MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

This is the time of the year we get to reflect on the blessings we have received and look forward to those still to come. It is also a time when we are moved to give time and resources to our neighbors in need in our local and global communities.

Each year I write in my journal ten things that I am thankful for. I would like to share a few this year with you.

1) I am thankful that I have a job that I am passionate about. I get to share that passion with 523 wonderful students.

2) I am thankful that at TOPS I am able to work with some of the finest teachers and staff in the Seattle Public Schools.

3) I am thankful that I get to work in partnership with great parents and community members who volunteer their time, talents and resources to TOPS School.

4) I am thankful to be a part of a community that reaches out beyond the TOPS walls to help others.

5) I am thankful for the gift of love that I feel for my family, who warm my heart on a daily basis. They are truly the wind beneath my sail.

Happy Holidays!

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER:

Our quarter ended for Middle School students on Thursday, November 10. Elementary students are on a trimester schedule, and their trimester ended December 2.

Our Middle School students have been working hard rehearsing for Grease which will be performed on December 9th and 10th. Friday, December 9, performance is at 7:00 p.m. Saturday’s performances are 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. at TOPS. Please support our students and Drama Committee.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE TOPS NO-BAKE ANNUAL FUND DRIVE

By Team No-Bake

We are in our final month of our annual TOPS NO-BAKE fund drive. Our TOPS community is so generous in time and spirit and financial support.

We are working towards a goal of $72,000 this year. Keep reading to discover what this critical fund drive is all about.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the annual TOPS No-Bake fund drive?
At TOPS we don’t bake…. we donate. It’s easy! Each fall TOPS has a good old fashioned fund drive. Just get out your checkbook, write a check to FRIENDS OF TOPS, and mail it off! We don’t ask our kids to hit the streets to raise funds. We don’t sell candy or magazines. TOPS has two fundraisers: the fall No-Bake fund drive and our spring school auction. Each is vital to ensuring our continued support of TOPS.

What is our $ goal this year?
We are reaching for $72,000 this year.

How much should our family donate to the No-Bake?
We welcome your donation of any amount… whether your family can give $10 or $1000. Last year we averaged approximately $200 per family.

How many families donate to the TOPS No-Bake?
Our goal is to receive a donation from 100% of the TOPS families. We are a community 400 families strong! In past years, we have celebrated the participation of over 90% of our families, and this year we would love to receive a donation from every family.

Where do we send our No-Bake donation?
Mail your donation: TOPS NO-BAKE, 2500 Franklin Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98102 – OR – deliver your donation to the No-Bake box in the TOPS office.

February TOPS News Deadline
Tuesday, January 10. Submissions to topsnewsletter@gmail.com
By Catrice Dennis, AmeriCorps Member

Winter Wishes and Holiday Food Drive

The food drive began on Monday, November 14, and will run until Friday, December 9. All donated food will be used to prepare winter food baskets for our families here at TOPS. Students are being asked to bring non-perishable items along with other non-food items. Students have been bringing donated items to their classrooms so that we can keep an accurate count of what is brought in daily.

If you are a family wishing to receive a food basket, or if you are interested in volunteering to help assemble the baskets, please contact Catrice Dennis, 206-252-3527, or crdennis@seattleschools.org.

CSJ Corner

Welcome to the CSJ corner where you can look each month to find out what the Coalition for Social Justice has planned for its monthly meeting, the first Thursday of each month from 6:30-8:00 pm in the TOPS library. Childcare is provided.

CSJ is a group of parents, staff, and administrators who work together in support of the stated mission and vision of TOPS. The purpose of our work is to educate ourselves and the school community about issues of academic equity, cultural diversity, and social justice as they affect our school and the broader community.

December 1st Meeting:

- Kindergarten teachers, Joan O’Connor and Joby Moore, will talk about what they do in kindergarten to introduce the social justice mission of TOPS.
- Continuing discussion of Mel Levine’s important book, A Mind at a Time, about our children’s learning differences. Copies of the book are available for parents to borrow from the library. School Counselor Jennifer Murray and parent Lis Soldano will facilitate the discussion.

January 5th Meeting:

- We will view and discuss a recent film by award-winning director Lee Mun Wah (director of Color of Fear). Last Chance for Eden documents nine women and men engaged in an emotionally honest conversation about how race and gender affect their lives and families. Their stories, filled with history, courage, and wisdom, inform and inspire.

February 2nd Meeting:

- Topic to be announced. We know it’ll be another scintillating discussion.
HOW TO RESPOND AT HOME
WHEN YOUR CHILD SHOWS BULLY BEHAVIOR

By Gerrit Kischner, Assistant Principal

As students at TOPS have become increasingly knowledgeable about the nature of bullying—my own first grader told me the other day not to help her pour a full carton of milk, but if she spilled, “you’ll be the bystander!”—many class meetings have focused on empathy. Jennifer Murray, our school counselor, has observed frequently that building empathy is the key to developing the sense of community and individual responsibility that will make the biggest difference in improving the climate in any school.

Over the next couple of newsletters, I would like to explore how parents can respond when they hear about bullying at school. This month, I’ll focus on what to do if you receive a report that your child has been involved in bullying another student. Next month, I’ll look at the reporting aspect of our program: how to respond if your child reports that he or she is being bullied at school. Building empathy and being empathetic is the key to both responses.

The most useful discussion of this topic that we have found comes from Barbara Coloroso, whose book The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander became a central part of our CARE Committee’s planning this summer. Coloroso is clear that “bullying is a purposeful, thought-out activity intended to harm someone who is seen as inferior or unworthy of respect and concern.” It’s important, she says, that parents resist the inclination to justify, rationalize, or minimize what has happened. Instead, the goal must be to help the students understand the effects of their actions and take responsibility.

The first rule, according to Coloroso, is don’t punish, instead discipline. Punishment, she argues, only models aggressive and hurtful behavior, and it preempts more constructive ways of relating to a child by looking for reasons and solutions. When incidents are brought to my attention, I often find that the information students share is tangled and confusing. Frequently, the student who has been bullying another student was him- or herself bullied. While it’s important to help students work through their perspectives about the history of a given event, I often find it’s very useful to tell students at the outset of discussing minor events that “based on what I know right now, nobody is going to get in trouble for what happened—instead, we need to figure out what we need to do to make sure it never happens again.” This is the relationship-building piece that we must constantly work on both as parents and as educators.

