

TOPS NEWS

February 2007 ♦ Volume 10, Issue 5

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

MESSAGE FROM THE PRINCIPAL

HAPPY WINTER AND WELCOME BACK to the second half of the school year. I hope that you had quality time with your family and friends. We were challenged by the weather with lost power and travel complications, but we are Northwesterners and things like this bring out the best in us! We got to meet our neighbors, share resources, and be thankful for things that we take for granted like electricity, heated homes, food, telephones, television, and a garage door that opens at the push of a button.

Superintendent Manhas surprised TOPS staff and students with a visit on Thursday, January 4. He spent time hearing about TOPS Alternative School Program.

I shared with him our anti-bias curriculum, alignment of our curriculum K-8th grade, the celebration of individual self-expression and achievement through the arts, drama, public speaking, and writing. He visited several classrooms, both elementary and middle school, met teachers and parent volunteers, and spent time talking to the students. The highlight of his visit was the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Program and the kindergarten classrooms. When we arrived, I asked the kindergartners

if they knew who he was, and several students raised their hands. When I called on one, he replied, "Barack Obama." The next one said he was a businessman because he was wearing a black suit and tie, another said, "Dr. King," and still another shouted, "He is Mrs. Scott's husband."

You have to love those kindergartners! He left TOPS feeling good about what we are doing here educating kids.

WINTER ACTIVITIES:

TOPS continues to be a school with lots of activities. Our Ski Program for middle school has begun. Middle school students are rehearsing for the Middle School Play. Dates have been moved to March 9 and 10. Mark your calendar!

Our 4th and 5th grade students are beginning Math Olympiad this month. Elementary and middle school



Photo by Karen Staudacher

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NEWSLETTER ONLINE
The TOPS newsletters are available online in PDF format before the printed copy arrives in your mailbox! From the TOPS home page, <http://www.topsk8.org>, click on *Latest Newsletter* in the *Quick Links* section.

TOPS AUCTION 2007— "MOSAIC"

By Kathy Wickward

We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams. — Jimmy Carter, 27 Oct. 1976

After a two-year theme hiatus, the auction committee has chosen one to fit TOPS: "Mosaic." And, like the mosaic of cultures that make up our community, every contribution to the auction effort fits together to make up a beautiful whole.

The auction is the second major fundraiser of the year, raising money for all the programs also funded by the No-Bake. If you haven't already marked your calendars,

it's May 5. For those of you who have never been, it's as painless as inviting your friends and family for a night of dinner and shopping. It's easily one of the most enjoyable TOPS social events of the year.

Yet, like any party with 300+ guests, 500 items to sell, a catered meal, and a raffle, there is some time and effort involved to put it all together. For a single person it is overwhelming, but with a mosaic of volunteers each taking their own piece of the event, the planning can be as much fun as the party itself. It's a great way for new families to connect with the school and with parents from other grade bands.

Many of the current auction committee members are parents of middle school students, so the clock is ticking

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MARCH TOPS NEWS DEADLINE
Friday, February 9. Submissions to topsnewsletter@gmail.com



**SEATTLE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

TEACHING EXCELLENCE FUND

By Jamie Flaxman

ABOUT THE OUTRAGEOUS PUBLISHING SERVICE

Welcome to the fifth newsletter of the 2006-07 school year. Jamie Flaxman and Ann Simonson edit, Sharon Mentyka does the layout, and Jane Summerfield, Peggy Maraghe and Roxanne Robinson get it mailed off to you. Don Zemke provides many of our photos. G & H Printing prints the newsletter.

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

Submit your contributions by email to topsnewsletter@gmail.com or to the newsletter box in the main office. The deadline for the March issue is February 9. Would you like to edit or otherwise help with our newsletter? Newcomers welcome. Please contact Jamie and Ann at topsnewsletter@gmail.com

In addition to co-editing the TOPS News, I am also a member of the Building Leadership Team (BLT). The BLT is responsible for managing the Teacher Excellence Fund. The BLT examines each request for funds to determine how it will help benefit students and support the mission and Transformation Plan of TOPS.

Each person who attends a workshop, training, or conference funded by the Teacher Excellence Fund is expected to make a presentation to the TOPS staff at a staff meeting, and write something for the *TOPS News*. Below you will find an article by Carla Fetterley on her experience. You will then learn about Digital Photography Bootcamp from Leslie Nilan and Katie Waters. And checkout Steve Haines' library article for insights into the conference he attended.

When I joined the BLT this past fall, I agreed to be treasurer for the Teacher Excellence Fund. I thought I'd take this opportunity to share with you how YOUR dollars are being spent.

Last year at the TOPS Auction, the TOPS community donated \$26,650 to the Teacher Excellence Fund.

Funds are used for professional development opportunities, that the teacher or staff person would not be otherwise able to participate in without financial assistance (or would have to pay for out of their own pockets). The BLT decided to allocate the funds to last through the 2007-2008 school year, as follows:

K-2 teachers \$5,000
3-5 teachers \$5,000
6-8 teachers \$5,000
Specialists \$5,000
School-Wide/Cross Bands \$6,650

So far this year, \$5,890 has been allocated. We expect that many teachers and staff will apply for funds for programs over the summer. Here's a list of what funds have been used for:

◆ Tracy Seefeld attended a training on Brain Research (see the article in the September *TOPS News* for more information).

◆ Leslie Nilan and Katie Waters attended a workshop for teachers on using digital photography.

◆ Marianne Trangen and Jennifer Murray attended the International Anti-Bullying Conference.

◆ Steve Haines attended the Washington Librarians Library Media Association Conference.

◆ Carla Fetterley and Nicole Titus took a Linguistic Remedies class.

◆ Ten staff will be attending the Guiding Light Conference, a conference on mentoring.

◆ Most recently, Cynthia Livak and Luzita Roll have been awarded funds to attend the upcoming National Arts Conference.

We look forward to sharing more stories from teachers and staff with you about how they have benefited from the Teacher Excellence Fund.

THANK YOU FOR THE TEACHER EXCELLENCE FUND!

By Carla Fetterley, Reading Specialist

I am so excited and happy to be the TOPS Reading Specialist this year. I couldn't be happier. Teaching reading to small groups of children has been my career goal for the last few years, and thanks to some changes here at TOPS, I made it! So, I am particularly grateful for the Teaching Excellence Fund for teachers, generously provided from the TOPS parents and community.

