



# Birchwood Clipboard

## The Lion's Roar

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### **August Clipboard**

#### What's New

##### **NEW TEACHING STAFF**

This year we are adding three wonderful teachers to our staff. Shannon Tagliarina will teach third and fourth grade science and math. Becky Bynum will teach Latin I & II and advanced vocabulary for grades five and six. Emily Waldal will teach the computer classes, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade graphic design elective, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Logo elective, and she will oversee those students taking C++ through Northwestern University.

Shannon Tagliarina was born and raised in Garfield Heights. After graduating as salutatorian from Garfield Heights High School, she continued her education at John Carroll University where she majored in early childhood education. Shannon earned Honor Roll each of the eight semesters, and graduated *summa cum laude* in 2005. She comes to us from Lorain Gifted Academy where she taught for two years. She has been interested in gifted education and is working towards a gifted certification through Cleveland State University.

Becky Bynum is the mother of Sophie and Nate Calabrese. Last year she monitored the work of our Latin I students. Ms. Bynum received a B.A. with honors in Greek/PlanII (liberal arts honors program) from the University of Texas at Austin. After spending three years at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Greece where she studied Greek archaeology and history, Ms. Bynum went on to earn her Ph.D. in Classics and an M.A. in Latin from the University of California, Berkeley. She has taught Latin, Greek, and courses in Greek and Roman Literature, culture and history at Berkeley (as a graduate instructor), Beloit College, Tufts University, and John Carroll University.

Emily Waldal, a Birchwood graduate, earned a Bachelor's in Information Systems from Cleveland State. She interned at *Sherwin-Williams Information Technology Center* and Cleveland State's Department of Computer Science. In addition, she has organized registration and activities for youth conferences and other events. Working together with her husband at their church, Emily coordinates childrens' activities and events. Last year, she worked as a teacher aide and helped us set up our data base systems. This year, she said she is really excited to pass on her love of computers and technology to the kids at Birchwood.

##### **ACADEMIC PROPROGRAMMING**

In our continuing effort to expand and enrich our academic programming, we are not only improving upon our core curriculum but we have added a few electives.

##### **Core Curriculum**

*Writing Center:* This year we are adding to our already distinguished writing program, a writing center headed by Mrs. Kufahl. The purpose of the writing center is twofold. First it will provide additional writing instruction to students who require remedial help and it will also offer guidance for students who excel in and enjoy writing. Second, the center will help coordinate student work for publication and writing contests.

*Latin I & II:* Last year we piloted a high school level Latin I course through Northwestern University, which was overseen by Ms. Bynum for seventh and eighth grade students. It was very successful and this year Ms. Bynum will teach Latin I & II to students who have excelled in language arts.

*Spanish I:* Similar to last year, Mrs. Rodriguez will offer high school level Spanish I to students hoping to pass out of their first year of Spanish in high school. She conducts this program alongside the Spanish language enrichment classes.

*Wood Math for pre-algebra and algebra:* The wood math program focuses on computational facility. It stresses algorithmic operations. It also allows children to progress at their own pace and without ceilings. This year, students in the elementary grades may be accelerated through the algorithmic pre-algebra and algebra skills.

*Creative Problem Solving and Future Problem Solving:* Nearly every economic and educational expert predicts that one of the most important characteristics needed for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the ability to be creative and innovative. For this reason, we are supporting our creative problem solving classes and our Future Problem Solving Program with additional teacher training and time allocations.

*Advanced vocabulary development using Greek, Latin and German roots:* This class will meet one time per week for fifth and sixth grade students. It is addressing the needs of those students who require greater challenge than our core curriculum in vocabulary development.

*Homework class:* Three days per week from 2: 40 to 3:20 we will provide homework direction for those students challenged by the organizational and focus issues in completing homework. Homeroom teachers will help students with recording assignments, organizing materials and time, and other helpful strategies.

## **ELECTIVES**

*Music:* For years we have wanted to enrich our music program because all of the research supports the fact that the study of music (especially regarding the discipline and thinking skills involved) positively influences academic success in all subjects. To this end, Mrs. Chu has added to the curriculum instrumental and voice ensembles for students in grade 5-8.

*Technology:* Students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades who have completed our technology curriculum, may elect to take one of two technology courses: graphic design or C++ through Northwestern University. Furthermore, understanding the importance of exposing children to programming early, we are offering a Logo programming class (Microworlds) for fifth and sixth grade students. Logo programming was designed by Seymour Papert at MIT specifically for children.

*Roundtable discussions:* Using the Socratic method of discussion, Mr. and Mrs. Debelak will lead students in the critical and analytical reading of various literature - historical documents, fiction, non-fiction, current issues, etc.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

We could hardly leave out the addition of air-conditioning to every classroom. The benefits of working in a comfortable environment during August and September are incalculable. A big thanks goes to Allen Deak who persevered on this project until he found something that would work.

