



Birchwood Clipboard

The Lion's Roar

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Special Program Highlights

New Addition Expands our Programs

We are still giddy about the added space and how much it will enhance our academic program. Here are some initial highlights:

- Our first Kindergarten is running smoothly within a cozy happy environment. It has taken awhile to establish routines and assess abilities, but this is a very bright group of children so the next step is to let the children take off. In the mornings students will be working on ability levels especially in math, reading and writing, while in the afternoon they will be repeat lessons in Spanish!
- Our foreign language room has the capacity to accommodate both our Spanish and Latin programs. The students enjoy traveling to a special room for foreign language and the teachers enjoy the flexibility and space that enhances learning.
- Ms. Tagliarina, teaching science in grades 1-4, is enjoying her dedicated science classroom and lab. Her room buzzes with excitement.
- Mr. Sprau, teaching math in grades 1-4, also enjoys a dedicated classroom filled with math manipulatives, software and activities for a wide range of abilities.
- Ms. Brown is using two rooms for upper grade science: a classroom for instruction and a lab for demonstrations and experiments. Look for her articles in this issue discussing the range of investigations going on.
- The Future Problem Solving Program, the international problem solving competition, now meets in the creativity and innovation room where they can spread out their research and investigation this year's topics: Sensory Overload, Invasive Species, Orphaned Children, Food Distribution. If you can come in to speak on any of these topics, we invite you to do so! Research is a key to innovative thinking.
- Music programming continues to blossom in the new site: classes, electives, music lessons, and a school choir. It is a joy to walk through the hallways on Monday afternoons and listen to the variety of music lessons in four different rooms.
- In this new building even the parents have their own room, and they have been working hard to set up a wonderful environment for work, communication and camaraderie. Thank-you parents! The turn-out at the September meeting was terrific. The space affords a wonderful way to meet other parents and create a sense of community as we work together to raise our children.
- The art and physical education teachers have room to expand their programs. Already the halls are lined with art projects and students are working on their sit-ups goals for the first quarter.
- The teacher resource room is a center for planning and meetings both for our staff and for parents/teachers in and beyond Birchwood. See the attached list of monthly meetings on educational topics of interest to parents and teachers.

Special Opportunity for Parents

Parents! Would you like to become a judge at one of our academic competitions – History Day, Power of the Pen, Future Problem Solving? It is intellectually stimulating and a great way for you to help your own child. If you are interested, let Mrs. Debelak know. We are scheduling an informational meeting to explain further.



Class News

Art: Mrs. Kutis, Summer Professional Development

I attended a two day Urban Conference where I participated in a Seminar called “Reaching for Optimum Success with Every Child.” I learned various study skill techniques for students. This seminar also presented ways on how to create bully free classrooms and ways to address the unique needs of the gifted student. Several tips and strategies for better classroom management were investigated and discussed in this seminar. In mid June, I took a six-week online course about Islam, the second largest religion. The course also discussed not just the religion but culture and history as well. Taking a course in Islam gave me a better appreciation and understanding, rather than getting information from the news media that is often misleading. I spent a little free time knitting and completing some around the house projects that had been put aside. My husband and I also spent the last half of July in Canada relaxing and doing some photography.

Gym

The American Cancer Society Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines suggest that children and adolescents engage in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity at least 5 days per week. In order to help students to reach this goal this quarter we have begun the Sit-Up Challenge. The response has been fantastic! The 6th grade students are in the lead with 21,220 sit-ups, followed closely by the 8th graders, and holding the third spot is the 2nd graders. This challenge will end with the first quarter, and a new challenge will begin.

Music: Folk Music and Songs

The subject of music this year is “Folk Music,” which presents the Folk lore stories in music form and matches the poetry show of the reading class. If you would like to know the details of Folk music, please visit Mrs. Chu’s webpage at: <http://www.birchwoodschool.org/chu>. In brief, folk music is one of the great human heritages and bears the remarkable cultures and brilliant colors of communities or nations. What is Folk music? Well, it could be “old songs, with no known composers”, or “the music by the ethnic group or community with its folk character.” This year I would like to get the students acquainted with the history and key composers of folk music, and usher them into enjoyment of folk music both of the past and of the present. I will walk them through forms including ballads,

children songs, carols, patriotic songs, sea shanties, war songs, and work songs, and stir up their appreciation of how the folk music composers adapt various kinds of instruments, classical and modern, into their works. I believe this year they will enjoy the journey of folk music throughout centuries by listening to the music, singing the songs, and playing instruments with the music.

