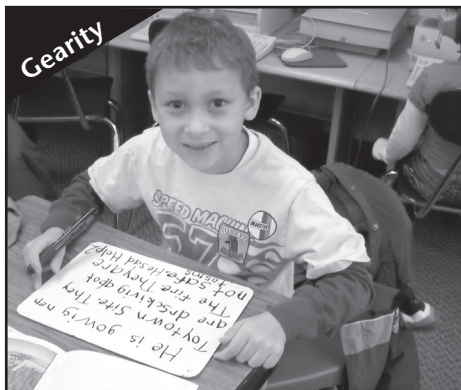


# Canterbury | Gearity

News From Reaching Heights



*First grader Stephen Tyler Simerka-Gocz writes an essay, while other students work independently at learning centers or have small group lessons with Mrs. Hoang or a tutor.*

by Florence D'Emilia

One size does not fit all in Angela Hoang's first grade class at Gearity Professional Development School. She frequently assesses students' knowledge and differentiates the lessons they receive. Hers is a classroom full of active learners, experiencing many targeted

## A Classroom Hums With Active Learning

levels of instruction, each with its own richness and rigor.

At the beginning of a recent double block period, students find their names on a chart directing them to one of six work centers containing a range of math, reading and writing assignments. Some students work at the computer, others read independently or help a classmate.

The classroom hums with activity as the teacher and an adult volunteer work with students in small groups. Hoang gathers five students at a table to work on distinguishing long and short vowel sounds. Before the morning ends, she works on comprehension tasks, like how to compare and contrast, with two other reading groups.

Meanwhile, a skillful volunteer works with another small group, reading aloud the book, "Save Paper Save Trees," pausing to discuss word meanings and to engage in rich conversation about

the book and their knowledge of the world. When they finish, the volunteer calls another small group to gather around her rocking chair. These students bring a more difficult book, "Planets of the Solar System," and engage in a more sophisticated conversation.

Long gone are tracked reading and math groups. Frequent progress assessments give teachers the data they need to group students based on individual progress. "My groups are often made up of different students from week to week. "My groups are often made up of different students from week to week," Hoang said. Learning can happen in spurts or may be influenced by how a child is feeling physically and emotionally. Each child has his or her own learning trajectory and we can adjust the classroom and teaching style to accommodate each student. ¶



*Robbn Rankin and classmate Khareem Alim form the number 17 by counting out cubes (worth one each) and longs (worth ten). Hands-on tools help teach place value, addition and subtraction with regrouping, and other math skills.*

by Florence D'Emilia

Teresa Taylor-Ware, a second grade teacher at Canterbury, tells her students, "I'm going to give you a 'tiny test' of four to ten questions that will take five minutes

## Data-Driven Differentiation (AKA Targeted Teaching)

and will tell me how to teach you better."

Students know that the "tiny tests" don't count for a grade, so they aren't nervous about the outcome. Unlike a test that comes after completing a unit, these assessments are timed to help Taylor-Ware see more clearly how much of the material each student has mastered. The information allows her to target lessons to specific groups, either re-teaching or introducing new material where appropriate.

Scores are entered on a chart in a binder and highlighted with markers: pink indicates a serious need for intervention from a tutor, yellow indicates struggling students who will work with peer tutors, and green indicates a student who should continue to make improvements. Students whose scores are not highlighted are performing well

enough to serve as peer tutors.

Ms. Taylor-Ware devotes Monday afternoons to math intervention. She preps volunteer tutors who will work with two to three students in the hallway. In the classroom, she gathers a small group of students to work on a skill they haven't mastered. Peer tutors help another group of classmates.

"I know from the assessments what students are struggling with and group students with similar weaknesses," explained Taylor-Ware. "That way they get the instruction they need."

