

Meet the Children's Teachers



The seventh-floor lead teachers of the fours and fives are, from left to right, front row: Michelle Krumland and Laleña Garcia, and back row: Elyse Everett, Becky Ryan, and Judy Taylor.

This year, like last, the Weekday School is operating nine classrooms. Each classroom has a lead teacher and a full-time associate or assistant teacher (two assistants in room 730), or two co-lead teachers.

Because the parent body changes in roughly two-year cycles, the newsletter has a custom of profiling the entire full-time teaching staff about as often. This year, we invited all teachers, new and old, to tell us about themselves. Due to space constraints, this is the first installment of a two-part article. The second part will run in the December issue of *Inside Riverside*.

Lead Teachers

Judy Taylor was born and raised in Shaker Heights, Ohio. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from Denison University and a master's degree in early childhood education from Teachers College. She has been at the Weekday School

for more than 25 years, teaching threes, fours, and mainly fives. She continues to instruct the oldest children in the school, the fives, in room 715.

Earlier in her teaching career, Ms. Taylor lived in Uganda for four years under the Teachers College "Teachers for East Africa" program. Ms. Taylor's first daughter (now a teacher in the New York City public school system) was born in Kampala, Uganda. Her second daughter (a lawyer who plans to become an elementary-school educator) was born in the U.S. between tours in Kampala and Tororo, Uganda. Her husband is a professor at Teachers College.

She writes: "What I find special about our school is the diversity of the students and staff; the multicultural events; and the church building itself, which is a wonderful, inspiring resource for learning."

Michelle Krumland was born in Los Angeles and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Ms. Krumland did her undergraduate work at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where she earned a bachelor's degree in comparative literature with an emphasis in French. Four years ago, she moved to New York City and obtained a master's degree in museum education from Bank Street College.

This is Ms. Krumland's first year as lead teacher of the young fours in

room 716, but she is not new to the school. She joined the room last December as an assistant teacher when the former lead teacher, Nancy Kovaleff, took a leave for personal reasons, and her assistant, Dong Wei, stepped into the position of lead teacher.

Ms. Krumland has also worked at the Bay Area Children's Discovery Museum, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine (as a museum educator). Interests include playing the flute; cooking healthy meals using organic and whole foods; swimming; knitting; and sewing.

Elyse Everett hails from Manalapan, New Jersey. She has a bachelor's degree in human development from Cornell and a master's degree in early childhood education as well as an advanced certificate in elementary administration and policy from the University of Pennsylvania.

Ms. Everett is beginning her second year as lead teacher in room 717, a class of "middle" fours. In her five years of teaching experience, she has worked with twos, threes, fours, and fives. Before arriving at Weekday, she taught at two schools in Philadelphia (the Parent-Infant Center and Friends Select) and one in Houston, Texas (Becker Early Childhood).

Her interests include reading, skiing, knitting, and spending time with friends and family.

She writes: "I love teaching and spending time with children. I am really excited about the school year."

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

A Newly Organized Parents Association

We are starting the school year with many enthusiastic parents eager to participate in the Weekday School community. Thank you for filling out the blue questionnaire when you met with your child's teacher for the first time at the family conference. If you indicated an interest in one of our ongoing projects, such as the library committee, the Children's Closet, our newly revamped Web site (which we introduce on page 4 of this issue), or another year-long project, a parent who has agreed to coordinate that effort will contact you. If you put a check next to one (or both!) of our fall events—the International Potluck Supper and New York City Schools Night—chances are you have already played a role in making those events a success. Sixty-one families volunteered to help coordinate our activities and fundraising events, and many of them offered to contribute to several efforts. This outburst of enthusiasm is remarkable, and gives Amita Gupta and me great encouragement that our Parents Association activities will be resoundingly successful this year.

Each classroom now has two class parents, and their names are listed below. I am grateful to everyone who volunteered for this responsibility. We had more volunteers than slots, making for a difficult set of decisions. Even if you will not be serving the school in this capacity, you are

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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—Jan Miller—

encouraged to provide leadership in the Parents Association.

