A MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Many thanks to the TOPS parents, grandparents, friends, and staff who contributed to the No-Bake Bake Sale, and to the many employers who matched parents’ contributions. The No-Bake, chaired by Sheri Toussaint and Kirsten James, raised over $60,000 for the TOPS students.

We are now gearing up for the TOPS auction, chaired by Janet Morrison and Tammy Luthy. Please start asking for donations and inviting family members to attend the auction on Saturday, May 14. Classes are preparing for class auction projects, and these promise to be a big hit as always. The money that you contribute to the No-Bake and auction help us to maintain the quality extracurricular programs, as well as providing curricular support, and last year half of our counselor’s salary was funded by these contributions.

We just completed our visitation period, and had approximately 300 visitors looking at TOPS for the 2005-06 school year. The largest group was prospective kindergarten parents. Thanks to all the parents and middle school students who helped out on the tour. We received some great feedback on our school from the visitors.

Our speech tournaments are underway. I wish that all of our participants could receive a trophy. They are so awesome!

TOPS AUCTION CALL TO ACTION

By the auction committee

The TOPS annual spring auction is a mere two and a half months away. We have been challenged by the Site Council to increase our goal to $85,000. We believe we can do it, but we need every TOPS FAMILY to get involved to make this event fun and successful! We are asking every family to:

1) PROCURE OR DONATE AT LEAST 3 ITEMS WORTH $50 OR MORE BY APRIL 27.

It’s EASY! And we are here to help! Follow this step-by-step guide:

STEP 1: Inventory your own resources. Are you a talented artist, artisan, cook, organizer, photographer, gardener, or musician? Do you have any NEW (not used) items you can donate worth $50 or more? Do you have vacation property you can share? Do you have friends who are noted artists, famous athletes, or have access to unique opportunities?

STEP 2: Inventory the businesses you frequent and the organizations you belong to: restaurants, hairdressers, mechanics, museums, clubs, studios, etc. Most businesses are happy to donate items, so don’t be shy!

STEP 3: Identify the items you will procure. Hot procurement items include, but are not limited to: restaurant gift certificates, sports tickets, getaways, boat trips, retail gift certificates, and camps and lessons.

STEP 4: Check the TOPS auction web site to see which businesses have already donated items or services.

STEP 5: Approach the businesses you’ve identified, preferably in person:

Continued on page 2
ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the fifth 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 zongora@gmail.com. Please send photos to csuzumura@mindspring.com.

Deadlines are the Friday after each Site Council meeting. The deadline for the April issue is March 18. Hard copy must be in the newsletter box March 17, as there is no school March 18.

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

TOPS Auction Call to Action continued from page 1

◆ Ask for the owner or manager
◆ Introduce yourself as a family of TOPS and provide them with a copy of the procurement letter
◆ Tell them that TOPS School needs their support
◆ Ask them, “Can your business support our school through a donation to our spring auction?” Remind them that all donations are tax deductible. Let them know that 350 people attend our auction and they will be listed in our catalog—great exposure!
◆ Fill out the donation form fully, giving the business their copy
◆ Thank the owner/manager warmly!

STEP 6: Turn in all items and donation forms to the TOPS office by April 27. Be sure that the donation forms are fully and completely filled out!

In the office you will find more auction kick-off packets with donation forms and the procurement letter you can present to businesses when you approach them for donations—please pick one up if you haven’t already received yours (or if you need more forms for any other reason)! Don’t forget that one of your items can be a TOPICS FOR GROWN-UPS party! Contact Sandy Green at thetangeloes@hotmail.com for more information.

2) UNDERWRITE AUCTION EXPENSES

Last year the auction cost $13,600 to run, about $3,300 of which was supported through generous underwriting. The less we must spend on the auction itself, the more money we can apply towards our goal. You can help by writing a check or donating supplies, food or beverages, or even decorations. Send your check made out to “Friends of TOPS” to Ellen Markman, 3715 E. Union, Seattle, 98122, or contact Tammy Luthy with donations of supplies at 322-3784.

Here are some key dates for you to remember:

April 8: Deadline for RFP submission.
May 11, 5 p.m.: All interested parties meet to discuss proposals. All those who have submitted a proposal may be requested to come and answer questions.
May 18, 5 p.m.: Site Council reviews the preliminary budget and key issues as evaluated by the finance committee (see blurb p. 5).
June 15: Site Council reviews and approves the budget. Should you have any questions, please email me at shavas@seanet.com or call at 282-8355.

3) VOLUNTEER TO HELP WITH PLANNING OR ON THE NIGHT OF THE AUCTION

We are still in need to people to fill the following volunteer positions:

◆ two new members of the Dessert Dash Trio who will procure desserts and run the dash; expect a time commitment of 2 hours before auction and 4 hours auction day/night.
◆ one new catering team member: an auction-night angel or banker(s), 5 hours auction night.
◆ registration, 3 hours auction night.
◆ set-up, 2 hours auction morning.
◆ raffle sales, 1 hour for three Friday afternoons.
◆ auction closers, 20 minutes night of auction.