Kindergarten

During the first two weeks of school, we spent time becoming acquainted with each other and working out routines for the class. Activities included:

- building relationships between the teacher and students, and among the students with each other;
- learning classroom and school rules;
- becoming acquainted with the building and the staff;
- and assessing student strengths and talents, to determine instruction paths and methods.

K-Reading/Writing/Language

For reading and writing related activities, Mrs. Sprau teaches phonics, sometimes individually and sometimes in a group of two or three students. During this time, the rest of the class works on “directionality.” In other words, they practice making appropriate pencil strokes to form lower case letters.

In addition, each student writes a daily journal in which he/she expresses his or her own interests and activities. They do this at their own pace.

K-Math

The math part of the morning has included such activities as:

- working on logical thinking problems,
- classifying objects,
- comparing and measuring objects;
- and making patterns.

The students also count objects they see. Some of the children can count up to 30; others count up to 100. But they are all learning, and they all enjoy resolving challenging problems.

K-Spanish

The afternoon session is devoted to Spanish. Already the children have learned several Spanish songs and games, to help them become familiar with the language. They are



starting to read basic words about family members and colors, and they like to count in Spanish.

They play number bingo using bilingual matching cards. Also, during snack time, the students and teacher use Spanish to ask and tell the number of crackers they want to eat. They use these times to practice rules and phrases of courtesy, such as: "I would like...." "Thank you." And "Please."

1-2 Computer

The first few weeks of computer class we covered a lot. We discovered the parts of the computer, we started to learn where the keys are on the keyboard. We also discovered Microworlds, a kids programming language that builds logic and math skills by giving instructions to the turtle that moves around the screen. Next we will be exploring online games to help reinforce skills learned in other classes.

1-2 Language Arts

One of the highlights of the week is reading the children's creative writing stories. Each Wednesday, we read a story in class then brainstorm ideas of how we could make some creative changes to the story's setting or characters. This task, called "modeling," allows the children to exercise their own creativity without having to produce their own story from scratch. This lays a good groundwork for their future writing endeavors.

1st Math

The year has gotten off to a great start and it is encouraging to see how enthusiastic the first graders are for math! We have been working on building number sense and familiarity and addition and subtraction skills. We have also done some counting strategies, skip counting, odd and even numbers and ordinals. The children are currently learning about surveys; why and how they are taken, how they are used, and how tally tables are used to construct bar graphs to display the data from the survey.

2nd Math

The second graders are also working on building their number sense, which includes numbers all the way into the hundreds of thousands. Our "purple group" has had a simple introduction to pre-algebra, learning how exponents are used in equations and finding the value of basic expressions. Three days a week we spend class time working on Wood Math, which really helps to build

computational skills. The students work very diligently on their packets and all are making great progress.

1-2 Reading

The first and second graders are being whisked away by the magic of fairy tales. We are reading classic versions of European stories and comparing and contrasting them with classic versions from other countries (eg. *The Brocaded Slipper* from Vietnam) and with modern American versions (eg. *The Gingerbread Cowboy*). The children are becoming adept at identifying the components of fairy tales such as magic, royal characters, good and evil and the pattern of three.

1-2 Science

Ms. Tagliarina, Summer Professional Development

Over the summer, I continued to work toward my Master's degree in Curriculum and Foundations by completing two courses online through Cleveland State – "Educational Research" and "Working with Gifted Students, Their Families, and Other Professionals." These courses also move me a step closer to obtaining a certification in Gifted Education.

In the Classroom: It's going to be an exciting year in first and second grade science! This year, the focus is life science. Some of the topics we'll cover are: animals, including vertebrates, invertebrates, food chains, life cycles, extinction, and dinosaurs; habitats, including water, plains, deserts, woodlands, and prehistoric lands; plants, including life cycles, leaves, and trees; and health, including human anatomy, exercise, food and diet, and hygiene.

