

TOPS NEWS

December 2004/January 2005 ♦ Volume 8, Issue 4

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

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Winter Greetings! I hope you will have a joyful and peaceful holiday season with your families!

Alesia Jessie and I are delighted to see all of the charitable Winter Wishes and food donations. Both events were tremendous successes and help to encourage generosity and kindness in our students.

Bravo to our middle school play actors and their brilliant director, Heather Hawkins. Their enactment of *As You Like It* was dazzling. An additional "bravo" goes out to Katie's class and their terrific performance of *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*.

Congratulations to our awesome Ultimate Frisbee team, which came within one heartbreaking win of being the district champions.

We await marvelous things from our prolific TOPS writers at this year's Young Authors Conference on Wednesday, December 15. We are excited to welcome the gifted author

Paul Owen Lewis, who will have great insights to share with our young authors.

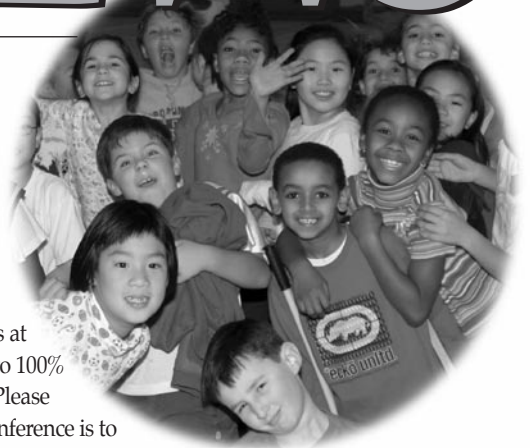
TOPS is certainly full of talent! Thank you for sharing your gifts with us!

Thank you for coming to conferences at the end of November. We had close to 100% participation in most of our classes. Please remember that the purpose of the conference is to inform you about your child's performance to date. If your child's teacher expressed concern about your student's academic or social success, I would recommend that you check in with that teacher on a weekly basis.

I look forward to an exciting and action-packed 2005 with all of the students and families of TOPS.

Cheers!

Clara



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NEWSLETTER ONLINE
The TOPS newsletters are available online in PDF format 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.

FIRST GRADE FIELD TRIP TO SEATTLE TILTH

Nalica's worm!



Rebecca has a worm too!



Tasting wild plants

Photos provided by Laura Roth



Eating fresh picked carrots over the worm bins.



SEATTLE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

REPORT FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD

By Kathy Wickward

The Seattle School Board voted unanimously November 3 to allocate 20% of open kindergarten seats at TOPS (after siblings) to families in the Eastlake/North Capitol Hill neighborhoods. This will be in effect for the 2005-06 school year, until the new assignment plan can be created and adopted. After introducing the motion, the Board added a proviso that those parents would have to indicate TOPS as their first choice school for their kindergartners. Director Stewart commented that neighborhood families should at least buy into the philosophy of the alternative school enough to make it their number one choice before they're assigned there.

Most of the other amendments to the assignment plan did not pass, as many Board members objected to piecemeal solutions. Queen Anne/Magnolia families, for example, will have to wait another year until they can know with reasonable certainty which high school their teen(s) will attend.

Issues that have been brought before the Board in public testimony have included at least two teachers and a parent lambasting the TERC method (and other constructivist math curricula) as vague, remedial, imprecise, and – contrary to their promotional materials – not based on solid research. The parent found herself purchasing math books and teaching her son on her own,

according to her testimony December 1. Water quality, the likely loss of a track in the Roosevelt High School facility improvement, reinstatement of capital improvements for Beacon Elementary, and the increase in the rates the district will charge to use their fields all merited lively public comment as well.

The Board tackled water quality issues, approving a policy on the drinking water improvement with a number of amendments. The Board directed the district to test for copper in all drinking water sources, and for iron in all buildings with galvanized iron piping. The superintendent is to report no later than March 10, 2005, on plans to implement the policy.

The Board approved the continuation of existing transportation services standards for the 2005-06 school year, and plans to develop new standards in conjunction with the student assignment plan.

A revised policy regarding the formation of community advisory committees (PALs) also passed December 1. This change was much lauded by Board members, who stated that it would allow for greater citizen input – particularly in areas where citizens have expertise.

Finally, the Board elected a new executive committee. Brita Butler-Wall and Jan Kumasaka are respectively president and vice-president. Irene Stewart will be the member-at-large.

ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the fourth newsletter of the 2004-05 school year. Teresa Nemeth edits, Cindy Suzumura handles photos, design, and layout, and Toby Harris and Peggy Riehle get it mailed off to you. Don Zemke provides many of our photos.

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

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

Deadlines are the Friday after each Site Council meeting. The deadline for the February issue is January 21.

Would you like to edit or otherwise help with this fabulous publication? Newcomers welcome. Please contact Teresa at the above address.

TOPS FAMILY SKI WEEKEND 2005

By Julie Braybrooks

FEBRUARY 24, 25, 26

If you haven't tried this TOPS tradition before, try it this winter. The latter part of winter break leaves the Mission Ridge slopes uncrowded, with plenty of dry snow, bright sun, and a smashing view of the Columbia River. It's easy to caravan or carpool with other families. Bring a student friend or two.

Mission Ridge ski area, only twelve miles from accommodations in the town of Wenatchee, offers alpine skiing and snowboarding lessons, and there is tubing and cross-country skiing nearby on weekends. Non-skiers have also found snowshoeing is great fun on trails alongside ski slopes. Go to www.missionridge.com for more information.

The Cedars Inn in Wenatchee has set aside a block of rooms for TOPS families to reserve. The deadline for reservations is January 31, 2005. Rooms still are at the low rate of \$61 plus tax per night. Kids 18 and under stay free. The Cedars Inn is just 20 minutes from Mission Ridge, across the road from the rolling Columbia in East

Wenatchee. It offers continental breakfast, indoor pool, and outdoor hot tub. For reservations, call 1-800-358-2074 or 509-886-8000 (tell them you are with TOPS school).

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

If someone would like to organize a group purchase of tickets (15 or more), look on the web site at "group sales." If you have a Summit-at-Snoqualmie season pass, bring it along; last year we were given a 30% discount for showing it. Also, last year Texaco gave a "buy one get one free lift ticket" for Friday skiing with any gas purchase.

