

Four Rivers Currents

October 2016

From the Principal's Desk...

SHARING THE JOYS AND RIGORS OF AN EL EDUCATION

Nearly 1,000 educators gathered last week in Detroit for the annual EL Education National Conference. Currently over 150 schools comprise the network, which Four Rivers has been part of for all of the 14 years since founded. Four Rivers embodies and demonstrates the power of Expeditionary Learning design principles and core practices. It is our mission to employ these practices to prepare our graduates for lives of learning and service. It is also our purpose to show how effective these practices can be for any and all students. Here are some of the key items we could -- and should -- share with surrounding public district schools.

EL schools care about more than just academics. These schools define 3 dimensions of student achievement: development of skills and knowledge, cultivation of strong character, and helping students learn to create high quality work. Any one of these outcomes without the others leaves a person's education incomplete. It matters that we give students detailed, constructive feedback so they revise their work to high quality. It matters that we connect learning to the real world around us so students apply what they learn and try to make a difference. Knowledge without character can lead to intelligence without commitment. School is not just about test scores or grades. Are students becoming good people? Do they show concern for their community? Do they step up to support a classmate? Do they demonstrate respect? Do they pitch in? We are crew, not passengers. Public district schools can pay attention to character and quality work if they choose to; these practices are learnable.

EL schools care about deeper learning. These schools challenge students to dig into complicated ideas and texts. These schools demand that students think for themselves, basing original interpretations and conclusions on rigorous examination of evidence. These schools engage students with problems and questions that professionals and scholars wrestle with themselves. Our students grapple and stretch when learning; teachers design the experiences, select the case studies, and craft essential questions that inspire interest and require thoughtful participation. Public district schools can take students deeper if they choose to; it is a matter of approach and priorities.

EL schools care about excellent teaching. EL Education's book of core practices covers 38 different components, an ambitious agenda. At Four Rivers, we set out to focus on certain key aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and expect that all teachers learn and demonstrate solid implementation for each. We ask a lot of our teachers, which makes it all the more impressive how they strive to meet those expectations. Writing learning targets, designing expeditions, developing workshop lessons, organizing fieldwork, describing products for selected audiences, finding service opportunities -- all while building and maintaining relationships with young people -- teaching calls on every ounce of brainpower, heart, and patience we can muster. Teachers need planning time for all this work and to be able to collaborate with colleagues, making this one of the more challenging aspects of EL schools for public district schools to replicate.



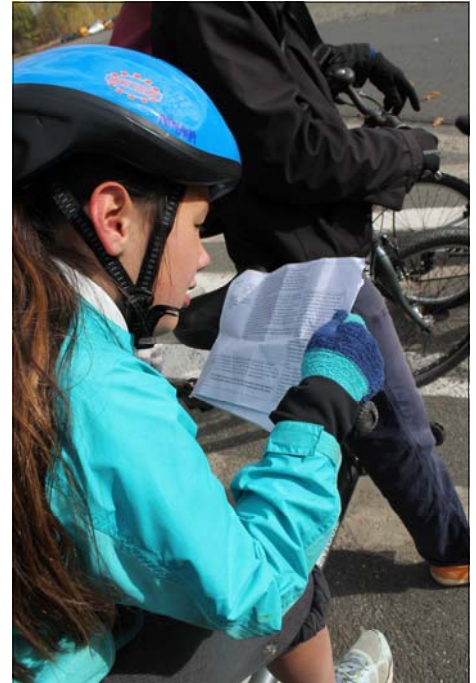
Peter Garbus, Principal

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Grade 7 News

A DATA COLLECTING BIKE EXPEDITION

How far will we bike? Will there be hills? Are we going uphill or downhill? To prepare for the 7th grade bike trip, students learned to read topographic maps in order to answer these questions. While out on the bike trip they were able to check their map-based predictions with hard-peddling experience of local topography and collect time and distance data which they will be graphing and calculating with for the next several weeks of Ratio, Rate and Slope math.



Above clockwise from top left: Learning to read topographical maps by the river; measuring the slope of the stairs in Highland Park; a biker checking the way forward; reaching the ridge at Highland Park; bicyclists rest at Beacon Field.

Photos at right: Masks help to kick off the personal narrative writing assignment, which asks students to consider how they're looking at the world around them. Immediate right, River helps Liam make his mask.