If you can help, please contact Tammy Luthy at 322-3784 or jlieft@seanet.com.
SITE COUNCIL REPORT

FEBRUARY 16, 2005

By Louise Bush Rosen

INTERNAL SITE COUNCIL ISSUES

Lianne Sheppard resigned as Site Council secretary; Marlies van Bergeijk has agreed to serve as secretary for the remainder of the year.

FUNDRAISING REPORT

Sheri Toussaint and Kirsten James reported that this year’s No-Bake Bake Sale raised $60,090, and that 80% of TOPS parents contributed, at an average donation of $259. Sheri stated she was very proud of the community’s participation since county-wide donations are down due to tsunami relief donations. Sheri noted that in the last two years the No-Bake has raised $130,000, at a cost of just $4,500.

Tammy Luthy and Janet Morrison reported on the upcoming auction. They announced that a new silent auction item this year will be “TOPICS for grownups,” in which auction-goers can bid on various “parties” where they can learn a skill or participate in a fun project. They further reported that the auctioneer will conduct the live auction at a faster pace this year than in the past, so that no auction items will be left until late at night when many attendees have gone home.

Finally, Tammy and Janet reported they are soliciting ideas for this year’s Special Auction Item (a needed big-ticket school item that is described by the auctioneer and for which auction attendees simply “raise the paddle” to contribute). Site Council members discussed the fact that the last two Special Auction Items – an art display and the gym sound system – have not yet been put in place. With respect to the art display, Sheri Toussaint reported that TOPS has received all the needed materials, and that with one or two volunteer weekends the display can be installed. Kathy Cox-Czosnyka reported that TOPS has begun to purchase and install the sound system but that someone needs to champion that project.

SCHOOL BOARD REPORT

Kathy Wickward gave the report from last month’s Seattle School Board meetings (see article p. 5).

ASSIGNMENT ACTION PLAN/ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL COALITION

Sheri Toussaint began by passing out a summary of the results of the fall 2004 TOPS assignment plan survey, which showed that the vast majority of survey respondents do not want any change from the 2004-05 TOPS assignment plan, other than wanting applicants to be required to rank TOPS #1 in order to be so assigned. The Site Council will discuss how to use the information gathered from this survey at its March meeting.

Maureen Germani reported that a group of staff and parents from approximately seven alternative schools are forming the Alternative Schools Coalition, whose purpose is to advise the Seattle Public Schools Community Advisory Committee on Alternative Education. This committee will research the definition and characteristics of alternative education and make policy recommendations to the School Board. The Alternative Schools Coalition met on February 16, at which time it approved its formal position on assignment and transportation, which it will present to the Seattle School Board and to the Advisory Committee. Included among the Coalition’s recommendations discussed are 1. alternative schools should continue to draw from clusters from which they currently draw, and possibly expand to all-city draws; 2. the School Board should adopt a clear definition of alternative schools; 3. parents should be required to list an alternative school as their #1 choice in order to have their child so assigned; and 4. parents choosing an alternative school should be required to attest that they have been informed of the program and culture of the school. The Coalition discussed the fact that workers at the parent information centers should also be informed of the nature of alternative schools, so as to better advise parents.

Maureen also passed out a draft definition of alternative schools, written by former NOVA principal Elaine Packard, which may provide the basis for the definition adopted by the Advisory Committee.

The Site Council passed a motion endorsing Sheri Toussaint, Maureen Germani, and Teresa Nemeth for nomination to the Advisory Committee (nominations for which were due on February 18). Maureen stated that only three parent representatives from the entire district will be selected for the Committee, which will meet every Monday from 4 to 6 p.m. from late February through March 2005.

Kathy Cox-Czosnyka stated that TOPS needs to put together a task force to guide the conversation surrounding the issue of alternative schools and to create an action plan. Sheri Toussaint, Maureen Germani, Teresa Nemeth, Judith Lee, and Gerrit Kischner volunteered to be on the task force, and Randi Niemer will send out a notification to parents.

THANK YOU

to ELLEN MARKMAN for two and a half or ten or whatever years of erudite Site Council reporting!

Three cheers to K-parent LOUISE BUSH ROSEN for volunteering, fast-forwarding, and reporting like a veteran!

Would you be up for writing a newsletter article? You don’t even need an idea – we have a long list just waiting for writers. Please contact Teresa Nemeth at zongora@gmail.com or 325-8320.

FUND DEVELOPMENT CHAIR

Kathy Cox-Czosnyka reported that Jennifer Shaw is resigning as the fund development chair, and that a new fund development chair should be in place by April so that he or she is able to work with Jennifer before her departure.

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Randi Niemer, TOPS’ new volunteer coordinator, reported that she works full days every Monday and Wednesday, and that she is currently getting systems back in place after a period of the volunteer coordinator position going unstaffed.

Name tags will be ready soon for parents to wear again when volunteering at the school.