For more information contact Julie Braybrooks at jab.ges@earthlink.net.

This is a parent-sponsored event that has been ongoing for . . . how many years? Is there someone who can tell us if this is a ten- or fifteen-year tradition?

TOPS ASSIGNMENT PLAN SURVEY

Parent survey on TOPS assignment plan available in Spanish/Chinese/Vietnamese in the TOPS office or by request.

Giấy thăm dò ý kiến về phương cách chọn học sinh tại trường TOPS có bản dịch cho các tiếng Tây Ban Nha/Tàu/Việt Nam. Nếu cần xin hỏi vấn phòng nhà trường.

TOPS學校的學生分配計畫之家長調查表，可以向 TOPS學校辦公室索取西班牙文/中文/越南文的翻譯本。

La encuesta para los padres sobre el Plan de Asignación de estudiantes a la escuela "TOPS", está disponible en Español, Chino y Vietnamís. Pida uno en la oficina si desea participar.

PLEASE RETURN COMPLETED SURVEY BY DECEMBER 17.

Drop off or mail to: 2500 Franklin Avenue East, Seattle WA 98102

The School Board, assisted by the District Leadership Team, is developing a five-year plan for Seattle Public Schools. Students are at the heart of the plan. As the plan is created, they will closely examine every aspect of their operations. School assignment is one of the aspects they will examine.¹

The TOPS Site Council would like to know your opinion regarding the TOPS assignment plan so we can communicate the information from the TOPS community to the School Board and District Leadership Team.

2004-05 TOPS assignment plan: Students from five Seattle clusters (Northwest, Queen Anne/Magnolia, Central, South, and Southeast) get an assignment priority to TOPS school. Students are assigned to TOPS by lottery. Applicants who rank TOPS first on their list of choices are not given priority in assignment over those who ranked it lower.²

2005-06 TOPS assignment plan: the School Board has voted and approved the following provision:

Distance will be applied as a tiebreaker to 20% of the open kindergarten seats at TOPS K-8. Open seats are defined as those remaining after siblings are assigned. This tiebreaker applies only to those kindergarten applicants who select TOPS K-8 as a first choice.³

Do you think that, in the future, the TOPS assignment should:

(please circle ONE of the (a)-(e) choices, or choose (f) to write your own TOPS assignment plan)

(a) Remain the same as the 2004-05 TOPS assignment plan.

(b) Remain the same as the 2005-06 TOPS assignment plan.

(c) Require all applicants to rank TOPS #1 in their list of choices in order to be assigned to TOPS. Everything else remains the same as the 2004-05 TOPS assignment plan.

(d) The five clusters will each receive 20% of the open kindergarten seats, and permit the Central cluster (where TOPS is located) to use distance as a tiebreaker. Lottery for four of the five clusters and everything else remains the same as the 2004-05 TOPS assignment plan in the space below.

(e) I don't know.

(f) Other (write your own TOPS assignment plan)

Optional information: Home zip code _____

Grade level(s) of your child(ren) _____

I am a: parent guardian TOPS faculty

other _____

¹ See www.seattleschools.org/area/fiveyearplan/index.xml for more information

² See www.seattleschools.org/area/eso/elementary_guide_04_05.pdf (pages 40-45) for more information

³ See www.seattleschools.org/area/main/comp.dxml?app=Story&storyId=1672 for more information

WHAT TOPS FAMILIES ARE CELEBRATING

Compiled by Lynne Goodrich

Please send comments, additions, and suggestions to goodrich_yas@msn.com.

DECEMBER 2004 HOLIDAYS

Dec. 7 – 15: Hanukkah (Jewish) Festival of Lights and celebration of freedom. Menorah candles are lighted, one added every night for eight nights, to commemorate the victory of Jewish Maccabees over the Syrians and their refusal to be assimilated.

Dec. 8: Bodhi Day (Buddhist/Mahayana Branch) Day when Gautama Sakyamuni, or Prince Siddhartha, became the Buddha after he attained enlightenment.

Dec. 16 – 24: Las Posadas (Mexico, USA)/**Simbanag Gabi** (Phillipines) Candlelight parades commemorate Joseph and Mary's search for shelter in Bethlehem. Celebrants re-create the search and host parties.

Dec. 21: Winter Solstice Shortest day of the year for residents of the Northern Hemisphere; longest day of the year for people living in the Southern Hemisphere.

Dec. 23: Birth of Joseph Smith (1805) Founder and first president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Dec. 25: Christmas (Christian) Commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, upon whose life, crucifixion, and resurrection Christianity is based.

Many customs from non-Christian festivals (Roman Saturnalia, Mithraic sun's birthday, Teutonic Yule, Druidic solstice) have been adopted as part of the Christmas celebration (lights, holly, holiday tree, wassailing, gift-giving, for example).

Dec. 26 – Jan 1: Kwanzaa (African American) Celebration for African Americans of both religious and non-religious backgrounds. It celebrates African roots, African and African American history and culture, and seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Each evening a candle is lighted, a unity cup passed, and the principle of the day discussed.

Continued on page 12

2004-05 TOPS CALENDAR

Please send your events and dates to our webmaster, Jack Lee, at Lee@Oz.net.

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

DECEMBER

- 15(W)..... K-5 Young Authors Celebration
- 15 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 16(Th)..... Grades 2, 3, 5 and Judy's class to SCT
- 17 (F)..... 1-hour early dismissal
- 20-31 (M-F) .. Winter break; no school

JANUARY

- 3 (M)..... Classes resume
- 6 (Th)..... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m., library
- 11 (T)..... *Another perspective on bullying* with Rachel Simmons, Eckstein MS, 7 p.m.
- 12 (W)..... Grades 4-8 to Rachel Simmons Assembly, Eckstein M.S. 9:20 -2 p.m.
- 17 (M)..... Martin Luther King Jr. Day; no school
- 19 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 21(F)..... Newsletter deadline
- 25 (T)..... Parent math night, *Math Vocabulary & WASL*, 7-9 p.m.
- 28 (F)..... End of semester
- 31 (M)..... Day between semesters; no school

FEBRUARY

- 3 (Th)..... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
- 9 (W)..... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
- 15 (T)..... Parent math night, *Fractions, measurement, & geometry*, 7-9 p.m.
- 16 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 18(F)..... Newsletter deadline
- 21 (M)..... Presidents Day; no school
- 22-25 (T-F)..... Mid-winter break; no school
- 24-26 (Th-Sa) ..Mission Ridge ski trip

MARCH

- 2 (W)..... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
- 3 (Th)..... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
- 16 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 18(F)..... Newsletter deadline
- 18 (F)..... Professional development day; no school

APRIL

- 7 (Th)..... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
- 8 (F)..... End of third quarter

- 11-15 (M-F) .. Spring break; no school
- 20 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 22(F)..... Newsletter deadline
- 26 (T)..... Parent math night, *Probability & statistics*, 7-9 p.m.

