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Little River News

Little River Goes Solar

Little River is now the proud owner of nine solar panels. The panels are mounted on the south-facing roof of our building. The system is grid-tied and will produce 2,340 watts of electricity per year and will meet 100% of the school's electrical needs.

The panels were in-

stalled by Apex Solar Power as part of the local Solarize Canton program. We received state and federal incentives including a New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) grant of 25% and a federal tax credit of 30% of the system's installed cost. Taken together the system

will entirely pay for itself in about six and a half years.

The system is a statistician's dream and there will be a number of projects we can do with the students to monitor the amount of power generated. Each panel collects information on its production and efficiency that is sent to the

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Little River Community School installs solar panels!

The Game of Village

We ventured into the Game of Village not really knowing how much learning would take place or how much we as teachers would learn. The Middles are spending every Tuesday building a miniature vil-

lage. Leon and I decided to team teach The Game of Village in the Middles class and joked that we would be "playing dolls." Well, the biggest surprise would be on us, as the learning creeps in to every

lesson we plan.

Peepville is the village that the Middles are creating in a scale of 1:24. Each student created a three inch tall character with both a physical body, made using pipe cleaners and Sculpey

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- 8:1 Student/Teacher Ratio
- Hands-on Learning
- Individualized Curriculum
- Field Trips
- Satellite Options

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The Game of Village (continued)

clay, and a persona, complete with education, favorite foods, hobbies, and more.

After creating our peeps, we each staked a claim to a homestead in Peepville. We measured the length of each side of the property, oriented all sides using a compass, and drew scale maps of the property complete with landmarks and measurements. The maps will be copied to compile one large map of Peepville. We modeled our claim acquisition after the Homestead Act of 1862, which allows settlers to claim 160 acres of land at little or no cost.

Government has been our biggest



Homestead picnic lunch

obstacle in this venture. The class researched various forms of government in order to establish leadership in Peepville. Monarchy, oligarchy, socialism, representative and direct democracy were all explored. The Middles narrowed their interests down to direct democracy and oligarchy. Because we are operating under consensus until we decide on a form of government, decisions have been slow and thoughtful in the making. All students were asked to conduct outside research on both direct democracy and oligarchy and we then conducted a formal debate in which students worked on teams to present and defend information about their stance. While consensus still eludes us, the debate was an enormous success with students making strong statements, working under time constraints, and rebutting their opponents' statements.

After drawing their house plans at a scale of 1:24, the students will submit a lumber order to the Peepville Trading Post. They will receive pre-cut plywood pieces to make the walls, floors, and roof of their houses. However, they will

need to cut openings for doors and windows. They will assemble and paint the houses so they can be placed on their homestead claims. The Peepville government will select a location for the village center and various peeps will be hired to build public buildings, including a town hall, library, and school.

Peepville is a huge undertaking for the Middles. We have entered into the project with many goals, including unifying the multiage group of full-time and satellite students, exploring academics in an interdisciplinary environment, and simply having fun. The project has already far surpassed our expectations. These students are demonstrating strengths in public speaking, debating issues such as government power in the hands of a few individuals, using their creativity to develop a character all their own, and envisioning an entire community. Play is important. And when it coincides with our learning, it is so fulfilling.

by Kelly Newman



Staking a claim in Peepville

Little River Goes Solar (continued)

school's router and can be read in real time on our computers. We will be able to track how much energy each of the panels is producing.

These solar panels are important to

us as a tangible way to work toward a more sustainable planet. We are becoming more aware of our energy use and are taking concrete steps to reduce our fossil fuel consumption. Solar power is cleaner than conventional sources of

Alternative School Conference to be Hosted by LRCS

Little River has had many unique opportunities, but this one may be far from just exciting. For many years we have attended alternative school conferences. In recent years a Northeast Association Democratic Education Conference (NADEC) has been held by different alternative schools to celebrate the tools and ideas utilized in self-directed learning environments. The purpose of this conference is to inspire and empower all forms of education for students like ours. Students, parents, administrators, and supporters have all been participants at these conferences. Various Little River students have at-

tended in the past, and now we are inspired to host our own.

We plan to host the conference at our school on April 29th through May 1st of 2016. A group of older students, LR parents, and teachers have made lists for things we need to do and have had multiple meetings about this conference. We are now deciding what types of workshops for the conference, like tie-dying, student-led panels, a talent show, arts and crafts, etc. This conference will be a blast! We plan to have lots of great music, yummy food, and awesome students. Conference attendees will have the op-

tion to camp out at the school or stay at nearby hotels.

We have already heard back from one school in Maine, who will be sending 15 of their students. We have also sent out emails to various alternative schools inviting them to join us. We have a Skype meeting planned to discuss workshops that appeal to them and to field any questions they might have.

Little River students, parents, and teachers are getting very excited to host this conference. We have a limit of 100 people who can be accommodated. Without the support and contributions from our commu-

The Joy of Learning to Read: Bringing Language to Life

"You're actually going to read!" states the poster that hangs on the center of the Rainbow Room door, the entrance to the magical world of kindergarten and first grade here at Little River. Our goal is to inspire each other to fall in love with reading, which will lead to a life-long reading practice. To fall in love with books before you can even decode the words on the pages makes all the hard work it takes to become a reader an absolute joy. We tell stories, listen to stories, draw stories, and admire our favorite authors and illustrators, collecting ideas from their work to incorporate into our own.