Finally, Gerrit Kischner stated that, given Randi’s extensive knowledge of the TOPS community, the formation of a steering committee to help her identify resources and

Continued on page 5
HELP WANTED: TOPICS PROJECT IN HONOR OF MR. J

By Elizabeth Dickinson

As we all know, Mr. J, former teacher of 2nd grade at TOPS, has a deep spirit of compassion and generosity. He volunteered for several summers at First Place, a school for homeless children. And he instituted a tradition in his class of asking students to do a project on behalf of others and write up their experience. He and his family would read all the stories as part of their Christmas celebration.

Now we have an opportunity to do two projects for First Place in honor of Mr. J. The first is to sew quilts for the kindergarteners’ naptime. The second is to decorate one or two chests for dress-up clothes. I hope to invite TOPS students to create these projects during TOPICS and write cards about it to share with Mr. J.

I’m looking for ten or more volunteers to help plan these projects and to work with elementary and middle school students to create them during TOPICS (April 7, 8, and beyond if necessary). Any energetic folks would be great, but we especially need people with sewing, quilting, or painting or crafts experience.

We also need the loan of a few sewing machines, donations of child-friendly fabric, and contributions toward other materials.

If you are interested in helping out, please contact Elizabeth Dickinson (mother of Hannah and Nathan Merrill) at 320-0432 or joem@u.washington.edu.

Thanks so much!

A Message From the Principal continued from page 1

be relocated this year. Please check with the teachers of these classes for new locations.

February is the month when Seattle Schools enter into the budget process for the 2005-06 school year. This year we will be experiencing major cuts in our Learning Assistance Program, which funds Mike Anderson and his program. The I-728, which funded our class-size reduction to 25 in kindergarten and 26 in first grade, will be cut $5 per student (see Report from the School Board p. 5). The shortages are due to lack of funding from the state and federal governments. Washington State is 42nd in the United States in per-pupil funding.

TSUNAMI

The ASB (middle school Associated Student Body) is leading the effort to raise funds for Tsunami victims. There will be a car wash at TOPS on Saturday, March 12, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

During the week of March 7 through 11, elementary students will be able to contribute money in containers in their classrooms. I encourage the students to give money they have earned themselves.

I know everyone will enjoy the mid-winter break.

Cheers!

Clara

2004-05 TOPS CALENDAR

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.

MARCH

2 (W).............Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
3 (Th).............CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
8 (T)..............Middle school forum, 7-8:30 p.m.
16 (W)...........Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
17(Th)............Taste of TOPS, 5:30-8:30 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

JUNE

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

CHANGE THE DATE!

The Coalition for Social Justice invites you to hear TOPS 2nd grade teacher Carla Fetterley give a presentation sharing what she learned on her trip to Japan.

Thursday, April 7, 6:30-8 p.m. in the TOPS library.

Childcare is provided.

Please call the office 24 hours in advance, 252-3510.
REPORT FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD

By Kathy Wickward

The Seattle School Board voted on February 2 to approve school allocations for the 2005-06 school year, based on funding the district will receive from the state and federal governments (specifically Weighted Student Formula (WSF) funds, I-728 funds, and Title I funding). This year, schools are not being required to set aside mitigation funds as a hedge against low enrollment; the district has already held some back. In addition, the district will be holding back $5 per student from I-728 funds to provide $229,000 for intervention services in low-performing schools. Chief Academic Officer Steve Wilson presented the district’s “Accountability and Intervention Plan” at the February 2 meeting. The goal of this plan is to improve the quality and effectiveness of low-performing schools, as measured by as yet unspecified data.

The need to vote on this portion of the budget early created some consternation, particularly with Director Lilly, who wondered how it is possible to create a balanced budget when such a large portion went out to the schools unchanged. In fact, this first portion of the budget has almost always shown carryover (money unspent), which district officials have urged schools to spend on professional development. Lilly advocated letting attrition make the payroll smaller and reducing the allocations to schools. However, like most grant funding, there are restrictions on how WSF funds can be spent. Chief Operating Officer Mark Green explained that the money remains largely the same, but that the rising cost of teachers will already force schools to make their own difficult budget decisions. Because the majority of I-728, Title I, and Weighted Student Formula funding goes to pay teachers, the district hopes to address the shortfalls by closing schools, reducing transportation, and limiting choice. The Board will vote on the second portion of the budget, which covers such items as transportation, custodial staff, and central services, in June.

The lack of clear budget information has stymied parents and advocates who have attended multiple community meetings regarding school closures and assignment plan changes. While district officials insist that no decisions have been made about whether to close schools or eliminate transportation, the community meetings were all about asking the public how they’d like those things to happen, “if” they did. Somewhat late in the process, Brita held a budget forum at her regular community meeting and is asking the budget office to “cost out” a number of different ideas. She plans to hold additional meetings regarding school closures and assignment plan changes. The Board will vote on the second portion of the budget, which covers such items as transportation, custodial staff, and central services, in June.

Lilly further stated that the budget process is underway.

