

Four Rivers Currents

October 2012

From the Principal's Desk...

FEEDBACK, DATA, PROPOSALS, PRIORITIES GUIDE OUR IMPROVEMENT

In the September CURRENTS, I shared with you what we feel are our most important accomplishments over the past five years. This month I want to share the priorities we've set to work on in our School Improvement Plan for this year. The plan was developed from feedback, concerns, and suggestions made over the course of last year, as well as data we gather on how our students are doing. Each year, we try to identify a number of focus areas -- both continuing efforts and new initiatives -- that we think will have an impact on student achievement. This reads like a list, but you'll get the ideas.

Priority 1: INSPIRE A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

A. Help students engage, advance, stretch, and work hard in their learning. There are a number of ways we think this can happen. Grade level teams implement one integrated expedition this year and other subject-based expeditions each term. Teachers provide exceeding options so all students have opportunities to stretch as far as they want. Grade level teams implement at least one project in each grade that asks students to wrestle with the school's Essential Question/school themes and they ask students to reflect on this in their portfolio. I set out to teach students about the "Growth Mindset" and teams develop ways to make our use of HOWLs more effective. The administrative team with our EL consultant help teachers understand what their different students need for learning through workshops. And in Crew, advisors focus on academic advising to reflect on strengths and next steps, and to form and follow-up on effective goals.

B. Help students create high quality work. We expect to make this happen through two key steps: Teachers work on learning targets, rubrics, and use of models. And our teams review policies on HOWLs and revision.

C. Help students meet state achievement and growth objectives. Teachers work on MCAS item analysis to guide curriculum and instruction decisions. Teachers and administrators analyze individual achievement and Student Growth Percentiles and provide targeted support.

D. Help teachers learn, strengthen, and implement the school's Core Practices. In consultation with me, teachers set individual goals related to the school's core practices. Administrators and colleagues use coaching cycles and peer coaching groups to model, instruct, and give feedback on core practices.

E. Help students put good faith effort into their learning by making HOWLs count. In Div 3, the team ensures that the Div 3 HOWL means more than just homework completion. In Div 1 and 2, the teams develop policies to make HOWLs count.

F. Help students learn to be strong Critical Thinkers and Writers. English teachers implement the next step for school wide writing assessment, which is to use the data from assessment to guide instruction. Two teachers developed school wide framework for critical thinking -- grade by grade rubrics with common language -- which we'll begin to use.

Priority 2: BUILD COMMUNITY

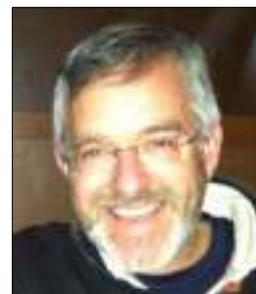
A. Help students thrive in and contribute to our school community. With administrative support, advisors ensure consistent crew routines and practices. Administration and teams run whole school events. Teachers and students make efforts to build relationships across grade and across division. Administration and teams establish and implement a crew curriculum and calendar. Teams work on ongoing practices to bring attention to the school's character virtues.

B. Help students create and respect beautiful spaces. Administration and teams develop and implement guidelines for keeping rooms and corridors in order. Administration, teachers, and students use bulletin boards and fun design ideas (ribbons or silhouettes, for example) to brighten our school.

C. Help students develop an ethic of service. Teams establish service relationships for Div 1 and 2, and ensure completion of service requirement in Div 3. Teachers work to spread an ethic of service -- a spirit where each looks out for the other.

Continued on page 7.....

Peter Garbus, Principal



Grade 7 News

GREEN RIVER CLEAN-UP DAY

7th Grader's Want to Know: Who found the best item on Green River Cleanup Day?

You decide! Rank the following items in order from "best" (1) to "OK, it's good, but not so awesome" (7).

___ Mini football; ___ Gutter; ___ Computer; ___ Canister of whipped cream... with whipped cream still in it!
___ A kid's bicycle; ___ Tire; ___ Mattress

Match It!

Can you match the following accounts of the Green River Cleanup to their author? When the river work was complete, we went back to school and wrote about our experiences from the perspective of inanimate objects. Hopefully, their writer's voice will help you decide "who" would say what!

1.

