

# Four Rivers Currents

September/October 2013

From the Principal's Desk...

## **THE ADDITION, LEVEL 1, FAMILY ENGAGEMENT, AND GRIT**

Before I get all philosophical on you (saved for subsequent editions), I thought I'd give one more round of updates on the events and themes for the start of this new school year. We are rolling along into our second month, our students having oriented, stepped in, and taken on weeks of daily assignments and probably their first larger projects.

Four Rivers is one of only two middle or high schools to achieve Level 1 accountability status based on last spring's MCAS scores. The school achieved a Performance and Progress Index (PPI) of 75 for all of its students and 92 for its high needs students. The PPI combines data from 7th, 8th, and 10th grade scores, including achievement, growth, more students earning advanced and fewer students failing. The state hopes schools can narrow achievement gaps, especially for high needs students. Four Rivers' score of 92 is among the highest in the state. The school's 10th graders again scored at or near the top of the state. They achieved 100% proficiency on the English Language Arts exam, with 9 students scoring Proficient and 26 scoring Advanced, tying Four Rivers for #1 in the state. Last year's 10th graders placed 6th in the state on the Biology test with 97% proficiency and 48th in the state for Math with 94% proficiency. As I frequently repeat, we are not all about these test scores and we don't abandon or core principles for test prep. To the extent that MCAS or the next testing system on the horizon emphasize important fundamental skills, we share those objectives and want our students to show proficiency. Where you might see low scores for your child or the school, we will work to do better while maintaining our school mission.

The addition to the high school building is on schedule to be completed by the end of October. Several people have commented that it looks like it's always been part of the structure. Indeed, many of us feel that the old rectangular box of the high school is much more interesting with this new north end. Along with a new entryway, there are two new classrooms, and a small breakout room in the new space. Our plan is to have an open house when we're ready to show you what's been built.

Family Council had a terrific first meeting this past week and we are looking forward to a great year ahead. A few stalwart volunteers have held this group together for the past couple years, but we are interested in generating much more energy for parent and family connection to the school. The question is how to do that? For a start, we're putting together a quick survey in the next few weeks to ask families how they can and how they want to connect to the Four Rivers school community. Watch the Flash and be ready to get involved.

Last item is to share our latest booster shot in the Growth Mindset campaign. For those of you who are new to the school, we try to emphasize to our students that their capabilities -- especially their intelligence and smarts -- are not fixed in stone. Through effort and practice, they can grow their brains, which is what we hope they do in our school. The idea we've introduced this year is GRIT, which is the attitude of perseverance, determination, and persistence through setbacks. Check out a [TedTalk by Angela Duckworth](#) for an introduction. The grittier a student can be, the more success they'll have in school.



Get gritty!

*Peter Garbus, Principal*

## Grade 7 News

### WELCOMING A NEW 7th GRADE

#### Prints of Compassion

The 7th grade students are doing their part to be crew, rather than mere passengers, in the Four River's community. Within the first three days of the school year they participated in a service project that "otter" make a difference. While covering the sidewalks in otter prints and statements about compassion and service, they became familiar with the two character virtues our school has chosen to emphasize this year. They also experienced what it means to welcome and encourage fellow students.

#### Upcoming topics and projects

Now that the first expedition, Mini Me, has come to a close, seventh grade students are moving on to study "Evidence of the Past." In science, students will explore the rocks that make up our local landscape, focusing on how to "read the rocks" and learn the story of the Connecticut River Watershed's formation. English will cover the question: what makes a story interesting and engaging for a variety of audiences? In social studies, students will look at prehistory and early humans, examining how there is more than one story to represent the same events from the past. Math will explore the connections between algebraic graphing, latitude/longitude and topographic mapping as we prepare to explore our local landscape by bicycle.



#### MINI-ME

As a Spanish component to the mini-me expedition, students learned about the alphabet, about feminine and masculine words and formed letters with their bodies. They also made their own mini-alphabets choosing a word and an image to represent each letter. Finally, from the first few weeks of class they chose one mini-piece of information to present in the Mini-Me ceremony.

