HAPPY FALL TO ALL OF YOU

Thank you parents and staff for four successful Curriculum Nights. We are already at mid-term for middle school students. Middle school parents, check the mail! Midterms will be mailed soon! These reports let you know how your student is progressing through the first term of the school year.

HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORT – Catrice Dennis, AmeriCorps member at TOPS, organized a very successful Hurricane Relief Project to send school supplies and personal care items in backpacks to students in Berg Jones Elementary School in Monroe, Louisiana and Jefferson Middle School in Columbia, Mississippi. Thank you to all who contributed to the effort.

NO-BAKE – Our No-Bake is in progress and we have already received many donations. The No-Bake provides critical funding for programs not funded by the school budget and we need your support. There is a box in the main office if you choose to drop off your No-Bake donation. Otherwise, it can be mailed in the envelope provided. We are on our way to achieving our goal of $72,000!

MIDDLE SCHOOL PLAY – Our students have auditioned for a part in the middle school play, Grease. Performances will be December 9 and 10. We always need many parent volunteers to make this a successful event. You may call or e-mail Julie Jamieson or Randi Niemer if you are able to help.

CHESS CLUB – Our Chess Club has begun and there are over 30 students participating. We are grateful to Michael Adams and the other parent volunteers for keeping this program active.

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES – Parent-teacher conferences are important for your child to succeed at TOPS. We had 98% participation last year and we are striving for 100% this year! Middle school parents, please remember to call in to make an appointment if you were not able to sign up on Curriculum Night. Elementary parents will be contacted by their student’s teacher

ONE FAMILY’S STORY

By Kristina Hagman and Kaya Masler

Hi. My name is Kristina Hagman. My daughter Nora Masler is new to TOPS this year as a 4th grader. At the same time she started a new school I had to start a new job that takes me away from home by 5 a.m. I knew my older daughter would help (she is almost 14), but I was still worried about how my younger daughter would do going on a school bus for the first time. Without being prompted my older daughter wrote this story about Nora’s first day. I do not know if this is the sort of thing you like but please use it if it fits your format. We are so happy to be at TOPS. We understand if it does not fit.

Kaya is an 8th grader at the Northwest School. When we moved to Seattle from New Mexico, the year Kaya was to start Kindergarten, we started applying to TOPS. After eight years of trying, this year our family was lucky enough to be accepted at TOPS. Thanks, Kristina

September 7, 2005

This morning I walked my little sister to the bus stop for her first day at a new school. My parents were both working, so it was just us. I gave her a little pink paper clip that I had kept since the fifth grade, and had thought used to give me luck. When we got down to the bus stop there was no one there. No kids and no busses. I told her as I read the back of the slip the school gave out,
**W E ’ R E  T H A N K F U L  F O R  V O L U N T E E R S**

Thanks to all who are doing such a wonderful job of volunteering. We have lunch/recess monitors, Seattle Kids Marathon mileage recorders, tutors, field trip chaperones, and lots of classroom volunteers, to name just a few. I also want to extend a big thank you to class Room Reps. They do a great job of helping the teachers with a myriad of tasks and I couldn’t do my job without them. Thank you Room Reps!

As you may have noticed, this year’s edition of the TOPS Directory is out. It looks great and I know we’ll all get lots of use from it. Many, many hours were spent on this huge project. It was rebuilt from the ground up this year and we have Ellen & Jon Markman to thank. So please, if you see either one of them, please take the time to say thank you. Many thanks, Ellen & Jon.

~Randi Niemer, Volunteer Coordinator

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**INTRODUCING . . . SARAH CAUSEY AND CATRICE DENNIS, AMERICORPS VOLUNTEERS**

By Ann Simonson

AmeriCorps was formally launched in 1993 when President Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act, which brought the full range of domestic community service programs under the umbrella of one central organization. AmeriCorps is a network of local, state, and national service programs that connects more than 70,000 Americans each year in service to meet the country’s needs in education, public safety, health, and the environment. Volunteers sign on for an 11-month commitment. We at TOPS are fortunate to have two wonderful volunteers working with us this year, Sarah Causey and Catrice Dennis.

Both Sarah and Catrice felt compelled to do service work. Catrice was working as an insurance agent, and was feeling uninspired by her career choice. She stumbled upon AmeriCorps through the Fremont Public Association website. She had often thought of working in the schools, and AmeriCorps seemed like a great way to start. She has decided she would like to use the AmeriCorps education grant she’ll receive to pursue more schooling with a major in social work. Her goal is to become a family support worker in the schools.

Sarah worked as a dance teacher, and decided to take a break so she could do work which was more activism oriented. She has always enjoyed working with children, so she was also eager to work in a school setting. Her dream is to some day start a performance group, and to explore connections between activism and art. She’s also interested in teaching at-risk youth.

