

★ PROPEL POST

A NEWSLETTER FROM PROPEL SCHOOLS ISSUE #4

“As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is...”

— Fred Rogers

Bringing the “Neighborhood” to Propel

Even though Fred Rogers is no longer with us, his lessons on learning, life and love remain relevant today, especially at Propel Schools.

Propel MONTOUR first grade teachers, Kristen Frame and Sarah Ryms, are among a group of emerging artists, technologists, researchers and educators selected to participate in a new program of the Fred Rogers Center. They were recently chosen as two of the six Fred Rogers Fellows for Creative Curiosity. Fellows were selected from a national pool of applicants, based on their design of a project that integrates technology, media, literacy and art into learning for young children. Fellows are looking forward to the opportunity to present their projects in front of a national audience at the Fred Forward National Conference in March!

Kristen and Sarah have been working on developing a six-unit lesson plan based on Mr. Rogers’ character education model.

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For the **Self** unit, students made papier-mâché puppets (of themselves!), then videotaped each other talking about what made them special. For the **Family** unit, students used digital cameras to make photographic journal of their family, then made connections with classmates about similarities and differences. Currently, students are working on the **Community Helpers** unit, where they will podcast an interview with the famous Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood postman, Mr. McFeeley!

“We are so excited to see students becoming more comfortable with technology, sharing more about themselves and relating to each other through similar experiences,” said Ms. Frame.

Kristen and Sarah hope their new curriculum will help students discover their uniqueness and carry forth the values of Mr. Rogers.

We have a feeling that Fred would be very proud.

First grade students show off their SELF portraits. ▶



Propel is a not-for-profit independent public school organization whose mission is to catalyze the transformation of public education in Southwestern Pennsylvania so that all children have access to high performing public schools.



Megan Newsome,
Propel HOMESTEAD
Literacy Coach

An Interview with Megan Newsome, Propel HOMESTEAD Literacy Coach

Q: Why did you want to work for Propel?

A: The mission and vision of the organization. I believe that building strong relationships with students, families and the community, while making learning relevant and rigorous, is the key to achievement.

Q: What's your role as a Literacy Coach?

A: I am a guide and a resource for teachers. I help them to incorporate instructional methods into their classroom and use students' assessment data to guide instruction. I also serve as a guide, resource, and cheerleader for students, getting them enthused about reading and writing.

Q: What makes Propel so successful?

A: It's really the people and the relationships that make the number one difference. Propel hires the best of the best!

Q: What did it mean to you when you received National Board Certification? How will this impact your teaching at Propel?

A: I am very proud of receiving my National Board Certification. It was certainly a challenging process, but I know it will help me be a better coach for students and teachers.

Q: What makes you want to come to work everyday?

A: To be a part of this amazing team — we all work together to guide students towards a bright future!

Q: What is your biggest challenge as a Literacy Coach?

A: The biggest challenge is having enough time. There is never enough time to do everything I need and want to do for teachers and students.

Q: How do you encourage children to read?

A: By reading to them — no matter the age. Helping students find a style of writing, genre, theme, or author they can get excited about gives them confidence to read. I am here to provide constant encouragement and support.

Q: If you would recommend one book that you think everyone should read during their lifetime, what book would it be, and why?

A: *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. It's an insightful book for anyone interested in taking their lives or their work to the next level. I think it's important to recognize that there is always room for improvement, we can always challenge ourselves to do better, and we can *inspire achievement* in others!



Propel HOMESTEAD student
enjoys independent reading.

Propel BRADDOCK HILLS Update

**We are on track to
open Propel
BRADDOCK HILLS
in August 2010!**

Renovations are on schedule and a new principal is confirmed to help pave the way for new students. The school will open with grades K-4 and 9, adding grades in subsequent years. Spots are still available!

May We Present....The FutuRisticz!

Through the Hip Hop on L.O.C.K (HHOL) program, eight Propel students had the opportunity of a lifetime.

Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. (HHOL) is an arts education program, in which youth ages 13-18 learn leadership and organizational skills, knowledge of the music industry, and cooperative economics. They do this by creating a music CD project from start to finish, including conceptualization, writing lyrics, producing tracks, and performing their work. Students from Propel HOMESTEAD and Propel ANDREW STREET High School completed the program this Fall. RaNaja Kennedy, a Propel HOMESTEAD 8th grader, would like to share her experience with you.

Learning about Life through Hip Hop

By RaNaja Kennedy

The Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. program gave me the chance to express myself in a way that I've always wanted.