*At right, 7th graders Julia Campbell and Lyra Macek make their letter.*

## Grade 8 News

### WHO ARE WE?

Currently in Humanities, we are reading *Lord of the Flies*, talking about survival, society and group dynamics, as well as doing research and collecting data to make a BioFlyer, demonstrating the unique approach to life of an 8th grade peer. This is all a part of the bigger picture, studying the individual and society: Who am I? Who are you? And who are we? ~ *Ms MacNeish*



### Also happening in science:

We are studying the reasons for the seasons at two scales: from a view of Earth's position in orbit and in relation to the Sun, and from our view here on Earth's surface. For the Fall Equinox, we visited the UMass Sun Wheel, a circle of stones that marks the locations of the sunrises and sunsets on the equinoxes and both solstices. The purpose of our visit was to gain perspective on how the hours and intensity of sunlight change with the seasons here in western Mass.



In math, we are learning how to create graph and equation models for experimental data. At first we reviewed how to carry out an experiment, and we looked at linear versus nonlinear patterns. This week, we are focusing on linear patterns and how to write equations for lines, including finding the slope and y-intercept. In both math and science models are a strong theme, modeling trends in data, looking at models that intend to explain natural phenomena, and even looking for models of good work and effective habits within our classroom. ~ *Ms. Gilbert*



*Pictured: Luka and Kiernan lend perspective to the size of a wind turbine tower at Searsburg, VT. While our formal study of wind power takes place in the spring, we had an amazing and rare opportunity to tour these wind turbines in September, and so we did!*

*Also pictured: The whole 8th grade class lines up along a single wind turbine blade.*



## DIV 2 NEWS

### SCIENCE — Ms. Stamas

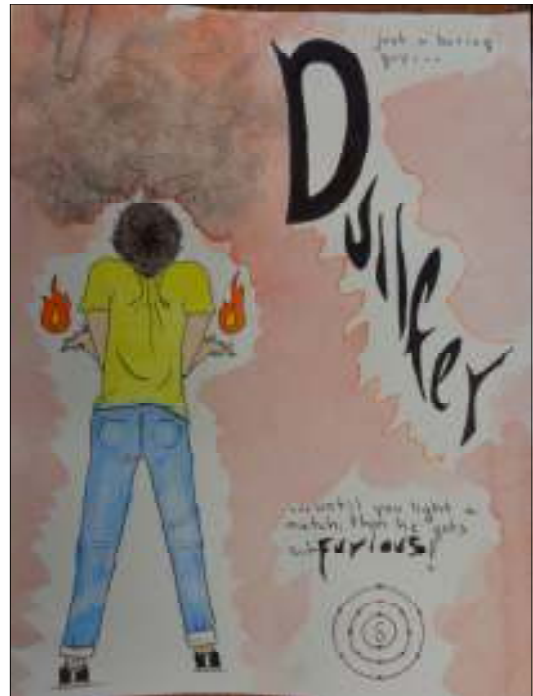
#### 9th Environmental Science:

The students in 9th grade will be heading out to visit ten different farms in our local community. Some students will be heading to dairy farms like Sidehill in Ashfield, Hager Brothers in Colrain, and Upinngil in Gill. Other students will be heading out to CSA's like Wintermoon in Hadley and Rainbow Harvest in Greenfield. The students will be taking pictures and interviewing farmers to get images and information to work on an English and Science expedition.

#### 10th Biology

We spent the first two weeks learning about electrons, molecules and bonds. The students used their Biology knowledge to create high quality work on their superhero element projects. We are currently exploring the human digestive system, focusing on the enzymes your body uses to break down lipids, carbohydrates, and proteins. The students will be conducting a lab that examines the factors that influence the rate at which the enzyme Catalase functions in the liver.

*At Right: Neva Newcombe's depiction of her Sulfur "Superhero"*



### WELLNESS — Ms. Griffith

To begin the year in Wellness, students in Divisions 1 and 2 engage in group initiatives that foster trust, communication, cooperation, safety and fun.



### SPANISH 2 — Eliza Beardslee

Spanish 2 has kicked off the year working on talking about food! Not only are they reviewing the names of foods, they are also connecting to the Farm Expedition that is happening in the 9th grade and are looking into where their food comes from. Through observing their own lunches, pantries, supermarkets and comparing these to photos and images from open-air markets in Mexico, and farmer's markets here, students are beginning to be able to answer these big questions: Where does my food come from? What do I like to eat? Can I choose what I eat and where I buy food?