MAY

- 5 (Th)..... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
- 14 (Sa)..... TOPS Auction, Asian Resource Center
- 18 (W)..... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
- 18 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 20(F)..... Newsletter deadline
- 20 (F)..... Elementary play, 7 p.m.
- 21 (Sa)..... Elementary play, 2 and 7 p.m.
- 24 (T)..... Parent math night, *Patterns and functions/algebraic thinking*, 7-9 p.m.
- 30 (M)..... Memorial Day; no school

JUNE

- 2 (Th)..... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
- 15 (W)..... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 21 (T)..... Last student day

A MESSAGE FROM EMILY LAUDERBACK, TOPS MATH COACH

The focus on number sense and computation strategies is well underway at TOPS. Almost all teachers are devoting an extra 15 to 30 minutes each day to assisting their students in developing these skills. Teachers are also primarily assigning homework within this strand to reinforce these skills and concepts to an even greater extent. The growth in the students' understanding is already very evident as they receive this focused instruction in addition to their usual curricular math time (30-60 minutes each day).

As I have cited previously, TERC is the strongest existing curriculum for engaging students in activities that develop the reasoning, problem-solving, and communication skills that are now the state standard for our students' math learning. The curriculum develops these skills within each strand of mathematics: number sense and computation, geometry, probability and statistics, measurement, and algebraic thinking (a.k.a. patterns and functions). We know that nothing is perfect, however. Certain computation, estimation, and mental math skills covered within the curriculum do not appear to provide the repetition and frequency that students need to truly reach the depth and retain the understanding that is required in order to be fluent with computation. With this professional understanding amongst educators and the assessment data from TOPS, we decided to pursue this extra focus on number sense and computation skills.

In addition, the hard work the teachers are putting forth to cover all of the other curricular areas is extremely impressive. To be sure, excellent, well-rounded, intentional instruction is occurring at TOPS daily. It's a pleasure to be witnessing such quality education!

Below is a math homework plan designed and supported by TOPS teachers:

PURPOSE OF HOMEWORK

- ◆ Practice what's already been taught in class.
- ◆ Teach responsibility for students' own learning (includes being organized, having necessary materials, being resourceful, and managing time).
- ◆ Middle school students only: apply skills already covered in class in different ways/contexts.

Daily Assigned Homework vs. Weekly Homework Packet

- ◆ Up to teacher's discretion depending on his/her educational philosophy and practice. However, grades 5-8 will assign daily homework in order to prepare students for high school responsibilities.

Number Sense and Computation Homework

(Homework from other mathematical strands may also be assigned.)

- ◆ Kindergarten: none
- ◆ 1st grade: TERC and Addison Wesley for computation
- ◆ 2nd grade: TERC and/or number sense strategies and practice
- ◆ 3rd grade: Computation from each operation or computation game
- ◆ 4th grade: Computation from each operation and/or fact practice
- ◆ 5th grade: 1-4 computation problems every day from each operation

Other curriculum-based assignments, depending on unit of study

- ◆ 6th grade: Number sense skills practice
- ◆ 7th and 8th grade: Computational or procedural homework out of CMP (curriculum)

Time Guidelines for Completing Daily Math Homework

- ◆ 1st and 2nd grade: 5-10 minutes
- ◆ 3rd and 4th grade: 10-15 minutes
- ◆ 5th and 6th grade: 15-30 minutes
- ◆ 7th and 8th grade: 30-45 minutes

Role of Parents

- ◆ Promote homework as opportunity for learning ("Do the best you [student] can.").
- ◆ Provide guidance vs. answers.
- ◆ Model positive attitude.
- ◆ Provide consistent environment conducive to learning and completing homework (e.g., quiet, no television, having necessary materials).
- ◆ Observe when child is at his/her best for doing homework (i.e., after school, morning) and structure student's schedule accordingly.
- ◆ Communicate with teacher as soon as possible if child is struggling, bored, etc.

emily.lauderback@comcast.net

BULLY-PROOFING TOPS

By Galen Motin Goff

True or False? How would you answer the following questions?

- ◆ Most bullying is physical in nature.
- ◆ Girls bully just as much as boys.
- ◆ Studies suggest that fewer than 10% of children are involved in bully / target problems in elementary or middle school.
- ◆ The majority of children who are bullied tell a teacher.
- ◆ Most students who observe bullying don't think that they should get involved.

As revealed during Terry Chadsey's Introduction to Bullying Prevention parent workshop last month, the answer to every question is false. Chadsey, former manager of Seattle Public Schools' Communities That Care project and the district's trainer for the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, said bullying—intentional harm-doing, repeated over time, in relationships where there is an imbalance of power—is taking place on school buses, playgrounds, and in classrooms across the nation. At TOPS, bullying may look like children teasing, taunting, holding secret clubs, and behaving badly towards one another—sometimes even in the presence of an adult. If it is hard to believe this is happening, think back, as Chadsey asked parents to do, and recall how it felt when bullying happened to or around you. Because bullying affects everyone—the child who is bullied, the bully, and the bystanders—every parent at the workshop had a story. So do our kids.

Chadsey said today's statistics show that 20-40% of children are involved in bullying / target problems in elementary or middle school. Chadsey described bullying, primarily verbal in nature, as a phenomenon that is more prevalent in boys. "It is a problem among girls," Chadsey said; however, "girls bully differently." A reason we might think bullying doesn't happen here is because victims tend not to tell, he said. Teaching children the difference between "telling" and "tattling" is a step in the direction of bullying prevention. Hope arises from the fact that the majority of children either try to help or think that they should. The reason the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is proving successful is that it gives children, parents, and teachers—everyone in every environment impacted by bullying—the tools to eradicate the behavior. It's more than just a good idea: two years ago Washington State passed legislation requiring every Washington school district to enact an anti-bullying policy and report the number of incidents that occur annually. Bullying prevention is in fact part of the TOPS Transformation Plan.

