

# News from Burr

Burr's School Newsletter

Winter/Spring 2014

## Message from the Principal

Dear Parents,

As we transition from winter to spring, I wanted to update you on an exciting opportunity happening at Burr in the months ahead.

A discussion about the book *The Smartest Kids in the World* by Amanda Ripley will be occurring at the May principal's coffee. (We might also add in a night discussion date. More information to follow.) The book is available through Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble, and local libraries. We even have a few copies in Burr's LMC. The purpose of this book club is to engage in a thoughtful discussion about how to best educate our children. In the process, I hope it provides insight into teaching, learning, policy making, and our own beliefs about school and what it should be.

As you read the book, I would encourage you to think about the following questions:

- What's America's vision for education? (Politicians, business leaders, parents, students) What do we prioritize? Minimalize? How is that vision similar or different from how other countries around the world see education?
- How do we develop teachers in America? How is that process similar or different (or better or worse) from other countries in the world?
- How does the work that students do in American classrooms vary from other countries in the world? Is it more rigorous? Less rigorous?
- Does America's ranking (educationally) in the world matter? Why or why not?

I have included a few supplemental materials about the book and author. I would encourage you to explore interviews, blogs, and reviews online.

Extended Radio Interview with the Author - <http://radiowest.kuer.org/post/smartest-kids-world>

NY Times Review of the Book - <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/25/books/review/amanda-ripleys-smartest-kids-in-the-world.html?pagewanted=all>





Author's Website (includes interviews with the students profiled in the book) - <http://www.amandaripley.com>

I also wanted to take a moment to celebrate some recent accomplishments by students and staff at Burr. Congratulations to the Roots and Shoots Club for raising over \$3,000 to help *Guiding Eyes for the Blind*. Congratulations to all Burr students who participated in the National PTA sponsored "Reflections" art recognition and award program. A big congratulations to Isabel Levi the 1<sup>st</sup> place Burr winner in the Literature category who also placed 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CT state level. Also, Danna Ponce the 1<sup>st</sup> place Burr winner in the Music Composition category who also placed 3<sup>rd</sup> at the CT state level.

We are so incredibly proud of all of our students and staff at Burr who make amazing contributions to both our school community and the world.

Warmly,

Jason Bluestein

### **News from Pre-Kindergarten**

Mrs. Totilo Smith

Pre-K is busy learning about Buildings! We are learning how houses are built, what tools to use, and what shapes we see in buildings. Pre-K students are having fun using different kid-friendly tools to make their own buildings. It has been a great opportunity to problem-solve and work cooperatively in small groups - both very important skills to practice in play for early childhood development at the preschool level! Our thinking has also been challenged in math, as we work with partners to compare and contrast tall and short buildings and with using colored cubes to understand and create combinations of 5 (1 and 4, 2 and 3, etc.). We are reading books with photos of all kinds of buildings and houses from all over the world and using those photos to inspire us to create buildings with the same shapes we see or with similar materials, such as sand and water. We are anxious for spring to come! On our spring calendar, we are so excited to plant seeds and learn about the life cycle of a flower and to raise caterpillars to become butterflies. We are thankful for the generous support of the PTA, which will provide us the opportunity for hands-on science through Hi Tech, Hi Touch to reinforce our studies of insects and the weather. Spring topics will also include noticing changes associated with spring weather, the clothes we wear, and the activities we can do with the warmer weather. Finally, Pre-K students and their parents will experience connections to the community through visits to the Connecticut Audubon Center of Fairfield and the Fairfield Public Library. We continue to enjoy a wonderful year of singing and dancing, creating and playing, reading and drawing, and learning and growing!



## News from Kindergarten

Mrs. Root, Mrs. Schallau, Ms. Sherwood, Mrs. Thompson

March and April are busy months in kindergarten. March is the beginning of non-fiction units in both reading and writing. In Writer's Workshop children composed booklets that tell "How To" do a task in simple sequential steps. In Reader's Workshop children will learn to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction and to identify and use the features of non-fiction books. In math we are working on comparing and writing numbers 1-30. We are developing an understanding of teen numbers using benchmark numbers 5 and 10 to count and match numerals through 20. Children are beginning to work with place value as they compose (put together) and decompose (break apart) teen numbers.

In April, we will write poetry and opinion pieces in Writer's Workshop. In Reader's Workshop we will revisit the important task of retelling stories we have read. We will put emphasis on the following questions: *What is the character's problem? How did the character feel? What happened in the story? Does this story remind you of another story you have read? Does this story remind you of anything that has happened to you?* In math we will work on adding and subtracting within five and place value.