A group of Propel students started the program by meeting on Saturday afternoons at the HHOL recording studio in East Liberty. The first few weeks we learned about the history of hip-hop, math in music, and how to use the recording studio equipment. The directions were simple – use everything, but don't break anything! We made many important decisions, like creating our group's name, *The FutuRisticz*, producing tracks, and creating a mock record label.

It was really exciting when we began making music, which involved things like developing an idea for a song, choosing a beat, and writing the lyrics. We went to Pittsburgh's premier DJ Nate Da Phat Barber's workshop, where we learned how to spin turntables and mix songs. We even had our own photo shoot with legendary Pittsburgh photographer Jordan Beckham.

By the sixth week of the program, we had recorded three songs and received some amazing news. We were invited to perform at the Mayor's "Graduate Pittsburgh Summit!" Even though we were nervous about having enough time to prepare, we rose to the challenge. In just one night, we worked together to write and record the song "Stay in School." That was one of my favorite moments in the program. We have been asked to perform at various events and venues around the city ever since. We are really starting to catch-on!

The Hip Hop on L.O.C.K. program has given me a new outlook on hip hop music, confidence in myself, and the confidence to teach others what I've learned. I plan on continuing to write songs; who knows, I just might be the next big hit!

It is important for me to say how much I appreciate my school for providing me with this opportunity to learn through real-world experience. I am so proud of *The FutuRisticz* for being a great team and supporting each other. We have all grown so much.

The FutuRisticz are raising money for a trip to New York City this spring. They hope to take an "Educate Us" tour where they will learn more about the music industry. You can help make this trip possible through a donation. To learn more, contact Anne D'Appolonia at adappolonia@propelschools.org or donate online at www.propelschools.org and specify HHOL.



The FutuRisticz

In just one night, we worked together to write and record the song "Stay in School."





From Glass to Art to Others

Propel EAST students are using their new passion for glass art to help Haiti...

It began last year when Alison Babusci, Propel EAST art teacher, was inspired when she took a glass fusing workshop at the Pittsburgh Glass Center. "I brought the glass I made into school to show my students and started to talk to them about the idea of glass art." Students also had the opportunity to work with Jennifer Stephens, professional glass artist, through the school's CreativeArts Artist-in-Residence program. They soon decided that the money they had raised from a school craft market last spring should go toward purchasing a glass kiln so they could experience glass-making for themselves.

Over the past few months, students have been learning about linear design and abstract art through glass, and have tried their hand at creating colorful jewelry pieces. Alison has emphasized the resurgence of the popularity of crafts, and adds that, "students couldn't believe they were making glass jewelry that is actually marketable and in demand!" Many students gave glass gifts to family and friends for the holidays.

In light of the recent tragedy in Haiti, students decided to put their glass art to even better use and host a special fundraiser where their designs will be sold. On February 24th, from 6 - 8 PM, students will host "HeArts for Haiti" event where all profits will go towards those affected by the earthquake. Two Haitian students, a 3rd and a 5th grader will be hosts. The evening will include traditional Haitian dance and song, craft activities and refreshments.



Now that's what we call a masterpiece!



Highmark Lends a Helping Hand

The Highmark Foundation's Healthy High Five campaign continues to make a strong impact within several Propel Schools. Highmark has awarded Propel HOMESTEAD, McKEESPORT and MONTOUR monetary grants that go towards fitness equipment to encourage students' physical activity, overall health and team-building skills.

Propel HOMESTEAD was awarded the grant last year and implemented a "Wellness Activity Program" in their school. Fitness equipment such as jump ropes and Dance, Dance Revolution games were purchased via Highmark's grant funds. Students spent structured time during recess and in music class using the equipment and learning about the importance of good health. At the beginning of the program, body mass index (BMI) and heart rate data were collected to help monitor improvement. By the end of the program, not only was there a BMI decrease in 53% of the 400 participating students, but there was an even more significant result. Through surveys, students reported increased energy, feelings of well-being, and an awareness of healthy habits.

Propel McKEESPORT and MONTOUR are looking forward to having similar results this year, and are excited to provide students with equipment like scooters, interval exercise stations, and even a Nintendo Wii gaming system. The Healthy High Five grant enables students to have a variety of fun options for physical activity.

Propel works hard to create meaningful learning experiences that nurture the whole child. The Wellness Activity Program is one more step towards that goal, providing a deeper understanding of the importance of good health from an early age.

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