Sarah’s focus at TOPS is the CARE (bullying prevention) program; she will be working closely with Gerrit Kischner, Assistant Principal, our counselor Jennifer Murray, and the teachers to create a curriculum for the program. Sarah is eager to prepare our middle schoolers for high school, and to make a positive impact on the younger children as well. She hopes that catching them while they are young will make their school years smoother.

Catrice is involved with stewardship and service learning. She is currently working on the Hurricane Katrina Drive to supply 250 backpacks to students displaced by the hurricane. TOPS has been matched with Columbia Middle School in Jefferson, MS, and Berg Jones Elementary in Monroe, LA. Our students have collected school supplies and personal care items to fill backpacks for students in these schools.

These are two busy women – their AmeriCorps jobs involve work not only at TOPS but at several other sites as well. Catrice has two children; her son is 4 and her daughter is 9. Both children play basketball, so they spend much of their free time at games. Catrice is even holding down a part-time job at Wal-Mart as well! Sarah loves dance, music, art, and theater. She is very proud to have been recently invited to be part of a sketch comedy troupe (this editor thinks she’ll be good). She is a die-hard Seattle Storm fan. Our interview was delightful and filled with laughter; I’m sure the students will thoroughly enjoy Sarah and Catrice. Please give them a warm welcome to TOPS if you meet them in the hall!

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I like reading block because we read books and the teacher reads us books.

~ Allie, grade 2

I like the library because I get to check out books that give me information.

~ Lindley, grade 3
The No-Bake

Sprinkled throughout this edition of the newsletter you will find quotes from students and teachers. These are expressions of gratitude for the programs at TOPS that are funded, either fully or partially, by the money we as parents donate to the No-Bake. There are many programs at our school that are not funded by our donations; these programs about drama, music, art, the library, science, and more. And yet these are just some of the things our money pays for. We urge you to give generously, for we believe these programs are a crucial part of our children’s education. ~ Ann Simonson & Jamie Flaxman, Newsletter Co-Editors

Dear Parents and Friends of TOPS,

As our students begin a new year at TOPS we want to take a moment to thank everyone who gave generously to the No-Bake Annual Fund last year. The No-Bake campaign raised nearly $60,000 for the 2004/05 school year and every penny of it has been allocated to supporting many important programs.

Each year the Seattle School District’s budget covers less and less. Parents are sometimes surprised to learn that funds raised by Friends of TOPS are not just used for “enrichment” but also support many core programs. The Friends of TOPS budget for the 2005/06 school year includes money for core programs such as the elementary science program, literacy programs, the school counselor, technology and tutoring programs.

In addition, these funds support the many enrichment programs our students enjoy at TOPS. These include the Visual Arts program, drama, music, the Oral History Project, physical education and much more. Because of the generous support of TOPS parents our kids have benefited from these “extras” every year. Teachers and administrators at TOPS rely on and appreciate our support.

The Friends of TOPS budget for all of the programs listed above and more is $180,000 for the 2005/06 school year. Our goal is to raise at least $72,000 through the No-Bake Annual Fund Drive to help finance these programs. The complete budget is available for review on the school website. Friends of TOPS is committed to “delivering on the dream” even if the Seattle School District and the federal government don’t.

Your support is essential for the TOPS staff to continue providing our students with high quality programs and challenging, interesting curriculum. Every donation, no matter the size, is critical to our efforts. Many employers will match donations, so be sure to find out if yours does. All contributions are fully tax-deductible, so please send in your checks today. Thank you for your support.

In unity for kids and learning,

Judith Gille (6th grade parent) & the No-Bake Committee: Kimberly Hobbs (6th & 3rd grade parent), Kris Johnston (6th grade parent), Tammy Luthy (6th grade parent), Randi Niemer (6th, 4th, & 1st grade parent)

No-Bake Contributors

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Karen and Peter Olive
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Suk Ying Wong
Anonymous

I have been generously gifted with multicultural books paid for by FOT over the years. They enrich my social studies curriculum significantly because they give students access to colorful, stimulating books both in my classroom and in the TOPS library. These have included books on ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, and Africa. We have also gotten a number of books on African ethnic groups. These enable kids to explore the subjects we study independently. They serve as great resources when they do research for projects.

~ Marianne Trangen, sixth grade social studies and language arts

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@columbiahospitality.com.
CARE Program: Understanding the Role of the Bystander

By Gerrit Kischner, Assistant Principal

The bullying prevention program at TOPS, dubbed the We CARE (Coach All to Respect Everyone) program last month in the winning entry from Marianne’s homeroom, continues to prompt good discussions around the school. Our weekly class meeting curriculum will be leading students through each of the four rules on bullying to give them specific skills they will need to be active participants in improving relationships and building community.

