LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dear TOPS Families,

I really enjoyed meeting many parents at our Ice Cream Social on Sunday, October 4, and at the curriculum night events. The TOPS community is clearly a vibrant and dynamic family friendly group... I am glad to be a part of it. It’s wonderful to see so many parents at the morning bus area greeting and welcoming me to the school. Keep coming. It makes my day.

Thank you so much for making the necessary adjustments before and after school to keep our students and building safe, as well as honoring our teachers’ work day. I appreciate your willingness to work together to ensure the well-being of all of our students. Students are enjoying Ultimate Frisbee and working hard in Study Table. The school year is quickly moving along. Look for the articles in this newsletter regarding Parent-Teacher Conferences and Assessment.

After School Activity Bus: Our Middle School Activity Bus, which started on October 20, arrives at 4:50 and leaves promptly at 5:00 p.m. This activity bus is paid for by a Middle School grant to support after school activities for Middle School students. Students who are enrolled in after school activities may ride the bus. Parents must fill out a bus form which can be found in the school office. There is a turn-around time of

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Welcome to TOPS, Jessica!

By Ann Simonson

Jessica Pugsley joined TOPS this fall as our new first grade teacher. She is taking over for Kristina Stoneberg, who moved up to 4th grade this year. Jessica is excited about teaching at an alternative school where she can expand her teaching beyond the classroom to the community and the city. She is also very pleased with the TOPS focus on social justice, as she believes education is a social justice issue. Not only should every student at TOPS receive an excellent education, children everywhere should. She hopes to contribute to the education and growth of her students as good citizens. And hopefully some day they will fight for social justice and demand an excellent education for all students.

Jessica has moved around a bit. She was born in Chicago, but her family moved to Panama when she was 6 weeks old and lived there until she was four. They relocated to Ohio, where she

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MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

By Jeanne Kuban, Assistant Principal

November signals the return of Parent-Teacher Conferences to our busy school and home schedules. As a parent, I always looked forward to this time spent with my children’s teachers. I could spend hours talking about my children and I wanted to make the most of the time I had for this important, collaborative meeting. When I became a teacher, I learned what it was like to prepare for conferences from “the other side.” I wanted to use this very important time in the best way possible, and serve the needs of my students and their families. Both roles held many similarities in terms of goals, concerns, and hopes. The most important similarity, whether parent or teacher, is the primary focus on the student and his/her learning and well-being in school.

As a parent, I left the conference feeling much more satisfied and informed with a little preparation on my part. I talked often with my children before the conference to get a reliable sense of how they were feeling about school, their classes, their learning, and their teachers. I looked over the work they brought back from school. I tried my best to find time to read the teachers’ newsletters. I then kept track of the questions I had for the teachers.

The simple act of making a list of your questions and concerns is one of the best ways to make the most of your conference. Many family/education websites recommend developing at least five questions that are specific to your child. Some examples of these questions/concerns follow:

- Tell the teacher what you see as your child’s strengths.
- Let the teacher know of your child’s special interests.
- Tell the teacher about the positives your child is experiencing and share any concerns you and/or your child have.
- What are the teacher’s academic/social-emotional goals for my child this year?
- How does the teacher assess my child’s progress?
- What does the teacher see as my child’s strengths? Challenges?
- How does my child know how he/she is doing in your class?
- What can I do at home to support the work

This is obviously not a definitive list! Please feel free to address whatever questions you have. You are the person who knows your child in a way that is unique. Your rapport with your child’s teacher during this most important meeting time is critical to his/her continued academic success. Enjoy the time spent together discussing one of your favorite topics…your own special child.

Conference Schedule

**No school for students K-8 on Nov. 23-25.**

**Kindergarten – Grade 5:**
All day Nov. 23-25.

**Middle School:**
- Nov. 17-18 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.
- Nov. 19 4:30 - 8:00 p.m.
- Nov. 23 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
- Nov. 24 9:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

"My dear Sir, in all my years of teaching I’ve never met a student quite as... interesting... as your son".
What's stopping you from signing up for Escrip?