## DIV 2 NEWS

### INCREDIBLE START TO THE YEAR

Division two started out the year with an amazing camping trip to the Path of Life Garden in Windsor, Vermont. As soon as we unloaded our gear we began our voyage down the Connecticut River; some students kayaked, some canoed, some rafted, and some went tubing. We cooked fabulous burrito dinners by crew, roasted marshmallows around the campfire, and slept under the stars in shelters built by the students. The glorious morning was choice time... Students chose yoga, meditation, a nature walk, went for a run, or just hung out at the campsite. We spent some time reflecting and setting goals for ourselves for the year. We made lunch, packed up, and made sure to leave no trace. It was definitely an incredible start to the year!



### SPANISH 3 — *Eliza Beardslee*

Spanish 3 has started off the year with a short story by Sandra Cisneros: *House on Mango Street*. Through learning different vocabulary and mirroring her story with their own writing, students review the past tense and practice the conditional by describing their own ideal homes. Students will have the opportunity to connect the resilience and imagination of Esperanza in *Mango Street* to resilience in a different form as they look into different art forms that were powerful forms or resistance in Chile.

## DIV 3 NEWS

### JUNIOR ORIENTATION ACTIVITIES



**Learning to work together.**

**Learning to be a community.**

### What In The World Is JORAKA?

If you're the parent of a junior, you might have heard JORAKA mentioned at some point so far this year. JORAKA is a new initiative by junior crew leaders, and it stands for Junior Otters' Random Acts of Kindness and Adventure. Junior crews have been given a list of over 100 items to create, find, photograph, and videotape over the course of the year. Some are random acts of kindness: "Serve salad in a soup kitchen - 120 pts." Some are art-based: "Create a promotional poster designed to market ukuleles to heavy metal guitarists - 40 pts." Some are just plain strange: "Recite three verses of 'The Raven' to a crow - 82 pts." Although the event is year-long, each week, the team who earned the most points in the previous week gets the coveted JORAKA trophy. *For more information on JORAKA and to keep up with our adventures, visit our website at [tinyurl.com/joraka](http://tinyurl.com/joraka).*

*Unaccompanied Minors (Mr. Hornick's crew) is the first to hold both the Joraka Trophy and the Erlenmeyer Flask of Excellent Feats in the same week.*





## DIV 3 NEWS

### **MATHEMATICS** — *Mr. Hornick*

**Algebra 2** — Using math for chemistry and social studies is our first area of study here. So far, we have covered unit conversion (factor label method) and dealing with different orders of magnitude (scientific notation). Now, we are investigating how to use spreadsheets to understand large bodies of data, especially how to quantify correlations.

**Applied Math** — Our first unit involves math magic tricks and speed reading for math. The magic will be performed in the next two weeks for the rest of the student body. The speed reading is learning shortcuts for doing basic arithmetic in your head. This unit is a light warm up for the study of data and financial literacy that make up the rest of the year's study.

**Advanced Math** — Advanced Math students have spent the first few weeks of school exploding dots and dancing around with ropes. They are discovering and figuring out novel mathematics on their own.

### **SCIENCE** — *Mr. Patari*

This October in **Chemistry**, students will take a trip to the UMass Chemistry department. This will serve as the kickoff to their expedition in which they will join the graduate and undergraduate research team of Professor Julian Tyson. Afterward, working in our very own lab here at Four Rivers, they will help his professional research effort aimed toward designing reliable, accurate tests for arsenic levels in rice.

In **Physics**, students are studying electricity and electrical circuits. Multi-meters, battery packs, wiring, and electric motors are a common sight in our classroom. Once students develop a solid understanding of electrical circuits they will learn how electric motors and generators work and attempt to build their own.

### **ENGLISH** — *Ms. Plath*

**Junior English** starts each year with Shakespeare, and this year it's *Hamlet*. Students are midway through the play, giving voice to famous speeches like "To Be Or Not To Be" and speculating on the true nature of Hamlet's madness. Soon, they'll each choose a speech from the play to give before the class, practicing the presentation skills they'll need later in the semester.

