

COMPOST

The Parent Community Organization newsletter of Imagine Environmental Charter School **FEBRUARY 2010** Vol. 2, Issue 3



Technology in our classrooms

BY MIKE BENNETT

Above:
Elliot
Escalante
uses
Compass
Learning
in his
first grade
classroom.
Photo by
Kirsi Jansa.

An environmental elementary school that makes broad use of digital technology might seem counterintuitive, but computers are becoming increasingly common in schools across the nation, and ECS is no exception. Elementary school students belong to the so-called “digital native” generation – they are growing up in an environment full of digital technology. Because of their experience, they feel at home – that is, native – in situations that require them to use computers. So ECS teachers and administrators are finding that various technology-based educational methods can be nearly as important as the students’ frequent visits to Frick Park when it comes to teaching environmental concepts.

One way teachers aid the school’s environmental mission is by reducing paper waste. Some parents of Diane Karichko’s second grade students submit their children’s spelling assignments via email rather than on paper. Now that the library catalog has been digitized, there’s no need to maintain a card catalog and its attendant paper

See **TECH**, page 2

A letter from Jon

This school year ECS took on a new student information management system (MMS). The system is designed to warehouse and integrate student information for routine school use, facilitate accurate and timely state reporting, and to provide online grade book and report card functions. After much school based professional development our parents, faculty and administration are at last beginning to enjoy the advantages of the MMS system. Our shift toward electronic grade books and a standards based grading system however has caused some consternation. I wanted to take advantage of this month’s *comPOST* column to highlight the rationale behind the school’s shift toward standards based grading.



Why a switch to standards based

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Technology enhances our classrooms

TECH, from page 1

records. Also, with students practicing skills on classroom computers every day, there are far fewer paper and pencil assignments.

With the easy availability of information offered by the internet, some teachers have also begun making frequent use of computers in day to day environmental lessons. Since learning about environmental issues and concepts often requires students to develop a more global perspective, access to information becomes crucial. As librarian Jackie Fulton says, "By teaching our students to be information literate and comfortable with a multitude of technology formats we are teaching them to be more aware of the world that we live in, become better learners, and setting them up for a successful future."

"Technology provides not only a great resource for teachers in teaching/integrating the environmental curriculum, but it also provides students with a link to harder, more abstract concepts and far away places," says first grade teacher Nicole Rypczyk, who often finds information on the spot during class discussions. "We try to use the technology available to us whenever there is a question that pops up in an environmental lesson. Instead of waiting to find the answer later or being unsure, I can send a student to the computer or go there myself to find the answers to many great questions our students come up with!"

However, students don't just use computers in environmental lessons. ECS has adopted CompassLearning educational software as part of its curriculum, particularly in math and reading centers.

These skills are practiced every day in every regular classroom, and teachers are finding Compass useful, easy to master, and most importantly, customizable for each student. According to Ms. Rypczyk, "we are able to tailor each lesson for individual students. This allows us to give students extra practice, review, or enrichment activities while online."

Information collected in Compass exercises helps teachers assess students' needs daily. Ms Rypczyk again: "We are able to use data from each lesson the student completes to see how well they are understanding the skill. We can then use that information to tailor future lessons both in class and on Compass as well." Adds Ms Karichko: "I love that I can differentiate learning easily by prescribing and assigning specific lessons/activities on Compass Learning." Students can even practice their skills on their home computers via CompassLearning's website, with a bit of help from parents.

But while Compass is now part of the school's curriculum, teachers report that they enjoy the freedom to decide how to apply it – or indeed how to use any other technology. Ms Rypczyk: "One really great thing about our school is that we as teachers are given the autonomy to decide where and when to use technology." In some cases teachers work together to plan: "We as a grade level team plan together and decide how we will use technology in the classroom," says kindergarten teacher Danielle Meyer, adding, "however, sometimes we do our own activities."

Even in kindergarten, these activities clearly appeal to students. Mrs Meyer further

explains, "Since our kids are in kindergarten we don't really see those immediate gains, however, I can assure you that my kids are excited when I bring over my laptop to the carpet. Typically their favorite center activity is computers too!" Teachers in higher grades are certainly reaping the benefits of younger students who are accustomed to learning with the help of computer technology, in specials as well as in classrooms.

Jackie Fulton has been at the forefront of technology's application in educational projects at ECS. She has created (and continues to create) multimedia presentations based on class projects. Each of the first grade classes has completed one of these projects: at Thanksgiving, Mrs Mars's class made a "Digital 'Quilt of Thanks'...where each child drew a picture of something they are thankful for." Ms Dessell's class made gingerbread men, and Ms Rypczyk's studied butterflies. In each case, students recorded explanations of their projects that play in conjunction with a slideshow of the projects themselves.

