

# Four Rivers Currents

February & March 2014

## **WHAT'S CORE? WHAT'S COMMON? THE ARRIVAL OF THE COMMON CORE**

Students in grades 7, 8, and 10 are taking the English Language Arts MCAS later this month, with Math and Science to follow in May and June. Given this season of testing, I thought I'd share some information about where these tests are headed and the standards they're designed to assess.

The newly minted Common Core State Standards are supposed to lay out what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. No Child Left Behind—George Bush's landmark education legislation—established the idea that students should be tested in order to hold schools accountable for every student. But it lets states set their own standards. The authors of the Common Core wanted to correct that problem and define knowledge and skills across state lines.

The new standards are supposed to better prepare all students for college and career. Students who meet the standards for English Language Arts embody the following attributes:

- They demonstrate independence.
- They build strong content knowledge.
- They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.
- They comprehend as well as critique.
- They value evidence.
- They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
- They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

Students who meet the standards for math reflect the following “standards for mathematical practice”:

- They make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
- They reason abstractly and quantitatively.
- They construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
- They model with mathematics.
- They use appropriate tools strategically.
- They attend to precision.
- They look for and make use of structure.
- They look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

These are two interesting lists. They are not too different from what many of us say we want to see our students develop. They focus on thinking, on reasoning, on being able to do something with information that is at hand, and on being precise with evidence to back up ideas, interpretations, and solutions.

If the standards are shifting, the tests have to shift as well. That's where we get the two state consortia, each grouping around 1 of 2 new tests. Massachusetts will be using PARCC—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career. In two years, the new tests will have replaced the MCAS—though the state says there is considerable overlap given that MCAS served as a model for PARCC to some extent. Mitchell Chester, our state education commissioner, said the following: “We're looking to develop the next generation of assessment, one that requires students to do more performance-based application of what

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*Peter Garbus, Principal*

## Grade 7 News

### SCIENCE FACT vs. SCIENCE FICTION — Thinking about Past and Future

From late November to early January, the 7th grade students were Time Travelers in training. They studied classification, geologic time and paleogeography in preparation for the Postcards from The Past project in which students are assigned to research a particular part of earth's history and use those science facts to write a short piece of science fiction. In December, students visited the Bedneski Museum of Natural History on the Amherst College campus, and combed the collection for fossils, footprints and bones that would give them clues about the creatures that inhabited Earth during their assigned time periods. Museum director Alfred Venne talked with students about what it takes to create an exhibit. With much creativity, peer editing and revision, the postcards were completed just as semester one ended and many of them are indeed museum quality. The Postcards were on display at the Bedneski Museum of Natural History for the month of February. This project has become a staple of the 7th grade year, and the Museum docents and geology department at Amherst college have come to expect great work from our students and really look forward to the display each year.

The postcards expedition gets 7th graders thinking about science fact and science fiction. And this year we are digging even further into this rich realm as we launch into an expedition called **COULD IT REALLY HAPPEN?** where we are reading science fiction and putting our research skills to work as we consider the "What ifs" of biotechnology and make us wonder what science currently can do, and what the consequences are for society? We'll share our thinking with you soon.



*Pictured above: a group of 10th graders was the audience for a 7th grade cell model gallery. Tenth grade biology students graded the 7th grade models. It was good review for the 10th graders in preparation for MCAS and it was a real audience for the 7th graders to present their understanding of cells.*

*Pictured at left are students with their cell models:*

- *Near left is Sean Clancy.*
- *Far left is Charles Dean.*



## Grade 8 News

### THE PLAY'S THE THING

This month in Humanities, the 8th grade is acting out Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. As you can see from the photos, their costumes are not quite historically accurate! However, they are having fun, getting up each day, to read, act, and interpret Shakespeare, which is a great thing!



We finished up our study of Medieval times with researching, writing, and editing Medieval Narratives. Students created wonderfully realistic journals for this project (see photos of Fiona's and Tanner's journals). And some students enthusiastically participated in Reader's Theater Performances, as seen by Jeff in his Court Jester costume!



This month, we also went on field work to Smith College Museum of Art for the Renaissance Kick-off! We compared Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance art, and what art from each period reveals about society. An example is the Medieval *Madonna and Child in Majesty* by Cimabue, circa 1270, versus the Renaissance *Madonna and Child With Two Angels* by Filippo Lippi 1447-1465. Students noted the difference in perspective, how the light falls on each painting, and the depth of emotion reflected in the eyes and face of the characters.



Abby Schlinger and Fiona Tierney, left, were the grand prize winners at the 2014 Kid Wind Event held at Greenfield Community College.

Second place went to Malik Baker-Gore and Michael Hill. Third Place went to Peter Derivolkov and Milou Rigollaud.

All six of these students were invited to compete in the first ever National Kid Wind Challenge in Washington D.C. in April!

Congratulations to all!

