

Four Rivers Currents

January 2018

From the Principal's Desk...

COMPASSION AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Compassion--feeling for another, feeling as another, co-suffering. The word is related to empathy, but it implies action as well. One source says, "While empathy refers more generally to our ability to take the perspective of and feel the emotions of another person, compassion is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help."

Our faculty this year have been thinking about school culture and what might make ours stronger. Among the school's character virtues of respect, responsibility, integrity, perseverance, and courage, the virtue of compassion might make the biggest difference in creating a strong school culture. How do students and adults treat each other? How does our behavior enhance or take away from the community? How can we be a place where every individual feels they belong and are respected? Do we encourage—in our students and ourselves—the desire to help? I think compassion--the ability and tendency to think about others--might be the key.

Two professors from the Harvard Graduate School of Education see the key to compassion being the ability to care about other people:

"If we want children to be caring, responsible, and committed to justice, we must generate in them the moral capacity to value and truly care about diverse members of their communities, and we must help them overcome barriers to valuing others."

What allows us--or prevents us--from being able to do this? Some schools try to teach students to care about others through Crew or advisory, while others create curriculum or pursue service opportunities to help students think about, understand, and value other people. However it happens, being able to value others lies at the heart of compassion.

Through our professional development on what it takes to have a strong school culture, we want our students to be "caring, responsible, and committed to justice." Part of that work involves setting and upholding community and classroom norms, part involves teaching and assessing character, and there is a third part, which is directly connected to compassion and valuing others--the use of restorative practices.

Restorative practices refers to a range of methods and strategies for building relationships and repairing them when there's conflict or when harm has been done. According to the [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#), the aim of restorative practices is "to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships."

Our faculty have focused on two particular practices this year, while a few of us administrators have taken on a third.

1. **Community-building circles:** A group sits in a circle, uses a talking piece, and creates regular routines for talking and listening to one another. The purpose is to build trust, create positive feeling, and give everyone a sense of belonging.
2. **Problem-Solving circles:** Again sitting in a circle and using a talking piece, this kind of circle digs deeper to understand situations or conflicts. What's the issue at hand? Who is



Peter Garbus, Principal

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Grade 7 News

TIME TRAVELERS

As our Pieces of the Past Expedition draws to a close, students have been working hard on their final projects.

In Humanities, students have been combining what they've learned about narrative writing and early humans this semester to write well-researched short historical fiction stories. Inspired by local children's book illustrator and author Micha Archer's work, students also have been working on collaged illustrations for their stories using Archer's paper-making and layering techniques.

In Math and Science students have been using the "time machine" to go back in time to their assigned geological time periods. First, to get an idea of how far back they'd be traveling, we made and assembled a geological timeline at the scale of 1cm = 1million years. After wrapping the timeline around the classroom multiple times our 7th grade time travelers dove in and used texts, museums, movies and maps, and researched until they felt like they had really been there. In the final dozen days of the semester they'll be using those science facts to "write home" to tell their peers about their science fiction adventures in the form of Postcards From the Past. Please mark your calendars as we hope to hold a culminating Museum Opening event at the end of the school day on January 26th at the Amherst college Museum of Natural History where our postcards will be on display through February break.



Counterclockwise from left: studying fossils; 2 students working on their Post Cards of the Past final projects; students spend a day at the Museum.



Above and Left: Students grasping the length of the geological time line.



Grade 8 News

MATH — Ms. Farwell

In 8th grade math we have been working with the formulas of cylinders and spheres and doing unit conversions as we explore a problem called "Making Matchsticks". Students are working collaboratively as they explore the problem. They use modeling techniques to show their thinking, and create posters that represent their work visually, in words, and in symbols. They then present their work, offer peer feedback and revise their work into a professional final display. At right, the collaborative process at work in 8th grade math.