Chadsey said Seattle's public schools have implemented anti-bullying initiatives in the past, but nothing as comprehensive as the program developed by Norwegian professor Dan Olweus after the 1983 suicides of three teen

bullying victims in the Scandinavian country. Adopted by Seattle Public Schools last fall, and implemented by 10 schools in the district to date (primarily middle schools with the exception of one K-8, Blaine), the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is individualized to the school community. It is a multiyear project requiring a long-term commitment to succeed.

The program came to the attention of members of the TOPS' Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) during discussions with school counselor Jennifer Murray and at the annual CSJ retreat, where bullying, cliques, and exclusion emerged as a major theme to address this school year. The CSJ exists to bring forth or support inclusive initiatives that support the TOPS mission and vision and to help the school meet the needs of all its children. And as Chadsey's presentation showed, children cannot learn at high levels in an environment where they feel humiliated and frightened. The TOPS Building Leadership Team and Site Council both supported the exploration of a bullying-prevention initiative and the Chadsey presentation.

In preparation for the Chadsey workshop, parents had an opportunity at the October CSJ meeting to discuss bullying prevention with Murray and the subcommittee of parents formed to research the Olweus program. The meeting gave faces to the problem as parents rehashed the pain of children who go to school with your children: children who, in this village called TOPS, are your children. At the October 20 Site Council meeting, TOPS parent and child psychologist Wayne Duncan shared books on bullying prevention and previewed the program's strengths. "School norms and values will not change overnight," he said. "For the program to work, it must be tailored for our school community." Anonymously collected data as well as playground observation data will be used to identify problem areas at TOPS and to tailor interventions to address these. There will also need to be data collection over years to assess how well the bullying prevention program is working. The Olweus program requires each school to form a steering committee consisting of parents, teachers, volunteers—all who have a clear interest. This group is charged with developing the program.

So what does the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program look like? Chadsey elaborated on these areas in his presentation, explaining that the program is not a curriculum, a peer-mediation, conflict resolution, or an anger-management program. It is a framework adaptable to the specifics of the school community. It requires systematic effort over time and it requires broad, ongoing commitment to change. Through school-wide interventions, classroom interventions—like the ongoing classroom meetings which some TOPS teachers trained this summer in the program now do—and individual and community interventions, the program seeks to reduce bullying incidents, prevent new incidents,

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ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON BULLYING:

RACHEL SIMMONS TO TALK TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AMONG GIRLS

By Gerrit Kischner, assistant principal

TOPS is joining Eckstein Middle School and Bryant Elementary to host three events intended to help explore the specific nature of the relationships adolescent girls have among themselves. On Wednesday, January 12, all TOPS 4th through 8th graders will travel to Eckstein to hear from Rachel Simmons, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Odd Girl Out* and *Odd Girl Speaks Out*. The day before, Simmons will conduct trainings for teachers and for parents.

The evening event for parents will take place on Tuesday, January 11, at 7 p.m. in the Eckstein auditorium. It will feature a talk, question-and-answer period, and book-signing (books available for purchase) by Ms. Simmons. This event is free and open to the public with donations accepted at the door.

The next day, Wednesday, January 12, Ms. Simmons will speak at assemblies for TOPS, Bryant, and Eckstein 4th through 8th graders. After each assembly there will be a discussion group for boys and a discussion group

for girls. TOPS students will be reading excerpts from Simmons' books in their health and PE classes ahead of the appearance by Simmons to prepare them for discussing the kinds of scenarios she explores with students, and middle school students will follow up later with discussions in Pizza TOPICS. This important step in our education about bullying is sponsored by the Middle School Support Grant, which is now in its final year at TOPS.

PARENT VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Moving all TOPS 4th through 8th graders to Eckstein for the day on January 12 will be quite an undertaking. We will need a large crew of parent volunteers to help accompany the students to Eckstein, leaving on the buses at 9:20, leading discussion groups after the first assembly, supervising during the lunch hour, and returning on the buses at about 2. We will also need parent supervisors to help with activities for students for the last hour before school's out that day. Please contact me at gakischner@seattleschools.org, if you could be available to help.

For more information about the Terry Chadsey presentation and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, go to the TOPS web site.

The CSJ meets the first Thursday of every month, usually in the TOPS library. We invite all parents to attend. The next meeting is Jan. 6, location to be announced. In January, the CSJ will also sponsor parent and middle-school presentations by Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out* and *Odd Girl Speaks Out*.

Bully-proofing TOPS continued from page 6

improve peer relations, and improve school climate. The Olweus program uses "teachable moments" to stop bullying, support the target, name the bullying behavior, enforce school and classroom rules against bullying, impose appropriate consequences, and empower the bystander.

The cost of pursuing the Olweus program—or any other bullying-prevention program—will primarily be time. The TOPS administration plans to use Middle School Support Grant funds to help with the initial training of an Olweus coordinating committee. The administration has also applied for a grant from the City of Seattle that will help establish the Olweus program as a community-building project that connects with the work currently being explored by the stewardship committee. Once a decision has been made about the shape of a bullying-prevention program, it becomes a multiyear project requiring support from the Site Council to allow for ongoing parent and staff training, data tracking, and additional resources.

More information about the Olweus program will emerge as a staff committee continues to explore the program's effectiveness and appropriateness for the TOPS community. In the meantime, what steps can parents take to prevent bullying? We can listen. Take time to learn about your child's experiences and take what you hear seriously. If you have concerns about things your child or adolescent is telling you, please contact Jennifer Murray, Gerrit Kischner, or Clara Scott to discuss the experiences or situations further. We can step in and stop bullying behavior that we see and we can help build a culture of safety around "telling," which means getting someone help, versus "tattling," which means getting someone in trouble. We can and should advocate for

the child. We can work to break bullying's code of silence. And we can remember that children watch and repeat everything they see us do. According to Chadsey, "bullying prevention requires doing things differently throughout a school community in order to shift the culture from one that normalizes bullying and isolates those who are targets to one where children and adults alike step in to stop bullying and isolate those who bully."