### KID WIND SUCCESS

### SPANISH

Students in 8th grade Spanish are writing, writing, writing! We have officially begun writing our series of "mini cuentos" (super short stories) by utilizing weekly vocabulary that comes up in conversation as well as a variety of target vocabulary. Students are beginning to become very comfortable with the strategy of writing simple sentences in order to get their ideas across. Some students have begun writing more complex sentences, asking for past tense, future and conditional suggestions. It is so much fun to watch them grow as a writers!

## DIV 2 NEWS

### Four Rivers Celebrates Social Justice Day!

Tenth graders presented workshops for their Do Something Projects as a part of their Social Studies and English Expedition. Students taught 1 hour workshops around a topic that they felt passionate about. Some topics included: grit, body image, childhood obesity, depression, anxiety and many more! Students spent a long time preparing these workshops which were attended by the whole school. Social Justice Day wrapped up with some reflections from the students of Four Rivers about what they learned from attending the student-led workshops.



### SPANISH — Ms. Rice

Ninth graders are currently trying to answer the questions: What is in a legend? What are the cultural and historical elements that make up a legend? Students have read two legends, one from Mexico and another about the earth's creation from Bolivia and Peru. Students will use their experience with these legends in order to create their own country complete with a legend, national anthem, traditional dance, food, clothing and more!

### 10th GRADE MILESTONES

Students in 10th grade are about to embark on their last Student-led Conference before their Passage Presentations in the Spring! Students are beginning to think about questions such as, Who am I to my community? and How do my peers and teacher see me? What are my strengths and Where do my next steps take me? Students are currently in the process of gathering examples of work that help illustrate the story of their Division 2 experience. In addition to gathering this work, students will be submitting their work for safe keeping and easier demonstration in an online, digital portfolio. Students will be able to have their work on file for as long as they like, in great condition!

## DIV 3 NEWS

### Math — Mr. Hornick

Students in **Algebra 2** are finishing up a large unit on sequences, series, exponents, logarithms, and modeling with exponential functions. In March, they'll be reviewing quadratics (have you ever wondered why they are called quadratics when they only have three parts and only go up to a power of two?) and digging into polynomial and rational expressions. It's any area filling with fascinating and amazing patterns, and it's the most hard-core algebra 2 adventure.

**Applied Math** students continues to study aspects of personal finance. Having completed an investigation of saving and budgeting, we are about to begin our study of debt. We visited Greenfield Co-operative Bank and will soon be touring apartments and small houses in the area.

**Advanced Math** students derived Euler's formula and found the value of the great transcendental number  $i^i$ . Now we are investigating fairly complex probability problems. This will prime us for an investigation of statistics.

### SPANISH — Ms. Rice

Students in **Spanish 4** are cruising through conversations in Spanish as they arise organically. Students are practicing the strategy of circumlocution in order to describe words that they need to say without relying on English as a crutch. Students have discussed complex topics such as: What does our country do with the tax money we pay? What does it mean to be a conscious traveler? If we could be anywhere instead of here, where would we go and why? Students look forward to continuing to speak as much Spanish as possible and improve their conversational skills!

Students in **Spanish 5** have just begun reading a novel in Spanish as part of our investigation of, What does it mean to be Latino in the United States? Students chose between a variety of books that touch on this theme in one way or another. Half of the class is reading, *De como las chicas Garcia perdieron su acento* (*How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accent*) by Julia Alvarez from the Dominican Republic and the other group is reading, *El pais bajo mi piel* (*The Country Under my Skin*) by Gioconda Belli. The second book is Belli's account of being Nicaraguan and participating in revolution. Students who read this book will be heading head to Nicaragua in April. In addition to their choice books students will be interviewing a business owner from the Latino community in the Pioneer Valley about their experience being Latino in the US.

### Final Stretch for Seniors

Seniors are heading into the final stretch of their senior expeditions. They are working on their products, aiming for the April 5th deadline (preparing them for adulthood and the April 15 deadline). In April and early May, they will be designing their presentations and gearing up for their graduation passage presentations. Now that we are past February vacation, it feels like one giant step to graduation day! We'll be savoring it!



## **CROSS COUNTRY SKI CLUB You've got Snow!**

Despite early snowfall, the cross country (x-c) skiing group was challenged with snow conditions in January. The group was able to work on basic techniques in back of the school and up and on the GCC campus. Since that time, additional snow has allowed them to test other trails. That will expand to other opportunities and some adventures on weekends and on Fridays, as the days get longer and snow remains cooperative. Ruben Perkins has been a great help with his nordic expertise as a member of the Notchview Nordic Patrol. The skiers have progressed well and will gain more confidence as we continue to explore more areas. *Charlie Olchowski, Coach*

## **ULTIMATE SEASON Pushing back the snow!**

Sign-up for spring ultimate starts March 3rd. You can find paperwork in the Flash or pick it up at the office. Along with the paperwork, all players should have a physical within the last 13 months on file with the school nurse.