In educators' jargon, Taylor-Ware is using a formative assessment to inform and differentiate her instruction. End-of-Unit tests then confirm what students have learned. ¶

## REACHING HEIGHTS

Our Passion: Excellent Public Education

### From the Executive Director:

This, the third of four Neighborhood Newsletters for 2009-10, focuses on teaching and learning at Canterbury Elementary School and Gearity Professional Development School. Our goal: to describe the teaching process and share stories about the work going on in our classrooms. How do teachers teach? This newsletter provides a few of the many answers to that simple question. We also want to describe students' classroom experiences by looking at some of what they do on the path to learning.

Shedding light on both teaching and learning (while intertwined, they're distinct) offers parents and community members an inside view of some of the work going on in our Cleveland Heights-University Heights schools. My thanks go to the team that wrote these stories: Joy Henderson, lead writer Florence D'Emilia and community writer Tricia Springstubb, to Krista Hawthorne for her skillful editing, and to our great teachers and students, for all their work.

Let me know what you'd like to see in future newsletters and what you think of this one. You can reach me at 216-932-5110 or [patrick@reachingheights.org](mailto:patrick@reachingheights.org).



Patrick Mullen

Canterbury


# Learning by Moving and Manipulating

By Florence D'Emilia

"Different children learn differently," explains Stacy Kroger, Canterbury Elementary third grade teacher. In her classroom, students work in small groups, in pairs, or independently at specially prepared stations. "I know that hands-on activities and movement demonstrations allow some students to grasp concepts faster, so I incorporate them into lessons whenever possible."

She begins a math lesson by asking students what they remember from previous lessons about lines, line segments, and rays. Kroger introduces the concept of angles and moves her body to show the class how angles change: a quarter turn, a half turn, and a full clockwise turn. The students stand and follow her prompts to make various angles. The movements require control and concentration.

Now, the students are ready to form angles with a pair of straws connected at the vertex by a twist-tie. The teacher demonstrates how to make a quarter turn clockwise with her straws, and reminds them that it is called a right angle. She slowly walks through the classroom observing their work. As the students gain confidence, she asks them to make more challenging angles—obtuse and acute.

A typical week includes whole class activities, team teaching and parallel teaching with a special education teacher. "Everyone seems to benefit from being more involved," Kroger said. "A variety of learning groups and a mixture of activities keep everyone engaged which mean more success." 



Canterbury third grader Jabril Atkins manipulates a set of straws to form an angle during Ms. Stacy Kroger's math class.

Gearity



Jed Harrington and Josephine Johnson, fourth grade students of Mr. Joe Mendes, write essays about an Olympic sport they would like to try.

By Florence D'Emilia

Teachers like Joe Mendes and Natalie Wester at Gearity value children's thinking, and so help students value learning itself. They masterfully create a structured learning environment that


## Teachers Who Share the Value of Learning

encourages deep thinking, participation, and mutual respect.

In Mendes' fourth grade class, students prepare to write personal essays, and listen to his concise overview of the task: "We are going to watch a video of a speed skater competing, we'll talk about it, you'll read an article about Olympic sports and then you will write about a sport that you would like to compete in." After the video, he reminds everyone of the ground rules for discussions-SLANT: Sit still, Look at the speaker, Activate your brain, Nod, Track the talker. During a lively discussion, Mendes keeps students on-topic and ensures they respond respectfully to each other's opinions.

To a small group of readers, third grade teacher Wester reads aloud the story of two girls, one white and one black, who

get to know one another while sitting on a fence that divides their town. Wester gives students an opportunity to think and talk about the book's big ideas. She waits calmly through long pauses for students to respond and listens closely as they speak.

When the entire class regathers, Wester reads Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise." She asks engaging questions and gives students time to respond, building on what they say, eliciting more details or clarifying a student's idea. The lesson culminates with an opportunity for students to create a poem. These teachers give students time to think, listen to their ideas, and encourage mutual respect. They establish an atmosphere of high expectation and trust in which students' thoughts and learning are highly valued. 

## Learning Outside the Classroom at Canterbury

Here are some of the exciting learning opportunities offered outside the classroom at Canterbury Elementary School:

**Classes and Clubs:** Three times a year, Canterbury PTA organizes six- to eight-week afterschool enrichment classes including Art, Chess, Spanish, Dance, Yoga, African Drumming, and Theater.

