

Intensive Math Program Multiplies Student Achievement and Excitement

This school year Gordon Parks Elementary sought to build on the success of its Reading Program by bringing the same focus and drive to its mathematics instruction.

Enter Karen Brunk, Supplemental Math



Karen Brunk plays a factors game with Symmihh Holloman during the Aftercare program.

Teacher and leader of the new Intensive Math Program. Brunk began at Gordon Parks as a classroom teacher in 2009, but after identifying a deep need for supplemental instruction in math, she put her background in math instruction to work.

In 2009, fewer than 10% of students scored proficient or advanced on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests. In response, Gordon Parks implemented a new math curriculum called Investigations. Math achievement improved in 2010, but despite this growth, overall math achievement remained low.

“This year, the teachers have renewed their commitment to implement the Investigations program with fidelity,” said



Supplemental Math Teacher Karen Brunk works with a small group of 4th grade students on classifying solids.

Brunk. “We integrated what we have learned about using data and assessment to continually drive our decisions about instruction to enhance student learning.”

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Come Run with Us: Girls on the Run at Gordon Parks

by Marilyn Ebersole, Features Writer

Girls on the Run is a lot more than a running program. The national nonprofit character-building program encourages girls to set goals and become strong, healthy and confident young women.

“The Girls on the Run program aims to educate and prepare girls for a lifetime of respect and healthy living,” said Selena Van Horn, Gordon Parks Elementary 2nd grade teacher and Girls on the Run coach.

The local chapter of Girls on the Run added Gordon Parks as a new team site this spring using funds provided by the Junior League of Kansas City, Missouri. The 15-girl team, comprised of 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students, trains twice a

week from 3:30 to 5 p.m. for 10 weeks with their teacher coaches. This funding allows students to participate in the program at no cost to their families.

The Gordon Parks team will join other school teams from 10 area cities at 9 a.m., Saturday, May 21 at the Missouri Riverfront Trail in Riverside for a 3.1-mile race. This race is open for anyone in the community who wishes to participate.

The run is a life-changing learning program accompanied by a prepared curriculum that incorporates methods to develop self-respect and healthier lifestyles. Girls on the Run complements Michelle Obama’s “On the Move” program to combat childhood obesity.



Coach Selena Van Horn encourages Girls on the Run participants during a recent practice at Gordon Parks.

Intensive Math Program
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Brunk works with small groups of students who are not proficient in math, using activities from the new curriculum and MAP test examples to individualize her teaching to meet the specific needs of students. She also meets weekly with students who are advanced in math, using higher level math problems and logical thinking concepts to challenge them.

“The most exciting part of all the hard work has been watching students become more confident in their abilities. They create goals for themselves to evolve into even better mathematicians,” said Brunk.

Math fever is evident school-wide as students are eager to show off their new problem solving skills.

“They are excited about math. A subject that once seemed impossible is now challenging and fun. Students love to show me all the ways they can solve one problem,” said Principal Tysie McDowell-Ray.

Ernst and Young employees have been an important supporter for the Intensive Math Program by serving as weekly tutors during the Aftercare program. Volunteers from the accounting firm have worked one-on-one and with small groups of students doing math games and activities that reinforce the curriculum they are learning in the classroom.

“It is extremely rewarding to watch a student improve from week-to-week, and it brings a smile to my face to see them speed through a quick math quiz,” said Justin Bolton, Ernst and Young employee and Aftercare tutor. “Towards the end of tutoring I found myself taking lessons from the students. I never thought I would have fourth and fifth graders re-teaching me long division and three digit multiplication!”

Gordon Parks Elementary is deeply grateful to The George K. Baum Family Foundation for providing substantial financial support for the Intensive Math Program.

Notes from the Executive Director...

PACE Program Provides an Important Path to Student Success

The problem is clear: every year, nearly half of the students enrolling in Gordon Parks’ kindergarten classes are developmentally a year or more behind their kindergarten-ready peers. Addressing this crisis has always been at the center of Gordon Parks’ mission. Exceptional teachers, small classes, extensive support services and a corps of dedicated volunteers are the reasons our students make so much progress.

But too many of our kindergarteners begin their formal education without the most basic skills – reciting the alphabet, counting objects or properly holding a pencil – and struggle earnestly while never fully catching up.

On March 24th, The University of Central Missouri Board of Governors approved, at our request, an amendment to the Gordon Parks charter which allows us to launch the PACE program. PACE (Preparing All Children for Excellence) is a transitional kindergarten class for children who are old enough to begin



kindergarten, but have not yet acquired the requisite skills to fully succeed in kindergarten. PACE students will spend one year in a specialized hands-on classroom honing the skills they will need to thrive when they start kindergarten the following year.

“We recognized a pattern among our kindergarten students over the last few years. When conducting one-on-one assessments throughout the year many of them were not ready developmentally for kindergarten,” said Carolyn Faenger, special education teacher. “Through the PACE program we will be meeting children where they are and helping them move forward so they can be successful.”