Discipline, on the other hand, helps children to develop their own moral code and coaches them on how best to take control of their own actions. Coloroso presents four advantages to disciplining as opposed to punishing: 1) it shows the child clearly what he has done, 2) it gives the child ownership of the problem created, 3) it gives the child a process for solving the problem created, and 4) it maintains the child’s dignity. Coloroso then presents a three-step process to discipline that we are working hard to implement at TOPS and that requires a close partnership between school and home: Restitution, Resolution, and Reconciliation. Restitution means fixing the problem (repairing what’s broken, including trust). Resolution involves figuring out a way to keep the incident from happening again. Reconciliation looks to healing and building a relationship with the target of the bullying.

In addition to providing discipline as an immediate response to an event, Coloroso also explains that it is important for families to respond to bullying incidents by creating opportunities to “do good,” nurturing empathy, teaching friendship skills, and by closely monitoring your child’s TV viewing, video game playing (“Bully,” the video game, is scheduled for release this spring by the makers of Grand Theft Auto), and computer activities, engaging in more constructive activities, and by teaching your child to “will good” by “speaking and doing what is right, ‘even when the burden is heavy.’

All of this takes a great deal of time, and this is why home and school must work so closely together to help each other in providing the most thorough response to a given incident. Ultimately, nothing else will be effective in helping a child who has engaged in bullying to recognize and label his feelings and thoughts and then identify methods for controlling his actions in pro-social ways. This involves asking questions of your child about how he or she was feeling and then to explore ways of understanding the other person’s perspective. The final step is learning to recognize how we are feeling and how others are feeling before we act.

Here’s how Coloroso explains it: “Knowing that you control 50 percent of a relationship and the other person controls the other 50 percent, that your words and actions influence the whole relationship, that you both can choose to accept or reject each other’s invitations, and that ‘No’ is a complete sentence, can serve all three characters—the bullied, the bully, and the bystander—who are trying to change roles and break the cycle of violence. A child who is annoying you is only inviting you to pounce back; you don’t have to accept the invitation. His annoying you never justifies bullying him. A bully’s taunting is only an invitation to feel bad or to react aggressively or passively; you can turn it down. The bunch of bullies can invite you to join the bullying of another child; you can say no and can invite the targeted child to join you in a more productive and creative endeavor. You could even invite the bully to join you.”

Incidents like these provide rich learning opportunities. This year, we’re doing great work at finding out how to make the most of them. Certainly, every child is different and will react in unpredictable ways, and parents know their children in ways we never can at school. I would appreciate hearing from families about how their conversations at home are reflecting these same ideas. We can learn from each other.
SITE COUNCIL REPORT

NOVEMBER 9, 2005

By Louise Bush

Chair Marlies van Bergeijk opened the meeting with a welcome and introductions.

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT

Clara Scott began her report with a hearty thank you to the TOPS community for its response to the school’s Hurricanes Katrina and Rita project. She stated that TOPS families sent 165 backpacks filled with school supplies and 200 personal care packets to two schools, one in Columbus, Mississippi, and one in Shreveport, Louisiana. Mrs. Scott spoke with those schools’ principals and they are very thankful.

Mrs. Scott also noted that TOPS kicks off its annual food drive on Monday, November 14, and that last year we gathered 450 cans of food for TOPS families in need. The Winter Wishes project will run from November 21 through December 9, and will be coordinated by Americorps volunteer Catrice Dennis.

Mrs. Scott announced that TOPS will hold its winter concert on December 6 at 2:00 p.m., and the middle school will perform the play Grease on December 9 at 7:00 p.m. and on December 10 at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Mrs. Scott also spoke to the issue of middle school sports, noting that the girls’ soccer team made it to the playoffs. She also noted that basketball season is starting, and that because we are such a small school we need lots of boosters and cheerleaders to root the teams on. The middle school boys’ basketball team practices on Mondays and Wednesdays, and the girls practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Finally, Mrs. Scott stated that TOPS’ after school intensive Spanish classes start the Monday after Thanksgiving in Julie’s room, Leslie’s room, and the commons. She thanked the Site Council for helping fund student scholarships.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP TEAM (BLT)

Gerrit Kischner gave the BLT report, announcing that BLT is “robust,” and has already put major pieces of the transformation plan into place.

Gerrit stated that BLT is working on the “student in good standing” program, whereby middle school students must maintain a “C” average in every class in order to maintain their status. If students do not maintain a “C” average, they enter a probationary period whereby they are at risk of losing their athletic, dance, and non-academic field trip privileges. Gerrit noted that teachers have been very generous with their time to provide study hall time for students who need extra time to study at school.

Finally, Gerrit stated that BLT is working on how it can evaluate the work it’s doing. It is investigating what data it needs in order to be able to judge its effectiveness, specifically regarding the math and reading block programs.

FUNDRAISING

Marlies van Bergeijk gave the fundraising report. She stated that as of November 8, 20% of TOPS parents had sent in their No-Bake donations, for a total of $28,015 (this amount includes corporate matching and staff gifts). The No-Bake goal this year is $72,000.

Marlies also stated that TOPS did not host a Carnival this year because no parents volunteered to put one on; she noted that we are currently looking for parent volunteers to take on the Carnival project for next year.

DRAMA

Marlies also gave the drama report, stating that Grease rehearsals are going very well and that they are now in the middle of costuming. She also stated that the Grease Saturday matinee (on December 10) will be by donation, so that everyone can attend without worrying about cost. The non-matinee performances will cost $6 for adults and $4 for students.

Katie Waters stated that the third grade will perform A Midsummer Night’s Dream on February 16, 2006, and that they are currently conducting auditions and creating costumes.

COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CSJ)

Suzanne Oelke gave the CSJ report. Suzanne stated that CSJ is investigating applying for a mini grant of up to $500 for an intervention specialist to do a workshop at TOPS around issues of domestic violence.

CSJ is also working on words, ideas, and reminders for parents regarding how to confront and prevent bullying. Suzanne stated that CSJ has discussed other schools that have implemented the Olweus civility program; specifically how McMurray Middle School on Vashon Island has noticed a big and positive change in the atmosphere of the school since it implemented the program. She also stated that Mrs. Scott received a phone call from the principal at McGilvra Elementary in Seattle, who is also interested in implementing the program.

Finally, Suzanne stated that the next CSJ meeting on December 1 would feature Kindergarten teachers Joby and Joan, who will discuss how they address the school mission in their classrooms; the January CSJ meeting will feature the video Last Chance for Eden.

2006-2007 ASSIGNMENT PLAN

Maureen Germani discussed the 2006-2007 assignment plan, stating that the Seattle School Board revisits its assignment plan in November of each year. She stated that, just as it did this year, TOPS will dedicate 20% of its open Kindergarten seats in 2006-2007 (after siblings and ESL student placements) to children from the Eastlake neighborhood.
**Stewardship at TOPS: Zone Happy!**

*By Laurie Stusser-McNeil*

Some people look around outside at TOPS and see play equipment, plants, stairs, and parking spaces. Others see kids, parents, and teachers intermingling. Still others see architecture, views, and neighborhood.