The class parents will form the first circle of parent coordination, the Parent Council, which will meet monthly with me to discuss matters of interest and/or concern in the classrooms. These folks will act as liaisons between the second circle of parent coordination, the event coordinators, and the parents as we

begin our cycle of social and fundraising activities. From time to time, they may also organize informal social events for the families in each class so that everyone can get to know each other better.

Prepare to be contacted by your class parents and by event coordinators. Whether you've got one hour or several hours a week to spare, they will do their best to find a way for you to participate. All parents are expected to contribute to our major fundraising efforts: the Holiday Bazaar and the Spring Benefit and Auction. Remember that there are many ways to help: by joining the setup or cleanup crew, by creating decorations or making handmade (and hand-baked) items to sell at the Holiday Bazaar, by donating other goods, services, or funds, and most importantly, by attending.

I look forward to working hand in hand with the new Parents Association. It should be a great year.

CLASS PARENTS, 2002-2003

- Room 614 Lucia Skwarek and Susan Zak
- Room 615 Sarah Woods and Heidi Seroy
- Room 616 Susan Jacobson and Sherri Gorelick/Don Mikkelsen
- Room 617 Cory deArmas-Kendall and Amy Lipman
- Room 715 Jocelyn Stewart and Susan Strauss
- Room 716 Marie Roker and Peter Hagen
- Room 717 Christel Force and Michele Curry
- Room 721 Beverly Watkins-Goodman and Elise Lederer
- Room 730 Jane Aronson and Joy Fairbanks (Tu, Th)
India Baird and Patty Nasey (Wed, Fri)

Inside Riverside The Newsletter of The Weekday School at The Riverside Church

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Ongoing Schools

NYC Schools Night October 9

NYC Schools Night will take place on Wednesday, October 9th from 6-7:30pm in room 630 here at the Weekday School. All families are welcome to attend, but parents who are preparing to apply this fall for children who will be leaving for ongoing schools at the end of this school year may be especially interested.

Parents of Weekday children who have gone on to various public and independent schools will be on hand to answer questions about their personal school experiences. In a change from last year, each parent will sit at a desk clearly marked with the name of the school their child attends. Refreshments will be served. Another informational schools night will be held in the spring for parents preparing to go through the application process next year. It will feature a presentation by ongoing schools consultant Robin Aronow, who discusses both public and independent schools.

Following is a list of public and independent New York City schools that Weekday School children have attended in the past few years:

Independent Schools

The Abraham Lincoln School
Bank Street School for Children
Birch Wathen Lenox School
Brearley School
Calhoun School
Cathedral School
The Chapin School
Collegiate School
Columbia Grammar & Prep
Convent of the Sacred Heart
Dalton School
Ethical Culture
The Fieldston School
Horace Mann Lower School
Manhattan Country School
The Riverdale Country School
St. Bernard's
St. Hilda's & St. Hugh's
Spence School
Trevor Day School
Trinity School

Public Schools

The Anderson Program at P.S. 9
Hunter College Elementary
P.S. 87
P.S. 199
P.S. 166 G&T
P.S. 163 G&T
P.S. 9 G&T
P.S. 75
P.S. 77: Lower Lab School
P.S. 6
P.S. 333: Manhattan School for Children
P.S. 212: Midtown West School
Special Music School of America



Everyone had fun at the Weekday School picnic, greeting old and new friends.

What is Curriculum in a Preschool and How Does It Grow?

Parents often have questions (and concerns) about what their children are learning in preschool and how teachers decide what to teach. The art of developing a good early childhood curriculum balances the development, learning style, and interests of each individual child with the social needs and responsibilities of the group as a whole.

It also balances what the teachers bring to the classroom and what the children and parents bring. Teachers know that each new class comes with an entirely new set of needs and possibilities; each group of parents brings their own expectations and perceptions, each group of children their own chemistry of social organization and cooperation. This web of personalities, styles, expectations, and experience is the soil in which the curriculum is planted and grows. This is everyday life in the classroom.

