



The Lion's Roar

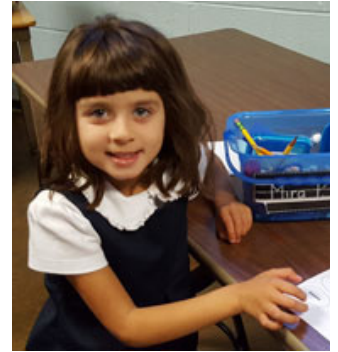
A VIEW FROM HISTORY AND RESEARCH

In “Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do,” Laurence Steinberg explains the result of his 10 year study examining the factors that lead to student success in middle school and high school. He identifies *student engagement* as the most important of all factors. Steinberg concluded that a student who comes to school ready and eager to learn, is the student who *will* learn. Even in a poor educational environment, the engaged student learns. However, if a student comes to school not interested in learning, if a child is preoccupied with interests that do not enhance the learning process, then no matter who the teacher or what school, learning will be stunted.

THE NEED FOR ENGAGEMENT

For Steinberg, student engagement means a child goes to school with the determination and will to learn. This factor alone, not only insures learning will take place, but even overcomes deficiencies in teacher competency or school environment.

Steinberg’s scientific research supports what we have known for more than a century in America.



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UNDER THE CANOPY NEWS FROM BIRCHWOOD

Support The Birchwood Fund

Birchwood School of Hawken ...

“The Same Birchwood School, only stronger!”

The last few weeks have been a whirlwind of historic proportions. We hope you are as excited as we are. After Mr. and Mrs. Debelak’s letter, the community meeting and Q&A, you know Hawken School is providing Birchwood long-term financial sustainability: a safety net. However, Birchwood remains autonomous in our day-to-day operations and responsible for annual fundraising. Retaining our financial model as part of a two-tiered tuition plan with Hawken, we are and must remain financially self-sufficient in our daily operations and budget. **Becoming a better, stronger Birchwood but an otherwise unchanged Birchwood, requires financial self-sufficiency.**

This means that, as we do every year, we must support our annual fund: the Birchwood Fund. What you may not know is that world-class education is inherently inefficient. Providing individualized attention to our students – the core of our identity – means industry-leading student-to-teacher classroom ratios. The national standard for excellent classroom ratios is 20 students to a room. We maintain a ratio of eight students to every teacher or less than half. This allows us to individualize curriculum to each and every student. We *could* reduce our staffing by half and maintain ratios considered excellent; however, we could not provide the indi-

vidualized attention that is core to our mission. We *could* increase tuition to cover the extra costs, but this too detracts from our mission of providing world-class education to all regardless of socio-economic situation.

Being Birchwood demands pouring resources into staffing and not increasing tuition to compensate. Instead, we operate frugally. However, this limits the unrestricted dollars available for ongoing investments. The Birchwood Fund – **your support** – fills this need. Your annual donations allow us to do the special things. It allows us to underwrite more Signature Programs, upgrade facilities faster and to a higher standard than otherwise possible, to take advantage of unexpected opportunities, and, of course, to keep our tuition low by not requiring us to raise it in support of operations. Basically, supporting the Birchwood Fund keeps Birchwood Birchwood.

Join us today. Make your voice heard during this momentous time and support the Birchwood Fund! All donations made to Birchwood School of Hawken **stay** at Birchwood School of Hawken. And, as always, all gifts matter, no matter the size. We simply ask your gift be meaningful to you and your family.

To make your gift, visit us at birchwoodschool.org. Please contact Michelle Ehlert, director of advancement, at mehlert@birchwoodschool.org or 216-251-2321 with questions or for more information.

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UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

Future Problem Solving Brainstorming

Sixth through eighth grade members of Future Problem Solving (FPS) teams recently completed Practice Problem #1 on the topic: Educational Disparities.

Students researched the current situation including how aspects of poverty, race, gender, early childhood opportunities, family structure, culture and technology are impacting the gap in educational experiences around the globe. Then with a one-page future scenario in hand they had to forecast 50 years into the future what might happen if this trend is allowed to continue.

In a two-hour session they brainstormed challenges from multiple perspectives, wrote 16 of them out in clear language, came up with and articulated one underlying problem to solve, brainstormed solutions from wide-ranging creative angles, and then wrote 16 of them with logical elaboration. Eight teams of four and three individual competitors accomplished this feat. Kudos! They are now hard at work researching the topic for Problem #2: It's All in the Genes – genetic modification.

Welcoming Alums



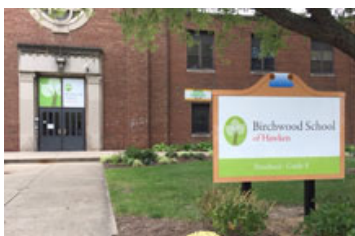
Birchwood alum, Jack Brancatelli, took time during a recent day without classes at St. Edward High School to volunteer and help with preparations for Grandfriends' Day. Birchwood welcomes former students and alum who have a few hours or a day to come in and help out in a classroom or with staff. Welcome alums!

Opening Our Doors

Mr. & Mrs. Debelak as well as parents, teachers and staff enjoyed touring and talking with prospective families during Birchwood's fall Open House. Please invite your friends and neighbors to [RSVP](#) to attend Birchwood's next Open House on Sunday, Jan. 22.



New Entrance Signs



Families and visitors are now greeted at the school's entrance by the new Birchwood School of Hawken signage.

What's so Special About this Year's IFA?

Well, the IFA is always special because from the very beginning it was a parent effort to show support for the school and to show their children the importance of giving back! The idea of giving back to an institution, from which you have benefitted, was the initial driver for the formation of a parent committee. Their first effort was to help provide healthcare for teachers (a luxury the school did not offer until 15 years ago). Once the school was able to provide its staff with healthcare through tuition revenue, the focus of IFA funds shifted to the support of the school's Signature Programs and professional development. This remains the school's emphasis today.

But this year it is special for another reason. It's our first IFA as Birchwood School of HAWKEN!

Now stronger and better, we are part of a larger whole that is able to provide long-term financial viability.

We must all recall, however, that a most important requirement of our recent merger, strongly agreed to by both parties, is that our Birchwood School remain the same. This requires that we finance our educational programs exactly as we have in the past: by our tuition and by our fundraising efforts. While the school through tuition revenue currently pays for the professional staff needed to operate these Signature Programs and for professional services required for our professional development program, the IFA has significantly helped the school by paying for fees, materials and transportation. The IFA has partnered with the school to make sure the Signature Programs and professional development receive the support they need to function at a high level.