Grade 8 News

SCIENCE & MATH

In 8th grade math and science, students continue to practice their skills of measuring accurately using the metric system. While measuring volume, students were challenged to re-design a paper cup that could hold the greatest volume of water for 1 minute (pictured). Students have since moved on to measuring and investigating the concept of density. In math, students are exploring measuring volume of cylinders, cones and spheres and their work has involved discovering the formulas of each of these shapes using experimental methods.



HUMANITIES

We concluded our first guiding questions, *Who Am I?*, *Who Are You?*, and *Who Are We?*, with the completion of the Bioflyer Project and *Lord of the Flies*. We transitioned seamlessly into our second guiding question: *What Shapes an Individual?* and our study of society, with our Current Event Assignment and Society Collage. Eighth graders delight and surprise me daily with their ability to gain a deeper understanding, make connections, and bring all of these guiding questions and topics to our daily discussions. I so hope that 8th grade parents and guardians are hearing about these daily discoveries, learning and understanding. If not, feel free to ask your student some of the questions we grappled with while reading *Lord of the Flies*:

- What does it take for a group to function?
- What makes a good leader?
- What are the major themes of this novel?
- Why did Golding write this novel?
- What is the mood created by the setting?
- How does symbolism work to enhance the novel?

And see what they say!



Photos are of the Bioflyer Project, during which students were assigned an 8th grade partner they didn't know very well, to interview, collect data about, and then compose a two page biographical flyer on. They did a great job!

DIVISION 2 NEWS

NINTH FOOD AND FARMING EXPEDITION

The 9th grade started off the year with an expedition on food and farming. Students have been learning about different methods of agriculture and how their personal food choices have an impact on sustainability. On September 29th and 30th the students visited ten different local farms to see first hand what sustainable agriculture looks like. These interviews and visits were turned into advertisements for the farms as the students examined food propaganda and how advertising impacts our food choices. The students are each working on a food manifesto that turns all of this research into a personal belief statement. Students are also using information they collected during their interviews to mathematically model a profitable farm in Algebra 1. Their manifestos, and everything else, will be on display at the culminating event , Thursday afternoon, November 10, from 12:45 to 2:30. More information for families will be in a forthcoming email. We hope you can join us!



Left two photos: Tara Brown, Evan Leaf, Gaelen Mast and Alexis Dimitriou visit Nourse Farms in Whately.

Right two photos: Noah Pitcoff, Serenity Perkins, Emily Williams and Joe Monkiewicz visit Just Roots Farm in Greenfield.

DIVISION 3 NEWS

A Day in the Field

On October 13th, seniors once again ventured out of the classrooms and into the field. The focus was two-fold. One, students were canvassing to register those remaining unregistered voters and, two, students received training in audiovisual equipment at GCTV to prepare for the Energy Expedition's final product, a documentary film.

For the canvas, students were located in both downtown Greenfield and Shelburne Falls. The students had engaging conversations with pedestrians, some of whom were already registered, some of whom were foreign visitors commending our youth for engaging in the democratic process, and at least two dozen who were registered on the spot.

Where do we go from here? The senior class pitched six topics for the energy expedition and voted on the final focus for the documentary: Colleges and Universities Divest from the Fossil Fuel Industry. We all look forward to the premier at The Garden Cinema in February! Many of the seniors will not be able to vote in this election, however they successfully debated a yes or a no vote on Question 2: *Charter School Expansion*.

Next month look forward to an update on the juniors.



CROSS COUNTRY

The Four Rivers Cross Country team is continuing to enjoy an incredibly strong season. The boys team placed second to Dublin at the Four Rivers home meet on September 30th, and the girls placed 4th. The boys competed solidly at The Academy at Charlemont on October 5th where they placed second to BART. One big highlight of the last few weeks was the meet at Eagle Hill on Wednesday, October 19th. At Eagle Hill, many athletes on both the girls and the boys teams ran to personal best times. On the boys' side, the team placed first and the girls' team placed 4th. A shout out to Mac Sloan-Anderson who continues to race top times at every single meet! Huge appreciation for any runner who has taken time off for injury or sickness and who has returned healthy! Special kudos to our captains this year: Jemma Dickson, Oscar Gibson and Tynan Hewes. Their leadership has helped to bring this team to new strength! We race next at Stoneleigh Burnham (10/26) and then will race at BART for the championship meet on November 2nd. We want to extend a HUGE thanks to all of the volunteers who helped with tasks that made it possible for us to host the meet at Four Rivers on September 30th. We couldn't have done it without you!