Twos and Threes

Going to school has lots of new demands: getting up in the morning at a particular time even though you'd rather linger in bed, getting dressed and eating breakfast even if you don't feel like it or aren't hungry, and then traveling to school where you eventually will be asked to separate from a beloved adult and strike off on your own into the small pond of the classroom. Good programs don't ask children to sink or swim, but provide a gradual transition and help the child (and often the parent) become comfortable with the whole routine before encouraging separation. One of the ways teachers of twos and threes accomplish this is by enticement and distraction: "Come over here and let me show you something wonderful/interesting/mysterious/beautiful/new that we have for

you today." Or "Look, here is your friend, who has been waiting for you to arrive." Gradually, as the parents begin to trust the teachers to care for their little ones, the children relax and take steps (or strokes, to continue the swimming metaphor) toward what we think of as individuation. We're demonstrating that there are people outside the child's family who can keep him or her safe, happy, and engaged. There are various theories that describe this stage of development: Erik Erickson describes its psychological components. First, the infant achieves a sense of "basic trust"—trust in self, trust in others, trust in the world. Toddlers strive to achieve a sense of autonomy and begin to be able to manage on their own in a wider setting for some part of the day. (Here we witness the nearly universal motto of this stage, "I can do it myself!," alternating with the plea "Don't leave!") So curriculum at this age is geared toward helping children begin to move into the (little bit) bigger world beyond home with confidence and competence. At this age, teachers initiate much of the activity, especially at first. They provide materials and projects to invite the children into a new world, one that the children can desire and look forward to. (Apparently, our teachers are pretty good at this: according to reports from parents, their children—once they make the adjustment to school—are usually pretty unhappy on days when they can't come.)

Fours and Fives

With the fours and fives, things begin to heat up. They usually adjust quite easily to a new classroom, new teachers, and a mix of old and new friends. By the second or third week, the teachers have had

a chance to get to know each child personally, and then they can begin to plan the arc of their curriculum for the first few months of school. Of course, teachers already know some of the things that continue to be important to children at this age: a sense of security and trust, getting to know new teachers who like them and whom their parents trust, and learning the schedule and rhythm of a new classroom. Teachers also know that with all the basics in place, fours and fives are ready for some new adventures in learning. The basic structure, or scaffold, of the curriculum still revolves around the children's immediate world and their experiences in it, but the teachers can carry these areas of study into new and more complex realms. A very important transition that occurs at this age is when the teachers invite the children in a more in-depth way to create the curriculum with the teachers. Rooms are not so chock-full of stuff at the beginning of the fours year, but materials appear in more measured doses, as and when the children and teachers desire. Teachers pay close attention to what catches the interest of the children, all the while offering materials and experiences to expand their attention spans and foster exploration. From our perspective, it is important to make a switch at this time from the mostly teacher-directed curriculum of the threes year to one that is a mutual

creation of both children and teachers (and often, parents too). This is the genuine partnership that makes a learning environment meaningful and compelling to children—and teachers who teach this way are constantly renewed by how unique each group is, and by how differently the curriculum proceeds each year.

The basic categories of a good fours and fives curriculum contain the following core areas of study.

Social Studies

Children experience the emerging social studies curriculum as an extension of and an expansion from a focus on self ("Who am I as a person separate from my parents?") to a feeling of confidence about where they come from: their family, race, culture, language, and religion. Social studies is considered a "core" curriculum because so many things emanate from it. Children are getting better and better at resolving their conflicts peaceably. They are becoming good citizens of increasingly larger communities: the classroom and the school. Children are becoming more aware of people different from themselves and families different from theirs and, hopefully, they can begin not only to tolerate but truly to value these differences. We start in personal ways: celebrating the holidays of the families in the classroom; inviting our families to share their

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Don't forget Curriculum Night!

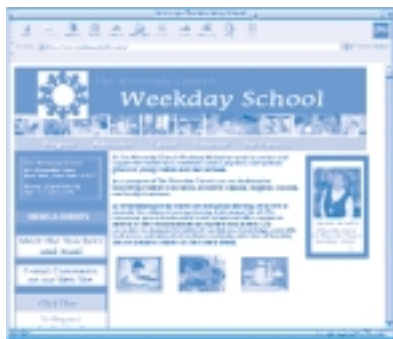
Come find out how your child's teachers are growing minds in their classroom at Curriculum Night on Wednesday, October 16 from 7-8pm.