By Julie Wroble

Since January, families who participate in the Escrip program have earned $450 for Friends of TOPS. Are you new to TOPS? If so, consider signing up for Escrip. It's easy!

1. Go to www.escrip.com
2. Click on “sign up”
3. Follow the instructions to register your grocery cards and existing credit/debit cards

It's easy, it's free, and it's powerful! Registering your cards is quick and simple, and once that is done, a small percentage of every purchase you make at participating vendors will be sent to Friends of TOPS for use in the general fund.

If you have no idea what your Safeway club card number is, all you have to do is call 1-877-Safeway and they will give you the club card number. You can also sign up other credit cards or retail cards (Visa, Mastercard, Macy's, etc.). You also have the opportunity to register credit cards and debit cards or do on-line shopping at www.shopping.escrip.com.

Feel free to contact me with questions or suggestions at jwroble@comcast.net or (206) 324-4829.

Global Reading Challenge Comes to TOPS

After years of being on the wait list, we are finally going to get a chance at the ever-popular Seattle Public Library’s reading challenge. The Global Reading Challenge is a Battle of the Books program for 4th and 5th graders enrolled in the Seattle Public Schools. Its mission is to encourage children to have fun and enjoy the sport of reading.

After reading ten books, children take part in a “Quiz Bowl” game to determine the winner for the city of Seattle. School Challenges are conducted in each school building by SPL library staff. Semi-Final Challenges are held at the downtown Central Library, and winning Semi-Final teams compete in the City Challenge. The winning Seattle team takes home the Global Reading Challenge traveling trophy and goes on to a videoconference challenge between Seattle and Fraser Valley and Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. Last year there were 320 teams representing 40 schools.

In our first year we can have two to four teams of up to seven students on each team. The action starts in November when the books are announced. We get a set of books for each team to read and study, with parent help (right Missy?). A wide range of reading levels is represented by selected books so all students can participate. Librarians from each city pick the books. Esme Raji’s Sahara Special and I was a Rat by Philip Pullman (remember the SCT play?) were among those chosen last year.

The Challenge started in the late 1930s, when two Chicago school librarians developed a program to test young readers’ knowledge of good literature. The program reached thousands of Chicago school children and was quickly turned into a weekly radio quiz program known as “The Battle of the Books.” Teams representing public elementary schools answered questions about characters, plots, and settings from well known fiction books and biographies.

If you are curious about this highly stimulating program let me know.

State Library Media Grant (ESHB 2687)

Thanks to three moms from Spokane who worked tirelessly for adequate funding for all public schools in Washington, we have received our allocation of books and they are now ready to be perused. This “grass roots” effort resulted in the first ever state-level support for libraries in Washington. A budget of $4 million was passed in March, which breaks down to about $4 per student for the 2009-10 academic year to maintain and improve library materials, collections, and services.

This all started in 2007, when Susan McBurney, Denette Hil, and Lisa Brunken from Spokane started to skillfully work for the future of school libraries after the Spokane School District slashed the schools’ library budget. We have all benefited from their hard work. I noticed that we needed more books written at a high interest level and a low reading level, so I sent out publishers’ catalogs to several teachers and the resulting collection of 102 Mom’s Library Grant books can be viewed at www.seattleschools.org/area/library/stuindex.xml, or if you are really curious you could come in to the library. They are on the top shelf in the reference section. Enjoy!

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.

-DOROTHY PARKER, AMERICAN WRITER

Mom’s $ Books - Photo by Steve Haines

What’s your favorite book?
CSJ's September meeting yielded a strong interest from both the parents and staff to explore how social justice can be better integrated and aligned throughout the building. To begin that conversation, parents and staff met after the staff meeting on October 7 to discuss how we can work together to further the mission and vision incorporating social justice at TOPS. Teachers from virtually every grade band, along with support staff and administration, participated in this valuable discussion.

