

# COMPOST

The Parent Community Organization newsletter of Imagine Environmental Charter School **DECEMBER 2009** Vol. 2, Issue 2

## SWAP

### Exchanges Pull-Outs for Achievement



**BY MIKE BENNETT**

Since special and gifted education became a typical feature of American education half a century ago, students and teachers alike have had to cope with “pull-outs” from the classroom. Teachers would pull small groups of students, or even individuals, out of the classroom for part of each day to receive instruction specific to their skills or ability level. The rest of the students would remain and become, by default, the “mainstream”.

Naturally, this situation creates problems for both students and

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See SWAP, page 2

## A letter from Jon

In the coming weeks, we will be embarking on a new phase of our work here at ECS. With this in mind, I wanted to take a moment to explain our mission as we move forward.

### Why does ECS have to expand?

Our waiting lists are long and inquiries into current available space and future enrollment opportunities are constant. Our front office fields calls from across the nation from families relocating to Pittsburgh who are looking for quality choices in public schools. ECS continues to grow in stature and influence due to a learned and dedicated faculty that works closely each day with parents to ensure all students’ needs are met. Student achievement results have outpaced many local schools and we anticipate similar outcomes at the conclusion of year two. Each Friday since early October our staff conducts tours for prospective parents all seeking to enroll their children in the ECS program. It is

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See A Letter from Jon, page 8

## In this issue...

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Calendar.....          | 4  |
| RiverQuest.....        | 6  |
| ECS Marketplace.....   | 7  |
| Field Guide .....      | 9  |
| Green New Year .....   | 10 |
| Get Fresh: Recipe..... | 11 |
| Book Nook .....        | 11 |
| New Book Program.....  | 11 |
| Just 4 Kids .....      | 12 |
| ECS Recess .....       | 15 |
| 5 Questions .....      | 16 |

# SWAP Achievement

continued from page 1

teachers. Teachers have to cope with interruptions of their classes and recreate their lessons later for the students who were pulled out. Special and gifted education students are separated from their peers, removed from the lesson, and often stigmatized socially. "Mainstream" students are left to wonder what they're missing—and the answer is often special attention to their learning needs.

ECS meets these problems head-on through the SWAP program. SWAP—short for "School-Wide Achievement Period"—is designed to afford each student individualized instruction at

his or her level and end the practice of "pull-outs" for good. Federal Programs Coordinator and Literacy Coach Dwight Laufman describes SWAP as an educational environment in which "each child is met where they are" in terms of academic ability. "This is a time to look at the individual needs of each student and meet them, whether that is reteaching skills, practicing skills, or extending skills" he said.

SWAP comprises 45 minutes of each instructional day in grades one through four, with kindergarten scheduled to join them in January. During this period, students work with Title 1, special education, and classroom teachers to

improve performance in reading and math. However, students still cover these subjects in their regular classes; SWAP is designed to supplement, not replace, classroom instruction, to give teachers support focusing on strengths and weaknesses of each student in specific grade-level skills. The school uses various standardized tests—the Terra Nova (soon to be the Stanford), DIBELS, AIMSweb, and 4Sight—to figure out which skills need development or enrichment.

In each grade, students split into three groups, roughly defined by the teaching strategies required to best suit the needs of each; enrichment, practice, and reteaching. Enrichment groups focus on building the skills of high achievers and challenging these students to stretch themselves further academically. In re-teaching groups, teachers can spend time with students reinforcing skills and working toward goals that have been set, but perhaps not quite reached, in the traditional classroom. Practice groups strengthen skills that have been acquired in class, and establish solid grade-level achievement for each student.

Though SWAP splits each grade into these three groups, students are not pigeonholed into unchanging categories for the year. The SWAP program is designed to be dynamic in every way; teachers discuss the program in detail at weekly grade level meetings, and Mr. Laufman and other school administrators will reassess the program quarterly, with the help of the standardized



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**P A I R . C O M**

tests. Teachers monitor each student's progress carefully to figure out which teaching practices are working for each student, or even move students between groups if achievement slips—or, as is often the case, if it improves dramatically.

Classroom teachers also rotate between enrichment, practice, and re-teaching groups quarterly to make sure that each teacher has the opportunity to work with each group throughout the year. However, teachers often find they are especially comfortable or effective working with a particular group, and decide they would like to remain with a group from quarter to quarter. In these cases, administrators allow teachers a great deal of leeway in making decisions. The school makes every effort to balance teacher autonomy and administrative control.

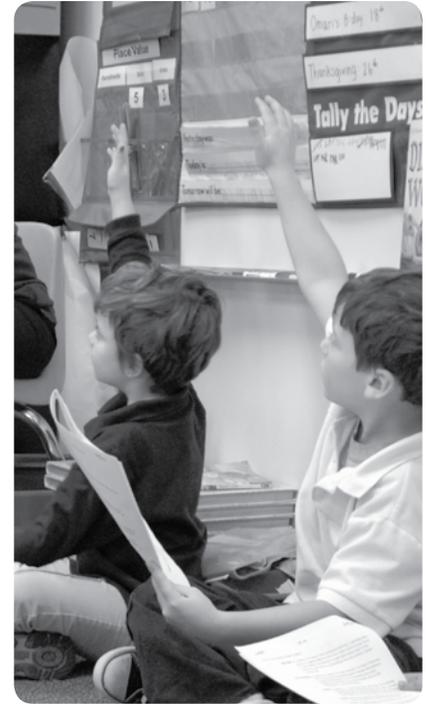
The SWAP program is brand new this year, and is designed for constant change and adjustment. Regarding the future of the program, Mr. Laufman wants to keep this ease of movement, but also to establish a baseline of practice in each group, in each grade. The

weekly meetings and quarterly reassessments help to point out the best projects and assignments by checking in with student progress early and often, and also to point out which projects aren't working.

Also in store for the program's future is greater incorporation of environmental topics, in keeping with the school's mission of awareness and stewardship. Currently, SWAP projects cover environmental issues when possible, according to Mr. Laufman. But as teachers and administrators gather more information and fine-tune SWAP, more effort will be made to bring the program in line with the school's environmental curriculum.