What do we stewardship folks see? All of the above plus Zones! With input from the administration and teaching staff, we have divided the school and adjacent grounds into working areas for different grade bands to study, care for, and use as their environmental “laboratory.”

Teams (based on the kindergarten-5th grade buddy system) will soon be getting to know their zones quite well with regularly scheduled activities. Each class has a stewardship coordinator that will work with the Stewardship Committee and the teachers to develop interactive projects rich with environmental learning and citizenship opportunities. TOPICS in March will also focus on the zones, creating a school-wide Earth Day celebration.

It’s clear: we all want TOPS to grow kids who care about the earth! As the students move through their TOPS experience, they will eventually get to know each zone and see how they can leave their mark on the school environment. Everyone knows how litter can destroy a landscape, but our kids will also know how a little effort and a lot of team work and fun can leave the world a little better for those to come.

To join in the stewardship zone action, contact Laurie Stusser-McNeil, ljstusser@comcast.net.

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**Associated Student Body (ASB)**

Miguel Castro, president of the ASB, spoke briefly to the Site Council, stating he was pleased with students’ efforts toward Katrina relief and with the middle school’s latest dance. He noted that the middle school will have two more dances, with a third dance optional. Finally, he said that the ASB meets weekly except for the 2nd week of every month.

Finally, Marlies asked if anyone was interested in serving on the finance committee. Maureen Germani announced she would so serve. Marlies then adjourned the Site Council meeting and convened the Friends of TOPS meeting.

**Friends of TOPS**

Gerrit Kischner addressed Friends of TOPS (FOT) to request funds for furniture that TOPS will need when the school district delivers 132 new computers on Monday, November 14 (98 PCs and 34 MacIntoshes). The district, which will also be delivering document cameras, projectors, and sound field systems all by virtue of a tech levy which was passed a few years ago, told schools only that they would be receiving new technological equipment in one of the next five years. Therefore, because the TOPS finance committee did not know last year when it was setting its 2005/2006 budget whether or not it would need the funds to purchase computer furniture this year, it set aside what now amounts to approximately $14,000 in a contingency fund for that purpose. TOPS’ goal is to outfit two computer labs, one in the middle school and one in the elementary school.

FOT then engaged in a lengthy discussion of whether the by-laws permit FOT to commit funds from a contingency fund or whether it is permitted to commit funds mid-year.

Ultimately, FOT passed a motion to allocate $8,000 of the contingency fund for the purpose of purchasing furniture with instruction on how to allocate the remaining $6,275, contingent on determining the legality of the allocation.

Maureen Germani then adjourned the Friends of TOPS meeting and reconvened the Site Council meeting, at which point Kathy Wickward gave a brief presentation on the TOPS Mission Statement and Vision.
TOPS Mission

By Kathy Wickward

How can TOPS communicate its mission and vision to inform prospective parents about our school? Alternative schools in Seattle are unique because they are a community of students, parents, and teachers who choose to be there. No family is assigned to an alternative school by default. One would like to think that all families who chose TOPS carefully researched the school, compared it to other alternative and traditional schools, and then made an informed choice based on that information and on their family’s needs. (I didn’t, but here we are and happy to be here to boot.) Informed choice is one of the twelve characteristics of an alternative school, according to the Alternative Schools Committee, which presented its findings to the public last spring.

Alternative schools have a mission and vision, according to the committee. Many traditional schools also have missions and visions. Presumably all Seattle Public Schools, regardless of their designation as alternative or traditional, buy into the mission of the Seattle School district, articulated by the Board on their web page. Simply having a mission and vision apart from the district is one indicator of “alternativeness.” The statements themselves do not have to be radically different. The TOPS mission statement is not a radical departure from the district’s. Nor does it set us apart as “alternative.” It is likely our methods, rather than our mission, that make us unique.

At the last Site Council meeting, I gave a brief introduction to the information and ideas that I will present in this newsletter and at the December Site Council meeting. Some information is conspicuous by its absence. I chose not to go into the history of the current mission statement, although it may be important to note that the current mission and vision statements were developed primarily by staff, with parent input. Staff were informed by their consultant that the previous mission statement was in fact a “program description.” Parents have expressed concern about what has been left out of the current mission statement. For those of you who are interested, a brief history of TOPS mission statements (since 1996) may be found in the TOPS newsletter archives in the February 2005 newsletter.

A mission statement says who we are and what we do. So what does the mission statement say about us as a school community? In my presentation, I pick apart the text of the mission statement and identify four primary values. Those are:

- All students belong at TOPS.
- TOPS values cultural diversity, as well as all other forms of diversity.
- At TOPS, we value academic achievement (as defined by the district).
- At TOPS, we value social and emotional development, particularly in the areas of responsibility, respect and caring.

Although it is not expressly said that TOPS values our children’s social and emotional development to the same degree as academic achievement, it isn’t ruled out, either. Should that be stated more clearly? It’s worth further discussion.

In addition, a number of secondary values are stated. Those are:

- A safe environment.
- A stimulating environment (fun, interesting).
- Elimination of the achievement gap.

What does that last one mean to us? Well, it could mean one or all of the following:

- We will do what it takes to help all students.
- We are in line with district goals.
- We are particularly interested in attracting students traditionally underserved by the public school system, e.g. African Americans, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders and English language learners.

Is the mission statement clear? That’s a tough question that I can only answer for myself. It’s three long sentences, one of which has some subject/verb/adverb confusion. (Can you guess which one that is?) I haven’t quite figured out yet if “we” refers to teachers and staff, or if it includes parents and students. It took me a little while to pick out the 4 values that “we” have (and it helped that I’d been here a couple of years), but it took almost no time at all to find the verbs that state what “we” do: we educate, we help.

Continued on page 18
I was minding my own business one morning when all of a sudden I heard the sound of a large truck outside. Now I knew we were scheduled to receive our allotment of new computers from the 2003 BTA II Technology levy but that big truck got the adrenaline going. Reminded me of the rush I got on a construction site when the concrete truck arrived. Well things picked up dramatically as the 98 Dell computers were unloaded and stacked in the library. From there they were delivered to the assigned areas. Packing material was flyin’.

Curious students were pressing eyeballs to the glass wanting to know when they could use the new computers. Several days later we received 33 eMac computers in colorful white boxes. It’s all in the packaging. Still to arrive are projection devices, document cameras and sound field systems. This new technology will allow all of our students access to tools to help in their educational trip through TOPS.