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT

Clara Scott welcomed Randi Niemer, who Mrs. Scott announced “has hit the ground running.” She reported that the speech tournament is well underway and that a new lunchroom manager will begin immediately after mid-winter break. She also announced that Brita Butler-Wall, from the Seattle School Board, will visit TOPS on March 7 and March 22. Also, she reported that over 300 prospective parents attended tours at TOPS in January and February.

Finally, Mrs. Scott announced that the ASB will conduct a car-wash fundraiser on March 12 to benefit tsunami disaster relief. She stated that the ASB will research which tsunami relief organizations have the lowest overhead in order to determine to whom to donate the funds raised.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAM (BLT)

Gerrit Kischner gave his report, stating that the faculty overwhelmingly voted to adopt the Olweus civility (anti-bullying) program (see articles in the October, November, December/January, and February issues of TOPS News). There will be Olweus training on March 9 and 16, and Gerrit stated that the BLT is seeking names for a committee to attend the training and plot out the implementation of the Olweus program. He stated that the BLT is now considering a possible stipend for staff members who

FINANCE COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you are interested in helping Friends of TOPS decide how to allocate funds to next year’s school programs, please contact Steve Havas, treasurer, at 282-8355 or shavas@seanet.com.

Site Council Report continued from page 3

volunteers within the TOPS community will not be necessary.

TREASURER’S REPORT

We are solvent!

BUDGET PROCESS

Steve Havas reported on the finance committee and the RFP process (see related article p. 2 and blurb this page).

DRAMA

Linda Korbus, drama committee chair, stated that the elementary school play will take place on Friday and Saturday, May 20 and 21. David Crandall, who took a break last year but created original musicals for TOPS the three years before that, is working on a brand new show for us.

COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CSJ)

Galen Goff reported that the CSJ discussed the Rachel Simmons presentation and the adoption of the Olweus program. The CSJ is championing an effort to obtain more multicultural books for the library.

JAPAN STUDIES PRESENTATION

Carla Fetterley, 2nd grade teacher, gave a photo presentation of her twenty-day fall 2004 educational visit to Japan.
WE NOMINATE...YOU!

By Maureen Germani and Kathy Cox-Czosnyka

There are a lot of ways each of you gets involved here at TOPS. First and foremost, you support your kids and their teachers in the classroom. As you know, though, there are several other ways to help TOPS deliver the quality education that each of our children deserves.

There are two governance groups parents participate in here at TOPS: the Site Council and the Building Leadership Team. It is time to start thinking about membership in either or both of these groups for the 2005-06 school year.

FIRST – SITE COUNCIL:

According to our bylaws,

“The Site Council serves as one of the governing bodies of the school, with responsibilities for leadership, advocacy, fundraising, financial stewardship, and strategic planning to assure the highest standards of educational excellence and an inclusive, supportive school community. We operate under the current school district policy with regard to Site Councils.

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

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

Members of the Site Council represent and are expected to communicate with their constituency, but they vote in the best interests of the school as a whole. Members of the Site Council are not paid for their services to the Site Council.”

RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Site Council meets one Wednesday a month (from 5 to 7 p.m.), with additional meetings as necessary for focus groups, committee work, or budget preparation. Members of the Site Council comprise the board of directors of the nonprofit Friends of TOPS organization, and are responsible for the allocation of funds raised by Friends of TOPS -- that budget is set in spring each year for the coming year.

Membership in Site Council includes parents, guardians, staff, and administrators; the non-staff membership is elected by grade band, three representatives per band (nine total). For 2005-06, there are four to five open positions. If you are interested in nominating yourself or a friend, please contact a member of the nominating committee (listed below). Site council meetings are open to everyone, so feel free to come and see what it’s all about.

NEXT UP – BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAM:

The teacher’s contract explains the role of the BLT directly:

“The primary function of a Building Leadership Team is to promote and facilitate the collaborative decision-making process which affects academic achievement. The more specific responsibilities of the Building Leadership Team are to oversee the facilitation and development of:

1. An Academic Achievement Plan (now referred to as ‘Transformation Plan’), including the configuration and structure of the school’s classes and/or program offerings.
2. The development of a school-wide professional development plan to support the Academic Achievement (Transformation) Plan.
3. The school’s budget.”

The BLT is the steward of the academic program of the school – the critical support and advisory team for the principal, who is responsible for the final decisions. The Transformation Plan lays out the academic focus the school has refined in order to boost student achievement. For TOPS the three areas of focus are:

1. The impact of race on learning
2. A quality writing program
3. A quality math program.

The BLT plans professional development activities to meet the needs of teachers as they work to implement the Transformation Plan.

In terms of the budget, each school in the district has control over how it allocates money received from the district. The BLT determines staffing needs for the program to meet the goals of the Transformation Plan, and allocates the budget accordingly. The money Friends of TOPS raises from the No-Bake and the auction is not a part of the budget the BLT works with, and is allocated through the proposal process facilitated by the board of directors (Site Council members) of Friends of TOPS (see related article this issue on RFPs).

