TOPS received an allocation of $1.77 million from the Seattle School District for the 1999-2000 school year, and the school-based Leadership Team met in March to decide how to allocate the funds. Projected enrollment is officially 588 students. The budget breaks down as follows:

- Weighted Student Allocation $1,505,706
- “Foundation” Allocation $231,573
- Other Allocation (grants and special funds) $36,740
- Total School-based Allocation $1,774,019
- Per Pupil Allocation $3017

Schools must pay for most school-based personnel and activities with this budget. The District, however, pays for transportation, custodial services, and security.

The Leadership Team reported to the March Site Council meeting that it plans to fund all the current staff positions, but that it also hopes to add a full-time K-8 and BOC counselor. The source of this extra money will be some carry-over funds from an underspending of the budget last year. This $90,000 amount should fund the counselor for a couple of years.

The District has posted an Internet page, which gives lots of budget information by school: http://bb.ssd.k12.wa.us/bb/budgethome.html

For example, the District Web site indicates the TOPS budget in 1997-98 totaled $1.9 million, and was spent as follows:

- Basic School Program $1,066,136 55.6%
- School Administration $282,634 14.7%
- Bilingual/BOC/instruction $184,983 9.6%
- Elementary PCP $105,872 5.5%
- Special Education $82,628 4.3%
- Library $63,869 3.3%
- Counseling $38,496 2.0%
- Title I Instructional $35,285 1.8%
- Other $38,198 2.0%
- Total 100.00%

LEADERSHIP TEAM SPENDS $1.77 MILLION

FACILITIES NEWS AND APPEAL

Gary Tubbs told the March meeting of the Site Council the District has declared May 1 the “drop dead date” for deciding whether the remodeled Seward building will be ready for occupancy in August. That is when Stevens School needs to know if it is moving to McDonald during its construction, or to another site (probably Lincoln). If it were determined on May 1 that Seward would be ready on time, and it turned out it wasn’t, then TOPS would “simply” start school late.

Debrah Walker, facilities committee co-chair, announced last week that the TOPS facilities committee is about to go into full production with the completion (or not) of the building and there is a need for new volunteers on the committee. This is your chance to help with America’s favorite past-time: Moving! Work parties will be organized to help faculty move their classrooms into the new building in August (hopefully). Help is also needed with the development of the Franklin Avenue project.

Call Debrah at 329-0625 or attend a facilities committee meeting on April 20 at 6:30 pm at TOPS.


Principal:
Gary Tubbs
Site Council Chair:
Penny Bolton

McDonald School
144 NE 54th Street,
Seattle, WA 98105
729-3360

http://sea-css.ssd.k12.wa.us/TOPS/index.html
A Primer on TOPS Class Scheduling

The following is an explanation of the daily scheduling throughout TOPS. It is not for the faint of heart; needless to say, we recommend that you do not try this at home.

First Bell, Last Bell
For kindergarten through 4th grade, the first bell rings at 9:15 a.m., and the late bell rings at 9:20. Students in K-4 are with their primary teacher most of the day, but attend PE every day for 30 minutes and K-3 have music with Kent Stevenson once a week for 30 minutes. For grades 5-8, the first bell rings at 8:55 a.m. and the late bell rings at 9 a.m. The school day ends at 3:20 p.m. for all.

Are you with us?

Lunch Time
Kindergarten lunch is from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., and includes 1 to 1:30 p.m. recess. Lunch for 1st and 2nd graders is from 12:05 to 12:40, and includes a short recess at the end. Lunch for 3rd through 5th graders is from 12:20 to 12:40, and includes recess between noon and 12:20. Middle schoolers have lunch from 11:45 to 12:20, with a break tossed in. As you can see, these very fast lunches are designed to accommodate many kids in a very small space.

Take a deep breath now.

Sixth Grade
The middle school class schedule is complicated, but has been carefully worked out over the years to accommodate varying learning styles and approaches to teaching. Sixth graders have one teacher for the first two hours of the day, 9 to 10:50 a.m., during which they are separated into Language Arts/Social Studies or Science/Math. The third period (prior to lunch) is either Math or Language Arts, and the fourth period (just after lunch) is either Science or Social Studies.