A reminder of a great resource to take advantage of is the student resources page designed and operated by Seattle Schools. Found at www.seattleschools.org/area/library/stuindex.xml this site affords students and parents access to subscription services that are free for us to use. Remember the username is W001CSEATL (all caps). The password is WELCOME (all caps). You can also access our library catalog from this page. Things keep changing on this page so it is good to keep going back to it. How about this; you have a homework question which no one understands. With a Seattle Public library card and pin number you can log on and contact them by email. From what I understand the response is very fast. Sounds good.

The bookstores have their fall books in, and it’s like I’ll take one each please. Watch for the wish list coming soon to the TOPS website. I’m working my way through the newest Harry Potter. I remember when the Chamber of Secrets came out, we had a long waiting list to read it, but now everyone has read the new book, and for some more than once. It’s amusing listening to some of them brag about how fast they read it. Nice to see Harry is finally growing up. I’m also reading the third book in the Lionboy trilogy, The Truth. Written by Zizoa Corder, the pen name for the mother-daughter writing team of Lousia Young and Isabel Adomakoh Young, the story continues with Charlie who has the ability to talk to cats. It’s one futuristic adventure after another. Perfect for 4th grade and up.
Kindergarten and 5th grade buddies see spawning salmon at the Cedar River

Kindergarten and 5th grade buddies went to the Cedar River last month to learn about spawning salmon as part of their study of the salmon life cycle and habitat. Thanks to the teachers and all of the volunteers for making this annual event possible.

Photos provided by Joan O’Connor
One of the distinguishing characteristics of TOPS is a strong Arts curriculum, including Music programs that provide opportunities for grades Kindergarten through 8th.

Studies have shown that participation in music correlates with improved academic performance in math and reading. Music also reinforces listening, focus, individual discipline, and patience, and teaches how to work with others in an alternative group setting.

Music instruction has traditionally had very strong support from the TOPS community, something reinforced last spring in the many replies to a music committee survey. Nearly all of the music offered at TOPS is paid for by Friends of TOPS, through contributions to the No- Bake Sale and purchases at the spring auction.

Because of our school’s mission of equity and justice, and because the school district provides minimal support for music, this funding from the TOPS community ensures equal access for all students regardless of economic background.

Music instruction at TOPS has multiple components. The K-2 classes meet weekly, and are led in singing by dynamic TOPS Choir Director Sari Breznau, who brings a vast knowledge of folk, social justice, world music, and choral material. Sari has been on leave this fall, first touring with her neo-vaudeville troupe Circus Contraption, and then traveling to Asia to collaborate with other international artists on an arts festival in Taiwan and a puppet festival in Bangkok.

While Sari is gone this fall, violinist Irene Mitri has been ably filling in, leading the K-2 classes as well as the two TOPS choirs, the Hummingbirds (grades 3-4) and Inspire Choir (grades 5-8). The Hummingbirds Choir meets one day a week during lunch, and Inspire Choir meets twice a week, once during lunch and once after lunch.

In addition to the choirs, students in fourth through eighth grade can participate in instrumental music. Fourth graders can begin to learn an instrument from a district provided instructor; this year’s instructor is Dan Yarr.

After fourth grade, Friends of TOPS pays for band and strings instruction. Instruction on band instruments is offered during school hours by multi-instrumentalist Paul Gillespie, and includes weekly sectionals and a bi-weekly session that brings all of the middle school players together in a band setting.

Frequently mentioned in last spring’s music committee survey was the desire to see stronger and more focused instruction on stringed instruments. This year for the first time TOPS has a dedicated strings instructor, the dynamic and talented violinist Erica Brewer, who has been leading weekly before school sessions of intermediate and advanced string players.

Both the choirs and band students perform in at least two all school concerts, one in December, and one in late spring. They also have other opportunities to perform, such as the Martin Luther King Jr. Day assembly and Spring Passage. This year’s winter concert takes place on December 6 at 2:00 p.m.

To inspire our middle school band students, the music committee is planning field trips for our older students to observe rehearsals of the award-winning Roosevelt and Garfield High jazz programs. It’s important for students to know what great opportunities lie ahead at the high school level, and to experience first-hand what will be expected of them as teen musicians.
**TOPS FAMILY SKI WEEKEND**

*(After no snow last year we’re optimistic for piles of the fluffy stuff this winter!)*

By Julie Braybrooks

February 23, 24, 25, 26, 2006

If you haven’t tried this TOPS tradition before, try it this winter. The latter part of our mid-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 as well as tubing and cross country skiing nearby. Non-skiers have also found snow shoeing is great fun on trails alongside ski slopes. Go to www.missionridge.com for more information.

The Cedars Inn has set aside a block of rooms for TOPS families to reserve. The deadline for reservations is February 3, 2006. Rooms are at the low rate of $63 plus tax per night. The Cedars Inn is just 20 minutes from Mission Ridge, across the road from the mighty rolling Columbia in East Wenatchee. They offer an improved continental breakfast with a waffle maker and espresso machine, indoor pool, and a new outdoor hot tub. They’ve also spiffed up the rooms.

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

Traditionally we have held a family potluck Friday night (6:30) in a banquet room the Cedars Inn provides. Bring a dish for 6 – 8 people and a beverage to share. Many families prefer to drive over on Thursday to have a full day of skiing on Friday.

If someone would like to organize a group purchase of lift tickets (15 or more), look on the Mission Ridge website at group sales. If you have a Summit at Snoqualmie season pass bring it along; in 2004 we were given a 30% discount for showing it. Also that year Texaco gave “buy one get one free lift ticket” for Friday skiing with any gas purchase. One year Subway shops did; keep your eyes open and let us know if you see any Mission Ridge lift giveaways this winter.

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 twelve, fifteen years or more tradition?

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**SKI CLUB: A BRIGHTER (WHITER) YEAR**

By Teresa Nemeth

Remember those delicate, cold fluffed crystals that collect to adorn peaks to the east and west? Remember how dismal rain down here means lovely snow up there?

Last year being one interminable pineapple-growing season, we had nearly forgotten, but now the flakes have returned and TOPS kids are ready to go. Four Friday afternoons in January and February, as well as Friday morning, February 3, the ski bus will depart TOPS and head to Snoqualmie Pass, where middle schoolers from around the city will meet to ski, snowboard, and generally have a good time. Even the bus ride, I’m told, can be half the fun. Lessons are available at a special group rate, and TOPS students will be taught with other TOPS students at their ability level. Parent chaperones will ride with each bus and remain available on the mountain to help with gear, cold fingers, finding food, or whatever is needed.

Skiing is not cheap, as some of us under-funded mountain addicts are forced to acknowledge every single winter, but thanks to the generosity of a number of TOPS families, scholarships are available to those truly in need.