Continued on page 7
TOPS’ Building Leadership Team is composed of the two administrators, five staff members elected by the school staff, and three parents/guardians – one from the Site Council executive committee and two elected at-large from the TOPS community. While the contract does not require parent representation on each school’s leadership team, the TOPS staff believes such representation is a critical component for our school community.

RESPONSIBILITIES:
The BLT meets twice a month (on Thursdays this year), from 4 to 5:30 p.m. (sometimes a little longer). You will represent a grade band (K-4 or 5-8), and it will be your responsibility to facilitate communication – from the community in to the BLT, and from the BLT out to the community.

Qualifications:
Communication is key! BLT members must be excellent communicators, concerned and committed to supporting the academic focus of the school. As a BLT member you must be comfortable representing the ideas and opinions of a wide variety of people. You must also be able to honor the staff Code of Conduct, which includes confidentiality as appropriate. You must attend meetings consistently— we need people who will take ownership of this and see it through!

If you are interested in nominating yourself or a friend for the BLT, please contact a nominating committee member: Maureen Germani at Maureen@germani.org or Linda Korbus at l.korbus@comcast.net.

Report from the School Board continued from page 5

budget forums in April. Given the size of the budget gap ($12 million in 2005-06, $30 million in 2006-07), and that no single cost-cutting mechanism covers anything approaching a majority of the shortfall, all of the measures that have been introduced will likely be implemented in some form.

The district predicts that reducing choice will save $4-6 million in transportation costs and will cut in half the cost to enroll students (a savings of about $0.9 million). Its “base model” plan assigns all students to an elementary school, which feeds into a particular middle school and then high school. All schools would have certain programs located in the school such as bilingual education, special education, and advanced learning. Students will still have the option to attend an alternative school in their area. A committee on advanced learning and a new committee on alternative education will be providing the Board with their recommendations regarding these programs. Director Butler-Wall is also planning to form a transportation committee. No clear consensus on criteria for school closure came out of the meetings; district staff will likely develop a set of recommended criteria that the Board will then vote on in March.

Bus drivers have turned out in force at the last two Board meetings, to voice vehement opposition to the Board’s decision to re-bid the contract for First Student and Durham. They feel the decision amounts to a forced unionization of their companies. Those who spoke stated they preferred working for First Student over Laidlaw, a union shop. They also questioned why the Board would undertake such a costly process at a time when the district’s budget is tight.

The small-works roster has been developed, with a database of 543 companies that are small and/or minority- or women-owned. The BTAII levy is the source of 21 projects that have been identified for the summer. Of the 90 applications that have been received, 12 have been from minority-owned companies, 13 from small businesses, and 5 from women-owned businesses. Members of the minority contracting community commented during the meeting that despite the attempts to advertise the small-works roster, it is impossible to get information from the district over the phone and that the program has neither internal nor external leadership.

Family support workers and nurses, who are funded by the Families and Education Levy, are being asked to sign displacement paperwork. While it is likely they will not lose their jobs, the district is very conservative regarding staffing grants until they are funded. The Families and Education Levy funds have not yet been approved by the City Council. District staff have started meeting with the City and expect a document will be presented to the Council this month.

The Alternative Schools Coalition meets to discuss issues pertinent to alternative schools, and will advise the now-forming Alternative Education Committee. This committee, in turn, will create a definition of an alternative school and will make a policy proposal to the School Board. If you would like to be added to the Alternative Schools Coalition email list, or to attend a meeting, please contact Deidre Falin-Meacham at dfalin@yahoo.com.
"We shouldn’t teach great books; we should teach a love of reading." ~B.F. Skinner

That sentiment was richly enhanced this month when TOPS received 500 dollars’ worth of new books from Washington Mutual Bank in its “WaMoola for Schools” Back to School promotion. These mostly fiction chapter books came totally “out of the blue.” This program, which started last spring, gave customers who enrolled in WaMoola a choice of schools to support, and every time they used their credit card they earned a point for their chosen school. So a big thank-you goes to all of those TOPS families who supported this program. I put the books out at a staff meeting for the teachers to use in their classrooms, and the books were gone in minutes.

EXPANDED MAC LAB

With a few strokes of good fortune and a huge amount of hard work by Greg Flood (parent volunteer) and Dan Bloedel (science teacher), TOPS now has a complete Mac computer lab in the library loft. Several years ago Dan received a science grant that provided 15 iMac computers that eventually found a home in the “computer wired” library loft. While functional, this never quite worked out because it was difficult to share computers with a whole class while providing appropriate instruction. We knew that there were teachers willing to donate from their classrooms other iMac computers that we could use in the loft. Then, in a chance encounter, Dan received a huge donation of computer tables. Everything started falling into place thanks in large part to Greg, as he made memory upgrades to all the computers and installed OS X and Office 2000 Suite. Now they are all connected to the Internet, have printing capabilities, and face a screen (painted on the wall) on which the students can observe lessons via a LCD projector connected to the teacher’s computer. This wouldn’t have been possible without the support of the Friends of TOPS technology budget. The lab is now ready for all classes to take advantage of this remarkable new space.