You'll get a chance to walk around your child's room without distractions and take in all the details that make the room a rich, multilayered learning environment. Teachers will explain why they've structured the classroom environment as they have, and explore how they envision the curriculum developing in the classroom this year.

They'll answer your questions and give you a more nuanced understanding of what your child does at the Weekday school everyday. You'll walk away with tips for enriching your home environment and ways to support your child's learning at home.

Online @ the Weekday School

Misplace your school calendar? Forget the number to the main office? Want to tell other parents how to get a sneak peek at the many wonderful things you love about your nursery school right from their home or office? Well, this fall, parents, friends, alumni/ae, teachers, and staff are invited to visit the newly designed Weekday School Web site at www.weekdayschool-nyc.org.



Visit the *Weekday School Web site for news, information, and fun.*

The Web site features admission information for prospective families, a button to submit e-mail requests for application materials, the school calendar, upcoming news and events, information for parents, and a very warm welcome from director Jan Miller. And, if you need to place a name with a face, you can now find pictures of all Weekday School teachers and staff online.

Of course, the numerous pictures of happy Weekday kids busy at work painting, reading, playing dress-up, and much more speaks entirely for itself. New school pictures will be added throughout the year, highlighting school events and projects.

Work began to revamp the school's Web site last spring when then-Parent Association President Melissa Ulloa met with Michele Curry (parent of Lucas in room 717), to discuss how the Weekday School community could benefit from having a more dynamic online presence. Over the course of the spring, Michele and Melissa worked with all of the school's administrators (Jan Miller, Amita Gupta, and

Deborah Flynn) to design a new, more vibrant site with its own domain name that provided more up-to-date news and information.

Jan Miller, whose own much-read columns and articles from the newsletter will now appear online, remarks, "This is an exciting opportunity for us to share all of the wonderful things about the Weekday School community—from its dedicated teachers to its diversely talented preschoolers—with our committed parent body as well as with new families interested in the school. Given the great demands we all face living in New York City, we certainly hope the new Web site makes it a bit easier on everyone to stay in touch and stay involved."

Plans continue to evolve for the site. "Over the course of the coming year," Michele Curry notes, "we hope to add even more helpful features, including major event information, from the Holiday Bazaar to the Spring Auction, as well as other items helpful to parents. Some parents have already suggested listing favorite books by age, or tried-and-true kid-friendly meals when you need a break from mac-n-cheese and chicken nuggets." Already, Ms. Curry adds, a few classrooms are preparing links to class pages they're designing themselves. All ideas or suggestions should be sent to comments@weekdayschool-nyc.org.

Interested parents have been taking note of the site, and requests for applications have come from as far away as Hong Kong. "Providing this information online is a good way to help parents learn more about the school and answer some of their questions before they arrive for their tours," says Amita Gupta, assistant director and director of admissions.

The Weekday School's vibrant new Web site is a work in progress—one that we hope everyone will make use of throughout the year and will share with friends and other families as well.

Art, Movement and Music

Two new teachers come to Weekday and one returns

The threes, fours, and fives begin their once-a-week segments in art, movement, and music this month. Weekday's popular and gifted Orff-certified and Kindermusik-trained music teacher, Colleen Itzen, returns, and the school is delighted to welcome two new specialists, Naomi Hudson-Knapp in art and Jeanne Bennett in movement.



Naomi Hudson-Knapp comes to Weekday with more than five years of experience as an art instructor in a diverse set of environments: the Smith College art museum; the Saturday Art School at Pratt Institute; Dieu Donne (a handmade paper mill in SoHo); and New York City private and public elementary schools, including Corlears School and P.S. 13 in Brooklyn, where she led staff workshops on painting and collage techniques using children's literature as inspiration.

At Corlears School, Ms. Hudson-Knapp developed after-school ceramics and printmaking classes and taught summer camp art workshops that included papermaking, kite construction, and wood-working. She's worked with two-year-olds to twelve year olds, so she's knows how each age range learns best and adjusts her teaching style accordingly.

