

Four Rivers Currents

May 2014

From the Principal's Desk...

WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT OUR SCHOOL CLIMATE

If it's nearing the end of the year, that must mean that you have a School Climate Survey to fill out. We'll have instructions for you in the next Flash (though, if you're eager, click on [SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY -- PARENTS](#) and go to town). I want to take the opportunity to describe what input we hope to see from you and where it goes.

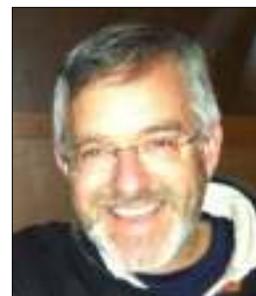
We feel we have a successful school if students are engaged and learning day to day and over time. So are they? And do they feel comfortable in our school community? Safe? Inspired? What do parents observe about their children's school experience? We have year by year responses to almost all of the questions on the survey, so we can line up the numbers to see if we're doing better or worse on different indicators. And we have long lists of concerns and suggestions. Each year, I make a list of all the suggestions people give; I group them and eliminate duplications. The last step is to think about whether the suggestion would be fairly easy -- and not too expensive -- to implement and if it would solve a problem we need or want to solve. If the suggestion is valid but difficult or expensive, it becomes part of a list of competing initiatives. All of that input helps us select a few initiatives each year to make our school better. And that, of course, is the reason for going through all of this -- we want to make our school better and better.

If our primary function is to promote important student learning, we want your input on our Educational Program. From your point of view, what's working and what's not? Is it clear what we're trying to do and how well are we doing it? Are we providing students the support or the challenge they need in order to stay engaged and progress? Our faculty members work continually on how their classrooms function and how they structure student learning experiences. They get more detailed feedback from me and many get regular feedback from their students. The survey allows us to get a more global sense of whether the program seems to be working as we wish. One thing to note here is that we are a small school, which means that we can't offer the breadth of programs that some students and families wish for. We often get comments on the additional programs people would like to see at the school. They are almost always good ideas, but they go beyond our capacity or our budget. Still, say everything that is on your minds, because we may get ideas that we hadn't thought of before.

A next category of information we seek might be described as School Culture and Communication. We want to know from you how it feels to be part of our school community. It matters whether you feel connected or alienated. It matters whether you can find out what's going on at school. It matters whether you feel valued. In this category, we ask you general and specific questions that try to draw out these aspects of your experience. It seems communication is always an issue, despite efforts year after year to make improvements. We know we've gotten better, and yet individuals still experience glitches or frustrations. We're always interested in possible good ideas here.

All of you get to say how you feel I'm doing as the head of school. The Board of Trustees completes a performance review for me every year and your input serves as data for that review. Students, parents, staff, and trustees all have their say, and a small committee of trustees gathers that data into a picture of my strengths and needed improvements. If there are issues or concerns, it's better that they come up so I can try to do something about them. And it's healthy in a school community that people have some input on the leadership.

Only about half of you complete the survey each year -- a percentage similar to the number who regularly read the Flash. Some feel that's better participation than most schools. I'd still like to see more of you do it, just so we can be even more sure that the views shared reflect all parts of our school. I hope this preamble gives you even more reason to fill yours out this year.



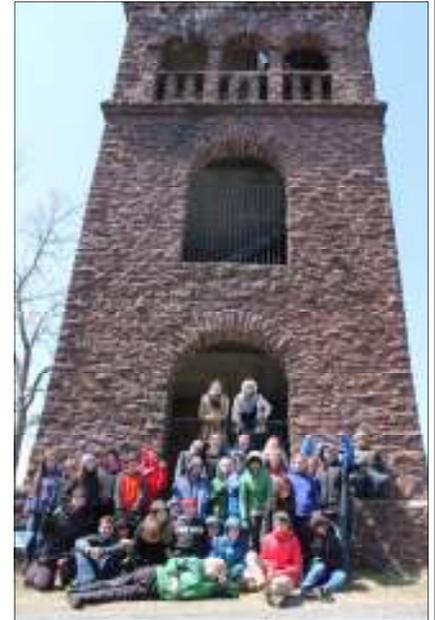
Peter Garbus, Principal

Grade 7 News

READING OUR OWN POETRY AT POET'S SEAT TOWER



Above: Hear ye, hear ye! Teagan presents a poem from the tower to her classmates below. Her poem about Little Lucy definitely puts imagery into action! Center: Julia and 'Ri present Julia's poem, "The Inspired Introvert," where appearance and reality are personified. Far right: 7th grade Poets!



FOOD AS FUEL LAB

Right: Gavin and Riley use Food as Fuel to warm water and measure the calories.

Far right: Jaida, Morgan and Marcel - 7th grade scientists - set marshmallows, peanuts and crackers aflame to measure the energy contained in sugars, lipids and starches.