This past summer and fall, I took several classes in preparation for my new teaching duties. Thanks to the Teaching Excellence Fund, I was granted tuition reimbursement for my linguistics classes, which I feel will really help those students who need more explicit phonological work, and learn best with multi-sensory teaching methods. Though I have always felt supported by the TOPS parents, this financial support was particularly nice to receive. Thanks again for your generosity.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY BOOT CAMP

By Katie Waters and Leslie Nilan, 3rd Grade Teachers

Last summer third grade teachers Katie Waters and Leslie Nilan attended a class titled “Digital Photography Boot Camp” at Pack Forest Conference Center at the foot of Mount Rainier. We originally took this class so we could learn more about how to use our digital cameras and how to implement this knowledge in our third grade classrooms. Katie had an idea for a project that would tie into our Student of the Week program and be teachable to third graders at the beginning of the school year. It turns out we had a lot to learn before we could implement this into our classrooms.

We went to this class with different photography backgrounds and skills. Leslie has enjoyed photography since childhood. She eventually outgrew her instamatic camera and progressed into the world of the manual cameras. As an adult Leslie enjoys taking pictures as a hobby. For the class Leslie had a brand new Canon Rebel XT that she was eager to learn how to use. Katie also started with an instamatic camera. As an adult Katie became the family photographer and took pictures of her children’s activities, but never moved beyond a point and shoot camera. Katie brought a Nikon Cool-Pix to the class and was interested in learning how to use the settings.

The first day we spent the morning in the classroom learning the basics: the history of photography, how digital cameras are different from film cameras, the settings on our cameras, and how to take good pictures. In the afternoon, we went on a hiking field trip to take some photographs. We tried manipulating the settings on our cameras and using the tips we had learned in the morning session. Back in the lab, we downloaded our pictures and experimented with editing them using Google’s Picasa2. Neither of us had worked with Picasa2 or card reader before. Picasa2 is very intuitive and easy to use. It organizes the pictures and then allows you to edit them. Katie enjoyed cropping while Leslie had fun with fill light. Our all time favorite though, was the collage feature. It allows you choose some of your favorite pictures and makes them into a collage.

The second day we drove up to Paradise near the top of Mount Rainier for a little hike and a greater variety of picture taking opportunities. We took pictures of the beautiful views including waterfalls and close ups of flowers. We were more comfortable with our cameras after seeing a bit of what manipulating the settings truly does to the picture. The goal for the trip was to get a lot of photos to work with back in the classroom. Back in the lab we learned to use Adobe Photoshop Elements 4.0; a much more complicated program than Picasa2. This was when better than average computer skills really paid off.



We needed to be able to follow the path of the picture while exporting it from Picasa2 to Adobe and then to a thumb drive. Often if a picture got lost along the way, it took a bit of help to find the picture. Practice turned out to be the best way to learn this skill. The highlight of day two was that we got to print a few pictures. Printing was like taking the cake out of the oven and getting to taste it. At the end of the second day in the lab, our brains were saturated. We had learned a lot about our cameras and how to use different programs on the computer.

Our final day was spent in the lab working on editing and manipulating an image we had chosen to enlarge as a 12” x 18” print. These large photographs were really fabulous. It was fun to see all the photographs everyone in the class printed.

At the end of the class we seemed short of developing our goal of how to actually incorporate this into our classrooms. We both learned a lot in this class, but the class hadn’t really focused on how to develop a project for a specific grade level. We will be able to use these skills to document activities in our classrooms. However, in just three days, we learned there were many basic skills students would need before they could produce a finished product.

STATE OF THE SCHOOL SPOTLIGHTS STUDENTS

By *Maureen Germani*



Photo by Don Zemke

The annual TOPS State of the School put students in the spotlight. Site Council Chair **Glen Tamura** and Principal **Clara Scott** welcomed a group of about fifty to the cafeteria on Wed. Dec. 6, but they were soon upstaged by a lineup of students encouraging us to donate to the No-Bake. The kids read a list of some of the many worthwhile activities and programs funded by Friends of TOPS. The 1st through 8th graders were accompanied by Riley and Leo from Katie's class on their violins; emphasizing the fact that if we had to rely on District funding alone there would be no music at TOPS!

About half a dozen teachers attended to share the work they are doing this year.

Carla Fetterley, former 2nd grade teacher and current reading specialist, introduced us to Sam from Sarah's class to wow us with his first grade reading skills. She encourages us all to read out loud at home. This and writing for a variety of purposes will build reading skills that will serve our children for the rest of their lives. Carla's position is new this year. She is working mainly with 1st through 3rd graders to assure that they all meet standards. She applies a program called "Linguistic Remedies" which is particularly suited to identify young readers who struggle with "phonemic awareness."

Lori Eickelberg, our middle school Language Arts teacher, explained that, at TOPS, all of the teachers K-8 help kids to understand that writing is a process. Grace, from Julie's class, illustrated this by reading her Frog and Toad story and explaining the process she went through to create it. Grace's very clear explanation: from brainstorming ideas, to writing a rough draft, through multiple edits and on to your final version, was very helpful to me in writing this article! Sam from 7th grade read us his self-portrait poem and Ms. Eick read a poem by Eliana, 7th grade, and an essay by Nick, 8th grade last year, to show us what amazing work our kids can do after spending nine years in the coherent, aligned writing program we are fortunate to have.

Elementary math was represented by Leo and Riley, Katie's class, who showed us the mental math skills third graders should have. They made it look easy, but **Mark Ellis** (M.S. Math teacher) brought us all back to earth by distributing a 7th grade WASL problem. He gave us a few minutes to sweat over it and then outlined the way our answers would be graded. The grading system emphasizes students' ability to explain their answers clearly over application of specific techniques or algorithms. He recommends that we go to www.k12.wa.us (the OSPI website) to see sample WASL questions and explanations.

Joe and Koji from 8th grade represented Science at TOPS. They gave us an overview of **Mr. Bloedel's** 7th and 8th grade curriculum and emphasized how camps and field trips incorporate the chemistry, physics, biology, and geology they learn in the classroom.