## Summer News

### **Mrs. Alicea**

Summer is a wonderful time to continue to develop as a professional and work on projects for the upcoming school year. This school year I am teaching both reading and social studies for grades three and four. Throughout the summer I read a number of children's books, from fantasy to historical fiction, and everything in between. There are so many good books for children, and I wanted to take some time this summer to read many of the books that I didn't have time to read during the school year. I set a reading goal for myself to read 30 books this summer, and I was able to meet that goal.

I also finished reading, *The Art of Teaching Reading* by Lucy Calkins, which I had started reading last summer. Many of the ideas and best practices for the Birchwood Reading Curriculum come from that text. It was a very enlightening and enjoyable book to read, and I learned many excellent reading strategies and techniques. I also read, *Retelling Strategies to Improve Reading Comprehension*, by Darla Shaw. This book gave a number of hands on strategies and activities for both fiction and nonfiction texts, in order to help students comprehend what they read. I had the opportunity to attend a Cleveland Council of

Independent Schools (CCIS) Workshop over the summer, and the topic was: Working Effectively with Students and Families, Creating Meaningful Assessments, and Basics of Instructional Design. The CCIS Workshop not only gave me the opportunity to meet many other teachers from around the Cleveland area, but I also gained valuable information and helpful ideas.

As a new social studies teacher, I wanted to familiarize myself with the 3-4 social studies curriculum. Over the summer, I skimmed through the social studies textbooks, familiarized myself with the content areas, and updated the syllabi for the year. Furthermore, I worked on differentiating instruction for both reading and social studies. I compiled a list of gifted options and activities for students in both reading and social studies. It is such a blessing to teach at Birchwood School, and I am looking forward to the 2008-2009 school year with great expectations!

### **Ms. Brown**

I attended a SATELLITES institute this summer. SATELLITES is a NASA funded program that joins students, teachers, and research scientists in a program that uses geospatial technologies to learn science and improve student spatial abilities. The program involved a 5-day teacher institute to learn the technologies for the student field campaign in which students collect data relating to surface temperature and atmospheric conditions, conduct an inquiry-based research project, and present the research to scientists. A fellow teacher and I won first place for our inquiry that studied the relationship between the latitudes and temperatures on Mars and Earth.

I attended a JASON teacher training. JASON, originally founded by Dr. Robert Ballard, connects students with cutting-edge research and scientists. (National Geographic, the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)) JASON pioneered educational telepresence to create a "being there" experience for students to work side by side with scientists and researchers on exciting, real-world missions.

"Using Online Resources in the Middle School Science Classroom" sponsored by the Ohio Resource Center for Mathematics, Science, and Reading was another workshop that I attended.

### **Mrs. Burkholder**

With a new addition to our family last year, I decided to focus my work at Birchwood solely on the website coordination and school/parent email relations. Diving right in this summer, I discussed the pros and cons of our current website software with a variety of professionals, expert graphic designers, and the Debelaks. After weighing many different options, I decided to set a goal to switch the entire site over to HTML. This summer, I read several books (my favorite was *Build Your Own Website the Right Way Using HTML & CSS* by Ian Lloyd) and tapped into online tutorials in order to learn this new language and develop the skills necessary to begin the project. It must also be mentioned that this project is a joint effort with a Birchwood parent who has volunteered to help out. He will design the main templates for the website while I will input the varied content. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work from home and still be a part of the Birchwood staff.

**Ms. Bynum**

I spent part of the summer working up one of the new courses to be offered this fall, on the Latin and Greek roots of the English language. As Mrs. Debelak says, planning a new curriculum is a blast! There are so many great resources available online that I had a lot of fun coming up with activities that I think the students will enjoy as they learn about the thousands of English words that come from Latin and Greek, and about aspects of Greek and Roman culture such as the Olympics and mythology.

**Mrs. Chu**

This year is an exciting year for music class. I will conduct music class in some new ways, both in music classes and ensemble. I believe students will benefit from the mutual interaction between music and all other main subjects, based on the multiple intelligence theory that every student has the potential of seven multiple intelligences — verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, body/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and musical/rhythmic intelligences. By research, I found that the development of all the intelligences, along with awareness that each student differs in his/her intelligence strengths, enhances the music learning process, and vice versa. We hope to provide students a well-rounded education with opportunities to learn and develop all of the intelligences. Out of the seven intelligences, music is one of the most basic and fun ways to develop the skills of reading, thinking, counting, analyzing, and memory.

**Mr. Debelak**

I have prepared materials for the Wood Math program so that it now is a comprehensive program up through pre-Algebra and Algebra.