Our goal was to begin to think about ways in which teaching and learning related to social justice and the TOPS mission can be sustained, as well as foregrounded for our children. The goal is to extend this learning so that seeds of justice are being planted in each grade, with the 8th grade project “Planting the Seeds” as the capstone—and that students are aware of this learning as they go.

Staff members discussed ways in which they are addressing social justice issues in their classrooms, both as part of and distinct from their curricula. A number of teachers talked about ways in which they build community in their classrooms by having students share their stories and family histories. Tracie told about creating a buddy system for new students. Others talked about asking students to give one another meaningful compliments. Teachers are clearly committed to incorporating ideas of equity, compassion, inclusion, and respect in their interactions with our students, and are dedicating December’s TOPICS to International Human Rights’ Day, Dec. 10.

Sometimes the most important interactions are unplanned ones. Joan and Joby described an incident in the kindergarten class that led them to decide on the spot to suspend the rest of the afternoon’s planned activities in order to focus on cooperative play, tolerance, and reinforcing their classroom as a “hate free zone.” The incident underscored how essential it is to be able to take advantage of such moments, and how important it is to address issues right when they come up so that children understand immediately the repercussions of their actions.

Other teachers lamented the lack of time to be able to take advantage of such situations, as well as to be able to incorporate exciting and creative social justice activities beyond what they are expected to teach. Many want to include volunteer work in their curricula, either in the school or out in the community, so that students are used to it when they get to 8th grade and “Planting the Seeds.” Katie talked about 3rd graders and “Planting the Seeds.” Katie talked about 3rd graders reading at the senior center; Lori brought up 7th graders working at the Union Gospel Mission.

We explored how parents can support and help expand teachers’ efforts. A number of ideas came up, including developing social justice resources that all teachers can access, such as reading lists, contacts at organizations that are willing to bring students in to help with activities at age-appropriate levels, and offering their own expertise in social justice work they are already doing. Parents can also be engaged in classrooms of any age.

Other ideas and issues included:

- a professional development day focused on creating a social justice curriculum for the building;
- working to better include non-English speaking families, including money for interpreters;
- strengthening the role of the room reps to help to identify families that may need extra help, with language or other issues;
- ways in which community can be created and reinforced throughout the building, through language, relationships, and cross-grade parent connections;
- broadening the discussion of where to send Penny Harvest money beyond the “winning” classroom into a school-wide conversation;
- developing a virtual community, through a blog or news group, to improve communication and allow teachers to access volunteer support from every grade for help with learning activities related to social justice;
- continuing to follow-up on new families as they are added to the school, and new kids in the classrooms.

The meeting began the process of developing a working and growing definition of social justice, and how to bring that into the larger TOPS community. But this work is ongoing. We are looking to get more feedback from staff that weren’t at the meeting, and brainstorm what we can do. Come to CSJ’s next meeting, November 3 at 5:30, for the next phase of this conversation.
CSJ Corner
Welcome to the CSJ Corner where you can look to find out what the Coalition for Social Justice has planned. Please mark your calendars for meetings and events! The Coalition for Social Justice will meet each month in the TOPS Library from 5:30-7:30 p.m.; until we have a consistent day of the month, check the CSJ Corner for meeting announcements. Our goal this year is to build a larger group that is committed to discussing and working on issues of diversity, social justice, and inclusion at TOPS.

MONTHLY MEETING, TUESDAY NOVEMBER 3, 5:30 – 7:30
CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION!
We will explore and expand on October’s discussion with staff about how TOPS’ mission and vision of social justice can be better aligned, integrated, and supported throughout the building. We welcome all ideas, questions, and creativity.

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.

CSJ is seeking more participation from members of the TOPS community to help with planning and ideas. Please consider spending your volunteer hours at TOPS with CSJ. Contact Karen Stuhldreher at kstuhldr@sccd.ctc.edu for more information.

Penny Harvest 2009-2010
By Sheri Touissaint

Penny Harvest is the largest child philanthropy program in the United States. It is an outstanding service-learning program that teaches students how to collect money for a good cause and give back to others.