The IFA is our chance to give back, to partner with the school, along with our children, in order to make these wonderful opportunities even better. By the way, did you know that our hard-working teachers and students have done so well this past year that we have approximately doubled our competition expenses? Bravo! Let's keep that growing!

To help with this, our IFA "Fund-a-Need" campaign this year will directly focus on supporting and advancing these important Signature Programs: our academic competitions. Let's prove again this year that we can rise to the occasion and support these wonderful, growing programs. That we can do it on our own!

*Greg Gordon
Parent Committee Co-Chair*

Learn more about Birchwood's Signature Programs on page 14.

REFLECTIONS BY CHARLES DEBELAK

PARENTING FOR CHARACTER: THE NEED FOR TEACHING

The cycle of building character is simple. It begins when parents sow virtuous thoughts and words into a child's heart. Given time, this sowing results in good behaviors, which, if practiced, accumulate to good character. By nature, children aspire to be good and virtuous. When they hear or read words of virtue or goodness, they respond spontaneously and automatically. The goodness in words reverberates in their hearts and inspires them to action. Virtuous words, spoken or written, urge virtuous behavior.

There is no question that children want to be good, and if reminded and inspired they will do their best to practice goodness. Yet be warned of the obvious. By nature, children also have impulses toward bad behavior! Not some children, but all children. Any clear-headed adult who works with boys and girls, knows by experience that this is true. Even though parents may inspire their children toward virtue, and even though youngsters incited to be good, it is an ineluctable result that good behaviors are often short lived. Bad behaviors slowly return.

These are the realities behind the task of raising children of good character. They help us frame the right question, "How do we help our children habituate good virtue while mitigating the compulsions toward bad behavior?" There are two parts to this task, and they compose the guiding principles for effective education that leads to good character. The first is teaching and the second is training.

Teaching:

Since children have propensities for good behavior and bad, they need to be fed inspiration that stimulates and awakens their own virtue. They will prosper under a steady dose of enlightening and encouraging stories or



fables or maxims and quotations. As they learn about exemplars of virtue from biographies of great men and women, they will become emboldened to mimic the same behaviors and model good virtue. If someone will point out to them virtuous behaviors of ordinary people in the everyday affairs of life, they will find direction for their own lives.



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Parents should take every opportunity to teach virtue, because teaching virtue as it is described here, is like providing a "meal" of virtue. The lessons contain emotional vitamins and minerals that empower virtuous behavior. Through words and models of virtue, the willpower of action in a child's heart is reenergized to do what is good. Granted, their resultant good behavior might be short lived, but their inclination to do good, as a matter of habit, grows stronger.

Also, through these virtuous "meals," the reasoning within a child's heart and mind is being constructed. They are learning what good behavior is and why it is good. The beauty embodied in these virtue meals, creates a taste in their mouth for doing good. Spontaneously they wish to emulate the same beautiful behaviors they see in others.

It is hard to overstate the need for such pervasive, consistent and persistent teaching. Without positive feeding, children will be influenced by the less virtuous people and environmental circumstances that model vice. They will consume the aspirations, goals and forms of pleasure, that create and shape poor character. Children will become what they "eat."

Mr. Charles Debelak (cdebelak@birchwoodschool.org) has been teaching and training Birchwood students for over 30 years.

CHARACTER EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

BIRCHWOOD'S LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IN PRACTICE

Since the beginning of October, Birchwood School of Hawken's Leadership Program has been in full swing. During the month of September, students learned the principles of leadership, including the interplay between freedom and responsibility and the qualities of a servant-leader. Each student then selected one or two areas in which to practice their leadership skills throughout the year. Almost immediately Birchwood's seventh and eighth grade students displayed examples of virtue in their leadership.

Below are two letters that I recently received in response to leadership displayed by several of the seventh and eighth grade students:

Sent by Mrs. Shumway, preschool "Seedlings" teacher:

"I wanted to tell you how impressed I have been with Karim and Erhan (eighth grade). Miss Becky (Seedlings aide) and I have been very thankful for all of their help at the end of the day.



Eighth grade students, Karim and Erhan, enjoy helping the children in the Seedlings class get ready to go home or attend an After School Enrichment class at the end of the school day.

When they enter the Seedlings room they are quiet and respectful. The kids don't get all crazy when they arrive; Karim and Erhan have a calming effect on the children. They have read stories to the Seedlings, helped to build structures and helped to tidy up the classroom. Every request is accepted with an energy of helpfulness and a smile. I have also observed

how Karim and Erhan work to support each other as they care for the Seedlings.

When assisting with the children's coats, they know exactly what to do to help us make it to the car line on time. I barely have to say anything as they just seem to know what needs to be done. They are such a gift to our classroom. Yesterday, Becky and I were happy that they arrived in time to share our pizza lunch. A small reward for all their hard work so far."

Sent by Mrs. Mely Sato, Birchwood parent:

"I just wanted to share with you that yesterday on our way down to Fogarty Hall, Hadi (seventh grade) was on his way up. He saw that

our hands were full (holding equipment for an IFA photo shoot) and he automatically offered to help. Very impressed! No teacher was present to prod him to help us, nor anyone to see his action of kindness. He offered help without any hesitation. It says a lot about the character building that you try to instill in all of the children. Thank you!"

To lend a bit more insight into Birchwood's Leadership Program, [click here](#) to view an Oct. 27 Facebook slideshow post of a day in the life of students going about their twice-weekly leadership jobs.

[Click here](#) to read more about Birchwood School of Hawken's principles of teaching and training that are at the heart of our mission of educating for character. Birchwood's biweekly, leadership class is a culmination of our systematic approach to building character in children year by year.

Consequently, the effects of the Leadership Program are not something that happen overnight,



Virtuous character does not happen spontaneously. It must firstly be defined, then modeled by parents and teachers and then finally a child must be given opportunities to practice virtuous behavior on a regular basis before it becomes inherent ...

[Oct. 27 Birchwood Facebook Post](#)

or since September, but rather a result of comprehensive and systematic programming that occurs throughout Birchwood School of Hawken.

Mrs. Helene Debelak
Director of Curriculum

Mrs. Debelak (hdebelak@birchwoodschoolorg) has been shaping the lives of young people through leadership for over 30 years.

CLASS NEWS

Seedlings

Mrs. Shumway's and Ms. Becky's Seedlings have been exploring units on autumn as well as food and nutrition. Many of the children expressed their love of different foods. Over the past few weeks the Seedlings have explored the four food groups: dairy products, grains, fruit and vegetables, and meat/protein. The children have sorted a variety of foods according to these four food groups. They then put food shapes in order from smallest to largest. The children also graphed their favorite fruits and vegetables. During our large group time the Seedlings worked together to identify the beginning sounds of various foods we found in the house center. All of the Seedlings enjoyed making banana pancakes. They mixed and stirred all the ingredients together to make a delicious batter. The pancakes were a tasty addition to our morning snack.