SERVICE — Ms. MacNeish

The 8th grade participated in a week-long Service Immersion just before winter break, from December 15th to 21st, 2017. We started out by asking questions like, "What is service?" We considered the Four Rivers Mission Statement: "Four Rivers Charter Public School is dedicated to educating young people for lives of learning and service." We drew comparisons between our actions and our school's Character Virtues: Compassion, Perseverance, Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, and Courage. We contemplated quotes such as, "Service to others is the rent we pay for the space we occupy on this Earth." Eighth graders volunteered with a myriad of organizations, from Community Meals to the Survival Center, from local schools to the Girls' Club, and from pie-making to visiting elders at The Arbors. As they shared in our debrief the day before break, 8th graders not only learned a lot from their experiences, they gave their knowledge, energy, ideas, help, laughter, care, compassion, and joy. (photos below—8th graders help in an elementary classroom)



DIVISION 2 NEWS

ENGLISH

Ninth Grade

Ninth grade students spent December writing short stories. They were given lots of freedom over what they wrote about as long as they included objects, places, and phrases that the class came up with; these included a blinking red light, an abandoned Chinese restaurant, the smell of exhaust, and "Run!" Currently, we are wrapping up the semester by reading novels that have been adapted into films: *The Great Gatsby*, *I Am Legend*, *Into the Wild*, and *Fahrenheit 451*. Once they finish the book versions, students will analyze and critique the film adaptations.

Tenth Grade

In English class, tenth graders have been busy researching topics for their *Do Something!* projects. Before December break, students chose issues that they want to "do something" to improve. Topics vary widely and include foster care, youth incarceration, climate change, net neutrality, animal testing, and bullying, to name just a few. In their research papers, they will propose possible solutions for these issues. They have also been reading and discussing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Although written over 130 years ago, it brings up many issues we are still grappling with today.

MATH

In Algebra students explored systems of linear inequalities to pull together everything they learned this year. They needed to remember how to graph an equation and how to solve inequalities. We also looked into linear functions. Students graphed their weekly productivity to make goals for next semester. The main takeaway was that we need to remain focused and productive after lunch!

In Geometry students are learning trigonometry. They extended slope to represent the relationship between legs of a right triangle and then realized that this property is called the tangent ratio. We introduced the sine and cosine ratios.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Ninth grade students are currently studying the Constitution through a role play where farmers, enslaved and free Africans, Native Americans, indentured servants, plantation owners, and merchants/bankers are discussing what it takes to produce and distribute life's necessities in the newly independent country. They are using parliamentary procedure to think critically about a number of issues confronting the framers of this important document.

Tenth grade students recently completed a monologue project where they researched an activist who has advocated for change. From Fred Korematsu, Albert Einstein, and Rachel Carson to Michael Bennet, Sarain Carson-Fox, and Billie Jean King, students connected with the lived experiences of people whose lives reflected Angela Davis' question: "How do we imagine a better world and raise the questions that permit us to see beyond the given?"

DIVISION 3 NEWS

JUNIORS

The semester is drawing to a close. Juniors are finishing the semester in the humanities with a combined final project. They will be writing and delivering monologues, either as a Holocaust rescuer or a soldier from WWI or WWII. To prepare for these monologues, students watched a film related to their topic and researched primary source documents. Those students writing about Holocaust rescuers read interviews with their subjects conducted in the book *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*. Those writing letters from the soldiers on the front lines read archives of letters from soldiers. Students responded to such guiding questions as "What is moral courage?" and "Why do people serve their country?" They will be delivering these monologues in the final days of the semester.

In chemistry, juniors have been researching molecules. As they read excerpts from the book *Napoleon's Buttons*, they examined the way molecules have had significant impacts on human history. Topics included TNT, miracle drugs, and the molecules behind witchcraft.

SENIORS

Seniors are finishing first semester work in their classes while simultaneously working on the culminating project of the energy expedition, a documentary film about the Block Island Wind offshore wind farm. Traveling to Boston, Providence, Cape Cod, and Block Island last month, students interviewed over a dozen professionals related to their topic. Since returning, they have been transcribing those interviews and organizing all their footage. Soon, they will move into the final post-production phase of the whole endeavor. Divided into groups of editors and editing support teams, they will use Adobe Premiere to turn hours of interview footage and b-roll into a final polished documentary.



The documentary will premiere on Thursday, February 15th at the Garden Cinema in Greenfield. Join us for a celebration of learning that includes exhibitions of student work and a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the film. The event will begin at 7:00 pm, and we hope you can join us.



SIBLING ENROLLMENT FOR FALL 2018

SIBLINGS OF CURRENT STUDENTS:

- Siblings of current students who wish to enroll next fall, for the 2018-19 school year, **MUST complete an admission application and submit it by the due date—February 26, 2018 at 5 pm.**
- Siblings are given priority in the lottery – which will be held on February 28, 2018.
- Applications are available on the school’s web site under Admissions, from Ms. Taylor at school, or at our Admissions Information Sessions:

Wednesdays: January 24 and February 14, 7:00 to 8:30 pm

Saturday: February 3, 10:00 to 11:30 am

LOOKING FOR PARENT VOLUNTEERS: We are looking for a few current parents to help with the Admissions Information Sessions. Are you available on one or more of the above dates? Contact Leslie Taylor — ltaylor@fourriverscharter.org OR 413-775-4577 x 202.