PACE is a paradigm shift in educating at-risk children. We know that poverty negatively impacts educational achievement. We know that a strong education is a child’s surest path out of poverty. We know that kindergarten readiness is a critical first step for a child to succeed in school. By ensuring that Gordon Parks’ students are beginning kindergarten ready to succeed, the PACE program will fundamentally alter the trajectory of a child’s success in school and beyond.

Above: Mr. Smith reads a book to kindergarten students in Mrs. Groves’ community.
Left Top: Kindergarten student Wesley Grayson works on a coloring and cutting project.
Left Bottom: Kindergarten teacher Mrs. Groves does a one-on-one reading assessment with student Unique Gray.



Coach Earns Honors at Ultra-Athlete Event

By Marilyn Ebersole, Features Writer

Mr. Coach Roth,” the moniker given to him by his students, is Gordon Parks’ physical education teacher. In the gym and on the playground, he stresses fitness, positive behavior and teamwork.

“I encourage the kids to cheer on their teammates, even when they strike out,” says Roth, whose belief in positive reinforcement contributed to his third place overall finish in the International Double Decathlon (also called ICOSATHLON) last fall in Lynchburg, Va. The two-day grueling track and field multi-event drew 60 athletes from 14 countries.

“The competition was a lifetime experience for me. Would I do it again? No!” said the ultra-athlete who holds the world’s Double Deck record for the Discus. “I trained everyday for a year working out on the track at 5:30 a.m. before going to school, then returning to the track in the evening for more training. I practiced getting exhausted.

“The 20 events were the most exhilarating moments of my life and the most painful. But I have no regrets. The meet helped me realize how important it is to stay positive – it’s a lesson I pass on to my students.”

Coach A.J. Roth accepts his third-place trophy at the International Double Decathlon in September.



Gordon Parks Celebrates Another School Milestone



Former Gordon Parks student Kennae Grigsby graduates from Raytown High in May. She will attend the University of Missouri in the fall.

This school year marks a milestone for Gordon Parks Elementary as its first kindergarten class of students from the 1999 – 2000 school year will graduate from high school this spring.

Sandy Elkins has been the Office Manager at Gordon Parks since the school opened.

“That first year we had 53 students and seven adults,” said Elkins. “One of my favorite memories from that first year was being assigned to accompany a first grade student on a field trip. He told me this was his third year in school and the first time he had ever been on a field trip. That experience was so exciting for him! I still keep in touch with that student.”

One of the high school graduates, Kennae Grigsby, has fond memories of her time at Gordon Parks. “What I remember most are the trips to St. Louis and Washington, D.C.”

Principal Tysie McDowell-Ray was one of Grigsby’s teachers and describes her as a bright and funny student with a good spirit. “One of my favorite memories of Kennae was when we were flying to Washington, D.C. Like all of the students on that trip, this was the first time she had ever been on an airplane. She spent the entire trip just staring out the window. She asked me if we were in heaven and I said ‘Yes, we are in heaven!’”

Grigsby is a student at Raytown High School and has a GPA of 3.3 with 96% attendance. She is a cheerleader, member of DECA, and participates in the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) club. Grigsby was a member of the 2010 AKA Debutante class and will study Pre-Nursing at the University of Missouri starting in the fall.

“All of my teachers were really nice,” said Grigsby. “I would choose to go to Gordon Parks again if I had the chance!”

How Does Your Garden Groove?

Kindergarten, first, and second grade students performed a vegetable-themed musical on April 7th, using handmade costumes that brought food to life!

Don’t miss the next spring musical on May 5th which will feature Gordon Parks’ third, fourth, and fifth grade students. Performances are at 2:30 and 5:30 in the school gym.

Right: Kindergarten, first, and second grade students perform during their spring musical.



Monthly Meetings Encourage Participation and Community

On the second Tuesday of each month the sounds of laughter and conversation can be heard from the cafeteria as Gordon Parks families gather for the monthly Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting.

On average, about 12 parents attend the monthly meetings where activities range from guest speakers to cooking lessons to discussions on upcoming events at the school.

"I am proud of the number of parents who have been coming each month, especially compared to last year when only three parents would attend the meetings," said Wadandra McBride, the school's new Family Outreach Coordinator. "It is important to keep the parents involved so they know what is happening at the school, that our doors are open, and that they feel empowered to learn and be active at Gordon Parks."

PAC meetings are just one of the many ways McBride is working to increase parent involvement at Gordon Parks.

"Some parents feel intimidated and do not realize what they can do to help their child's school. We have to encourage them to give their time and talents. All you have to do is ask and they are more than willing to participate and support Gordon Parks."



Parents Amber McMurry and Adrienne McGee complete a survey during a PAC meeting.

Kathy Pitman's involvement in PAC gives her the opportunity to be an active part of the

community. "I want to be a part of my kids' school life. Gordon Parks is a great school and my sons love being here. Attending the meetings lets me be involved in the school and also gives me some time each month to take a break and meet other parents."