Although SWAP requires extra work from teachers and administrators and can be, in the words of one teacher, a "scheduling nightmare", the benefits are obvious. Classroom teachers can focus on lessons without worrying that some students will miss instruction because of pull-outs, and students get tailor-made education that focuses on their individual needs. Environmental Education Coordinator Nikole Sheaffer, who works with the fourth grade enrichment group,

points out that SWAP makes the great teachers at ECS even better by giving each one "the opportunity to ... refine [their] practice" every day.



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# What's **going on** here? (LOCAL FUN FOR YOUR FAMILY)

Saturdays, 1 p.m., all winter

## WINTER NATURE HIKES

On Saturdays throughout winter, join naturalists and educators for family-appropriate, seasonal nature hikes at Powdermill Nature Reserve. These hour-long hikes take place in snow, rain, wind, or cold, so please dress appropriately. Powdermill is the biological research station of Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Located in Rector, PA, amidst the rolling Laurel Highlands, wildflowers, trees, songbirds, and salamanders can be examined by eye, ear, magnifying glass, and camera. The world-class research programs at Powdermill, including the renowned bird-banding laboratory, take advantage of the biodiversity of the Allegheny Mountains.

**Free, no registration required. Please note: The December 12 hike will take place on Sunday, December 13 instead of Saturday. For more information or directions, call 724.593.6105.**

November 30-December 11

## ECS HOLIDAY MARKETPLACE

The Holiday Marketplace is an opportunity for students to shop for gifts for their loved ones during the first week of December. The Holiday Marketplace aims to provide a selection of fair trade, sustainable, afford-



## Gingerbread House Event

Dec. 11 at 12:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Bring your family to make a gingerbread house at school. Choose from the afternoon session at 12:30 p.m. (after the half day of school) or the evening session at 5:30 p.m.

**Please pre-register! Contact Angel Lehrian at [social@ecspco.org](mailto:social@ecspco.org) for details.**



able gifts. Parents and staff will also have a chance to shop starting December 7.

Contact [marketplace@ecspco.org](mailto:marketplace@ecspco.org) for more info.

Saturday, Dec. 5, 11 a.m. - 11:45 p.m.

## CARKIDS: ONE HORSE OPEN SLEIGH

Check out The Frick Car and Carriage Museum's real jingle bells and sleigh, and learn how people made wintertime fun with sleighs, sleds and skates 100 years ago. Make your own wearable jingle bells. Family program, kids ages 4-8.

**This event is FREE. For more information e-mail [info@TheFrickPittsburgh.org](mailto:info@TheFrickPittsburgh.org) or call 412-371-0600. Includes take-home activity.**

Saturday, Dec. 5, 12 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## MAKE-IT-NOW GLASS ORNAMENT

A very special holiday activity and gift. Make your own colorful glass ornament for display in a window or on the tree. This is one of Pittsburgh Glass Center's Make-It-Now workshops. Make-It-Now workshops are an opportunity to try glass making "on the spot" in 20 minutes or less.

Just a reminder that the temperature of hot glass is 2,000 degrees. That's much too hot to put your masterpiece in your purse or pocket. We will slowly cool your artwork over night and it will be ready for pick-up

the following Tuesday. We can also mail it to you for an additional fee.

**Ages 10 and above. Cost is \$25. Pre-registration is not required, but we suggest that you call ahead because time slots fill up fast. For more details or to register call the Pittsburgh Glass Center, 412-365-2145 ext. 201.**

Sunday, Dec. 5 - 12, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

## WSCC HOLIDAY GIFT SHOP

The annual WSCC Holiday Gift Shop is a wonderful opportunity for area shoppers. It's a stress-free pleasurable way to find the perfect gift for everyone on your holiday gift list. Once again the main floor of the WSCC will be transformed into a unique boutique filled with original hand crafted gifts. Net proceeds for this year's HGS will be earmarked for increasing WSCC building handicap accessibility. Funds collected so far helped with the installation of ramps and handrails throughout the lower level.

**Visit the Wilkins School Community Center website for more information. [www.wsc-cpgh.org](http://www.wsc-cpgh.org)**

Sunday, Dec. 6, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

## FAMILY WORKSHOP: PRETTY PAPER

Wrapping paper, gift tags, cards, and bows—get started on your list (and your holiday fun!) with an afternoon of creativity. Make a cheery selection of paper items for your own use or for gifts. Hot chocolate and cookies make your time together complete! Ages 6-12, with accompanying adult. Advance registration and pre-payment required.

**\$5 child members; \$7 child non-members and guests. For more information e-mail [info@TheFrickPittsburgh.org](mailto:info@TheFrickPittsburgh.org) or call 412-371-0600**

Saturday, Dec. 12, 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

## FAMILY SNOWSHOEING INTRO & HIKE

Shake the winter doldrums out of your system with an easy, rejuvenating winter walk in the park. We'll start with the basics of this fun winter sport and then hit the trails for experience. If there isn't enough snow to snowshoe on the trail, we'll try snowshoeing in the grass before walking along the trails.

@McKinley Park. Cost is \$5 per person, or \$20 per family. Fee includes snowshoe rental. Supply is limited, so advanced registration is recommended. For more information, visit [ventureoutdoors.org](http://ventureoutdoors.org)

Saturday, Dec. 12, 12 p.m. - 3 p.m.

## THUMBWRESTLING TOURNAMENT

LET'S GET READY TO RUMBLE!!!! Calling all athletes to the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh THUMB WRESTLING TOURNAMENT!!! Competitors welcome ages 5 and up, from gifted thumb wrestlers to enthused novices. Create a thumb wrestler identity, compete in the tournament or wave your pompoms for your friends and family to see who takes home the ultimate prize! All International Thumb Wrestling Competition Rules Apply (just kidding).

For more information visit: [www.pittsburghkids.org](http://www.pittsburghkids.org)

Sunday Dec. 13, 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

## SKATE WITH SANTA

Bring the kids and "Skate with Santa" during this popular annual event at the Schenley Park Skating Rink. The festivities will include music, refreshments, and an opportunity to skate outdoors in beautiful Schenley Park.