Jennifer Murray and UW grad student Jody Newman presented an overview of the CARE anti-bullying program's first year. They have collected feedback from students and teachers and in response have made a few changes. They are checking the bullying boxes more frequently and following up with students more quickly to let them know they've been heard. More adults (wearing bright vests) have been added to supervise recess. Curriculum for class meetings now varies by grade level: K-3 uses the "2nd Step" program; 4-6 uses "Steps to Respect;" and 7-8 uses the "Let's Get Real" curriculum. These varied curricula are tied together by monthly school-wide themes, a monthly meeting with Don and Eric in PE, and mix it up lunches. Jennifer has also added a writing wall in the cafeteria for kids to respond to her prompts on subjects related to bullying. Their goals for the future include increasing parent involvement, creating a "CARE Corner" in the library, continuing to support the teachers, and maintaining the visibility of the CARE program at TOPS.

Last, but not least, Assistant Principal **Gerrit Kischner** presented the test data overview we have all come to expect at the State of the School. It is always a challenge to make this data meaningful. Given the small size of TOPS, relatively small differences in the group of kids from year to year can have a large impact on the overall scores. We now have a seven year history of data that shows that our 4th grade scores have held fairly steady—not trending up or down.

The most meaningful way to assess our program is to look at the scores of a given cohort of kids over time. This year is the first time we have had access to scores for one group of kids at three points in time: 4th, 7th, and 10th grades. Tenth grade WASL scores from about 75% of the students that graduated from TOPS in 2003 and 2004 were obtained from the District (the other students had left Seattle or gone to private school). Their scores showed that TOPS kids' scores rise from 4th to 7th grade and continue to rise as they go through high school. By 10th grade 100% of former TOPS students had met standard in reading in both graduating classes (rising an average of 12% from 7th to 10th grade). Writing scores had risen an average of 14% and math scores 6% between 7th and 10th grade. Gerrit concluded that TOPS does create life long learners.

Gerrit went on to list recent additions to the TOPS program that will support the success of all of our students. In math, this year's third grade is the first class to have benefited from a consistent, balanced program combining TERC with supplemental computation work. Carla Fetterley was hired as a reading specialist because the evidence shows that extra attention to reading in the lower grades really pays off later. The Student in Good Standing program in the middle school has highlighted the kids who need help with motivation and extra support from the staff. All of the 6th and 7th grade students who had a 2.0 or lower grade point average last year have increased their GPAs this year (by an average of 0.9%).

Glen Tamura summed up the presentations with the observation that at TOPS we are creating life long learners. We were invited to stay and ask questions and talk with the teachers and administrators who attended.

KATIE'S 3RD GRADE PRODUCTION OF *AS YOU LIKE IT*,

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

By Sarah Voss, Grade 3

I am in Katie's third grade class. Every year Katie's class puts on a play by William Shakespeare. This year my class put on a shorter version of *As You Like It*. My role was Rosalind (a.k.a. Ganymede). Rosalind is a princess who is in deep sadness because her father was banished, but then Orlando comes into her life and changes everything. It was quite a challenge to learn 89 lines, but fun. It was a real privilege to bring Shakespeare to TOPS.



Photos by Karen Stuhldeher

By Owen Leonard, Grade 3

What it's like backstage is there is a huge table that has all our bags with our names on them. And in the bag it has our props and quick-change clothes. Before the wedding scene Celia and Rosalind had to do a quick-change. How they did it was they rushed everybody who was supposed to come out first. Then we had the clothes ready for them to change into. They changed while everybody was going out.

Backstage you had to read a book when you weren't in the scene. We got to choose our own book.

It took us about 2 1/2 months to memorize all our lines and where we had to walk on stage.

During practice my hat kept falling off during the wrestling scene. I had to tell Milo/Charles to pull the cape to the other side so it wouldn't knock my hat off.

The play wasn't as long as it originally was made. We cut it about 3/4's down.

TOPS MIDDLE SCHOOL PRESENTS *TWELFTH NIGHT*, A COMEDY BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

By Linda Korbus

The story revolves around Viola and Sebastian, twin brother and sister, who are shipwrecked in Illyria and unaware of each other's survival. Viola takes the name of Cesario and disguises herself as a man to work as a page in the court of Duke Orsino. Orsino is hopelessly in love with a woman named Olivia, and he sends Cesario to plead his love for her. Viola soon finds herself hopelessly in love with Orsino, but Orsino thinks she is a man. The plot thickens when Olivia falls in love with Viola's disguise as Cesario.

Meanwhile, Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew, and Maria plot their revenge on Malvolio, a pompous steward, who is subjected to a terrible practical joke!

Join the Royal Court, Sea Captain, Sailors, Servants, and Officers as the twists and turns of *Twelfth Night* unravel into a mess of mistaken identities and surprises!

Twelfth Night is directed by Michaela Koerner, and will be performed at the Todd Jamieson Stage on Friday, March 9 at 7 pm, and Saturday, March 10 at 2 pm and 7 pm.

TOPS WINTER CONCERT A ROUSING SUCCESS!

By Johnny Calcagno

A large and wonderfully respectful audience of TOPS students, staff, and parents enjoyed a series of student performances at the annual TOPS Winter Concert on December 5.

This year's concert featured selections from the Inspire and Hummingbirds Choirs, TOPS Middle School Band, TOPS Strings, and TOPS String Quartet, and included students from grades 3 to 8.



Photos by Ann Simonson

Strings Director Erica Johansen, returning to TOPS after a successful first year, led a group of violinists, violists, and cellists in Soon Hee Newbold's "Rhythm 'n' Blues," Dorothy A. Straub's "Summer Stomp," and an arrangement of the fiddle tune "Blackberry Blossom" by Gary Gackstatter. She also directed the newly formed TOPS String Quartet in the first movement of Mozart's

"Eine Kleine Nacht Musik."

Paul Gillespie, director of TOPS Middle School band and fondly called "Mr. G" by his students, led this year's band in "The Haunted House," a Halloween inspired tune by William Svarda.

TOPS Choirs have traditionally been very strong and talented, and this year's groups are no exception. The amazing Sari Breznau, TOPS' longtime Choir Director, leads both the Grades 5-8 Inspire Choir, and the Grades 3-4 Hummingbirds, and for the Winter and Spring concerts is greatly assisted by TOPS parent and stellar piano accompanist Teresa Nemeth.

For the first time in memory, the Inspire Choir kicked off the Winter concert, performing "Carol of the Bells," by Peter Wilhousky and Mykola Leontovich, and a rousing arrangement of "S'Vivon," a traditional Jewish Folk Song. S'Vivon was accompanied by 3rd Grade violinists Riley Calcagno and Leo Shannon, who received a warm round of cheers at the conclusion of the song.

