

# Four Rivers Currents

April 2016

From the Principal's Desk...

## **EFFORTS TO BUILD STUDENTS' HABITS OF WORK AND LEARNING**

Each year, our faculty set out a work plan with objectives for what we want to learn and develop in the year ahead. This year, we set out to help our students become better learners through mindfulness, developing a positive academic mindset, and strengthening specific learning strategies.

OBJECTIVE 1: MINDFULNESS -- Students will improve their academic performance and their overall experience as learners by developing tools to help them concentrate and focus. Faculty will support students' emotional regulation by integrating mindfulness practices into the classroom and in crew.

OBJECTIVE 2: POSITIVE ACADEMIC MINDSET -- Students will improve their academic performance and their overall experience as learners by developing a positive academic mindset. Faculty will employ instruction, assessment, and grading practices that encourage students' positive academic mindset.

OBJECTIVE 3: LEARNING STRATEGIES -- Students will become more proficient as leaders of their own learning by developing strategies for self-regulation and metacognition.

As a faculty and as individual teachers, we have definitely made progress and learned valuable lessons towards a number of these objectives, though we have more work to do on others. Below are descriptions of what teachers have been working on in our efforts to help students become better learners.

1. One teacher tried to incorporate the newly developed HOWLs inventory of non-cognitive factors (check out the document [HERE](#)) more explicitly into classroom learning, goal-setting in crew, and self-assessment in class. She wanted students to be able to describe areas of strength and challenge and to leverage related specific skills to meet goals. Currently, students all have academic goals, some of which could be replaced by HOWLs language. She had one on one moments with students talking about non-cognitive factors that seemed powerful. The HOWLs inventory played a new role in the recent Student-Led Conferences -- students focused on one HOWL that might be a leverage for them -- so that is a first step. We have a sense that we're perhaps on the brink of something.
2. Another teacher taught and encouraged her students to use a variety of tools to help them develop executive function skills. She created "do now" slips to focus students when they come into class. Students would make a plan for the day as class started, and use the back as an exit ticket to say whether they met their goal that day and why they may have fallen short. The teacher see students moving faster and getting their work out when the period begins; they don't mess around at the beginning as much. They plan and prioritize better. Students also seem to feel better when they get something done.
3. Another teacher had the intention for students to be more aware of their progress towards learning targets and be able to understand what they might try in order to improve learning on a standard. She has been able to check their comprehension in more effective ways and follow up with those who need more support. It has also made differentiation easier, as she used students' insights to plan next steps and design lesson plans. Students are making decisions about how to work at their learning. We agree that students as self assessors leads to more calm, mindful kids.



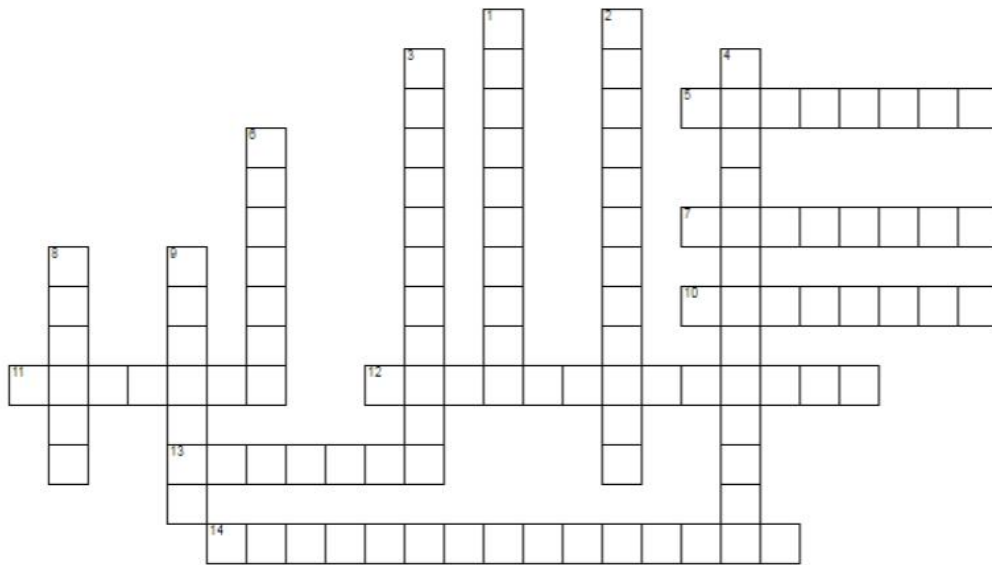
Continued on page 6...

