



FOCUS



SPRINGMAN & ATTEA

VOLUME 13 ISSUE 7



From the PTA President

Dear Parents,

Last month we began to run a new feature in our newsletter called “Ask the Principal”. We are providing parents with the opportunity to ask questions of our principals and then sharing their answers with a broader audience. Last month, Heather Hopkins explained the purpose of X Block and gave an example of an X Block in action at Springman. This month Jim Woell has addressed the concern expressed by parents regarding the speed of implementation of the Middle School Task Force recommendations. Please look to the back page for his response. Our intention is to keep parents informed and involved. Please let us know what questions you would like to see addressed in future issues.

As usual the PTA remains busy planning and promoting the end of year

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From the Principals

In late January, representatives from the Middle School Task Force presented recommendations aimed at improving our middle school program. These recommendations came after a 10-month study of best practices related to teaching and learning, gathering feedback from all stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, administrators, Glenbrook South High School, experts in 6-8 education) and analyzing school and district data. We have six “high priority” items and four additional priority items. We are already implementing a number of strategies to address each of the high priority items and this issue of the FOCUS gives us the perfect opportunity to tell you about our work on one of the high priority recommendations: Grading.

The Task Force recommendation on grading is stated this way: *There is urgency for communicating and consistently following grading practices that encourage and support learning.* To implement this recommendation, the middle school staffs at both schools reviewed best practices and recommendations for grading at our March Institute Day. One of the resources we are using is the book *A Repair Kit for Grading; 15 fixes for broken grades* by Ken O'Connor. Mr. O'Connor explains the need to examine our grading practices this way:

(cont. page 2)

Dates to Remember



April

20-24 D34 TV Turn Off Week

23 Annual Family Night—
No Homework

27 District Board Meeting 7PM
New Date

29 VIA GELATO School Fund-raiser
Details on Pg. 6



May

1 & 2 Springman School Play 7PM
LAGOONED

5 PTA Meeting at Attea 9:15am

26 No School—
Memorial Day

WIN A \$15 iTunes GIFT CARD - SEE CONTEST PAGE 3

From the PTA President, cont.

activities. Graduation ceremonies and parties are being fine tuned. Volunteers are still needed for both schools, contact Angela McCune for Attea 847-657-6442 and Laurie Binstein for Springman 847-998-8408. Our Middle School Art Fair will take place at the Park Center on May 29th through June 3rd. The opening reception is Friday evening, May 29th from 4:00 - 8:00. This wonderful event showcases our students' art work for everyone to see in a casual and fun setting. See the flyer in this issue for more details. Everyone is welcome.

Something new this month, a **Springman/Attea fundraiser at Via Gelato!** Via Gelato is a great restaurant in the Glen that features delicious homemade soups, panini sandwiches, salads and crepes, and of course the most fabulous freshly made gelato I've ever tasted. If you haven't tried it now is the perfect opportunity. All day (11am—9pm) on **Wed., April 29th** the PTA will receive 20% of total sales to those who identify themselves as Springman/Attea friends and family. Stop by for breakfast, lunch, an after school treat, or dinner and tell them that you are part of the Springman/Attea family. Bring your friends and family, enjoy great food, tasty desserts, and live music, all while helping out your school.

Finally, please look for our PTA membership packets that will be mailed to your home next week. These packets include PTA membership, and volunteer forms. This is your opportunity to join the PTA, and possibly volunteer for a position on the PTA. When you join you will automatically receive a school directory. These forms and your dues check will be due back to school at the end of May. Please note that District 34 also mailed out your school registration information. These are two distinct processes and must be completed and mailed separately.

Our next PTA meeting is May 5th at Attea, 9:15AM. Call me if you have any questions or concerns you would like addressed at our next meeting. I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

Candy Pullano

From the Principals, cont.

The two essential questions that all educators should ask about their grades are, "How confident am I that the grades students get in my classroom/school/district are consistent, accurate, and meaningful, and that they support learning?" and "How confident am I that the grades I assign students accurately reflect my school's/district's published content standards and desired learning outcomes?" In most schools/districts the answers these questions, especially at the middle and high school levels, range from "not very" to "not at all." Because of this I believe that, very often, grades are "broken" and that teachers and schools/districts need a "repair kit."