A tree

A. If you want to get rid of something, I'm the one you need. Something from a candy wrapper to a piece of wire, I can keep it in my "tummy" for you.
by Tori Koncz

2.

A car antenna

B. I have seen very strange things come flying out of cars, or people just dump their stuff here. Nobody really picks it up, just the kids at Four Rivers. Even though it was muddy, rainy, wet and cold, they looked past the conditions of the weather and just came and picked it up. Lots of people throw trash into my friend, Green, but some people pick it up and I would totally thank them but...ummm...I'm a tree so.. I can't really talk. Of course, we trees still thank them in our heads. *by Casey Davey*

3.

A bicycle

C. Then I saw some kids coming along. They got pretty excited to see me. They seemed really hyped up, like they each had 10 espressos or something. They started to dig the sand out of my belly. It was nice not to have all that gunk inside of me. Two of the kids hauled me up the hill, half carrying me and half dragging me. They dropped me next to the school bus that they arrived in. *by Tim Stuart*

4.

A garbage bag

D. I was part of a 1970 Jeep GC 5. I was sitting there, counting (I was at 5,305,742.34556036592), when I heard voices. It was some little humans, with 2 big ones. As I watched, they pulled out a wheel. *by Kieron Schweitzer*

5.

A computer

E. So there I lay, rusting for more than two winters... then another and another. I had completely lost hope of being rescued. My mirror was cracked, my chain broken, and a skunk tore up my seat to make a nest. One day I was sleeping and I was awoken. Suddenly, I was being pulled out of the brush. I looked up and saw a 7th grader from Four Rivers picking me up and carrying me! *by Isaiah Caron*



Grade 8 News

FLIES AND KITES TAKE FLIGHT!

Ms. Gilbert, Ms. Wilson & Ms. Falco

In 8th grade two investigations took flight over the past couple of weeks. One fine Monday morning we headed to the woods instead of the classrooms, and to an anticipatory circle of students Ms. Wilson declared, "You are here because your plane has just crashed." "We knew it!" shouted some, and our spirited group got right to work on the challenge of electing leaders, writing rules, building shelters and making help signs. Primed by the question, "What would we do if we had to survive out here together?" students began their first book of the year, Lord of the Flies.

Eighth graders have also begun Wednesday Workshops, which bring Engineering and Design challenges into their weekly work. In our first project of the year we focus on building kites. Three kites are introduced, constructed and tested before students are challenged to select and build an amazing kite of their choice. Our first kites were sled kites; we're in the midst of working on tetrahedral kites (we know some of you have helped construct cells at home!), and then we'll make box kites. Each kite brings opportunities to practice measurement, scaling and craftsmanship, to learn a piece of history, and to test the properties of each design. Ask an 8th grader about the kite of the week, all throughout October!

OTHER NEWS

In math, students are learning to use equations to represent and analyze situations where there is a constant rate of change between variables. These situations are called linear relationships and can be described with equations that, in general, look like $y = mx + b$. While 8th graders typically have the intuition to make sense of the situations themselves, writing and using equations is new to most, and offers them a powerful approach to problem-solving. In science we have begun to explore the change of seasons, and we will be outside a lot during the next month to collect data on light, shadows and leaves. Lastly, we want to announce that the three 8th grade crews have named themselves (Mechanical Crickets, Family Secrets Sold Here, and Inappropriate Condiments) and to remind you that Student-Led conferences are this month. See you there!



Above:

Students had only twenty minutes to build their shelter before the "storm" was going to hit. They did it! .

Right:

Benny Coan-Nixon's kite flew high all morning.



DIV II NEWS

Grade 9 Environmental Science and Social Studies—Ms. Tabachnick & Ms. Stamas

The 9th grade spread out all over Franklin and Hampshire counties to visit 10 different farms for their local food, farming, and democracy expedition. During their visits they toured the farm, conducted interviews, and took photographs that they will use in their final product for our expedition. Right now they are reflecting on what they learned from their visit and putting this in context with the background information they have been learning in science and social studies.