Between Monday, October 26 and Monday, November 30, over 1,000 schools nationwide - and nearly 500,000 students - will be scouring their homes and neighborhoods for idle pennies. From now until Thanksgiving, students will connect with their parents, friends, and neighbors as they go in search of pennies.

During the next four weeks, millions of pennies will be collected by Penny Harvesters, and thousands of Penny Harvesters will connect with their communities. As students participate in the first phase of Penny Harvest, they literally create their own philanthropic bank account. The curriculum gives students the opportunity to develop their leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. Students use one hundred percent of the funds collected to make grants to non-profit organizations of their choice.

How to help
Get a Penny harvest bag, gather pennies, and bring them to your classroom teacher.

How to prepare
Set a goal of how to harvest pennies. To find tips, tools, sample letters, and translations go to www.PennyHarvest.org/neighbors.

Last year at TOPS school we exceeded our goal by filling 30 canvas sacks and collecting $262 dollars. The TOPS Philanthropy Roundtable Group Leaders allocated funds to the Downtown Emergency Service Center and the Hamomi Children’s Center. The Downtown Emergency Service Center serves disabled and vulnerable homeless adults, and they are one of the largest multiservice centers for homeless adults in the Pacific Northwest. The Hamomi Children’s Center is a primary school whose mission is to improve the lives of orphaned and vulnerable children in the slums of Nairobi.

Young children want to help others, but they have few real opportunities to do so. Penny harvesting is a simple and safe way to start the journey to good citizenship. Along the way, students gain confidence, learn to work as team, and increase their dedication to school and their community.

www.PennyHarvest.org

Looking for fun activities after school?
Check out Kids Co!
The Kids Co. program at TOPS has openings in our before school program (7:00-9:00 a.m.) and our after school program (3:30-6:00 p.m.). We run a high quality program with fun and enriching activities. Our curriculum includes sports, arts & crafts, cooking, drama, and social skills building, and it’s a safe place to grow and make new friends. Please call Aaron at 709-8487 to register your child!
The new Student Assignment Plan (SAP) for Seattle Public Schools is here and goes into effect for grades K, 6, and 9 in 2010. Each student will initially be assigned to a school based on his/her address – an attendance area school. Students may also apply to attend a different attendance area school that is not full or to attend an option school. All students currently attending a school may stay at that school until its highest grade.

TOPS is an option school. Admission to option schools will be based on three tiebreakers – siblings, geographic zone proximity, and lottery. The sibling tiebreaker means that siblings of students already at TOPS who will still attend TOPS the following year will be the first to be admitted. Second, there will be a geographic zone around TOPS – students who live within that zone will be the next to be admitted. Finally, the balance of students will be admitted by lottery.

On October 6, the District released proposed maps showing attendance area boundaries. The District is holding community meetings about the proposed maps and will submit final proposed maps to the School Board on November 4. The Board is scheduled to vote on the maps on November 18.

Site Council is studying three issues that affect TOPS. First, the District has not yet released the boundaries of the geographic zones around option schools that will determine the second tiebreaker for admission. The District has indicated that these zones will be subject to change each year and will be used, in part, to manage capacity. Thus, if there is not enough capacity in a nearby attendance area school, the option school geographic zone may be drawn larger so more children in that area could be admitted to the option school. Site Council is concerned that the District has not yet released proposed boundaries of the option school geographic zones and is consulting with the Eastlake Community Council about the geographic zone for TOPS.

Second, once the SAP is fully implemented, a student will only be entitled to yellow bus transportation to an option school in that student’s “service area.” If a student lives in a service area that does not have an option school, yellow bus transportation will be available to an option school in a “linked” service area. TOPS is in the Washington Middle School service area (see map: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/boundarymaps/pdfs/Washington.pdf). Site Council is considering whether to propose that another service area be linked to ours so that students from two service areas could be entitled to yellow bus transportation to TOPS.