Every threes, fours, and fives class will see her at least once a week in either their classroom or the art studio on the sixth floor to draw, paint, and create with a wide range of materials. Her passion for and knowledge about art in its many forms comes through as she says, "I look forward to introducing the children to a variety of art media through structured activities and independent explorations. I'll focus first on drawing, then painting, then on things that are built so that they have the tools to create their own works of art." She continues, "I hope to collaborate with the children's teachers to develop interdisciplinary projects that interweave what happens in the art studio with what's going on in the classroom."

Ms. Hudson-Knapp grew up in Fair Haven, Vermont. A working artist as well as an art teacher (her medium as an artist is works on paper with graphite, watercolor, and wash—a kind of opaque watercolor), she now lives in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.



Jeanne Bennett has conducted weekly movement classes to preschool-age children for ten years. Now, on Monday and Tuesday mornings, the children of the Weekday School will stretch their bodies and engage their creative imaginations with her in half-hour to forty-minute movement segments in their classrooms. Ms. Bennett will structure the sessions to help develop each child's physical coordination, strength, and creativity through movement, music, yoga, game playing, and dramatic play. To

add greater diversity to the experience, she'll add sports equipment and other props as appropriate. As Ms. Bennett says, "the goal in every session will be to have fun, participate in the world of make believe, and get the children to engage in aerobic activity."

A certified yoga teacher of adults and children, Ms. Bennett also brings admirable related experience in the world of performing arts. She was in the national touring companies of *Les Miserables*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *South Pacific*, and *Brigadoon*, as well as numerous other Off-Broadway, regional, and stock productions. She holds a B.F.A. in music theater from Syracuse University and training in integrating music into the curriculum from Bank Street College. She resides in Manhattan.

MEET THE CHILDREN'S TEACHERS

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Rebecca (Becky) Ryan has a bachelor's degree in French literature from Bryn Mawr College and a master's degree in early childhood education from Bank Street College. Playfully she writes: "I come from Jamesville, Wisconsin, the original and former home of Parker Pens as well as the current and proud home of a giant plastic cow on the edge of town."

Ms. Ryan is the co-lead teacher in room 721, a class of old fours. She continues: "I am beginning my eighth year at the Weekday School and my seventh working with four-year-olds. I remember when I first came to the Weekday School (after three years of experience with children in other settings): I was immediately struck by how kind and respectful the teachers were with the children. It continues to be a relief to be in a school that not only hopes, but expects, people to treat each other well."

Laleña Garcia hails from Buffalo, New York. She holds a bachelor's degree in history from Yale University and a master's degree in early childhood and elementary education from Bank Street College. This is her first year co-lead teaching the old fours in room 721 with Becky Ryan. Previously, she taught for two years at the Bank Street School for Children (one year with the threes and one year with the fours). Her hobbies include surfing, reading, and sewing. When asked to describe her teaching experience she simply and enthusiastically writes, "Fun!"



Patricia Pool Steckman's hometown is Austin, Texas. She holds a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Texas at Austin and a master of arts in teaching in integrated language arts. She is working toward a master's degree in early childhood education at Bank Street.

She is in her second year of teaching at the Weekday School, guiding our youngest children, the young twos in room 730, side by side with her co-lead teacher, Lisa Zaretsky. Prior to her appointment at Weekday, she was an art

instructor in the "Me and My Grown Up" program at the West Side YMCA for several years (a program she later administered) and director of the Y's Kinder Camp for four-to-six-year-olds for three summers. Ms. Steckman likes to travel and go out to dinner. She writes: "I am delighted to be working at the Weekday School."



Laura Sweeney was born and raised on West 111th Street. Her classroom, 616, has "middle" threes. She has a bachelor's degree in economics and psychology from Hunter College and a master's degree from Teachers College. She writes: "After a 24-year career with Verizon (formerly N.Y. Telco), I worked as a part-time substitute teacher in New York City public elementary schools. Six years ago, I joined Weekday and have been in heaven ever since." Ms. Sweeney has a 15-year-old son, John, and enjoys cooking, gardening, and travel. She

believes the best method for teaching preschool is a child-centered, multi-cultural approach focused on different themes throughout the year, many of which emerge from the children.