In any case, technology represents a definite enhancement of the curriculum. While using computers daily helps students to "reinforce concepts, to enrich, and to support struggling learners," in the words of Ms Karichko, this practice adds to an already strong foundation of traditional instruction and outside exploration. Teachers and students alike are demonstrating the benefits of ECS's wholehearted adoption of technology every day.

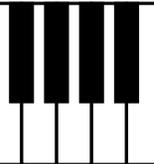


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Sierra Club visits E-Day

Allegheny Sierra Club, in partnership with Pennsylvania Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, presented a special program to E-Day on Monday November 16th

E-Day, the extended day program at ECS, welcomed Barry Lavery of the Pennsylvania Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, along with the Endangered Species Action Team (ESA) of the Allegheny Sierra Club. They presented the program "Hoo, Hoo! Who Are You?" all about local owls and their importance in nature.

The afternoon's activities began with Barry presenting a slide show all about owls. This was followed by an interactive session on the owl's habitat, the food it eats, and the sounds it makes. Once the children had an opportunity to ask all their questions, Barry introduced E-Day students to Bucky the Screech Owl. The petite rescued owl sat gracefully on Barry's arm while the children were en-

couraged to view Bucky up close. Bucky's appearance created a flurry of additional questions from the children, which Barry gladly answered.

When Barry and Bucky's visit concluded the children participated in craft activities and poetry writing by the ESA Team. The children worked collectively along side artist and ESA Team member, Mike Lamark on a mural inspired by the day's events. They also enjoyed coloring in the one of a kind owl coloring book created by Mike Lamark just for E-Day. A few of our older students wrote creative acrostic poetry about owls and embellished the poems with colorful art.

Both the students and staff of E-Day will

remember this day's event fondly. E-Day thanks Allegheny Sierra Club in partnership with Pennsylvania Wildlife Rehabilitation Center for volunteering their time to expand our children's knowledge of the world around them.



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

Saturday, Feb. 20, 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.

NATURE DETECTIVES: WINTER BIRDS

Join us as we investigate birds in winter, what they eat, and how they survive. The first 20 families will receive a free birdhouse to construct at the program. Our guest presenter is Dr. Cynthia Morton, Section of Botany, Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

Located at the Carnegie Library in Oakland. Ages 6 and up. Registration required. Visit clpgh.org for more information and registration.

Saturday, Feb. 27, 12 p.m. - 4 p.m.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Celebrate the Year of the Tiger Chinese New Year with Silk Screen: Asian Arts and the Steel Dragon Lion Dance Team. Celebrated paper cutting artist Bovey Lee will teach this ancient art form.

Located at the Children's Museum. For more information visit pittsburghkids.org.

Saturday, March 6, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

SPARKS PARENT/CHILD WORKSHOP @ CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

The primary goal of Bronx Zoo-initiated SPARKS (Supporting Parents in Advocacy, Reform, and Knowledge in Science) is to promote parental involvement in children's science education. Children participate

in guided museum activities while parents learn tactics to engage their children in museum exhibits, the natural world around them, and scientific exploration. Parents also learn how to design science- and nature-related activities, encourage children to ask questions, and find the answers together!

For more information call 412-578-2456.

Saturday, March 6, 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

PB&J SNOWSHOE INTRO

Let's strap on our snowshoes and take off through the snowy trails of McKinley Park in Mount Oliver! We will learn all the basic techniques of snowshoeing before setting out. If there isn't enough snow to snowshoe on the trail, we'll try snowshoeing in the grass before walking along the trails. After taking to the trails around the park we will enjoy a plethora of PB&Js designed by our brave hikers! Creamy Peanut Butter and Marshmallow Fluff? Banana, Peanut Butter and Bacon? We'll need more courage for our sandwiches than we will for our hike!

Location: McKinley Park
Cost: \$5.00 non-member / \$5.00 member / \$5.00 kids / \$20.00 family. For more information visit ventureoutdoors.org

Sunday, March 21, 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

FAMILY GEOCACHING

Embark on a special mission to find hidden treasures in the park! Hand-held GPS

(Global Positioning Satellite) units will be used to locate the treasures, or "caches" in this family-friendly adventure. This is a free, drop-in activity, so show up anytime between 1:30pm-4:30pm and we'll show you how to use a GPS unit and set you on your course. Supplies are limited. No experience necessary.

Location: Mellon Park
Cost: FREE. For more information visit ventureoutdoors.org

Saturday, March 27, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

VOLUNTEER IN NINE MILE RUN

The Parks Conservancy is teaming up with the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association to restore stream bank vegetation in Frick Park, and we need your help! Visit www.pittsburghparks.org for more information.

Where: Frick Park. For more information visit pittsburghparks.org

Saturday March 27, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

MAPLE MADNESS @ BEECHWOOD FARMS

When the sap runs, it's maple syrup season! Our annual event features a pancake brunch and living history trail where the entire family can investigate the sweet mystery of turning sap to syrup.