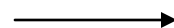
May is poetry month in kindergarten Reader's Workshop. Children will listen to all types of poetry. They will also be reading poetry themselves with a focus on the most important part of the poem and its meaning as well as words that help the reader visualize the writing. Our math work will continue to explore measurement.

## News from First Grade

Ms. Kurimai, Mrs. Musante, Mrs. Vigeant

Welcome Spring! We are so looking forward to enjoying the outdoors. We have been working hard in the LMC. We researched penguins using computers, and completed a Webquest. Next in science we will be studying the butterfly life cycle and continuing with our bird adaptations CANE program with a field trip to the Birdcraft Museum.

During reading, children continue to work on word solving strategies (pictures, beginning sounds, ending sounds, looking through the word, patterns, rhyming words.) Children should ask themselves if what they are reading *makes sense*. Please continue to read to and with your child each night. Talk about books and have conversations about the setting, characters, and events. Remember to have your child retell the story after reading. This will help to ensure his/her reading success. In class we are making personal connections with characters and story events in order to understand stories better. Ask your child after reading, "What does this book remind you of?" It's possible your child has a connection that reminds them of something that happened in their own life or something that happened in another book.





In Writer's Workshop, we have been learning how to write informational/non-fiction texts. We have been writing "All About" books as well as "How to..." books to teach readers. In our writing, we continue to work on editing and revision skills in order to make our pieces better. Please practice spelling words so your children can transfer this knowledge when they write.

Reviewing addition and subtraction facts, story problems, and counting and identifying numbers will strengthen your child's math skills. Please practice a few times a week in a fun way with different math games – all available on the Math Wiki located on Burr's website.

## News from Second Grade

Mrs. Cinquegrana, Mrs. Miles, Mrs. Uliasz

Second grade's in full bloom as we head into spring! In math, we're working on adding and subtracting with double-digit numbers. We've learned ways to model our work with tape diagrams and show our thinking using various strategies such as number lines and number bonds. Keep on practicing the addition and subtraction facts to build fluency! In reading, we've learned about non-fiction text features and how to use them to access information in a text. We've just begun our next unit on fluency, and students will practice their expression through Readers' Theater. In writing, we're working hard to finish our non-fiction *All About* books. Soon, we'll be sharing our books with other second grade classes and learning lots of new information. Then we'll be moving into opinion writing. In the LMC, we've completed our Connecticut Webquest and are beginning our States Project. Our curriculum has been enriched by a visit from a *High Touch High Tech* scientist who taught us about matter. We've also enjoyed our Mystery in the Marsh presentation, a fieldtrip to see Robin Hood at the Cabaret Theater, and a parent storytelling presentation. Thanks to parents for helping us integrate technology into our homework by blogging on Collaborize Classroom.



## News from Third Grade

Mr. Jasgur, Mrs. Noonan, Ms. Taylor

Third graders have been very busy this year and have been learning every day. Currently, students are continuing to work on their poetry in writing and reading. They are also working with measurement in math, including time and elapsed time. In social studies, students are working on their unit on Asia. They will continue their research, synthesize their information, and create an online Glog (graphic blog!) to convince others that their marketplace is needed in the "Fairfield Global Community Marketplace." As we continue through the next few months, third graders will be learning how to read short text closely using evidence to support their thinking and refine their opinion writing skills in writer's workshop. In math, students will continue to work with measurement before moving on to geometry. They will be learning how to measure with standard



and non-standard units of measure. After this social studies unit, we will begin studying Africa as our last unit. This will culminate with our Africa Fair in the spring. The students will be brainstorming ways that they can help ensure that everyone has access to clean drinking water. We have a lot of learning to go this year!

The best way to support your child at home is to make sure they find time to read and practice their math facts consistently. Any keyboarding practice will also benefit your child. Please see Burr's website for instructions, games, and ideas about reinforcement, extra practice, and enrichment. Please check Mr. Bluestein's frequent newsletters for important information, including information on the SBAC testing that will occur at the end of April for third graders. Thank you for your support as we continue our learning!

### **News from Fourth Grade**

Mr. Moura, Ms. Passero, Mrs. Sadick

We are ready to spring through the latter half of the year! We have been busy bees in fourth grade. In reading, we are finishing up our nonfiction unit. In writing, we've become essayists and learned how to write an organized essay. Ask your child what he/she wrote theirs about! In the coming weeks, we will be moving into poetry in both reading and writing. In math, we learned about measurement and are ready to tackle fractions! In social studies, students are studying Colonial Times. We will be taking a trip to Sturbridge Village in May where your child will further their education about life in a colonial village. The SBAC window for fourth grade is from April 7<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>. You can help your child prepare at home by having them practice their typing skills, as well as helping them learn how to navigate a computer. As always, please have your child continue to read, write, and practice their math facts daily.