For more information, call 412-422-6523 or visit [www.SchenleyRink.com](http://www.SchenleyRink.com). Admission is \$4 for adults and \$3 for youth (17 and younger) and seniors (60 and older). Skate rental is \$2.50, and skate sharpening is \$3.50.

Monday, Dec. 21, 6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

## WINTER SOLSTICE HIKE

Join us for an evening of exploration on an easy 3-4 mile hike around Boyce Park. The sun has set and we'll see how our eyes adapt to the darkness. On the shortest day of the year, we will enjoy the tranquility of the evening, while listening for the critters that prefer the dark and stopping occasionally to gaze at the stars.

\$8.00 non-member / \$5.00 member. For more information, visit [ventureoutdoors.org](http://ventureoutdoors.org)

Dec. 26-30, 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

## PHIPPS FAMILY FUN DAYS

Pack up the kids and head for Phipps during the school holiday break. There's

## ECS Winter Concert

at  
ECS

Winter Concert: Dec. 8 p.m. at 7:30 p.m.

Students in grades 2-4 will be featured in this informal music event. The concert is free and open to the public with all students encouraged to participate. Join the ECS family for some fun songs and a few holiday selections for the festive season!

Contact the ECS music teacher, Jon Erik Schreiber, at [jonerik.schreiber@imagineschools.com](mailto:jonerik.schreiber@imagineschools.com) at 412-247-7970.



lots of fun for everyone. Stations throughout the Conservatory will feature lots of activities and crafts that reflect the beautiful designs of nature. Let your kids make a pinecone birdfeeder for the backyard, or take part in the snowflake decoration contest.

For more information please contact Kelliann Walsh, at [kwash@phipps.conservatory.org](mailto:kwash@phipps.conservatory.org) or 412-622-6915, ext. 6904.

Thursday, Dec. 31, 1 a.m. - 3 p.m.

## FAMILY DANCE PARTY

Kick up your heels one more time in 2009 as we transform the theater at the Pittsburgh Children's Museum into a Family Dance Party with kid-friendly DJ Raw-Z.

Pittsburgh Children's Museum  
[www.pittsburghkids.org](http://www.pittsburghkids.org)

Friday, Jan. 8, 5:30 p.m.

## ECS GAME NIGHT

Enjoy an evening of family fun during our first game night at ECS!

For more information contact [marla@ecspco.org](mailto:marla@ecspco.org).

Thursday, Jan. 21, 6:30 p.m.

## GREENING IT UP SEMINAR

The PCO is hosting the Environmental Focus Group for an exciting and informative night for parents and community members! Giveaways, fast facts and fabulous prizes will be included in the presentation. Greening

It Up Seminars are one hour in length, interactive and designed to give participants a "quick dose" of information that can be implemented immediately. The seminar will follow a short PCO meeting. Light refreshments and childcare for school-aged children will be provided.

Contact [nikole.sheaffer@imagineschools.com](mailto:nikole.sheaffer@imagineschools.com) for more info.

Monday, Jan. 18, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

## FAMILY FUN ON MLK DAY

Get ready for heat-defying acts of art and hands-on fun for the entire family on Martin Luther King Jr. Day at Pittsburgh Glass Center. Glass blowing demonstrations will be ongoing throughout the day, plus you have a chance to Make It Now with beads. Try your hand at making a glass bead for \$15.

Free/\$15 bead making. Pre-registration is not required. For more information visit [www.pittsburghglasscenter.org](http://www.pittsburghglasscenter.org)

Saturday, Feb. 6, 11 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

## ARTKIDS: I ♥ ART

February is all about love! Come look for examples of loving friends and family in the paintings and tapestries of The Frick Art Museum. Create a special valentine for someone you love. This family program is for kids ages 4-8. Includes take-home activity

For more information e-mail [info@TheFrick-Pittsburgh.org](mailto:info@TheFrick-Pittsburgh.org) or call 412-371-0600

# RiverQuest + ECS = **Adventure**

BY SARAH ANDERSON

There are so many ways in which our school is special. One of the finest examples is the environmental science curriculum, known as Using the Environment as an Integrating Context (EIC). The curriculum is from the Green Woods Charter School, which is the only other environmentally themed charter school in Pennsylvania. Their curriculum has received an Exemplary Status Award from the PA Department of Education's Office of Environment & Ecology. The educators here at ECS have adapted that curriculum to be specific to Southwestern PA. The curriculum has been further enhanced through local, community partnerships such as with organizations like RiverQuest.

RiverQuest is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1981 as Pittsburgh Voyager, Inc. by a group of parents who wanted to use the rivers as a classroom. Their mission "is to connect the people to their environment through river education adventures." RiverQuest operates a river-learning center on Explorer, a green passenger vessel on the Ohio River near the Carnegie Science Center. Students and teachers from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia can utilize the services RiverQuest provides. Programs are available to students from elementary school through high school, and RiverQuest also offers teacher training workshops. In addition, there are ticketed events open to the public as well as summer camps for school age children. RiverQuest has won numerous awards for their work in river education. At an environment charter school in a city with three rivers, studying the rivers is an important way of understanding the health of our local ecological system.

RiverQuest's educational philosophy is:

Tell me, I'll Forget  
Show me, I Might Remember  
Involve me, I'll Understand

This classic philosophy mirrors ECS teaching practices and is another way RiverQuest and ECS make ideal partners.

Nikole Shaeffer, Environmental Education Coordinator at ECS, explained how the 4th graders at ECS recently "completed a study focusing on the work and science of a stream ecologist. Throughout their work this quarter, students studied the ques-



tion 'How healthy is our local stream?' by conducting a series of field studies on the creeks that flow into Nine Mile Run. Students explored macro-invertebrate life, inventoried the living and nonliving things surrounding the creek banks, and did some basic water chemistry to understand the various components of what a stream ecologist may investigate to determine if a stream is healthy. After completing this exploration in our own backyard, our fourth graders moved to the boat to study the larger question 'How healthy are the rivers?' with the assistance and expertise of the RiverQuest staff.

"On the RiverQuest boat, students explored the above question by conducting similar fieldwork, but on a larger scale. Students also had the opportunity to study plankton samples from the rivers as an additional data point to support their evidence as they investigated river health. Students were then able to compare the data discovered in their own backyard with the data discovered 'downstream.'