The Hummingbird Choir closed the concert with a performance of "Velvet Shoes," by Ruth Elaine Schram, and "Elinor Wylie Holiday Lights," by Sally Albrecht. The last piece was performed in near darkness, after all of the lights in the theater were turned off. The Choir surprised and delighted the audience by spinning and dancing with dozens of small flashlights.

The annual Winter Concert highlights TOPS' strong Arts curriculum, including music programs that provide opportunities from grades K-8. Music instruction has always had very strong support from the TOPS community, most of it 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, the parent and community funding of music ensures equal access for all students regardless of economic background or privilege.

To ensure that the music program at TOPS continues to be successful, this year a small group of parents formed the TOPS Music Boosters. In addition to writing a budget for the music program and helping to plan for the Winter and Spring Concerts, the group has been brainstorming ways to better serve the musical needs of more kids. Some of the ideas that are currently being discussed:

- ◆ field trips to Washington Middle School, Roosevelt, or Garfield to watch concerts and/or practices
- ◆ new programs that might serve our under-represented students, e.g. a sort of "rock school" to attract guitar and bass players, and drummers, or a "hip-hop" recording program
- ◆ assigned boosters – one parent who would track, "manage," and assist with the middle school band program, one parent for the strings program, etc. This would help with communication, student/family expectations, etc.
- ◆ instrument acquisition
- ◆ additional performance opportunities or collaborations
- ◆ dedicated TOPICS weeks for music

For more information or to get involved in TOPS music, contact Johnny Calcagno at johnny@stickerville.org.

Auction continued from page 1

for them to train new volunteers to take their place. Here's a list of volunteers needed:

- ◆ Volunteer Coordinator Trainee
- ◆ Set up Coordinator
- ◆ Procurement Manager
- ◆ Raffle Coordinator
- ◆ Class Basket Coordinator
- ◆ Interior Decorator
- ◆ Merchandise Sales
- ◆ Registration Trainee

Within the next couple of weeks, every TOPS family will receive their auction kick-off packet in the mail, containing job descriptions, procurement ideas, and donation forms. All TOPS families are needed to procure or donate three items or services to sell at the auction. Each item should be worth \$50 or more. Those who enjoy hosting TOPICS for Grown-ups parties will be happy to know that those count towards your procurement total.

Procuring items for the auction is easier than you'd think. All it takes is a few quick conversations with people who can donate a product or service to the auction. You'd be surprised how often people are more than happy to contribute – it's great advertising for them! See the step-by-step guide in the auction packet for ideas.

Other ideas? We love to get restaurant gift certificates. These are so popular that one of your three items should be a restaurant meal, so next time you go out to dinner, ask the owner if they'd donate another dinner. Collaborate with friends to offer a service or a theme basket (anything with chocolate or wine goes over well). Can you donate a week at your vacation cabin? An afternoon sail on your boat? Music, knitting, or golf lessons? Mariners tickets? The possibilities are endless.

It's also time for your class to think about their auction art project. The class projects are often the highlight of the live auction...and they bring in a lot of money! The kids are really proud of their contribution to the school, the projects are quite wonderful, and the artwork and the evening's energy combine to create a bidding frenzy.

The class baskets have also been very successful and fun to put together. Usually one family from the classroom oversees the project, informing families of the theme and the dollar limit for contributions. After families have brought in contributions, the coordinator puts them together in an interesting basket or container. If your teacher is donating an event or activity, the basket can add to it.

Last year, it cost about \$14,000 to put on the event. If we were able to have most of these expenses underwritten it would make a big difference—the money raised could go directly to our kids! If you or someone you know owns a business that would be willing to donate money or services to the auction, let the auction coordinators know. The auction co-chairs are Tammy Luthy (322-3784, thejeffandtammymyshow@comcast.net) and Janet Morrison (634-2203, janetm@blarg.net). If you can volunteer, underwrite expenses, or have procurement questions or ideas, please let them know.

CSJ CORNER UPCOMING EVENTS

MARCH 1: TEACHER SPOTLIGHT
at 6:30 pm in the TOPS Library

Fourth Grade Teacher Joe Drummond will talk about the ways in which the TOPS mission is carried out in his classroom and through the fourth grade curriculum. He will also share with us experiences from his recent travels to the Philippines. Childcare is available for this event. Reservations for childcare can be made by calling 252-3510.

MARCH 15: TASTE OF TOPS
at 5:30-8:30 pm

This year's theme will honor the culture of India. There will be a potluck in the cafeteria and a number of events to educate and entertain will be presented throughout the school. The TOPS Middle School staff is organizing these special events related to Indian culture. The Annual TOPS Talent Showcase will begin at 7:00 pm in the Gym. (Forms to sign up for the Talent Show will be available March 1 and DUE March 12. Be sure to get them in on time!) You won't want to miss this very special annual TOPS event!

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.



NEW TOPS BROCHURE CREATED

By Glen Tamura, SC Chair

As part of our ongoing efforts to improve communication with the wider Seattle Community and in particular with perspective Kindergarten parents, Michael Courtney and Johnny Calcagno have designed a new Kindergarten Brochure to describe the program at TOPS. This brochure brilliantly captures what makes TOPS such an exciting school – from our social justice mission to our yearly camping trips. Vance Martin and Jack Lee are in the process of posting this brochure to the TOPS Website.

Our hope is that parents interested in a progressive alternative educational experience for their children will be enticed into further exploring whether

TOPS would fit the bill. Our thanks to Vance Martin, Jack Lee, Johnny Calcagno, Gerrit Kischner, and especially Michael Courtney for the incredible amount of work they have done to bring this to fruition.