We recognize that grades must communicate useful information to students and parents. Teachers are currently examining their grading practices to determine how clearly the grades they assign students reflect a clear and accurate indicator of what a student knows and is able to do – mastery. If a grade is going to signal a student's mastery of skills and concepts, we need to make sure they reflect only student performance and knowledge of identified learning goals.

Traditionally, teachers have combined achievement with other variables such as behavior, effort, and/or participation into grades for several reasons. If we include these other factors into grades we run afoul of our intent to keep grades as accurate indicators of mastery.

Student "effort" has often been included in grades and again, is one that muddies our understanding of a student's level of mastery. When we purchase an item, let's say a new piece of furniture, we are spending a good deal of money and we want quality for our money. We don't ask how much did the carpenter TRY, how much effort did he or she put into making this table? We look only at

(cont. page 3)

From the Principals, cont.

the work to appraise it because in the end, that's what's going to determine whether this table remains standing, doesn't tilt, or become wobbly. In the end, it is the achieved result that matters and the same should be true about grades. Definitions of "trying hard" vary greatly from teacher to teacher and lead to a great deal of subjectivity. The more we can remove subjectivity from grading, the more accurately the grade will represent mastery.

Participation is a difficult quality to assess. What do we agree will be our standard of excellence for participation? Is it how many times a student raises his/her hand in class? Is it coming to class prepared? Is it using class time wisely? Often, participation can be a personality issue - some students are naturally more assertive while others are naturally quieter. Should we really be including something in a grade that can be beyond a person's control?

We want to recognize students for their growth in other areas, particularly those that contribute to their learning such as willingness to stay with a problem until solved, ability to review and revise their work, teamwork, etc. We know that effort and behavior are important to a person's lifelong success and we want to help students' develop these traits. We just shouldn't include them as part of a grade intended to represent mastery.

A practical solution to the problems associated with these different learning criteria is to report separate grades or marks for students on each set of criteria. In this way, grades or marks for learning skills, effort, work habits, or learning progress are kept distinct from assessments of achievement and performance. The intent is to provide a better, more accurate, and much more comprehensive picture of what students accomplish in school.

As you can see, the issue of grading is a complex one that requires a great deal of study and consideration. We will continue our staff discussions about how we will ensure that grades clearly communicate mastery and improve learning. As we finalize our new set of grading philosophy and practices for the 2009-2010 school year, we will share these with you via future newsletters and our websites.

Best regards,

Dr. Heather Hopkins, *Principal*
Springman Middle School

Mr. Jim Woell, *Principal*
Attea Middle School

WIN a \$15 iTunes Gift Card

Parents, to continue to motivate students to bring home the FOCUS newsletter - the PTA is giving away two more \$15 iTunes gift cards for April. All you have to do to enter is:

1. Send an e-mail to - focusnewsletter@comcast.net
2. Please include: Your name, your student's name, grade and school.
3. Answer this: What is the date of the *Via Gelato* school fundraiser?



Two lucky students, one from Springman and one from Attea will be randomly selected to each receive a \$15 iTunes gift card!!! We will publish the winners in the May FOCUS issue.

Thanks for reading the FOCUS!

Congratulations to Frankie Hebert and Arman Tousi—March Winners!

INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS @ ATTEA & SPRINGMAN

Attea and Springman are members of the Central Suburban Middle School Conference. This *athletic* conference is made up of ten member schools. There are six interscholastic sports offered at *both* Springman & Attea: girls' and boys' cross country, co-ed soccer, girls' and boys' volleyball, girls' and boys' basketball, spirit squad and girls' and boys' track & field.

Students are selected for teams through a try-outs *process with the exception of cross country and track & field*. Cross country and track do not have roster limitations *therefore there is not a need for tryouts*. Sixth graders are only eligible to be on the cross country and track & field teams since the roster sizes are unlimited.

In order to tryout, practice or participate in a clinic for any team, a valid sports physical needs to be on file in the school health office.

Sports physicals are valid for one calendar year, therefore it is strongly recommended that you have your physical during the summer.