One of the most important aspects of the CARE program comes in understanding the role of the bystander in a bullying incident. Lisa Reynolds, a former counselor at Denny Middle School, suggested the following actions a witness can take to shift the power in a situation and help a target of bullying:

1) Stop the bullying: In doing so, of course, any student needs to assess a situation carefully to avoid getting in the middle of something that could become physically dangerous. If appropriate, the witness could stand between the person who is bullying and the target, preferably to block eye contact between the parties. If a student feels confident, the witness could ask the person who is bullying a question that is unrelated in order to change the subject or could use humor to diffuse things. It’s important that a witness in this situation not try to retaliate, get involved in an argument, or try to sort out the facts.

2) Support the person being targeted: The witness can take action simply by standing close to the target. In such a situation, it’s advised that the witness make minimal eye contact and make physical contact only if he or she thinks it will not cause the target to lose self-control or feel embarrassed. The witness should take note of other bystanders who could help later as witnesses. The witness should not offer lots of sympathy to the target – the goal is to empower the target.

3) Name the bullying behavior and refer to the school rules against bullying: Staff at TOPS are clear that when we see incidents that could involve bullying, we need to intervene swiftly even if we don’t have time at that moment to sort out all the facts. The simple statement that some action “looks like bullying” gives any witness the license to intervene because it stops a potentially dangerous situation and leaves open the possibility to discussing the facts later. A witness should say what he or she saw and what rule was broken (e.g. “Name-calling is bullying” or “Leaving someone out of a game is exclusion and that’s against our school rules.”) and should use a matter-of-fact voice. The witness should not accuse, but simply state the facts about what he or she saw or heard.

4) Empower the bystanders: If a witness has some influence over others in a group, he or she should let bystanders know that their inaction was noticeable and use a calm, supportive tone of voice. Again, it’s important not to engage in a discussion about the facts, and bystanders should not be asked to state what they saw at this time.

5) Follow-up with a trusted adult: Witnesses should write down all the details they remember and talk with a teacher, playground supervisor, Jennifer, or an administrator when they have time to listen. The witness needs to understand that his or her job is in the reporting, and should not engage in trying to discuss this and should not offer lots of sympathy to the target – the goal is to empower the target.

The TOPS Tips boxes and envelopes are up around the school - in the library, two middle school lockers and every elementary classroom. Students are leaving lots of important observations that demonstrate that they are thinking seriously about their roles in building a respectful, supportive community at TOPS. We are aware that this process of reporting also raises a lot of expectations that difficult situations will be addressed swiftly and decisively. This is generally not the intent of encouraging this kind of reporting. Instead, the information students are sharing with us is helping us to see aspects of student interactions that we might miss otherwise. The reports are part of our learning process, and students should know that the information they share is very helpful to us even when they do not see direct action resulting from the reports.

~ Ryan, grade 4
The annual State of the School meeting offers the TOPS community an opportunity to assess where we are and the general goals for the next year. This year’s meeting on October 20 began with Marlies van Bergeijk, Site Council (SC) Chair, welcoming parents and staff. She introduced SC members who were present, and then introduced Judith Gille, who spoke on behalf of the No-Bake committee. Judith spoke briefly about all that is funded at TOPS by the money Friends of TOPS raises through the No-Bake and the auction in the spring. Many core programs, such as science supplies, the literacy block, tutoring, library supplies, the school counselor, and much more, are funded by this money. She encouraged parents to give generously. Our goal this year is $72,000, and so far $11,000 has been raised.

Marlies discussed the focus of the SC this year. Last year the Alternative School Committee produced a report on alternative schools in Seattle, in which they listed twelve items essential to alternative schools. The SC has decided to focus an hour of each SC meeting on one of five of these twelve items. They had planned to start at the October meeting, which was cancelled due to a religious holiday. So they will release the revised schedule soon.

The first hour of the SC meetings will be spent on business as usual, and the second hour will be devoted to a discussion of one of the following five topics: How does and can TOPS 1) involve all members of the TOPS community in decision making; 2) inform choice (of TOPS by incoming parents) by clarifying TOPS goals and objectives; 3) create a deeply caring and respectful school culture; 4) individualize curriculum and recognize different learning styles; and 5) utilize alternative scheduling to create a small school feel. These five topics were chosen by the SC members as important to our definition as an alternative school. The assumption is that we’re already doing some of these things, but there is still room for improvement. Marlies encouraged parents to attend these meetings; parent feedback is welcome and much appreciated. The SC is also working to increase communication this year, and we will be seeing articles on the above topics in the newsletter, written by SC members.

Clara Scott, Principal, began her remarks with a thank you to all who contributed to the Katrina/Rita project. Next week we’ll be shipping backpacks to two schools, and she was pleased that this project reflected and was true to the TOPS mission of social justice. Clara spoke about the curriculum focus for this year, and sited the Nine Characteristics of Highly Performing Schools as a guideline for the TOPS staff. These schools 1) have a clear and shared vision and purpose; 2) have high standards and expectations for all students; 3) have effective leadership that is proactive and finds ways to get things done; 4) have a high level of teamwork (Clara noted that TOPS does this very well); 5) have aligned curriculum with state standards; 6) closely monitor teachers’ and students’ progress; 7) emphasize professional development (those early dismissals and days off are used for this); 8) have a supportive learning environment, and students feel valued and connected to staff; and 9) have a high level of parent involvement.

