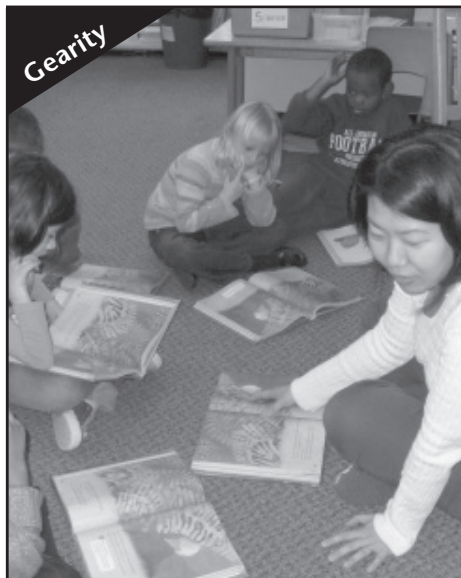


News From Reaching Heights



Esther Yeh, student teacher and JCU graduate student teaches a reading lesson to Gearity second graders.

by Florence D'Emilia

When principal Sherry Miller assumed leadership at Gearity Professional Development School, the district's pre-school through fifth grade campus in

College Connections Enrich Gearity

University Heights, she envisioned a center of innovation, best instructional practices, and a community of lifelong learners. Thanks in part to partnerships with John Carroll University and Hiram College, that vision is becoming reality. Those partnerships help train future educators, engage families and community, and provide professional development for all. And students benefit from exemplary classroom practices designed to maximize achievement.

Hundreds of college students observe, learn and practice their future professions in preschool and elementary classrooms as well as in the Sensory Room under the guidance of Gearity teachers and college professors. Getting college students into real classrooms early and often helps them decide if they are suited to a career in education and helps them learn how to be great teachers in the future. "The more time college students spend in the classroom observing experienced teach-

ers and working with students, the more sophisticated they become," commented Carol Paull of John Carroll University's Institute of Educational Renewal.

Professional development schools borrow heavily from the medical model of teaching hospitals. "Just like doctors, teachers need to practice their skills," said Cheryl Hunter, the education professor (and Gearity parent) who oversees the Hiram connection. "As they experience life in a classroom, college students gain a great deal." College students progress from a purely observational role to developing a lesson plan and teaching a lesson. Gearity teachers provide guidance and feedback every step of the way.

"There is phenomenal energy at Gearity," said Hunter. "The teaching staff is concerned about every child. We wanted Hiram students to have an opportunity to be a part of this fantastic school." 📖



Fifth-grade science teacher Janice Kurtz helps a student create a scale drawing of the sun and planets.

by Florence D'Emilia

Making sense of the world around them can be tough for kids, but a recent exercise in science class helped fifth graders at Canterbury understand the scale of the universe.

Using an inquiry-based approach,

CANTERBURY 5TH GRADERS PLACE THE UNIVERSE IN ORDER

fifth-grade science teacher Janice Kurtz elicited information that the students had learned in an introductory lesson. Students eagerly offered facts: The planets orbit the sun. The inner planets are closer to the sun. The asteroid belt is located between the inner and outer planets. The outer planets are much farther from the sun. Then Mrs. Kurtz asked the students to look at a beautiful, glossy poster of the solar system and tell her what was wrong with it. She helped the students articulate that the poster did not accurately depict the distances between planets and the sun.

The inexactness of the poster offered an opportunity to learn. Ms. Kurtz clearly stated the learning intention for the class: "We are going to make

a diagram that shows the proportional distance between the planets." Through a series of questions, she helped them to create accurate representations of the solar system on long narrow sheets of paper. With their rulers and a chart filled with information about planets, students drew a large sun at the left hand edge of their papers, and then began to measure and mark them.

As they carefully drew the location of Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars, students noticed how close these planets were to one another—a mere centimeter separated the four inner planets. Drawing the furthest outer planet a full 30 centimeters from the sun helped the students understand the enormity of our solar system. 📖

REACHING HEIGHTS

Our Passion: Excellent Public Education

Reaching Heights Neighborhood

Newsletters take you into classrooms to give you a glimpse of the important work of teaching and learning happening every day in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights public schools. In words and pictures, Florence D'Emilia and Krista Hawthorne describe the rich learning environments, progressive teaching techniques, and community connections that work together to educate all of our children.