Finally, the District has indicated that current bus transportation may continue for an undetermined period after the SAP goes into effect – probably one or two years. But, within the next few years, school bus transportation will no longer be provided for many of our current students. Site Council wants to find out how many of our families will be affected and whether those families will have to leave the school if they don't have bus transportation. We also want to consider whether our school community can provide any transportation options to help families who will be affected by this change.

If you want more information about the SAP, see the District website – www.seattleschools.org. If you are interested in working on any of the issues affecting TOPS, please contact either Susan Welch or Janis White.

Message from the Principal continued from page 1

approximately 10 working days from the time your student’s name is submitted, to the date his/her name shows up on the official riders’ list. Therefore, we are asking parents to pick up their children until bus transportation is confirmed.

Students must go directly to their activity when dismissed at 3:30 and go directly to the activity bus on Louisa when their activities are dismissed at 4:45 p.m. Students who are not enrolled in activities are not permitted to ride the bus.

Younger siblings who are not enrolled in after school activities must have supervision while waiting for older sibling(s) to be dismissed at 4:45. KidsCo is available for childcare. Please call Aaron at 709-8487 to make arrangements.

If your student is not riding the bus after an activity, please plan to pick him/her up by 5:00 p.m. Parents who do not pick their students up by 5:00 risk having their student(s) removed from the after school activity.

Middle School Questions:
It has come to my attention that the student “rumor mill” is talking about a cancelled Middle School dance. The first Middle School dance has not been cancelled. The date for the first dance has also not been set. Ms. Hubbard (ASB Coordinator), Ms. Kuban, and I told the students that before the date could be set, we needed to see more consistently appropriate behavior in the lunchroom. What this includes is removing food from tables and benches, recycling/composting/garbage appropriately, taking trays back to the kitchen, staying in the lunchroom until tables are clean or they are dismissed, not taking food outside of the lunchroom, and listening when asked for attention. It’s important for us and the students to know that they can maintain this level of responsibility before we plan an event which requires a higher level of responsibility on the part of the students. We have to know that the students are going to respond appropriately to the chaperones at an activity like a school dance. Please help and support your student’s understanding of the lunchroom guidelines as well as school rules in general. Your support will help us a great deal in creating the safe and predictable environment where children can be successful.

Sincerely,
Jo Lute-Ervin
Principal
### November
- 3 (T) .... Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) meeting, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
- 4 (W) .... DHH to SCT
- 6 (F) .... TOPICS, elementary school
- 6 (F) .... End of first quarter
- 11 (W) ... Veteran’s Day; no school
- 12 (Th) ... Meet & Greet, Library 3:45-6 p.m.
- 23-25 (M-W) Parent-Teacher Conferences; no school
- 26-27 (Th-F) Thanksgiving Holiday; no school

### December
- 2 (W) ....... DHH to SCT
- 4 (F) ....... Grades 1st - 4th, S.E. to SCT
- 8 (T) ........ TOPS Music Concert
- 9 (W) ....... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 11 (F) ....... TOPICS, elementary school
- 11 (F) ....... Middle school play
- 12 (S) ....... Middle school play
- 18 (F) ....... Early dismissal, 2:20 p.m.
- 21-31 ......... Winter Break; no school

### January
- 1 (F) ........ Winter Break; no school
- 4 (M) ....... School resumes
- 13 (W) .... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 15 (F) ....... Martin Luther King Assembly, 2 p.m.
- 18 (M) ....... Martin Luther King Day holiday; no school

### February
- 3 (W) ........ Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
- 10 (W) .... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 10 (W) .... DHH to SCT
- 12(F) ....... Grades 2nd, 3rd, S.E. to SCT
- 12 (F) ....... Kindergarten 100 Day Celebration
- 15 (M) ....... Presidents Day; no school
- 16-19 (T-F) ... Mid-winter break; no school
- 26 (F) ....... Grades 2nd – 6th, S.E., to SCT

### March
- 3 (W) .......... Professional development block time; 2-hour early dismissal
- 10 (W) .... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 10-12 (W-F) ... 6th grade Camp Arnold
- 12 (F) ....... TOPICS, elementary school
- 16 (W) ....... State Museum, Library
- 18 (F) ....... 8th Grade Passage
- 18 (F) ....... Awards Assembly
- 21 (M) ....... Field Day
- 21 (M) ....... Wild Waves
- 22 (T) ....... Last student day, 2:20 p.m. dismissal