With the assistance of some experts of the Creek Connections program, students were able to conduct fieldwork on a small and large scale and then engage in discussion about the health of our waterways as a city."

Mrs. Shaeffer also noted, "The RiverQuest experience is ideal for our students, and especially potent when supported by curricular work before heading on the boat. What makes the RiverQuest program more meaningful for our students is in its connections to what we do in our fieldwork before having the technical experience on the boat. Being on the boat, exploring and seeing our city from the water perspective is an experience in itself that builds knowledge and impact beyond curricular ideals.

By coupling the boat experience with our curricular programming, we continue to build robust and unique science programming for students at the elementary level."

# ECS Marketplace Looks to the Holidays—and Beyond

ECS isn't your typical school, so it's only natural that its holiday gift market isn't your typical school fair, either. Guided by the school's mission and spearheaded by the efforts of the PCO's Fundraising Committee, the Global Holiday Marketplace aims to provide a selection of fair trade, sustainable, affordable gifts for students, teachers and parents who want to do some holiday gift giving.

## Why fair trade?

Fair trade organizations offer a wide variety of great, unique, often handmade products at really great prices. For example, here at ECS, students can choose from such things as candles, finger puppets, recycled paper products, jewelry, chocolate and more—all for under \$10 (many items under \$5).

But it's not just the great stuff. It's about the world, its resources and its people. You can think about it like the "web of life" our children study at school. Fair trade groups cultivate partnerships with their suppliers and contribute to the development of communities through educational, nutritional, environmental, and health programs. In short, using a fairer system of exchange serves to create safer, empowering working conditions and ensure the rights of all people.

## How did it come to ECS?

Most schools have some sort of winter holiday shopping event during which students can pick out gifts for their parents, siblings, friends, or other loved ones. As those of us who were here last year know, ECS had no such event in its inaugural year. Members of the PCO's Fundraising Committee knew they had to create a plan from scratch if it would happen this year, so they started meeting about it several months ago.

"There's a wealth of fair trade products available," Marla Ferrency said, "if you only know where to look." Instrumental to the effort of creating ECS' fair trade holiday marketplace was Amy Sobkowiak, who arranged for the procurement of the marketplace inventory and Ayanna Ramsey, who agreed to organize it.

With its attention to environmentalism and equality, fair trade shopping demonstrates not only true ECS school spirit, but also holiday spirit—no matter which winter holiday you're celebrating!

## Holiday Marketplace Vendors

**Baskets of Cambodia** was one of the first businesses to open up new markets for handcrafted items in Cambodia in 1996 after the war. With the help and dedication of talented Cambodians they have created a growing business that employs upwards of 400 people each year and has sold over a million products worldwide. They strive to produce eco-friendly products of original design that are labor friendly, and exhibit great craftsmanship and quality.  
[www.basketsofcambodia.com](http://www.basketsofcambodia.com)

**Building New Hope** is a volunteer-driven non-profit organization based in Pittsburgh, PA and Granada, Nicaragua that has been supporting grassroots development projects in Central America since 1992. They sell the fairly traded organic coffee that has been part of the monthly coffee fundraiser at ECS since last year.  
[www.buildingnewhope.org](http://www.buildingnewhope.org)

**Divine Chocolate** produces quality and affordable fair trade chocolate bars. Divine is a leading fair trade brand of chocolate and a pioneer in the world of socially responsible enterprise. The success of Divine means that cocoa farmers in West Africa have a secure source of fair trade income that continues to grow year on year.  
[www.divinechocolate.com](http://www.divinechocolate.com)

**Fair World Designs** is part of the Fair Trade movement that began in Europe over 40 years ago. The Fair Trade purpose has been a mission full of hope to build small businesses of artisans to the point of securing sustainable incomes. Fair World Designs markets jewelry made from recycled paper beads.  
[www.fairworlddesigns.com](http://www.fairworlddesigns.com)

**HandCrafting Justice** is a fair trade partnership working with women struggling for economic justice and independence in developing countries. They promote human dignity and justice by creating opportunities for economic and social transformation in part by marketing items the women make, such as candle holders, finger puppets, jewelry, coin purses, hand-made cards and

much more. They also produce ECS's hand-embroidered polo shirts.  
[www.handcraftingjustice.cedris.org](http://www.handcraftingjustice.cedris.org)

**Mr. Ellie Pooh** is an eco-friendly, innovative company that sells 100% handmade journals, stationery, crafts, scrapbook/photo albums and various grades of paper made of 75% elephant dung from Sri Lanka and 25% post-consumer paper. Ellie Pooh Paper is also sold at the Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium.  
[www.mrelliepooh.com/index.html](http://www.mrelliepooh.com/index.html)

**SERRV** is a nonprofit organization with a mission to eradicate poverty wherever it resides by providing opportunity and support to artisans and farmers worldwide. Through their work with community-based organizations in 36 countries, they create economic opportunity so these artisans and farmers can support their families and themselves. Their fair trade products include jewelry, ornaments, baskets, candles, and other food and gift items.  
[www.serrv.org](http://www.serrv.org)

**Ten Thousand Villages** is an exceptional source for unique, handmade gifts, jewelry, home decor and personal accessories representing the diverse cultures of artisans in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. One of the world's largest fair trade organizations, the company strives to improve the livelihood of tens of thousands of disadvantaged artisans in 38 countries. ECS is working with the local Squirrel Hill branch to bring a variety of gift items to our marketplace.  
[www.tenthousandvillages.com](http://www.tenthousandvillages.com)

**Women of the Cloud Forest**, founded in 2001, produces beautiful jewelry in a never-ending range of colors, styles and patterns using sustainably harvested seeds from the dry tropical and wet cloud forests of Costa Rica. (You may have seen the rainforest beads on the lanyards used for volunteer name tags in the ECS office.) The women also sew bags, hand embroidered with colorful, accurate reproductions of North and Central American plants, birds, butterflies, and other animals.  
[www.womenofthecloudforest.com](http://www.womenofthecloudforest.com)

# A letter from Jon

continued from page 1

clear we have an obligation to parents across the Pittsburgh region to increase our school capacity to the maximum extent in a way that is consistent with our mission.