One of the challenges of teaching beginning readers is to maintain their enthusiasm for letters, words, and stories while learning sound-symbol relationships and building oral fluency. We have a variety of Rainbow Room mantras that help keep our positive momentum going: (1) Working hard feels good; (2) Three is a magic number to lock it in; and (3) Good readers reread. The first mantra speaks to the significant amount of determination, dedication, and time it takes to learn how to read. The second refers

to the number of times we repeat activities in order to lock new information into our memories. The final mantra sets the expectation that we will read the same story more than once and when we do, we will read it three times since "three is a magic number."

The myriad strategies used in our structured reading lessons come from the *Project Read Phonics* curriculum, which teaches sound-symbol relationships through simultaneous use of visual, audi-

tory, kinesthetic, and tactile activities. Students clip consonant sounds with their finger scissors; write letters in the sky, in a memory (sand) box and on fuzzy felt; finger-spell the words they catch in their spelling mitts; tap out red (sight) words on their arms; and joyously place words they can read and spell in our jewel box.

Above the large windows that overlook the trees behind Little River hangs another sign: "Read every day!" It is a joy to read to children and to teach them



Artwork by Sierra, age 13



Artwork by Tera, age 15

Science in a Multi-age Classroom

This year the classrooms are divided into kindergarten to 1st in the Youngers room, 2nd to 7th in the Middles and 8th to 12th in the Olders. As you can see, there is a range of ages in our classrooms and a corresponding range of abilities, challenges, and interests. Finding ways to address the needs and goals of such a diverse group makes our days interesting, to say the least.

In science, it is foolish to expect the 2nd and 7th graders to accomplish the same tasks, so most days there are two different activities happening at the same time. Last week we looked at food chains and food webs. After a brief introduction and discussion, the group went to work on different tasks. The older half of the group read a fictional scenario in which human intervention in an ecosystem had unexpected negative consequences further up the food chain. At the same time, the younger half of the class prepared posters

of food webs by cutting and pasting pictures from the web onto a poster. They then shared these posters with their peers and identified producers, consumers, herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores. In the end both groups learned about food webs during the same class time. The older half practiced higher-level critical thinking and analysis, while the younger half mastered some vocabulary and shared their results with their classmates.

It is tempting to partner a younger student with an older student for projects. Such an approach can help the older student deepen her knowledge of the material as she guide a younger student through the project. It also encourages leadership and patience in the older student. The younger student benefits from the older student's experience and academic skills. We did this for a one-day outdoor research project, and it worked fairly well. However, overusing this technique can result in less learning for

the older student. Learning to teach your classmates is a great skill, but it does not replace content knowledge.

A third approach is for the younger students to continue on a topic for an extra period to complete their mastery even if the older students are ready to move on. While the younger students finish up, the older students are learning a new topic and preparing a lesson on that topic for the younger members of the class. This worked well when the younger students were finishing up predation and symbiosis and the others were learning ecological succession. The youngers listened to and learned the basics of succession from their classmates. The advantage to the older students is that they have to know the material well if they want to present it confidently.

Teaching across a six grade range of skills and maturity levels is not always easy. In fact, it may be the hardest teach-

Olders Poetry Showcase

Thank You!

Basketball

Basketball
is not a sport
it's kind of like
a lifestyle no one
understands what
it is like to play
it not for the
money and not
to be famous but to
play it for fun and
the love for the sport
it's like a lifestyle.

by Myra, age 15

birds fly in the sky
they hunt worms to feed their kids
they live in high trees

by AJ, age 13

Autumn, the Season

The leaves are falling,
Falling down,
Falling down all around.
Orange, Red, Yellow, Brown
Leaves are falling on the ground.

by Eli, age 13

Have your child come home happy!

We would like to give our appreciation to:
Sean Coon, First Aid & CPR training with LR staff; **Ann Petroccione**, epi-pen training with LR staff; **Chuck Bolesh**, Adventures in Learning elective; **Cathy Giglio**, tutor; **Annie Gibbons**, Youngers volunteer; **Jean Williams-Bergen**, Equal Exchange fundraiser organizer; **Dulli Tengeler**, hosted Youngers field trip at Birdsfoot Farm; **SLU's Commons College students**, who work with the Olders and do fundraising for LR: **Bridget Fleming**, **Dylan Murtha**, **Mary Ann Roberts**, **Matthew Monhart**, **Colin Kirkland**, **Derrick Robinson**, **Liam Donnelly**, **Kei Kullberg**, **Taber Engelken**, **Daniel Martin**, **Kaleigh Galvin**, **Sophia Frankenburg**, **Naomi Feiguine**, **Grace King**, **George Misiewicz**, **Robert Hash**, **William McGowan**, **Harrison Cobb**, **Reed Spearman**, **Lily Barrows**, **Julia Ristine**, **Peter Caulo**, **Madeline Goff**, **Meredith Wolpe**, **Nick Stenicka**; **SLU's Pub 56**, hosting fundraiser for LR; **Ellen R. Newman**, Pub 56 manager; **Andrew Nolan**, SLU ANNEX representative; **Chris Rich**, Pub 56 IT department; **Marissa Skaczkowski**, art with Olders, **Maize Rosenheimer**, Youngers & Middles volunteer; **Emily Giordano**, SUNY Potsdam volunteer; **Marsha Baxter**, Ensemble Director; **Crane Latin Ensemble**, music for fall fundraiser; **Jeanna Matthews**, salsa dance lessons at fundraiser; **Valerie Pulver**, Middles & Youngers reading volunteer; **LRCS Parents: Ann Petroccione**, **Rainbow Crabtree**, **Shelby Connelly**, **Howard & Yasmine Eissenstat**, **Tom Langen**, volunteers for the Latin Dance Party fundraiser.

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