**Mrs. Debelak (in role of Director of Curriculum and Special Programs)**

When we first developed curriculum for Birchwood in 1984, we drew heavily from the research in the field of gifted education that emphasized development of human potential. We have always held that these findings were applicable to all children. Having a view to refresh our staff in these principles, I researched current best practices in the field of gifted education and planned the teacher workshops for the year. In the back-to-school workshop, I reviewed the literature with teachers and together the staff confirmed that we continue to implement many of the important findings. Furthermore, I have guided each staff member in a summer-long project to articulate the opportunities for enrichment and acceleration in all subjects across the span of grade levels. The staff produced excellent models that were shared in teacher workshops.

Other topics in our back-to-school workshops:

- Enhancing creative problem solving in the classroom which will equip our children for a future requiring innovation in society and personal life
- Solidifying our scope and sequence of topics for our inspirational opening time.
- Collaboration among teachers in the uses of technology in the classroom

**Mrs. Debelak (Reading Teacher)**

Mrs. Jackson and I worked to create “worlds of inquiry” in the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> reading classroom. Our thrust is to encourage nonfiction reading and make it a life-long habit. Also, to practice what I preach, I immersed myself in good books to stay fresh and passionate.

**Mrs. Jackson**

I had a busy, exciting summer. I completed the course, “Making the Match: The Right Book at the Right Time for the Right Reader: Grades 4-12” through the American Librarian’s Association, and discovered many new titles to recommend to Birchwood students. In addition to reading great books, I established Birchwood School’s first Moodle site, a website for teachers to allow students to explore, create, and review content related to what is happening in the classroom. I am still experimenting and playing with Moodle, and the sixth grade reading class will soon join me, using Moodle on Thursdays this year.

**Mrs. Kufahl**

In the spring, I requested sample copies of a new grammar, vocabulary, and writing series for gifted students written by Michael Clay Thompson. The books focus on simplifying grammar concepts and presenting them in an orderly way, teaching vocabulary by memorizing Latin roots, and building writing skills by consecutively studying the sentence, the paragraph, and the essay. I will incorporate select elements of the program into my lesson plans this year with the consideration for adopting much more of the program the following year. In addition, I spent time familiarizing myself with the state language arts standards, benchmarks, and indicators for grades 3-5. This was mainly in preparation for teaching at a new grade level this fall. Finally, I attended a helpful one-day professional development workshop for CCIS teachers and also took two evening computer classes at my local library.

**Mrs. Kutis**

Art plays an integral part in the learning process and students of art will often learn, discover and develop skills that will follow them throughout life. I truly believe that it is a mistake to overlook, downplay or completely discard the Fine Arts as part of the curriculum in schools. Often, children who struggle in the day-to-day activities in the classroom thrive in the Arts, as they display creativity, higher level thinking skills, problem solving skills and ingenuity. All children show great pride in their creations when the time is taken and the effort is made, so as a parent please note on what day your child has Art and ask to see what they made, you may be pleasantly surprised!

**Mrs. McNaughton**

Research has begun in an effort to present our physical education curriculum to Birchwood students as an opportunity to develop life long habits of health and fitness. The Physical Education teachers have been studying philosophy, standards, and goals laid out in a variety of studies including state and national panels and reports. I’m looking forward to implementing some new strategies in class in an attempt to encourage the value of physical activity as it relates to the students health, enjoyment, self-expression, and social interaction.

**Mrs. Miller**

This summer had a couple of highlights as a teacher. During the week of June 15-19, I was at the University of Maryland for the National History Day competition. With two Birchwood students, Oliver D and Anirudh D, as well as my own children competing, it

was an exciting time. I was the lead judge for one of the preliminary individual documentary rooms. That was a very challenging, yet rewarding, experience.

At the end of July, I attended the Buckeye Council for History Education conference in Columbus. The theme was on the individual in history, which coincides with this year's History Day theme. The conference was very interesting, with a mix of talks on historical topics as well as practical helps for teaching history in the classroom. The summer also provided a chance to get caught up on reading various professional journals.

### **Sra. Rodriguez**

During part of the summer, I was planning on how to make my classes more interesting so that my students really enjoy them. I came up with the idea of "Palabras y Mas Palabras", which is a series of games with different difficulty levels. This game is to improve their vocabulary and compete against each other. I also read several articles about teaching a foreign language, and I selected activities for our Annual Spanish Program where we will present Peru. In addition, I participated in a conference taught by Dr Davis about classroom activities as creating and offering opportunities to learners for learning.

I am very happy to teach Spanish at Birchwood School and to have an opportunity to give the best of me to your children.

### **Mr. Sprau**

I spent time this summer reading about Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a condition that affects between 3 and 7 percent of school-age children. ADHD stems from a fundamental deficit in the manner in which children learn to control their impulses and regulate their own behavior. However, these problems are not perfectly defined and often manifest themselves in different ways. A lot of research has been done and great advances have been made in understanding ADHD from a physiological perspective. Unfortunately, there is still somewhat of a stigma that is associated with the disorder. Getting educated about ADHD is probably the best way to undo this stigma and the myths that produced it. I benefited from the book, *Taking Charge of ADHD*, by Dr. Russell A. Barkley. It is primarily for parents, yet as a teacher I was also able to glean valuable suggestions for use in the classroom.