Rest! Stretch! Ice! Run!!
~ Eliza Beardslee and
Lisa Ritchie, Coaches

Cross Country Team Photos courtesy of Judah Hughes



SO LONG TO SOCCER SEASON

Girls varsity soccer had a very successful season staffed with 24 players from all 6 grades. We came in 3rd place in the River Valley Athletic league with a 9-4 record. Not only did we improve on our 1-10 record from last season, but we also were awarded the River Valley Athletic League's Sportsmanship Award. Congratulations to all of the players, but especially our two seniors, Sophie Garbus and Kin Wildman-Hanlon. ~ Amanda McNamara

The boys varsity finished the season with a loss, 4-3, to a solid Putney team in the quarterfinals of the RVAL league. The boys finished with a record of 8 wins and 5 losses. This is a fairly young team with only 3 seniors on it, some newer players, and was forced to deal with injuries, so I feel the team did well for itself. Not only did we learn to play fine soccer, we developed team chemistry that helped us have a lot of fun, enjoyed games and practices, and made new friendships. This does not always happen, and it is special when it does.

We are graduating Jake Wallenius-Duda, Jordan Leh, and Barnabas Yu from the team. Each of them made a great contribution to the good team and the feeling that we had. Looking forward, I have every reason to hope that we will have some strong teams coming up. Next year we'll have 12 returning players and some very talented athletes moving up from the middle school team. ~ Terry Plotkin

LEAVES WANTED!

The forest garden is in need of leaves for mulching trees over the winter. If you are raking yard waste off your lawn, please consider bringing the paper bags of leaves and other organic yard waste to the school, and leave them in the concrete trough near the blue barn. **Thanks!** Felix Lufkin ~ Nature trib

COLLEGE ADVISING

APPLYING FOR FINANCIAL AID

For families of college bound seniors, now is the time to start applying for financial aid. For federal aid, families should submit the FAFSA which can be accessed at: <https://fafsa.gov/>. The FAFSA for the 2017-2018 school year can be completed now and will be based upon 2015 tax return data. Even if your child isn't certain about what schools they will be applying to, you can still complete the FAFSA now and arrange for it to be sent to schools at a later date. Completing the form early will also allow families to see their Expected Family Contribution (EFC), and this can be helpful with planning for college expenses.

Many private schools require additional materials including the CSS Profile, a second form that asks for more information, for example home equity. The CSS Profile can be accessed here: css.collegeboard.org.

Dates, deadlines and more specifics regarding individual schools can be found by visiting the admissions/financial aid sections of their respective websites. Financial aid deadlines need to be adhered to, and it's not unusual for financial aid deadlines to fall at the same time as the rest of the application materials.

Questions regarding the college application process? Email astenson@frcps.org.

FINANCIAL AID EVENING—Not Just for Seniors

WHEN: Thursday, Nov 17th ~ 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

WHERE: Four Rivers ~ High School Room 101

WITH: Michael Ireland ~ Associate Director of Student Financial Services at Smith College

Andy Stenson ~ Four Rivers College Counselor

Topics covered will include: Financing a college education * Tools for Future Planning * Net Price Calculators and EFC Forecasters * How Financial Aid is Calculated * Impact of Income and Savings * Detailed Instructions regarding submission and timelines for FAFSA and CSS Profile forms * Need based Financial Aid packages and their component parts * Grants, Loans and Work Study * Need Blind and Need Aware school practices * Merit aid and Scholarships. **THERE WILL BE AMPLE TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION.**

From the Principal's Desk...Continued from page 1

EL schools care about school culture and leadership. For effective teaching and learning to happen, a school community must allow its members to feel safe and productive. Schools need structures and routine procedures that encourage students and teachers alike to use their voice, to participate in problem-solving, to feel ownership and agency in its day to day life. We hope the same for parents and community members, too. Leadership must allow community members to participate and give input, involving everyone to take responsibility for the institution they're a part of. Public district schools can build strong school cultures and encourage leadership that empowers, with many models to choose from.

EL schools care about results. How well are students learning? How prepared are they for college, work and citizenship? Are all students able to achieve and grow? The debate over charter schools really misses this point. Instead of arguing about unfairness and the finances, people should ask which schools effectively narrow achievement gaps and encourage powerful student learning. When that becomes the question, charter schools -- especially EL Education schools -- might just be the answer.

Join me this Thursday morning, November 3, from 8-9. for Coffee with the Principal. We may continue our conversation about charter school politics, but we might also be ready to move on to some new topics. Get out there and vote!

~ Peter Garbus, Principal ~

"This institution is an equal opportunity provider. To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Washington, DC 20294"

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



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.