Assistant Teachers

Jennifer Dammann, also in room 730, grew up in Flushing, Queens. She has an associate's degree in applied science and a bachelor's degree in fine

art from the Fashion Institute of Technology (F.I.T.). Before coming to teach at Weekday, Ms. Dammann taught toddler art classes and was an assistant teacher at Columbus Pre-School and Gym. She also worked in the afterschool programs at Churchill and Weekday. She writes: "My experience working at Weekday is unlike any other. A position here has been my goal. I started by working the late-day program. As I learned more about Weekday and its teaching staff, I knew I wanted to be a part of their team. I feel incredibly fortunate to be involved with such a wonderful organization." Two of Ms. Dammann's other passions are painting and jewelry design. She runs a small business out of her home and teaches jewelry-making classes.



Suzanne Ascher works alongside Judy Taylor with the fives in room 715. She writes: "I was born in Brooklyn, grew up in Alexandria, Virginia, and came back to New York City for college. I majored in cultural anthropology at Barnard and studied postgraduate anthropology in Norway for a year. While in Norway, I became interested in Japanese language and literature. I returned to Columbia to obtain my master's degree in anthropology and education at Teachers College and continued studying Japanese part-time at Columbia for seven years."

She continues: "Once my own children were showing signs of real independence, as a former Weekday parent, I thought of Weekday as a place where I could be useful and enjoy the company of some of my favorite people: the families of children and parents and teachers who are drawn to Weekday. The school has long stood out as an oasis for people who enjoy watching children grow during a special narrow frame of time in their lives."



Ann Levine joined the staff last spring as an assistant teacher of old threes in room 615, where she continues this year.

She writes: "As a recent career changer, the path I've taken has not always been a straight one, but I've enjoyed every bend in the road along the way. I grew up in the Midwest and attended Washington University in St. Louis, receiving a B.A. in English. I graduated early so I could live and work in Aspen for a year before joining the ranks of the real world. My first serious job was as an associate editor at *Better*

Homes and Gardens. After several years, I returned to school in pursuit of a master's degree in journalism. Next came marriage, then a move to Denver where I became the managing editor at *Colorado Homes and Lifestyles* magazine."

She continues: "In search of greener publishing pastures, my husband (an art director and photographer) and I moved to New York City to launch a new monthly magazine called *Victoria*. After our son was born, I became a freelance editor/writer, then managed a children's bookstore called Eeyore's. Eventually I was hired as the editor of a website for women called iVillage. I stayed at iVillage until I heard the sounds of a new calling—teaching. I returned to school yet again to seek a master's degree in literacy from Bank Street College. I now attend school at night while teaching at Weekday during the day. My husband Bryan, son Tom, and I love to read, ride bikes, and take advantage of city life—everything from Broadway to Blue Man Group, with music, museums, and movies on the side."

... to be continued in the next issue of Inside Riverside

The Annual Fund and the 2002-2003 Budget

The Annual Fund was established in 1998 for the purpose of raising revenues to help cover the Weekday School's operating expenses. It eases the school's reliance on tuition fees and fundraising events by allowing donors to contribute at any time during the year, according to their ability to pay. Unlike other kinds of fundraising, it requires minimal hours of volunteer effort and little cash outlay, making even the smallest donations a significant contribution to the school. This point, perhaps, cannot be overemphasized.