Skis and boards can be had on loan from the mountain or from shops down here, purchased new or used, or traded in swap programs. Ask around if you need help figuring out what to wear. Rule of thumb: no cotton. Snoqualmie Summit is at a wet 3,000 feet.

Many thanks to Keith Cohon and Molly LaPatra for their excellent organization of this year’s program and for representing the seventh grade families, and to Mary Harty for unknotting the budget tangle from last year’s sadly interrupted season. Thanks to Michael Seibel and Joe Foye for heading up the sixth grade families, and to Gretchen Chambers for coordinating the eighth grade families.

Why is Ellen Markman always in the position of collecting checks? (Thanks so much, Ellen.) Janice Lovell, eighth grade parent, has gracefully handled scholarships for a number of years – thank you, Janice – and we will need to find a replacement next year. Finally, thank you to Helen Hundley in the office for . . . everything, all the time!

You can find beautifully clear information about the ski program on the TOPS web site under “After School.” Let’s all think snow and – stop driving, or something.
**Math Curriculum**  
*By Mark Ellis, 7th-8th grade math teacher*

I am on the Math Adoption Committee for the district. We are currently working towards an adoption of curriculum materials K-12 for Seattle Public Schools. I would like to hear from you about math curriculum, the good and the bad. Send your comments to me at mellis@seattleschools.org and I will compile and forward them to the members of the adoption committee. Later, there will be a time to look at the materials being considered at several different open houses at the John Stanford Center.

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**A K-12 Math Curriculum Adoption is Underway in Seattle Public Schools**

**What Are We Doing?**

The Fall of 2005 marked the beginning of a district-wide focus on mathematics in Seattle Schools. In October, the Board approved the allocation of funding for a K-12 Mathematics Adoption – the first in 12 years for high schools. The last adoption for elementary math materials occurred in 1998 and for middle school mathematics was in 2000.

**Why Are We Adopting New Curriculum Materials?**

While students are demonstrating increases in reading achievement, student math achievement gains are slower than we’d like. District WASL scores can be viewed at [http://www.seattleschools.org/area/math/math-adoption/mathadoptionhome.htm](http://www.seattleschools.org/area/math/math-adoption/mathadoptionhome.htm)

Our goal is to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning so that all students can learn significant mathematics and have equitable opportunities for high achievement. As a result of the adoption, schools (teachers) will use instructional materials and strategies that are the same in content, scope, sequencing and approach, so that students moving from one grade to another and one school to another will have similar experiences.

**What Does the Research Say?**

Research on learning suggests that, in addition to effective teaching strategies, high student achievement requires:

- Curriculum and instruction to be focused on standards.
- Assessments aligned to monitor student progress, and curriculum to be coordinated/articulated within and between grade levels.
- Support for culturally relevant student learning and effective instruction.

These ideas will direct our adoption work.

**What is the Timeline?**

In mid October, the district began an adoption process that has included selecting an Adoption Committee of teachers, families, principals, instructional assistants and coaches. The committee has representation from ELL, Special Education, and various ethnic groups. The committee will get feedback from all over the city to help them choose the best program for teaching our kids.

- In November, the Adoption Committee will develop the screening criteria. Several opportunities for families and community members will be offered to increase awareness and understanding of the math adoption rationale and process.
- In December and January, the Adoption Committee will identify the final candidate programs. Opportunities will be provided for educators, families, and the community to review the candidate programs and offer feedback.
- In February and March, Adoption Committee members will complete a comprehensive evaluation of the candidate programs. The committee will recommend a math program to the School Board in April. The School Board will make the final decision.

For more information please e-mail Rosalind Wise at reise@seattleschools.org

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**Grease**  
*By Julie Jamieson*

“Grease is still the word.” The middle school production this year is the ever popular musical Grease. This is a new endeavor for TOPS and all involved are getting very excited. We want to break all box office records and get the word out now that this production will be completely appropriate for children OF ALL AGES. We are doing the “kids” version of Grease, so all objectionable references are omitted. So please support the drama program and bring your elementary age children! The production will open December 9 at 7:00, with performances on Saturday, December 10 at 2:00 and 7:00. Greased Lightning!
TOPS Historical Society

By Toby Harris

September 26, 1989 Newsletter

155 students, Kindergarten through 5th grade, Principal: Karen Kodama (TOPS was part of Stevens Elementary).

- TOPS will participate in Ackerley Communications’ “Larger Than Life” billboard contest in conjunction with the Goodwill Games. Children’s art will be selected, enlarged, and mounted side by side with a Soviet student’s art. Students are going on a field trip to Ackerley to see how billboards are made.

- Teachers whose names you may recognize:
  - Susan Mamlock (Goforth) – 4th grade
  - Louise Chacartegui – 2nd grade
  - Steve Haines – 3rd grade
  - Mary (Tien-Hui) Chao – 4th grade
  - Tom Rowe – 5th grade

- TOPICS are offered Monday through Thursday, 2-2:45
- Parent’s Survey – 1989
  Responses received from 79 families. The summary does not indicate what percentage of TOPS population of that is return rate. All options were rated on a scale of 1 to 6 the extent to which they liked or did not like:
  - #1 = Expand TOPS K-5 and move
  - #2 = Expand TOPS K-8 and move
  - #3 = Keep TOPS the same at Stevens site

Option #2 was “most favorably rated” with 79.7% “likes;” 59.5% liked Option #1 and 57% liked Option #3.

Families also indicated higher support to be an All-City Draw school (50.6%), compared to 31.6% for Zone II only, and 15.2% for Zone I and II.

- City of Seattle Education Summit, April 1990
  Parents are encouraged to attend meetings at over 20 locations. Suggestions and ideas pertinent to TOPS were listed as:
  - Lower class size and teacher increase in pay
  - Ideas to overcome disproportionality
  - Expansion of programs that work (such as TOPS)
  - Quality daycare and after-school offerings that may include academic assistance

TOPICS

By Tracy Seefeld, 3rd grade teacher

TOPICS has always been an incredibly powerful part of our curriculum at TOPS, and a big part of what makes us different. If you ask the children, for many it is their favorite part of the day. TOPICS is a multi-age, reduced class-size, enrichment opportunity for kids. Teachers, parents, middle school students, and community members come together to teach TOPICS. Grades 1-5 are included in TOPICS. We encourage leaders to design their TOPIC to be suitable for multi-age groups. TOPICS are scheduled for two consecutive days, Thursday and Friday from 2:25 p.m. - 3:20 p.m. Former TOPICS include sign language, chess, knitting, math games, art, cooking, poetry, and opera. The opportunities are endless. But we can’t do it without your help. We need everyone to volunteer. Please join us and teach an academic subject or a passion you have!