Fifth period for 6th graders is Physical Education. Sixth period is Art (with Mrs. Roll) for one semester and Reading (with Mr. Ellis) for the other. Reading, by the way, includes classics, speed reading skills, and other fun activities. (If and when World Languages comes to 6th grade, it will take place during Reading.)

Hello? We’re almost home.

Seventh and Eighth Grades
For 7th and 8th graders the schedule alternates every other day.

On “A” days, Language Arts and Social Studies come in a block from 9 to 11:50 a.m. After lunch, from 12:20 to 12:40 p.m., it’s silent reading time. It’s Science or Math from 12:40 to 1:30 p.m., and then Math or Science from 1:40 to 2:25 p.m. For sixth period, 2:30 to 3:20 p.m., students have either PE or Exploratory.

On “B” days, students go from one period to the next, spending 50 minutes each in Art, Science, Math, Language Arts, Social Studies, and PE or Exploratory.

Whew! You made it!

For more information, please contact Charlie Burleigh.

Middle School Schedule Changes for Next Year
As we head toward the 1999-2000 school year, grades 6, 7, and 8 have begun preparing for several schedule changes. First, for 7th and 8th graders, is a shift to extended periods for Math and Language Arts rather than for Social Studies and Language Arts. This change should support greater depth in math instruction and will support the changes that have been made to the Middle School math program in general.

Another change for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders will involve the probable introduction of World Language curriculum into some sixth period classes. Middle School staff have recommended this addition be made in the Exploratory class time and that changes begin with 6th grade. The exact nature of these changes will depend on funding and curriculum-development issues.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am writing to enthusiastically support the proposed changes to “Topics” organization at TOPS. I’ve had a continuing interest in Topics during the years that our children have been at TOPS, and served on the Topics Committee during this year.

I strongly support any proposal that seeks to improve the academic content and learning value of Topics. Teachers, parents and students expend a great deal of time and energy preparing, teaching and attending Topics. The suggestion for thematic TOPICS with Spanish, music, dance, drama, as initial themes will enhance the educational value of TOPICS substantially, and justifies the effort of offering them. Supplements to classroom work in history and science, coordinated with the classroom curriculum, would also be excellent future TOPICS offerings.

Rebecca Fox
TOPS parent
**SITE COUNCIL HELP WANTED FOR 1999-00 YEAR**

It’s that time of year again. TOPS is looking for a few good people to join next year’s Site Council. It’s your chance to weigh in with your point of view and help keep our school vibrant. Site Council participation requires a commitment to attend one meeting per month at school—the second Wednesday at 5-7pm. You should also plan to spend some other hours outside of meetings connecting with your constituents (the grade levels you represent) and helping with various projects.

Current K-2 representatives include Andrew Schmechel (1st), and Heather Worthley (K, 2nd), leaving one opening at the K-2 level. Grades 3-5 representatives include Pat Helgren (2nd, 5th) and Betsy Scott (2nd, 4th), leaving one opening. Penny Bolton (7th) is the only remaining middle school representative, leaving two openings. A “diversity” parent appointment needs also to be made, replacing retiring Cheryl Pappy.

Ballots will be distributed via the May newsletter. If you are interested, please call Heather Worthley at 789-6092 or email her a short paragraph about your interests at worthmine@premier1.net. We need to hear from you by April 9.

Other positions that we know are open for next year are Drama Committee chair, Newsletter editor, and committee members for Finance and Facilities. Anyone wanting more info on other openings, call Penny Bolton at 325-5074, or send her an e-mail at pennyb@halcyon.com.

**ATTENTION TOPS PARENTS! TIME TO ADDRESS PARKING AGAIN**

Once again our neighbors around TOPS have brought to our attention that parents picking up and dropping off their children are parking in driveways and blocking the street. This is not good for neighborhood relations and it is, frankly, just not good manners.