*Peter Garbus, Principal*

## Grade 7 News

### Ask A 7th Grader

Does your 7th grade student rarely share details of their school day? Try using these crossword clues as conversation starters!



#### ACROSS

- 5 - Pruning and replanting an overgrown houseplant was a morning meeting \_\_\_\_\_ to represent the re-setting of classroom norms.
- 7 - Ms. Locke's crew name is the \_\_\_\_\_ Fishsticks?
- 10 - What sport are 21 of the 7th grade students currently playing?
- 12 - Name of Ms. Hobbs' crew
- 13 - What do we call our class when we're studying the same thing in math and science?
- 14 - Earth Day Exploration and Case Study Creature whose ecology and extinction we just studied in Science

#### DOWN

- 1 - Where does Pedro hide from Señor McGregor?
- 2 - Which sound device in poetry is the result of a repeated consonant sound at the beginning of the word?
- 3 - In which 2 tribs classes are 7th graders currently participating? (OneWordAlphabetically).
- 4 - We recently read an entire story in Spanish! What is the title in Spanish?
- 6 - There once were 50 of these in the drawer at the start of the year, but they've all been borrowed and not replaced.
- 8 - What musical has us all impressed with number of 7th graders who helped to put it into production?
- 9 - In which class are 7th graders currently earning their "poetic license"?

**ANSWER KEY ON BACK PAGE**

## Grade 8 News

### SCIENCE & MATH

Eighth graders have been investigating heat transfer in different materials as a way to launch their exploration of solar radiation and its connection with the seasons and as a sustainable energy source. They used the engineering design process to design and build their own solar ovens using a variety of new and recycled materials. They spent a cold windy morning testing solar ovens, which successfully made s'mores despite the weather.



Next the students will be exploring others ways of using solar technology, by building solar powered cars (in miniature, of course).

*Photos show 3 different solar ovens and the teams that built them.*



### CARDBOARD BOATS

*Parent help needed*

The cardboard boat challenge is an annual event that is part of the 8th grade passage expedition. It acts as a symbolic rite of passage, as well as a culminating engineering design project for math and science. The challenge: Design and build a boat using only cardboard, glue and paint, and paddle it across a lake.

The 8th grade will be paddling their Cardboard Boats on June 10th (lightning date: June 15th) at the DAR State Park in Goshen, MA . They could use your help with the following:

- Large amounts of cardboard, especially large sheets (from appliances, furniture, plywood, etc.)
- A volunteer with a large truck/trailer who can transport our cardboard boats from Four Rivers to the DAR State Park (either on the afternoon before our event or that morning at 8:30) and then back to school again after the event.
- A certified lifeguard who can help out at the lake.

Please contact Jessica Farwell ([jfarwell@fourriverscharter.org](mailto:jfarwell@fourriverscharter.org)) if you are able to contribute any materials or assistance!



## DIVISION 2 NEWS

### **SOCIAL STUDIES** — *Laura Tabachnick*

Ninth grade students began their immigration study by reading self-selected chapters from Ronald Takaki's book, *A Different Mirror*. They learned about the history of immigration. They researched U.S. immigration policy and how it has changed over time, especially recently. They did field work; small groups went to Chelsea High School, The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition and The Irish International Immigration Council (all just outside of Boston). Others went to The Center for New Americans and Greenfield High School. They spoke with immigrants and those who work and advocate for them. Afterwards, they dissected a document called, "Mass. by the Numbers." It informed them about specific issues and statistics involving Massachusetts immigrants. They broke into small groups based on their topic choice to write petitions, plan presentations and create useful slideshows to help advocate for their ideas for immigration reform. They presented in front of state legislators at the Massachusetts State House on March 31st. They got their petitions signed in Greenfield as well as on the Boston Common before their presentations. Their presentations at the State House were featured on Channel 22 TV News!



### **MATH** — *Molly Pratt*

**Geometry:** Tenth graders finished their probability unit by creating carnival games. They used what they had learned about compound probability to determine the likelihood of each event and to determine the best price to charge for their games. They designed games that appeared to be fair, yet always benefited the house. A few students created loaded dice using pieces of paper and some beads! Seventh graders have also been studying probability, so they joined the 10th grade for the carnival. The 7th graders played all of the 10th grade games and determined which games were fair!

**Algebra:** Students have been learning about quadratic functions. They have explored the different ways of writing the same function and have been practicing their factoring skills. They then used factoring to help solve the equations for the x-intercepts of the functions and have been graphing them. They will be using these skills to help them investigate projectile motion in the coming days!