Students stirred up a yummy pancake batter; part of learning about the four food groups.

Grandfriends' Day was a huge success. Seedlings painted pumpkins, made fall trees using their handprints and their grandfriends handprints and decorated trees using fall stickers. Many of the Seedlings could be found curled up in the lap of a grandfriend reading their favorite classroom story. Thank you to all who came to visit. A huge thank you to Mrs. Whitney DeJohn for all of your help during the event, both in the morning and the afternoon.

Sprouts

Miss Hallett's and Mrs. Brady's Sprouts class have been becoming familiar with units on apples, transportation and pumpkins. They are having fun and learning many new and different concepts in the classroom. Mrs. Brady and Miss Hallett have also been working with the students on sight words and spotting them in sentences. Some activities they have completed are, comparing and contrasting an apple and a pumpkin, seeing which objects will roll down a wooden ramp, and using our descriptive words to describe the inside of a pumpkin. Sprouts are enjoying math activities in the classroom. They have been practicing many different skills such as sorting seeds, using a scale to see how many counting bears it will take to weight the same as an apple, and building their own cars and trucks out of three-dimensional shapes.

Sprouts went on their first field trip as part of the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) in University Circle. They went to the Dunham Tavern Museum and learned what it would be like to live in the 1800s in Cleveland, made pattern quilts out of construction paper

squares and made their own farm collages. Students had a wonderful time. Thank you to the parent volunteers who accompanied us.

Grandfriends' Day was also a big hit. Thank you to all the grandfriends who were able to visit our classroom. Sprouts painted pumpkins, traced their hand as the trunk of the tree and then fingerprinted leaves on the tree, and made wreaths out of tissue paper leaves. It was such a treat to see the students with their grandfriends! A huge thank you to Dr. Greg Gordon, Mrs. Naticia Tricano and Mrs. Christine Mulloy for their help during the event.



Sprouts enjoyed painting with their grandfriends.

Kindergarten

Grandfriends' Day in Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarten classes was a great success thanks to Mrs. Christina Perry and Mr. Shaun Matthews who volunteered to help. Each grandfriend made a keepsake with handprints cut out from construction paper and a photograph of the student and their grandfriends. Grandfriends and students also enjoyed Goldfish rainbow fish math. They sorted, counted, graphed and, of course, ate the colorful fish crackers!



Fun with rainbow fish math on Grandfriends' Day.

K Exploratory Learning

Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarteners learned about the wonderful human body. Students now know all about their five senses through books, interactive experiences, songs and exploration projects. They used their sense of hearing to play animal sound bingo and their sense of sight to take a closer look at things around the classroom. They also saw how vinegar and baking soda reacted together by blowing up balloons attached to bottles. They used their sense of touch to explore various textures around the classroom and hidden in balloons. They used their sense of smell to figure out what was in mystery bottles. Students used their sense of taste to sample a variety of foods – including one dish with bitter melon – and to distinguish the differences between salty, sour, sweet and bitter. Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's classes came together to culminate the unit by using all of their senses to explore marshmallows. First they touched and smelled a marshmallow as is, and then they changed the texture by spraying water on it. Then they got to taste one! Students loved this unit and loved exploring with their senses.

K Math

Mrs. Chen's and Mrs. Hallett's kindergarten mathematicians continue to work hard in their math groups. Students are growing in their understanding of number sense. They are working on recognizing, writing, composing and decomposing teen numbers. Math groups start each day with an exercise song that excites students with kinesthetic math practice. Some are recognizing any number up through 100 and then putting mixed numbers from 1 to 100 in order from least to greatest and vice versa. They have also learned the difference between even and odd numbers, and are counting using ordinal numbers through games and movement. Students enjoyed lining up to figure out who is first, second and so forth.

K Reading

Kindergarten students are working diligently on reading books, sight words, phonics, mini research projects and more, according to their respective reading group. All students have started using a personal "book box" to keep their "good fit" books in. They love to read them over and over again during transitional time. This repetitive reading helps with building fluency and accuracy of reading!

1st Math

Mr. Sprau's and Mrs. Bontje's first grade mathematicians have been diligently practicing and improving their addition and subtraction skills. Most recently, some of the children even began learning subtraction with regrouping. Besides the "paper and pencil" ways of practicing, the children have enjoyed playing the on-line game Minus Mission in which the player has to match the correct answer to moving subtraction problems. At home, they practice a "mad minutes" drill that employs flash cards and a parent helper. Each of the young mathematicians is making fabulous progress in laying this crucial foundation.

1st Spanish

First grade students reviewed shapes and the calendar. They were working diligently on learning the objects of the classroom and big numbers. Mrs. Rodriguez asked questions about their names, their age, where they live, their birthday and their preference of food and animals they like. They had a good time answering the questions. The classes enjoyed learning a new Spanish song each week.

1st-2nd Computer

One of the skills first- and second-graders learn in basic programming, with Mrs. Mamone and Mrs. Sprau, is done with MicroWorlds, Jr. In this program a "turtle" wears a backpack in which the children load commands, such as pen down, turn, step forward, etc. The objective is to have the turtle to do exactly what you want

it to do. The challenge is to program it correctly. MicroWorlds, Jr. enhances children's thinking skills by requiring them to think ahead and use logic to create a series of commands that cause the turtle to move as they intend it to.

1st-2nd Reading and Language Arts

Mrs. Mamone and Mrs. Sprau continued to lead their students in their journey to explore American tall tales. First- and second-graders compared and contrasted Davy Crockett's real life and the tall tales made up about him after watching a short biographical documentary and then reading "Davy Crockett Gets Hitched" by Bobbi Miller. They also enjoyed listening to a story about Paul Bunyan and creating their own exaggerations about Birchwood students with their grandfriends on Grandfriends' Day. As a conclusion to

First- and second-graders compared and contrasted Davy Crockett's real life and the tall tales made up about him after watching a short biographical documentary and then reading "Davy Crockett Gets Hitched" by Bobbi Miller.

the unit, students wrote their own tall tales using all five characteristics of the genre. After reviewing the story with a teacher, they edited, rewrote and illustrated their stories. These exciting stories are proudly displayed in the first and second grade wing hallway.

1-2nd Science

First-graders, along with Mrs. Syed, and second-graders, along with Mrs. Syed and Dr. Neider, have been busy geologists as they completed their rocks and minerals unit. They learned about the three types of rocks and gave them the nicknames – Iggy, Sed and Meta – to help remember them. They also learned how each type of rock is formed. Students applied all their knowledge of rocks to make their own rocks using clay. They finished their unit by reading a book and watching a video about how fossils are formed and then made their own fossils using things from nature like leaves, twigs and shells. In all, the scientist's tool emphasized through this unit was "observation."