STEWARDSHIP, THROUGH THE EYES OF 2ND GRADERS

By Laurie Stusser-McNeil

DURING A RECENT STEWARDSHIP SESSION, A GROUP OF TOPS SECOND GRADERS STOPPED TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN DOING TO CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT LATELY:

"I pick up litter. I don't smoke. I plant fruit in my garden. I sometimes ride in buses rather than in cars. I plant small trees at my Grandma's house and they grew up and gave air." ~Justin

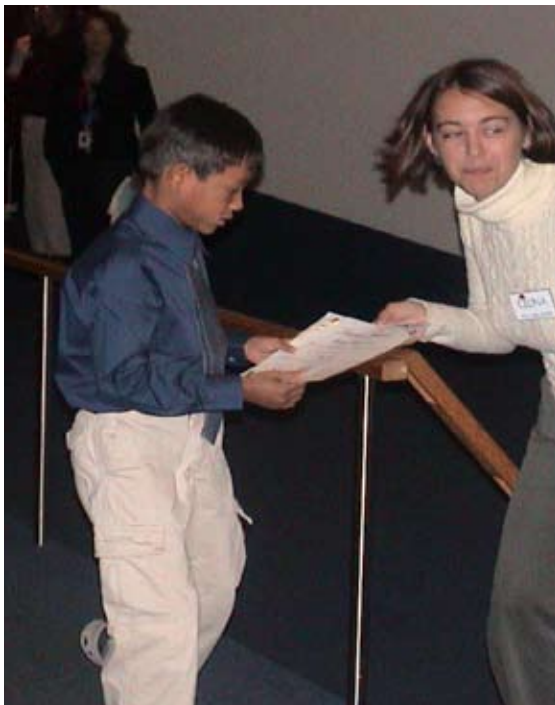
"I went to the beach and I went really far out in the waves. I saw a bottle and took it back to shore and threw it out." ~Riley

"Do not throw garbage or anything in the ocean or on the ground. Pick up garbage when you're going outside. Don't step on plants that are just growing and if they're dead. Don't throw smoking things on the ground and step on it. Do not waste paper because it comes from trees and do not chop down the trees. Don't pick leaves off of bushes and plants." ~Yin and Angel

"We don't litter. We only throw garbage in the trash. We also do not throw soda cans on the beach. Sometimes I pick up trash at the park and throw it away. I clean up at my bus stop because we see lots of litter. We put it inside the trash." ~Harrison and Nathan

"One time at the beach, my brother threw a soda can in the water. Then he threw a cap in the water from a water bottle. Then I went to pick it up and put it in the garbage can. I said, 'don't do it again because you are littering and littering is NOT COOL.' My brother always leaves the bathroom light on. I don't because it wastes our money and burns electricity." ~Leon

"Taking care of the Earth. Picking up litter. Don't pollute. Taking care of the Nature around you. Don't smoke (it pollutes the air). Do compost. Don't litter in the oceans." ~Cora and Rukeya



A STEWARDSHIP AWARD

By Marcia Weaver, Mom to Makara

Makara Chapko, grade 2, received an award for outstanding achievement in Stewardship from the Pacific Science Center on November 18, 2006. In 2006, the Pacific Science Center began asking the counselors at their summer and school break camps to nominate children for Discover Awards. The counselors selected 158 children from more than 2000 campers for achievement in five areas: inspiration, teamwork, ingenuity, curiosity, and stewardship.

In making the awards for Stewardship, the announcer explained that Jane Goodall's work is an example of outstanding achievement in Stewardship. She has taken on responsibility for protecting chimpanzees and their habitats.

Only 15 of the 158 children were recognized for Stewardship. Makara's achievement reflects well on the TOPS Stewardship program and the relatively rare education that TOPS offers in this area.

Makara Chapko receives his Discover Award at the Pacific Science Center.

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY AND BEYOND

By Steve Haines, Librarian

"Knowledge is of two kinds: we know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it."

— Samuel Johnson, English Writer, 1709-1784

YOUNG AUTHOR'S CELEBRATION

"NO STRUGGLE!" "NO STORY!" This was the call and response of our TOPS elementary students as local author Deb Lund spent time talking about writing successful stories. Deb, an accomplished author of several picture books including *Dinosailors* and *All Aboard the Dinotrain*, told the students that in writing stories it is most important to get the readers to the problem right away and then add details. She hammed it up with the younger students during the reading of *Dinosailors* and with the older students she and her son Kaj read from her book about his birth entitled, *Tell Me My Story, Mama*. She told us she has two new books in the works to continue the Dinosaur theme. One story will be about airplanes and one will be about motorcycles. She has a very informative web site, www.deblund.com.

After the exciting morning the students retired to one of 46 different locations in the school to share their own writing with each other during the Young Author's Celebration. Fifth graders led the small multi-grade groups, and many clusters also included interested parents and other adults. Our students should pride themselves on their writing accomplishments. Each year starting in kindergarten they add to their writing prowess capped off in 7th and 8th grade by Ms. Eich's richly rewarding writing program.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE FUND

I was very fortunate to be able to take advantage of the Teaching Excellence Fund to attend the annual WLMA (Washington Library Media Association) Conference, held this year in October near the airport. The conference theme, Stretch Yourself at WLMA '06, covered three days (I attended one day) of concurrent sessions, meant to "inspire you toward professional growth."

There were many authors sharing their new writings as well as a huge area of exhibits, which of course is a conference favorite: free stuff. The sessions varied from storytelling, to buying books with a "bare-bones" budget, to podcasting and blogging. Unfortunately there were way too many great sounding sessions to attend them all.

One session of interest to me that I did attend was entitled Research Without Copying, and was presented by Nancy Polette. I thought how novel, doing research without copying out huge passages of text, or printing off long wordy website articles. Nancy, a well sought after in-service presenter, gave us ideas on how students can

synthesize their research findings, including one I enjoyed called a Mystery Report. A student writes 10 clues (facts) about a researched subject. One clue is a "give away" clue. Another student in the class says a number between one and ten. The clue for that number is read. The students can guess what the subject is or pass. The game continues until the topic is guessed or all the clues have been read.

There were also ideas about ABC reports, and That's Good, That's Bad type reports, which are good for biographies. I enjoyed Nancy's quick wit and honest nature, and I hope to include some of her ideas with my Reading Block students this year. She has a well laid out website at www.nancypolette.com. Of course the day went way too fast, but it was rewarding being with so many



other teacher-librarians from all over the state. I appreciate the experience, and am grateful for the TOPS community's support.

HARRY POTTER, BOOK 7

I was preparing the library on Tuesday after Winter Vacation for the morning crowd of students. The room was cold and the plants were drooping but that soon changed with all of the warm, happy children that soon took over the library, including several who rushed up to me demanding to know what the 7th Harry Potter book is called. After dashing to a computer we discovered that *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* will be the final installment of the Harry Potter series. J.K Rowling has been working 17 years on these books, and she said this would be the end, although she may produce an encyclopedia to go along with the series. We enjoyed reading the gossip and rumors about this book. The biggest question is when it will come out. Can we wait?



