

Four Rivers Currents

April / May 2018

From the Principal's Desk...

WHAT MAKES A GOOD TEACHER

Four Rivers is hiring three teachers for next year, so we've been interviewing candidates and considering the question of what makes a good teacher. There's even more to the question when it's at Four Rivers, in an expeditionary learning school, with strong-minded colleagues and lively students. Perhaps the single most important thing I can do as Principal is to hire the best possible teachers we can find. How do we know who that is?

Imagine you're being considered for a teaching job at Four Rivers. How well would you meet the "General Qualifications" listed for our teacher job postings?

- Genuine interest in and connection with adolescents: *Do you like kids? I mean, do you really like them? Are you more fascinated than annoyed by their inconsistencies, their naïveté, their inexperience? Can you find ways to appreciate each and every individual you might be assigned?*
- Personal qualities that exemplify the school's emphasis on character development and community: *When we say "we are crew, not passengers," do you step forward to participate and contribute, or do you hang back to see if anyone else steps forward? Can you hold students accountable for their demonstration of character, because you stand up for those very qualities yourself?*
- Appreciation for the EL Education design model -- commitment to develop curriculum and implement EL core practices, including in-depth learning expeditions: *There are concrete, describable, learnable practices, with evidence that they are effective, that our school tries to implement. While you might not have learned about these before, are you inclined to such approaches? Will you be swimming upstream or are you ready for our model?*
- Experience, training and interest in teaching a range of abilities in heterogeneous classes: *We don't track or group our classes by ability. At the same time, we aim to support and challenge every single student. Again, there are learnable approaches that teachers use day to day in their classrooms to keep all students stretching. How do you support students who are struggling? How do you keep those who need challenge engaged and moving forward?*
- Strong interpersonal skills, commitment to teamwork, and readiness to reflect and grow; energy, flexibility, and sense of adventure required to work hard in a young school: *It's one thing to be a good teacher with students. It's another to be a good colleague in an institution and enterprise that has more impact when the adults are working together in the same direction. When you see needs, do you find ways to contribute? When you have concerns, do you propose solutions? Do you listen more than you talk? When the path ahead is not necessarily known, do you chart the course or wait for direction? To teach at our school is to be part of a team on a mission.*
- Strong subject area background: *You've got to know your stuff if you're going to help students learn essential skills and knowledge in your subject. Which skills are most important? What texts or studies or experiments are most likely to engage students? What questions or entry points are most likely to drive students towards important learning in a field? The more creative we want to be with our curriculum, the more a teacher needs to know about the structure and content of an academic discipline.*
- Enthusiasm for the school's mission and its themes of nature, technology and

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Peter Garbus, Principal

Grade 7 News

TECHNOLOGY IN ITS MANY FORMS

After reading *The House of the Scorpion*, students tackled their most advanced research project yet, each choosing a different biotechnology to study and on which to compose an evidence-based essay. The students worked hard to make compelling connections between existing technology and science fiction in order to answer the questions "Could it happen? Should it happen?"

After spring break (and masterfully using testing strategies on the ELA MCAS), students continued with the theme of technology in their study of the ancient world, where they focused on food production, distribution, and preservation. We kicked off our Ancient Food Technology Expedition by planting and grinding wheat. Students used this as a jumping off point to start exploring other ancient food technologies in preparation for our upcoming Duel of the Tools.



As students read *The House of the Scorpion*, they wondered how much of the science fiction about mind control was science fact. Neurobiology graduate students from UMASS came to help us learn about cutting edge research, the ethics of neuroscience, and the biology of brains in a hands-on way.

Grade 8 News

SCIENCE

Recently, the 8th grade traveled to Poet's Seat to complete fieldwork for their mini-expedition in science, *How Far are the Stars?* This culminating activity for the astronomy unit challenged the students to learn and use the methods by which astronomers are able to calculate the location to nearby celestial objects. Using a mix of geometry, trigonometry and precision measurement, students worked in small groups to measure the distance to objects that are visible from Poet's Seat. Students have worked to annotate images taken from this location, showing objects and their distances from the view point.