1st-2nd Social Studies

Did you know that the three main types of neighborhoods are all within driving distance of Birchwood School of Hawken? The first and second grade students now know this! They have been busy explorers during our neighborhood unit. Mrs. Moore's first grade

CLASS NEWS *continued*

classes and Mr. Parrino's and Mrs. Moore's second grade class have been going on adventures around the Birchwood neighborhood to discover what makes up our neighborhood. The students have been comparing and contrasting their own neighborhood with the Birchwood neighborhood. Students were introduced to rural, suburban and urban neighborhoods and how these neighborhoods change over time with the Caldecott Medal winning book "The Little House" by Virginia Lee Burton. They are also learning the differences and similarities between these three types of neighborhoods. Students have also watched videos to understand the people, places and jobs within our neighborhoods, including: "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood," "Sesame Street," and BrainPOP Jr. Movies. We are lucky to live in a diverse area of Northeast Ohio where all three types of neighborhoods are within driving distance.

2nd Math

Mrs. Bontje's and Mr. Sprau's second grade math class has begun a unit on money. Mrs. Bontje's group is practicing the basics of identifying and counting coins. For this, they are using the "Early Math" workbook series along with "play" coin manipulatives. Mr. Sprau's group is learning to make change and trade coins to make equal values. One activity that they enjoyed is called the "change changing challenge." In this activity, the children are challenged to make a certain amount of change with a given number of coins, such as: make 67 cents using six coins; now make it using nine coins. The second graders are becoming proficient in their money-counting skills.

2nd Spanish

Second-graders had a wonderful time working on *la casa* and objects of the house with Mrs. Rodriguez. They completed activities in the workbook, placed furniture in different rooms of the house and participated in conversations about their own houses, appliances and furniture. They love to sing Spanish songs and listen to stories using props to facilitate comprehension.

3rd Computer

Third grade students have started to practice typing on typing.com. Mrs. Kufahl, Ms. West and Mrs. Waldal are helping them practice proper finger positions and keeping their eyes on the screen. They are also using Google Docs to write stories for language arts.

3rd Math

Mr. Sprau's and Mrs. Bontje's third grade mathematicians have begun a unit on time. Mrs. Bontje's group has been working hard and practicing telling time to the nearest quarter hour, five minutes and even to the nearest minute. Using thatquiz.org and a fun game

from oswego.org called, "stop the clock," they are becoming much more proficient in their telling time skills. Mr. Sprau's group has been working hard at understanding the concept of elapsed time. They've been practicing by marking out elapsed time on number timelines which helps the process of counting the hours and minutes that have passed. Third graders have been doing a great job with such a difficult concept to master.

3rd Social Studies

With Mrs. Moore and Dr. Neider, our third grade community has been practicing our research skills as we explore the wonders of our national community. First we got to know our national parks, learning how to peruse a book and a website to glean pertinent

... our third grade community has been practicing our research skills as we explore the wonders of our national community.

information about a park. The third grade community learned to take concise notes that corresponded to a question we had about the park. Students then created magnificent posters to clearly and creatively communicate information about their park. The third grade community has now turned their attention to our nation's capital: Washington D.C. and the marvel of our monuments. Adding the encyclopedia to books and websites as another valuable tool of historians, students dove deeper into the research process to discover the history and purpose of the monuments as well as the ways in which these pieces of architecture reflect our nation's values. Students have also built 3D models of their monument!



Students enjoyed presenting their 3D models to the class.

3rd Reading

Mrs. Debelak's and Ms. West's third-graders have been enjoying various historical fiction books along with the class book, "Sarah, Plain and Tall" by Patricia MacLachlan. Paying close attention to the author's beautiful writing, the students have been keeping track of "sea" words and "prairie" words which they use to draw comparisons between the two different settings. They signed their first contract in which they set a goal for the number of pages and books they would read over the course of the unit. They have also been practicing writing answers to comprehension questions and

CLASS NEWS *continued*

citing page numbers to show examples and reasoning. Additionally, the third graders have tried their hand at writing poetry. First, they wrote their “best scary poem” to be sent into Cricket magazine. Later, after learning about rhyme schemes, (AAA, ABA, ABB, AAB, ABC) the students wrote a triplet about a theme or a character from chapter one of their class book.

3rd Spanish

Students worked on action words. They acted out words, played a game, wrote silly sentences about things they will never do like – *Me levanto en el fregadero* – “I wake up in the kitchen sink” and incorporated vocabulary of the “house” from last month. Students learned how to read the time in Spanish. They imagined calling their friend and talking about what they did today. The most enjoyable activity was when Mrs. Rodriguez asked them to write two schedules, one they would enjoy and one they did not like.

3rd-4th Language Arts

Having successfully submitted entries to the September Cricket magazine story contest, students in Ms. West’s and Mrs. Kufahl’s classes have knuckled down for some serious lessons on writing fluency. They learned the difference between choppy, “chugging” sentences and longer, more fluent ones that flow like a smoothly operating train. They enjoyed the beautiful language in “The Night is Singing” by Jacqueline Davies and then practiced writing lovely fluent sentences of their own. “Quiet 10” remains a favorite class time activity as well as “Caught‘ya,” a lively supplement to Birchwood’s formal grammar program. Additionally, third grade students are steadily learning how to form all the uppercase letters in cursive, while the fourth graders are striving to perfect their handwriting during their final year of formal instruction in cursive.

3rd-4th Science

Mrs. Syed’s third- and fourth-graders are completing their rock unit. They studied the three types of rocks: sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic. They observed samples of each type and also discovered how each type is formed, and applied their understanding of rocks to create their own rocks.

4th Computer

Fourth-graders have been working with Mrs. Bontje, Mr. Sprau and Mrs. Waldal to learn programing skills using MicroWorlds EX. They created a beautiful design by typing programs and changing them until the design they liked was created. Then they saved the image and inserted it into a Google Doc. After that they copied the program and pasted it beneath the image. This was a great mash-up of using multiple skills and applications. Mrs. Waldal printed the designs and they are displayed around the school.

