

Gearity GLOBE

A Publication of Reaching Heights

Gearity's Preschool Stepping Stones

by Tricia Springstubb, Reaching Heights volunteer

A tiny girl in a plaid jumper and ponytail rushes into the bright classroom, finds her nametag, and with the help of her teacher, names each letter. Minutes later, she's giving directions to her classmates, playing teacher behind Miss Nicole's back. What makes this scene all the more delightful is that a year ago, this preschooler had next to no language at all.

Gearity School is home to the district's Early Childhood Center, six classrooms housed in a separate wing and serving 120 young learners. Stepping Stones offers all-day, full-year preschool, while the other classes are half-day. In three of those classrooms, children with and without disabilities play and learn together.

Nicole Coatoam, a licensed early childhood teacher, collaborates with Rena Ellis, a pre-school intervention specialist, as well as two aides, to address each child's needs. Today they're deep into dinosaurs, in preparation for next week's trip to the Natural History

Museum. The children dictate dinosaur stories for their journals, become sand-table paleontologists and arrange toy T-Rex's according to size. All this fun is keyed to the state's content standards, building skills that include literacy, measuring, memory and observation.

The center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Staff-to-child ratio is 1:10 or better. When a boy with behavioral problems has trouble during circle time, Miss Rena helps him re-focus without disturbing the other children's concentration. "Our curriculum has many levels," she says, "with opportunities for children to move up, and for everyone to succeed." Speech and physical therapists work in the classroom, their expertise benefiting all the students. Close communication with parents is part of the process.

The day before was dance class, and later this day the art teacher is due. But right now it's snack time. A smiling girl leads the way, ponytail bobbing. 🍌

Principal Miller: A Lifelong Learner as Leader

by Florence D'Emilia, Reaching Heights



Sherry Miller, Gearity Principal

Aptly for the leader of the district's professional development school, Gearity Principal Sherry Miller is a lifelong learner. Gearity educates children from preschool-5th grade, benefitting from and has a special relationship with John Carroll University's education department. Mrs. Miller's open-mindedness and intellectual enthusiasm inform all aspects of learning. Research-based strategies drive classroom instruction.

Gearity's emphasis on literacy begins in pre-school, encompasses Writers Workshop and harnesses 21st-century technologies, including classroom blogs that let students use the district's secure website for educational networking. "My primary role is to help teachers become more reflective about who each student is and address how and what each student learns," says Mrs. Miller. She nurtures collegiality within a structure for professional development using the best research-based strategies, skills and resources.



Preschool students Siomha Kenney, Jasmin Matthews, and Toni Trent enjoy lunch together.

(Lifelong success continued on page 2)

Gearity Globe is published by Reaching Heights, a citizen organization that mobilizes community resources to support the Cleveland Heights-University Heights public schools.

Newsletters featuring news about each elementary school are written and distributed by Reaching Heights and a team of parent and community volunteers, under the direction of Reaching Heights Assistant Director Joy Henderson. Florence D'Emilia is the lead writer.

We welcome your ideas and help. Contact us at 216-932-5110 or joy@reachingheights.org. Learn all about Reaching Heights and see how you'd like to become involved, by visiting us online at www.reachingheights.org.

Gearity School is located at 2323 Wrenford Road in University Heights. The phone number is 216-371-6515.

Natural Wonder

by Joshua Hunter, Gearity parent

Last fall, I led hikes for the pre-school classes at Gearity. We looked for clues about how squirrels live and how they prepare for winter. The students pretended to be squirrels – they hopped like squirrels and they collected things that squirrels might eat – not in their cheeks, like real squirrels, but in a sack.

We compared our squirrel goodies and talked about how much time it takes animals to prepare for winter. The children were really interested and already knew a lot about local animals. The hike gave them the chance to be outside, look for signs of life and experience the natural world.

I have been teaching environmental education for more than 15 years for elementary schools, college students, state parks, and camps. It never ceases to amaze me how interested people are in other creatures, and to see the wonder that children have for exploring outside. 🌲

Coming to Gearity - Learning Gardens

The Gearity staff and parent volunteers received a Reaching Heights Community Connection grant to build a community garden. Students will help plant, tend and harvest the garden while learning about food production, nutrition and the local environment this spring, summer and fall.

For more information or to offer help, contact parent volunteer Joshua Hunter at 320-9308 or environmentaleducation.hunter@gmail.com.



Students of Amanda Barker and Carolyn Edwards class hopped like squirrels during an outdoor education lesson with parent volunteer Joshua Hunter.