## DIVISION 3 NEWS

### **GREASE is the Word!**



### **JUNIOR INTERNSHIPS**

Juniors just completed week-long internships in a field of their choice. To prepare, they completed interest and aptitude surveys, researched their chosen career, and reached out to professionals in the area to act as mentor/hosts. Experiences ranged from work with a physical therapist, to learning how to blow glass, to testing medications on tadpoles, to tending butterflies, to medical interpreting. Join us for a presentation of learning the morning of May 26th to hear more about all of the juniors' experiences in the world of work!

**Allison:** I observed at NEARI, which is a school in Holyoke for kids with mood disorders, PTSD and other mental health challenges. Students may be sent to NEARI from their sending school if they can't get proper learning and support at their home school. I mostly observed classrooms of 1st-6th grade students and I think it's a great field for me; it was a good fit.

**Catherine:** I did my internship with an art teacher at the Putney, VT elementary school. I basically acted like her assistant teacher, doing everything that my mentor teacher did. For each class we set up all the supplies, like clay and tools, or if we were painting we would set up the water colors, paper, and pencils. During the class we would go around and help students with their art. You would help get them started, maybe by just talking with them or starting just a few lines. Kids really liked sharing their art! I enjoyed being there as an assistant teacher. But on Friday, my mentor had to leave early and I had to handle the whole class on my own. It was pretty chaotic. I much more enjoyed the 1-1 art, check-ins, and being able to give my undivided attention to one child at a time. Overall, it was really fun.

**HABITS OF WORK AND LEARNING**—Continued from page 1

4. One of our math teachers hoped to see her students' attitudes, participation, and problem solving abilities improve by the end of the year. More specifically, she hoped that students with fixed mindset (either that they are "good" at math or that they "hate" math) to become more open to the learning, group work, making mistakes, participation, and taking on challenge. In letters from students last year and students personal reflection statements at the beginning of this year, the teacher noticed many fixed mindset messages. Most of them were negative (i.e. anxiety, stress, feeling bad at math, etc.) while others were more positive though still fixed (i.e. I'm good at math, I need more challenge, etc.). The teacher wanted to try to disrupt those ways of thinking and change their mindsets. She wanted students to be open to making mistakes. She spent two weeks on norm-setting at the beginning of the year. As the year proceeded, she asked students to do an error analysis after each big assessment. Students rate their confidence on questions, and how they feel after they try it. Students analyze the types of errors they make. This approach seems to take some of the pressure off because mistakes get depersonalized. It's become more the norm that mistakes are to be learned from; everybody makes mistakes. It has helped math high flyer perfectionists as well. Students have given feedback that their mentality about math has in fact shifted this year. One student with previously low confidence described feeling better.
5. Another teacher wanted to see students more regularly attempt academic work, persevere through or seek help with challenges, and apply feedback on successive drafts and revisions. With a bit of insistence from him, regular acknowledgment of fear and doubt, exuberant celebration of any positive movement, and fantastic modeling from a couple of key students, he was able to show many students that discomfort is normal--even important--and that they benefit from working through it. He has used journals to prompt short responses to mindfulness items: What do you need to do today? What's on your mind right now? These have helped students be more open about the expectations they face, their challenges, and their hopes. These moments to get out their thoughts seem to help them name, recognize, and move forward from stressors. They note what they're worried about and then let that be. This can release anxiety and worry, making it easier to move into challenge.
6. One other teacher wanted to have students keep track of their own learning and progress toward standards -- a student assessment tracker. She was thinking about non-cognitive factors and hoping to support students who struggle. She was also thinking about how students don't seem to know how they're doing until the end of the term. The teacher reported that the tracker did help students watch their own progress and think about how they're doing on a standard. Ironically, but not unexpectedly, the students who already do well benefited the most from this new tool. She reported some of the pitfalls experienced by the strugglers: these students had more missing work which led to blank spots on their tracker, less motivation in class to fill it out well, and also more misplaced work and misplaced trackers. At the least, the teacher found that the tool helps and doesn't take too much time.

I've shared these descriptions in some detail both to show what kind of work our teachers have been trying this year and to suggest the nuanced nature of student learning. Very little of what's described here has to do with the content of school. Success or struggle with learning often has more to do with our readiness to learn, our ability to manage stress and multiple tasks, and our emotions and thoughts about what's happening in school.