NURSE’S NOTES

I will be conducting state mandated health screenings the week of March 19th. I will be sending an e-mail with the opt-out form attached. 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 activities too early if he/she sustains this type of injury. <http://www.capecodonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20140212/NEWS/402120329&emailAFriend=1>

Our bodies still need adequate hydration during the winter. Please make sure your child has a water bottle with them at school.

~ Jeanne Milton, RN

CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

YOUR SCHOOL NEEDS TO KNOW!

While we mostly communicate with students and families by email, it is nevertheless very important that you notify us right away if you change your residence or mailing address.

Several times a year the school reports to the state the residence address and town of every student. This information is used to calculate tuition payments to Four Rivers. A report is going out soon to local school districts and we want it be accurate.

If you move, please make it a priority to notify the school of your new address and the date of your move.

THANK YOU!



COLLEGE ADVISING

SENIORS

Our Seniors are starting to hear back from colleges. Schools that have already said **YES!** to our students: Bay Path College, Becker College, Berklee College of Music, College of the Atlantic, The Evergreen State College, Green Mountain College, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences, Pace University, Skidmore, Sterling College, University Massachusetts-Lowell, University of New Hampshire, and more to come.

JUNIORS

All juniors have now received their PSAT scores and we have reviewed these in Junior Seminar. Having taken the PSAT's, juniors now have the opportunity to sign up for free SAT practice and preparation through Kahn Academy. Kahn Academy provides customized test preparation, based on PSAT scores, and also allows students to create a practice schedule tied to their chosen SAT test date. Recent data shows that 20 hours of Kahn Academy practice leads to an average gain of 115 points. All of our juniors are encouraged to take advantage of this.

In terms of the SAT's, most of your juniors take the SAT's for the first time toward the end of their junior year, and then again early in the senior year. Upcoming testing dates and registration information is available on the College Board website, www.collegboard.org

Upcoming Testing Dates:

Test Date	Deadline to Register
March 10	February 9
May 5	April 6
June 2	May 3

Subject Tests are required by some of the more competitive schools, as well as for those looking to enter programs in the hard sciences or engineering. These are school specific, but if required they need to be considered as part of an overall testing schedule. Again, the College Board website has a lot of information.

I will be meeting with all members of the junior class over the next month or so to help with developing initial college lists and/or post Four Rivers plans. February and April breaks are excellent times to visit colleges while they are in session. We will be hosting a College Admissions Evening in the spring – keep a look out for details in future editions of The Currents and via Flash emails.

Questions ? Email astenson@frcps.org.

2018 Annual Franklin County Teen Show at Artspace

Art work by Sophie Trimbach-Rios, Quinn Lucas, Lexy Austin and Aidan DeLorenzo will be on view at the 2018 Annual Franklin County Teen Show at Artspace. The show is open January 22 through February 16, 2018. Artspace is located on Mill Street in Greenfield and is open Monday—Friday 12:00-2:30 and 4:00-6:00 pm.

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affected? Why do we think this situation exists? What might we do about it?

3. **Restorative conferences:** When someone disrupts learning, breaks rules, or damages relationships, the immediate participants meet with an administrator to talk through the situation, again using regular protocols for speaking and listening.

All three practices involve individual participants sharing their points of view and experiences, while others listen and try to take in what the others are saying. If harms have been done, can the perpetrator hear how his or her actions caused that harm? If there is conflict, can the circle or conference participants see their role in contributing to that conflict? The connection for me comes back to compassion, because the individuals have to be able to feel what another person has felt and they need to value that other person. Restorative practices that build positive school climate and healthy relationships depend on students' abilities to take other's perspectives, be aware of their own thoughts and feelings, communicate effectively, and solve problems.

Our first steps into restorative practices feel constructive so far. It remains more an open question what it takes for students to value others. Thoughts? Suggestions?

SUMMER ULTIMATE — We've started receiving sign ups for the Four Rivers Summer Ultimate Intensive held from June 25 - 29. It's going to be fun and we'll learn stuff too. All the information is at <https://fourriverssummerultimate.weebly.com/> or contact Terry Plotkin at tplotkin@fourriverscharter.org

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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.