Left— Ethan Dodge with the goats at Manda Farm in Plainfield. Above—Aiden Kennedy interviewing Cliff Hatch at Upinnigil Farm in Gill

On Thursday, October 4th the 9th grade will be gleaning from 11:00 am to 2:50 pm. Gleaning is harvesting crops that a farmer is not going to sell themselves. We will be donating the food that we harvest to the Center for Self Reliance in Greenfield. Stay tuned to hear about what we glean and how many pounds of food the 9th grade is able to harvest in one afternoon.

MATH

In 9th grade math, students have begun learning and practicing Algebra 1 skills through ALEKS, an on-line math website. At the same time, they have been working in small groups to find ways to solve equations, tackling more complex and more difficult aspects of solving equations as they move on. During the last week of September, students were assigned their first Problem of the Week (POW), which is a writing assignment in which students will need to not only solve problems, but, more importantly, explain their thought process.

In 10th grade math, students have been learning the basics about geometry – not only the properties of angles, lines, rays, and triangles, but also the appropriate (nitpicky) notation and symbols. Geometry is based on logic, and during the last week of September students did their first proof involving congruent triangles. Tenth graders continue their work in ALEKS as well, and in the next week, will see their first Problem of the Week. This POW will begin with students collecting data, then using the data in trigonometry to estimate heights of tall objects.

DIV III NEWS

ENGLISH—Ms. Plath

"Something wicked this way [came]" as juniors finished reading *Macbeth* this past week. To wrap up, they had to "screw [their] courage to the sticking place" and present a monologue of their choice from the play. Popular selections included Macbeth's guilt-induced hallucination speech ("Is this a dagger which I see before me...") and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking ("Out, damned spot!"). This is all part of their study of the Renaissance, the first literary period we looked at for the semester. They read some of Shakespeare's sonnets and discussed how the writing was influenced by the cultural events of the time. On Friday, October 5th, juniors will travel to Medford and watch the Actors' Shakespeare Project present *Macbeth*.

It's autumn, when a senior's fancy turns to thoughts of... college applications. Seniors have spent the last week or so writing their college admissions essays in English class. They've been asking themselves hard questions and reflecting on how they've changed and grown in their lives, then putting it all together into one of the most important pieces of writing they've ever been assigned. Peer revision groups have been focused, considerate, and thoughtful, and students have approached this assignment with the level of gravitas it truly deserves. Next week, we'll put it all behind us and look again at the familiar world of literary analysis, but for now, it's hard to think of anything but that fat envelope coming in the mail next spring.



Photos:

Making toroidal maps

(aka, drawing on bagels)

in the senior Advanced Mathematics class.



YEARBOOKS

*Yearbooks are now on sale! From now until November 30th, our full-color hardcover yearbook is only \$35. After November 30th, the price goes up, so order early. Order forms are available in school, or yearbooks can be purchased online at www.jostensyearbooks.com.

SPANISH—*Ms. Beardslee*

News from Spanish 4:

In Spanish 4 we have just finished up our first project in which small groups of students taught the rest of their classmates about an issue dealing with the lives of indigenous people in Mexico. They came up with some creative and fun ways to teach what they have learned from various resources presented in class. We will continue on with our study of revolutions in Latin America by beginning to read excerpts from Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s *Notas de viaje* and looking at examples of revolutions throughout Latin America’s history.

News from Spanish 2:

In Spanish 2 our investigation of coffee is in full swing! We have studied the main ideas of café de “comercio justo” or Fair Trade coffee based on an interview with Dean from Dean’s Beans in Orange, MA. Next we will visit Dean’s Beans to learn how to roast coffee and see first hand where our coffee and other important food products come from in Latin America. Next week we begin reading *El cuento de cafecito* by Julia Alvarez, a story about a coffee farming family in the Dominican Republic. As part of our investigation we will be chatting via Skype with an Expeditionary Learning school in the Dominican Republic that has their own coffee farm.

News from 8th Grade Spanish:

In 8th grade Spanish we are learning all about who we are and where we come from. We will be using all of the new vocabulary that we have learned to write to pen pals from a different school, explaining who we are and what makes Four Rivers unique. Our investigation of ourselves and who we are will take us to learning about some Latino populations who live in the United States, with an eventual visit to the Latino Market in Hadley to become familiar with some authentic Latino products.