The ultimate goal is to place an outdoor display at Poet's Seat showing the information the students have collected. We have initial approval from the Greenfield Recreation Department and are waiting to hear back from the DPW. When you go to Poet's Seat this summer, look for our display! - *Marc Guillaume*



ENGLISH

From February through April, the 8th grade read and analyzed Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. But we did more than that... We got up in front of our classmates, dressed in non-authentically Renaissance yet very amusing and fun costumes, and acted out the meaning of the words. Many 8th graders struggled in the beginning with Shakespearean English, but by the middle and certainly the end, they were aficionados! Now they are expertly putting their knowledge into five paragraph essays analyzing one of four themes in *Romeo and Juliet*.



DIVISION 2 NEWS

IMMIGRATION EXPEDITION KICKS OFF ~ Ms. Rice

Students in the 9th grade kicked off their Immigration Expedition in English, Social Studies and Spanish with a drum circle led by Brazilian percussion artist Ricardo Frota. Students are answering the essential question: How have Immigrants Shaped our Country? Students will study this question through the lens of music, art, sports, food or politics, and have built background knowledge through various case studies, interviews and a debate. They now look to create a podcast of their findings that will be aired through GCTV. Stay tuned!

ENGLISH ~ Ms. Ritchie

At the beginning of April, the ninth graders wrapped up their I-Search, a 7-week research project, by presenting what they learned at the I-Search Fair at GCC. Thanks to everyone who came by to hear about what they learned! Since they have embarked on the Immigration Expedition, they debated current immigration topics (such as DACA and sanctuary cities), and started creating podcasts about different immigration issues as their final product.



The tenth graders are reading novels in lit circles connected to their **Why War?** Expedition. The book choices include *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Slaughterhouse Five*, *The Things They Carried*, *The Frozen Hours*, excerpts from *Redeployment*, and *Sand Queen*. They are also researching advantages and disadvantages of specific topics connected to war, such as the use of drones, women in combat, mandatory conscription, and whether/ how the U.S. should intervene in Syria.

WELLNESS ~ Ms. McNamara

In Division 2, students have created their own personalized strengthening routines by completing body weight exercises. Students are learning about the benefits of strength training as well as their different muscle groups. Strength training may also help you:

- **Develop strong bones.** By stressing your bones, strength training can increase bone density and reduce the risk of osteoporosis.
- **Manage your weight.** Strength training can help you manage or lose weight, and it can increase your metabolism to help you burn more calories.
- **Enhance your quality of life.** Strength training may enhance your quality of life and improve your ability to do everyday activities. Building muscle also can contribute to better balance and may reduce your risk of falls. This can help you maintain independence as you age.
- **Manage chronic conditions.** Strength training can reduce the signs and symptoms of many chronic conditions, such as arthritis, back pain, obesity, heart disease, depression and diabetes.
- **Sharpen your thinking skills.** Some research suggests that regular strength training and aerobic exercise may help improve thinking and learning skills for older adults.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/strength-training/art-20046670>

DIVISION 3 NEWS

ENGLISH ~ Ms. Plath

Juniors are beginning work on *The Undercurrents*, an annual newspaper of good-natured satire about Four Rivers. They began by analyzing headlines from past editions of the Undercurrents to create an anchor chart of characteristics, then began brainstorming their own. This week, they will Skype with an editor from The Onion, a national satire magazine/website. The Undercurrents will be released in June.

Juniors are also beginning work on the Reader's Theater this week. They will start with theater games to practice performance skills, then read the script and audition for parts. This production of Ariel Dorfman's play *Speak Truth to Power: Voices From Beyond the Dark* will be held at the Shea Theater on Thursday, June 14th. Events begin at 7pm, and proceeds benefit the Traprock Center for Peace and Justice.

Seniors are nearing the end of their academic year, and in English, they are producing creative writing portfolios of their best work. They are currently in the "Revisionfest" part of the course, where they peer edit their work in groups and finalize their best pieces for these portfolios. The course will culminate with an in-class Writer's Cafe where students share excerpts from their portfolios and celebrate their accomplishments.