Also, to be eligible to participate in interscholastic sports 2 additional forms are required to be completed and turned into the coach, The Interscholastic Parent Authorization Form as well as the Sports Examination Form will be in an upcoming newsletter. They can also be downloaded from the District 34 website. Go to "Parents", click on "Frequently Used Forms" and you will see both the forms listed. *Both of these forms are required prior to the start of each sports season.*

If you have questions, please contact us at:

Theresa Jasonowicz
Attea Athletic Director
(847) 657-2011

Dave Tosh
Springman Athletic Director
(847) 657-2116

Thank You Raffle Prize Sponsors!



Cookies in Bloom, Café Ari,
Katy Boldt Jewelers,
Pier One Imports,
The Daymaker Salon, Chicago
Wolves, Country Cobbler

FEBRUARY STUDENTS OF THE MONTH—ATTEA

Journey	Kaitlyn O'Brien	Xavier Franczyk
Omni	Connor Watson	Stephanie Smelyansky
Jigsaw	Bridget Nelson	Ajay Bhojwain
Patriots	Lindsey Zelvin	Jake Janecek
Galaxy	Maddie Hauser	Alexei O'Brien
Pathfinders	Trace Powers	Brittany Balzano

Congratulations!



*Blooming this spring out of Glenview's middle schools: creative, artistic talent!
Come see their creations, live demonstrations, and buy what the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders
have been working on all year at the*

6th annual Middle School Art Fair!

Kick off reception: Friday, May 29, 4-6 pm,

Park Center lobby, 2400 Chestnut St.

Artwork on display until June 3

*Budding artists interested in selling any of their artwork with proceeds going to the
Debra Gelfand fund should contact Markie Condon at tmceb5@gmail.com*

Volunteers needed for set up and take down! Please contact Markie at 847-724-0004

**National
Junior
Honor
Society**



Springman Chapter's National Junior Honor Society informational letters and application packets were distributed to qualifying students prior to Spring Break. Applications are due April 24th. For advance planning, the ceremony will be on the evening of June 3rd. Students who fulfill all of the requirements will receive acceptance letters at the end of May. Feel free to contact the Springman NJHS Advisor, Jenny Kreiseder, if you have any questions. She can be reached at 847.657.2208 or by email at jkreiseder@glenview34.org. Students can find her in room 208. Best of luck to all of the applicants!

SCHOOL FUNDRAISER

ALL DAY
LONG!



11am - 9pm

Via Gelato & Cafe
located in the Glen Town Center

Wednesday, April 29th

Via Gelato serves homemade Panini, Salads, Soups, Crepes,
Authentic Artisan Gelato, Coffee & more!

Come for lunch, dinner, snack and some
Authentic Artisan Gelato
Live Music at night!

20% of all proceeds go directly back to Springman and Attea
Just mention that you are there for the fundraiser!

Come out and support your school!!!!



LAGOONED

Springman Play

PERFORMANCES—7:00 pm

FRIDAY, MAY 1 & SATURDAY, MAY 2

ATTEA SCIENCE OLYMPIAD

On February 28th, The Attea Science Olympiad team competed against surrounding schools in 23 different events at the annual Regional Science Olympiad competition held at New Trier High School. Events varied from building a robot that is able to complete certain tasks, to building an airplane that has the longest flight duration, solving crimes using forensic science to taking an anatomy and physiology test. The Attea team was proud to have placed in 4 events at this competition: Trajectory, Science Crime

Busters, Amphibians and Reptiles, and Disease Detectives. Overall Attea placed 10th out of 25 middle school teams. Thanks to a grant provided by GEF, Attea was able to sponsor a science olympiad club for the first time this year. Congratulations Attea Science Olympiad members:

Albert Valiaveedu, Lin Koop, Christopher Callahan, Jaons Lin, Demetri Maroutsos, Lydia Lutz, Annie Erdene, Sierra Orlowski, Vimal Gunasekaran, Mike Piron, Ari Jacobson, Stephanie Smelyansky, Josh Jacobson, Paulina Pys, and Alex Kikos

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Attention 6th and 7th Grade Attea Parents

Graduation is on

Monday, June 8th, 2009.

We need volunteers to assist set-up, help at Glenbrook South High School during the ceremony or work the graduation party following the ceremony.

If you are interested in helping make this an evening to remember for our graduates, please contact Angela McCune at 847-657-6442 or e-mail.