Register online now at www.aswp.org or call 412-963-6100.
Cost: \$6 per member; \$10 per nonmember

Sunday, March 28, 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

MAKE-IT-NOW EASTER EGG @ PITTSBURGH GLASS CENTER

The Easter Bunny will be surprised to see a beautiful handmade glass egg in your basket this year. 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 15 minutes or less.

Who: Ages 10 and above
Cost: \$25
How to register: Pre-registration is not required, but we suggest that you call ahead because time slots fill up fast. Registration opens one month prior to the event date. For more details or to register call, 412-365-2145 ext. 201.

Friday, March 19

6:30 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Dr. Seuss Movie Night

Put on your PJ's and join other ECS families for a fun filled evening of Dr. Seuss movies. Snack on popcorn and see why the ECS movie nights continue to be a very popular event.

at
ECS



Everything you ever wanted to know about **snowflakes**, but were afraid to ask

BY PAUL G WIEGMAN

You have probably heard that no two snowflakes are alike. Think about that. Can it possibly be true, given the amount of snow that falls each year around the world?

There is science behind the claim and it begins with basic physics, specifically the properties of water and how it changes from gas (water vapor) to a solid (ice). When water is heated it becomes a gas, as it cools it turns back to a liquid. Below 32 degrees F it becomes a solid.

However, snow is an exception. Snowflakes are made of ice, but they skip a liquid state and form directly from a gas.

Here's how it happens. Water vapor is always present in the air, called humidity. Air at a given temperature can only hold so much water vapor. As wet air cools the excess has to go somewhere.

Think of the atmosphere as a huge cup. Not a solid cup, but one that can shrink and expand with temperature. If this atmosphere cup is filled to the brim then cooled, making it shrink, the excess water would spill over the edges. In the summer the spillage is rain. In the winter, the same water vapor changes to crystal ice and it snows.

Crystals are solids where the molecules are packed together in an ordered and repeating pattern. Ordered and repeating are the key words here.

Take a salt shaker and spill out a few grains and look at them with a magnifying glass. Each salt crystal is a cube, an ordered and repeating pattern. Crystalline water has a distinctive six-fold symmetry. No matter what kind of snowflakes is formed it is always six sided.

Snowflakes generally represented as the multi-sided, star-like, crystals. Those are only one form of snowflakes. Depending on the temperature at which they are formed, snowflakes may also fall as plates or columns. On the way through the air they can clump and form bunches of the various shapes providing even more variety.

The two, plate or column, shapes are divided into 35 different types according to snowflake experts. These include simple prisms, solid columns, hollow columns, isolated bullets, fernlike stellar dendrites, arrowhead twins, skeletal, cups, columns on plates, and crossed needles. The bullets and needles sound scary when you think about going out into the snow, but they are small and harmless.

One other necessary ingredient for a snowflake is something for the ice to attach to as it condenses from a gas to a solid. Microscopic particles of dust in the air are just the ticket. Every snowflake will



have a speck of dust at its center. The flakes are microscopic at first, but once the process starts, more water attaches to the original bit of ice and the snowflake grows, often to considerable size. Finally the flake gets big and heavy enough to fall and gravity brings the snow to the ground.

Wind, the amount of water in the air, temperature, one crystal combining with another, and a myriad of other conditions make snowflakes very complex and diverse. That complexity leads to the initial statement that "no two snowflakes are alike". Individual flakes are so intricate that it is extremely unlikely that even two in the 1 septillion of flakes that fall on the planet each year there are perfectly identical twins.

For more information about snowflakes visit www.snowcrystals.com, or look for "Ken Libbrecht's Field Guide to Snowflakes", Voyageur Press, 2006. Ken Libbrecht is a world renowned expert on snowflakes and has filled his field guide with incredible photographs.

(This article is a condensation of an article that appeared in the Pittsburgh Tribune Review, Focus Magazine, January 6, 2008.) Paul Wiegman can be emailed at pgwphotography@gmail.com.

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ECS Holiday Marketplace a success



ECS's first Holiday Marketplace in December was a resounding success! Students, parents and ECS staff members had a chance to shop from a selection of fair trade, sustainable, affordable gifts. Why fair trade? The PCO's marketplace committee decided it was important to provide socially and environmentally responsible products to support the school's mission and allow the students to make meaningful purchases for their loved ones. Through fair trade, artisans and farmers in low-income communities are able to earn an honest living, to provide for their children and to be gainfully employed in a job that brings dignity and joy.

PCO volunteers assisted each student as they selected finger puppets and musical instruments for brothers, bead kits and coin purses for sisters, paperweights and organic chocolate for dads, earrings and note paper for moms and much more. Students also had the chance to decorate gift bags and cards for their gift recipients.