### April
- 1-2 (Th-F) ..... Spring Break; no school
- 9 (F) ......... TOPICS, elementary school
- 14 (W) .... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 14 (W) ....... Poetry Festival
- 15 (Th) ....... Poetry Festival
- 16 (F) ....... Grade 3, S.E. to SCT
- 16 (F) ....... End of third quarter
- 30 (F) ....... TOPICS, middle school

### May
- 1 (S) .......... TOPS Auction, 5 p.m.
- 5 (W) ......... DHH to SCT
- 7 (F) ......... Grades K, 1st, and 5th, S.E. to SCT
- 12 (W) ....... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 14 (F) ....... TOPICS, elementary school

### June
- 2-4 (W-F) ...... 7th grade Camp
- 9 (W) ....... Site Council meeting, 5-7 p.m.
- 10 (Th) ....... Kindergarten Puppet show
- 10-11 (Th-F) ... 3rd – 4th grade Camp Arnold
- 16 (W) ....... State Museum, Library
- 18 (F) ....... 8th Grade Passage
- 18 (F) ....... Awards Assembly
- 21 (M) ....... Field Day
- 21 (M) ....... Wild Waves

### 2009 - 2010 TOPS Calendar

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

Please join us in welcoming all the new staff and families to TOPS!

Meet and Greet event in the Library. November 12, Thursday 3:45-6:00 p.m.
It was a beautiful breezy sunny day. I am not sure the teachers doing the dunk tank liked the weather as much as I did because after they were dunked, the water was much warmer than the breeze they felt while preparing for the next dunk. Don squirted us with water after each dunk in the tank so some of us got almost as wet as he did. The teachers who volunteered to be in the dunk tank were really good sports. For some it seemed like a long 15 minutes while kids threw the ball at the target waiting to dunk them. For other teachers it seemed like another fun event with families at TOPS. Inside, the gym was bustling with a bouncy house, the No Bake table kicking off the TOPS fundraiser, and popcorn, bags and bags of popcorn. By the end of the Ice Cream Social, I was getting hungry having watched numerous kids with vanilla, chocolate, chocolate chip, and rainbow sherbet ice cream cones. The event was almost over and there was still enough vanilla ice cream for a few more cones. All in all, it was a fun social event which reinforced the strong, active community we have at TOPS.
Thank you to all who attended our No Bake kickoff on Sunday, October 4; it was wonderful to see so many old and new friends show up to enjoy such a fun-filled Sunday afternoon. Thanks also to all the volunteers who monitored the dunk tank and bouncy house, scooped ice cream and popcorn, and painted all those adorable little faces; we could not have done it without you!!

And, of course, special thanks to the teachers who spent their time on a Sunday afternoon sitting in a dunk tank — Don, Sarah, Colette, Mr. Lawrence, Ms. Eick, Marianne, Leslie Nilan, and Mr. O’Connor. We appreciate you so much for all you do for TOPS.

The No Bake Fall fund drive is off to a great start: we raised over $6,400 at the event alone! For those of you who were either unable to attend the kickoff or were unable to make a donation at the event, fear not: we will be sending out our annual No Bake letter later this month, explaining the background of this annual fundraiser and asking for your help in raising the money our community requires to meet the needs of all TOPS students. We look forward to the continued success of this year’s No Bake. Thank you for your commitment to TOPS!
In the 1970s Seattle saw the founding of a number of alternative schools in the district to meet parents’ desires for greater involvement in their children’s learning and school experiences. TOPS was one such program, founded in 1976 and located in several portables at Stevens Elementary School on Capitol Hill.