4th Reading

Under the guidance of Mrs. Debelak and Ms. West, the fourth graders began a Laura Ingalls Wilder author study this month. They signed their first contract of the year, setting a goal for the number of pages and books they will read within this unit. They are excited to learn all about pioneer life through the eyes of a young girl and her family. Wilder wrote many interesting stories about her father hunting, making bullets and smoking meat. She retells stories Pa told her as a little girl. The students enjoy reading about Laura Ingalls Wilder in both their class book and their individual books as she reminisces through her engaging and interesting writing. They will practice answering comprehension questions, citing page numbers to show examples and their reasoning. They will also be using context clues to discover the meaning of vocabulary words. After guessing the meaning, they will look up the definition in a dictionary. Additionally, the students wrote their best scary poem which they submitted to Cricket magazine.

4th Math

Mr. Sprau’s group is continuing their lengthy unit on decimals. They have now learned all four operations of decimal computation: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Their next challenge will be problem solving with decimals. One of Mrs. Bontje’s groups has been working hard at becoming fluent in their division facts. This was all in preparation for them to start learning long division, which they began this past week. Mrs. Bontje’s other group has been challenged by extremely difficult word problems from the “Primary Mathematics Level 5” book. The problems have been focused on decimals. They will soon begin a lengthy unit on fractions which will include challenging pre-algebra level problems, mostly from the “Art of Problem Solving” series.

4th Social Studies

Mrs. Moore’s and Mrs. Kufahl’s class studied Ohio’s mound builders and sculpted a class effigy mound (which currently needs a haircut). They then moved to the exploration of Ohio’s historic tribes and enjoyed trying to communicate with one another using Native American sign language and picture writing. Each student has also chosen a tribe and is diligently conducting research, which will culminate in a project and oral presentation. The field trip to take a Voyageur canoe paddle, however, was by far the highlight of the month.



Fourth grade students became French fur traders as they paddled a Voyageur canoe across Hinckley Lake.

Students, parents and teachers traveled to Cleveland Metroparks

CLASS NEWS *continued*

Hinckley Reservation where they became French fur traders of the 1790s for a few hours. Not only did the group paddle a 30-foot canoe to simulate the voyageurs' annual 1,200-mile journey, but they enjoyed French songs, old-fashioned games, starting a fire using flint and tasting delicious pea soup cooked over a campfire.

4th Spanish

Students worked on verbs by using props and acting out scenes to help with memorization with Mrs. Rodriguez. Then they drew cards depicting their own subject pronouns and learned the conjugations of the verbs. Finally, they selected activities they liked to do and used question words to engage in simple conversations with their friends.

5th Language Arts

Mr. Kurtz's and Mrs. Kufahl's students produced some truly creative and hilarious stories about people and animals swapping places in their quest to model the zany tale "Parents in the Pigen, Pigs in the Tub" by Amy Ehrlich. In their stories, students focused on paragraphing and the use of dialogue: not the "go nowhere" variety, but the kind which truly advances the plot and reveals more about the characters. They have also begun work on modeling a more traditional story, "The Nightingale" by Hans Christian Andersen, in which they will have the option of telling the tale from the viewpoint of a different character. In addition, the sophistication of each child's writing continues to be our goal in teaching weekly VLAT lessons. Check the students' writing for the inclusion of the three P's: absolute, appositive and participle phrases.

5th Reading

The class is finishing up a historical fiction unit on "The Sign of the Beaver" and "Calico Captive," both by Elizabeth George Speare, and "Indian Captive: The Story of Mary Jemison" by Lois Lenski. One big emphasis in the Colonial unit is on Native American versus white points of view, and the understanding and then appreciation that grows for the other culture by story's end. Also, students are practicing summary writing (plot), with some students approaching this from the angle of "journaling" as the main character and adding a character's thoughts and feelings to a review of events. The next unit will be a reading of two Newbery Award winner titles: "The Summer of the Swans" by Betsy Byars and "Bridge to Terabithia" by Katherine Paterson. However, at the height of preparation for the Poetry Show, students will independently enjoy the American Jack Tales and Uncle Remus stories.

The field trip to see the play, "The BFG," at the Magical Theatre Company in Barberton on Oct. 12 was monumentally enjoyed by all in Mr. Kurtz's and Mrs. Little's reading class. But then, who can exceed the appeal of Roald Dahl's stories at this age?

5th Science

Ms. Bottini's and Ms. Brown's fifth grade science class learned what acids and bases (ask them about the pH of their favorite sour candies and what they do to tooth enamel) were and applied their new knowledge to a chemistry week contest. Using red cabbage juice as an indicator, they tested sour candies to find their pH level. They have also written their first review of the literature for the science fair.



Students used sour candies in their hands-on study of acids and bases.

5th Social Studies

Students have been learning about European exploration of the Americas. After viewing a series of videos about explorers from Portugal, Spain, England and France, each student chose one explorer to research in-depth. Mrs. Miller and Mr. Parrino also had a fun classroom brainstorming session of the personal qualities needed by great explorers. Students voted on their top five and will have to assess whether their explorer had these five qualities. Through many smaller research projects like this, students become adept at developing research questions, finding sources for note taking, taking notes, and then presenting their information in a final product. For this project, students will produce explorer brochures that will be on display in November. In addition, since this year is a look at the Western Hemisphere, students memorized the countries and capitals of Central America and down the road, will also memorize the provinces of Canada and their capitals as well as the countries and capitals of South America. These students have shown they're ready and eager for the challenge!

5th Spanish

Class time is divided into work for the entire class and group study. The class has been working on verbs, conjugations and basic prepositions with Mrs. Rodriguez. Andrew and Sofia (who have Spanish language backgrounds) are reading and comprehending the book "Patricia va a California" by Blaine Ray; James and Leah are working on level 3 reading and comprehension, answering questions and translating stories; and the rest of the class is completing level 2 reading and comprehension, studying vocabulary using flash cards, memorization and games with the new words.

5th-6th Computers

Mrs. Waldal's students have been working on learning Microsoft products. They were given a basic budget that they typed in Excel. They learned how to type different formulas to calculate sums. Then they created bar graphs and pie charts within Excel. After that they emailed them as an attachment in their Gmail account.

5th-6th Math

Mr. D, Mr. Debelak, and Mrs. Gregory have continued to build problem solving skills with fifth- and sixth-graders. To develop problem solving skills students are adding to their toolbox so that they break apart complex problems. Since the beginning of the year we have been practicing our skills on previous math contests: Continental Math League (CML), Math Olympiads (MO) and American Mathematics Competition 8 (AMC8). The growth of fifth and sixth graders with their identification of how to break apart complex problems has begun. Students will be competing to get either a Bronze, Silver or Gold on each contest. Our first CML was Nov. 3, the AMC8 was Nov. 7 and the first Math Olympiad contest is Nov. 16. Good luck to all of our competitors!