THE CENTRAL DISTRICT FORUM FOR ARTS AND IDEAS PRESENTS “HARRIET GOES TO SCHOOL: A STUDENT’S LIFE AFTER BROWN VS. BOARD.”

For the second time this year our middle school students have been the recipients of a program sponsored in part by the Seattle Public Library and young-adult librarian Kay Kirkpatrick. This time our students watched a play performed by two actresses: Timeca Briggs, who played Lillian Johnson, and Adillia Scott (a nine-year-old student at Leschi school), who played her daughter, Harriet Johnson. The setting was the Johnsons’ home. The time was three years after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling on Brown vs. the Board of Education, which required the “de-segregation of schools across America.” The fictional play is a conversation between mother and daughter after Harriet indicates that she doesn’t want to help integrate Gillespie Elementary School (in Greensboro, NC). She feels intimidated by her new classmates and their angry parents, who converge on the school daily. Lillian then reveals the importance of an equal education and how it impacts all of our lives. This thought-provoking play was well received by our students especially because of the historical and present-day significance of the Supreme Court ruling and its impact on their education.

Our speech tournament is moving right along, with two speech categories to go. I am constantly amazed at the effort our students put forth. See the next newsletter for a full summary of this year’s tournament.

Item last. I have my homepage set to Refdesk.com and every day they have a new “site of the day.” This one really intrigued me: www.exploratorium.edu/music, “The Science of Music: Accidental Scientist.” This site is full of movies and interactive exhibits all about sounds. Learn how and why “earworms” (songs that get stuck in your head) occur. Create your own rhythms. I especially enjoyed the “dot mixer” and “kitchen sink-o-pation.” The evening I introduced myself to this site, I glanced at the clock after what seemed to be only a short time and found that it was well past my bedtime. Enjoy!
NOTAS AND NOTICIAS

By Maestra Rabbitt

My students have welcomed the Spanish language and Spanish and Latin American cultural manifestations into their daily lives, their school environment, and their psychological makeup.

My middle school class students have philosophical discussions about what is appropriate behavior within the parameters of Latin manners and take me and each other to task if we veer outside those parameters. One of them put a screensaver in Spanish on a computer in the commons, and among my 3rd-5th grade and 1st-3rd grade classes I have students who show me books they have checked out to read that pertain to cultures we studied last year.

One of my middle school students who spent a month in Mexico teaches the rest of the class the vocabulary she learned there and the children in the younger classes go out of their way to speak Spanish at home, with each other, and with the Spanish-speaking students in school.

As I walk to and from school I hear:

¡Hola, Maestra Rabbitt! ¿Cómo estás? or ¡Adios, hasta la vista!

We live in a world that is becoming ever more international economically and politically, and I believe my students will also help to assure that it is a world of respect and acceptance and inclusion.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BIRTHDAY PARTY

By Koji Pingry, Grade 6

On January 30 I had a joint birthday party with my two friends Ben Hirshberg and Eli Davis. We invited the whole 6th grade to a bowling alley. Instead of presents we asked for a small donation from each person. It was a huge success. Thirty-five people came and we raised $1,028. We then took the money and gave it to a charity called iEARN. This charity directly gives all the money to kids and schools in tsunami-affected areas. I hope we can raise this much again next year.

Photo provided by Hiromi Pingry
A MONTHLY CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS

WHAT TOPS FAMILIES ARE CELEBRATING

Compiled by Lynne Goodrich, CSJ member. Please send comments, additions, and suggestions to goodrich_gas@msn.com.

MARCH IS WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH

National Women’s History Month was initiated by the National Women’s History Project, a nonprofit educational organization founded in 1980 to “promote gender equity through education about women’s diverse lives and accomplishments.”

MARCH 2005 HOLIDAYS

March 1: Dydd Dewi Sant (Wales) The feast day for the patron saint of Wales, St. David. Celebrated as a patriotic and cultural festival.

March 3: Hina Matsuri (Japan) On this day, also known as Doll Festival, parents celebrate their daughters’ happiness, growth, and good health. It originated about 1,000 years ago in the Heian Period (794-1192). Dolls dressed in the fashion of the people of the ancient court are displayed at home, along with peach blossoms.

March 4: World Day of Prayer Worldwide movement of Christian women of many traditions who come together to observe a common day of prayer each year, and who, in many countries, have a continuing relationship in prayer and service.

March 14: Great Lent (Orthodox Christian) Many Christian churches observe this period of fasting and penitence (40 days, not including Sundays), beginning on Ash Wednesday (February 9) and ending on the Saturday before Easter. Great Lent is an Orthodox Christian holiday that always begins on a Monday between February 15 and March 21. It is a period of self-denial observed with abstinence from meat, dairy products, wine, and olive oil.

March 17: St. Patrick’s Day Celebrated in honor of Ireland’s patron saint, who came to Ireland as a Roman slave at the age of 16 during the 5th century. He brought Christianity to many in Ireland. Celebrations in the US are secular and date back to 1737, when Boston held its first St. Patrick’s Day parade.