**Girls Circle:** Fourth and fifth grade girls join the school counselor for this program that builds self-esteem, enhances judgment skills, and encourages the use of critical thinking to make wise and healthy choices.

**Girls on the Run:** Parent volunteers follow a national curriculum that encourages pre-teen girls to develop self respect and healthy lifestyles through running. 📌

## Learning Outside the Classroom at Gearity

Here are some of the exciting learning opportunities offered outside the classroom at Gearity Professional Development School:

**Classes and Clubs:** Seven afterschool and lunchtime enrichment classes and clubs meet: Spanish, Yoga, Hip Hop, Poetry, Art, Math and Chess.

**Environmental Club:** Students travel to the Ohio State Lake Erie biology laboratory for field projects.

**Classroom Community Gardens:** Thirteen gardens (one per classroom) are planned, maintained and harvested by students and neighbors.

**Meaningful Work:** Students who want a job in the office, cafeteria, or library begin by writing a resume. Applicants are interviewed, trained and evaluated. These students are volunteers who gain work experience that is meaningful and helpful. 📌

## Spotlight on Heights High Graduates



**Deidre Walker**  
Gearity '01  
Heights High '08  
Deidre is a sophomore  
at Cleveland State  
University

**What's your major?**

Early childhood education.

**How about your dream job after graduation?**

I'd love to be a kindergarten teacher. It's important for kids to have positive influences as early as possible, while they're still young and impressionable.

**Do you have a favorite memory or two from Gearity Elementary?**

Making friends. I went to Heights schools all the way from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Many of the kids I met at Gearity stayed my friends all those years.

**What did you learn at Heights High that**

**prepared you for college?**

I took lots of AP classes at Heights, and the transition to college level work was easy.

**What did you enjoy most at Heights?**

I had some wonderful teachers who both inspired me and made class fun—one even got me interested in physics, and I am not a science person! I was a member of the Minority Student Achievement Network. Among our activities, we went to the middle schools to encourage kids to work toward taking AP classes. In my senior year, I did a project assisting a kindergarten teacher at Gearity. That's what steered me toward teaching as a career.

**What advice would you give current Heights High students?**

Don't get distracted! Heights has so many academic opportunities—you can go in so many different directions, try so many different programs. Be prepared, and use your time well. 📌



**Kim Hackman**  
Canterbury '01  
Heights High '08  
Kim is a sophomore at  
Ohio University.

**What's your major?**

Photo journalism with a minor in French.

**How about your dream job after graduation?**

It does feel a little like a dream, since journalism is a field undergoing such transition, but ideally I will travel and make documentary photographs. I'd also enjoy teaching French or being a translator. I really want to travel! I'm leaving soon to study in Avignon, France.

**Do you have a favorite memory or two from Canterbury Elementary?**

I have three sisters and we all went to Canterbury. It was almost like being at home—our teachers would get mixed up and call us by each other's names. I remember in kindergarten, after we read the story of the Gingerbread Man, we had a hunt throughout the school, trying to catch him. We baked some good gingerbread, too.

**What did you learn at Heights High that**

**prepared you for college?**

There's no place like Heights! I went to preschool at Millikin, so I was in the system for my whole education. My parents gave me the choice of going to private school instead of Heights High, but I didn't want to leave. The diversity in my classes was wonderful. When I got to college, I was able to make friends and work with kids from all kinds of backgrounds. When I saw how hard that could be for others, I was really thankful.

**What did you enjoy most at Heights?**

As a sophomore at Heights High, I took my first photography class and traveled to France with my class. As a sophomore at OU, I'm doing the same things - history repeats itself! My high school photography teacher was inspiring; she put her heart into that darkroom. I was president of SADD and of AFS. The foreign exchange students had a big influence on me. I'm still in touch with them, and plan to meet up with some of them in France.

**What advice would you give current Heights High students?**

Get involved! Join extra-curricular activities, volunteer. It's worth working hard in the classroom. A strong work ethic will stick with you. 📌



By Joy Henderson

Seventh graders in Damion Creel's math class at Wiley Middle School get

## Math Lessons With a Side of Fun

plenty of math conversation, solid life coaching and just a little silliness in each 90-minute class.