(Lifelong Success continued from front page)

At weekly half-hour grade-level team meetings with the principal, teachers review math and reading progress, and ask: What did we want to teach? Who learned it? What can we do for students who didn't learn it? What comes next for students who mastered the material? Teachers and instructional coaches identify strategies that will help students learn. Every eight to nine weeks, Mrs. Miller meets one-on-one with teachers to evaluate each student's progress. "Kids and learning are at the center of everything we do at Gearity," says Mrs. Miller. "We develop students into problem solvers and creative thinkers." 🌲

3rd Graders in College

by Laura Weber Smith, Gearity parent

This year, the two 3rd grade classes at Gearity took turns walking to the John Carroll University campus for weekly lessons in a computer lab. These sessions were designed to reinforce classroom lessons. When students were learning about maps in the classroom, they could use the super-fast JCU computers to play games demonstrating how to use maps, including map directions, locator grids and map keys.

The program was a cooperative effort between 3rd grade teachers Natalie

Wester and Tammy Bishko, JCU student teachers Beth Rini and Erin McBride, and JCU staff members Carol Paull and Brendan Foreman.

"We want our students to be on a college campus and to begin visualizing themselves going to college," says Ms. Bishko. According to their teachers, the students enjoyed their "college experience." Hannah Gates is already visualizing her future as an actual college student. When she asked her teacher on the walk back to school if she could go to JCU someday, the answer was, "Absolutely!" 🌲

The Gearity Experience

We asked two parents to describe their experience at Gearity so that other parents could have a small snapshot of life at the school.

'I Know They're in Good Hands'

by Bridgett Louis

I remember when my girls first attended kindergarten at Gearity. They both had Mrs. Golenberg (nee Weisman) and Mrs. Williams, who were wonderful teachers. Josephine and Jae'la really loved being in their class.

When Mrs. Golenberg saw Joe was having trouble reading, she got some other teachers together to help her. Several times a week, Josephine had one-on-one reading support. Now, as a 3rd grader, she reads at a 4th grade level and enjoys chapter books. Her

writing skills have also blossomed. She recently read one of her poems for morning announcements and came home very excited about that opportunity. Everyone in the school commented to Josephine about her poem – the secretary, other teachers and her classroom teacher. She read it for us at home so she could share her success with her family.

My 2nd grader Jae'la is also an excellent reader and loves everything about school. She never wants to stay home – even when she really is sick. In the recent Jump Rope for Heart, a fund raiser for the American Heart Association, Jae'la's class was the top fund raiser for the school. I have heart disease and Jae'la was very excited to



Bridgett Louis with Josephine and Jae'la.

participate in my honor.

The love and support the staff shows for students at Gearity is unbelievable. The staff is so attentive to students; it's beautiful that they care so much. My girls see it, too. They come home and excitedly tell me about what they have learned. I feel really good having my girls at Gearity, where I know they are in good hands. 📖



Rachael Mann and Sylvie

See For Yourself

by Rachel Mann

When we moved to University Heights in 2001, we heard that the public schools "had problems." Real estate agents promoted Catholic, Jewish and other private schools, but never mentioned that our public elementary and middle schools were just blocks away. When we asked for specifics regarding Gearity, the people we asked

didn't seem to have any. We were hearing about Gearity from people who had never been inside the school!

We visited Gearity and discovered a small school where the adults know every child by name. Gearity's "Professional Development" relationship with John Carroll University trains student-teachers at Gearity and Wiley. That's why our daughter's kindergarten class of 18 students had a primary teacher, a teacher's aide and a student-teacher.

In the after-school care program, our daughter participated in reading and writing enrichment with a John Carroll student-teacher. At semester's end, she proudly brought home her self-authored chapter book.

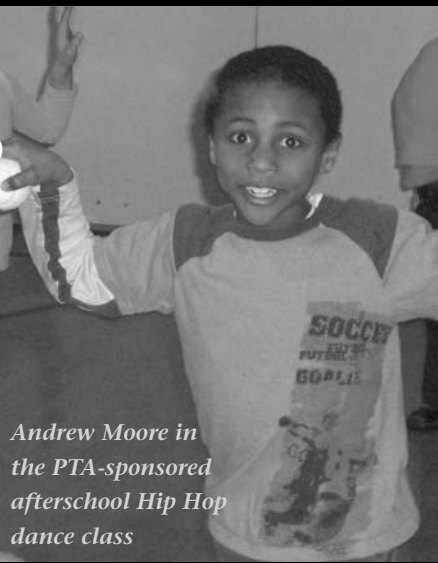
Gearity meets the needs of each child. Children who need extra help or additional enrichment are identified through testing and good communication with parents. The teachers and principal work with parents to design appropriate small-group or pull-out programs. All Gearity children benefit from weekly "specials," including music, gym, art, math lab,

library (alternate weeks) and visits from the "feelings" specialist.

Principal Miller is incredibly responsive. She heard my concerns and made immediate changes: Children are no longer "tempted" by a roving snack cart during lunch, and they don't watch non-educational movies during indoor recess. They read, play games or do crafts. And 10 minutes have been added to lunch for young children to ease rushing that results in uneaten lunches.

When my daughter was bullied on a school bus, Principal Miller took immediate and effective action. She contacted the principal of another school, identified and counseled the bully, and established a supportive peer-network of Gearity bus riders.