TOPICS DATES CONFIRMED THIS YEAR ARE:

- January 26th & 27th
- February 16th & 17th
- March 9th & 10th
- April 6th & 7th - Stewardship
- May 11th & 12th

It is helpful to have your commitment as soon as possible, at least 14 days before the Thursday TOPIC date. Contact our TOPICS Coordinator, Tracy Seefeld at tseefeld@seattleschools.org, or Randi Niemer, raniemer@seattleschools.org. Sign up now to help! Thank you.

It’s Coming, It’s Coming

By Kathy Wickward for the TOPS Auction Committee

Heads up!

Whoa, look out!

It’s coming, it’s coming – MAY 6TH.

Got that? Put it in your calendar.

It’s the date for the TOPS annual auction.

If you want to board this train and ride it with the auction committee, these cars are wide open:

PROCUREMENT - we need someone (or two someones) to take charge of “filling in the blanks;” helping to fill up those tables with all the cool stuff TOPS shoppers love to bid on.

CLASS BASKETS - this person coordinates with the classroom volunteers to put together themed baskets full of goodies to sell.

Also we need:

A RAFFLE COORDINATOR - to find the prize and make sure the tickets are sold, and

A DESSERT DIVA (OR TWO) - to scour the local pastry shops and bakeries and find a sweet finish to the auction dinner for every table.

Want to help, but don’t know what to do? We will find you a place! Contact Tammy Luthy at thejeffandtammyshow@comcast.net, or by telephone at 322-3784.
TOPS MIDDLE SCHOOL SAILING TOPIC

By Don Zemke, PE Teacher

The morning of our fall Middle School Topic turned out to be perfect. We had beautiful blue sky, mild temperatures, a nice breeze from the south, and 16 eager TOPS sailors.

We were greeted at Shilshole Bay Marina by our wonderful volunteer sailors, TOPS alumni Alex Marts and TOPS parent Boyd Marts aboard their 30’ Islander; B.F. Day kindergarten teacher Stuart Corsa aboard his 27’ O’Day (I assured him that that spending the day with middle school students wouldn’t be much different then spending the day with his kindergarteners); and myself with my 23’ San Juan.

After leaving the marina we first pulled up a crab pot that I had set the night before and found it full of crabs. The male keepers soon were named and became our traveling companions for the rest of the expedition . . . we then passed the channel marker which gave the sailors a chance to bark at the sea lions that were lying upon it. The sea lions were more then happy to reply.

The sails were hoisted and we steadily made progress toward Blake Island. Students learned sailing techniques, sailing terms, and aboard my boat, how to use the electronic chart plotter, GPS, and depth sounder. Jessica liked the fish finder, and wanted to stop and fish every time we came over a bunch of salmon!

We made it to Blake Island without losing any, sailors even though I was tempted to keel-haul Marja Scott since her mom gave me permission to do so. Upon arrival we ate lunch, talked about the history of Blake Island and how the island was a summer camp for local Native Americans, and is thought to be the birthplace of Chief Seattle. The students then had time to explore the east side of the island checking out the beaches, campground, and the great views of Seattle and Mt. Rainier before having to head back all too quickly.

We had a nice sail back aboard different boats, saw a lot of wildlife, found some more crabs in the pot, and hopefully gave students an idea of what it’s like to sail around Puget Sound. Many thanks to Alex, Boyd, and Stuart, our great volunteers, and to you TOPS parents who supported this excellent adventure.

THE SAILING TOPIC

By Emily Mathay, Grade 8

We started off at TOPS getting into cars. We took off heading to Shilshole Bay. When we got to the dock, everyone gathered around Don as he read off the names of the people on the boats. I was on the 27 foot sail boat with Sinclaire, Shannon, Nikki, and Megan. We set off, using the motor to get out of the bay. As soon as we get into the open, the sails are put up, and we got to help. We got to learn how to sail a sail boat, and got to steer.

When we got to Blake Island, we ate lunch, and immediately found out that many geese lived there. (We had to be careful where we stepped.) We headed to the tire swing, and had a lot of fun spinning on it.

There was a deer, and it came really close to us. Then, it was time to head back, and we switched boats. When we got back, I wished we were still sailing, it even felt like it.

I headed home happy. I hope I can do this topic again.
My goodness, oldies but goodies like me are still around. I came to TOPS @ Stevens 16-17 years ago. I look at the changes from one class per grade to two from K-5 to K-8, and in wonder, I do miss the portables, but love the elevator! I remember when we sold Christmas trees, made, wrapped and delivered pizzas to families, sold kid-made calendars, and recipe booklets. The intent of the No-Bake is to ease the money, time and energy required to pull off fund-raising. You save time and energy by just sending the money.

Oldies but goodies, my goodness – has it really been 16 years?
~ Mary Tien-Hui Chao, 4th grade teacher.

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**What is the deadline for No-Bake donations?**
Our No-Bake ends on December 31. We will gladly take donations until the first week of January due to our long winter break.

**How are our No-Bake donations used?**
Look closely at where our No-Bake funds are used. Scroll down the following list and recognize the many ways your No-Bake donation serves your child, your family, and our community.

Here are just a few of the programs supported directly by your donation:
- our school counselor, Jennifer
- our elementary art teacher, Cynthia
- elementary science with Mr. Bloedel
- science materials for all grade levels
- school directory and newsletters
- tutoring
- literacy block
- library supplies & multicultural books
- middle school & elementary plays
- choir program
- instrumental music program
- Oleweus anti-bullying program
- volunteer coordinator
- 3rd grade drama program
- Taste of TOPS
- 8th grade passage
- ACT Theatre Young Playwright program
- supplies for every teacher & classroom
- childcare during meetings
- Spanish lesson & sailing lesson scholarships
- Sports team uniforms
- Safety committee

PLUS many, many more beneficial educational opportunities for our kids.

**Where can I get more information about the No-Bake?**
Budget Info & No-Bake Updates: [http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/ops/](http://www.seattleschools.org/schools/ops/).

Questions About Your Donation: Kris Johnston, No-Bake Treasurer, 285-0284, kjohnston@columbiahospitality.com.

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**Why do the families have to fund core programs as well as enrichment programs?**
The Seattle School District is in financial crisis. Increasingly, the families of TOPS have been called upon to fund core programs in addition to the enrichment that we think is important to our children and our community.

**How often are the families contacted about the No-Bake?**
The No-Bake campaign consists of three letter appeals mailed to parents. When a family donates, their name is removed from the mailing list. We will limit emails from the committee to four over the length of the twelve-week campaign. Room reps and teachers may send along their own messages. Weekly updates of our totals are available on the TOPS website and are posted throughout the TOPS building.