Once the children had a chance to shop, many staff members and parents did their own holiday shopping. Sharon Leavitt,



parent and school nurse, enjoyed this opportunity and stated, "I feel the items available were much nicer than I have seen at other school holiday markets. In addition, I felt better about buying the items knowing that I was helping someone earn a living wage. I also think that the prices of many of the items were extremely affordable."

Parents had the option of choosing to donate the change from their child's purchase to charity. We collected approximately \$30, enough to buy a Gift of Honeybees from Heifer International.

This gift will be given to an impoverished family in another part of the world who will be able to earn income from the sale of honey, beeswax and pollen. For more information about this unique gift, go to www.heifer.org.

The PCO sends out a huge thank you to Donna Payne and Kristen Priganc for sharing their office space to accommodate the marketplace. We appreciate your generosity! We look forward to another holiday marketplace next year with an even larger selection of fair trade products.

The Charter Corner

BY CANDY SMITH

This is the first in a regular column about the particular issues charter schools face in our region and our state. If you have questions you'd like to see addressed, please e-mail them to newsletter@ecspco.org

Did you know that not everyone supports the creation of charter schools? Did you know that in Pennsylvania in order to establish a charter school, you must get the approval of the local school district? Did you know that most local school districts view charter schools as unwanted competition? They blame charter school tuition, paid from district budgets, for their financial woes. What does this all mean to the students of the Environmental Charter School (ECS)?

If you and your family are pleased with the education your child is receiving at ECS, then you should take every opportunity to tell folks about it. But most importantly you should take a few minutes to let your local, state, and even national legislators know what an amazing education your child(ren) are receiving at ECS. These decisionmakers have significant control over the continuation and growth of our school. It is our responsibility and obligation to let them know that we are pleased with ECS and support its growth.

In the next few months, ECS will be seeking approval for an expansion. It will be ever so important that we make every effort to publicly share our wonderful experiences at this school. Every one of us needs to call, email, or fax a letter to the Planning Commission, the City of Pittsburgh Council, state senators and congressmen.

If you aren't sure who your legislators are, it is easy to find out. There are many directories online to assist you with this information. The Pennsylvania Charter School Coalition has one search tool for locating your state and federal legislators; you just need to type in your home address. The website offers a wealth of information about charter schools in Pennsylvania. You may want to sign up to receive alerts regarding news and information related to charter schools.

Visit: pachartercoalition.com/main/centers/advocacy.html



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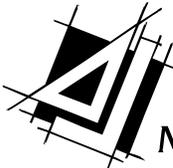
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A letter from Jon

LETTER, from page 1

grading and report cards?

Pennsylvania, in line with other states, adopted lists of skills, or standards, that students should master at each grade level. Teachers are now responsible for teaching the skills applicable to their grade level. Given the emphasis on individual standards, schools across the country are beginning to align their reporting systems to reflect key grade level skills. Instead of traditional letter grades, a standards based report card lists the core skills that students should learn in each subject area. Students are then assigned a numerical mark that indicates an advanced, proficient, basic or below basic ranking.

The central function of grading and reporting is to provide an accurate and clear picture of academic and social growth. Grading, and ultimately report cards, should certify attainment of specified learning goals or skills and furthermore indicate areas in need of additional growth. Traditional letter based report cards that historically collapse many

skills under a single heading (for example mathematics) fail to communicate progress toward mastery in individual skills. Receiving an A grade under the heading of mathematics may elicit a feeling of success but in real terms it fails to accurately communicate the progress a student has made toward mastery in specific mathematics skills.

Advantages of standards based grading and report cards

- School wide and common meaning for each grade
- Standards based grading provides a more accurate picture of student progress as measured against state standards.
- Standards based grading provides clear information about strengths and weakness of individual students.
- Standards based grading helps teachers ensure that all students are making appropriate and focused gains.
- Improves the quality of communication with parents.

I look forward to engaging with parents as we continue to refine and craft our grading and reporting systems.

Game Night

The first Game Night at ECS was a big success. Families had a great time playing games!



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Diary of the Field Guide

BY AMY BIANCO

Looking back to the beginning of November when the temperature outside was in the upper 60's, believe it or not, it clearly says in my notes, "a little chilly"! At this time, the hikes yielded a bounty of discoveries. By the time of the winter solstice, the temperature hovered around freezing dropping lower and lower until a 32 degree day seemed like a heat wave! The ECS kids were outside observing the changes in the weather, and also observing the changes and adaptations happening in the neighborhood and park. The squirrels were less active, there weren't as many chirping birds overhead, and leaves covered everything. As each week passed, we gradually changed from tennis shoes to boots and from hoodies to heavy coats. We, too, were adapting to our habitat!