CHINESE NEW YEAR

By Hong Jiang, TOPS Mandarin Teacher

Chinese New Year is also known as the Spring Festival. It is China's biggest holiday. It starts with the New Moon on the first day of the first month of the Chinese calendar and ends on the full moon 15 days later with the Lantern Festival. The Chinese calendar is based on a combination of lunar and solar movements, and that's why Chinese New Year falls on a different date each year somewhere between mid January and February 20. Each Chinese year is represented by a repeated cycle of 12 animals: rat, ox, tiger, hare or rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig.

ORIGIN

The origin of Chinese New Year is centuries old, actually too old to be traced. But many believe the word Nian, which means "year," was the name of a beast that preyed on people on the eve of a new year.

In one legend, the beast, Nian, had the power to swallow up all the people in a village in one big bite. Village people were very scared of Nian. One day, an old man came to the villagers' rescue, offering to subdue Nian. At the end of the legend, Nian was gone and the old man, who turned out to be an immortal god, told the villagers to put red paper decorations on their windows and doors at each year's end in order to keep Nian away. It is believed Nian is afraid of the color red.

Today people continue the custom of putting up red paper and lighting firecrackers to scare away Nian. The term "Guo Nian", which means "Survive the Nian" became "Celebrate the Year" and the word "guo" in Chinese means both "pass over" and "observe."

CELEBRATIONS

As part of the the Chinese New Year celebration, people buy presents, decorations, special foods, and new clothing. Railroad stations throughout China are filled with travelers

who take their vacation days around New Year to return home for a family reunion.

Days before the New Year celebration, Chinese families are busy giving their home a thorough cleaning. It is believed the cleaning sweeps away bad luck and makes the house ready for good luck to enter. All brooms and dust pans are put away on New Year's Eve so good luck cannot be swept away.

In many homes, doors and windowpanes get a new coat of red paint. The home is decorated with paper-cuts and poems called couplets of "happiness," "wealth," "longevity," and "satisfactory marriage with children."

The New Year's Eve dinner is a feast with all the members of the family getting together. One popular food is "jiaozi" which are dumplings boiled in water. After dinner, the whole family stays up all night playing cards, board games, or watching TV programs dedicated to the New Year's celebration. Lights in the house are kept on during the whole night. At midnight, the sky is lit up by fireworks which symbolize the sending out of the old year and the welcoming in of the new year. People open all the windows and doors in the house in order to let the old year go out.

Very early the next morning, children greet their parents and receive their New Year present. They get lucky red envelopes with money inside. The rest of the first day and the next days of the New Year are spent visiting relatives, friends, and neighbors.

Chinese New Year is a time for reconciliation. Old grudges are forgiven. People are warm and friendly toward one another. The Lantern Festival marks the end of the 15-day New Year celebrations and life goes back to normal.

Chinese New Year customs vary from place to place in China as the country is big with regional and ethnical diversities. But the spirit underlying the diverse celebrations of the New Year is the same, a sincere wish of peace and happiness for family members and friends.

2007 TOPS CALENDAR

Send your events and dates to our webmaster, Jack Lee, at webmaster@topsk8.org. Please check Thursday Go-Homes and the web site for updates.

FEBRUARY

1 (Th)Middle school tour, 9:30 a.m.
 2 (F).....Middle school ski bus – all day
 2 (F).....Day between semesters; no school
 6 (T)Elementary school tour, 9:30 a.m.
 7 (W).....Professional development day;
 2-hour early dismissal
 9 (F).....Middle school dance, 6:30 p.m.
 13 (T)BLT meeting, 4 p.m.
 14 (W).....Kindergarten 100 day celebration
 14 (W).....Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
 19 (M)Presidents Day; no school
 20-23 (T-F)....Mid-winter break; no school
 27 (Th)5th grade to Burke Museum

MARCH

7 (W).....Professional development day;
 2-hour early dismissal
 9 (F).....Middle school play, 7 p.m.

10 (S).....Middle school play, 2 and 7 p.m.
 14 (W).....Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
 15 (Th)Taste of TOPS, 5:30-8:30 p.m.
 16 (F).....Professional development day;
 no school
 21-22 (W-Th)6th grade camp
 21-23 (W-F) ...5th grade to Camp Colman
 30 (F).....Middle school dance, 6:30 p.m.

APRIL

3-4 (T-W).....Poetry Festival, 1st and 2nd grades
 4 (W).....Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
 6 (F).....Kindergarten ABC party
 9-13 (M-F)Spring break; no school
 16-30WASL Testing
 18(W).....End of third quarter

MAY

1-4 (T-F).....WASL Testing
 5 (Sa).....TOPS Auction at the Asian
 Resource Center

9 (W).....Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
 16-18 (W-F) ...7th grade camp
 16 (W).....Professional development day;
 2-hour early dismissal
 18-19 (F-S).....ArtFest
 18-19 (F-S).....Elementary play
 28 (M)Memorial Day; no school
 30 (W).....Spring Concert, 2 and 7 p.m.

JUNE

5-8 (T-F).....8th grade camp
 7-8 (Th-F)3rd and 4th grade camp
 12 (T)6th and 7th grade Orientation
 14 (Th)K, 1st, 2nd grade to Camp Long
 15 (F).....8th grade Passage
 18 (M)5th grade Passage
 19 (T)Field Day, elementary grades
 19 (T)Wild Waves, middle school
 20 (W).....Last student day

A MONTHLY CALENDAR OF HOLIDAYS

WHAT TOPS FAMILIES ARE CELEBRATING

Compiled by Lynne Goodrich, CSJ member

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month is the successor to Negro History Week which was initiated on February 12, 1926, by Carter G. Woodson, a pre-eminent historian and founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson was concerned that the contributions of Black Americans were overlooked or misrepresented. He selected February because it included the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass whom he believed had dramatically impacted the lives of Black Americans. In 1976, Woodson's legacy, now renamed the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, successfully lobbied to extend Black History Week into a month-long observance.

FEBRUARY 2007 HOLIDAYS

Feb. 2: Groundhog Day (United States) This holiday was brought to America by the Pennsylvania Dutch (German settlers) who believed that all hibernating animals come out to check on the weather. If the animal saw its shadow, then six weeks of bad weather would follow and the animal would go back to sleep. However, a cloudy day meant that spring was coming soon.