**Why is there no carnival this year?**
The No-Bake decided to go back to basics this year. The carnival was a fantastic community event and a fun kick-off to the No-Bake fund drive. Unfortunately, our budget has become so tight that the No-Bake committee decided to run a basic mail campaign this year. We are paying for three mailings and are hoping to keep our expenses very low.

**Can we use our credit card to donate to the No-Bake?**
Yes! We can accept donations via MasterCard or Visa. You fill out the donation form in your No-Bake letter or download a form on the No-Bake link on the TOPS Website. You can also contact Kris Johnston, the No-Bake treasurer, at 285-0284 for more information.

**Is my donation to the No-Bake tax deductible?**
Absolutely. FRIENDS OF TOPS is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit entity (TAX ID 94-3142402).

**Can my employer match my No-Bake charitable donation?**
Many, many employers will match the charitable donation of their employees. Your employer’s matching donation will double your gift to FRIENDS OF TOPS. Please contact your human resources department to fill out the necessary form. FRIENDS OF TOPS is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit entity (TAX ID 94-3142402).

So . . . DON’T BAKE – DONATE!
NO-BAKE CONTRIBUTORS  As of November 18, 2005

Kris and Christine Aamot
Tsegareda Adal
Linda and Michael Adams
Gloria Alberta and Frank Fabens
Anonymous
Jane Ao
Jeff and Mary Beth Bert
Scott and Jessica Bishop
Dana and Eric Blazevic
Jean Bradbury
Bonnie and Frank Cech
Renee and William Ceriale
Mary Chao
Andrea Chin and Vance Martin
Steve and Christine Naranjo Clarke
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Therese Coad
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Tran Ngoc Hung
Chinh Tran
Kate and Cliff Trent
Greg Tuai and Benling Wong
Winfired Weiner
Susan Welch
Jim and Susan Wells
Gasborie Wong
Brad Wood
Michael and Tracy Wrey

If your name is missing from the contributors list or corrections need to be made, please contact Kris Johnston, No-Bake financial coordinator, at 285-0824 or kjohnston@columbiashospitality.com.

2005-06 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.

December

1 (Th) ........... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
6 (T) ............. Winter Concert, 2 p.m. in the gym
9 (F) ............. Middle School play, Grease, 7 p.m.
10 (Sa) .......... Middle School play, Grease, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.
13 (T) ........... BLT meeting, 4 p.m.
13 (T) ........... High School choices night, 7-9 p.m.
in the cafeteria
14 (W) ........... Young Author’s Conference
14 (W) .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
16 (F) .......... 1-hour early dismissal
19-30 (M-F) .... Winter break; no school

January

2 (M) ............ Winter break; no school
3 (T) ............ Classes resume
5 (Th) ............ CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
10 (T) .......... Newsletter deadline
10 (T) .......... BLT meeting, 4 p.m.
11 (W) .......... 2nd grade, Elem. SE, DHH to SCT
11 (W) .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
16 (M) .......... Martin Luther King Jr. Day; no school

February

2 (Th) .......... End of semester
2 (Th) .......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
3 (F) .......... Day between semesters; no school
7 (T) .......... 1st & 3rd grades, Elem. SE to SCT
8 (W) .......... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
8 (W) .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
14 (T) .......... BLT meeting, 4 p.m.
14 (T) .......... Newsletter deadline
15 (W) .......... DHH to SCT
20 (M) .......... Presidents Day; no school
21-24 (T-F) .... Mid-winter break; no school

March

1 (W) .......... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
2 (Th) .......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
8 (W) .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
14 (T) .......... Newsletter deadline
17 (F) .......... Professional development day; no school
21 (T) .......... 6th-8th grades, Middle school SE to SCT

April

5 (W) .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
6 (Th) .......... 2nd-5th grades to SCT
6 (Th) .......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
10-14 (M-F) .... Spring break; no school
21 (F) .......... End of third quarter

May

4 (Th) .......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
6 (Sa) .......... TOPS Auction at the Asian Resource Center
9 (T) .......... Newsletter deadline
10 (W) .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
12 (F) .......... Kindergarten to SCT
17 (W) .......... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
24 (W) .......... 1st-3rd grades and Elem. SE, DHH to SCT
29 (M) .......... Memorial Day; no school

June

1 (Th) .......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
21 (W) .......... Last student day
Ultrama Frisbee: Notes From The B Team

By Joelle Worthley, Grade 6

My brother started playing Ultimate Frisbee when he was in 6th grade, and that’s pretty much what inspired me to play. When I would watch his games, I liked the fact that it was self-refereed, and you could call a foul and not have to count on referees seeing it. It’s the first sport I’ve seen that’s almost entirely about having fun, and the competition isn’t supposed to matter.

Now that I’m old enough to play (6th grade), I joined the team in September and loved it. In the first couple of practices, we mostly had competitions so the coaches could see what you could do. We had a competition for accuracy where they placed a cone about 15 feet away, and you could try to throw the Frisbee closest to the cone. In later practices, we’d warm up by throwing the Frisbee back and forth, then we’d run around Rogers Field, then we’d scrimmage or play Keep-Away, and see which group could get to ten passes without any interference first.

The Ultimate Frisbee games are played on the Ingraham turf soccer fields, and they’re really fun, a lot funner than the practices in my opinion, because they’re self-refereed and everybody’s really nice to each other. At the end of each game, we have to make up a short cheer for the other team, and then we give them a Spirit Rating from 1 to 5 according to how nice they were. Making up the cheers is one of the funnest parts of Ultimate Frisbee and it’s really challenging sometimes.

To play Ultimate Frisbee, you start the game by lining up on either end of the field. Then the team that’s “throwing off” throws the Frisbee as far as they can towards the other team. Then the receiving team runs out and picks up the disc. The object of the game is to pass the Frisbee to your teammates down the field and have one of your teammates catch it behind the goal line, and touch the ground with it. There’s no traveling, no double-teaming, and when you’re guarding someone, you count to ten slowly, and if they haven’t thrown the Frisbee by “ten”, it’s a turnover and goes to the other team. You can also call a foul if someone fouls you, and you can call “out-of-bounds.”

In our last game of the season, in which we lost the Division Championship to A.S.1, we started the cheer off with Max Nowinski and Kalia Hobbs doing a takeoff on Napoleon Dynamite. The mascot of A.S.1 is the Wolverine, and Max remembered that Napoleon said that he spent the summer hunting wolverines. So Kalia said: “Hey Napoleon, what did you do over the summer?”