Here are some things we can all do to avoid antagonizing our neighbors:

1. Do not park in the load zone and leave your car, not even for one second.
2. Do not park in people’s driveways, even if you stay in your car.
3. Do always drive west on 54th and east on 55th so everyone can have reasonable traffic flow.
4. Do not wait for your child in the load zone in front of school. It doesn’t work because it only keeps other parents from safely collecting their kids. Instead, drive on by, park a block or two away (if necessary), and come back and get him or her on foot.

An early warning: When we return to Seward next fall, we will potentially have an even worse traffic problem. This year is a good time to work out carpools and work on building good neighbor relations. With just a bit of practice on everyone’s part, we can work here to avoid the parking hassles there.

Thank you, everybody, for representing TOPS in the most courteous way possible.

---

**THE 7TH ANNUAL TOPS SPRING AUCTION WAS A SUCCESS AS USUAL!**

The experienced Auction Committee headed by Rhian Lombard works like a well oiled machine to make this evening a fun party and a great money maker.

Ted Johnson, a truly experienced TOPS parent, and Frank Grief were our able auctioneers again. The initial returns show that we grossed around $43,000, a number very close to last year. The class projects were a great success as was the bowling party with Mr. Tubbs and Mr. Burleigh.

We found out that Mr. Tubbs owns his own bowling shoes, a sign of an expert! Thank you to all who participated, as volunteers, procurers or guests.

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**MONEY MATTERS**

Friends of TOPS treasurer Dana Carey-Twight reported to the Site Council in March that income this year has totaled $50,134, while expenditures are at $33,183. The total budget remains at $103,100.

Principal Gary Tubbs reported on the Associated Student Body budget, the fund administered for TOPS by the school district. This is the budget that receives funds from parents for field trips, among other activities. Field trips in this budget have included Skate King, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle Children’s Theater performances, Seattle Art Museum, Woodland Park Zoo, Children’s Museum, and Burke Museum. Total ASB expenditures in the 1998-99 school year have come to $15,317.

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**Penni Bolton**
TOPS Site Council Chair

**Gary Tubbs**
TOPS Principal
WORLD LANGUAGES
SOLUTION PROPOSED

The TOPS faculty has been working to find a way to incorporate World Language instruction into the school day, especially for middle school students.

It was announced at the March Site Council meeting that a budget request would be submitted to Friends of TOPS to hire a Spanish language instructor for the middle school. Spanish would be taught during 6th period and would alternate each semester with PE for 7th and 8th graders. For 6th graders, Spanish would take the place of reading instruction, alternating with Art each semester.

For elementary students, Spanish would be incorporated into the TOPICS schedule (see the related article on Topics reformating).

What middle school students would be giving up in their 6th period exploratory class is attention to social and emotional growth and health instruction. Health would be incorporated into the science curriculum. Sixth graders would be giving up some instruction in speed reading techniques and time for silent reading.

This proposal now enters the budget process. The next opportunity to provide a “public” comment would be at the May 12 budget discussion, 7 pm, following the Site Council meeting at school. Prior to that time, please feel free to contact your Site Council representative or a member of the budget committee (chair is Dana Carey-Twight).

REASONS FOR INCLUDING WORLD LANGUAGES

By Michelle Anciaux

TOPS has sought to prepare its students for success in life and school beyond TOPS. The TOPS World Languages Committee believes that an important step in offering a world-class education to our students at TOPS is to make opportunities for learning a second language available as early as possible in our students’ lives.

In addition to the information presented earlier to the Site Council and the faculty on the benefits of learning a second language, the March 1999 issue of Statistics in Brief produced by the National Center for Education Statistics, entitled “Do Gatekeeper Courses Expand Education Options?,” provides additional rationales for not waiting to introduce foreign (world) language until high school. This publication reports on follow-up studies from the National Education Longitudinal Study of the Eighth Grade Class of 1988, specifically looking at the correlation of studying “gatekeeper courses” required for college entrance (algebra and foreign language) in eighth grade and the likelihood that a student will later apply to a four-year college or university. Specifically,

Percentage of students applying to a 4-year college or university:

◆ 78% of 12th grade students who enrolled in BOTH algebra and a foreign language in eighth grade
◆ 56% of 12th grade students who enrolled in EITHER algebra or a foreign language in eighth grade
◆ 29% of 12th grade students who enrolled in NEITHER algebra nor a foreign language in eighth grade
◆ Offering world language at TOPS Middle School could have the happy effect (especially in combination with offering algebra) of increasing the likelihood that TOPS graduates will see themselves as college-bound when they reach high school.