Momseq123@aol.com.

CONGRATULATIONS!!

Congratulations to the 7th grade Attea Boys Volleyball Team for a fantastic season!

The 2009 season ended in April with a record of 14-1. Each player utilized their athletic strengths to contribute to every success on the court. Throughout the season the boys demonstrated tremendous growth in their skills and teamwork. Their positive attitude and sportsmanship made them excellent representatives of Attea Middle School. Great job Flyers!

The members of the team were:



Casey Berg, Jake Carr, Michael Dillon, Michael Hanches, Jackson Irwin, Josh Just, Tommy O'Hara, Jason Paek, Adrian Remeniuk, Kurt Roemer, Nick Schumacher, David Thompson, Joseph Lee (manager)

Coach Daniels and Coach Brown

Ask the Principal

Q: Why does it take so long to implement the recommended changes from the Middle School Task Force (MSTF)?

A: The MSTF was formed in late winter of 2008. This group worked through the remainder of the 2008 school year, throughout the summer and into the fall of the 2008-2009 school year. During this time frame the group gathered data and information, visited other middle schools and heard from experts in the area of middle school best practices. The charge of the MSTF was to make recommendations for the “what” needs to be worked on in the middle schools, but not the “how” those changes will occur. In all fairness, working out the “how” is far more complex than working out the “what” and appropriate time needs to be devoted to figuring out the “how” and implementing changes successfully. The most sustainable changes in educational reform come from changes that take place on an incremental basis over a long period of time until they are imbedded in the day-to-day practices of our teachers. In other words, doing it right takes time.

The Middle School Task Force came up with six high priority and 6 priority items that need attention in our middle school practice and framework. Below is a listing of those priorities and descriptions of what is being done to address the items:

Item	Implementation
To develop and implement the use of common, consistent district learning targets in all curricular areas.	This work actually began in January 2008 through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Content areas across all grade levels are working to establish viable curriculum and develop essential learning outcomes for each grade level in each content area. This work is well on its way to completion and once completed, will be periodically reviewed for sustainability.
Create and align common formative assessments to those learning targets (referenced above) in order to help students identify what they know and what they need to know. Use the common assessment data to help teachers differentiate instruction and challenge each student.	The creation of these common formative assessments, based on the established learner outcomes, is underway. Some subject areas are further along than others but the work is being done. Once these common assessments are established, they will be consistently administered in each content area and the data used to help teachers isolate areas where teaching practices can be enhanced and student learning needs to be addressed.
Reduce the student-to-teacher ratio (both class size and team size) to provide a more personalized learning environment and support differentiated instruction	This is perhaps the most daunting of the recommendations from the MSTF. It is a multifaceted issue as it encompasses classroom space and utilization, the potential for teachers in the middle schools to teach multiple subject areas and financial concerns around staffing and allocations. Each scenario developed to address this issue has to be worked out to a point where it can be ascertained as to whether or not it is viable. This is painstaking and takes a tremendous amount of time and energy. A committee is being formed to study this issue and recommendations will be brought to the Board of Education in December of 2009.
Communicate and consistently follow grading practices that encourage and support learning.	This work is currently underway and we are optimistic that we will have a new grading policy/philosophy in place and followed for the first trimester of the 2009-2010 school year.
Communicate and consistently follow homework practices that encourage and support learning	A draft of a homework policy has been developed and further discussion continues around this issue and also relative to best practices. It is our goal that a policy would be adopted within the next year.
Examine the use of the school day to optimize time to meet students’ academic and social/emotional needs	Currently school wide structures such as X-block, Flexible block scheduling and before and after school interventions need to be examined to determine effectiveness. We need to determine whether or not our current structures are effective and for the benefit of all students, not just those who struggle. This will be an ongoing discussion as part of the class and team size group work.

As you can see, the depth and breadth of the work on the high priority items alone is daunting. In order to continue the work in the excellent fashion that is expected in District 34 we need to make sure that we are consulting appropriate parties and gathering input from all stakeholders as we look to create the best possible implementation of the “how”. We are not attempting to slow down the implementation process, but rather we are working to ensure that we consider all ramifications of decisions that will have a long ranging impact on our schools. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your building principal.