March 20: Palm Sunday (Christian) Occurs on the Sunday before Easter Sunday in the Western Christian liturgical calendar. It signals the upcoming end of Lent and the beginning of Holy Week.

March 21: Naw Ruz (Iran) Iranian New Year and very important celebration. Unlike many other festivals in Persia, Naw Ruz is not exclusive to one religious group. Always on the first day of spring in Iran. Recognizes the rebirth of nature with rituals practiced for more than 3,000 years.

March 21: Spring Equinox When day and night are the same length.

March 21: Higan-E (Buddhist) Seasonal celebration for spring and fall when day and night are the same length, symbolizing peace, equality, and harmony.

March 24: Purim (Jewish) Like other Jewish holidays, begins at sunset and concludes at sunset the following night. A joyous celebration commemorating the intervention of Esther, a 6th-century queen, who saved the Jews of ancient Persia from Haman’s plot. The book of Esther/The Megillah is read aloud in synagogue – children dress as characters in the story and hiss and use noisemakers whenever Haman’s name is mentioned.

March 25: Good Friday (Christian) Observed in commemoration of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, this is the oldest Christian celebration.

March 27: Easter (Christian) Commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It also marks the end of Lent. The date is set by determining the Sunday following the full moon on or after the vernal equinox. Many churches hold sunrise services to symbolize the return of light to the world after Jesus’ resurrection.
RACHEL SIMMONS SPEAKS ON BULLYING

By Marlies van Bergeijk, CSJ member

Rachel Simmons is the author of two books on the phenomenon of bullying between girls: Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls and Odd Girl Speaks Out. On January 11 she spoke to parents in a nearly full auditorium at Eckstein Middle School. The following day she spoke to students from TOPS, Bryant, and Eckstein. TOPS 4th through 8th graders attended, as well as some parents. The events were sponsored by the Middle School Support grant. On February 3, the TOPS Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) hosted a follow-up meeting, facilitated by counselor Jennifer Murray and child psychologist (and TOPS parent) Wayne Duncan, for parents to discuss their impressions.

Rachel spoke to many preteen and teenage girls and adult women while researching her books and was struck by how influential experiences of being bullied were in each person’s life, often extending well beyond adolescence. Her book is full of examples. Her goal is to introduce language to talk about female aggression, and to counter prevailing notions that such behavior is simply developmental or a rite of passage.

Rachel refers to bullying by girls as alternative aggression. She identifies three types of it: social, which aims to target reputation via gossip and rumors; indirect aggression, which is either expressed anonymously or followed by remarks such as “just kidding” or “can’t you take a joke?”; and relational, using friendship as a weapon: “If you don’t do this, I will not be your friend anymore.” She considers all these behaviors relational violations. In addition, body language plays a very important role in bullying between girls; eye rolling, eyebrow raising, giving the silent treatment, and back turning can be subtle yet very effective weapons. She calls it a hallmark of relational aggression.

Rachel’s premise is that females are socialized to be nice and caring and to value relationships. They are very fearful of being alone, without friends. Thus, if a relationship is disrupted, a girl is disrupted. Yet for many girls, behavior that threatens relationships is very difficult to confront. She observes that middle class white girls especially tend to believe that anger and “negative emotions” are unacceptable and they are fearful of directly expressing them. However, by not doing so, they give their power away. What is often very confusing to girls is that bullies can be their friends, who may be nice in public but not in private, or visa versa. Subtle changes in a friend’s behavior can result in girls questioning their perceptions and assuming that they were somehow at fault. Girl bullies often have terrific social skills and they tend to be popular. Maintaining their popularity requires a lot of work, though, and when the group dynamics change they can quickly become the “odd girl out.” Very frequently, girls who have been bullied become bullies themselves if the opportunity lends itself.

Of particular concern to Rachel is the explosion in using technology, such as the Internet or instant messaging, to harass others. She refers to the Internet as the new bathroom wall and feels strongly that kids’ use ought to be regulated in part because they believe they can be different online than in person. She favors schools developing an Internet use policy and contract that holds students accountable for their behavior on and off school grounds.

Rachel encourages parents to help their children by listening to them, and by validating their experience and not trivializing it. Girls need to realize that they are not alone with the experience. Parents also need to ask themselves what they model in relationships.

In addition, they can offer girls opportunities to interact with different peer groups via new activities and if need be change schools, because sometimes bullying is specific to the dynamics of a particular group. Parents can also work with school staff to give girls social permission to express themselves directly, and they can serve on an anti-bullying taskforce. Together with schools they can aim to have girls take responsibility for their actions.

Rachel concedes that bullying among girls is often very difficult to detect by teachers because so much of it happens under the radar. Often nothing looks wrong. However, schools can be very influential in addressing these behaviors by first acknowledging them and then adopting a new language, policies, and disciplinary guidelines school-wide. Some other recommendations she has are creating a broad-based anti-bullying taskforce, creating parent-student contracts for ethical behavior, and training teachers, counselors, and parent volunteers in mediation.