We'll begin the year by discussing the differences between living and non-living things. Then we'll focus on vertebrates in the animal kingdom. During September and part of October, students will complete a Vertebrate book. The book will consist of five sections, one for each of the different animal groups (mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds and fish). Beginning in October, students will also have the opportunity to complete the Delta Education Learning Module "Observing an Aquarium." In this module, "students build and maintain an aquarium that becomes, over several weeks, a diverse underwater ecosystem. Students can observe food chains, how populations change, and how life cycles unfold. One by one, organisms are introduced into fresh water habitats: two types of aquatic plants, tropical fish, pond snails, algae,



and tiny crustaceans called daphnia. Students examine each one to discover how it is suited to life under water.” I’m excited to encourage each student’s curiosity this year and help them discover the amazing world around them through science!

1-2 Social Studies

The first and second graders finished a unit on safety in September. They learned about safety at home, on the playground, and while traveling. The children practiced what they learned by conducting a home fire drill and by participating in class and school fire drills. They also made fire and home safety posters and pet safety lists to teach others safe practices.

1st Spanish

The first graders have been working on greetings and polite words such as Hello, how are you? What is your name? How old are you? Please, Thank you, and See you later. They practiced answering the questions until they were familiar with the question and response. At the end of the month I spoke a phrase and they found the proper picture. They learn Spanish songs with Plim Plim and Plom Plom the two Spanish clowns whose make the children laugh and learn at the same time.

2nd Spanish

The second graders learned numbers up to 20. They counted objects, learned number words, resolved math problems and wrote the Spanish number words in the puzzle. Later they worked on colors, played the game “Veo Veo” to differentiate colors, and they found words in a word search.

3-4 Art: see “Art”

3-4 Computer

In computer class we learned the parts of the computer and started learning to create documents in Microsoft Word. We started to learn to type properly and figure out basic programming in Microworlds 2.0, a kids programming language. Next we will learn about Microsoft Excel and Internet safety.

3-4 Gym: see “Gym”

3-5 Language Arts

Mrs. Kufahl, Summer Professional Development

Over the summer I worked to catch up on reading educational journals. I also read a book about discipline protocol in the classroom by a presenter whose seminar I had attended in the spring. Many of the ideas were helpful, and the result is a quieter and more orderly learning environment.

In the Classroom: The third and fourth graders have completed their first essay contest entries on a topic of their choice. These will be submitted for judging by early next week. The fifth graders successfully finished a grammar unit on prepositions. They have also been writing a story per week modeled after the work of well-known children’s authors.

3rd Math

Our “blue group” has been working on number sense to the millions, which is a lot of digits to keep track of. They have done estimation by rounding, comparing and ordering larger numbers, and writing numbers in different forms, such as expanded, word, and standard. The “purple group” has been learning the basics of algebra, such as balancing equations and leaning to write expressions.

One point of emphasis this year will be computational fluency, especially with the basic facts. Each week we will do fact “speed drills.” The goal is that, by the end of the third grade, the children would be able to complete 50 addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts in 2 ½ minutes. Quite a challenge, but I think they will be up to it!

4th Math

After some review of place value of whole numbers, the “green group” began working with decimals. This can be a challenging concept, because it involves values that are equivalent to fractions. However, they realized that decimals are also a part of our daily lives, such as when we deal with money or timed events, such as races. After leaning to compare decimals, the children are now working on problem solving with decimals. The “magenta group” is also working with decimal problem solving. One day they had to calculate the payroll of several employees of a fictitious company. They soon realized that one little mistake in computation can cause big trouble. The children also did some work with pre-algebra, learning the order of operations and how to apply algebraic properties to solve equations.

3-4 Music: see “Music”



3-4 Science

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In the Classroom: Third and fourth grade science is all about life this year – animals, plants, and health. Some of the major topics we'll cover are categorizing life, vertebrates and invertebrates, animal adaptations, ecosystems, seed plants, body systems, healthy eating habits, and healthy living habits.

We began our studies by learning about the five kingdoms into which all living things (a.k.a. organisms) are grouped. Next we learned about the building blocks of all these living things – cells. We learned about some parts of cells and, in the process, discovered how plant and animal cells are alike and different. The students really enjoyed making an edible model of an animal cell!

Once we finished at the microscopic level, we reviewed the difference between vertebrates and invertebrates and began an in-depth study of vertebrates. We're learning about the five groups of vertebrates and their characteristics, including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians and reptiles. Students are currently working on Whale Brochures that highlight characteristics of whales and touch on whale endangerment. I'm looking forward to a great year full of discovery!

3-4 Social Studies

Hello all! My name is Mrs. Samulak, the 3rd and 4th Social Studies teacher. For those of you who don't know me, I was the Math and Science teacher for 3rd and 4th, but took off a year to have a baby. I am so happy to be back, enjoying once again the opportunity to work with your children.