Clara noted that TOPS does some of the above extremely well, but is always working to improve in these areas. For the last three years the curriculum focus has been writing, and last year math was added. Emily Lauderback was hired as math coach, and her contract has been continued through this year. Work on reading involves efforts to improve the 1st and 2nd grade reading blocks, and to extend reading blocks into upper grades. The writing focus continues as well; the teachers have taken a writing sample from all students this fall, and they will check in the spring for improvement.

In the area of climate safety, TOPS is working on bullying prevention with the CARE (Coach All to Respect Everyone) program. Clara noted that the students are “really into it,” although they still seem to be bullying! At least they’re now able to identify it – the first sign of progress.

Gerrit Kischner, Assistant Principal, took a look at the WASL scores. He noted that for all the complaining about this test, it’s actually a pretty good test, and is much better than some of those used in other parts of the country. He spoke of the educator’s approach to these tests; they serve as a very good way to measure an individual student’s progress. Educators are interested in individual results over time. The changes we see in scores in the newspaper each year can often reflect changes in school population, and sometimes even changes in the test itself. A better measure is to compare scores of students at TOPS in 4th grade and then again in 7th grade. Scores have been very stable and reflect the advantages of our K-8 program.

Emily Lauderback, our math coach, explained the work she and teachers have been doing to improve our students’ math performance. They have created a curriculum guide for K-5 to develop strong number sense and computation. Teachers have a guideline of goals for each grade; students are then assessed to track their recall stage of math facts. Rote memorization is being discouraged because educators have discovered a majority of students don’t learn in this way. Students usually progress from a stage of counting (using fingers or counters), to using derived facts (finding the answer by manipulating the numbers), to instant recall. Teachers are trying to assess students by January so they know how far each student is from recall of their math facts. The math facts start in 1st and 2nd grade with addition, subtraction in 3rd grade, multiplication in 4th, and division in 5th.

Emily spent her time teaching in all of the classrooms last year; this year she coaches the teachers, observing and debriefing them. Emily and the teachers are encouraged because they’re already seeing improvement in the students’ math performance. Tracy Seefeld, 3rd grade teacher, spoke about 3rd grade math and how geometry

Continued on page 7
NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY AND BEYOND

By Steve Haines, Librarian

“The end of reading is not more books but more life.”
~Holbrook Jackson

This year, September 25 through October 1 was Banned Books Week. This event sponsored by the American Library Association is a week set aside to “celebrate our freedom to read.” For the third year in a row, TOPS had actors from the Book-It Repertory Theatre come and present their show “Book-It All Over: Danger Books!” to our middle school. We are fortunate to have a fantastic Seattle Public Librarian, Kay Kirkpatrick, to work with in bringing this event to our school.

She is the young adult librarian at the Henry and Montlake branches. This year Book-It Repertory Theatre presented selections from three books that have been challenged due to content. They were Alanna: the first adventure by Tamora Pierce; Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers; and Slave Dancer by Paula Fox. The actors read through parts of a chapter from each of these books. Afterwards there was time for discussion and questions about the books and about the whole idea of “intellectual freedom,” and what that means for a democracy. To find out more about banned books you can visit www.ala.org. They have a list of books that have been challenged and banned, and some of the books may surprise you.

Let’s say that your family is working on a project at home for a class, and you want to see if there are any books that might just be in the library. In the past you would have to wait until the next school day to come to the library to look for the material. WELL….. Now you can turn to a computer that is located anywhere outside of school and access our library’s online catalog. There are two ways to do this. One is to access www.seattleschools.org/area/library/catalogs/catalogs.htm and under elementary libraries scroll down to TOPS. The other site was mentioned last month as a great way to access for free the subscription services of World Book Encyclopedia, CultureGrams, and elibrary. Here it is again, www.seattleschools.org/area/library/stuindex.xml. Scroll down to Seattle Public School Libraries. I hope many of you can take advantage of these resources. It certainly is different than the “good old days” when I was in school. If you want a book from our library just email me at shaines@seattleschools.org or call 252-3530 and I will save it for you.

One Family’s Story continued from page 1

that if she missed the bus I was going to have to drive her. She laughed, as I am only thirteen. We were both a little nervous. She’d been up for hours changing clothes, and jumping around. We’d even played a game of magnet darts to pass the time and ease our nerves. I eyed my watch as the minutes trudged on and still no one came. We looked up and down the street, squinting at the people entering and leaving the coffee shop two blocks away.