6th Language Arts

Continuing with the writing of descriptions, Mrs. Tzeng and Mr. Kurtz had students draw with words portraits of themselves and one another (through a mirror and face to face observations), and even creatures and monsters using exaggerations. After revisions, their creations are posted in the south wing hallway where many younger students are matching descriptions to drawings in hopes of prizes.

6th Reading

The class is completing its spin-off unit (from “Number the Stars” by Lois Lowry) of survival books. Titles are “Abel’s Island” by William Steig, “Julie of the Wolves” by Jean Craighead George, “Island of the Blue Dolphins” by Scott O’Dell, “Treasure Island” by Robert Louis Stevenson and “Lassie Come-Home” by Eric Knight and each student has read at least one book. There was a Jeopardy game with questions on setting, characters and plot. For the remainder of the week students will finalize all writing assignments and create a cover for a booklet. Following this, class members will read either “Maniac Magee” by Jerry Spinelli or “The Westing Game” by Ellen Raskin, both Newbery Medal winner titles. As Poetry Show preparation vamps up, this unit will be carried out independently by each student; parents should feel free to check their child’s progress via the reading calendar where each day’s work and homework is recorded. Although students are proceeding independently, there will be deadlines for writing assignments or activities.

With a theme of world folktales for the Poetry Show, the class will be enjoying not only the storyline for “How the Camel Got His Hump” (from “Just So Stories” by Rudyard Kipling), but also the blocking, acting, costumes, prop building and musical accompaniments as they prepare. There are also three Aesop fables to work up and a second more serious folktale was passed out and quickly tackled. Students have been very busy, but in the best way.

The field trip to see the play, “The BFG,” at the Magical Theatre Company in Barberton on Oct. 12 was monumentally enjoyed by all in Mr. Kurtz’s and Mrs. Little’s reading class. But then, who can exceed the appeal of Roald Dahl’s stories at this age?

6th Science

Solving mysteries using chemistry, the sixth grade students are experimenting with the chemistry of fibers and forensic science to compete in the National Chemistry Week Contest. Ms. Brown’s and Ms. Bottini’s students have been working diligently on their science fair projects and review of the literature. Students are in the process of creating a procedure, defining variables, accumulating materials and testing their experiment. Save the Date: Science Night is coming up on Friday, Jan. 13.

6th Social Studies

Sixth grade social studies is charting its course to the cradle of civilization along with Mrs. Miller and Mr. Parrino. Students will navigate great rivers like the Tigris, Euphrates and the Nile, to learn how these bodies of water with their many geographic advantages act as strong currents to development. The agricultural revolution, the rise of trade centers like Babylon and the empires of the pharaoh all trace their source upstream. The unit culminates in a web-based presentation the students create on an ancient Egypt topic of their choice.

6th Spanish

Students worked in the textbook “Asi se Dice 1A” with Mrs. Rodriguez. They completed the first chapter: Como somos? They identified and described people and things including telling where someone was from. They also talked about school subjects and began to learn about Spanish speakers in the United States. To accomplish this, students learned the agreement of nouns, articles and adjectives and the present tense of the verb *ser*.

7th Language Arts

Students are collecting personal experiences in Mrs. Tzeng’s class to write them as vignettes and memoir. To get the point of the story across, they learn to “explode the moment,” drawing out the most critical parts and stretching them with narration, description, dialogue and thoughts. Students are enjoying dramatizing these recollections, but the challenge will be to find the significances in the experiences and discovering more about themselves in the process.

7th Reading

Mrs. Debelak’s students focused on three qualities of good readers as they read “Harriet the Spy” by Louise Fitzhugh. 1) They had to “read with a wide-awake-mind” throughout the story in order to bear in mind the two questions that drove the reading: Why does she spy? and Why does she keep a diary? Many lively discussions

CLASS NEWS *continued*

ensued as they followed the trail of possibilities. 2) To discover the reasons, they had to “make connections” and articulate them in diary entries. They eagerly shared their observations with one another. 3) This class was fantastic at the good reader quality “loves words!” The author’s descriptions graphically present the behaviors that help put the pieces of the puzzle together. Students loved to share words they liked; this part could have gone on all day every-day. The culminating activity was to write up paragraphs on Harriet’s reactive and proactive methods of solving her problem, and to express in writing how this line by John Keats played out in the theme: “Beauty is truth; truth, beauty. That is all ye know and all ye need to know.” Alongside the class book, students read nonfiction historical diaries, for example, by Marco Polo, Civil War soldiers and Oregon Trail pioneers. Currently, they are wowing Mrs. Debelak with their drama talent as they prepare for the upcoming show of tales and poems from around the world on Friday, Nov. 18.

7th Social Studies

Mrs. Miller’s class recently finished up a unit on the early formation of the 13 colonies and their steps toward self-government. Now the students are continuing this march in history by looking at the events leading up to the American Revolution. They have also started their History Day journey by choosing their topics for research. With the theme of “Taking a Stand in History,” students chose topics ranging from Ben Franklin to Muhammed Ali and the Oberlin/Wellington rescue to the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812. Other topics chosen by the students are:

Christian Barnard, the heart transplant pioneer; Thomas Paine, the Revolutionary War writer; Denmark Vesey, a slave who formulated plans for a slave uprising; Steve Jobs, the visionary inventor who brought the personal computer into America’s homes, and the Fifth Amendment right clarified by the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of *Miranda v. Arizona*.

In November, students visited the Cleveland Museum of Art for a tour of the museum’s early American art collection. They will learn about Colonial Era portraits and various techniques used at that time. In addition, students will have a chance to view a number of American landscapes from the 1800s, particularly some associated with the Hudson River School technique. It will be a wonderful companion field trip to their study of early American history.

7th Science

Ms. Brown’s seventh graders worked on two thrusts this month. The first was an introduction to matter (beginning chemistry). One group of students began by using an online high school unit in addition to the textbook. The second thrust this month was to prepare for and write the review of the literature or background information for the science fair project. Students ordered books, took notes, produced an outline and wrote.

7th Spanish

The students have the textbook “Asi se Dice 1B.” They worked on Repaso B “En casa y en la escuela” with Mrs. Rodriguez. Students reviewed the vocabulary associated with both home and school activities. They worked on the present tense of regular verbs besides the irregular verbs, *estar*, and *ir* plus the contractions *al* and *del*. They looked at pictures and engaged on conversations using the vocabulary already learned.

7th-8th Latin I

The seventh graders are blazing through our exciting new online curriculum, the Cambridge Latin Course, and acquiring a sense of daily life amid Romans of all classes while also learning how to read basic Latin sentences. The eighth graders are working towards their year-long goals regarding high school placement while also having more independence in setting their paces. All the groups periodically gather together at the board with Mrs. Haskins to explore vast overviews of the entire verb system – all six tenses in all four conjugations – which can be unnerving, but provide a roadmap for their individual work.