## Where are we in the expansion process?

During the past year, Imagine Schools, board members, developers, architects, researchers, city officials and academics have come together to steer our expansion efforts and ultimately craft an innovative and exciting new building design. In early January ECS will participate in a series of public meetings designed to provide community members with a comprehensive overview of all aspects of the school expansion plan. We are excited to share our onsite expansion plans with all constituents and look forward to integrating additional suggestions from the wider community. Green and LEED building criteria will inform all aspects of our project as well as the existing building upgrades ensuring that our school becomes a state-of-the-art educational facility. At the conclusion of the

community process, formal applications will be submitted to the City Planning Offices. Our new school is poised to become a regional asset of which city leaders can be proud.

## How will the building play a role in the curriculum?

Ultimately unique to our moving forward with the growth of our school is our power to bring this experience to the learning of our children. We firmly believe that engaging students in the design, concept and actual implementation of an expanding building critically connects them to our community and to the greater Pittsburgh region – an asset in creating students “rooted” in their world. Establishing connections in our built and natural worlds connects students to curriculum and impacts their perspective on the world as they become young adults, and later, decision makers. As we move forward through this growing period, we would like to refer to our movement as the “Green Roots Project,” an initiative aimed at establishing educational and environmental roots to our city.

## How can you support our expansion?

Parent support and enthusiasm will demonstrate the support ECS has garnered

across the city for its program and its mission. As the *only* environmental school in western Pennsylvania, we have the exciting opportunity to lead the way and serve as a model for green building design and environmental integration in a public school setting. We need your support and commitment as we move forward in the ECS Green Roots Project. Please plan to attend the first community meeting in January to show your support.

We look forward to moving ahead on the Green Roots Project in the coming weeks, and will continue to keep our parents involved in this process from the very beginning. Our mission is to engage students in an academically-rich, environmentally-focused educational experience, and the Green Roots Project will allow us to support this mission and the overall values of our school. We look forward to your continued commitment and thank you for entrusting us with your child's education. We are grateful for the opportunity to make a difference in your child's life.

Details will be forthcoming in the Wednesday folder regarding the community meeting schedule for 2010.

## You'll Reach Higher With a Trusted Advisor



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# Diary of the Field Guide

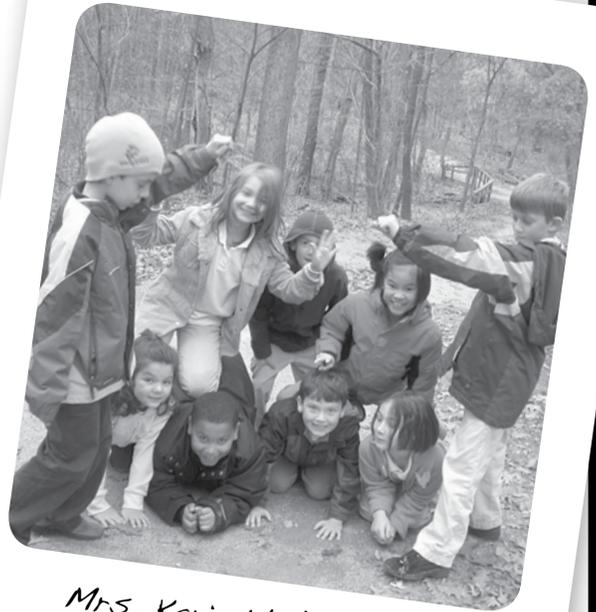
BY AMY BIANCO

I absolutely love autumn! The colors in Frick Park were amazing these past few months as was the weather! Falling leaves beautifully illustrate nature's self-sowing bounty. Trying to catch the leaves as they fell from the trees was a favorite activity of some of the classes. When the wind would pick up and the leaves would rain down, we'd drop everything and try to catch one. Catching a twirling leaf is harder than you think, but if you manage to do so, it's good luck!

It sure has been a busy autumn. As of the second week of November, I've been on over 60 hikes with the students, soaking wet or shine! While on the Plants hikes, we observed the changing of flowers to seeds. We identified Spicebush with its smooth, simple leaves and learned how to scratch a branch to smell it so we can identify it when the leaves are gone. We popped Jewelweed seeds and wondered why Pokeweeds have such pink stems! For the Landmarks Hike, classes identified man-made and natural landmarks during our route. We made a simple map as we walked and at the end of our hike the class would name it. Some of the more interesting hike names were, "Miss Raimondo's Great Big Superstar Rocket Spiderman Hike" and "Miss Sica's Landmark Mystery Map Leaf Challenge Hike." Out of the 3

hikes offered for Unit 1 (All Living Things) the Animals Hike was the most popular. There were many reoccurring sightings of the Banded Tussock Moth with its long, whisker-like tufts, and, of course, the ever-active squirrel. While hiking with Mrs. Cowherd's class, we had the opportunity to watch a squirrel (12 feet away or so) stuff its mouth full of fallen leaves, bound up a beech tree and disappear into a hole between 2 limbs. It would then reappear and bound down the tree for another bunch of leaves. It went on like that a few times while we watched quietly. None of us had ever seen a squirrel actually building a nest!

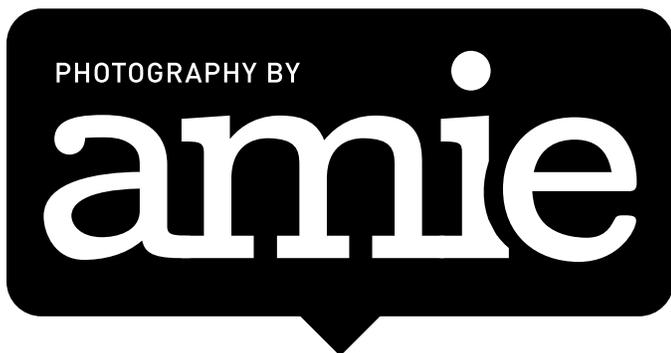
Some of the animals we found weren't as common. One fine September day, Mrs. Brunger's class walked out of the door to find a young corn snake basking right there on the steps. Mr. Tracey's class stumbled across a plant with an absolutely enormous camel cricket perched on the end of it. While hiking down the Biddle Trail steps with Miss Raimondo's class one sunny afternoon, we noticed a very large orb web attached between two trees. One of the students commented, "That's like AN APARTMENT!" Mrs. Karichko's class had the opportunity to observe a Downy Woodpecker defy gravity while searching for insects on the oak trees right above our heads. And I must mention the October 20th hike with Kindergarten when we saw



*Mrs. Karichko's class demonstrating a food energy pyramid.*

one ladybug, then 5, then 15, then noticed them all over the houses we were walking past, and then ALL OVER THE FRONT OF THE SCHOOL! We had ladybugs in our hair and on our clothes! A little research on the phenomenon explained that this is a behavior that happens in conjunction with the weather changing.