At school, your help is needed to:

- ◆ Provide more adult supervision on the playground
- ◆ Volunteer to do bullying prevention as a TOPIC—talk to Jennifer Murray
- ◆ Help organize assemblies
- ◆ Help children create posters
- ◆ Locate resources, including speakers within the community
- ◆ Serve on an expanded exploration/ planning committee
- ◆ Help the school develop a common language around bullying prevention

We may have memories of bullying or being bullied in our past but, as Chadsey reminds us, bullying does not have to be an expected part of growing up. It is time to see the problem wherever it may exist and with an informed voice and unified intention—act.

Galen Motin Goff is the Coalition for Social Justice representative to Site Council

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY AND BEYOND

By Steve Haines, librarian

"There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island."
~Walt Disney

The following books, mentioned in the November newsletter, are now available for checkout in the TOPS library:

♦ *A Mind at a Time*, by Mel Levine. Levine is a distinguished learning specialist who was at the UW in November. In his book he explains to parents and those who care for children "how to identify children's individual learning patterns, explaining how they can strengthen a child's abilities and either bypass or help overcome the child's weaknesses, producing positive results."

♦ *Math: facing an American phobia*, by Marilyn Burns. Math coach Emily Lauderback mentioned this book in her column. Burns looks at why math has a "dreadful reputation" and how adults can keep children from "adopting some of the same negative attitudes."

♦ *The Essential Conversation: what parents and teachers can learn from each other*, by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot. Gerrit Kischner recommended this book about parent-teacher conferencing and how you can work together for the "benefit of the child."

Photos provided by Steve Haines



Qingya and Claire enjoy a recent Sonics basketball game.

bring the form to the library. At the end of the month six names are drawn and the students receive among other things Sonics tickets, bookmarks, water bottles, binoculars, and duffel bags. The community service program has proven very successful in encouraging children to practice their reading outside of school to become better readers. This is open to all of our students at TOPS.



The Virginia V foundation has received a grant to create a set of curricula that will provide teachers and students with direct hands-on experience learning about a historic vessel. The National Historic Landmark Virginia V is the last working wooden-hull, steam-powered boat, and was part of the Northwest's "Mosquito Fleet." It is now moored at the south end of Lake Union. Several teachers from TOPS, Ballard High School, and the Highline and Vashon school districts will be working with the foundation to help create this online curriculum, which they hope will be ready by spring. Hopefully we will be able to take advantage of this for our students, as a way to expand on our "City School." More to follow.

Our annual Young Authors Celebration is set to happen Wednesday, December 15, from 2:20-3. Groups of students from grades 1 through 5 will be spread throughout the school sharing their own writing with each other. Fifth graders will facilitate the groups, and will be giving questions and eliciting responses from the group members concerning their writing. As an added feature this year we will have as our guest local author/illustrator Paul Owen Lewis. He will give a presentation at an assembly in the morning, and then visit classrooms answering questions. He will also have his books on sale for autographing. His books include the popular *Storm Boy* and *Frog Girl*. All are invited to both events.

The library now has a book wish list on Amazon.com as well as on the TOPS web site. Just go to the "wish list" link on Amazon and type in TOPS K-8 School in "wish list search."

Enjoy the vacation with a good book.

TOPS AUCTION - SPRING 2005

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

CATERING COORDINATOR — Are you a party planner extraordinaire? The TOPS 2005 AUCTION is seeking a new catering coordinator. Your duties would include choosing a caterer, planning the menu, and supervising food service volunteers on the night of the auction.

DESSERT DASH COORDINATOR — Join a group of experienced Dessert Dash team members. Your duties would include ordering and procuring desserts, supervising pick-up of desserts, and coordinating the Dessert Dash on auction night.

JOIN THE AUCTION COMMITTEE — We are always looking for folks who want to join in the fun. Please contact Tammy Luthy at 322-3784 or jleft@seanet.com to discuss possibilities.

MANY MANY THANKS to Lisa Allworth and Dana Blazevic, who have given their heart and soul to feeding our families on auction night... You will be greatly missed!!

SOME POEMS FROM REBECCA MOSLO'S 5TH GRADERS

CINQUAIN

By Amry Kimmerly

Dogs
Playful runners
Prancing, running, catching
Happy to see you
Puppies

UNTITLED

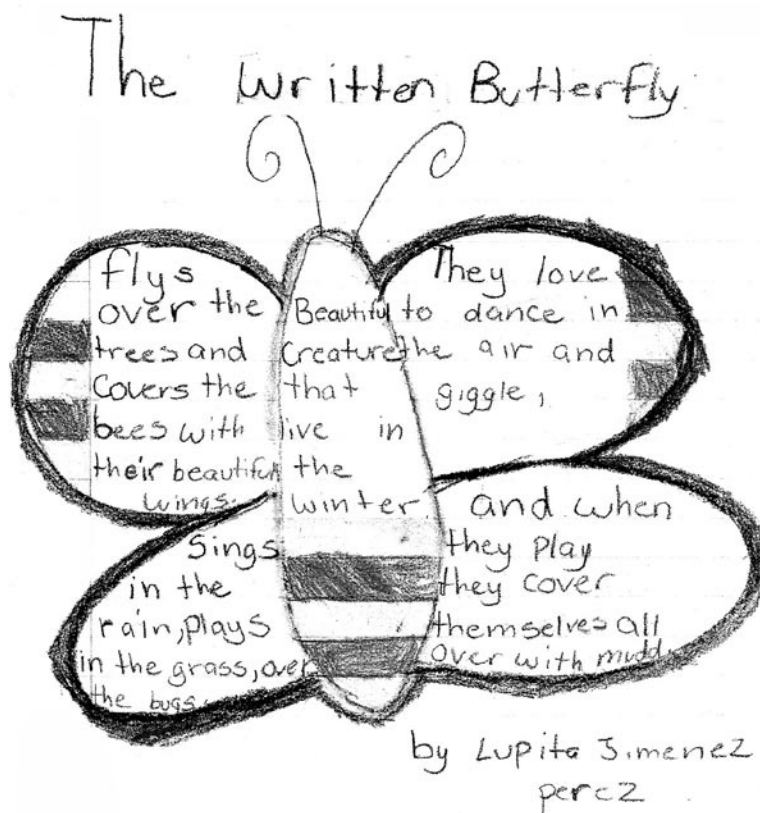
By Jeremy Weizenbaum

Light
Glowing Life
Changing, Inviting, softening
Unpredictable beam of happiness

A BEAUTIFUL MIND

By Jackie Ginez

When a beautiful mind was gone
A fluttering moth of silence was made.
Dancing eyes of beauty were lost
Found in a field of hatred.
Doubt was made, a choice was given
To stay or go, a beautiful mind was gone.
Intelligence was going to waste.