GOALS FOR WORLD LANGUAGE AT TOPS

1. To provide a language learning experience for students so they can develop a wider cultural outlook as well as the flexibility, creativity, and cognitive abilities that come with learning language at an early age.

2. To provide students with enough competence — knowledge and skills — in a single world language to qualify them to enter a second year class in that language in high school (if they choose to do so). Spanish is the most widely spoken language in our hemisphere.
TOPS CHESS PLAYERS NOTCH BIG-TIME RESULTS AT LOCAL TOURNAMENTS

Mark Morales, Chess Club coordinator, would like once again to extend an invitation to all TOPS students, regardless of playing level, to come join the Chess Club. (We could even use a few more parents to supply snacks and help with post-meeting clean-up.) Members not only get solid instruction each Monday afternoon from renowned chess master Robert Karch and a handful of terrific parent volunteers, but our kids’ education is paying off in the excitement of great results for a number them at many local tournaments. Congratulations to all Chess Club players and a special Hip-Hip-Hooray to our tournament participants!

Seattle Country Day Tournament, Feb. 6: Cuzak Bailey, 2-5; Anna Ludwig, 2-5; Marcus Morales, 4-1 (8th Place in the K-3 division); Eric Nelson, 3.5-1.5 (5th Place for 3rd grade). (First number is wins, second number is losses)

Moses Lake Tournament, Feb. 13: Nicholas Morales, .5-4.5; Anna Ludwig, 2-3 (2nd Place for 2nd grade); Marcus Morales, 5-0 (1st place in the K-3 division).

University Child Development Tournament, Feb. 20: Alex Manning, 2-5; Cuzak Bailey, 2-3; Eric Nelson 4-1 (8th Place for 3rd grade); Marcus Morales, 4-1 (2nd place for 2nd grade).

Spinning Tournament (Puyallup), March 6: Alex Manning, 2-3; Marcus Morales, 3-2 (8th Place for 2nd grade).


St. Michaels Queen’s Quest, March 13: Anna Ludwig, 4-1 (1st Place for 2nd Grade); Jessica Savage, 2-3.

Tournaments on March 20 and 27: See results in May newsletter.

State Tournament in Yakima, April 10: Players qualified and slated to participate at press time were Alex Manning, Anna Ludwig, and Marcus Morales. To qualify for the state tournament, kids must win at least 3 games out of 5 in a state-ranked tournament.

MIDDLE SCHOOL GRANT RENEWED

The Seattle School District has announced that all middle schools will receive the same grant allocations in the 1999-2000 school year that they received in 1998-1999. TOPS received $30,000 last year.

Middle School Support grants come from the city’s levy, and are targeted to meeting the social, emotional and developmental needs of students and helping middle schools to provide caring and encouraging environments for students and families. Funding IS NOT for direct academic improvement programming, such as teachers, aides, remedial classes, educational materials, etc. Research continues to show that the more developmental assets a student has the greater likelihood they will show positive outcomes including school success and positive behaviors.

At the end of the 1999-2000 academic year, each school receiving levy support funds will be evaluated. Because these funds are to support the District’s larger middle school reform efforts, likely evaluation questions are: Is the school meeting the social/ emotional/ developmental needs of students? Is the school providing a safe, caring and encouraging environment for students and their families? How has levy funding helped in these efforts?

ART AND SCIENCE JOIN IN ENVIRONMENTAL SCULPTURE CLASS

Luzita Roll and Lana Fuller will work together to integrate science and art instruction for middle schoolers in May. They will host a sculpture field trip in which groups of students will make art out of found objects in three different settings: sandy, woodland, and stone. Parents are invited to join the fun (and help out) at Golden Gardens Park on May 20 and 21. Photos will be taken of the work that will be on display during the artwalk.