This year has started with a whirlwind of activities for the students. In the 3rd grade we've had fun creating our community mobiles, showing the different communities we belong to, from family, city, state, country, and finally, the world. With the map skills portion of the curriculum, we had fun constructing our very own paper globes (currently hanging up in the classroom) and using them to

practice our map skills. We are currently working on creating our own communities, using the information on communities that we've learned thus far, and displaying them on poster boards to present to the class. A guest speaker came to share with the class an African community, with a wonderful display of pictures and items to help visualize the culture and land of the community. If there are any parents who would like to come in and share on an international community we would love to have you. Please don't hesitate to email me.

Coming up in October: a field trip to the Plain Dealer for a guided tour of the facility.

In the 4th grade we've started off the year with a group study of the different regions of the country, forgoing the brief intro to each region from the text (ch.2) and instead having each group give an intro through presentations on their assigned regions. Not only did this give students the opportunity for a more in-depth study of their region, but also to present what they learned about their region to the rest of the class with the use of visual aids (posters). We have been learning about the Southeast Region of the United States of America, and will continue with the Northeast Region in October.

3rd Spanish

They learned numbers to 39 and the number words. They identified the word and they wrote the numerals. They also worked on greetings and roll-played with a partner until they memorized the words.

4th Spanish

They students worked on number words up to 16. They pronounced and recited the numbers and matched the word. With numerals they counted objects and resolved math problems. The students learned greetings and polite words and completed a crossword puzzle.

5-6 Art: see "Art"

5-6 Computer

We started the year with an initial typing test and will continue to improve typing skills using an online typing program called TypingWeb.com. We have also set up e-mail accounts for school use. After a little instruction the students are writing each other and adding friends to their address books. Next we will learn how to send files using attachments. The e-mail accounts are free through



gaggle.net. Mrs. Waldal monitors student e-mail accounts using a number of filters which search through the student's e-mail and alert directly. We will be covering more advanced topics in Microsoft Word and Excel in the next few weeks.

5-6 Computer - Logo Programming

We have a special elective based on Logo, a programming language for kids, where "turtles" can be given instructions to move and perform commands. In Logo class we first concentrated on learning about procedures: the basic building blocks of a program. Once we have the basic procedures written we start to add more procedures and functions in our programs. We are discovering how a simple change in a procedure changes how the turtle moves and how the program works.

5-6 Gym: see "Gym"

5th Language Arts: see 3-5 Language Arts

6-8 Language Arts

Students are spending several weeks on memoir writing, capturing slices of moments in their lives. For the first few weeks, the students were "marinated" in the genre by reading different published pieces. Other pieces were read to them, allowing them to hear the lilt of the language. This immersion allowed them to know what constituted the genre, paving the way for their own writing. Some of the students' memoirs may be showcased in the Birchwood School Gallery of Writing, in collaboration with the National Day of Writing with the National Council of Teachers of English, slated to open on October 20.

5-6 Language Arts - Vocabulary Enrichment

The fifth grade students have taken up the challenge of learning lots of new words that have Latin and Greek roots, and are showing great curiosity about the history of both individual words and the English language itself.

In their second year of enrichment, the sixth graders are using a new, more challenging workbook that requires them to understand the meanings and usage of unfamiliar words in greater depth than last year, and to use them in various creative-writing exercises.

5-8 Math

The first month of school is always hectic because we are trying to sort out initial placements for the year. So

much can change during the summer. Some students hit a surge of intellectual development and suddenly must be placed far ahead in their studies. Others are on a plateau and need frequent review of various topics. In either case it is important that students are placed on an instructional level – challenged but not overwhelmed. Parents are welcomed to weigh in on placement decisions.

5-6 Music: see "Music"

5-6 Reading

Over this past summer, Mrs. Jackson has been hard at work creating Birchwood's new school library. She has also been working on her master's degree, designing and tweaking programs for students all while keeping abreast of the best new books for our new library. Already this quarter students have created graphic novels based on Silverwing, penned original fairy tales, and explored many engaging and exciting tales ranging from Hatchet and Treasure Island to Gregor the Overlander. Students are also trying to figure out the mystery in our class read aloud for both fifth and sixth grades, When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead. We have also started working on our poetry show selections. Mrs. Jackson is looking forward to a wonderful year exploring and reading with all of you!