If you have questions, suggestions, or corrections, please contact Reaching Heights at rh@reachingheights.org or 216-932-5110

Heights Graduate Profile



Amirah Saafir
Canterbury '01
Wiley '04
Heights High '08
Junior at Howard University,
Washington, DC

What's your major?
Psychology

What are your plans for the future?
After graduating from Howard University, I plan to go on to graduate school to get my doctorate degree in developmental psychology and then become a school psychologist.

Do you have a favorite memory or two from elementary school?
One of my favorite memories from Canterbury Elementary School was watching the letter people in Mrs. Slater's kindergarten class. I remember dressing up as Ms. A for the Letter People parade. I had handkerchiefs pinned all over my clothes. She made learning fun!

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?

I believe my entire Heights experience helped prepare me for college. Two things that stand out to me are developing an effective study technique and learning how to balance academics and extracurricular activities.

What did you enjoy most at Heights?

While at Heights I was extremely active so it's difficult to pick one thing. I definitely enjoyed being a part of the volleyball team, the gospel choir, and the Minority Student Achievement Network.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

Take advantage of all Heights has to offer. Having been involved in a wide variety of activities, I was able to explore my likes and dislikes as well as cultivate my leadership skills, shaping the types of organizations I'm involved in at Howard University as well as giving me the skills necessary to obtain leadership roles within these organizations. I would also advise students to take academics seriously; building good study habits in high school will help develop the discipline necessary to excel in college.

F.A.S.T. AT CANTERBURY

by Florence D'Emilia

"When I came to Canterbury, I was welcomed like family and I wanted to extend that family friendly atmosphere to new families through FAST," recalled school secretary and FAST facilitator, Brenda Gadowski. FAST (Families and Schools Together) is an eight-week program sponsored by Cuyahoga County that strengthens family relationships, and builds connections between parents and the school community.

Ten families, each with a kindergarten or first grader, are joined by two community volunteers, two veteran Canterbury parents, and two school partners. The busy evening begins with a group meal followed by FAST family activities.

FAST activities include games that challenge family members to think creatively and communicate with one another. Next children go the gym and work on a craft while parents pair up and give each other seven minutes to talk uninterrupted. Then all parents, plus a community resource person, gather together for 45 minutes to share parenting and school concerns. The evening winds down with 15 minutes of creative playtime between parents and children.

Robert Carlson, parent of a first grader, has enjoyed the FAST program. "It was great to have this special time with my family, and to get to know other families and school personnel in a more informal setting."

Co-Teaching Depends on Shared Planning

by Florence D'Emilia

Throughout every school week, regular teachers and intervention specialists at Canterbury Elementary exchange information and collaborate on lesson plans during "Thinking Outside the Box" (TOB) meetings. At every grade level there is one inclusion classroom that includes special needs children, and the TOB meetings provide time to plan lessons that will be co-taught in the regular classroom.

On Wednesday mornings, kindergarten teacher Evelyn Fierer, intervention specialist Emily Hesse, and autism specialist Julie Meese gather around binders, text books, and hands-on teaching materials to decide what role each will play in teaching English Language Arts and Math lessons.

"If we didn't plan together, then we wouldn't be co-teaching," commented Ms. Hesse. "We would just be assisting one another or taking turns, but that isn't co-teaching." The goal of co-teaching is to allow each teacher to bring a special strength to the lesson. For instance, Mrs. Meese's background in teaching autistic children gives her special expertise in sequencing, an important pre-reading skill for all kindergarten students.

As they create their lesson plan, they review information gained from a professional development experience. They consider data collected through KRAL (Kindergarten Readiness Assessment of Literacy), short cycle



Canterbury kindergarten teacher Evelyn Fierer meets with intervention specialist Emily Hesse weekly to plan lessons they co-teach.

assessments and observations to help identify students' skills and abilities. And they discuss the social, emotional and behavioral challenges in the classroom.

"In the classroom, I work with all kids, but focus on my students' needs. If I pull small groups I will often also bring regular students that are struggling, explained Ms. Hesse. "Sometimes we do parallel groups and I will have 'my students' plus other students and the reg teacher and I will be teaching the same content but in smaller groups." Co-teaching in the classroom does not replace pull-out interventions.