We will have 5 teams this spring with 4 returning coaches. David Delorenzo will coach the JV boys, Dave Campolo will coach the Middle School boys, Amanda Griffith will coach the Varsity Girls, Terry Plotkin will coach varsity boys, and our new coach for the JV Girls is Nichole LaCoy, a former Four Rivers student and varsity captain.

Please look on our FRCPS web page for the ultimate Frisbee schedules: [www.fourriverscharter.org](http://www.fourriverscharter.org).

Please note all weekend tournaments. We expect players to attend tournaments! Thanks, and here's to a great ultimate season! ~ *The Ultimate Frisbee Coaches*

## **SUMMER ULTIMATE INTENSIVE**

We will run a Summer Ultimate Intensive again this year from June 30 - July 3. Contact Terry Plotkin if you have any questions about spring ultimate OR the summer intensive. [tplotkin@fourriverscharter.com](mailto:tplotkin@fourriverscharter.com). See you on the field.

## **PARDON OUR HEAVES**

The undulations in the Parking Lot are caused by frost heaves; we hope all will subside with warmer weather. Meanwhile, please drive slowly in the parking lot.

## **NURSE'S NOTES**

I will be conducting state mandated health screenings the week of March 17<sup>th</sup>. Please complete the opt-out form if you do NOT want your child screened.

Students who sustain a mild concussion require 3 to 5 days rest at home without screen time &/or homework. A delay in cognitive rest will delay healing. I have included a link to Cape Cod Times summarizing a recent forum on concussions. DO NOT allow your child to return to regular activity too early if he/she sustains this type of injury.

<http://www.capecodonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20140212/NEWS/402120329&emailAFriend=1>

*Jeanne Milton, RN*

## **11th ANNUAL VARIETY SHOW**

March 14, 7:00 pm  
Shea Theater, Turners Falls.



## COLLEGE COUNSELING & GUIDANCE

**Scholarships.** Seniors who plan on attending college next year are encouraged to apply for scholarships to help with the cost of attendance. We keep a file of local scholarships, and students have access to these, and time to work on them, during senior seminar. We don't get notified of everything that is available, so families are encouraged to keep a look out for local organizations that provide scholarships to area students. In terms of looking for national scholarships, [www.fastweb.org](http://www.fastweb.org), is one of the best resources available. Also, families should be sure that they have filed the FAFSA as well as any additional financial aid forms required by individual colleges.

**JUNIORS and the college search process.** Spring of junior year is typically the time that students start to "get serious" about the college exploration and search process. April vacation is a great time to visit schools – colleges are still in session so visitors are able to get a good "feel" of what a particular college is like. Most colleges host daily tours and admission sessions, and the times of these are typically listed on their websites, along with details about how to register.

Mr. Stenson will be meeting with every junior during March and early April, and based on this meeting he will provide each student and family with a list of potential schools to act as a starting point for their college search.

### 2014 COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE NEWS

Students that applied early are beginning to hear back from colleges. Schools that have ALREADY said YES to Four Rivers seniors include:

*Bay State College! Clark University! Clarkson! Colby-Sawyer College! College of New England! Colorado State! Drexel! Emmanuel! Evergreen State! Fitchburg State! Fordham University! Framingham State! Franklin Pierce! Goucher! Guilford! Hampshire College! Ithaca College! Lesley! Lyndon State! Manhattan College! Naropa University! Newbury College! Salve Regina! San Diego State! Smith College! SUNY Oneonta! SUNY Fredonia! Suffolk! Unity College! University of Colorado-Boulder! University of Georgia! University of Miami! University of New Haven! University of North Carolina! University of Vermont! Villanova! Wentworth Institute! Wheelock College!*

**Congratulations to our seniors!**

### **Common Core** *Continued from page 1...*

they learn than the current MCAS does, to be able to write in each grade, to read text, do research and demonstrate their ability to make sense out of what they've read and digest the information and report the information. These are more advanced skills than the current MCAS emphasizes."

It seems the new common core is not a set of facts all students have to know. The common emphasis is about skills, attributes, habits, capabilities. My mentor always worried about the dangers of a national curriculum established by government officials. He wasn't paranoid — he just felt those officials wouldn't know as much about our students as we educators and parents would know. The common core takes us in the direction of a national curriculum, but it might just head towards outcomes we actually agree are important. We'll see. ~ *Peter Garbus, Principal*

## HELLO DOLLY! A HIT AT THE SHEA THEATER

Drama Club students put on another fabulous show last weekend. Hello Dolly! featured fun and energetic choreography by wellness teacher and coach Amanda Griffith, and great musical direction by math teacher Josh Hornick, who also acted as a one-man pit band on keyboard. Director Leah Plath has another theatrical success, thanks in no small part to the talented actors, great singers, and a hardworking stage crew. Parents and school and community supporters also helped with everything from costumes, set building and props, to concessions and programs, tickets and publicity. *Below: students and parents build sets in the Common Room during February vacation; Right: Chloe Castro-Santos played Irene Molly.*



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Four Rivers Charter Public School  
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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.