In **Senior English**, students are beginning their year by looking ahead: what writing skills will they need after high school? Students have written cover letters for hypothetical jobs and updated their résumés to the most current version, as well as practiced professional emailing skills. Now, they're wrapping up their college admissions essays and are soon to write their first analytical essay on their chosen literature texts.

*Junior crews are embarked on a year long contest called "JORAKA", (see last page of Currents). All three crews have earned points for a human pyramid.*

*L—R: Ms. Roll's, Ms. Plath's and Mr. Hornick's crews.*



## NURSE'S NOTES

Welcome back everyone; and, a warm hello to all the new students and faculty. Just a few reminders:

- New students and those in 10<sup>th</sup> grade need to submit their physicals to me. This is a state mandated regulation. If you have not notified me of the exam date, please do so.
- PLEASE send a snack with your student each day; many need a boost mid morning (crackers and a slice of cheese or peanut butter crackers has protein and limited carbohydrate).
- All oral medications must be taken at the health office. If a student uses an inhaler for asthma, the first dose of the year requires my assessment for proper administration.
- Remember: Flip flops are not appropriate footwear at school.

ALL students should bring a water bottle to school.

*Please feel free to contact me by phone, 775-4577; or e-mail [jmilton@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:jmilton@fourriverscharter.org)*

**Jeanne Milton, RN**

## SPECIAL EDUCATION NOTICE

Four Rivers is committed to providing quality education to all students. If for any reason you would like to request information about eligibility for special education or 504 services, please contact Kate Conant.

Kate will be coordinating the referral process, evaluations, and students on Individualized Education Plans and 504 Plans.

## ELECTRONICS

### RECYCLING EVENT

You know that old stereo gathering dust in your basement or garage? Do you still have a fax machine or printers cluttering up your closets? Old telephones, tape players, speakers? Four Rivers Charter Public School is holding an electronics recycling event on **Saturday, October 19th from 9-12**. Check out the following link to see a list of acceptable items -- [LIST OF ACCEPTABLE ITEMS](#) .

We are working with Creative Recycling Systems, if you'd like further information about how they handle all of these materials ([CRSeRecycling.com](http://CRSeRecycling.com)). You are asked to make a donation of \$5/item and \$10/CRT monitors or TVs. Just pull up around the U at the front of 248 Colrain Road.

## SPANISH TRIP

**VAMOS A NICARAGUA:** Four Rivers will be traveling with a group of interested students to La Concepción, Nicaragua from April 12-21, 2014 (during spring Intensives and a few days of April break). The trip will be one that incorporates intensive Spanish language classes, home-stays in pairs for students, service projects in the afternoons and opportunities to see different parts of the country through day trips. Through this trip, we hope that students gain a greater understanding and love of Spanish, adventure, service and compassion.

**Please join us for an informational meeting on Thursday, October 17, 6-7p in Room 204.**

Contact Becca Rice or Eliza Beardslee if you have urgent questions before then. See you there! .

[rrice@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:rrice@fourriverscharter.org) or  
[ebeardslee@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:ebeardslee@fourriverscharter.org)





*Left:*

*Isaac Blodgett and  
Tynan Hewes of the  
Cross Country Team*

*Right:*

*Liam Carlton playing  
Varsity Boys Soccer*



## X-COUNTRY

The Four Rivers cross country team had their first meet in Dublin, NH on a loopy course full of hills and rocks and steep slopes and the most amazing views. Five out of seven runners finished, and all improved their times from last year by at least 2 minutes. Junior Liam Fiske-White was first for our team (14th/23:55) followed by freshman Isaac Blodgett (30th/26:58), sophomore Emory Ketch (32nd/27:09) and freshman Tynan Hewes (33/27:12). Not least was Chester Hardina-Blanchette in 49th place with a huge personal record (38:08). Casey Davey and Chris Turner competed and only completed a portion of the course. Stay tuned for the next competition!

Eliza Beardslee, Coach  
[ebeardslee@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:ebeardslee@fourriverscharter.org)

## VOLUNTARY STUDENT ACCIDENT INSURANCE

Once again the school is making this student accident insurance available. There is also an extended dental benefit available. See the brochure on our web site under "Links and Documents." Call Harlan Smith at the school if you have questions.