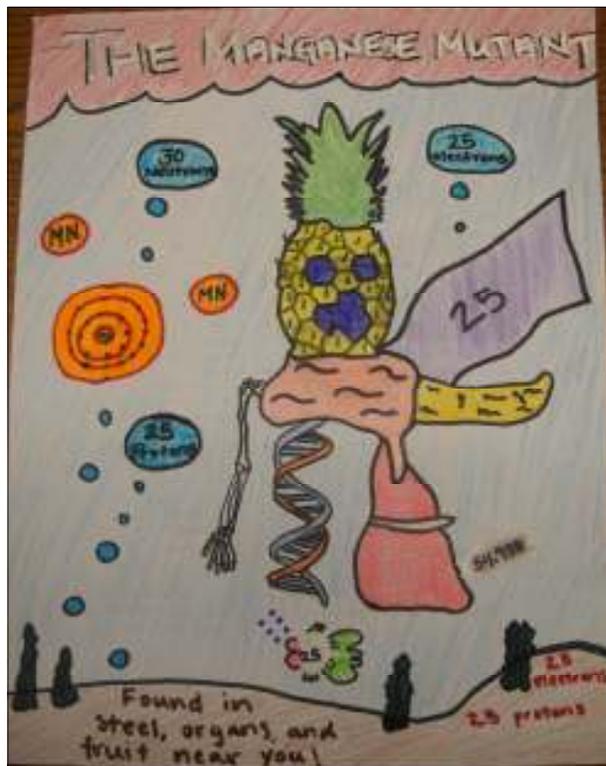
PARENTS WANTED FOR FOCUS GROUP

As you know, Four Rivers applied this summer for a renewal of our charter for another 5 years. We are in the process now of preparing for a formal site visit to take place November 6—8. A team from the Massachusetts Charter School Office will be here examining the school in detail, and speaking with various stakeholders including students, faculty, administrators and parents.

If you are interested in being a part of the Parent Focus Group on Wednesday, November 7th, please contact Leslie Taylor (775-4577, x 202). We are looking for a small group (fewer than 10) but would like to have representation across all grades, as well as a mix of new and returning parents, and from towns throughout our district. Call Leslie Taylor to express your interest!

BIOLOGY *Grade 10—Ms. Stamas*

The students are finishing up their superhero element comic book covers. They each researched a specific element to learn more about the bonds that it forms and its role in living organisms. Along with their research they created a superhero that had powers related to the properties of the element. Currently the students are using their knowledge of molecules and bonds to examine larger macromolecules that we ingest. They are studying the human digestive system and the enzymes associated with the organs.



Above left and right:

Superhero elements depicted by Asia Littell (left) and Trent Holmes (right).

Left:

The tenth grade took a trip to Concord to explore the stomping grounds of the transcendentalists.

BOYS SOCCER

The boys varsity soccer team played its strongest game of the season defeating Putney 4-2 on the road. The win was especially satisfying because in the three years since the formation of the RVAL league, this was Putney's first defeat. Ben Garbus and Sam Sol each contributed two goals for the Otters. Crisp passing and solid defense made the difference in this game. The team's record improved to 3-2 with the win.

Terry Plotkin, Coach

The Boys Middle School Soccer team is anchored this year by four veteran 9th graders and one new recruit. With only one returning 8th grader, the team is mostly comprised of 7th graders with varying degrees of experience and skill. However, they are energetic, enthused and are learning quickly. Unfortunately our schedule and rained out practices caused us to play our first four games with only one practice. We lost to Mahar, Bement, Hopkins, and Frontier by close scores, but played a well-balanced game against Mohawk to win our first game, 3-2. Pioneer squeaked by us this week to win by 2-1.

Charlie Olchowski, Coach

GIRLS VARSITY SOCCER

This year the Girls Varsity Soccer team is in a unique position. Due to lower than expected number of players, this year's team is comprised of all the players in grades 7 through 12. At one time or another girls from the middle school team have filled in the ranks of the varsity girls team. Some of the middle school girls have played in every varsity game. Our record is 2 wins, 1 loss, 1 tie.

The players are handling this situation with respect, a positive team spirit and great leadership. Kudos!