Finally when the bus came only a few kids were on it. We’d speculated earlier that some kids probably wanted their parents to drive them on the first day. A cheerful voice came from one of the seats saying, “Good morning how are you? Are you a new student at TOPS?” I was reassured then that the story I’d heard the day before of a kid being brought mistakenly to the wrong school on their first day was not going to become our story. I took the slip of paper back from the bus driver that told us when and where the bus stopped, and told him that she was on the right bus to the right school. I thanked him and said goodbye. As I did so, I felt a little sorry I hadn’t given her one last hug before she climbed in the cute little yellow bus. I made up for it by waving after the bus left even though I didn’t think she could see me across the aisle and through the opposite window. She had a smile when she turned to sit down, with her backpack still on, on a sticky brown seat towards the front. It gave me a feeling like when I first taught her to ride a bike, in our muddy back alley in the rain.

Walking back, I suddenly felt like fall had come and summer had gone. It was a good feeling. I love the fall, and the smell of the changing seasons. On my way home I crunched every dry fallen leaf I could find under my flip-flops.

~ Kaya

Thank you Tops Community for your generosity towards the Art Department. Friends of Tops has made a huge difference to the art exposure that your children have received at Tops. Cynthia’s hours were increased at the first through forth grade level. Middle school has been able to offer ceramics wheel work in seventh and eighth grade. We are continuing our Visiting Artist Presentation Series in middle school. We were able to make those fantastic art display units used for ArtFest. We are working on the wall-mounted units that will be going up in the school soon. We have had consistent funding of a portion of our art budget. The Tops art dept. would not be nearly as vibrant as it is without the support of Friends of Tops! We thank you!

~ Luzita Roll, middle school art

Thanks to the generosity of the TOPS community in supporting the No-Bake Bake sale the library and classrooms have seen an increase in available multicultural resources. From class literature sets to videos to informational books for the library; all of our students are being exposed to these new materials.

~ Steve Haines, librarian
CARE AND TOPS PE

By Don Zemke and Eric Herndon, PE teachers

TOPS PE is working closely with the CARE program (Coach All to Respect Everyone) to help make TOPS a safe and positive learning environment.

On Wednesdays after everybody has had their classroom meetings, we sit down in PE and have our own meeting. We relate the weekly topic to what goes on in the gym, and we discuss issues that we see happening. So far, students have had a lot of positive input and have done well with this process.

As you might imagine, a gym filled with 60 kids can provide many opportunities to learn how to get along with one another, include others in games and activities, know what to do if they find themselves in the role of a bystander, and to learn to respect everyone.

WHAT’S COOL AT TOPS

By Rebecca Ehlers, Grade 5

PE seems to be popular with many children at TOPS. But why? Is it the activities? The teachers? Or simply a break from class? You want to know, keep reading! It could very well be the activities. On a regular basis there is soccer, ultimate frisbee, basketball, jump rope, foosball, ping-pong, and as a recent addition air hockey! Also rock wall climbing and unicycling (which is gaining popularity by the looks of it!) We get to experience a whole lot of different options.

Or maybe it’s just Don and Eric, two cool dudes with major senses of humor. What it is exactly, well, that will take more research. What we do know is, PE rules!

ULTIMATE FRISBEE

By Robbie Lou, Grade 8

There is so much to say about Ultimate Frisbee. Well, first I have to talk about my coach. Don is the nicest, funniest, and coolest coach I have ever had. Don gives us encouragement all the time. I have been on the Ultimate Frisbee team for TOPS for three years, and ever since the first game I’ve been addicted to Ultimate.

Don splits up the age groups in an A and B team. This year the A team has 7th and 8th graders and the B team has 6th graders. The team has progressed so much from when my brother was on the team. When he was on it there was only one team and only like 10 kids playing. Now there are like 35 kids playing.

TOPS kids are really good at Ultimate Frisbee. For instance, last year the TOPS Ultimate Frisbee team got second place behind Aki Kurose, losing the championship game by only one point. I guess what I’m trying to say is that Ultimate Frisbee is a fun semi-competitive lifelong sport where you can meet new people.

and multiplication are taught. She encouraged parents to call their child’s teacher and arrange to sit in on a math class. Mark Ellis, 7th & 8th grade math teacher, talked about the transition from the elementary math program to the middle school Connected Math Program (CMP). CMP expects a great depth of knowledge and the ability to understand connections. He noted that expectations have shifted since parents were students; students in 7th grade are now doing the math we did in 8th grade.