For the Microhabitats hike, the kids split into groups and studied an area outlined by a loop of yarn, approx. 3 feet in diameter. It was amazing how much life could be found in that seemingly tiny space! Worms, spiders, and millipedes were common along with small green plants and fungi. Sometimes, I couldn't keep up with all of the excited shouts of everyone finding something at once! As the weeks went by, it became harder to find animals since many of them had squeezed into tighter or deeper quarters. The Microhabitats hike soon became the Find Anything Living hike. Towards the end of the unit, with the accumulation of snow, we really had to hunt to find anything which was very common only a month ago. The sow bugs are still around! They're just under the thick layer of leaves that are covered by the 5 or so inches of snow. It was cool to see where the bugs go in winter.

The Stream hike allowed us to closely observe the small stream at the bottom of Biddle Trail. At first, the water temperature was at 54 degrees and slightly colder than the air temperature. The stream bed was entirely covered with leaves on top of leaves. Among

the leaves were lots of planarians and scuds. Scuds are small crustaceans that live in the water. They look like they are swimming sideways and are also known as side swimmers. Occasionally, we would find a beetle or other insect near the water. One lucky day, Mr. Tracey's class found not one, but 2 Pisaurid spiders! They're awesome specimens in the same family as the wolf spider. These guys had a leg span wider than a quarter and could walk and hop right across the water!

As the water temperature dropped, the critters seemed to disappear. Eventually, it became cold enough for the stream to ice over. Instead of looking for bugs, we began to measure the ice layers. The thickest layer was 1 ½ inches as measured by Mrs. Cowherd's class on January 5th. We noticed that the ice was thickest where the water was still and that the water continued to run underneath even though the water temperature was below freezing. After the big snowfall, the stream was covered in white and looked like it, too, had disappeared.

For the Neighborhood hike, the kids saw the neighborhood through the eyes of animals looking for food, shelter, a water source, and space. The kids decided that a residential area could be just right for snakes, bats, mice, and hawks but might be a challenge for larger herbivores and carnivores. As winter set in and flowering plants died away, insects became scarce and then their predators became scarce. This hike shed light on food chains as well as good reasons for torpor and hibernation.

New for Unit 3, Designs, Dilemmas, and



Mr. Tracey's class found two Pisaurid spiders!



We found and measured thick layers of ice.

Development, are hikes on Tracking, Shelter Building, and a hike called Charting the Square where we'll count and graph natural and man-made structures in the neighborhood to gain insight into human interactions and construction in the natural world

10 green cleaning products

BY SARAH ANDERSON

There is a big misconception that to thoroughly clean something you have to use strong chemicals. When you use chemicals to clean, you are actually contaminating the surface. While the dirt and germs may be gone, what remains are toxic chemicals which are bad for your family and bad for the environment.

Green cleaning products are available for purchase now more than ever but it's just as easy to make your own cleaning products with common household ingredients like vinegar, baking soda, and salt. Essential oils also have great cleaning properties as well as a nice scent. Trader Joe's, Right by Nature, and East End Food Co-op all sell a variety of essential oils.

1. This all purpose soft scrub is great on bath tubs, sinks, stoves, and countertops. Mix 1/2 cup of baking soda with liquid castile soap (olive oil soap) to make a creamy paste. If you would like, add a couple drops of your favorite essential oil.

2. A great disinfecting spray which can be used in the bathroom or on counter tops is 2 cups of water, 1/4 cup of white vinegar, 1/4 tsp of tea tree oil, 1/4 tsp of lavender essential oil. Mix in a spray bottle and shake before each use.



3. To clean floors, mix in a bucket 1/4 cup of distilled white vinegar in a gallon of water. Add a couple drops of essential oil. Wash the floors then rinse with clean water.

4. For a non-toxic drain cleaner dump 1/2 cup of baking soda into the clogged drain. Follow up with 1 cup of vinegar. Let sit, then flush with boiling water. Repeat if necessary.

5. Most scented candles are made with a lot of chemicals. To make a natural air freshener, simmer cloves or cinnamon sticks in a pot on the stove. A simple clay diffuser works nicely in a sunny window. Place a couple of drops of your favorite essential oil into the diffuser, let absorb, then hang in a sunny window. The warmth of the sun will release the scent of the essential oil.



6. To clean windows, mix 2 tps of vinegar in a 1 quart spray bottle. Spray on to window and wipe clean with newspaper. Or spray club soda on the window and wipe with a linen cloth.

7. To clean toilets, pour 1/4 cup of borax in toilet, add a few drops of essential oil like tea tree oil or pine tree oil. Let sit, then scrub with a brush. Another way to clean toilets is to sprinkle the toilet bowl with baking soda, then spritz the bowl with the disinfecting spray. Let soak and then scrub.