7th-8th Math

Mr. D, Mr. Debelak, and Mrs. Gregory have continued to help build the seventh- and eighth-graders math toolbox for problem solving. Seventh- and eighth-graders take part in the American Mathematics Competition 8 (AMC 8), Math Olympiads and Continental Math League (CML) contests to compete against themselves as well as other students nationally. To gain experience, they have been practicing past contests. Contests provide a wonderful enrichment opportunity for math students to apply their knowledge and reach above typical classroom content. The first CML contest was Nov. 3, the first Math Olympiads contest is Nov. 22, and the AMC 8 contest is Nov. 15. Good luck to our seventh- and eighth-graders.

“Why are numbers beautiful? It’s like asking why is Beethoven’s ‘Ninth Symphony’ beautiful. If you don’t see why, someone can’t tell you. I know numbers are beautiful. If they aren’t beautiful, nothing is,” written by Paul Erdos a Hungarian mathematician. He was one of the most prolific mathematicians of the 20th century.

8th Language Arts

The group with Mrs. Tzeng ventured into writing about personal treasured objects as a culmination of the unit on “observation.” Using the construct of a short story model, they described their objects to depict observation from several perspectives.

7th-8th Computer

We have begun our virtual reality academy. Mrs. Waldal has developed a virtual world for students to explore, build and program. The first assignment was to create their avatars clothing and style. The next assignment will be to build a rocket in the virtual world

CLASS NEWS *continued*

using lessons from YouTube videos. Then they will add images or textures to their rockets, and program them to fly. We love this unit for the creativity and excitement of being “in world.” We will also talk about appropriate online behavior and actions.

8th Reading

The class book, “The Trumpeter of Krakow” by Eric Kelly, afforded students an opportunity to analyze how geography and historical context affect the plot and theme of an historical fiction novel. They consulted historical atlases and an array of reference sources to orient themselves with medieval Poland, the Tartar invasions, and customs, beliefs and superstitions of the time. In small group discussions students further analyzed the techniques of foreshadowing and the use of dialogue to heighten the mystery and create tension. After debating how the main character’s inner conflict between good and evil affected his final choice, Dr. Neider and Mrs. Debelak guided the class through the steps of a five-paragraph persuasive essay. The impressive result is one benchmark accomplishment that shows how ready they are to move on to high school English class. Students also read books of choice in the genre of world historical fiction. Each student created a PowerPoint showing the historical context, setting, and conflict in their individual book. Mark your calendar for the show of poetry and tales from around the world on Friday, Nov. 18. Noodlehead tales from around the world presented by this talented class are going to be f-u-n-n-y!

8th Science

Ms. Brown and Ms. Bottini have been working closely with students to finalize their review of literature. Students are creating procedures, obtaining materials and defining variables in preparation for testing their experiments. Save the date: Science Night is coming up on Friday, Jan. 13.

When not diligently working on science fair, the students are engaging in the cell processes. Students are taking what they know about photosynthesis and cellular respiration and comparing and contrasting the two processes through written analysis. Eighth-graders are investigating how materials move into and out of the cell through the cell membrane. Students are experiencing osmosis firsthand through lab investigations.

8th Social Studies

Eighth grade social studies with Mr. Parmio and Mrs. Miller is “steeling” itself for its upcoming unit on the Second Industrial Revolution, a period of explosive growth and change. Not only did this era put the Midwest front and center as a production giant of steel mills, oil fields and coal mines, it also attracted waves of new immigrants. The newcomers helped transform America into an ur-

ban society and the most diverse society seen on Earth. This is also the time of year when eighth-graders choose a History Day topic they are passionate about and start filling their spiral with research. This year’s theme is “Taking a Stand in History.”

8th Spanish

During the first quarter the students worked on verbs and their conjugations with Mrs. Rodriguez. They practiced the present tense of the regular and irregular verbs. To improve their comprehension and vocabulary they read books and completed writing activities.

A View From History and Research

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Children who attend school with an understanding that education is the pathway to a richer and fuller life: personally, professionally, monetarily and even socially or emotionally, struggle to gain as much as they can from their education. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in the immigrant’s experience in America. Even when faced with inferior educational opportunities, or with inadequate educational resources, children who embrace the opportunities in education and engage in their own education, overcome all odds to get a superior education and live on a higher plane.

My own experience in the classroom tells the same story. Children who come to my class ready to engage are the ones who learn. Most often these children have been taught by their parents to value education and work hard. Their attitude in class is positive and productive. When I have such students, I am able to instruct them to the highest levels of achievement.

But my experience also tells the sad story of unengaged students. If children attend my math classes disinterested because they are *disproportionately* focused on video games, social media, TV, athletics or social relationships, then my efforts to incite, excite and educate are limited. Progress is slowed.

What can a parent do? At least two things. First, talk to your children frequently about the importance and value of learning in school and learning as a way of life. By word and deed, make education and achievement a priority in the home. Second, understand there are countless distractions in your child’s life that provide far more enticing engagement, in the short term, than education and learning. For this reason, you need to become your child’s educational coach in a manner like that of a music teacher or an athletic coach who guides and reinforces attitudes about learning and performance. These mentors, hoping to inspire their students toward excellence, explain the difference between immediate gratification and long-term gratification. In so doing, they teach their students to make wise choices about how to spend their time and how to remain engaged in activities which will provide the greatest return.

Charles Debelak
Head of School

The Birchwood Educational Model: Shaped Through Two Efforts

The Intellectual Effort

The second effort that shaped the Birchwood Educational Model is an intellectual effort because it synthesized 1) the best educational principles found in history, 2) an ongoing, critical study of contemporary research in related fields of education and human development, and 3) our personal experience in the daily classroom as full time teachers work with different sets of students, year after year. My wife and I have had the unique opportunity at Birchwood to connect the world of historical and educational scholarship with the world of practice. Where these two worlds join, we have discovered – and continue to discover – ways to cultivate intellect and character in all children of all ages.

The need to combine scholarship and practice came to us out of necessity and from a little common sense. Our reasoning argued that if we wanted to give our children the best academic preparation possible and if we wanted to cultivate their character, we should know what history has taught us about great education, and in what ways contemporary research has built upon the lessons of history and how research has modified and improved those lessons.

Obviously, education is not a new venture for humankind. Examples of extraordinary achievement through exceptional education permeate every world culture. It would be foolish to ignore lessons history has provided. At the same time, humankind is continually advancing, and research in the fields of education, psychology, neuroscience and other educationally related fields may either corroborate the historical tenets of great education, or modify them to make education even better for subsequent generations of children.