5th Science

Science class has been a learning and application of scientific skills. First they measured themselves (centimeters, of course). Next they observed and communicated their observations of silica gel and had a chance conduct mini experiments, combining it with other ingredients to see how the silica reacted. The created tables and recorded their observations of salt, sugar and a mystery element, grew simple crystals and tried to identify a mystery element. With the help of Mrs. Stewart's Bluing they grew larger salt crystals.

Last week they "grew" alligators and fish (made of a polymer that absorbs water); that involved measuring, weighing, and charting daily growth. Entering the data on a spreadsheet, graph, a group report and presentation of their findings are the last steps. Besides all this, they did one lesson in the text book and tested minerals.

The class wants to thank the Balics for bringing Jitterbug and Bob the hermit crabs, the Bartletts for the fancy guppies, and the Kumars for the fancy snails. They have provided numerous opportunities for the students to observe, study, and interact with the animals.



6th Science

Students reviewed the scientific method in the textbook and practiced it with their own experiments on pendulums. It was hard stopping them, the students, that is. Several stayed in during a break and a study hall because they wanted to test another variable. Soon they will finish their chromatography experiments. Afterwards each group will summarize and present their research to the class. In their current unit they are studying populations and communities as parts of ecosystems.

5th Spanish

The fifth graders were working with greeting and polite expressions and practice simple conversations. They worked with number words and learned big numbers. They studied the days of the week and months of the year. The children were able to identify their birthday and holidays.

6th Spanish

The sixth graders use a text book called Paso a Paso and work with a partner in order to practice conversations. The first conversation was about how to introduce themselves and create dialogues. They learned vocabulary about objects of the classroom and practices the skills of translation.

7-8 Art: see “Art”

7-8 Computer

This year we have a new elective option in computer class all about blogging and learning Web 2.0 tools. Once students have passed the typing test they are eligible to create their blog. In this elective the students set up a personal blog through Edublogs.org. They are able to post as often as they like on a topic of their choice. I will be teaching a variety of different tools and plugins to enhance student blogs and reflect our different views of the world. This is becoming a great way for students to discover areas of the internet useful for learning and develops skills important for high school. We will also share websites and tools come across that are useful in other classes. We will also spend a lot of time talking about what is appropriate to post online. I encourage all parents to visit your child’s blog often and comment on what they write. We spent time setting up student email accounts for school use through gaggle.net. I monitor the blogs daily and e-mail accounts are monitored by keyword filters.

7-8 Gym: see “Gym”

7-8 Language Arts

SEE 6-8 Languages Arts

7-8 Latin I

In our new foreign-language room, students are building on the impressive foundation laid down by Mrs. Tzeng’s grammar lessons and enthusiastically learning the basics of Latin grammar.

7-8 Leadership Class

Service begins at home. To cultivate our hearts and minds to serve others, the seventh and eighth graders are starting right here in our school. After surveying the needs, students signed up for areas of service. As part of training in leadership, they will practice the ideas of responsibility, the exercise of freedom, and being the kind of person others want to follow. The areas of service include classroom aides, library, gardening, school store, Campbells/Boxtops program, teacher aides, safety, computer maintenance, and inspirational openings for younger students. Thanks 7th and 8th graders!

7-8 Math: see 5-8 Math

7-8 Music: see “Music”

7th Reading

Our first unit on Irene Hunt set the tone for thoughtful discussions and writing for the year on the theme of growing up in the face of difficulties. This group had amazing insights on the values to be learned from traveling “up a road slowly” and understanding that there are “no promises in the wind”. We were privileged to have a speaker on the topic. Mr Psarto, Alexander’s grandfather, came in to talk about the Great Depression. He highlighted the need for embracing change, treasuring the value of family and friendship in the midst of hardship, and reflecting on both the good and the bad that comes along in life. Himself a published author and poet, he also spoke on the great literary quality he found in the author, Irene Hunt, and was able to highlight a key subtext point in the book for us. That was fun because we had also analyzed the turning points in the novel.

Mr. Psarto also listened while the class shared their first poem/art project. This project centered on our names and our interests. You are invited to view these fine works which are displayed in the front our classroom. Note: Students



have grasped they can sidetrack the teacher if they bring up wonderful words.