8. Sea salt is a great to use when you need to scour something such as tough stains on stoves.

9. A great laundry booster is either baking soda or washing soda. Sprinkle about 1/2 cup into the laundry machine to whiten and brighten your laundry. Another way to lighten stains is to hang your laundry out in the sun.

10. If you run out of shampoo or instead of shampoo, mix 1-2 tbsp of baking soda in about a cup of hot water. Pour that over wet hair, thoroughly massage into scalp, rinse with water. For a natural conditioner mix about 1-2 tbsp of apple cider vinegar in a cup of hot water. Pour over hair, then rinse.

Green cleaning saves you money and is better for the environment and your family. I've been using these recipes for years now and actually enjoy cleaning with them because I know I'm not exposing my family or myself to harsh chemicals.

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

Warm Wheat Berry Salad

A wheat berry is a wheat kernel; they look very similar to brown rice. When you boil them cooked wheat berries have a chewy bite and subtle nutty, earthy flavor. They're sturdy enough to handle salad dressings and still delicate enough to taste delicious with some milk, honey and cinnamon. The Wheat berry is an entire kernel of wheat that has the germ and the endosperm still intact. Because it is whole, virtually none of the nutrients are stripped away. A cup of cooked wheat berries has about 300 calories and is packed with fiber, protein and iron. They have a slightly chewy texture and are very good for you.

INGREDIENTS FOR SALAD:

- 1 cup cooked wheat berries (or some other whole grain)
- 1/3 C celery cut into small cubes
- 1 Tbsp chopped parsley
- 1 Tbsp good olive oil
- 1 C cubed butternut squash
- 1/2 C cubed parsnip or celery root
- 1 spring onion sliced (or small sweet onion)
- 1 tsp kosher salt

INGREDIENTS FOR DRESSING:

- 2 Tbsp good olive oil
- 2 Tbsp real balsamic vinegar
- 8 sage leaves cut into thin ribbons
- 1 tsp salt
- freshly ground black pepper to taste

PREPARATION:

1. Assemble the ingredients
2. Peel, cube, slice and dice as needed
3. Boil the water for the wheat berries, and salt it well
4. Toss the hot wheat berries with celery and parsley in a large bowl.
5. Heat 1 Tbsp of good olive oil over medium heat and sauté the parsnip, the butternut squash, and onion and salt until the vegetables are soft enough to eat (but not mushy).
6. Add to bowl with wheat.

Whisk together the dressing ingredients and pour enough on the wheat and veggies, tossing gently, to lightly coat everything

This salad is an amazing side dish to any meal, or as the main entrée. It will take some prep work, but in the end it is all worth it. Wheat berries are very easy to cook. When I cook them, I treat them like pasta- boiling them until they are al dente in boiling salted water. This can take from 25-45 minutes, but is very much worth the extra time.



The Book Nook

ECS librarian **Jackie Fulton** selected the following books for ECS students and families to enjoy. They are suitable for readers from kindergarten through adulthood.

Just a Dream

(1990)

written and illustrated by
Chris Van Allsburg

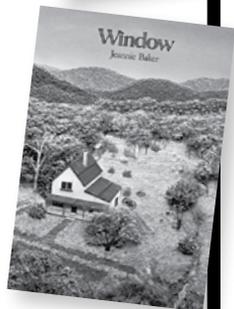
Walter does not have time for things like sorting trash and gardening because he is too busy thinking about the future. Walter imagines that, in the future, people will have machines to do everything from taking out the trash to making a snack. That seems ideal! Then he falls asleep and his dreams take him on a tour of what a world full of machines could look like. When he awakes, Walter decides to change the future by taking better care of the world he lives in right now.



Home (2004) Window (1991)

written and illustrated by
Jeannie Baker

These two wordless texts show a neighborhood through a window as it changes over the course of one child's lifetime. In *Home*, a rundown city is transformed into a green paradise by neighbors who decide to take charge. By comparison, *Window* shows what can happen to paradise when a city is created. Readers will enjoy looking closely at the pictures to notice the subtle and not-so-subtle changes that occur in just a few years.



The **world** according to ECS kids

comPOST wants to see what world looks like from the point of view of ECS students. We asked a group of 4th graders in Donna Payne's SWAP-group to write news stories and interviews.

Students didn't need much instruction — they had their own stories to tell.

Blanket Drive: Behind the Scenes with Annie R.

BY LEAH SIMPSON

Annie is in 4th grade she is 9 and came up with the drive so I decided to interview her.

Q: How did you come up with the drive?

A: Last year we were on a hike someone started screaming and there was a homeless man sleeping on a log and I cried the whole hike. That night I talked about it with my mom and Mrs. Sheaffer and that's how we started the drive.

Q: What does the drive mean to you?

A: The drive means to me whoever you are you never need to be forgotten.