ONE-HOUR WALK-A-THON

The day before break, math classes tried to estimate how far they could walk in an hour. How many times would they be able to walk around the bike path? How many times around the parking lot? Everyone walked; everyone had fun; some took it as a personal challenge and some RAN THE WHOLE WAY; two made it all the way around the bike path twice in an hour (Riley and Mac). A BIG THANK YOU to parents Michelle Bryan and Tamara Sloan for volunteering to chaperone and walk with us. *Photos Left to Right: Riley's second lap; Jaida and Raine on bridge; Mac's second lap!*



DIV 2 NEWS

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

In 9th grade we have started our watershed expedition. The students are collecting stream water at Arms Brook and analyzing it for nitrate, dissolved oxygen, phosphorous, coliform bacteria and pH. They are analyzing these water quality factors to draw conclusions about stream health. They are also using dichotomous keys to identify macroinvertebrates that they find in Arms Brook. They will be using their analysis of the macroinvertebrate diversity to draw conclusions about the stream water quality. The 9th graders will be taking the data that they collect and sharing it with 9th graders at the Springfield Renaissance Expeditionary Learning School. The students in Springfield are also examining a stream near their school that has been impacted by urban development. Through this collaboration the students will be comparing and contrasting how urban development and agricultural development impact water quality. In early June the Four Rivers students will be visiting the Springfield Renaissance School and sharing their findings of the Arms Brook stream study.



Chloe, Hannah and Lucia (left) and Jordan, Barnabas, and Tynan (above) collecting stream samples and measuring the velocity of Arms Brook

BIOLOGY

Tenth graders have launched into their study of evolution. They began by having an interesting discussion about seven different stories about how life on earth began. This allowed the students to discuss what science is. They also examined a comic about natural selection and talked about Darwin's observations in the Galapagos which helped him develop the tenants of natural selection. In the next week they will be looking more at human evolution and examining where we came from and what makes us human. When we are not engaged in an interesting discussion about evolution we are reviewing concepts for the Biology MCAS which is on June 2nd and 3rd.



These students are looking at the adaptations of mollusks and examining how the mollusk eye evolved.

DIV 3 NEWS

PHYSICS and THE SCIENCE OF SAFETY

The world can be a dangerous place, and division 3 students are working hard to use their science knowledge to protect us.

Seniors have been studying motion during the second semester of Physics class, and over the last few weeks they've been investigating the forces at work during collisions. They started with an egg drop to get an idea of how force, momentum, and time come together when an object hits a rigid surface such as a sidewalk. Through calculations and observations students predicted the forces their eggs experienced in the crash and compared these numbers to data we had gathered involving the amount of force needed to break an egg. In the end, students were able to use concepts from physics to explain why soft cushioning and protective wrappings are able to reduce the force of an impact.

Our next step in physics class was to look at collisions between two moving objects. These ideas allowed our class to begin a research project revolving around automobile accidents and automobile safety. As part of the project, students are asked to choose a car and use the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety database to find information on the types of testing done on new cars and data on how their car performed. By applying what they know about the physics of collisions, students will be able to better understand the safety features our cars have and critically evaluate the safety performance of the cars they choose to travel in.

CHEMISTRY

The juniors who study Chemistry are currently working on a unit about acids and bases. We've seen that acids and bases are a normal and essential part of natural and modern life. They are in our bodies, our drinks, our food, and many of the processes that bring us the goods we use each day. Students are mastering the calculations needed to balance and neutralize acidic or basic solutions, as well as practicing the laboratory techniques that help them carry out these reactions.

To apply these ideas, students will be faced with the following challenge: Imagine that a tanker truck full of acid were to spill into the Connecticut River just upstream from us. What would be the best way to neutralize the acid? What would be the cheapest? Students will have to use what they know to figure out answers to these problems. They will run tests on household antacids to calculate just how much they would need for one spill, and experiment safely with lab-grade bases to see how they might work. In the end they will have to settle on one particular choice and provide all of the evidence and calculations they can to support their choice. Hopefully these plans will never have to be used, but it is still comforting knowing they are there, and that our students have the know-how and perseverance to come up with these kinds of answers.



PROM MAY 30th

The prom will be held at the Greenfield Country Club on Friday, May 30th from 6:00—11:00 pm. Tickets are \$55 and will be sold through Monday, May 19th. Financial aid is available for qualifying families; for more information on financial aid, students should contact Mrs. Plath immediately.



SUMMER ULTIMATE

The Four Rivers Summer Ultimate Intensive will take place June 30 - July 3. Now in its third year, the program is geared towards having fun, making friends, building skills, and playing a lot of ultimate.

Further details can be found at: www.fourriverscharter.org. Click on *Our Programs*, click on *Summer Ultimate Intensive*. If you have questions contact Terry Plotkin, Athletic Director, at the school at 775-4577, ext. 218. OR tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org

Nature Class News

The Nature Trib has been keeping busy scarfing down greens fried in butter, tidying the garden, and putting in a row of chestnut trees along the school's property line south of the soccer field. Mark your calendars for big harvests in September 2020!