The TOPS focus on writing was addressed by Lori Eickelberg, 7th & 8th grade language arts teacher. At TOPS the Direct Writing Assessment is focusing on three areas: ideas and content, organization, and conventions (punctuation, spelling, etc.). She displayed two samples of writing by a 7th grade student to show us one of the ways the Direct Writing Assessment would be applied to a student’s work. She noted the improvement in the second sample. Students learn that writing is a process, that revision is a necessary part of writing. Lori noted the many opportunities for TOPS students; we’re fortunate to have a great librarian, we participate in ACT Theater’s Young Playwrights, the K-5 Young Authors Conference, and our children attend Seattle Children’s Theater performances. The focus on writing is a valuable part of education at TOPS.

Clara and Gerrit closed the meeting with praise for the teaching staff at TOPS and gratitude for parent input.

State of the School continued from page 5

I have learned that bullying can be stopped!
~ Kolena, grade 5
REPORT FROM THE COALITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Mind at A Time Book Discussion
By Lis Soldano

One of the three themes that the Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) will focus on this year is Learning Differences. During the October meeting, we kicked off this topic with a discussion of the book *A Mind at a Time* by Dr. Mel Levine. The discussion was facilitated by school counselor Jennifer Murray and me.

Jennifer Murray started the meeting with a brief introduction of the topic, and expressed her belief that all children come to school wanting to learn and wanting to experience success, a belief that resonated with many of the parents and teachers in attendance. She also suggested that many times a learning difference goes unnoticed by a parent or teacher because the signs are too subtle to detect.

Dr. Levine is a professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina Medical School and Director of the University’s Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning. He is also the founder of All Kinds of Minds, a non-profit institute that develops opportunities for educators, parents, clinicians, and children to learn about and deal with differences in learning. Last year I heard Dr. Levine speak in front of a packed Seattle audience of teachers and parents who know his work and were eager to hear his words.

In his book, Dr. Levine explains in layman’s terms how our minds learn and apply what we learn. He describes the most basic instrument for learning as something called a neurodevelopmental function, and likens our mind to a tool chest. “Just as a carpenter might deploy different groups of tools to complete various projects or a dentist might use different sets of tools for different tooth tasks, our minds make use of different clusters of neurodevelopmental functions to learn specific skills and to create particular products. One committee of neurodevelopmental functions enables a student to master subtraction; another squad participates in the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, yet another makes possible riding a scooter.” Although he observes that there are endless possibilities of neurodevelopmental functions, he notes that they can be sorted into eight learning systems or what he calls “neurodevelopmental constructs.” These systems work together as a team to enable learning. The systems (team members) are as follows:

- **Attention Control** – mental energy, focus, and self-monitoring
- **Memory** – short-term, working, and long-term memory
- **Language** – receptive and expressive oral and written fluency
- **Spatial Ordering** – spatial awareness, thinking, and memory
- **Sequential Ordering** – sequential awareness, thinking, and memory
- **Motor Functions** – gross and fine
- **Higher Order Thinking** – concepts, critical thinking, problem-solving, and reasoning
- **Social Thinking** – verbal pragmatics and social behavior

Dr. Levine believes that the way in which these eight neurodevelopmental systems function as a team is different for each of us and this shapes the way we learn. In other words, just as we look different from one another, all of our minds work differently. His book is rich with stories of children he has worked with who were struggling (e.g., difficulty writing, remembering, organizing their work) because of one or more deficiencies in these learning systems, and how they achieved greater learning success in school once they understood their learning strengths and weaknesses. He believes that if parents and teachers can understand how an individual’s mind learns, a framework for learning success can be built for that individual mind.

The ensuing discussion at the meeting centered around three questions:

1. Reflecting on your elementary school years, can you remember a personal experience with a learning difference? Was it addressed and if so, how?
2. Did you find anything particularly meaningful in the reading material? Do you have a different perspective?
3. How do you see “All Kinds of Minds” playing out at TOPS?

Individuals shared personal experiences with a learning difficulty. Two parents voiced their personal challenges with reading. One noted that he struggled with reading in his early years, and it wasn’t until college that he embraced it and became a stronger reader. Another said that she felt that her reading skills were so weak that when called upon to read aloud in class, her high levels of anxiety would affect her performance even more. One parent expressed her difficulty with learning a foreign language. Another parent told of her experience with detecting a learning deficiency in her own child when he was very young.

Everyone who read the book found Dr. Levine’s eight constructs approach to be a helpful tool for identifying learning strengths and weaknesses. Many ideas and specific quotes from the book were discussed. Several in the group agreed that the author’s presentation of student stories.

Continued on page 10
Their books to one another, and work with well-known, talented adults to learn more about writing.

Harper Welch, teacher, explains his Friday creative writing work:

Our class books are usually based on a writing pattern or sentence pattern borrowed or transformed from a published book. After reading the published book and listening for the pattern and discussing, we try our own version by substituting our own words and phrases. An example of a pattern we tried recently was based on Judith Viorst’s Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. After we read the story through a couple of times, we generated a list of possible ways to transform the book and came up with a new title for a book we would write called The Marvelous, Fantastic, Super-Perfect Day. Each student then wrote a real or imagined event that ends with the phrase “…and I could tell it was going to be a marvelous, fantastic, super-perfect day.” In the past two weeks, I have been encouraging students to begin writing their own books either using a pattern we have used in the past, or using an idea they may have of their own.