Q: What is your goal for how many blankets collected?

A: Well about 40-50 would be nice

Q: How many blankets did you gather last year?

A: Around 20 blankets.

Q: Where do the blankets go after they are gathered?

A: They go to severe weather alert blanket drive.

Q: Do you believe you could make a difference with this drive?

A: Yes because homeless people will give out blankets and homeless people will stay warm under 25 degrees F



Interview of Pinocchio at Gemini Theatre

BY BEN GORMAN

Hello. I am Ben Gorman, an actor in Gemini Theater's show Pinocchio. I sat down to interview two-time actor, Jenna Panza. She actually plays Pinocchio!!

Me: Why do you like the Gemini?

Her: I like it because I am in college and I don't get to interact with kids much.

Me: Do you think your mom is a good actor?

Her: Yes. I try to learn from her a lot.

Me: What are your strengths/weaknesses?

Her: I think I am worse at singing.

Me: What do you like/dislike about acting?

Her: I don't like that we have to do it over and over, but I love all the shows and the fun of finishing a song or act.

Me: Thank you.

Controversy Corner: Global Warming and the Arctic Tundra

BY SHANE FOGARTY

Global warming is a huge threat to the arctic tundra. It is mostly caused by greenhouse gases (or so I've heard). I really don't believe in global warming.

I don't believe in global warming because:

1. I haven't seen any proof of it. Really, I haven't seen any proof at all.
2. I have heard rumors about a crazy man inventing it to get people to stop polluting. Well really only one time but from a person I trust.
3. My dad doesn't believe in it, so neither do I. I trust my dad and know that he wouldn't lie to me.
4. Other people I trust don't believe in it either. Actually a lot of people I trust don't believe in global warming.
5. Animals in Antarctica stay there and don't seem to adapt to anything. Nobody has even thought about that, so I truly don't think they would bypass that when studying global warming. The animals don't believe in it, so why should I.
6. I don't want to believe that the land of my favorite animals is melting very quickly and they haven't adapted to anything yet. They could die and it would be all because of human beings, my very own race.

Anyway, back to what I was talking about in the first place. We must stop global warming because all of the wildlife will have to adapt, and all of the important human resources will be lost in the really high ocean. That's another problem we humans face. All of the ground near the ocean will become permanently flooded. You may want to call it sunk. Really, if global warming does exist, I'm especially concerned that the puffin's life style will have to change a lot. Their really cute little birds that are really chubby but can still fly. They live in the arctic tundra and you should really check them out. Anyway, a way to prevent global warming is to turn off electricity and try not to use greenhouse gases as much.

Well I hope you consider this and try to do some more research about it. Good luck in your wondrous journey to stop global warming and save the arctic wildlife.

The Whole Story on Whole Foods

Interview with Casey Dill, Whole Foods Team Leader

BY MARCUS MITCHELL

1. **What is your job?** I am the store team leader and I am in charge of supporting 250 employees.
2. **Do you offer any indoor or outdoor classes?** Yes. We have indoor cooking classes for adults and children and we also have outdoor gardening classes for adults and children.
3. **What is your busiest day of the year and why do you think it is?** Our busiest day of the year is Christmas-eve because people are doing Christmas shopping and we also have our regular customers so we are twice as busy as usual.
4. **How is your food different**

than food at other stores? It's different because we have strict standards for quality food.

5. **How are your prices different than prices at other stores'?** Our prices are different because we sell organic food and it's a different price than non-organic foods at other stores.

6. **How does Whole Foods have a positive impact on the environment?** Whole Foods has a positive impact on the environment because 85%-90% of the waste that we generate is renewable. Also, we compost, we recycle, we have local produce, we have a community garden, and we use wind powered energy.



The Health Hero

Interview with 12-year-old Ian Harris, The Health Hero

BY PHILIPPA ZANG

The Health Hero, Ian Harris, has tried to spread the word about health. Two years ago he dressed up for Halloween as an obese Ronald McDonald, with diseases you could get from eating fast foods written all over himself.

1. **Why do you care so much about health?** Because how healthy you are [affects] your longevity and quality of life.
2. **What restaurants do you not like, and why?** I do not like restaurants that don't openly show nutritional data and serve primarily unhealthy processed foods.
3. **What projects/activities do you do to tell people not to eat unhealthy things?** For a classroom project, and this got me first place in regional's, I made a five

minute dvd about both health and environmental concerns from fast foods.

4. **How did you think of the McDonald costume?** I thought that since too many Americans are hooked on fast foods because for one thing it's cheap and a lot of us don't have a choice – it's either that or starve to death. But for people who can afford better food but choose to keep eating McDonald's, I dressed up like a fat Ronald McDonald and informed people about the dangers of eating that stuff.