A LIMERICK

By Lily Rorick

There was an old pig with a pen
Who wrote stories and verse now and then
To enhance these creations
He drew illustrations
With brushes, some paints, and his pen.

"ARE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE OPPOSED?" (October 2004)

A RESPONSE FROM 7,000 MILES AWAY

By Ken Sommers

Our older son Jack attended TOPS during kindergarten (starting in 2001), first grade, and most of second grade. We loved the school and were very pleased with the education and the nurturing environment. Earlier this year, we relocated to Shanghai, where we plan to live long-term. Jack now attends a private international school here, but we still like to look at the TOPS web site to see what's up. Recently, I came across the piece by Laura Henry addressing the issue of whether TOPS needed to be more academic-focused and less interpersonal skills/social justice-focused. I thought it might be interesting for readers to hear the perspective of a quasi-insider/quasi-outsider, someone who is 7,000 miles away from Seattle and at the epicenter of economic growth in the world today.

By way of background, Shanghai has a plethora of various international schools, all aiming to serve the expatriate populations of the various countries whose companies have sent managers and others here to work in their China businesses. There's the Shanghai American School, the Shanghai Singapore School, the British School (and now a couple of other British-originating contenders), the German School, the French School. You get the picture. These schools charge around \$20,000 a year in tuition and competition is stiff to persuade the expats (who tend to be high achieving, goal-oriented professionals) to entrust their little ones to them. The educational quality is quite high with the various attributes commonly considered important: small class sizes, various enrichment programs (art, language, dance), families that are supportive of learning. It's a good set-up. Last year, Jack attended Shanghai Community International School, which, coincidentally enough, is administered by a group of folks from Tacoma and Puyallup. Really nice environment; however, we want our kids to learn Chinese, and Jack had only 3 half-hour Chinese classes a week. Not nearly enough to become fluent any time soon. So, we switched him this year to a new school that is only in its second year. It's a bilingual school, administered by a long-time educator from Great Britain whose vision is to combine the best of Chinese and Western teaching methods. This school is called "Xiehe Bilingual School." Rather than trying to be a British or American or French school plopped down in Shanghai, it is attempting to blend an international approach in a Chinese setting, to teach the children about the host country's language, history, and culture and also to draw on the various strengths of Chinese and of Western pedagogy. For example, in math, Chinese schools are very strong. Jack is already being called on to do long division and beginning geometry. He was not doing nearly as challenging math work at SCIS. In Chinese, he now takes

one hour a day and they are using the same textbook that a child of his age would use in a local school for Chinese class. This means he is reading stories that are akin to Aesop's fables (and from which commonly used phrases are drawn) and it's a challenge. All together, he's doing about an hour's homework each night and the work seems challenging and not like it's mere "busy work."

When asked about his new school, he still says he misses TOPS. He says he likes math, Chinese, and English, but that the IPC ("International Primary Curriculum"—sort of like social studies) is WAY too easy—that in kindergarten or first grade at TOPS he was learning about Native Americans and how to make cloth and all sorts of topics that he is now covering in third grade here. From our perspective, we believe he was very well served in the approach to education at TOPS. An interest in learning and participating actively in that process were ignited. He got good grounding in the various core subjects and he felt good about being a learner. As critically, he learned how to be flexible and interact with confidence in varied and unfamiliar situations. This is a kid who is on his third school in one year, in a different country, where half of his classes are taught in Chinese, and he's able to go with the flow. In an increasingly international world, learning and adapting are vital skills. We see a variety of families, some of whom are embracing the chance to be here and some of whom find it overwhelming. Being able to adjust to the different environment is a key factor in whether a person will succeed here, and if they're being sent by their employer, this skill will by definition affect whether they continue to succeed in their job. So, the emphasis at TOPS on communication, building adept skills at social interaction and respect towards others is good — these are all concrete and important attributes that will have a vital effect on how our children thrive as they grow. One of the best ways TOPS does this is through the "buddy" system and the emphasis on teaching the older children to care for and encourage the younger ones. This was a profound lesson for Jack in compassion and in making him feel valued. At his current school, they have tried to implement something similar, but with results not nearly as good, and he has been outraged at the older students' tyranny instead of kindness. Kind of cool to see.

In sum, the choice between academics and social justice/social savvy doesn't really seem to us a choice. Both are key parts of learning and preparing our children for the world. We would encourage TOPS to continue to pursue its aim of providing both challenging academics and challenging social lessons to its students. If TOPS were going to change anything, we would encourage the school to offer a foreign

Continued on page 11

EDUCATION OR MARKETING? REVISITING SCHOLASTIC BOOK ORDERS

By Suzanne Oelke

Scholastic Book Company is a \$2 billion-dollar-a-year industry, well entrenched in schools across the nation and renowned for providing quality educational materials to schools for generations. But it may be time the TOPS community took a closer look at the various Scholastic Book catalogues being handed out at school. Specifically of concern are the as-seen-on-TV books, movie-based books, toy-based books, and video game - based books dispersed among the educationally valuable books being offered by Scholastic.

First of all, we need to ask ourselves whether these books might violate TOPS' mission of educational excellence and social justice. Are they excellent, or do they "dumb-down," blurring the line between entertainment and education? Does teaching become more difficult when students have lost tolerance for slower, more in-depth learning? And because the entertainment industry is so prevalent in society at large, does it serve our kids well to offer more of this at school?

Secondly, is the intention behind these books education or is it simply marketing? Is the real aim of these books to create in children the desire to buy the toys, movies, and video games they are based on, and to buy the myriad other related products? Sponge Bob's likeness, for example, can be found on everything from toothpaste to lamp shades. If this is so, does the promulgation of more materialism than already exists on school property, masquerading as education, do justice to our students and parents?