One parent who attended the assembly with students expressed discomfort with some of Rachel’s answers to questions students asked, wondering if Rachel was put too much in the role of expert. Another parent would have preferred that questions could have been collected prior to the afternoon session and grouped around themes, rather than seemingly making the asking of questions itself into a popularity contest.

Jennifer encouraged parents to talk with their kids about any misgivings about the presentation. Wayne Duncan provided an excellent hand-out with definitions of bullying and relational aggression and what this looks like in different age groups. One suggestion was to allocate space in the TOPS library for books and other resources for parents.

Gerrit Kischner announced that the staff had just voted to adopt the Olweus framework around bullying (see this month’s Site Council report, as well as previous TOPS News issues). Please stay tuned…
A MESSAGE FROM THE NO-BAKE COMMITTEE

By Sheri Toussaint, No-Bake chair, and Kirsten James, financial coordinator

TOPS NO-BAKE BAKE SALE

October 2, 2004, through January 14, 2005

No-Bake dough-nation final total is

$60,090.00

80% participation

Thank you to the entire TOPS community and beyond.

Gracias, Toda, Cám ón em, Dankë, Domo Arigato, Merci, Asante, Toa chie

NEW CONTRIBUTORS

Haug, Kirsten
Hom, Nancy
Goff, Galen & John
Kellogg, Richard & Anne DeHelbach
Kent, Karen & Mathew

Seattle Center Academy

This is a summer program that gives middle school youth hands-on experiences in the arts and sciences. This program also includes both specialized and integrated opportunities for students with disabilities. For two weeks, your child can be acting, singing, dancing, painting, producing videos, exploring, and creating at Seattle Center in classes presented by 24 professional organizations, such as the Pacific Northwest Ballet, Earshot Jazz, Intiman Theater, the Pacific Science Center, and Ewajo Dance Workshop.

This summer’s session runs Mondays through Fridays August 1-12, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Bus transportation is available and lunch and snacks are included. Many scholarships are available.

Application deadline is April 29. The program is open to youth currently in grades 7 and 8. Visit www.seattlecenter.org. Call 233-3959 or email academysc@seattle.gov.

Calling On All Students!
DO YOU HAVE A TALENT YOU’D LIKE TO SHARE?

Sign up for the Taste of TOPS Talent Showcase (see back page)

Student name ______________________________________________________________________________________

Grade/Teacher _____________________________________________________________________________________

Talent _____________________________________________________________________________________________

Parent’s signature __________________________________________________________________________________

To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate, please limit performance to 2-5 MINUTES.
Please return completed form to the TOPS office. Forms will also be distributed at school.
What I Like About Gym

By Emma Slaton, Grade 8

Gym was always the best part of the day for me. You could do fun activities, run around, and just have fun. I can hardly remember the first time I went into the gym. This was at our TOPS before they remodeled it. All I can remember is big kids running around and on unicycles! I was actually really scared of it and never came back! (Haha.) But the next year in 1st grade (I think that’s the year when you are allowed to do gym, or at least that’s how it was when I was in first grade), ANYWAY I just remember always having fun and getting to run around with my friends and do new things I had never done before and I loved it! Eric was always giving me high fives and Don was always making jokes. Still to this day in 8th grade I still can’t wait to run into the gym after 5th period. Eric still gives me high fives and Don’s still cracking jokes. I remember on my birthday Don got me a cool snowman cookie!! I also remember Eric used to lift me up and spin me around. I have learned so much in gym. I learned how to play tennis, ping pong, baseball, basketball, and also stuff I had never even heard of like “pickle ball.” I’m going to miss the gym so much when I go off to high school. I hope other people have as much fun in the gym as I did!
Every year, we look forward to going on the Skate King field trip. This year, as 5th graders, we got to go with our kindergarten buddies. At Skate King we got to help our buddies learn how to skate. Ever since kindergarten we have looked forward to being the oldest because when skating is almost over, 5th graders get to skate for an extra song. We like Skate King because it gives us a chance to be with our friends and go skating. But we thought the best part was seeing Mr. J. He showed up and everyone was really excited. As 5th graders, it was the best Skate King ever.
If you would like to contribute or volunteer please contact Carla Fetterley, 2nd grade teacher, at cafetterley@seattleschools.org.

If you would like to volunteer for potluck set-up or clean-up, please contact Marlies van Bergeijk at paul-marlies@worldnet.att.net or 328-3064.

For more information regarding the talent showcase, please contact Sheri Toussaint at sheritoussaint@hotmail.com. (See sign-up form on p. 12, also to be distributed at school.)

Taste of TOPS flyers are available in Spanish/Chinese/Vietnamese/Japanese in the TOPS office or by request.

This event is sponsored by the CSJ, Coalition for Social Justice.

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Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against in any of the District’s employment or educational activities can file an internal discrimination complaint with the District’s Affirmative Action Office.