—Steve Haines
TOPS librarian

APRIL IS POETRY MONTH. SHARE A POEM WITH YOUR CHILD.

LIGHTNING JUMPSHOT

Daddy’s voice thunders he shoots a lightning jumpshot through a sweaty storm

The above poem is from a poetry book in our library entitled IN DADDY’S ARMS I AM TALL: African Americans Celebrating Fathers. Come to the library and check out some more poems.

—Steve Haines
TOPS librarian

Seward brick building windows under construction, March 1999.
The TOPS Site Council wants to know how you think the school is doing. Please answer the following survey questions and return this questionnaire to the main office by May 3, 1999. Results will be presented at the State of the School meeting on June 9. Your responses will guide the site council’s strategic planning process for next year! (Please note: this is not the same survey as the one that is being mailed to you by the School District. Please respond to that survey, as well.)

The following are characteristics of the TOPS program we are striving to achieve. How are we doing?

1. A small, K-8 school available on a completely voluntary basis to Seattle families
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

2. Close proximity to the central city, encouraging the use and enjoyment of the urban environment as an extension of the classroom
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

3. Strong, academically challenging program where the core curriculum and basic learning skills are consistent with and exceed the minimum requirements of each grade level, with a goal of maximizing each individual student’s potential
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

4. Opportunities for student decision making by involving them in a variety of settings including small groups, independent investigations, and elective ‘choice’ classes in which they study courses of interest to them
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

5. Regular cross-age groups in a range of activities which include instructional, tutorial, and special events
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

6. Programs for the personal, social and emotional growth of students, including skills of conflict resolution, social and personal responsibility, values and self-esteem
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

7. Innovation and risk-taking on the part of the entire school community
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

8. A diverse population, strengthened by an instructional program which fosters awareness, knowledge and appreciation of the contributions of our multi-cultural and pluralistic urban society
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

9. An overall school environment which is engaging, active, positive, and supportive, seeking a balance between structure and nurtured independence
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

10. Our community of students, their families, and school staff are seen as partners in the development and implementation of the program.
   - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

PLEASE EVALUATE THE FOLLOWING PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY’S PERFORMANCE.

11. Does the site council have regular, productive meetings; work between meetings; work through conflict constructively?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

12. Does the site council work on the right issues, and does it make the right decisions?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

13. Does the principal display leadership by encouraging participation of faculty, staff and parents in decision making?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

14. Does the principal carefully select staff with skills and commitment to the school’s mission, and does he support and nurture that staff?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

15. Does the faculty communicate openly, express their views and concerns, and influence school policy?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

16. Do the faculty have a shared vision of TOPS as an alternative school, and do they implement that vision effectively?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

17. Do the parents generously contribute their time, energy and funds to further the mission of the school?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know

18. Do parents effectively support faculty efforts in the classroom without meddling?
    - Excellent □ Good □ Fair □ Poor □ Don’t Know
19. Is the Eastlake community effectively involved with TOPS?
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

20. Does the strategic plan adopted by the site council effectively further the mission of the school?
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

21. How well does the newsletter meet your needs for information about school issues?
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

22. Your student’s academic achievement
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

23. Extracurricular programs (sports, chess, drama, etc.)
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

24. Student assessment
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

25. Emotional & social development of kids
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

26. Field Trips
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor  ☐ Don’t Know

27. Leadership and performance of:
Your child’s teacher
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor
Faculty in general

☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor
Principal

☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor
Site council

☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor
Site council chair

☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor
Site council committees

☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor
School district

☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor

28. Please rate the following methods of communication:
Newsletter
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor

Wednesday take-homes
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor

Phone tree
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor

School Connections
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor

Personal communication with teacher(s)
☐ Excellent  ☐ Good  ☐ Fair  ☐ Poor

Please tell us the following information so we can see if there are patterns of satisfaction and dissatisfaction which can guide our focus. Thank you.