SOCIAL STUDIES ~ Mr. Wilson

Students in 12th grade American Civics have been studying diverse perspectives on political power. They have examined the history of labor movement and the strikes of the early 20th century, the struggle for African American voting rights, as well as the history of women's rights and the debate over the proposed Equal Rights Amendment in 1982. Students have also researched and presented songs to the class that demonstrate the power of music in our nations' history and in society today. Lastly, each student has planned, executed, and reflected on a citizen action project of their choice. Issues ranged from Gun Violence, to the Opioid Crisis, to Xenophobia, to Youth Political Engagement.

In 11th Grade Modern World History, students are hard at work on the third significant writing essay of the semester. In the first, they compared and contrasted the Nuremberg Trials of the Nazis after WWII with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa after the fall of Apartheid. Students took a stand on the merits and potential of restorative justice practices as an appropriate response to wrongdoing. In the second paper students crafted pieces in response to Tracey Kidder's book, *Strength in What Remains*. This third and final paper is the culmination of their research and writing in the course as they independently take on any 20th century world history topic that they choose. They must perform research, develop a thesis, and build a strong evidence-based argument in support of their views.

JUNIOR INTERNSHIPS ~ Ms. Roll

In April, our 11th grade students took part in junior internships - opportunities to work for a week in a field they may or may not have thought of as part of a future career. They presented their experiences to the school and community on May 24th in the Common Room. Here are some of their stories.

Teagan Cardaropoli spent 20 hours working with the Head Start program in Greenfield, supporting pre-schoolers from low income families. She spent a lot of her time playing with and just having fun with these children. Many of the kids had not yet learned how to share and Teagan helped them with this through her consistent example of giving. While Teagan says this may not be the age group that she works with in the future, Social Work is definitely on her radar.

Tevin Osborne was a researcher at the Biochemistry Lab at Smith College, doing a lot of independent work, sometimes alongside graduate students. The professor at Smith, Adam Hall, gave him a lab in which he was measuring the electrical current that came out of genetically modified frog eggs when exposed to a particular drug. This specific experiment had not been tested before.

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community and understanding of the school's responsibilities as a charter public school: *Our purpose is to prepare students for lives of learning and service, to prepare them for college, and to engage them in thinking about sustainability. Your job as a teacher is to serve that mission.*

Teaching is both art and science, requiring an array of qualities and capabilities. Thank goodness so many of our teachers meet so many of these qualifications. -- **Peter Garbus, Principal**

JUNIOR INTERNSHIPS — Continued from Previous page

One of the things Tevin enjoyed the most was working alongside college and graduate students, all engaged in different projects, all taking time to support each other's work. While this particular study was not of primary interest to Tevin, he discovered that he can be happy with just about anything in the field of bio-chemistry.

Grace Cabral has an affinity for writing, so when the opportunity came up to work with the Northampton book editor, Jean Zimmer, she was happy to take it. Grace had the opportunity to edit a book, working both from a printed manuscript that Jean gave her as well as editing on computer. Grace also talked with radio and newspaper editors. The whole experience was quite encouraging and is definitely a direction that Grace says she is interested in pursuing.

Alouette Batteau worked with the Northampton ACLU Office Immigration Center. It was tough work, talking with immigrants about their experiences trying to live in this country. They spoke with her about their experiences with ICE and the legal issues they have had to deal with. Even getting in touch with immigrants who need help was often made difficult by current politics.

Alouette asked the questions that need to be asked by employees and volunteers at the Immigration Center, such as whether the immigrant needs asylum and whether they are trying to escape domestic violence. Alouette felt like she was doing something to bring about change and she has been asked to return there this summer. She is interested in going into criminal justice or law.