Coming up for Unit 2 (Biomes, Burrows, and Beds) will be a Stream Hike, a Micro Habitat Hike, and a Neighborhood Hike. It will be getting colder, but you bet we'll be out there bundled to the hilt ready to witness something amazing!



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# 10 green new year's resolutions

BY BRIAN BYRD

## 1. Change all of your incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs.

According to [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov),

"An ENERGY STAR qualified compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL) will save about \$30 over its lifetime and pay for itself in about 6 months. It uses 75 percent less energy and lasts about 10 times longer than an incandescent bulb." However, when LED lights become available for home use, they will be significantly more efficient than even CFL lights but without the mercury. Don't forget: CFL bulbs must be recycled and not thrown in the trash. Bulbs can be recycled at Construction Junction. Visit [www.constructionjunction.org](http://www.constructionjunction.org) for more information.



**2. Winterize your home.** Apply caulking around older windows and weather stripping around older doors to stop air leaks. Spray foam insulation can work well in basements to fill up any nooks and crannies. Also, if your garage is integral to the house, make sure that the garage door closes completely to block any unwanted airflow. There are gaskets made specifically for garage doors that will help you with this task.

**3. Have your heating system checked by an HVAC professional.** This should help you to save money by making sure that the system is running at peak efficiency.

**4. Reduce, reuse, and recycle.** Reduce waste by not buying things that you don't really need, reuse by finding new uses for things you already have, and recycle things that you cannot use anymore. Construction Junction, [www.constructionjunction.org](http://www.constructionjunction.org) in Point Breeze is



a great place to recycle things that cannot be recycled at the curb. Not only do they take appliances with Freon, computers, scrap metal, and building materials, they also take Plastics numbered 1 – 5 and used bicycles which then get fixed up and given to someone in need.

**5. Kick the bottled water habit by installing an under sink water filtration system.** Our family installed a \$200 system two years ago and the water tastes as good or better than some bottled water. We cut down on the amount of plastic that we recycle as a result. For us, I would say that the system has more than paid for itself. We have a system with a three-stage filter and reverse osmosis. If you don't want to install an under sink unit, then a pitcher filter is better than straight tap water.

**6. Unclog drains without using harsh chemical cleaners.** There are several good recipes online, but here is the one that we have been using. Pour about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of dry baking soda down the drain, then pour  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup vinegar down the drain, and plug the drain with a rag or plug. Wait 30 minutes. Remove the plug, and pour boiling water down the drain. Repeat as necessary.

**7. You can also keep toxic chemicals out of your house by looking for vinegar-based cleaners rather than using bleach-based cleaners.** Many work just as well, but are less toxic and cheaper to buy or make your self. Do a web search for non-toxic cleaning supplies. There is a huge list of cleaning supplies that can be bought or made inexpensively.



**8. Start a compost pile.** Composting can reduce the amount of trash that goes into a landfill, as well as provide good fertilizer for gardens. "Inside a landfill, there is little oxygen and little moisture. Under these conditions, trash does not break down very rapidly. In fact, when old landfills have been excavated or sampled, 40-year-old newspapers have been found with easily readable print. Landfills are not designed to break down trash, merely to bury it. When a landfill closes, the site, especially the groundwater, must be monitored and maintained for up to 30 years!"

<http://science.howstuffworks.com/landfill.htm> Here is a link on setting up a compost pile: [www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/DEPUTATE/AIRWASTE/WM/RECYCLE/FACTS/COMPOST.HTM](http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/DEPUTATE/AIRWASTE/WM/RECYCLE/FACTS/COMPOST.HTM)

**9. Stop unwanted Junk mail.** One site you may want to look at is [www.dma-choice.org](http://www.dma-choice.org). You can register with an email and then connect to other sites where you can opt out of credit card offers, magazine offers, coupons, etc. You just decide what you do not want to see in your mail. You can directly contact companies that send you junk mail. Keeping your phone number unlisted helps as well. There is additional information at [privacycouncil.org](http://privacycouncil.org).

**10. Maybe we can start a tie committee to find ways of repurposing ties that have been cut off of Principal McCann.** Perhaps one of the parents can sew the destroyed ties into an eco quilt.

*There are more ways that we as a community can work together, and within our own families, to make the world a better place than there is space to print. It does not matter whether you are trying to save money or better the planet, start with the easiest things you can think of and just keep going. Being environmentally conscious is not about inconveniencing ourselves, its about conserving the things that matter most and getting the most enjoyment out of what we have.*

# Get Fresh: A seasonal recipe from Jamie Root, Culinary Coordinator

## Sweet and sour meatballs

### INGREDIENTS:

1 pound ground chuck or round  
1 egg, slightly beaten  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon pepper

2 tablespoons fine plain bread-crumbs or corn flake crumbs  
2 teaspoons soy sauce, low sodium  
2 tablespoons grated or finely minced onion  
1 tablespoon cooking oil

### For the sauce:

3 tablespoons vinegar  
3 tablespoons cornstarch  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 tablespoon soy sauce, low sodium

1 large sweet bell pepper, cut into 1-inch pieces  
hot cooked rice  
1 can pineapple, chunks (15 ounces) or preferably 1 whole pineapple, cored, and peeled. Accompanied by 1- 8 ounce container of pineapple juice

### PREPARATION:

In a large bowl, combine ground beef, egg, 1 tablespoon cornstarch, salt, pepper, 1 teaspoon soy sauce, bread crumbs, and onion. Shape into 1 1/2 in balls. In a large skillet, lightly brown meatballs in the vegetable oil. Drain well. Transfer meatballs to slow cooker.