Parents Atavia Shanklin and Charlene Matthews joined Family Outreach Coordinator Wadandra McBride in the kitchen during a recent PAC meeting.

This camaraderie is also important to parent Patrice Maxwell. "It is important for me to be connected to people who are involved with my children. At the meetings, I can meet with other parents who are experiencing the same things as me and we can learn from each other."

The last PAC meeting of the school year will be on May 10 at 5:00 p.m.

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Conversations with a Congressman

By Marilyn Ebersole, Features Writer

Each month, Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II meets for coffee with his constituents at a popular venue within Missouri's 5th Congressional District (portions of Jackson and Cass counties). An exception was made in early December when Representative Cleaver came to Gordon Parks to encourage 4th and 5th graders to consider public service as a future career.

Cleaver was only 15 years old and living in Wichita Falls Texas, when he organized a march with fellow students to open the local movie theater to African Americans. It was his first venture into politics.



"I want all of you to read, read, read," said Cleaver who begins every morning by reading the newspaper. "When I was a boy back in Texas, I remember going to my Daddy who was sitting by the TV smoking a cigarette, and asking if we could subscribe to the newspaper. At first he said we couldn't afford it. But he had second thoughts. He quit smoking and with the money saved, he paid for a newspaper subscription. Fifty years later, my Daddy is still living in Texas, and reading the newspaper every day. Believe me, reading makes you smarter."

Students asked what Cleaver did in Washington ("I fight for jobs"); In what state is Washington D.C. ("It is not a state, but a district"); What does a mayor do ("He is the boss of the city").

Cleaver then moved to a white board to draw concentric circles illustrating the street configuration in the nation's capital city as opposed to street grids in Kansas City, when a fourth grader, late for school, entered the library where his classmates sat at rapt attention.

The U.S. Congressman walked over to the late comer, put his arms on the boy's shoulders and asked his name. The boy was mute. Cleaver then asked the boy what he knew about politics. Still no answer. Another question followed and the boy said, barely above a whisper, "My mama told me never to talk to strangers."

U.S. Representative Cleaver is no longer a stranger to Gordon Parks.



Above: Congressman Cleaver teaches students about the roads in Washington, D.C.

Left: Congressman Cleaver visits with a fifth grade student.

Fine Arts Friday Fun at the Nelson-Atkins Museum

The first Friday of the month is a special day at Gordon Parks as students participate in arts-related activities and field trips throughout the city. Second and third grade students, including Devon Walker and Rebecca Bell pictured below, visited the Nelson-Atkins Museum in February and learned about using clay to recreate the life-like animals they saw during a museum tour. We are grateful to the Francis Family Foundation and to Matt and Judith Flynn for supporting this program!



Thank You, Marilyn!

Over the past decade, retired Kansas City Star journalist Marilyn Ebersole has been the backbone of the Snapshots publication. With more than 300 articles written and 300 photographs published, Ebersole has seen the school grow in size and in its commitment to providing the intensive support services our students need.

Every six months, Ebersole devoted six weeks to interview, photograph, write, and format every component of the newsletter. Her dedication fulfilled an important need at the school and provided a skill set that the school did not previously have. Her effort saved Gordon Parks countless hours of staff time and significantly defrayed the cost of producing the publication.

Ebersole graduated from the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas. She retired from the *Kansas City Star* and used her extensive journalist background to help Gordon Parks Elementary share its school history.

While we are sad that Marilyn will no longer be at the helm of *Snapshots*, we are honored that she has agreed to continue working on the newsletter as a Features Writer and to help with the editing process. So THANK YOU MARILYN! We are deeply grateful for your hard work, your dedication to our school, and for the delightful way you make your subjects feel right at home at Gordon Parks.



WE GRATEFULLY THANK OUR CONTRIBUTORS WHO MADE EDUCATION POSSIBLE FOR OUR STUDENTS DURING THE 2010 - 2011 SCHOOL YEAR

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RSVP Today for Taste of Spring!



Date: Thursday, May 12th

Time: 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Location: Studio 2131

2131 Washington St., Kansas City, MO

(in the Crossroads District)

Gordon Parks' spring fundraiser is just around the corner! Visit www.GordonParks.org/TasteofSpring for more information and to purchase tickets.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

School Musical

May 5th, 2:30 & 5:30
Gordon Parks Gym

Barnes & Noble Bookfair

May 7
Plaza Location

Taste of Spring

May 12, 5:00
Studio 2131

Science Fair

May 24
Gordon Parks Gym

Graduation/Last Day of School

June 2, 10:00
Gordon Parks Gym

First Day of Summer School

June 6, 8:30

Save the Date!

Fall Fundraiser 2011

*A celebration of the living legacy of
Mr. Gordon Parks and the students
at Gordon Parks Elementary*



Date: Friday, November 4th, 2011

Location: American Jazz Museum

Gordon Parks Elementary is thrilled to announce this year's fall fundraiser, an event focused on the remarkable life of Gordon Parks and how his legacy is alive and thriving among the Gordon Parks' students.