Amanda Griffith, Coach

STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Wednesday & Thursday

October 24-25

**Call Now to make
your appointment!**

**Students lead this conference
for their parents and advisor.
Some evening appointments
available.**

*Because conferences go late on
Wednesday & Thursday, school will
release EARLY on Friday, October 26
at 12:30*

FAMILY COUNCIL COMMUNITY DAY

DATE CHANGED TO:

Saturday, October 13

5—7 pm at the School

JOIN US FOR COOKOUT & MOVIE

Cookout 4:00—6:00pm

Family Council is cooking hot dogs, hamburgers and veggie burgers. Bring a side dish or dessert to share!

Movie in the Blue Barn 6:30 pm

We will be showing the movie *Hugo* and providing popcorn. Bring your own lawn chair.

From the Principal's Desk—Continued from page 1

Priority 3: PROVIDE CLARITY, CONSISTENCY, SUPPORT

A. Support teachers in their efforts to foster student learning. Administration and EL consultant support development and execution of Learning Expeditions. Support advancement of other school Core Practices and EL Power Practices. Develop descriptions of developmental implementation of these practices. Expand the function of Peer Coaching Groups, especially looking at student work and using protocols.

B. Tend and develop communication strategies to ensure the right people know what they need to know. Continue effective follow through with the NO SURPRISES PLEDGE. Continue effective use of GOOGLE APPS FOR EDUCATION, FOCUS, and the website.

Yes, there are actually quite a few actions specified here, even though we've listed 3 priorities. We are ambitious and we have many ideas to make our school stronger. Do keep in touch to let us know how we're doing in these areas or if you have any possible good ideas to help us achieve our goals.

PRINCIPAL'S MONTHLY MORNING COFFEE IN THE FARMHOUSE

This Friday, October 5, at 8:00 am ~ All Welcome

Spend a few minutes with Principal Peter Garbus to express your Kudos or Concerns.

X-COUNTRY

The cross country runners have started off a fine season and did remarkably well in their first two meets. Of note, they tied for 2nd place with Dublin High School in the most recent meet with 82 points. Note: in cross country, teams are scored by the places runners get so if a team's runners place 1,2,3,4 and 5th in a race, the total score is 15. The team with the lowest score wins.

In the Dublin meet on September 19, top finishers on this hilly 3.1 mile course included Liam Fiske-Mercer (19th, 24:16) and Katie Soltysik (6th, 26:31). The second meet was at Eagle Hill. Top finishers on this 2.7 mile course included Liam Fiske-Mercer (12th, 19:20), Emory Ketch (14th, 20:10), Isaac Blodgett (17th, 21:13), Zach Elliott (19th, 21:41) and Casey Davey (20th, 21:59). On the girls' side, Katie Soltysik was 4th (21:26). The next meet is this Wednesday, October 3rd, at Putney School in Putney, VT. Come check these runners out!



GIRLS MS SOCCER

The Middle School girls started out the season with a variety of experienced players and some who are playing for the first time. The 0-4 record does not accurately describe the perseverance, integrity, and the hard work this team has shown on and off the field. These players also have stepped up to help out the Girls Varsity Soccer team, showing that they have the confidence and determination to help out fellow teammates.

Our goals for the team are learning new positions, spreading out the field, passing with confidence and purpose and to have FUN out there! We are looking forward to continually growing and learning as a team.

Cory Brown, Coach

Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service. The school offers a rigorous academic program aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks and an emphasis on character development for moral and social responsibility. Three central themes – nature, technology and community – pervade the teaching and learning at the school. Four Rivers works closely with parents and seeks both to serve and learn from the many resources of Franklin County.



Four Rivers Charter Public School
248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301

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ADMISSIONS NEWS

OPENINGS FOR CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR

OPENINGS IN 10th and 11th

POSSIBLE FUTURE OPENINGS IN OTHER GRADES

We are accepting applications for enrollment in grades 10 and 11 and for possible future openings in other grades in which waiting lists are short. Word of mouth via our Four Rivers families is always the best advertising.

If you know of a student who might be interested in our high school, or if you meet someone new to the area who does not know about Four Rivers, please invite them to call Leslie Taylor, Registrar, for details and deadlines.

Deadlines for our next interim lotteries are 9:00 am on October 15 and October 31!

CALL NOW!

Leslie Taylor—Registrar—413-775-4577