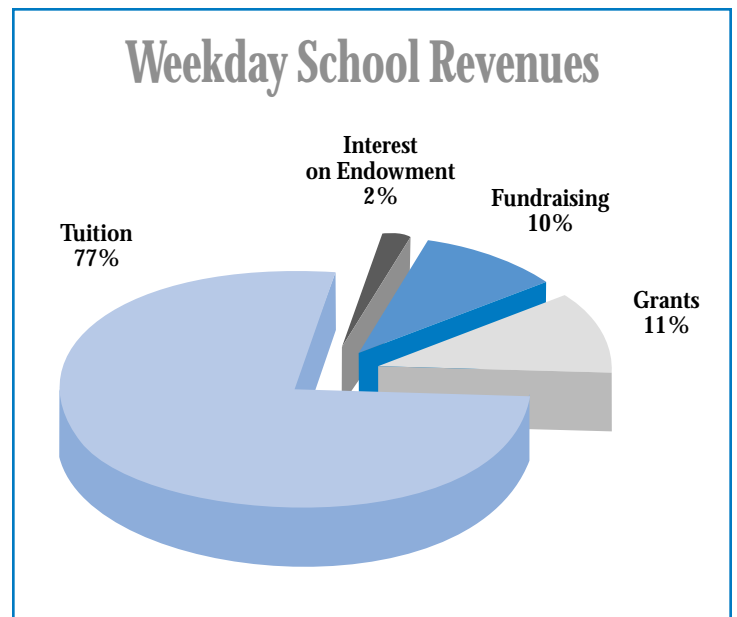
For the 2001-2002 school year, the Annual Fund raised nearly \$42,000 from mail solicitations. Approximately 72% of current Weekday School parents contributed to the fund, as well as alumni parents and friends. On behalf of the entire staff and the Advisory Board, Jan Miller and I would like to thank all who participated. We look forward to your continuing support and an increased participation rate in the new school year.

To place the Annual Fund in its proper context, consider the operating budget for the 2002-2003 school

year. Salaries and benefits comprise 81% of total expenditures, reflecting the school's commitment to maintaining high standards for teachers. Program and other operating expenses constitute 14% and overhead (including rent, utilities, and facilities maintenance) is 5% of the total.

As the school operates on a breakeven basis, tuition by itself is not sufficient to pay for all the operating expenses. Only 77% of the total comes from tuition fees, with tuition assistance being granted at a rate of 7%. Outside grants comprise 11%, fundraising is 10%, and interest on a small endowment is 2%. Thus the school relies on donations to keep tuition down, to increase the socioeconomic diversity of its student population, and to maintain its ability to attract the best teachers (see figure).

In addition to the Annual Fund, the Weekday school supplements its revenues with the proceeds of parent-run events such as the Holiday Bazaar, the Spring Benefit, and several concerts and fairs. (Together, these sources yielded more than \$70,000 last year.) While



the fundraisers are certainly fun occasions and serve an important social and community-building function, they require considerable planning and organization and need scores of volunteers. In addition, there is a monetary cost to producing them.

The Annual Fund thus plays an important role by raising cash in the

simplest manner. Think of it as you do your public broadcasting or radio station. You can contribute to the Annual Fund as early as possible and reduce the likelihood of receiving a plea on the phone in the spring! We thank you in advance for your enthusiastic support.

Emile Zen
Treasurer, Advisory Board



Self-portraits by children in the fours program.

CURRICULUM

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traditions; and welcoming them to come in and cook a favorite food; share some words in a home language, or sing some favorite family songs with everyone. Often parents enjoy doing a science or art project with their child's class related to their own field of expertise.

Geography

Just as children extend and expand their understanding of other people who are different from them, they do the same with the physical world in which they live. City children have lots of experience traveling around the streets, and they are well acquainted (from birth!) with all the intricate details of going to the store, getting on a bus, etc. Because of our proximity to several parks, our children have a more constant exposure to nature than those who live in more street-bound neighborhoods in the city. They can go out and bring back collections of things to the classroom. Whereas at a younger age they might simply have made a collage of these found materials, now a leaf, a seedpod, or an acorn is a beginning of a knowledge-gathering process that can lead into deeper study. Of course, sometimes a walk is just a walk—a time to “smell the roses.”

Riverside Church offers a new and very special kind of environment, that of Gothic sacred architecture. (Did you know that Riverside Church was built on the model of Chartres Cathedral?) The children and teachers go on walks around the church, taking careful notice of the things they see. They take time to look carefully at stained glass windows, to examine gargoyles, and to look down on their playgrounds from high up in the tower. On one of our staff development days last year, the teachers went on a tour around the church from the top of the tower to the bowels of the boiler room—lots of exciting curriculum ideas emerged from the experience.

