

PROPEL POST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM PROPEL SCHOOLS ISSUE #6



Keeping a Healthy Balance at Propel EAST

Nancy Koslosky, Propel EAST

Propel is always searching for innovative and effective ways to meet the needs of our students and staff. This year, Propel EAST is enjoying a change from the traditional daily schedule by introducing the **Balanced School Day** to our school community. The 2010-2011 school year began with a new and "balanced" daily schedule that is designed to improve learning, promote healthy eating habits and encourage physical activity for students and staff.

The Balanced School Day (BSD) schedule eliminates the noon-time lunch and recess period and replaces it with two nutritional snack/activity blocks, one mid-morning and the second mid-afternoon. Students return to their classrooms feeling refreshed, focused, and ready to concentrate on their learning. This re-structuring divides the academic schedule into three 100 minute instructional blocks, giving teachers and students more uninterrupted time for learning.

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Principal of Propel EAST, Sandy Gough, explains, "The Balanced School day was implemented this year in an effort to provide cohesiveness to the many health and wellness initiatives that we've adopted over time. BSD provides a structure within the school that supports the whole child and allows the Propel EAST families to put beliefs into action. Students and staff are not only encouraged to make healthy food choices, eat smaller, more frequent meals, and get regular physical activity, they are actually provided with resources within the school day to participate in these positive lifestyle choices."

Healthy food and exercise is not the only benefit to the Balanced School day schedule. Improved academic achievement is a primary goal in following the BSD model. Research shows that there is an increase in student alertness during academic classes. Teachers in schools with the BSD model have also witnessed students having increased energy and focus during instructional times, particularly at the end of the school day.

Ms. Gough says that after the first few weeks of following the BSD model, Propel EAST has already seen positive results. Student fitness teams are choreographing fitness routines that they will teach to their peers. Parents are showing great enthusiasm and support by making donations and volunteering to prepare and deliver the fresh fruits and vegetables to the classrooms.

"I keep my tennis shoes at work for activity time," says one teacher at Propel EAST. "There is focused conversation happening about healthy lifestyle habits. It's becoming a great support system for all of us."

The biggest challenge in these initial stages of implementation is finding the funding to purchase the fresh fruits and vegetables for the 400 students each day. During a regular five day school week, Propel EAST needs to purchase 2000 servings of fruit and 2000 servings of vegetables for the in-class nutrition time. To make an in-kind or monetary donation to Propel EAST's Balanced School Day (Healthy snacks and physical fitness equipment is needed!) email adappolonia@propelschools.org



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.

The Benedum Foundation Supports Propel's CreativeArts Program

Propel is thrilled to be the recipient of a \$150,000 grant to support its award-winning CreativeArts program. The CreativeArts program is a core element of the Propel model, providing students with exposure to a variety of art forms and an opportunity to find their personal passions.

The program has been taught by a unique mix of Propel's own teachers and professional visiting artists from the community, who extend and enhance the students' creative experience in the classroom. Every Propel school has a full time art and a full time music teacher; in addition, on a daily basis, 2-4 artists from local fine and performing arts groups are at each school instructing modules in visual arts, music, theater, dance, and physical arts. At the culmination of each arts module, students have the opportunity to share and celebrate what they learned with parents and the community through *Celebrations of Learning*. Last year, Propel MONTOUR received the prestigious Charles Gray Award for excellence in arts education through this program. For most Propel students, the CreativeArts program is their first and, in many cases, only contact with the professional arts community in Pittsburgh.

Support from the Benedum Foundation provides Propel with the opportunity to employ a new student focused Classroom Arts Manager at each school. The role of this person is three-fold; 1) to strengthen the relationships between students and visiting artists, resulting in more positive arts experiences for students; 2) to enable more collaboration among Propel's full-time art and music teachers and visiting artists; and 3) to work alongside other Propel classroom teachers to integrate the arts into core academic content areas.