In less than an hour a plan emerges integrating this information into a well-designed lesson plan that meets the needs of all of their students. **A**

Outdoor Learning Thrives At Gearity

By Florence D'Emilia

Thanks to collaboration among parents, teachers, college students and neighbors, pre-schoolers through fifth graders at Gearity Professional Development School are learning about the environment in tangible and exciting ways. When environmental educator and parent Josh Hunter brought his first child to Gearity, he recognized that the extensive grounds offered the potential for many outdoor learning experiences. Two years ago he helped to organize parents and neighborhood volunteers in creating several raised learning gardens where students sow, care for and harvest vegetables.

Two seasons later, the program has expanded dramatically, thanks in part to a \$5,000 grant from Lowe's Companies Inc. In the fall, Hiram College students joined forces with the Gearity community and neighbors to build additional raised gardens. A split rail fence and arch have defined the space that will include several dwarf fruit trees. A barn-like shed stores child-sized tools. On the other side of the school building, shrubs have been planted and bird and animal feeders are visible from second and third grade windows. In



Parents and community volunteers built the Gearity Learning Gardens, split rail fence and mini-barn that stores child-sized tools.

the spring, volunteers will build benches and a small building for observing wildlife.

Teachers also use Gearity's extensive property for outdoor learning. In addition to incorporating the gardens into lessons, teachers use the instruments of an outdoor weather station. In the fall, students from Hiram College joined Gearity teachers and 50 fourth graders for a walk in the woods on the Gearity campus. Together, they identified tree and fungus species, observed deer and other wildlife, and practiced good stewardship by collecting trash. 📌

Heights Graduate Profile



Eli London
Canterbury '01
Wiley '04
Heights High '08
Junior at Vassar
College in New York

What's your major?

Environmental Studies

What would be your dream job after graduation?

I would love to go into advertising or writing, basically something where I can be creative and try out new ideas. I plan to teach English in Spain for a year or so after graduation.

Do you have a favorite memory or two from elementary school?

Having Recess was amazing. We played kickball everyday but not the conventional version with bases. We would kick the balls to try to get them past the defenders on the other side. We never kept score but it was so fun. I'll never forget going skiing at Brandywine in 5th grade. It's the only time I have gone skiing so it was a cool experience.

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?

I learned how to think in different ways. Most colleges mainly consist of people that all come from basically the same type of lives. Heights is one of the truly unique areas in this country, and coming up there taught me a lot of different things.

What did you enjoy most at Heights High?

Playing lacrosse and soccer was an amazing experience at Heights. Coach Sullivan made our pre-seasons a huge test of our skills and really got us ready for the season. The best friends I have made so far in life are thanks to the athletics at Heights.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

When you go off to college or whatever else you do in life, hold on to the friendships you have from Heights. They are like no other friendships you will have in life because Heights people are so unique. 📌

Teachers Lead the Way at Gearity

By Florence D'Emilia

Gearity principal Sherry Miller is a strong instructional leader with a vision. Talk to her for just a short while and you hear clear statements defining school culture: "We are a community of life-long learners;" "Every child is every adult's responsibility;" "This is a P though 16 campus" (a reference to the preschool children getting their start at Gearity and the college students learning how to become teachers there). Mixed in with equal measure are descriptions of the collaborative atmosphere at Gearity and the role that teachers play in defining and implementing best instructional practices.

Last summer, Mrs. Miller and several Gearity teachers attended a conference that trained them in an educational approach called Assessment for Learning. The conference participants are taking the lead in collaborating with other grade level teachers to implement the approach that is characterized by clearly defined learning

intentions and learning destinations, learning through inquiry, and students teaching each other. The teachers meet twice monthly during scheduled PLC (Professional Learning Community) time, and confer informally throughout the workday. "Using meeting time to focus on specific strategies helps break down the process and makes us better teachers," said Tammy Bishko, a third grade teacher who attended the conference.

