

## NEWS FROM RIVER MILL ELEMENTARY

Learning is in the air at River Mill, even though spring doesn't seem to be in sight! Here's a little taste of what's going on in the classrooms on a typical day of an administrative 'walk-thru'.

- The quiet hum of learning to read in 1<sup>st</sup> grade: students working in small groups with the teacher, students working with 6<sup>th</sup> grade helpers, and students practicing spelling words on the white board
- A teacher singing, "I like the way that Johnny is sitting," to the tune of *Ten Little Indians*
- A News Flash posted on a classroom door: We can ALL read sight word lists 1-10 (yes, that's sped. Title I, and ELL students included!)
- A second grade class reading a poem aloud together to work on reading fluency and expression
- A note to students on the board in a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom telling students to give someone a compliment first thing in the morning
- Seven students identified as 'behaviorally challenged' working quietly with their teacher on a reading comprehension assignment
- Fourth grade students painting artistic backdrops for a Native American museum they are designing
- Third grade essays posted on the wall, in full five paragraph form, illustrated with watercolor paintings
- Students in 6<sup>th</sup> grade seated by Greek culture groups working on a group project
- Students in fifth grade building a math probability game to conclude a probability unit in *Number Corner*
- And of course, TESA testing in the computer lab

And the learning goes on.....

As a principal, it's such a pleasure to step out of the office and into a 'zone' where children are engaged in their learning and teachers are excited about what they are doing. Teachers don't take (or demand) the center-stage as much anymore; there's far less lecture, more students working together, and tons of evidence on the walls to demonstrate learning. In every classroom you will see classroom goals posted for things like homework completion, coming to school on time, books read, sight words learned, etc. The hallways also showcase everything from book reports,

collages, paragraphs about the perfect school (complete with swimming pools in every class), and student-made posters reminding students about Fantastic Friday. It's wonderful to see students engaged in learning everywhere you look!

Although unobservable to the naked eye, there are a few challenges in the building as well.

- 6<sup>th</sup> grade music, for those students not interested in band, continues to be a struggle for both teacher and students. It's the end-of-the-line for general music instruction since 7<sup>th</sup> graders only go to band or chorus. It's a challenge to keep most 6<sup>th</sup> graders interested in general music concepts, so teachers are exploring small group projects, intro to chorus, etc. To top it off, scheduling band/music between two specialists and three schools is a real challenge. For example, in addition to the logistical scheduling difficulties, placing a specialist in a building for a limited time (i.e. one class per day) creates a difficult scenario in terms of the teacher developing relationships with staff and students.
- Each spring the decision needs to be made regarding the configuration of classes for the next year. We struggle with the pros and cons of looping the teacher from one grade to the next. RM has had this practice for years in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms, but might discontinue next year. One of the largest factors is the number of students we have who are very difficult to work with for two years in a row. Of course there are many great reasons to travel with your students to the next grade level, but teachers' overall satisfaction is high on my list of priorities when deciding what is best for children.

Overall, RM is a thriving elementary school with fabulous teachers and staff. We invite you to join us for any of the upcoming activities and events. Dates and times are subject to change, so please feel free to call our office for details.

- After the snow melts, our kindergarten butterfly garden will be in bloom. Come on by and meet the butterflies!
- Fantastic Fridays occur every Friday afternoon from 2:15-3:00 PM. FF is an opportunity for students who have completed their homework and not received any discipline steps for the week to participate in cross-grade level activities throughout the building. Past FF activities have included African

drumming, knitting, math games, drawing, science club, and of course, study hall for students who didn't earn their positive reward for the week.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders are writing their own fairy tales and will be presenting a folk tale festival this spring
- Some wonderful assemblies are in the works: An Egyptian assembly at 9:30 am on 4/3, a Living Science assembly at 2:00 pm on 4/21, and a virtual tour of the Chinese Garden all day in the computer lab on 4/23
- Kindergarten Round-up from 4-6 pm on 4/23
- Sixth Graders attend Outdoor School in Salem from 4/29-5/2
- Grandparents' Day and Science Fair on 5/16
- Division I (thru grade 5) District-wide spelling bee, date TBA
- Intermediate Music Program at the Auditorium, 7 pm on 5/21
- 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grades will take a trip to the Oregon Food Bank to tour the facility as well as work on a food project
- 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers are planning a career fair where parents and others will come in and talk about their careers. Any takers?
- River Mill dads will once again host the end-of-year BBQ on the last half-day.....shortly after our field day and a RM parent parachutes onto the field

Thank you so much for your interest in and your ongoing support of our school. We welcome your involvement and encourage you to drop by anytime. Please plan on attending our April PTA meeting at 6:00 on the 15<sup>th</sup> to hear from the candidates who would like to have my principal position next year.

Sincerely,  
Tina Rhue