## SOCCER NEWS

The varsity boys are off to a very good start winning our first 3 games over Hartsbrook, White Oak and the Academy at Charlemont by a combined score of 16 - 1. The defense is solid, anchored by Chandler Thoma as sweeper and Jackson Reeves-Henning as our goalie. Jack Conant is leading the team in scoring. The exciting thing about this team is that it has strength at all positions and a solid, deep bench. ~ **Terry Plotkin, Coach**

This year's Girls Varsity team is lead by captains, Juliana Blodgett, Helen Perham and Sweeney. So far, the Otters have a 1-1 record. Please check the sports calendar on our home page and come support our teams! ~ **Amanda Griffith, Coach**

The Middle School Boys opened up its season with an 8-0 loss to a highly skilled Mahar squad. Another loss (4-1) to Hopkins followed. However, the mix of veterans and eager new players had an excellent game against Bement, winning 7-0. Another great effort was a 2-2 tie against a perennially strong Frontier, despite our team dominating play throughout the contest. The boys have worked well together and continue to develop individual and team skills.

Milou Rigollaud and Morgan Magee have been working well together up front, with Jordan Leh and Luka Newcombe anchoring the deep backs. Middies "Mac" Almeida, Tim Stuart and Kiernan Crough have been working nicely on both ends of the field. ~ **Charlie Olchowski, Coach**

## BIG YEAR AHEAD FOR SENIORS

The seniors began their year on Star Island, off the coast of Portsmouth NH. There, they worked on their senior expeditions, had a few raucous crew challenges, did service work, made s'mores over a bonfire on the rocks, designed the start of year ceremony and had time for reflection and sharing about how they could create a most excellent senior year, both individually and as a class. This trip is now a tradition; the class of 2014 is the fifth class to go to Star Island and it is a tradition worth keeping!



Clockwise from Left — Sailor, Sweeney, Sirens, Sunset, Scullers - **SWEET!**



## **The College Application Process for Seniors**

At back to school night, we reviewed the college application process, the tasks that need to be completed, and ways we can offer support both at school and at home. The notes from the evening are here:

### **Complete any outstanding testing requirements:**

- SAT's, ACT's, SAT subject tests
- Most seniors take the SAT's or ACT's for a second time early in their senior year

Check the testing requirements of individual schools that you will be applying to

### **Finalize list of schools**

- We recommend a list of 5 – 8 schools, and this should include reach, target and safety schools, and should be consistent with the family's financial resources.

We use Naviance to help manage the application process. Ask your child to share their list with you on Naviance.

### **Complete applications**

- Common Application or school specific application

College essay, any school specific supplements, portfolio requirements

### **Apply for Financial Aid**

- FAFSA – available after January 1, 2014
- EFC forecasters are available to help with planning. See <https://fafsa.ed.gov/FAFSA/app/f4cForm?execution=e1s1>

- All schools are required to post a Net Price Calculator on their website and these can be great schools to get a sense of YOUR estimated cost of individual schools.

We'll host a financial aid evening in December

### **At school we....**

- Provide support during Senior Seminar
- Meet individually with all seniors early in the school year to review the status of their post Four River's plans
- Work on college essays during English

Host weekly visits from college admissions representatives.

### **At home you should.....**

- Research the costs associated with different schools and discuss with your child funds that are available for college
- Help kids sign up for SAT's and ACT's
- Support your kid in terms of visiting schools

Help with deadlines

### **Other::**

- *Northfield Mount Hermon College Fair* — Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup> from 4:00 to 5:00 pm
- *Hampshire County College Fair* — Tuesday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at East-hampton High School.

**Questions? Contact Andy Stenson, [astenson@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:astenson@fourriverscharter.org) 413 7754577 ext. 222**



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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## GROW FOUR RIVERS

*Above — the faculty held their own orientation in August, which included a group service project at Just Roots Farm!*

*Right — The garden club is working on three major projects: creating accessible paths in the Blatchford garden, processing herbs and edibles, and harvesting, planting, creating season extension and irrigation in the veggie beds.*