Then Max said: “I played Ultimate Frisbee with the Wolverines, duh!”
Then Kalia said: “Did you block any passes?”
Then Max said: “About a hundred of them, duh!”

Then our whole team cheered:
“A.S.1, you had us on the run, you hit us like a gun, We had lots of fun, you’re Number One, Go A.S. 1!”

The A.S.1 team was particularly challenging because they are an all-school team, whereas we are the TOPS B Team and we are all 6th graders. They had an 8th grader who was over 6 feet tall! After the cheer, we rated their spirit score about a 2 because they were sorta swearing sometimes and they wouldn’t always say “Sorry” when they hurt you. Then we had donuts.

The coaches are the best part of Ultimate Frisbee. Mr. Durand and Don are really nice, and they’re both good at Frisbee, of course. People who are going to be in 6th grade next year should definitely join, because it’s awesome!
**TOPS Girls Soccer 2005**

*By Maya and Madeline, Grade 7*

Way to go TOPS! We made it to the playoffs! Out of twenty people at the practices, some games we barely had enough people to play, and others we had about one sub. On the team, we had players everywhere from select players to first time ever soccer players.

Our two coaches this year, Leila and Karen, were great! All the games were really fun. We especially got psyched up for the play-off game and lost a close one to Whitman who normally beats their opponents by 8 to 10 points!

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**ILLUSTRATED IDIOMS FROM MARY CHAO’S CLASS**

IDIOM: A group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meaning of each word understood on its own.

"**HIT THE BOOKS**"  **READ A BOOK**

"**ZIP YOUR LIP**"  **BE QUIET!**

"**CATCH SOME ZS**"  **GO TO SLEEP**

"**CUT IT OUT**"  **QUIT IT**

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Photos provided by Don Zemke
**School Dance**

*By Finley Baba, Grade 8*

The first dance this year, the Spookie boo, Boogie boo, Spookie bookie boo or whatever else people called it, had a Halloween theme complete with glow-in-the-dark ghosts on the walls, which doubled as souvenirs. The funny thing is that when we were in sixth grade, we stood in little groups giggling at the eighth graders who were going crazy on the dance floor but I’m pretty sure my friends and I were some of the first to start dancing this year. One of my friends who had skipped all the sixth and seventh grade dances, because he considered them a waste of five bucks and a Friday night, came to this one and said he had fun and promised that he would be going to the next dance. Despite its name these dances are a fun place to hang out with your friends outside of class even if you don’t like dancing.

**TOPS Mission continued from page 6**

The vision statement represents where we want the mission to take us; it’s our overall goal as a school. It spotlights another value, one that is not necessarily stated at the district level. TOPS values its youth as members of the community, and our goal is that they will grow up to be active participants in that community. Not only that, we expect our youth to be committed to the ideal of social justice, to contribute to that aim. That’s a very specific goal, and stated very clearly. Is it alternative? Gosh, I hope not.

The mission and vision statements are available in many venues: in the library, in the classrooms, on the website, on the front of the directory. They are used among the staff in their planning, in interviews, in the transformation plan, and in the budget process. In that respect, it is a living statement. It does not simply fill in a required blank to appease the bureaucracy with fashionable catch phrases.

So how can it be used to inform parents of our identity as a school? Parents want to know what makes us different from the other schools they have toured. The mission statement is only a small part of that. We need to talk openly and frequently about the unique ways in which TOPS programs support the mission and vision.

We have two opportunities to do this. We can reach parents when they visit the school, and when they visit the website. We can carefully choose what written material we give to parents on the tour, and we can develop a common script for tour leaders, anticipating typical questions parents have, and working our mission and vision into the answers. The program page on the TOPS website needs a rewrite for clarity, which can be done using the mission and vision as a unifying theme.

Those who are interested in being a part of the discussion about TOPS' mission and vision and informing parent choice are invited to attend the December 14 Site Council meeting. We’ll be in the library at 5 p.m., with the topic presentation starting at approximately 6 p.m. Childcare is available.
**A MONTHLY CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS**

**What TOPS Families Are Celebrating**

Compiled by Lynne Goodrich (CSJ Member)

**DECEMBER 2005 HOLIDAYS**

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

Dec. 16 – 24: **Las Posadas** (Mexico, USA) / Simbanag Gabi (Philippines) Candlelight parades commemorate Joseph and Mary’s search for shelter in Bethlehem. Celebrants recreate 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, Druid solstice) have been adopted as part of the Christmas celebration (lights, holly, holiday tree, Wassailing, gift giving for example).

Dec. 25 – Jan 1: **Hannukah** (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. 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. 31st and family feasts are held on New Year’s Day.

**JANUARY 2006 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 Twelfth tide. Celebration of the visit of the Magi.

Jan. 10: **Eid al-adha** (Muslim) Feast of Sacrifice is a very important feast of the Muslim calendar. Commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. It is part of the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

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

Jan. 15: **World Religion Day** Established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’i faith. Dedicated to increasing interfaith understanding and cooperation.

Jan. 16: **Martin Luther King Day** (USA) Celebration of the birth of the great USA civil rights leader (Born Jan 15, 1929).

Jan 29: **Lunar New Year** (China/Vietnam/Korea) The event takes place during the first three days of the first lunar month. For the Chinese the New Year is the most colorful, joyous, and important festival. For Chinese-Americans, the celebration depends on family or community customs. One popular custom is giving children good luck money in special red envelopes. In the 12-year cycle, one of 12 animals represents each year. 2006 is the year of the dog.

Jan 29: **Tet Nguyen Dan** (Vietnam) Marks the beginning of the lunar new year and arrival of spring. Tet is the most popular festival in Vietnam and has been celebrated since at least 500 B.C.E. The goal of Tet is to begin the year right and Customs include paying off debts, resolving conflicts in relationships, and giving gifts.

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**STEVENS ELEMENTARY INVITATION**

TOPS students are invited to enroll in any of the 16 courses offered at Stevens Elementary after school from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. for fun and enrichment. This program seeks to provide unique opportunities for your child’s development through classes in the arts, sciences, sports, and other creative topics such as sewing, woodworking, and sign language. For a full course listing, log on to www.stevenselementary.org and click on “after school.”

By Hana Wrigley
DECEMBER IS THE FINAL MONTH
OF OUR TOPS NO-BAKE FUND DRIVE

WE ARE PREPARED TO ANSWER ALL OF YOUR BURNING NO-BAKE QUESTIONS.

What is a NO-BAKE fund drive?
How are our NO-BAKE donations used?
Did you know the NO-BAKE funds pay for this newsletter?
Are you stumped about how much to donate?
How much longer will we see the “cupcake”?

Look inside to find an informative NO-BAKE Frequently Asked Questions Page.

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