29. I have children at TOPS in the following grades (1996/97): (Circle all that apply)
K  1  2  3  4  5
6  7  8  ___ I am a staff member

30. I live in this zip code: ______________

31. My children have this racial or ethnic identity (Circle):
   African-American  Asian
   White
   American Indian  Hispanic/Latino

32. We have been at TOPS ___ years.

33. Our family has contributed about ___ volunteer hours of work to TOPS this year.
WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD IS TURNED OFF TO READING

It happens to the best of parents: you suddenly realize that your child is far more interested in television, superheroes and the pursuit of new toys than in reading a book.

Fortunately, there’s a lot of research on what parents can do to turn their children into more enthusiastic readers. In particular, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, based in Portland, offers some tips on getting kids who are turned off to reading back into books:

♦ If your child doesn’t want to read, find reading materials that are tuned into his or her interest, whether it’s dolphins, fairy tales or trucks. In addition, books on tape and reading aloud, even if your children already know how to read, can increase vocabulary and language skills.

♦ Look closely at how time is being used in your home. Children need to spend time reading outside of school, and not just in the classroom, to make progress in their literacy skills. The problem may be too much TV. Keep in mind that researchers advise no more than two hours a day.

♦ Have your child prepare simple dishes using recipes or look up a number you need in the telephone book. Kids get more interested in the printed word when they see its useful and practical benefits.

♦ Make sure to keep a variety of reading materials in your home and show your children reading is important by doing it yourself.

♦ Follow up reading with questions and discussion. Listening and talking, combined with reading and writing, are the four cornerstones of language proficiency.

♦ Link reading materials to movies that interest your child. So, for example, the book series on young Indiana Jones might be a hit if your child loved the film.

Remember that your efforts are worthwhile, despite your child’s complaints. All children are now being expected to meet tougher academic standards in school, so making sure they are strong readers is more important than ever.

This information was prepared by Partnership for Learning, a non-profit coalition of business and community leaders to support higher academic standards. You can learn more by contacting the Partnership at 1-800-550-5437 or www.partnership-wa.org. The suggestions above were taken from “Tips for Parents About Reading.” For a free copy, contact the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory at 101 SW Main, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204 or (503) 275-9500.

HELPING OLDER CHILDREN DEVELOP GOOD READING HABITS

Reading is a habit that most of us enjoy with young children. We’re all too happy to pull a three-year-old onto our lap, turning each colorful page with delight as we bask in the youngster’s awe and excitement. But as children get older, it’s easy to let reading rituals fall by the wayside.

The problem is that children can only advance their reading skills if they read on their own time and not just in school. By the time your child reaches sixth grade, for example, he or she should be a fluent, independent reader, one who regularly picks up books and magazines for entertainment, information, and to learn.

Remember that your efforts are worthwhile, despite your child’s complaints. All children are now being expected...
to meet tougher academic standards in school, so making sure they are strong readers is more important than ever.

To encourage your older child to read outside school, consider the following suggestions developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Library in Portland:

- Use incentives. Allow a child a later bedtime or excuse him or her from a chore like washing dishes if reading.
- Play board games like Scrabble, Spill and Spell, Scattergories, and Balderdash, which are fun and reinforce reading skills.
- Limit television viewing to 10-14 hours a week.
- Go to the library and encourage children to check out all kinds of books, including travel, cooking, sports, fashion, or whatever suits his or her interests.
- Encourage older kids to read to younger siblings or cousins.
- Let children know you think homework is a priority and set up a regular time and place for it to get done.

WHAT TO EXPECT OF OLDER READERS:

Sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders who are reading regularly should be strengthening their analytical skills and using reading materials to gain information they seek. Middle school students should be able to:

- Read more complex young adult literature, such as stories focused on teenagers;
- Recognize bias and an author’s purpose;
- Make judgments and comparisons about what they read;
- Read magazines in their interest area;
- Evaluate, interpret and analyze literary elements (like plot, character, or setting);
- Use tables of contents, indexes, glossaries and captions; and
- Follow detailed directions and instructions.