### **Mrs. Sprau**

The focus of my summer professional development was my reading program. As I do every summer, I read more than 25 children's books ranging from beginning readers to advanced avid reader club selections. My favorite newly discovered series was the historical fiction collection, *Time Spies* by Candace Ransom. I'll be introducing these and other books to my classes this fall.

To help students and parents find quality books to read and enjoy, I am setting up a reading blog which will highlight books written on first to fifth grade reading levels. It will also include answers to reading questions frequently asked by parents.

To round out my summer education, I attended two presentations. The first was "Writing Picture Books for Children," given by Lynne Berry, a children's author. Although the majority of the presentation was for adults, Mrs. Berry did give tips on how to teach children to write thoughtful stories. I will also be receiving her monthly newsletter for teachers.

The second presentation I went to was a guided hike of Cleveland's AsiaTown led by Metroparks Naturalist Min Keung. This ties in with my social studies units on neighborhoods and Asia. Min Keung introduced us to several businesses in AsiaTown and gave insight on feng shui and other folk religion practices of the Chinese people.

### **Mrs. Tagliarina**

I am thrilled to be teaching at Birchwood this coming school year! Over the summer, I completed two online courses offered by Cleveland State University. Both courses helped further my goals of obtaining a certificate in gifted education and a master's degree in curriculum and foundations. The first course, EGT517 "Creativity, Inquiry, and Productive Thinking," provided me with many strategies for helping students think deeply, creatively, and critically. These strategies will be useful in the science, math, and critical thinking classes I will teach. The second course I took was EGT519 "Using Computers with Students with Gifts and Talents." This course opened my eyes to many technological programs, free software, and possibilities for technology integration in the classroom. EGT519 also reiterated the importance of learning through technology for children who will one day become leaders in a global society that continues to grow technologically.

Finally, I attended a one-day workshop sponsored by the Cleveland Council of Independent Schools. A few topics covered were teaching using Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, how to communicate effectively with parents, and the nature of independent schools. This was a productive summer, and I have definitely grown as a professional.

### **Mrs. Tzeng**

Over the summer, all alumni and current Birchwood families received a letter from me soliciting stories, essays, and poems. I am collecting and compiling a book of student writings that have won recognition from magazines or contests the past twenty-five years. The book will be an endeavor to commemorate the school's twenty-fifth anniversary.

### **Mrs. Waldal**

I spent this summer brushing up on my LOGO programming skills, and developing lesson plans for the new programming class for 5 & 6 grades. I found a lot of creative projects created by kids all over the world; I was able to develop projects that will challenge the kids to use problems solving skills and be creative. Birchwood also got ten new laptops so I've been configuring them and installing software, as well as getting the 4th grade lab setup for class. Also in my other computer class I've been looking for ways to coordinate with various classroom teachers for more applications to the lessons.

## **FROM RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE:**

### Planning for Academic Success

Academic success should not be left to chance. We can plan for it. According to the work of Albert Bandura (Stanford University scholar and author of *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*) academic success is directly related to what children *believe* about themselves and their abilities (self-efficacy). In fact, self-efficacy is a greater predictor of academic success than intelligence and talent. Bandura cites four components that help shape self-efficacy.

First, children need a consistent history of academic success beginning at a young age. A positive history of academic success informs the child's self-concept and self-worth. It is the work of parents and teachers to provide children meaningful academic challenges and then to help them with the work habits and attitudes that lead to success. Collaboration between home and school plays an important role in establishing levels of challenge and nurturing productive work habits.

Second, children learn habits of success from "vicarious experience," that is, from role models in history, society and family. When we point out excellent role models, we are, in effect, inscribing visual images in the children's minds that can speak to them long into the future.

Third, positive self-efficacy is nurtured in an environment that respects, encourages and rewards success. Parents and teachers should readily acknowledge and verbally award children's efforts that lead to academic achievement. In effect, we should "catch" them working hard and then support their efforts with strengthening words. Furthermore, children should be among peers who value learning and support one another's efforts to become successful.

Finally, Bandura notes, "people live in a psychical environment that is primarily of their own making." Due to our emotional, psychological and even physical state, reality is often what we believe it to be rather than what it actually is. Productive people learn to engineer their internal conversations. Even at a young age children can learn how to manage their moods, attitudes and even physical condition (it is a physical challenge to sit at a desk and complete homework) so that they can focus their efforts toward academic achievement.

Teachers and parents should take academic success out of the hands of chance and place it on a path of design.