One major line this quarter will be learning to be both a reflective person and a critical thinker through journal writing. Harriet in *Harriet the Spy*, is a great diary writer and model for writing our way through our problems. Side by side with the novel, we are reading notable historical diaries and journals in history such as *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, and the diaries of soldiers and pioneers. The latter will also prime us for primary source reading for History Day. Fearless readers in training!

8th Reading

In the first weeks, students gained an appreciation for how books at higher levels have more complex settings, plots and characters. In our first unit on world historical fiction, setting and historical context are crucial elements to understanding plot. This pushes the demand for careful reading and for knowing when it is important to adjust rate or reading style depending on the purpose for reading. *The Trumpeter of Krakow* is an award winner set in medieval Poland. Eventually we pulled out atlases, encyclopedias and dictionaries to figure it all out. We've had to set up charts to perceive the in-depth characterization of the main characters. Some lively debates ensued once we uncovered these character complexities. Following the class book, students will practice these skills with books of choice in this genre. Solid History Day projects also must place their topic in context.

The class enjoyed literature extension projects from the "split" group. Shawki, LuLu and Ben gave rich power point presentations on their book plots; Grant prepared a creative poster talk on his novel; and, Nathan gave a talk on *Walden Pond* by Thoreau.

7th Science

Seventh grade students studied matter to find the difference between mixtures and pure substances and the physical and chemical properties to describe them. They spent much time in the lab using the triple balances and graduated cylinders to measure density of different materials. They successfully separated water into two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen—electrolysis of water, a chemical change. It was a bit messy, but they were able to see the chemical change in turning milk into glue and how filtering actually worked. They learned about the 5

states of matter and how they change when energy is either added or removed.

8th Science

By the time students reach eighth grade, they know how to conduct their own investigations. They began with pendulums and presented their research via power point presentation. Later they conducted a short investigation to study radish seed germination. One group of students spent a week conducting a project of their own choosing while the other group delved into the first two chapters on cells and cell processes.

7th Spanish

The seven graders have the text book *Juntos* that means a journey together. They will study three units this year. The first one is *Mexico Hoy*, the second one is *Texas conservando la Herencia Hispana* and the last one is *Puerto Rico, Isla del Encanto*. They worked on "Bienvenidos" *Welcome to the Spanish World* and "Encuentros," an introductory unit that teaches essential communicative themes such as: At the airport. Where is..? What is your name? How are you? Where are you from? How old are you? And What do you like to do?

8th Spanish

During this month we reviewed the irregular verbs Ser-Estar-Tener-Haber-Ir in three tenses, present, imperfect and preterite. Another activity was to conjugate verbs according to the subject pronouns. The students won't use the text book *Juntos* until the intensive program is completed.

Math competitions

At Birchwood, all students participate in state, regional and math competitions. I take time each week to teach strategies for solving complex word problems. Sometimes I will review previous competition tests and illustrate how to attack each problem. Other times we will cover specific topics like counting & probability, plane & solid geometry, or number theory. Often for students who show exceptional interest in these problems (actually they are a lot of fun) and wish to perform well on the upcoming competitions, I will prepare special materials for them to use at home or during their free time.



Competency and Motivation

Part I

Welcome to the 2009-2010 school year and another series of short essays designed to make research and historical precedents applicable to the day-to-day tasks of raising great children. Our discussions this year will focus on issues of competency and motivation. Competency is verified ability. It is based upon what we have really accomplished. Competency leads to efficacy, the realization that we are effective in life and from here we develop our sense of personal value. Motivation describes internal drive. When motivated, we are roused to action and productivity. Together, competency and motivation help shape our sense of self-worth.

Since the late 1950's research in the field of human development has recognized that the need for competence is innate. We humans want to be able to do things, and once we can do something we want to get better at it. Robert W. White (1959), a pioneer in this field, suggested that to develop as a human being is to attain greater competence. As competency increases we feel satisfied and fulfilled.

We frequently see this phenomenon played out in children. One of my grandchildren is a two-year old toddler, Jonah. During his last visit he established his competency for throwing away rubbish for "Papachuck." I would give him a piece of crumpled paper from my desk. I assigned him a never-before-attempted task of throwing the paper away in a rubbish container. I said, "Jonah, throw this in the rubbish can." He gave me a puzzled look. I repeated the request, pointed at my crumpled paper, and motioned toward at the rubbish container a few feet away. Finally, he took the paper, walked to the container and dropped it in. Immediately I declared, "You did it!" He looked at me with great satisfaction and beamed, "I did it!" he said. Then without further provocation boasted again, "I did it!"