Four Rivers students also planted 20 apple trees at 4 other schools in Greenfield and Holyoke with this spring's service planting intensive.

Felix Lufkin



NURSE'S NOTES

As the weather improves students are involved in more outside activities. To prevent dehydration, ALL must bring a water bottle with them daily. The most common signs of dehydration are: headache, abdominal pain, and lightheadedness, which are all easily prevented with adequate fluids.

Flip flop weather is fast approaching. Wear clothing and footwear that allow you to safely participate in all activities—see the FRCPS handbook. Remember to send sneakers for Wellness as there is no support for feet with flip flops!



Reminder: No student is allowed to carry any medication while at school. If a student requires medication during school hours the medication must be stored in the locked cabinet in the Health Office. You can contact me at school if questions arise.

Jeanne Milton, RN

FOUR RIVERS BOYS SWEEP NMH TOURNEY

Four Rivers Varsity Boys Ultimate Team won the Northfield Mount Hermon Tournament on April 26, defeating Newton North in the final game, 11 to 5. This was the first time Four Rivers has won that tournament. No team got more than 6 points on the boys team all day.

On May 3 and 4, the boys varsity team went to Amherst to play in their tournament. This is one of the toughest tournaments in the country, drawing the best teams in the Northeast.

The varsity team had a great run, defeating Columbia (NJ), top-seeded Lexington, Amherst JV, and Northampton. This put us in the quarter-finals against Needham, which we won 14 to 9. Four Rivers then suffered its first loss of the season against eventual tournament winner Pennsbury in the semi-final 11 to 9.



COLLEGE COUNSELING & GUIDANCE

JUNIORS * COLLEGE FAIRS

College Fairs are a great way to connect with admissions staff from a wide range of schools. Juniors should try to attend at least one. Some events coming up in our area this month include:

- [NEACAC Fair: Keene State College](#) Spaulding Gymnasium Friday, May 23, 2014: 9:00am-11:30am
- [NEACAC Fair: Dean College](#) Dean College Campus Center Tuesday, May 27, 2014: 6:30pm-8:30pm
- [NEACAC Fair: Assumption College](#) Plourde Recreation Center, Worcester, MA Wednesday, May 28, 2014: 9:00am-11:00am & 7:00pm-9:00pm
- [NEACAC Fair: Merrimack College](#) The Sakowich Student Center Building, North Andover, MA Thursday, May 29, 2014: 6:30--8:30pm

Additional regional college fairs are listed here:

http://www.neacac.org/cf_spring.cfm

Also, the organization, “Colleges That Change Lives” is hosting an evening event in Boston on May 21. Information is available here:

<http://www.ctcl.org/events/boston14>

Questions? Contact Andy Stenson, astenson@fourriverscharter.org 413 775-4577 ext. 222

NICARAGUA TRIP REPORT

From April 12-21, 31 students from Four Rivers traveled to Granada, Nicaragua to spend the week taking Spanish classes in the morning, working on choice-based internships in the afternoons and staying with host families facilitated by VIVA NICARAGUA, a local organization that supports improving the strength of local communities through education and sustainable development and also cross-cultural learning through experiential internships. These internships ranged from making prevention posters for a local health clinic to playing cards and speaking with adults in Nursing Home to painting murals at two different community centers to playing with students of all ages from the local community.

Here is a snapshot from an email we sent from Nicaragua:

"Another beautiful day here in Granada. Yesterday was such a blast!! The kids went to the famous artisan market in Masaya and had a wonderful dinner followed by dancing.

Here's a direct quote from our dear Seb about yesterday's adventure: *"I thought yesterday was the best day yet, but I was wrong...today was even better!!!!"*

"The market had un poco de todo (a little of everything). Kids got to practice their bargaining skills and found that things are so much cheaper here in Nicaragua. The dollar gets you very far, an important lesson for everyone to learn."

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NICARAGUA TRIP REPORT

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We visited Coyotepe the site of the prison during the Somoza dictatorship and later during the contra war. This followed the history talk that we had a couple of nights before. We took a tour in the underground prison (complete with bats flying over our heads) and we were able to experience a little bit of the conditions that prisoners had to live in while they were there. The tour was amazing. The guide even turned off his flashlight at certain points so that we got a feel for the complete darkness that people had to live in. The kids asked some great questions about the history of Coyotepe and it really tied together for them what they learned about the history and present of Nicaragua. We finished our tour by climbing up to an amazing look-out point from which you could see where Nicaragua begins and ends in the South and the North. It was incredible to see how not built up and pure Nicaragua remains.

~ Eliza Beardslee and Becca Rice, Spanish teachers ~



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Four River Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people and 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
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