"The reorganization will transition us to a new, more sustainable model for our CreativeArts Program, where there is more collaboration between our visiting artists, teachers and students," explains Laura Ferguson, Propel's CreativeArts Director.

"We are excited that the Benedum Foundation shares our passion for arts education," said Dr. Carol Wooten, Propel Superintendent. "By supporting Propel through our arts program, we are in-turn able to provide a better, more

enriching experience for both our students talented Pittsburgh with whom we work."



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Propel HOMESTEAD Art Teacher Travels to Costa Rica With Toyota's International Teacher Program

"This year I will integrate science into my classroom by teaching students about the environment, preservation, and conservation through art."

Through a competitive process conducted by the Institute of International Education (IIE), Stefanie Maas was selected as one of 25 teachers (from a pool of more than 800 applicants!) to visit Costa Rica and develop classroom projects that foster an understanding about environmental and global issues. Stefanie tells us about her experience!

On June 21st we landed in San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica where we learned about the history of the country and visited the U.S. Embassy. From San Jose we hopped on a NatureAir Flight to the Osa Peninsula. NatureAir is the first and currently only carbon neutral airline. While in Osa we stayed at the Fundacion Neotropica, a foundation that promotes sustainability and conservation through education of visitors and of locals. We participated in a sustainable fishing workshop, planted 800 mangrove trees, and took the most amazing hike in a remote area of the rainforest.

From Osa, we traveled to the opposite side of the country to EARTH University in Guacimo. EARTH is an international university that is dedicated to agriculture sciences. This university is where the bananas from Whole Foods come from! Did you know a banana tree only produces one bunch of bananas and then dies? The university also reaches out to farmers in the area and helps them set up self sustaining farms and community coops. Many Costa Ricans have farms only big enough to feed their families. I got to eat sugarcane from the actual stalk, try a leaf from the Stevia plant, and learn how to milk a cow!

The last stop on the trip was Arenal. Arenal is named after the country's most active volcano. I was fortunate enough to see the volcano erupt at night and go on a hanging bridge tour of the rainforest's canopy. It was amazing to see the layers of the forest.

Throughout the trip I met with a curriculum coach that helped guide me in my lesson planning. This year I will integrate science into my classroom by teaching students about the environment, preservation, and conservation through art. I hope that Propel HOMESTEAD students will benefit from my experience and that I can inspire them to be more aware of and involved in environmental and international issues.

— Stefanie Maas, Art Teacher, Propel HOMESTEAD

Funded by Toyota Motor Sales, USA, Inc., the Toyota International Teacher Program is the only one of its kind sponsored by a major U.S. corporation. Since the program's inception 12 years ago, more than 600 teachers nationwide have traveled to Costa Rica, Galapagos and Japan.





Propel Creates New Innovation Fund to Support Teachers and Students

Propel has implemented a new program this year to support innovative projects created by teachers and students called the Innovation Fund. The Propel Schools Foundation is awarding each school with \$10,000 a year to use towards projects that enhance learning opportunities. Administrators, teachers and students (with an adult-school mentor) will be eligible to submit project proposals for consideration twice a year, in the fall and spring. Proposals will be reviewed by a Grant Review Committee and projects awarded funding will be posted on Propel's website for the world to see!

We're looking forward to sharing some of the great ideas with you!



CONTACT:

Anne D'Appolonia
Director of Development
Propel Schools
3447 East Carson Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15203
(412) 325-7305 x105
adappolonia@propelschools.org

Visit www.propelschools.org
to learn more!

Helping Young Minds Grow

On Friday, September 10, Ms. Melliand's and Mr. Kail's kindergarten students planted a pear tree on the grounds of the new Propel Braddock Hills School. The students have been exploring and investigating trees through their ASSET Science unit. They will continue to learn about the various parts of trees, how they change throughout the seasons, and what they need to thrive. Propel would like to thank Sestili Nursery in Pittsburgh, who kindly donated the pear tree to the kindergarten classes!