You can guess what happened next. He walked back to me, grabbed another piece of paper off my desk, marched it to the rubbish, dropped it in, and with the biggest smile called out, "I did it!" Not only was he establishing his competency for throwing things away in the rubbish container, he apparently wanted to get better at it. Before long, he continued his quest for increased competency by dispensing my notebook, my pen and the TV remote control into the trash (we are talking about competency here not perfection).

The same, although more sophisticated scenario, is played out among elementary and middle school students. Often in my math class, I will take pains to make math assignments relatively challenging yet likely to be mastered. The result is similar to Jonah's trash can conquest. With time and support, the math students "did it." They got the problems right, and then they want to do more problems. They are proud of themselves and before long identify themselves as "good at math." They established a degree of math competency.

An even more sophisticated example occurs when we work with students in the National History Day competition. For nearly five months students intensely read, research, synthesize and write. It is an absolutely grueling process for students and teachers. You would think that after such an experience students would vow to themselves never to get involved with "that" again. But in fact, the opposite is true. Even if students do not win the competition per se, they have developed extraordinary competencies in the process; upon the completion of the competition, they are already discussing what topic they will do the following year. In fact, even though some of these students are graduating eighth graders they even wonder if they can still do History Day in high school. The hard work does not dissuade them from further rigor. They are motivated. They have accomplished something; they have proved their ability and they feel great about themselves. -CD



THE BIRCHWOOD PROJECT 2009-2010

Lectures, Discussions and Workshops for Parents and Educators

Topic	Date/Time
Maximizing a Birchwood Education "Homework: What, Why, How" "Helping your children succeed in writing"	September 24 7-8:30 p.m.
Gifted Education Developing Talent In Gifted Learners	October 29 7-8:30 p.m.
Character Development Raising noble children in the 21st century. Teaching children to "know the good, love the good and to do the good."	November 19 7-8:30 p.m.
Maximizing a Birchwood Education "Helping your children succeed in mathematics"	December 10 7-8:00 p.m.
Why a Birchwood Education? A Value Proposition	January 21 7-8:30 p.m.
Early Education "Life is front-end-loaded. Give your child a head start with a strong, early education."	February 18 7-8:30 p.m.
Setting Realistically High Academic Standards and Expectations "What levels of academic performance should I expect from my children?"	March 18 7-8:30 p.m.
Gifted and General Education "Teaching children to think creatively - a practical workshop to learn the six-step problem solving method."	April 22 7-8:30 p.m.
Character Education "Raising happy, well-adjusted children - a historical, cultural and research-based overview."	May 19 7-8:30 p.m.

Additional details of each lecture are available online at www.birchwoodschool.org/thebirchwoodproject

The Birchwood Project

Mission

To provide parents and educators with practical help about the application of current research and historical precedents surrounding K-8 general education, gifted education, and character development.

Background

The Birchwood Project is a product of our 25 year experience and research at Birchwood School. Here we have had the rare and invaluable experience of having our own "lab school" environment pursuing the components of outstanding elementary and middle school education. Granted, a pursuit of this nature is never final; no one ever arrives at all the right answers. Nevertheless, our work has rendered us insights into good education, and provided our students with measurable academic and personal benefits. The Birchwood Project is our way of sharing what we have learned and inviting others to join our quest to provide children the best education possible.

Content

Currently the Birchwood Project has two thrusts. First, the project offers nine lectures and workshops throughout the school year on three topics: general education, gifted education and character education. Second it provides short monthly educational essays that are drawn from contemporary research and historical precedents made applicable to the day-to-day challenges of parents and teachers.



SHARE THE CLIPBOARD WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

In our efforts to tell Birchwood's story to a wider audience we plan to distribute the Birchwood Clipboard and other newsworthy happenings via snail mail and email on a regular basis. You can help us by listing the family, friends or colleagues that might be interested in news about your children and our school. Don't forget grandpa and grandma! Helene and I are now in that category (our tenth grandchild arrives in November). Basking in our grandchildren's world is one of our top joys.

Please return this form to the school office with other school information.

1.

Name _____

Home Address _____

Email Address _____

Relationship _____

2.

Name _____

Home Address _____

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Relationship _____

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Name _____

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Email Address _____

Relationship _____