### **News from Fifth Grade**

Mrs. Beno, Mrs. Chandler, Mrs. deRegt, Mrs. Phillips

While we wait for spring to (finally) arrive, fifth graders are busy completing a very ambitious and thoughtful study of immigration. They read a motivating story about a Russian Jew immigrating to America in 1919. Her story is filled with many obstacles and accomplishments indicative of the lives of many immigrants of that time period. Students were immersed in a general study of immigration, choosing one narrow topic to research and write an informational piece. We supported this study with a field trip to the Ridgefield Playhouse to see *Ellis Island: Gateway to a Dream*, a story that celebrates the struggle that many experienced in search of the American Dream. We are all looking forward to our next writing unit ... memoir. Our fifth grade mathematicians are finishing up their study of measurement and will be embarking on our next unit of study, geometry, shortly. In science, we have finished our study of light and sound.



A fun-filled day to the Discovery Museum provided students with two demonstrations and a hands-on session to kick off the unit in January. Our next unit begins the study of the river ecosystem and will include a trip to the Mill River.

## PE Happenings

*Mr. Hilinski*

Amazing things are happening in Physical Education class. Everyone from Pre-K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade has been participating in our Body Management Unit where students will experience things like the cargo net, climbing ropes, swinging ropes, vaulting, gymnastics, and a low level balance beam. Kindergarten through second graders can climb halfway up the ropes and cargo net if they pass some simple tests while the third through fifth graders can climb to the top of the ropes if they pass a climbing test. It's important for all the students to know that at no time are students required to climb up. There are plenty of low level stunts students can perform if they so choose.

In the coming weeks students will participate in units such as floor hockey, soccer, racket games, frisbee games, and of course field day games in preparation for our 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Field Day. This year field day will be on June 5<sup>th</sup> with a rain date of June 6<sup>th</sup>. We welcome any and all volunteers and will be asking for your help in the coming months. Be on the look out for more information.

Physical activity is such an important part of every student's development, both mentally and physically. Many studies have been conducted that have shown a direct correlation between kids who regularly exercise and academic achievement, so encourage your child to play everyday for at least 60 minutes. They will be happier, healthier, and smarter!!!

## Art Room Happenings

*Mrs. Yessenow*

Art this winter has had some new exciting projects! Ask your children to tell you what they learned when they bring home a piece of artwork. Some assignments you will have to wait to see at our annual Art Show. Kindergarten has been learning how to tear paper instead of cutting to make snowmen. We've also been experimenting with textures using Model Magic clay. First graders are making cozy quilt repeating patterns and learning how to fold origami penguins. Second grade art students have been learning about 3-dimensional items for a monsters-under-the-bed project! Our third graders have been studying the art of Laurel Burch and doing warm and cool watercolor wash paintings. Fourth graders have been creating Peruvian style Arpilleras using a variety of collage materials. Fifth grade students have been designing Mexican bark paintings on brown bag paper with fluorescent colors that really pop!

When you stop by the school, check out the new permanent framed artwork on the walls outside the kindergarten wing.



## ***Noticias de la Clase de Español!***

### **News from Spanish class!**

Mrs. Sugrue

We are very busy communicating and practicing our new vocabulary and language skills! During class, students are provided with opportunities to be engaged in activities that make the learning of a new language useful, meaningful, and connected to other areas of study. Grade 4 students have just completed a unit entitled *Spanish Explorers*. They have learned about the travels of three Spanish explorers, the names of the continents in Spanish, and the location of many of the Spanish speaking countries. This unit allowed for an interdisciplinary connection with geography and social studies content. With spring on the way, *La Primavera*, we will be creating acrostic poems in Spanish expressing things we see and enjoy about the season!

Our next unit, *In My School*, will afford students the opportunity to talk about their school, including the people, places, and objects used in our classrooms. Grade 5 students are at the end of a unit of study entitled *A Day in Madrid* and have acquired the necessary vocabulary and language structures to talk about where they are going, how they are getting there, and what they are looking for in a city or town. Each student has created a calendar plan for an imaginary trip from Fairfield to Madrid.

In our upcoming, unit, *Pastimes and Hobbies*, students will learn how to talk about their hobbies and what they like to do at home and at school. They will also be learning about famous Hispanics who have made contributions to various fields, including the arts, science and sports.

A fun way to reinforce what we are learning in class is to ask your child to teach you some Spanish expressions and vocabulary. Sharing is an exciting vehicle for practicing what has been learned in class!