The program had actually had its genesis in parents’ efforts two years earlier to start an alternative program in the Central District. At that time, staff at the Seattle School District directed them to enroll their children in Alternative Elementary #3 at Latona Elementary School (now John Stanford International School), where multi-grade classrooms were the norm. Soon, however, so many children were enrolled from the Central District that parents were told to explore opportunities to open an alternative program in the Central District—or their children would be reassigned to their regular schools.

According to documents in the TOPS archives, this led parents to research possible options in the Central Area. No options were identified until parents reached Principal Robert Bass at Stevens Elementary School. Bass offered space for the new program to be co-located with the regular program at Stevens. Prospective teachers were interviewed and hired in the summer of 1976, and the new program opened in portables that fall. It was known as the Garfield Area Option Program (GAOP). Although the portables were in less than stellar shape and lacked running water, parents and teachers worked actively to create welcoming environments. Parents and teachers painted classrooms and did many other things to support this new program, according to Susan Mamlock, one of TOPS’ founding teachers. When the district discontinued use of the Garfield Area boundary designation for school assignment in 1980, and when alternative schools in the district were shifting more toward identifiable names rather than just numeric designations (such as AS #1), the name “The Option Program at Stevens” was suggested by students in the program. The acronym TOPS was born!
The materials distributed to potential parents stressed several themes that are still evident today, and some that have evolved over the past thirty years. High parent involvement and clear cooperation among teachers and parents were very evident. With the small size of the program, teachers were able to individualize teaching and learning activities for students and coordinate units of study across different classrooms. There was a clear academic emphasis with all students expected to develop mastery in reading, writing, and math. Before it was widely done, teachers were using manipulatives to help children master early math skills and stressing the development of math problem-solving skills. In addition, a City School program was developed by teachers Harper Welch and Lydia Christofides, which extensively utilized the city as a classroom, including trips to museums, visits to City Hall, and studying downtown buildings for their history and beauty and rating them for accessibility and welcoming qualities for children. In fact, TOPS students provided input to famed architect Robert Venturi on features they felt would be helpful in the new Seattle Art Museum, as described in a Seattle Post-Intelligencer article (May 29, 1986).

Similar to today, the curriculum had a multicultural focus, and students and their families from diverse backgrounds were part of the TOPS community from the outset. During those early years, the multi-grade classrooms used a Magic Circle Curriculum that emphasized the development of students’ social-emotional skills, similar to today’s Second Step program. Each week children were allowed to choose end-of-the-day classes on topics of special interest that parents, teachers, or other students were teaching. This was a favorite part of the curriculum, archives materials suggest, and was the predecessor of today’s TOPICS. The school was thriving and receiving positive reviews in the community. For example, in April 1984 the
Seattle Medium newspaper praised TOPS for its education of minority children. Waiting lists for entry to TOPS are noted in minutes and other documents from these early years. After significant work over a two-year period, TOPS was approved as a formally recognized Alternative School in the Seattle School District in 1987.

The portables, though, were filled to capacity, their age was showing, and there was pressure to expand the program in order to accept more children and to expand to a K-8 school. Surveys were taken of parents and teachers, and the results strongly favored finding a permanent home for TOPS that would allow it to grow and benefit from a solid home base. Various options were considered, and the clear choice that emerged was the Seward School building, located in the Eastlake neighborhood. The Seward School had been closed in 1989 due to declining enrollment. The closure decision was controversial and strongly opposed by the Eastlake community, who saw the loss of their one public building and center of their community (Seattle Times, May 3, 1988). (See TOPS Newsletter article on a reunion of Seward School alumni, parents and teachers in June 2008: http://www.topsk8.org/news/newsletter/07-08/ Jun08-web.pdf).

Seattle School Board approved TOPS' move to the Seward School building in 1989 with the agreement that the school would expand to two classes per grade and gradually add middle school grades until a full K-8 complement was achieved. The move occurred in 1991. TOPS continued to grow, and in 1997 TOPS relocated to the McDonald building in order for the three Seward School buildings to be fully renovated, having been passed by Seattle voters as part of the Building Excellence Program. Since these buildings had been landmarked as historic structures both in Seattle and the State of Washington, the renovation of the buildings was a complex process that required extensive input and planning from the TOPS community as Duarte Bryant's architects designed a campus that reflected the needs of the TOPS program. The renovation was not without controversy, as evidenced in a lawsuit that opposed the construction of a new structure (the Learning Resource Center or library) joining the three historic buildings. The renovation was completed, and TOPS moved back to Seward in 1999. At that point TOPS' enrollment was at 568, and the waiting list for kindergarten entry was one of the longest in the district.