LEARNING TO READ: WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

All children are now being expected to meet tougher standards in school. That’s good news for both parents and students, since it means all children will be challenged to work hard and apply themselves. To help your child succeed at meeting these higher expectations, start by ensuring your child becomes a strong reader.

What should parents look for in a young child’s reading development? One key milestone is “phonemic awareness,” that is, the ability to dissolve a word into its individual sounds (called phonemes).

Individual letters on a page need to be linked to specific sounds, blended together, and pronounced as words – which is what leads to meaning. If, for example, your four-year-old can rhyme words like cat or boy, he or she is well on the way to developing phonemic awareness. Songs, rhyming games, and nursery rhymes are excellent ways to spark your child’s awareness of language and sounds.

But for many children, the actual process of learning how to read takes place in school. That’s why it’s important for your child’s school to have a good reading program, one that cultivates a love for reading and teaches kids the skills that will allow them to pursue their reading interests.

Good reading instruction should help children master the mechanics of reading – phonemic awareness, the alphabet, and blending sounds to make words. But good programs also help children develop comprehension and fluency. That means children learn to understand what is being read and can read words accurately and quickly enough, so that reading is enjoyable and not difficult.

Parents should not be misled by the debates pitting “whole language” reading instruction against “phonics.” Phonics involves learning the sounds of letters to understand how they come together as a word. Whole language, meanwhile, is a philosophy about learning language that seeks to turn kids on to reading through exciting, interesting books. Good teachers often use both approaches, avoiding over-reliance on either.

What parents need to look for are reading programs – regardless of what they are called – that help students learn the three important reading skills: mechanics, comprehension, and fluency. Children struggle with reading when they are missing one or more of these skills.

How do you know if your child’s school is running a sound reading program?

- Ask if there is a consistent approach across the grades in a school and that the teachers in later grades know what the teachers before them have done.
- Look for a commitment to helping teachers learn about reading research and effective teaching practices.
- See if the school uses good assessments that provide useful, regular information on students’ reading skills.
- Make sure schools identify and intervene with problem readers early on.

One first step is to ask your child’s teacher about what’s going on in the classroom and then to monitor progress to gauge results.

This information was prepared by Partnership for Learning, a non-profit coalition of business and community leaders to support higher academic standards. You can learn more by contacting the Partnership at 1-800-550-5437 or www.partnership-wa.org.
TOPICS TO BE REFORMATTED

Principal Gary Tubbs worked with the faculty and some Site Council parents to propose a new configuration for TOPICS in the coming school year. The proposal was enthusiastically received at the March Site Council meeting.

Essentially, the new configuration would allow some multi-week TOPICS, along with a complement of two-day TOPICS sessions as we now know them. See the accompanying chart for a visual portrayal of the scheduling.

TOPICS is currently scheduled Thursdays and Fridays, 2 pm to 3 pm, and provides an open choice time for students in grades 1-4 to learn from one another, parent volunteers, and other teachers. The goals of TOPICS include:

- Providing opportunities for student choice
- Encouraging parent involvement
- Providing cross-age learning opportunities
- Offering a wide variety of arts, science, language, social development, and other curriculum choices
- Making school fun while reinforcing academics

One of the driving motivations behind this change is to provide a way to incorporate World Language instruction for elementary students. This configuration would allow all students to have ten weeks of language instruction at a time. Visiting artists could come for some of the two-week spots. There might be 15 students in the World Language and other multi-week TOPICS sessions, but only six to seven in the one-week slots. If all goes as planned, only half the teachers would be offering one-week TOPICS at a time, while the others were assisting the World Language or other visiting artist-instructors.

Mr. Tubbs is particularly enthusiastic about offering a TOPIC on “How to Teach Topics” for parents, students, and volunteers.

The newsletter hastens to point out that TOPS parent Melora Battisti has contributed vital leadership, creativity, and “sweat equity” in this critical process of rethinking how we do TOPICS.
High school parents – thinking about their child’s future and wondering whether their child is getting the best preparation needed for college or “the real world” – will see signs of an important school improvement initiative this spring.