Feb. 2: Imbolc (Wiccan) Ancient festival that celebrates the middle of the season of long nights and anticipates the upcoming season of light.

Feb. 3: TuB'Shevat (Jewish) Also known as the "New Year for Trees." Celebration of the coming of spring and the season in which the earliest blooming trees in Israel emerge from winter sleep and begin a new fruit bearing cycle.

Feb 12: Birthday of Abraham Lincoln (USA) Born 1809 and 16th President of the United States. Once regarded as the "Great Emancipator" for his forward strides in freeing the slaves, he was criticized a century later for his caution in moving towards equal rights.

Feb. 14: Valentine's Day (USA) St. Valentine was imprisoned for performing marriages declared illegal by Claudius II. While imprisoned, he became friends with the jailer's daughter. On the eve of his execution, he thanked her for her kindness in a note signed, "Your Valentine."

Feb. 15: Nirvana Day (Buddhist) Celebration of Buddha's death when he reached total Nirvana, at the age of 80. The Buddha spent many years meditating to try to find out why people suffer. The Buddha is not worshiped as a god, but held up as an example of a compassionate way of being which all people can achieve through study and the practice of meditation. This day is usually celebrated by Buddhists from Japan, China, Korea, and Vietnam.

Feb. 16: Mahashivaratri (Hindu) Dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. The festival is religious in nature and universally celebrated by Hindus. Shiva is considered by many to be the supreme Indian deity.

Feb 18: Lunar New Year (China/Vietnam/Korea) This 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 twelve year cycle, one of 12 animals represents each year. 2007 is the year of the pig. People born in the year of the pig (1935, 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, and 2007) are chivalrous and gallant.

Feb. 20: Mardi Gras/Shrove Tuesday (Christian) The day before Ash Wednesday when Christians "shrive" or confess their sins prior to Lent. The oldest Mardi Gras celebration in the United States takes place in Mobile Alabama which first observed the holiday in 1703. The city most famous for celebrating Mardi Gras is New Orleans, Louisiana.

DOES YOUR CHILD LOVE TO SING?

Pacifica Choirs is seeking enthusiastic young singers (boys and girls, ages 5-18) for immediate entry. Pacifica offers a

fun, challenging, and unique musical experience: a rich and varied song repertoire, performances at concerts, festivals, & community events, CD recordings, music theory, opportunities to learn and perform folk dances, and international guest teachers. Rehearsals take place in NE Seattle and are just once a week at all five choir levels. No experience required for the three younger levels. Scholarships & reduced tuition available to low- & lower-middle income families. No audition required for the Preparatory level (5-6 years old). Simple, child-friendly audition required for performing levels. For more information, please call (206) 527-9095, email pacificachoirs@comcast.net, or visit www.pacificachoirs.org.



TOPS HISTORICAL SOCIETY – CITY SCHOOL

By Toby Harris

In the last issue, I wrote about the City School program, kicked off with a small grant during the 1982-83 school year. For the following seven, possibly eight school years, TOPS activities included a week of formal City School activities and field trips around Memorial Day time. The 1990s brought a focus on facilities and a couple of moves for TOPS; however, the spirit of the City School idea never disappeared and field trips continued, despite the lack of an all-grades City School Week.

The following are examples of “urban classroom” field trips and curriculum after that first year. These activities took place between 1984 and 1990. Walking and/or bus riding were frequently involved. Some of them were (and a few still are) annual events.



(top) Showing off designs for Seattle Center
(bottom) Downtown studying urban design with parent architect
Photos: TOPS Archives

- ◆ A visit to an architecture firm
- ◆ Exploring My Neighborhood: Mapping, vocabulary, taking photographs
- ◆ Harbor Tour
- ◆ Mural project downtown just below 1st & Union (grant from Seattle Arts Commission/Washington Arts Commission). Theme is “living in the city” and the artist-in-residence is Stuart Nakamura. (1986)
- ◆ TOPS kids presented ideas about the new Seattle Art Museum to architect, Robert Venturi. (1986)
- ◆ Kingdome, Occidental Park, Underground Seattle, monorail, public art
- ◆ Water Safety and Survival at the YMCA
- ◆ Visited downtown construction sites
- ◆ Visits to the Lakeview Cemetery on Capital Hill (where many Seattle pioneers are buried)
- ◆ PONCHO Theatre, Seattle Children’s Theatre, Longacres
- ◆ Toured “Darth Vader” building (4th & Blanchard)
- ◆ Pike Place Market Senior Center, First Avenue Food Bank
- ◆ Attended the unveiling of the camel replicas in front of Seattle Art Museum at Volunteer Park.
- ◆ Examined the Disney proposals for Seattle Center
- ◆ Camp Nintendo
- ◆ Created tiles for Tashkent Peace Park
- ◆ Mount Zion Baptist Church for Martin Luther King Commemoration
- ◆ Sports Medicine Clinic, Virginia Mason Hospital
- ◆ International District, Wing Luke Museum, and the Denise Louie Early Childhood Center where English is not most the children’s first language
- ◆ King County Prosecutor’s office and Judge Johnson’s chambers
- ◆ Henry Gallery, Burke Museum, and other buildings on the University of Washington campus

After 1990, many of these field trips continued, with walking and bus riding still common. Beginning in 2003-04, TOPS Middle School began an annual field trip day, “Student Exploration and Experience” (See TOPS newsletter, November 2006). TOPICS sometimes provides opportunities for urban discoveries as well.

Read about more TOPS innovations, such as the Underground Railroad journey next month.

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A SPORT...

By Sam Heft-Luthy, Grade 7

Football. The sport of kings. A battle, nay, a war. An epic struggle between two teams. Only one team will prevail. An ultimate fight for glory. This game is about so much more than a ball. It's about strategy, planning, and execution. Pushing yourself at something, and succeeding masterfully – or falling flat on your face. You know what sport I really like? Racewalking.



Photo by Don Zemke

I know that we haven't officially done Racewalking in PE – as far as Don and Eric know. But if they spent the time to look at Racewalking, they'd know – for some students at TOPS, it's more than a dorky pseudo-sport. It's a dorky pseudo way of life.

