

By Eli VanderBilt, grade 8

So far, PE has been fun because of the two good ideas Don and Eric (our gym teachers) have come up with for class games.

Since the beginning of the year, we've been participating in cooperative activities, like a race made up of teams. In each team, every player starts out in an archway position, side-by-side with his or her other teammates, and perpendicular to the direction of the straight racetrack. When the



race begins, each person in the back of their team's "tunnel" must crawl through all the others and, when he or she reaches the end of the tunnel, they will get into an archway position at the front of the tunnel, making him- or herself a part of it, as well as moving the entire tunnel one person forward. Now the second person goes, and so on

until they've crossed the finish line. This is a very cooperative sport, don't you think? I sure do.

The other thing we've been doing is disc-sports, especially ultimate Frisbee, one of my favorite sports ever since I signed up for a spring's worth of practices in 2003. The real fun of it is the enormous amount of teamwork needed, probably one of the largest teamwork-demanding sports that exist.

Our gym teachers are very helpful and thoughtful, along with their ideas. I could never have thought of the things that they came up with. At this school, all gym classmates are included in activities and must work together to win. I would rather have these gym teachers rather than any other. TOPS Physical Education Rocks!

7/8s Community Group Q & A continued from page 16

How does this group interface with the Site Council?

Shirley Bossier, who is the middle school Site Council liaison, represents and reports on the activities, concerns, and ideas of this group to the Site Council. Dave Sarju is also connected to the group on an as-needed basis.

How does the "teacher rep" differ from a "room rep"?

The idea is that since the structure of homeroom changes in seventh and eighth grade, having a class rep as modeled by the lower grades may not be the most efficient thing. It was also widely felt that each teacher should have one person to go to for any in-class needs they may have. So the teacher rep position was born. We are currently working through what that position will look like while we think through how to integrate some of the typical duties into the other network of sub-groups as listed above.

How can parents participate in any of these activities?

♦ For general inquiries, comments, concerns, contact

Holly Morris Jacobson at holly@morrisjacobson or 206-328-8965, or Arthur Dorros at 206-328-4691.

- ♦ For Peacemakers, please contact Bonnie Morita at 206-325-3677, or Arthur Dorros at 206-328-4691.
- ♦ For more information on the communications group, contact Mary Sue Galvin at 206-323-6439.
- ♦ For additional information on the anti-bullying task force, please contact Kathy Barker at kbarker@systembiology.org, or Janna Pekaar at jannap@u.washington.edu.
- ♦ For additional information on the Middle School Grant, contact Joni Marts at jonimarts@myexcel.com.
- ♦ For additional information on the community gatherings, please contact Holly Morris Jacobson at 206-328-8965 or holly@morrisjacobson.com.
- ♦ For additional information on teacher reps, contact Stacie Bonnelle at TopsVlntr@aol.com.



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