How useful are these books in breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting good social values? The Barbie Princess Pack, Bratz Will Work For Fashion, and The Cinderella Story based on the movie with Hillary Duff, for example, aimed at girls, and Battle Bots Design and Destroy, Duel Masters Own the Zone, and Reshef of Destruction, aimed at boys, not only promulgate the same tired stereotypes but

also disseminate values many parents and educators are concerned about: precocious sexuality, violence, bullying, excessive materialism, and family stress.

The billion-dollar corporations behind many Scholastic books, including Viacom, Cartoon Network, Game Boy, and Nintendo (leading maker of violent video games), are aware that many parents feel guilty these days because they are unable to spend much time with their children and try to make up for it by buying things. Cunning marketers are expert at driving a wedge between parents and children in order to make a profit, aiming a "hard sell" in the order forms, "marketing to the nag factor." Ironically, it is partly due to these very corporations' self-serving lobbying efforts, which help to create an uneven distribution of wealth, that many parents find themselves in their tough time-situation to begin with.

Indeed, it would seem these books violate the "Milwaukee Principles for Corporate Involvement in Schools," adopted by the TOPS Site Council in 1997, which state that "Selling or providing access to a captive audience in the classroom for commercial purposes is exploitation and a violation of the public trust." By handing out these catalogues TOPS is implicitly recommending their contents and implying that these items are educationally valuable and approved. Scholastic knows that schools are strapped for cash. The points that teachers receive by selling books allow them to buy quality educational materials, which Scholastic also offers, for their classrooms. Teachers, already spending about \$500 a year of their own money to buy materials, are hardly in a position to bite the hand that feeds them by challenging the premise of these book orders.

Do we have to accept a means to acquire educationally valuable items for our classrooms that comes from selling so many products that don't adhere to our mission statement? Is there a fox guarding the henhouse?

A Response from 7,000 Miles Away continued from page 10

language to ALL students (our vote would be for Chinese, naturally!), starting in kindergarten. The Chinese people in Shanghai who are able to get the best jobs are the ones who have strong technical skills AND strong English (or other foreign language) skills. Being able to operate in another language is a basic criterion for many kinds of work here and we see that giving our children that ability

will help give them more choices in the future. Having a core foreign language focus as part of the TOPS mission could reflect and support both concerns of the school: providing top academic experiences and openness to other cultures, societies, and ways of being. Good luck and keep up the good work!

NOTAS AND NOTICIAS

By Maestra Rabbitt

!Bienvenidos a mis estudiantes!

We have begun this year's Spanish language and culture classes and I am looking forward to learning, sharing, and having fun with my students.

Total immersion language teaching is a method that emphasizes language as a communication tool. The emphasis is on comprehension of language in a real setting. Students learn much as they learned their first language as a toddler: first understanding simple commands, then more complex communication, and eventually being able to respond in turn, with simple responses such as yes and no and later with more complex phrases and sentences.

I emphasize cultural understanding and respect and use games, music, dance, crafts, food, and art to teach.

Saludos de Maestra Rabbitt

!Gracias!

Many thanks to the administration, staff, teachers, parents, and students for making my first year on site at TOPS so great.

Thanks to Friends of Tops for making this great learning activity possible.

Thanks again to the parents and students for the wonderful gifts they gave me at the end of the year. The gift certificate for the Spanish table will be put to good use for this year's classes.

!Bienvenidos a mis estudiantes!

Ya hemos empezado las clases de Español para este año escolar y estoy contenta de estar enseñando aquí de nuevo.

El enseñar usando el método de sumergirse completamente en el lenguaje, trata al lenguaje como una forma de comunicación, hace hincapié en el aprender en situaciones reales. Estudiantes aprenden a hablar un lenguaje así como aprenden los pequeños, primero a comprender, luego a hablar palabras simples y después a hablar frases y oraciones más complejas. Lo importante es la comprensión del lenguaje, no el poder repetir vocabulario memorizado.

Es importante para mí enseñar a los estudiantes a comprender y respetar a las culturas de España y América Latina.

También enseñé usando juegos, música, baile, artesanía, comida y el arte.

!Gracias!

Muchas gracias a la directora, al personal de la escuela, a los maestros, padres y estudiantes por hacer al año pasado tan agradable para mí.

Gracias a Friends of Tops (Amigos de Tops) por hacer posible este programa.

Gracias de nuevo a los padres y estudiantes por los lindos regalos de fin de año. El bono para hacer compras en la tienda Spanish Table lo utilizo para comprar recursos para este año.

VOCABULARY: **Bienvenidos** –welcome **Saludos**—something you say to hail someone you're glad to see.

What TOPS Families are Celebrating continued from page 4

Dec. 31: New Year's Eve (USA, International) Last day of the calendar year in Gregorian calendar. Since much of the world uses this calendar, New Year's Eve is celebrated around the world.

Dec. 31 – Jan. 1: New Year (Japanese/Japanese American) Traditional rituals observed to result in a more successful year – going back as far as the Edo period of the 17th century. Buckwheat noodles are eaten to ensure longevity and prosperity on Dec. 31 and family feasts are held on New Year's Day.

JANUARY 2005 HOLIDAYS

Jan 1: New Year's Day The first day in the year of the Gregorian calendar. In the Middle Ages, most European countries observed New Year's Day on March 25. With the Gregorian calendar's introduction in 1582, Roman Catholic countries began to celebrate New Year's Day on January 1. In modern times, it's an occasion for celebration and the making of personal resolutions.

Jan. 6: Epiphany (Christian) Also called Old Christmas Day and Twelfthtide. Celebration of the visit of the Magi.

Jan. 14: Makar Sankranti (India) Hindu holiday celebrating the sun's changing position, infusing everyone with greater life and energy.

Jan. 16: World Religion Day Established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'I faith. Dedicated to increasing interfaith understanding and cooperation.

Jan. 17: Martin Luther King Day (USA) Celebration of the birth of the great USA civil rights leader (Born Jan 15, 1929).