In a small bowl, combine vinegar, sugar, 1 tablespoon soy sauce and cornstarch; stir to blend. Pour over meatballs. Cover and cook on LOW for 5 to 7 hours. In the last 30 minutes of cooking, stir in pineapple with juice and bell pepper. If thicker juices are desired, combine more cornstarch with a little cold water and add, stirring, until thickened. Serve with hot cooked rice.

Serves 4



## The Book Nook

ECS librarian Jackie Fulton selected the following books as appropriate to accompany EIC Unit 2: *Biomes, Burrows and Beds*. Enjoy!

**The World That We Want** (2005)  
written and illustrated by Kim Michelle Toft.

*Using the familiar rhyming style of This is the House that Jack Built, Toft artfully illustrates the interconnectedness of living things found everywhere from rainforests to beaches. Students will learn about biomes, habitats and rare animals in these pages. In addition, they will pick up a few new vocabulary words as they search the magnificent illustrations to find each of the 45 featured animals.*



**Trout are Made of Trees** (2008) written by April Pulley Sayre and illustrated by Kate Endle.

*The title may sound silly, but this an excellent non-fiction title for younger students. Not only will students have a better grasp of food chains by the time they are done reading this book, they will also learn about observing nature in a scientific manner.*



## New Book Program Celebrates Birthdays and More

### BY HEIDI GREEN

During its first year, our school library experienced tremendous growth. The book collection went from zero items to a whopping 5,000 books by year's end. A strong foundation was established, due in large part, school librarian Jackie Fulton notes, to "countless volunteer hours and generous book donations from our families."

This year, families can help the library collect books that support the school's environmental curriculum by participating in a new Student Recognition/Birthday Book Program. "Families who want to honor their child's birthday or congratulate them on their hard work can do so at any time during the school year," Mrs. Fulton explains.

Families who wish to participate in this program may donate \$10 toward the cost of a new library book.

In exchange:

- A permanent book plate will be placed in the book with your child's name and, if applicable, birthday.
- Your child will be the first to borrow the selected book. It will be delivered to the classroom on the child's birthday (or other specified day).
- Your child will be able to borrow the book for one week, in addition to his/her regularly selected library book.

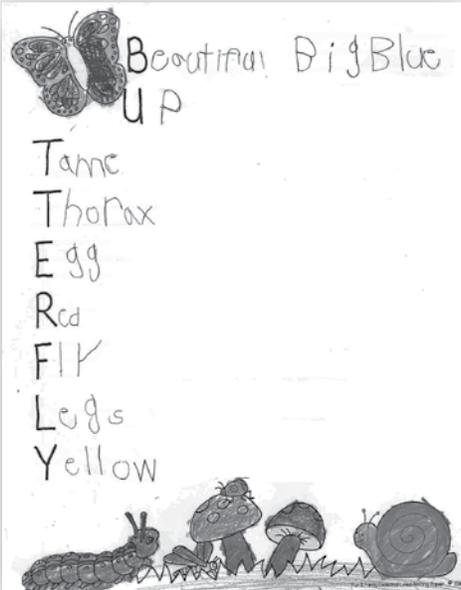
All of the library books purchased this school year—including books by acclaimed non-fiction author Bobbie Kalman, titles by popular fiction writers Mo Willems and Lois Ehlert, and works about Pittsburgh sports teams—are available for the Book Program.

Interested? Contact Mrs. Fulton for details or see previews at the monthly PCO meetings. Brief descriptions of the available titles and order forms can be found on the school website. (Visit the "Download Forms" section.)

# just 4 kids



These are the parts  
of a butterfly's life  
cycle: egg, larva, pupa, and  
adult



## First Grade Focus: Butterflies

The first grade students at ECS love to learn almost as much as they love sharing the facts they know. "We know so much about butterflies," they insisted with excitement at the end of their first EIC (Environmental Integrated Curriculum) unit. The students studied Monarch Butterflies as part of 8-week long unit that included writing poetry, reading butterfly literature, creating butterfly masks and investigating Monarch habitats at the Frick Park Nature Center. The unit designed to work learning about the environment into the traditional disciplines was a big hit with the students and the teachers. "There is so much interesting information out there, the kids just seem to absorb it so fast" Miss. Rypczyk said.



**Kathryn, from the Frick Environmental Center, shows Miss. Rypczyk's first grade class a Monarch habitat.**

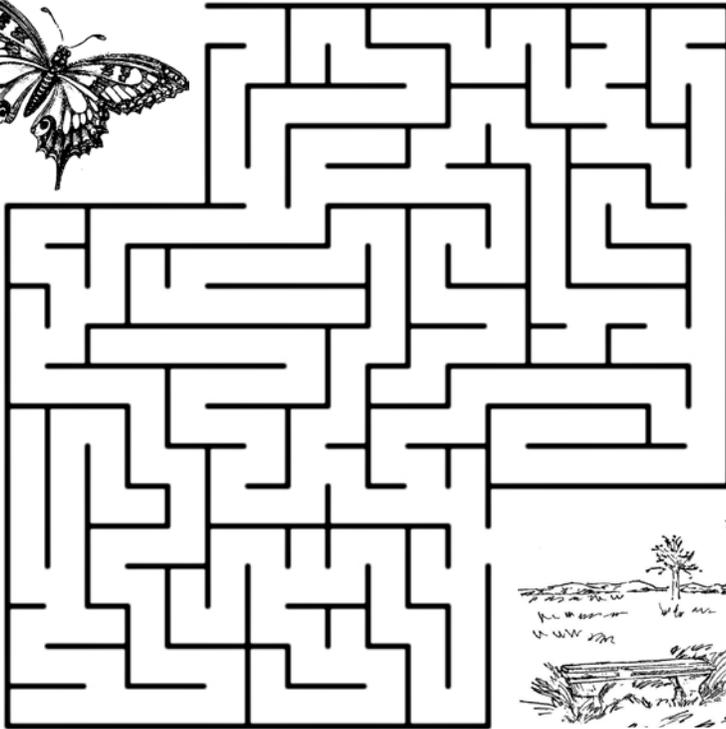
### First Graders' favorite Monarch butterfly facts:

"Their proboscis  
is like a snake's  
tongue. They use it  
to eat nectar."  
— Grace

"Monarch  
wings are  
covered with  
scales."  
— John

"Monarchs  
are poisonous  
to birds."  
— Mackenna

Help the Monarch butterfly get to the meadow.