Assessment for Learning encourages teachers to allow students to take more responsibility for their learning. "It is a very reflective approach for teachers as well as for students," added Bishko. At the beginning of every unit students are made conscious of what they are expected to learn, and are assisted in developing strategies for reaching the goal. Assessing the student's knowledge as the unit progresses helps the child and teacher understand how to get to the goal. 📌

Service Learning is Part of Life at Wiley



Wiley Middle School students provided holiday gifts to more than 40 needy children.

By Krista Hawthorne

Wiley Middle School was recognized earlier this year by the Ohio Middle Level Association for its extensive service learning program. Service learning builds self-esteem and teaches the concept of good citizenship with active learning. "Students benefit tremendously from helping others," explained Karen DiLillo, Health Teacher and Student Council Advisor.


The annual Leaf Raking, Thanksgiving Food Drive, and the Angel Tree Project

were highlighted in the award application. Each project takes detailed planning, publicity, fundraising, and completion of the service by a dedicated group of students and staff. Student Council and the National

Junior Honor Society members take a lead role but each project is a school-wide event. "This process makes school a more interesting place to be," said Melanie Lesar, Wiley Guidance Counselor.

Residents of the school's University Heights neighborhood benefitted from the leaf raking day on November 10, when 29 students worked from 9:30 am until 2:30 pm. Neighbors called to express appreciation and one offered to buy pizza for the students. "We thanked her but refused the gift. We want students to learn to do service without expecting

a reward," explained Heather Higham, Wiley Guidance Counselor. "We suggested she consider making a donation to our Thanksgiving Food Drive as a way to show her gratitude."

Dr. Octavia Reed, Wiley's principal, was amazed by the school community's response to the Angel Tree Project. Each year, a Wiley staff member selects six to eight "angels" with names of foster children from the Salvation Army's holiday tree display at the Cleveland Playhouse. Homeroom classes and staff are invited to select an angel and raise money to buy a fun gift and a practical gift for that child. This year the first eight "angels" were selected quickly. "I went down three more times to take more 'angels' from the tree as interest grew and the donations kept coming in," said DiLillo. Dr. Reid was clearly moved by the generosity of her students and staff. "When I heard that we raised enough money to buy gifts for 40 'angels' I was overwhelmed and so proud. Some of our students don't have much for themselves yet they were happy to give what they could to make someone else's holiday happier." 

AVID Students Determined to Succeed

By Krista Hawthorne

"AVID is a college prep class," explains Heights High freshman Shailynn Strowder. "It helps me stay on track." Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an elective class for credit, gives support to students with mid-range GPAs (2.0 – 3.5) to improve their academic record and prepare for college. Students sign a contract accepting responsibility for their learning by taking rigorous college prep courses, using a daily planner and maintaining a well-organized AVID binder.

AVID teachers Shawn Washington and Mark Sack work together to support their students. "Some students face daily challenges that distract them from their school work," explained Ms. Washington. "One student is frequently absent due to a chronic illness. Others just need extra support to work to their potential."

AVID classrooms are stocked with textbooks from most classes. On the blackboard are reminders of upcoming tests or project deadlines. Walls feature samples of student work and diagrams of

interests, life goals, and plans for achieving them. "They have a lot to read each night, papers to write, and projects to do. If they get behind it's easy to get discouraged. We help them figure out how to make it all work," added Mr. Sack.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, AVID classes follow a curriculum of learning and study strategies, advanced reading and writing skills, higher level inquiry and thinking processes, collaboration, and time management skills. Tuesdays and Thursdays, AVID students work in small groups with tutors who are college graduates. On Fridays, students do service projects, listen to speakers, or tour college campuses.

College is continuously discussed. A student recently explained that her parents thought a college degree in fashion would not lead to a good job. Her tutor, who minored in fashion merchandising, discussed the realities of building a career in the fashion industry. "Don't think you'll graduate, jump into a job with a major designer and go to New York and



AVID tutor Justin Ross-Walker works with freshmen James Walls and Robert Williams.

Paris," she cautioned. "It takes a lot of time drawing, sewing, and doing basic work before you get a good job."

One hundred students are enrolled in AVID at the high school and grades 7 and 8 at Roxboro Middle. In its fourth year at Heights High, AVID will have its first 11 graduates in June 2011, and all are headed to college. AVID will expand next year to include more students from the high school and students at all of the three middle schools. 