Jan. 21 – 24: Eid al-adha (Muslim) Feast of Sacrifice is very important feast of the Muslim calendar. Commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in Obedience to God. It is part of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

INTRODUCING... TOM O'CONNOR, SEVENTH/EIGHTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER

Interview prepared by Teresa Nemeth

Tom O'Connor joined our community this September. Before coming to TOPS, he taught 10th grade world history and AP US history at Nathan Hale High School. Prior to moving to Seattle, Tom lived in New York City and worked at The Beacon School and as a professional modern dancer. Tom has a BA in history and dance from Connecticut College and an MA in social studies education from Teachers' College/Columbia University. In addition to working at TOPS, Tom teaches history at Rainier Scholars.

How did you get involved in education, or what drew you to the field?

Actually, all of my jobs have always had some connection to education. My first job in high school was working at a daycare center for young children and I absolutely loved the energy and imagination of children. What keeps me excited about the profession of education is that there is a newness to each day and the possibility to foster students to find what excites them.

What strikes you as unique or special about TOPS?

The small classes, the active parent involvement, and a caring staff.

What would you like to accomplish here?

While at TOPS, I would like to teach the middle school students about the infinite connections of history to their lives, prepare each student to succeed within high school, and teach students to find new ways to express their ideas and listen to the ideas of others. Furthermore, I would love to find ways to integrate major themes in the middle school in interdisciplinary ways.

I would also love to teach a movement class for students that is grounded in yoga, dance, and other forms.

What is the role of alternative schools in a public school system?

I think that the concept of alternative schools is becoming more of the norm within our public school system and that this is wonderful. Alternative schools need to continue to push themselves to offer innovative programs that are not being supplied by the greater public school system as well as delivering high quality instruction to all students.

What is your vision of an excellent school, and an excellent classroom?

I believe that an excellent school is one that is responsive to the needs of the community it serves. A school needs to prepare students in a rigorous yet holistic way to become successful students and members of society. A school must make sure that every student has access to the highest caliber of education and find ways to make students' academic and social skills flourish. I believe that an excellent classroom is one where imaginations can grow and ideas are questioned.

How can parents best support their children? How can they best support you?

I think parents can support their children's educational journey by being curious and asking what is happening in the classroom. Visits to the library, museums, and road trips are great ways to support a child in a class.

What is the best way for parents to communicate with you? What is the best way for them to share concerns?

The best way for parents to communicate with me is via email. I am a technology nerd.

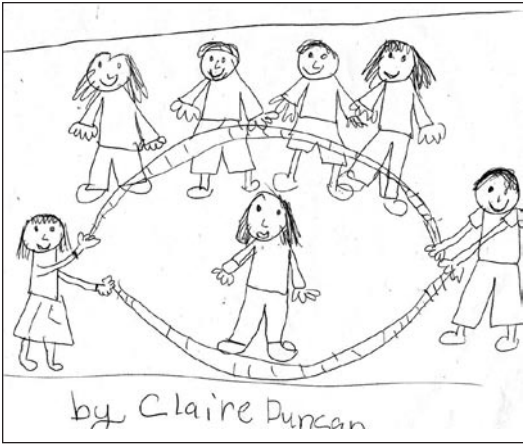
What is your favorite thing about working with children?

The moment when a child begins to understand an idea on a deeper and more meaningful level and the laughter that happens within an average day are two of my favorite things about working with children.

Would you like to tell us anything about your family or outside interests?

I am married and love to cook, dance, watch movies, and read. I love skateboarding, biking, any kind of balance game, and handstands. Road trips with my wife are my favorite activity. Oh, I have two cats, too!





DOUBLE DUTCH

By Anna Duncan, Grade 4

Each Tuesday after school Don Zemke meets kids in the gym for Double Dutch. You are probably wondering what Double Dutch is. Double Dutch is jumping rope with two long ropes that two “turners” turn and twirl to make arches. Kids jump in the ropes and do tricks.

During the Double Dutch practice time, kids first have a snack but then go straight to the ropes. Kids jump for about 10 minutes, and then Don calls them for attendance. The kids stretch and then go back to jumping. We finish at 4:20.

Double Dutch is a fun, athletic activity that I have enjoyed for more than two years. All ages are invited (including kindergarteners), so if this sounds interesting, please see Don for more information. All are welcome to join us for a lot of jumping fun!

TOPS PLAYS IN THE ULTIMATE FRISBEE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Alex Keo, Grade 8

The TOPS Ultimate Frisbee team came within one point of beating Aki Kurose in the end-of-the-season Ultimate Frisbee tournament this year. We made the finals by beating Meany, Mercer, Summit, and last year’s champion and undefeated Washington. After leading Aki 8 – 7 in the championship to 9, (you have to win by 2 points), we lost 10 – 8.

I think that Ultimate Frisbee is a great sport to play. Playing in games is fun whether you win or lose. As some of my teammates say, “Playing Ultimate at TOPS is one of the

Photos provided by Don Zemke



most fun things we do here at this school.” I agree. I’ve played Ultimate all three years that I’ve been here and seen our team develop into a championship level team who can compete well against any school in Seattle. I hope that others keep joining the team and win the championship in the future.

We may have lost to Aki this year but we still have great memories from playing together. Win or lose, we still had a lot of fun.

NO-BAKE CONTRIBUTORS

(*TOPS alumni parents, **TOPS Faculty)

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NO-BAKE BAKE SALE DOUGH-NATIONS

By Sheri Toussaint, No-Bake Chair

NO-BAKE BAKE SALE OCTOBER 2, 2004, THROUGH JANUARY 14, 2005

Our goals are 100% participation and \$70,000 raised.

Thank you, TOPS families, friends, faculty, and alumni parents who have made your financial contributions and pledges to the No-Bake Bake Sale. We are over halfway to our goal! It is exciting to know that when we ask for your support you give generously both of your time and money.

We are in our ninth week, and as of December 3 we have raised \$40,285.00. (Please see inside, p. 15, for a list of our donors.)

No-Bake appeal letters, brochures, and envelopes are available in the TOPS office and on the TOPS web site No-Bake page.

If you would like to take advantage of the 2004 tax deduction for your charitable contribution, please leave your donation in the No-Bake collection box in the TOPS office on or before December 17 (the last day of school before the winter break). Or mail your donation to Kirsten James, No-Bake financial coordinator, on or before Thursday, December 30.

Please remember

\$WE KNEAD YOUR DOUGH TO REACH OUR GOALS\$

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