**“Butterflies help by pollinating milkweed and other plants.”**  
—Miles

**“The caterpillar crawls around on the milkweed and eats the leaves or the pods”**  
—Elena

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 E S I C S O B O R P  
 A V R A L E G S S T

**Find all the words in the puzzle then read the unused letters to reveal a fact about butterflies.**

- |             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| ABDOMEN     | LEGS      |
| ANTENNA     | PROBOSCIS |
| CATERPILLAR | PUPA      |
| EGG         | SCALES    |
| HEAD        | THORAX    |
| LARVA       | WINGS     |

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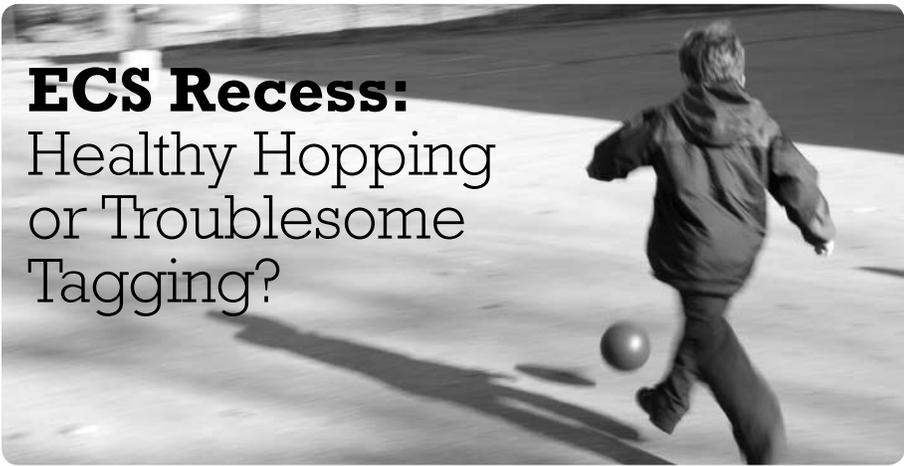
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# ECS Recess: Healthy Hopping or Troublesome Tagging?

Our hard-working students need intermittent downtime to learn effectively each day. Many studies have shown long-term memory benefits derived from the creativity and novelty that recess brings into the routine of the class schedule.

Some parents believe that elementary school recess contributes to healthy peer socialization and character development when it is more structured and monitored by adults. (The problem is having enough adults on hand to assist.) Others believe that recess time should NOT be directed. Children should

have more freedom to choose what they want to do and with whom.

### How can ECS provide a fun atmosphere that is also safe and beneficial for each student?

You might not know that the ECS PCO purchases our playground equipment (\$150 per semester) only to have it break or disappear in record time. The children are offered jump ropes, hula-hoops and dodge balls, which are often prematurely knotted, mangled and crushed from misuse.

- Should the PCO purchase different types of equipment?
- Should we use our funds to transform the playground into a colorful pattern of "sidewalk games"?
- What kind of equipment would be the most useful and lasting?

Perhaps, the type of equipment purchased is not the important issue.

- Is it possible to have a staff member (or volunteers) on the playground to facilitate creative play and teach group games?
- Can we enlist older students to organize and lead traditional playground games for our younger students?
- Would semi-organized activities like weekly scavenger hunts or nature game inspire our children or take away from their free time?

**VISIT OUR PLAYGROUND** during recess and see what our children do when they are not in their classroom.

**LET US KNOW** what you think about ECS recess and ways we can improve this valuable time. Join in the discussion at: <http://ecspco.proboards.com>



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# 5

## QUESTIONS

Get to know an ECS community member better through 5 inane questions...this month, **Sharon Leavitt, School Nurse**

### 1. What is your favorite Kennywood ride?

I like to watch the Sky Coaster. I marvel about what is going through the minds of the people who are riding it. I just don't have the desire to experience that much fear.

### 2. Who was your favorite teacher when you were growing up, and why?

Mrs. Anderson, 3rd grade. She was groovy. We learned *Desiderata*, an anonymous poem about how to live life with grace, and a few Elton John songs one line at a time. I still remember each of those. She was about as tall as the rest of us and fit into the refrigerator box for reading groups too. She allowed me to clean the chalk board, grade the spelling tests, water the plants, feed the hamster and generally make a pest of myself after school. When I moved away from Pittsburgh to Cleveland, she and her husband (a regular volunteer in our classroom) took me out to Eat'n Park for lunch to say good-bye. She made a lasting impression. Oh, I learned a lot too.

### 3. Describe your perfect Pittsburgh day...

First: I get up at 7:00 AM and go for a 2 hour mountain bike ride in Frick Park. I arrive home before anyone has missed me, the sun is shining, the weather warm, I haven't crashed. Next, my family and I go to Eat'n Park (my favorite kid-friendly restaurant) where I have Grilled Stickies and eggs, easy over, coupled with an extremely large Chai Tea. Then we go to a park, play frisbee golf or something, generally play and have a good time. Or, if it is summer time, we put our boat in on the South Side, motor over to the Allegheny River and water ski, tube and swim all afternoon. While on the river, we stop at the Crow's Nest in Sharpsburg for dinner. I will have a yummy seafood dish. That night, after the kids are in bed, I watch a romantic comedy with my husband who is thrilled about the evening's movie choice.

### 4. If you could, who would you cast to play you in a movie made about ECS?

Meg Ryan

### 5. What is your favorite spot in Frick Park?

The "Iron Grate" single-track mountain bike trail at the top behind the baseball fields. It's fast, has nice swoopy switchbacks, roots, a few places to catch air, a few log hops, an off-camber, steep downhill section and a teeter-totter feature. Big fun! Whoo-Hooo!

# comPOST

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