Next month: The Proud History of Seward School

Acknowledgments/Sources: Steve Haines; Toby Harris, TOPS Archives; Susan Mamlock; Eleanor Toews, Archivist, Seattle Public Schools; Tracy Seefeld; Nile Thompson & Carolyn J. Marr, Building for Learning: Seattle Public School Histories, 1862-2000 (Seattle School District, 2002).

I think that the September Experience was one of the best field trips I have ever been at. I had a lot of fun with all the games we did together. Also, I liked the Getting to Know You Bingo game the best. We learned a lot about each other. I met a lot of new sixth graders that I don't meet or play with much. I also met a lot of funny seventh-graders and we had a lot of good fun together. The grade captains weren't that helpful in the forest game and some people hurt themselves. Trying to approach everything through the eyes of a six year old! She finds working on appropriate classroom behavior can be a challenge at times. Her first graders can get pretty chatty, and she realizes there needs to be time built into the day which demands and allows the chattiness.

Jessica enjoys hiking and backpacking; when she and her husband walk out their back door they are on Tiger Mountain in Issaquah, so they have many opportunities for hiking. She also likes to bake, cook, play volleyball, and read.

Jessica is looking forward to many years of teaching at a K-8 so she can enjoy watching the students develop from kindergartners to eighth graders, to see the many changes as they grow. She's very happy to be at TOPS, and has been very impressed by how welcoming the whole community has been, both families and teachers.
Girls Soccer 2009

Photo by Don Zemke
Ultimate Frisbee isn’t a well known sport, but it is getting more popular everyday. Ultimate Frisbee is a non contact sport that is a combination of soccer and football. The way you play is very similar to soccer and football. Only seven players can take the field at once, and 3 of those players must be females. After one team throws off, the receiving team picks up the Frisbee and moves towards the opponent’s end zone. Once you have the Frisbee you may not move your feet, but you may pivot. The other 6 players run around the field, looking for the pass from the handler. If a defender catches or swats the Frisbee, the possession changes. It goes on until one team scores 11 points, or the time runs out.

A lot of people might think that Ultimate Frisbee is a very easy and simple sport, but it’s not. You have to be pin point accurate when you throw the Frisbee, or else the defender will get the Frisbee. Every player on the team must be the quarterback. Also, if there is any wind, you have to work with the wind, or else the Frisbee is going to be thrown wildly.

Ultimate Frisbee is a fun sport, it’s self refereed and is all about “the Spirit of the Game” which promotes good sportsmanship. The sport is getting huge with more student participation at the middle school level then any other sport. TOPS has three teams with a total of 1/3 of our middle school students participating! The sport is also growing in the High Schools and Seattle is home to national champion adult teams. I hope that one day it will become an Olympic sport. So give it a try. Its lots of fun!
Ultimate is a great sport. It requires hustle, focus, and most of all, teamwork. You will never see a good Ultimate team only pass to two players. You have to include everybody if you want to play well and have fun. Fun. That’s another key part. All the strategy and other stuff go out the window if you’re not having a good time. That’s why the players referee themselves. Everyone is important, and no one is left out.
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Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against in any of the District’s employment or educational activities can file an internal discrimination complaint with the District’s Affirmative Action Office.

TOPS Middle School presents

Two short plays written and performed by TOPS Middle School students

Friday, Dec. 11 and Saturday, Dec. 12 at 7:00 p.m.
Todd Jamieson Stage

Adults: $4; Students and Seniors: $2

All are welcome.
The two plays will both be performed each night.
Please come and enjoy this wonderful MS Production!