*¡Muchas gracias y Feliz Primavera!*

Señora Sugrue

### **News from Music**

Mrs. Eckhardt, Mrs. Maravich, Mrs. Zwickler

Approximately 350 string students are eagerly anticipating the April rehearsals and concert with world-renown violinist, Mark O'Connor. Along with Mr. O'Connor, our elementary players will be featured performing four songs with middle school and high school string students. Those pieces are *Boogie Woogie*, *Amazing Grace*, *Old Joe Clark*, and three variations of *Boil 'em Cabbage Down*. There are many new and challenging notes and skills that are needed to learn this music. Slurs, ties, up bows – please ask your string student to demonstrate! Even more challenging for the violinists and violists are the “low 2’s” in some of the Spring Concert music. Cellists have it a little bit easier, but nonetheless, still have a little finagling to do with their fingers. Hard, but fun!!! Challenging, but obtainable!!!



**BURR ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL**





Fifth grade band students began woodwind, brass and percussion instruments in the fall and meet once per week before school at 8:00 on Fridays. Students are given one 30 minute lesson per week and are progressing well. Burr Band is comprised of 4 flutes, 1 oboe, 12 clarinets, 5 alto saxophones, 1 tenor saxophone, 13 trumpets, 7 trombones, and 3 percussionists. Burr Band recently (Feb. 12) played with Stratfield and McKinley students in preparation for Tomlinson Middle School.

Burr Band students are in the midst of preparing concert selections for their first formal performance. Burr's spring concert is on Thursday, May 22. They are very excited to play for their teachers, parents and classmates. Check out the Burr Band pictures outside the band room (across from the cafeteria.)

In music, fifth graders have had time to reflect on their February Winter Concert and to realize both the challenge and the exciting inner experience of musical performance. My how they have grown, and I am so proud of them! Meanwhile, they are now busy exploring and defining music for their Spring Concert on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. The lower grades are expanding their exploration of moving safely in space. Movement to music and beat competency are a big part of their music classroom experience for this next month. Meanwhile, the Third graders are working hard learning the language of music so that they can both read and write it. You might ask them to share some of their 4 beat measure rhythms which they are creating. Soon to come will be their introduction to the Recorder! (Heads up for a letter coming home in April about purchasing a recorder for your third grader)

### **Pupil Services**

Mrs. Gardner, Mrs. Harkins, Mrs. Lawrence,  
Mrs. Montgomery, Ms. Raucci, Mrs. Shea, Mrs. Zarrelli

Our Burr community continues to show it is a most Cooperative, Assertive, and Responsible school at our monthly assemblies. Through indoor snowstorms, hula-hoop challenges, and a whole school volleyball game, our children have learned to work together in ways that are not only interactive, but also very fun. We look forward to our upcoming assemblies on Empathy and Self-Control.

At Burr we have many children who organize their own Outreach groups and put this knowledge into action. One group of fifth grade girls helped spread kindness throughout our school by creating the *Flakes of Kindness* group. They provided each child with a printed snowflake and encouraged them to write one act of kindness they themselves had done and then to decorate it for all to see. The response was overwhelming and as a result, we have a *Flurry of Kindness* hanging up by the main stairwell. Be sure to swing by and take a look! Another group that has been hard at work is our *Go Go Green* Team. This team of third grade girls have created a robot out of all recycled materials and a place for all to go if they want to get or give an environmental tip to help keep our earth a healthy one! Finally we applaud the efforts of a fourth grade group who have taken on the challenge of decorating our Burr Bear. Our next theme for the bear was provided to us by our own Mrs. Sherman and will be....A MATH BEAR!





Our amazing intern, Miss Lizzie has also been hard at work with her Outreach groups. Here is an overview of what they have done this winter.

#### *Mindfulness Basket*

A group of 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls compiled a list of ideas for how to relieve stress. They created a basket full of fidgets, worry stones, glitter jars, journals and a poster of ideas for ways to be mindful and to help you relax. This basket can be accessed in the Psychology office by anyone who needs a moment to relieve their worries.

#### *Friendship Bracelets*

A group of 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls made care packages for children in hospitals. The care packages consist of a friendship bracelet and an inspirational note. J

#### *Squishies for Philippines*

A group of 4<sup>th</sup> grade girls wanted to raise money for the Philippines. They made and sold "squishies" & gave out free bookmarks that listed ideas for relieving stress and worries.

#### *Burr CARES*

This month's CARES character trait is Responsibility. This group of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders has been collecting the Caught CARE-ing slips and decorating the Burr CARES bulletin board.

#### *Card Making*

A group of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade girls have been making *Get Well Soon* and inspirational cards that people will be able to access if a friend, classmate, teacher is sick or just needs a pick-me-up Keep your eyes and ears open to all the goodness going on in Burr...there is so much more coming!