I believe this teaching method of writing is still being used at TOPS today. And the Young Author’s Celebration is an annual event when students in several grades get together and share their books.

Al Doggett, Seattle commercial artist

Al Doggett’s visit is the first of what is planned to be a series of guest speakers representing different vocations and ethnic groups. His presentation of pieces from his portfolio of advertisements done for magazines and brochures coincided with recent assignments related to advertising and to efforts to produce posters that promote books in our library. Mr. Doggett told about the process of illustration and the sequence of how an advertisement evolves. [He] also helped students get started in selecting a book, an “image” that could represent the book, and a quick sketch of their poster.

The series of speakers continued with David Greenberg, poet; Helen Stout, writer; and Mike Courtney, architect. Stout brought a book she wrote in 1919 in fifth grade, poet; Helen Stout, writer; and Mike Courtney, architect. Stout brought a book she wrote in 1919 in fifth grade, a quick sketch of their poster.

The series of speakers continued with David Greenberg, poet; Helen Stout, writer; and Mike Courtney, architect. Stout brought a book she wrote in 1919 in fifth grade, along with a more recent publication.

If you have a question about TOPS history, ask away. I’ll try to find the answer and write it up.

Calling All TOPS Tee Shirts

Do you have a TOPS tee shirt that no longer fits? Do you have friends whose children attended TOPS preceding yours who may have old TOPS tee shirts?

The TOPS Historical Society is collecting TOPS tee shirts. Please consider donating yours and asking your friends. Archivist will give away years/images not needed. Someday we’ll have a TOPS tee shirt exhibit. Questions? Ask Toby, tojj@earthlink.net.

Please wash first and deliver to the TOPS Library. Thanks!
**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.

**November**
3 (Th) ......... 6th-8th grade, Middle school SE to SCT
3 (Th) ......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
8 (T) ......... BLT meeting, 4 p.m.
9 (W) ......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
10 (Th) ......... 4th-5th grades, Elem. SE to SCT
10 (Th) ......... End of first quarter
11 (F) ......... Veterans Day; no school
14-18 (M-F) .. Parent Conferences, 2 hour early dismissal
18 (F) ......... Newsletter deadline
21-22 (M-T) .. Parent Conferences, 2 hour early dismissal
23 (W) ......... I-hour early dismissal
24-25 (Th-F) .. Thanksgiving holiday; no school

**December**
1 (Th) ......... CSJ meeting, 6:30-8 p.m.
8 (Th) ......... Winter Concert
9 (F) ......... Middle School play, Grease, 7 p.m.
10 (Sa) ......... Middle School play, Grease, 2 p.m.
13 (T) ......... BLT meeting, 4 p.m.
14 (W) ......... Young Author’s Conference
16 (F) ......... I-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
7 (T) ......... Newsletter deadline
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.
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

**April**
21 (T) ......... 6th-8th grades, Middle school SE to SCT

**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.
17 (W) ......... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
24 (W) ......... K-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

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**Report from the Coalition for Social Justice continued from page 8**

throughout the book brought meaning to how a learning difference can be discovered, what it might look like, and how different tools can be used to find pathways for better learning. We also appreciated Dr. Levine’s idea that as parents and teachers we can and should use these tools to help each child find his or her individual and natural pathways to learning. This includes discovery of learning strengths and weaknesses, and a plan for celebrating strengths and dealing more effectively with weaknesses.

It was agreed that the question of how All Kinds of Minds could play out at TOPS is both exciting and complicated. Parents and staff expressed an interest in learning more and continuing discussion. It was noted that a programmatic approach, like Schools Attuned discussed in Chapter 13 of Dr. Levine’s book, would be complimentary of TOPS’ mission as well as the bullying prevention program kicked off this year. It was also noted that a program of this nature would require significant time and commitment from staff and parents, and possibly institutional-level changes (e.g. class size and focus on testing) to be successful.

Discussion of the topic and this book will resume at the December CSJ meeting. Everyone is welcome to join us! If you are interested in participating and/or would like to read the book, there are a few copies in the TOPS library.

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I like art because we’re drawing our bodies.
I’ve made lots of AWESOME art with Cynthia.

~ Jesse, grade 1

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**Happy Fall to All of You continued from page 1**

regarding conferences if they have not already signed up.

**Stewardship Program** – This program is helping to beautify and maintain our grounds by having classrooms sign up for designated areas around the school. If you would like to help with this program, please contact Molly La’Patra or Laurie Stusser.

**School Directories** – The directories will be printed soon and parents will be able to keep in touch and make play dates! Thank you to Ellen Markman and Randi Niemer for their dedication to this enormous task.