For us, good educational had to be *time-tested and research-based*. To further bolster our trek toward excellence, we added the need for contemporary *benchmarks*. Here we found it important to identify real-world examples of schools and other institutions whose results with children demonstrated superior academic performance and excellent character development. Focused on time-tested, research-based and benchmark programming models, we positioned ourselves for continual improvement and growth.

Time Tested Curriculum and Programming

As we define it, a *time-tested curriculum describes elements of education that have cultivated high intellectual achievement among students of each generation and every culture*. In history we found common threads of exceptional educational training within each academic discipline. History provided guidelines for what to teach and how to teach it.

We acknowledged that egregious errors occurred in historical models for education. They hindered students from attaining great education. Nevertheless, we believed this was not a reason

to ignore history and its extraordinary educational successes. We determined to study and draw from the best of powerful traditions.

For example, the history of reading instruction explained that the process of learning to read and growing as a reader is a lifelong process, and that process or habit needed to begin early in a child's life. Over time, a variety of approaches to instruction have developed and each claim to be the better method. Yet, evidence suggests that each may have merit depending on how that magic moment occurs within each unique child when reading "clicks." Two time-tested factors are consistent. First, when children are given beautiful texts and the time to read, they will engage with books. With these parameters, "learning to read by reading" is the guidepost for teachers from the earliest stages and ever onward as the texts become more complex. Second, the qualities of a good adult reader have been the same over time and are thus what we can cultivate in the youngest readers e.g., reads with an awakened mind, asks questions, makes connections and loves words. Our overarching understanding is that through story we are connecting children to the common threads of what it means to be human shared throughout time and cultures by way of story.

In another example, through our study of history it became evident that good writers of every generation readily cite the writer's maxim that "you learn to write by writing." For centuries, writers have perfected their writing skills by writing frequently, consistently and persistently. They studied the form, style and voice of other writers and used this information to shape their own work. Whether it was Benjamin Franklin, or Emily Dickenson or Steven King, the development of writing skills followed similar paths. Clearly, if we hoped to make our students excellent writers, then they needed to write frequently, consistently and persistently under the guiding eye of dedicated writing teachers.

History also taught us that the education of strong mathematicians, including that of engineers, followed consistent themes. Good mathematicians possessed a strong, mathematical knowledge base. They collected and mastered a "toolbox" of mathematical concepts and problem solving skills that enabled them to progress to higher levels of study and which also equipped them to solve complex math problems. The lesson was evident. In order to make children competent and enthusiastic mathematicians they would need to accumulate a "toolbox" of mathematical skills and concepts, and they would need to become good at using those tools. Being so equipped, students could engage in the essence of the math experience: solving problems. Here is where students learn to love the beauty of mathematics. Within this framework, children would not only become good at mathematics, but they would learn to love math as well.

History provided us lessons on science instruction. Capable and enthusiastic scientists had three integral learning experiences. First, their curiosity and investigative interests were aroused through many opportunities to explore and discover. Second, young scientists needed to expand their knowledge of the scientific world.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, November 18
Poetry Show - Grades 5-8

Saturday, December 3
International Festival and Auction



“The Magic of Story” will be featured at the Grades 5-8 Poetry Show.

UNDER THE CANOPY *continued*

The Birchwood Educational Model

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This required countless opportunities to explore realms of scientific knowledge, while also developing a love for reading books about science and specific skills for reading scientific texts. Finally, high quality scientific instruction, cultivated a scientist’s habits of mind: collecting data, formulating questions, hypothesizing and testing.

Following these three time-tested features in science instruction, we built our science program on a firm foundation.

We learned similar lessons from the past about the studies in history and geography. The most compelling common question asked by educators has been “why study history?” Without a firm intellectual grounding in this essential understanding, history – of all subjects – has been in peril of being the most boring and the one which least equipped students for future intellectual engagement in problem-solving either for society or for themselves. Thus, history education begins with the educator who develops a passion for the past and a focused goal to infuse the habits of mind, tools and passions of a historian (or geographer) into their classrooms. Facts and dates find their place in classrooms that are alive and driven by questions such as “Why now?” “Why here?” and “Why this person?” We found that students at any grade level can become engaged when experiencing history in this way.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, history has taught us that all learning is sentient. The mind must be engaged but genuine and lasting learning passes through the emotions. Hence it must be experiential. This means that each classroom, at every grade level, in every subject discipline, nurtures transactional engagement in the essential structure of each discipline. We believe every discipline can be taught in its essential form to any child at any age. Children can learn to be true historians, scientists, writers, literary critics and mathematicians if they are given genuine experiences through transactional engagement in the essential structure of each discipline.

In our quest for academic excellence, we recognized early we had to build upon a solid foundation. Although throughout our history we sought to be innovative and to model the best tenets of progressive education, we could not escape the necessity of building on a firm foundation that had been tried and validated. Our programming had to be time-tested.

Charles Debelak
Head of School

What are Signature Programs at Birchwood?

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A Signature Program, by design, extends the learning in each subject to allow more time for students to immerse in authentic experiences and habits of mind inherent in each. They include programs of our own design such as the poetry show, science fair, creative problem-solving in the early grades; and they incorporate carefully selected nationally-developed programs such as Junior Great Books, National History Day, Science Olympiads, Future Problem Solving, Scholastic Art & Writing (plus the fees to enter many other writing opportunities), and the array of math problem-solving contests beginning in second grade, including the Continental Mathematics League (CML). These authentic goals are wonderful tools in the teachers hands to inspire children to apply themselves to high standards of excellence. They allow students to spend more time in order to truly build experience in critical and creative thinking skills, and to thereby taste the essence and joy of each subject.

A historical perspective of the IFA: every Signature Program has costs whether it be simple costumes for the poetry show, fees to participate in the math problem-solving contests throughout the year in all our math classes, or team fees for Future Problem Solving. In the earliest years teachers ran bake sales and car washes. We were determined not to raise tuition and we did not want to continually ask parents for \$25 here and \$100 there to pay for their child’s participation. When parents’ approached us to ask if the IFA could fund these, it was the beginning of a meaningful partnership. All children, regardless of family economics, could participate.

Teachers and students would not have to expend energy with fundraising for each. Tuition would not have to be raised on this account. When parents had the idea that the students who are the beneficiaries of all the proceeds of the IFA could also participate, we believed this was an excellent way for them to show their gratitude.

This is the history behind each class creating an item for the live auction and another smaller item for the raffle, and for the fifth through eighth grade students to create and set up game booths for the younger children to take part in. They are learning to give back and to be grateful.

We look forward to seeing you at this year’s IFA!