"One of my goals is to help kids get over their fear of having the wrong answer," said Creel. "I try to create an environment where they feel safe to talk about the problem-solving process." He may also ask a student who describes an equation clearly to stand on a chair and repeat it.

This day's lesson is on volume and surface area – definitions, the difference between the two, and equations needed to calculate them.

Class begins with students working quietly on their laptops honing their definitions. Then they compare definitions. "Vocabulary is important," says Creel. "We call these flat surfaces faces." The

remaining hour is spent on a handful of volume and surface area problems.

Getting the right answer is important, but Creel also expects students to describe how they arrived at an answer. During class conversation, students respond to each other and ask their peers questions about the problem-solving process.

One student clearly knew the math words but was not using them in the correct context. "Don't just use important words," said Creel. "You're giving me too much information, and making it harder than it is. Let's read the problem together and talk it through."

This process is repeated for each problem, calculating and then talking about the process. And for the really serious math statements – a little chair standing. 📏

Seniors Erin Jackson, Dominique McKee and Eric Brock (L to R) are enrolled in three of the challenging programs at Heights High.

## High Achievers at Heights High: Three Stories

By Joy Henderson

Critical thinking, self-discovery and college credits are on the menu for many students at Heights High. The move to a small schools added challenging options for students who want to accept more responsibility. At Heights, more than 350 students are enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which offer college credit; 44 are enrolled in college classes. Here are three of their stories.

**The Future Pharmacist:** *Dominique McKee, CHHS '10, REAL School, Pharmacy Tech Program, part time at Tri-C*

"When I pass the Pharmacy certification test, I can work in a pharmacy part-time while going to college to be a pharmacist," she said.

She takes morning pharmacy and physics classes at Heights High. Four afternoons a week, she heads to Tri-C's Eastern Campus in Highland Hills for classes in English and government. On Saturday morning, she attends a statistics class. Many days after class, she returns to Heights for Student Council meetings and Gospel Choir rehearsals.

"The chemistry of drug interactions fascinates me," she said. When Dominique starts college in fall '10 (she's applied to four schools with pharmacy programs), she'll take a significant number of credits with her, and the knowledge of what it takes to succeed in college.

**The Aspiring Artist:** *Eric Brock, CHHS '10, Mosaic School, Artist, fulltime at Heights High*

"Art teacher Mrs. Hood-Cogan has been great – giving me artistic freedom but helping me to develop skills." He describes his artistic style as technical realism and loves experimenting with color. Next year, he will attend art school to study graphic design or illustration. He has applied to three art institutes.

He is enrolled in AP art, literature, composition, statistics, and government. He also takes guitar, forensic science, and political philosophy. All that and baseball and swim teams make for a demanding schedule. "But I've learned to be organized," he said.

"I love the amazing diversity at Heights, because there are so many groups of people to know," he said. "I have friends from music, art, sports, and my neighborhood."

**The Emerging Educator:** *Erin Jackson, CHHS '10, Mosaic, Senior to Sophomore student, full time at Tri-C*

"The Senior to Sophomore program is great," said Erin. "I'll leave Heights High with a high school diploma and enter college as a sophomore."

This semester she is taking politics, psychology, sign language and English at Tri-C. Her politics class includes older students. "I've learned so much from



them," she said, "especially about health care."

Erin has found that starting college while in high school has its advantages - she is expected to be responsible and self motivated but still has a group of adults at Heights High looking out for her. She feels she has the best of both worlds. She also plays on the Heights basketball team.

Erin will attend Bowling Green State University and will study early childhood education.

### Supporting High Achievement

Heights High Coordinator of Advanced Studies Jacqueline Harris and the guidance staff provide support for AP students and those taking college courses.

For more information about the advanced programs at Heights High, contact Jacqueline Harris, [j\\_harris@chuh.org](mailto:j_harris@chuh.org) or 320-3123. 📞