**Volunteering** – We want all parents to be a part of the TOPS community. We really count on our volunteers every day. If you need more information about opportunities at TOPS, please call Randi Niemer at 252-3541, she will find something meaningful and rewarding for you. Many thanks for all of your volunteer time!

Cheers!

~ Clara
A MONTHLY CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS

WHAT TOPS FAMILIES ARE CELEBRATING

Compiled by Lynne Goodrich (CSJ Member)

November is National American Indian Heritage Month. The purpose of National American Indian Heritage Month is to honor and recognize the original peoples of this land.

NOVEMBER 2005 HOLIDAYS

Nov. 1: Diwali (Deepavali), Hindu Festival of Lights A favorite festival celebrated by people of all religions in India for four days. People exchange sweets, wear new clothes, and buy jewelry. Thousands of lamps are lit and fireworks displayed.

Nov. 1: Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), Mexico Begins at the end of October and closes with visits to the graves of families and friends where decorations are left.

Nov. 2: All Souls Day (Catholic) Commemorates the faithful departed.

Nov. 3: Wuwuchim (Hopi New Year) Celebrated with songs, prayers and dances.

Nov. 4: Eid-ul-Fitr (Muslim) Marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, and is a festival of great display.

Nov. 11: Veterans Day (USA) and Remembrance Day (Canada) Honoring the men and women who have served in the armed forces.

Nov. 12: Birth of Baha’u’llah, 1817 Founder/prophet of the B’hai faith. Spiritual unity of humankind celebrated.

Nov. 15: Guru Nanak’s Birthday (Sikh) Birth of the founder of the Sikh religion in 1469.

Nov. 19: National Adoption Day (USA) This day is a national collective effort to raise awareness of the 118,000 children in foster care waiting to find permanent, loving families.

Nov. 20: National Bible Sunday An ecumenical observance by churches in the U.S. in celebration of the Bible.

Nov. 24: American Thanksgiving Celebrates the Pilgrims’ first successful harvest.

Nov. 25: Hmong New Year Celebrated with everyone in a community. A time of rest from harvest and work and a time for courtships and new beginnings.

Nov. 27: Advent (Christian) The period beginning the first of four Sundays before Christmas.

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CLIP BOX TOPS FOR EDUCATION AND EARN CASH FOR OUR SCHOOL

The Box Tops for Education program continues at TOPS for the 2005-2006 school year. Clip Box Tops coupons from hundreds of General Mills products like cold cereals, Yoplait yogurt, Betty Crocker products, and Pillsbury products. Each coupon is worth 10¢ when redeemed by our school. New products with Box Tops coupons this year include:

Ziploc bags and containers Nature Valley Chewy Granola Bars
Bisquick Complete Pillsbury Frozen Biscuits and Rolls
Betty Crocker Warm Delights and Muffin Mix Cascadian Farm Granola Bars
Hamburger Helper Value Size and more!

Box Tops offers three easy ways to earn cash for our school through everyday activities like buying groceries, shopping online, and making purchases with a credit card – all at no additional cost to you.

1. Clip – Clip Box Tops from hundreds of participating products.

2. Shop – Shop your favorite online stores at the Box Tops Marketplace. Up to 8% of each qualifying purchase is donated to our school.

3. Charge – Earn a full 1% on every purchase for our school with the Box Tops Visa card. Apply today at boxtops4education.com.

If everyone helps, we can earn more cash for our school than ever before. Check on our progress throughout the year by visiting boxtops4education.com. Remember to tell your friends and family near and far to sign up, too, and help us reach our goal.

The collection jar is located in the office waiting area. Boxtops are collected continually by Janet Morrison and redeemed once a year in the Spring. Please contact Janet if you have questions at janetm@blarg.net.

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 at 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 p.m., with 2 performances on Saturday, December 10, at 2:00 and 7:00 p.m. Greased Lightning!

I loved the third grade play. It was so funny. I got to wear donkey ears!

~ McKenna, grade 4

The No-bullying has made the environment better.

~ Jessica, grade 7
The Seattle School District is an Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action employer and employs individuals without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, age, sex, marital status, handicap/disability or sexual orientation. The Seattle School District provides Equal Education Opportunity without regard to race, creed color, nation origin, sex, mental status, handicap/disability or sexual orientation. The District complies with all applicable State and Federal laws and regulations, including but not limited to Titles VI, VII, and IX of the Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), RCW 49.60, Law Against Discrimination, and RCW 28A.640 “Sex Equality,” and covers, but is not limited to, all District programs, courses activities (including) extracurricular activities, service, access to facilities, etc. The Title IX officer and 504 coordinator with overall responsibility for monitoring and ensuring compliance is: Rick Takeuchi, Manager, Affirmative Action Office, W/MBE, 815 4th Ave. N., Seattle 98109. Phone (206)296-7175.

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.