### **News from Language Arts and the Library Media Center**

Mrs. Felberbaum, Mrs. Henkel, Mrs. Persson

We are so excited about some of the wonderful happenings going on at Burr in the fields of reading and writing. March 3 was "Read Across America Day." Everyone at Burr was reading at 9 AM and doing activities related to Dr. Seuss. If you had dropped by that day, you would have seen some red and white hats, or Horton, or even The Cat in the Hat as we celebrated this famous children's author. You might even have heard some second graders reading a poem on the speaker system. The whole world was connected that day.

We are busy planning our Reading Celebration Week, scheduled for the week of April 7, 2014. Our "One Book, One School" theme this year is "Unstoppable". We will be reading Unstoppable Me by Wayne Dyer, an inspiration book on how kids can be/become unstoppable in their spirit and in their deeds. The week will kick-off when our motivational speaker, Tim Green, author of Unstoppable



(recommended reading for fifth graders and some fourth graders) will speak to grades one through five. Mr. Green speaks on the power of family, academics, sports, friends, giving, perseverance, and related success. He had only two dreams as a boy, playing in the NFL, and becoming a best-selling author. He has accomplished both! <http://timgreenbooks.com/kids/family/>

During the week, we will write and talk about people and characters that are unstoppable. We will blog to answer questions or to reflect on our ability to be unstoppable. Grade levels will “flip-flop” with each other to discuss their books and characters who exemplify this trait. You will see unstoppable quotes around the building, musical books in the LMC, book voting, and if you are *really* lucky... videos of staff reading books related to the theme. Students and staff are encouraged to dress up as their unstoppable character on April 11<sup>th</sup> for the assembly where there will be some wonderful school singing, too.

In the last few months, students have been writing informational books, and learning to offer opinions (with reasons) on various topics. From the kindergarten “how to” books, to fifth grade essays on Immigration, we have been immersed in reading, writing, and teaching our audiences about our informational topics. Fourth grade is the only grade so far to actually write opinion pieces reflecting how they really feel about a subject and they were fantastic. All other grades will be writing their opinions in the next months, from reviewing books to petitioning the principal on school changes needed. Watch out, Mr. Bluestein!

April is Poetry month. Our LMC has hundreds of poetry books of all types. They range from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Shel Silverstein. Students will be immersed in reading and writing poetry. Here is a link for you if you want to read poems to your children or keep a poem in your pocket. <http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/406> Join us by keeping your spirit UNSTOPPABLE!

## News from Math/ Science

Mrs. Sherman

Math workshop in our classrooms continues to be an incredibly engaging time! Our kindergarten students have spent the last few weeks learning about teen numbers. Isn't it interesting that even though 11 and 12 don't have the word teen in them, they are still considered a teen number? Ask your kindergarten child why! Next our youngest students will be exploring addition and subtraction within 5. In first grade students have been exploring place value concepts while counting and organizing materials in their classroom. They noticed that 123 objects are composed of 12 bundles of 10 with 3 loose ones! In their next unit they will work on time and measurement. In second grade students are working hard to determine the ages of their family members as well as how old their family and friends were when they were born! The strategies they are using to solve some complex addition and subtraction problems are quite amazing! Third graders are working on time and measurement. They have recently been busy measuring objects around the classroom using a body benchmark (such as our knuckles for an inch) and a real ruler. Next they will be moving on



to a geometry unit. Our fourth grade students are studying fractions before moving on to a geometry unit. Fifth graders recently wrapped up a unit on measurement and are starting their geometry unit as well! As always, if you are interested in learning more about our curriculum, or looking for resources to understand the work your child is doing, check out our Parent Math website: <http://fairfieldpublicschools.k5math.wikispaces.com/>

Math is not only happening in the classrooms, it is happening all over Burr—even at night! Our first ever Burr Math Night was a huge success! The gym, cafeteria and library were filled with students and parents talking, thinking, and doing math! And, the best part was that everyone was having FUN too! The night would never have happened without the support of the classroom teachers! Thanks also to our custodial staff, amazing secretaries, and Ann Harvey and members of the PTA who offered valuable advice and suggestions! Next year, we will not only have math night for our K-2 students, we will expand it for our 3-5 students. In addition to Math Night, our students continue to participate in the Estimation Station and the Problem of the Week. Finally, we have a small group of our intermediate students who participate in our Math Club once a month after school. Math is EVERYWHERE!



Burr's March CARES assembly on responsibility.



A successful K-2 Math Night!



**End of Newsletter—Thank you  
for reading!**