~ Peter Garbus ~ Principal ~

# Habits of Work and Learning



## COLLEGE ADVISING

### COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

The following colleges have already said YES! to the class of 2016: Allegheny, Baldwin Wallace, Bennington, Berklee College of Music, Brandeis, Clark, Cleveland State, Colby-Sawyer, College of the Atlantic, Columbia College Chicago, Earlham, Emerson, Evergreen State College, Franklin Pierce, GCC, (including the Outdoor Leadership Program), Hampshire, Hartwick, Ithaca, Keene State, Lesley, Lewis and Clark, MassArt, MCLA, Middlebury, Mt. Holyoke, New England College, New Hampshire Institute of Art, Salem State, Sarah Lawrence, Seattle University, Smith College, SOKA University of America, SUNY Purchase, Tufts, University of Hartford, University of Maine-Farmington, University of Massachusetts Honors College, University of New Hampshire, University of Vermont, Ursinus, Warren Wilson, Wheaton, Westfield State University. ***Congratulations to our Seniors!***

### COLLEGE ADMISSIONS EVENING

Earlier this month Four Rivers hosted our annual College Admissions Information Evening with Karen Kristof, Associate Director of Admissions at Smith College. For those of you who weren't able to attend, here are a few key take-away points:

- The single most important item for college admission is the student's transcript. It's a record of academic performance throughout high school and the best indicator of likely success in college.
- Test scores (ACT and SAT) are taken into consideration at most, but not all, schools. Different schools have different testing requirements. Start looking at the testing requirements for schools that you are interested in and making a timetable to meet those requirements.
- Many schools offer Early Decision and Early Action programs in addition to regular admission. There are different deadlines for each of these approaches ... these deadlines will start to come around quickly once senior year begins.
- 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.
- Application Essays – use the essay to tell the admission office something about you as a person that is not otherwise available from your application.
- Take advantage of the Net Price Calculators that are posted on every college's website to get an estimate of what it would cost for your child to go to a particular school. Mr. Stenson suggested the print resource ***Going to College Without Going Broke***, published by Princeton Review as a resource for financial planning.

Visit some colleges. April break is an ideal time. Even if you can't get to visit colleges you are really interested in, visiting different types of schools close to home can be helpful. The 5-Colleges (Amherst area), Worcester (Clark, WPI, Worcester State, UMass Worcester) and Boston provide lots of opportunities.

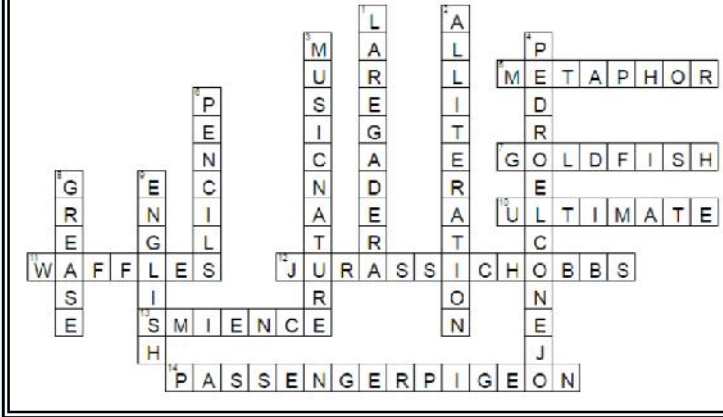
### SAT TESTING

Juniors are reminded that they should plan on taking the SAT's on Saturday, June 4th. We recommend that students take the SAT WITH the writing component. Families need to register at The College Board website ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)). While we will offer some test preparation in both English and math classes, juniors are encouraged to study independently. Free online resources offered through Kahn Academy, and available at The College Board website are a good option. **Contact: Andy Stenson – [astenson@frcps.org](mailto:astenson@frcps.org).**

## 7th—ANSWER KEY *From Page 2*

### Ask A 7th Grader

Does your 7th grade student rarely share details of their school day? Try using these crossword clues as conversation starters!



SEE YOU AT THE OTTER SOIRÉE

Friday — 7 to 10 pm

## FOUR RIVERS APPAREL

Spring is on the way and so is our Four Rivers apparel order! We will be offering Ultimate Frisbee, and Non-Sport Four Rivers Apparel. Forms will need to be submitted to the office by Friday 4/15/16 for May deliveries. Forms are available on the Four Rivers Family Council website, or in the school office. If you have questions, please contact Carolyn DiPaolo, [mjsj22@gmail.com](mailto:mjsj22@gmail.com), 413-773-9553.

### NOTICE:

The school will need a new PARENT VOLUNTEER to take care of apparel orders next year. Please contact Peter Garbus, or Carolyn DiPaolo if you would be interested in volunteering for this effort so the students can continue to enjoy wearing their school garb.

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

248 Colrain Rd., Greenfield, MA 01301

Four Rivers Charter Public School



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.