Cai Brockett worked alongside nurses and surgeons at Bay State Franklin in the Post Anesthetic Care Unit as well as in Pre-Op and OR. For some time, Cai has been interested in being a muscular-skeletal orthopedic spine surgeon and this internship confirmed this direction for him. Cai enjoyed his internship, seeing endoscopies and a number of surgeries - some involving toes, some stomachs - a good range.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS EVENING FOR JUNIORS

In late April we hosted our annual College Admissions Information Evening with Karen Kristof, Associate Director of Admissions at Smith College. Below are a couple key take-away points; a full page summary is available from Mr. Stenson or Ms. Taylor.

- The single most important item for college admission is the student's **transcript**. It is a record of academic performance throughout high school and is the best indicator of likely success in college. A student's performance in the context of their class is also important, and the school profile, available on the FRCPS web site, helps colleges to understand Four Rivers and to contextualize individual student performance relative to their peers.
- Plan to do something productive with your summer. Work, volunteer, travel, read. Admissions offices like to see that you are active and engaged and make good use of your time. ~ astenson@frcps.org

A BETTER WORLD DAY

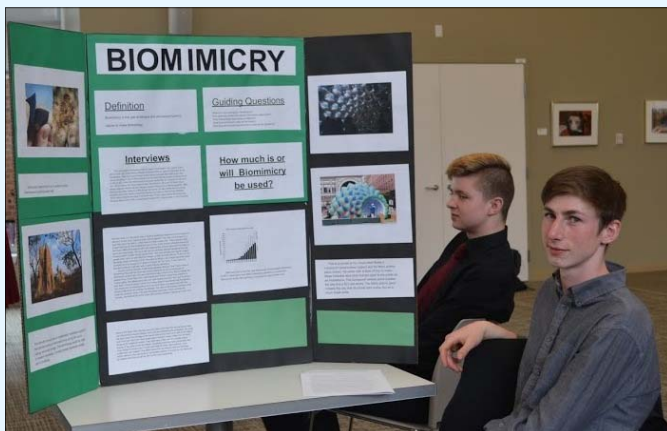
On Friday, May 4th, students from Four Rivers were joined at Greenfield Community College by those from Ralph C. Mahar Regional High School, Northfield Mount Hermon, and the Springfield Renaissance School in presenting projects they had done that all had a common theme of making the world a better place. The event, called Better World Day, was part of a national push to celebrate work students had done to make an impact through their learning.

Members of Greening Greenfield were present at the event, and on the night before had hosted a showing of *Blades of Change*, a documentary created by the Four Rivers Senior class about wind energy projects in the area. Four Rivers students also presented individual projects ranging from body image workshops to a voter registration drive where interested students 16 and up could preregister to vote. Sharing their work and successes allowed students to celebrate their accomplishments and stay motivated to keep promoting change in their communities.



I-SEARCH PRESENTATIONS—Grade 9

Ninth graders presented their I-SEARCH findings to the public at Greenfield Community College. *Photos courtesy of Photography Club.*



ULTIMATE NEWS — GIRLS VARSITY 8th IN NATION

The Ultimate Boys Varsity and Girls Varsity teams both went undefeated to win our home tournament on May 5 at Greenfield Community College. This was the first time that both teams have won it in the same year. The boys defeated last year's runner up in the state tournament, Masconomet, 11-8 in the final. The girls won their bracket easily. In another first, the Girls Junior Varsity team won the B pool.

The Girls Varsity finished second at the Amherst Invitational, losing 12 - 11 in the final. They are currently ranked 8th in the nation in ultimate, which is an impressive showing especially for a school as small as ours. The Boys Varsity won the RVAL Tournament held on May 17.

The State tournament for the boys and girl's varsity will be held at the Oxbow in Northampton on May 26 and 27. The girls are the reigning state champs so will be looking to repeat. The Middle School boys and girls will be traveling to Devens on June 3 to try to continue their winning ways of last year. The boys and girls J.V. teams are finishing their tournament season at the Oxbow on May 19 and 20 in the PVI Tournament.

There is still time to sign up for the Four Rivers Summer Ultimate Intensive for the week of June 25 -29. All the information can be found on the school web site under Our Programs or go to the following link to get all the details: <https://fourriverssummerultimate.weebly.com>

If you have questions contact Athletic Director Terry Plotkin at tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org

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

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
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