Language Arts

As the children learn about new things, they also begin to learn about how to record their knowledge. At first, the teachers record

what they did or said on experience charts or in large or small books. The children follow suit by creating their own charts and books, some with just drawings, some with words dictated to a teacher, and some with practice writing of their own (sometimes called “scribbling”). Recording what you have done and learned gives you a chance to think about it and reflect upon it. This is the beginning of what later will become a capacity for metacognition: the ability to think about thinking. Of course, it also lays the foundations for literacy, both writing and reading. The development of a narrative line, or how a story is told, also begins to emerge during these years. Children make up their own stories, put them down in their own books, and sometimes even act them out dramatically with their friends (a further refinement of dramatic play, but with a pre-written script).

Math and Science

Anything that can be collected can be counted, measured, weighed, sorted, compared, categorized, and researched—the kinds of activities that lead to competence in mathematical thinking and scientific enquiry. In fact, the central activity of the human brain from the beginning of life appears to be finding out about the world. As children grow older they are able to ask more questions, pose simple hypotheses, ponder more results, and hold in their minds more than one attribute at a time (both size and volume, for instance). These thinking abilities grow slowly and unevenly—sometimes children seem to have a flash of higher thinking, then slip back to their normal developmental level. Having many opportunities to freely experiment with and manipulate materials seems to be part of the process of developing the ability to think in increasingly more abstract ways.

The Arts

It is my belief (and I'm certainly not alone in it) that artistic expression is hard-wired into the brain (just like oral language), and is at the very core of how we define ourselves as human beings. Children, who are just learning to use language, find artistic expression to be a natur-

al form of expression and reflection. Unfortunately, this artistic focus often disappears when children learn to read and write, but those who retain it are lucky indeed! Painting, making things in clay, singing, dancing—all of these activities bring a deep joy and satisfaction to our lives, which are often swamped in language.

Materials and Methods

Materials in our classrooms lean toward the divergent and mutable, such as blocks, playdough, paint, clay, etc. These materials can be easily mastered on a simple level by very young children, yet lend themselves to more and more complex manipulation as they get older. Working with blocks can touch upon a wide variety of curriculum content areas, such as social studies (how buildings relate to each other in different settings), math (fractions and equivalencies), physics (balance and span), language arts, perseverance, cooperation, and the (literal) creation of a community.

Convergent materials, such as puzzles, have their place, too, for the satisfaction they provide when they are done “right.”

Children (more than grownups) don't learn in a linear manner—their learning is more of a spiraling process. That's why teachers swing back to familiar ground at the beginning of a school year, to review what children have mastered, and then move on to the new. This is a tried-and-true teaching method, and it is used throughout the elementary years. Also, children do the same things (or use the same materials) but in new ways. Parents sometimes say “But my child has done that!” That may be true, but because the familiar can be understood, mastered, and used in more complex ways, certain activities bear repeating.

So many things to do, so many things to create, so many things to think about! Stir it all up with lots of laughter and joy, and you have a veritable petri dish of learning.

Jan Miller



Older twos in room 614, exploring a sailboat made of found materials.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

NYC Schools Night

Wednesday, October 9
6-7:30pm, in room 630

Columbus Day

Monday, October 14
School closed

Curriculum Night

Wednesday, October 16
7-8pm in classrooms

Election Day/**Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Tuesday, November 5
School closed (conferences all day)

Veterans' Day/**Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Monday, November 11
School closed (conferences in a.m.)

NAEYC Conference

Thursday, November 21 and
Friday, November 22
School closed

Book Fair: Bank St. Bookstore (p.m.)

Friday, November 22
Time TBA
113th St. & Broadway

Thanksgiving Holiday

November 28 & 29
School closed
12:30 dismissal on Nov. 27

**Hanukkah Celebration
& Reception**

Monday, December 2
10:30-11am in room 630

Parent Association Pre-Bazaar Meeting

Tuesday, December 10

Holiday Bazaar

Saturday, December 14
10am-3pm
Assembly Hall

Set up on Dec. 13

Christmas Tableau & Reception

Friday, December 20
approx. 10:30am in room 630



THE WEEKDAY SCHOOL

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