6. **What do you think it told people?** I'm not sure if a lot of people understood it. One guy stuffed candy down my neck. Some people might have understood it, but not fully. But some people probably did, I mean, it looked like people were impressed.



E-Day Gets a Presidential Surprise!

BY MICHAEL LAMARK

After learning about polar bears and their melting Arctic homes, E-Day students leaped into action. With the help of the Endangered Species Action Team of the Sierra Club's Allegheny Group, the second and third graders drew pictures of polar bears and wrote letters to President and Mrs. Obama asking them to help stop climate change and save this magnificent species. The effort of the students was rewarded with an official White House letter and autographed photos from First Lady Michelle Obama! Congratulations to E-Day for taking action to help the polar bears!



The White House
November 16, 2009

Ms. Elizabeth E. Beamon
Extended Day Program
Imagine Environmental School
Post Office Box 778
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15051-0778

Dear Second and Third Grade Students:

Thank you for writing me in the White House! Your letters are so wonderful, and I appreciate the effort each one of you put into your note. As I say to my daughters, it's important to always do your best.

Many of you asked about Malia and Sasha, and I want you to know that they really enjoy living in the White House and discovering the history that surrounds them in our new home. But it's not just our home—it's your too! The White House is a place that all Americans should treasure and enjoy. You can learn more about it at www.whitehouse.gov or take a look through the rooms at www.whitehouse.gov.

So keep up the good work, and know that everything you need to accomplish your dreams is inside of you. With a lot of hard work, you can do anything!

Sincerely,
Michelle Obama



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A Different Kind of Time Out: Be Out There Resolution

This article is courtesy of the National Wildlife Federation website, www.nwf.org.

BY AMANDA COOKE

This year, National Wildlife Federation (or NWF) launched the Be Out There movement to help return to the nation's children something they don't even know they've lost—a connection to the natural world.

By making the 2010 Be Out There Resolution to spend more time outside in 2010, Americans will set a goal that's both good for their families and fun to keep. Everyone who makes the 2010 Be Out There Resolution will receive the Know, Go and Grow Be Out There Toolkit with important facts, fun tips and interactive tools to help them keep the resolution.

"To address childhood's fundamental shift indoors, we are asking parents to make the 2010 Be Out There Resolution to Know, Go and Grow," says National



Wildlife Federation's Vice President of Education Kevin Coyle. "We want them to know and understand the importance of outdoor time; to go outside more with their kids and grow the Be Out There movement by spreading the word and inviting friends along."

Children reap wide-ranging and numerous benefits when encouraged to interact with nature in an outdoor setting including better eyesight, enhanced physical fitness and less obesity, increased classroom preparedness and lower levels of stress and depression.

There's a reason they call it the great outdoors™. NWF hopes parents will show their children what that reason is by making the 2010 Be Out There resolution at www.beoutthere.org/resolution. This is one Time Out kids will actually enjoy.



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AT THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

5

QUESTIONS

Get to know an ECS community member better through 5 inane questions...this month, **William Tracey, 4th Grade Teacher**

1. You're standing in front of Simon Cowell at "Americal Idol" auditions. What do you belt out to knock his socks off, and does Randy take your side? (Or, if you've never seen the show, let's just say you're trapped in a 2-hour traffic jam with only pop music to entertain you. What are you wailing to, to keep your spirits up?)

The song that I would choose would be Journey "Don't Stop Believin". When they stopped laughing, I truly think that both Simon and Randy would throw me out and tell me singing is not for me.

2. Describe your perfect Pittsburgh day.

My perfect day in Pittsburgh would be spending time with my family.

3. What is the most unusual object in your home?

This is really a tough question. I have so many unusual things in my house. I would have to say it is a cow horn that is about 2 feet tall and sits on a stand in my living room. I have no idea why, but it looks cool.

4. What is the best thing you've learned since you started teaching?

The best thing that I have learned since I started teaching is that every child can learn.

5. Favorite spot in Frick Park, and why?

My favorite spot in Frick Park is down by the stream. I think it's just a peaceful place to find a spot to sit and reflect on the day's events.

comPOST is Seeking Volunteers

If there's something you'd like to see covered in comPOST, you can help us get it done. comPOST needs writers to help with our mission of keeping the ECS community informed of topics and issues that affect us all.

In addition, if your talents are more oriented toward organization, comPOST is looking for a new chairperson to coordinate the publishing of the newsletter. E-mail newsletter@ecspco.org if you are interested or have any questions.

comPOST

To contact us, email:
newsletter@ecspco.org

CONTRIBUTORS:

Sarah Anderson
Molly Bennett
Mike Bennett
Amy Bianco
Brian Byrd

Emily Escalante
Marla Ferrency
Heidi Green
Kirsi Jansa
Ailish Luedde

Candy Smith
Felicia Turano
paul g wiegman

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