Racewalking. Though I myself have never participated, I've spent some time observing the underground Racewalking "cult" (if you will), and know some things you may not know about it. For starters, it exists. I bet you've never heard of Racewalking. I bet you're sitting, reading this and thinking "Pphht...Racewalking doesn't exist. It's just something totally made up." HAH! YOU ARE WRONG!! Racewalking is the most exciting sport. . . EVER. Go as fast as you can! But always have at least one foot on the ground. And don't bend your knees. Don't even think of wearing clothes that don't make you look stupid. And don't go too fast. You wouldn't want to get a penalty. Or a boo-boo.

When I first learned about this Racewalking subculture, I was quite surprised. Almost half the students at TOPS

are involved in some sort of non-official school Racewalking league. Yes, those statistics are accurate. Sort of. The most popular one, the Blazing Snails, has been in existence since before most students at TOPS were born. Racewalking has been passed down from grade to grade and become a true TOPS tradition.

Racewalking is truly a wonderful "sport." Though it lacks the majesty of football, or...any other sport, it still enjoys a large amount of popularity on the TOPS campus. Some call it a stupid, annoying, weird, pointless activity. And they'd be right. But to say anything about the people who participate in Racewalking would be saying something about approximately half of the student body. And you never really know who could secretly be a participant in this subversive sport. . . of Racewalking.

TOPS SKI BUS

By Anna Duncan, Grade 6

Do you love to ski or snowboard? Or would you like to try it? TOPS Ski Bus is for any middle schooler who would like to try or continue learning skiing or snowboarding. Ski Bus is a great opportunity to have fun and spend time not only with friends, but new people as well. Ski Bus occurs for four Friday nights on which you leave school an hour early (2:30) and take a bus to Summit at Snoqualmie. From there, most kids take lessons, but they are totally optional.

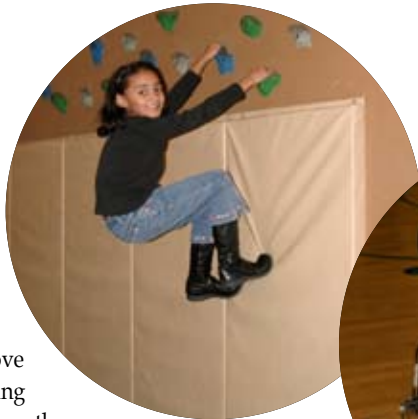
On my first time at Ski Bus, I was really excited when we got there. I went to lessons where I improved my skills and went down a couple different slopes, guided by an experienced instructor. After lessons, I ate dinner in the warm but crowded lodge where you could conveniently buy food and drinks. Then I free skied for the remaining hour and a half until 9:00, when everyone was due back



Photo by Don Zemke

at the bus. We get back to TOPS at 10:30, tired but happy. Overall, TOPS Ski Bus is a great way to have fun and enjoy yourself with different kids.

WHY I LOVE PE. . . .



I love going across the rock wall because it's physically challenging! It makes your arms real strong. I think it's cool in PE when we have great choices like the rock wall and soccer.

~Grace Cotter, Grade 2



I love to unicycle in PE because it's fun, it challenges your balance, and it's a special skill that not a lot of people have. When I first rode across the gym by myself I felt excited and proud! I really think it's great that TOPS gives us these great activities. ~Helen Maclay, Grade 3

I really like balancing on the bongo board in PE because it's fun and everyone says that I'm really good! I can even dribble a basketball while on the bongo board. Don wants me to learn to juggle while balancing on the bongo board. ~John Danielson, Grade 2



PE is fun. I love to run. PE is fun for everyone.

~Tania Rzhondkovsky-Zarate, Grade 2



Photos by Don Zemke

Message from the Principal continued from page 1

students continue to enjoy Chess Club, After School Sports, and Spanish, before and after school.

Our Dr. MLK, Jr. Assembly was held the 19th of January at 1:30 p.m. Our students always do a fantastic job of celebrating Dr. King's life.

Our school tours for prospective parents have begun. We have three elementary visits and one middle school visit. We welcome the opportunity to have visitors in our building. We are very proud of our program and love to show off our students. We thank our parents who have volunteered to be tour guides. Thanks to Linda Adams for coordinating our volunteers.

Sari Breznau, our Choir Director, is beginning a "Family Choir." See details in your January 4 Go Home.

We welcome Brad Angell, parent, who is taking over Volunteer Coordinator activities in Randi Niemer's absence. For those of you who do not know, Randi, Jim, and their three children are in India for three months. Brad will be monitoring Randi's mailbox: raniemier@seattleschools.org.

Robert Kubinec, parent, has taken over the responsibilities of being treasurer for PEAK while Randi is away. There is a locked mailbox in the office to receive PEAK payments.

Our annual speech tournaments have begun. If you have

suggestions of people from the community who would enjoy being judges, please contact the office or Steve Haines. The unfilled dates for judges for tournaments are: Friday, February 9, Friday, February 16, and Friday, March 2 (middle school).

Our Taste of TOPS theme for this year is India. The date set aside for this multi-cultural event is Thursday, March 15. For those of you who would like to share your culture, costumes, or artifacts from India, please call the school office at 252-3510.

Mark your calendars--the official end of the semester for middle school is Friday, February 2. There is no school that Friday. Wednesday, February 7, is a two-hour early dismissal for professional development.

Danny Rock, Danforth administrative intern, will be joining us for the second semester through April. He has become acquainted with our middle school team during first semester, attending our middle school meetings. He has been a teacher at Roosevelt High School and director of the Bridges Program.

Thank you to the students who participated in the State of the School meeting: Sam Heft-Luthy, Grace Cotter, Joe Markman, Koji Pingry, Riley Calcagno, Leo Shannon, and Sam Bert. They were awesome!

Cheers! ~Clara



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SAVE THE DATE!

EIGHTH ANNUAL TASTE OF TOPS AND TALENT SHOWCASE

OUR THEME WILL HONOR THE CULTURE OF INDIA

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2007

5:30-8:30 PM

Potluck in the TOPS cafeteria and Talent Showcase in the gym
Events to entertain and educate about Indian culture throughout the evening

TALENT SHOWCASE--CALLING ON ALL STUDENTS!

***FORMS FOR THE TALENT SHOWCASE WILL BE AVAILABLE MARCH 1.
THEY WILL BE DUE MONDAY, MARCH 12. BE SURE TO GET THEM IN ON TIME!***

THANKS TO G & H PRINTING, 2370 EASTLAKE E. 329-9888

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