Across the state, schools have begun expecting students to reach for higher academic standards and take new, tougher tests measuring their progress. Until now, much of this activity has been concentrated on the earlier grades. That changes in April, when tenth-graders across Washington will take a test measuring how well they meet important academic standards in reading, writing, mathematics, and listening.

When tenth graders take up their number two pencils to show what they know, they will join fourth and seventh graders who have taken these tests before. These tests – the Washington Assessment of Student Learning – are an integral part of the state’s school improvement effort.

This effort has three primary components:

◆ clear, high standards for what students should know and be able to do;
◆ new tests that measure student progress toward these standards; and
◆ accountability measures for both students and schools to improve.

Tenth grade students who “meet the standard” on the test in all four subject areas will have demonstrated a high level of skills and knowledge. Not only will these students know how to read, write and calculate, they will be able to read for information, write for different purposes and audiences, and analyze data and interpret statistical charts. And this is just at the end of their sophomore year. Imagine what they will know after two more years of school!

Eventually, meeting the standard on the high school test will become a graduation requirement, ensuring that all students leaving Washington’s schools have the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today’s world. For students who meet this requirement during the tenth grade, schools will offer a variety of options – like advanced academic classes for college-bound students and vocational courses for those intending to go directly into the work field. These options will allow students to specialize, and the new standards and tests will ensure that they have the foundation to succeed in whatever field they choose.

The standards are high and the tests are tough, but with focus and hard work, many schools have already begun showing incredible progress at helping more student learn. Over the next few years, we should expect to see the same from our high schools.

“These tests make kids think,” said Terry Bergeson, state Superintendent of Public Instruction. “One boy asked me, ‘Is this about my future job and college opportunities or is this about learning?’ I said, ‘I hope it’s about both.’ What we’re trying to do is make it so learning and your future are tied together.”

More details about the state’s new tests are available from Partnership for Learning, a business coalition working to build understanding about the statewide school improvement effort. Contact the Partnership at 206-625-9655 or www.partnership-wa.org.

TOPS 98-99 CALENDAR

March
25 .......... Budget meeting to review requests for funding, 5 pm, TOPS library
30 .......... 6th grade Science Fair

April
2 .......... Speech tournament, grades 5/6 impromptu
8 .......... Speech tournament, grade 6 editorial commentary
9 .......... Class/staff pictures day
9, 10 .......... Elementary School Play
7 .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 pm
Committees make funding recommendations
9 .......... End of 3rd Quarter
9 .......... Deadline to announce intention to run for Site Council
12-16 .......... Spring Break
15 .......... Newsletter deadline
18-24 .......... Volunteer Appreciation Week
20 .......... Facilities Committee meeting, 6:30 (new people invited!)

May
7 .......... Site Council’s finance & budget and executive committees draft a proposed budget
12 .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 pm
7 pm TOPS public meeting on the budget
13 .......... Cultural Fair / Achievement Fair
14 .......... Waiver Day
20 .......... Newsletter deadline
20, 21 .......... Environmental Sculpture field days for Luzita’s art class
24 .......... Instrumental music concert, 6:30 pm
31 .......... Memorial Day
26-28 .......... 7th grade at Mt. St. Helens

June
2-4 .......... 5th grade at Camp Kirby on Samish Island
3 .......... Site Council executive committee produces a final proposed FOT budget
4 .......... Art Walk, 5:30 to 8:30 pm
9 .......... Site Council meeting, 5-7 pm
1999/2000 Budget approved by Friends of TOPS
State of the School meeting
7-9 .......... 8th grade to Deception Pass
12 .......... Newsletter deadline
12 .......... Annual Site Council retreat
16 .......... 8th Grade Passage
17 .......... Wild Waves
18 .......... Last Student Day
21 .......... Last Teacher Day
30 .......... Site Council fiscal year ends
?? .......... Camp Long
K-8 TOPS / BOC Event
Awards Assembly

September ’99
7 .......... First Day of School

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