I love Gearity, for its community, its educational opportunities, and for its responsiveness to the individual needs of our children. You can't discover these things by talking to neighbors who have never visited or by looking at test scores. My suggestion: find out for yourself what Gearity Professional Development School has to offer. 📖



Andrew Moore in the PTA-sponsored afterschool Hip Hop dance class

by Dori Nelson-Hollis, Gearity parent

When the 3:00 bell rings to end the school day at Gearity Professional Development School, the learning is not over. The PTA sponsors unique after-school enrichment opportunities for students in kindergarten through 5th grade. For a nominal fee, children can participate in a variety of programs conveniently offered immediately following school.

Chess Club gives students the chance to learn strategic thinking, while having fun. Instructors from Heights Arts work with 3rd, 4th and 5th graders on projects using different media, and teach about a variety of artists and techniques. In the Little Racquets program, students learn the fundamentals of tennis from a professional instructor, while playing and having a great time.

In Spanish class an instructor from Ohio Language Arts Academy utilizes *Risas y Sonrisas* (Laughter and Smiles) a kid-friendly Spanish program that introduces children to the Spanish language and culture with music, games and play that increase motivation, participation and understanding. Students in the Jazz/Hip Hop class learn contemporary dance, jumps, leaps and turns from a professional dancer.

The classes provide an opportunity for students to learn through movement, art and sports, while having fun at the same time!

Support, Not Punishment, Is Key to Better Behavior

by Susie Kaeser, Reaching Heights volunteer

How students and staff treat each other – on the bus, in class or hallways, at lunch and recess – affects academic achievement. That's why Gearity Elementary School matches high academic expectations with a comparable approach to behavior.

"We're having a great year," says Principal Sherry Miller, citing a 50 percent drop in behavior referrals, evidence that the school's efforts to create a welcoming, safe, respectful and supportive school culture are taking root. Students take expectations to heart, and teachers face fewer distractions.

The key: approaching behavior in terms of support, not punishment. To support positive behavior, the school defined expectations and ensured that everyone knows them.

The expectations at Gearity are described as:

- Learning First (follow adult directions, complete assignments, have materials prepared, participate in lessons, have a positive attitude);
- Bodies Safe (hands and feet to self, respect the personal space of other students); and
- Kind Words and Actions (smile, show respectful language, stop rumors).

Students viewed a school-produced DVD about expectations and consequences, and took a written version home. Parents and students signed contracts to affirm they had read and embraced the expectations. These materials help orient new students to the school. According to Miller, "our common language and expectations have made a difference." As Gearity enjoys its supportive school climate, she is confident that it will have another benefit: increased achievement. 📖

Creative Writing Begins in 1st Grade

by Tricia Springstubb, Reaching Heights volunteer

Much like growing up, learning to write is a many-splendored process. A story unfolds bit by bit, revealing and revising itself many times along the way. At Gearity, children revel in the self-discovery of Writer's Workshop.

"Our goal is to create lifelong writers," says Kristin Abdow, literacy specialist. All students, pre-school to 5th grade, take part in lessons that include modeling from literature, conferencing and sharing. "They keep portfolios," says Ms. Abdow, "continually beginning and revising pieces, and work in many genres, from personal narrative to persuasive writing to stories they come up with on their own."

In Darell Lausche's 1st grade, student detectives eagerly catch grammar criminals, notorious for using the wrong tense or neglecting capitalization. Warmed up by this mini-lesson, they're ready to begin their own creative work. Mr. Lausche posts a

photo of runners in the heat of a race, and asks the students to think about the what, when and where of what they see. He challenges them to come up with exciting first lines that will pull their readers into the narrative.

All workshop lessons align with district standards for reading and writing, while also adapting to individual skill levels. Down the hall in preschool, emergent writers are happily "scribing" – drawing pictures and dictating stories to go with them. Book making and journal keeping are two more ways students get their unique voices and thoughts on paper.

In Mr. Lausche's room, the 1st graders are deep into their stories. They pause to gaze meditatively at the photo, or softly sound out words like "power" and "extreme." When it's time to share, a girl sings out her first sentence, "I'm going to win!" It's easy to believe, not only about the runner in the story, but also the proud new writer herself. 📖

WILEY WELCOMES

Kelli Cogan

by Joy Henderson, *Reaching Heights*

Principals sometimes join students in making the leap from elementary to middle school. Kelli Cogan, Wiley Middle School's new principal, held the same job for five years at Roxboro Elementary School. She's enjoying the excitement of working with older students.

"At this age, students need more freedom, but they also need clear expectations for behavior in classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria and at dismissal time."

"Middle school kids are fun and funny – they're sophisticated enough to understand adult humor and are good problem solvers," says Mrs. Cogan. She brings her experience to bear as she introduces internal structures and common language for behavior expectations at Wiley.

"At this age, students need more freedom – like having a locker," she says. "But they also need clear expectations for behavior in classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria and at dismissal time." She met with the staff last summer to describe responsible, respectful and organized student behavior. The result has been distilled into a chart that is posted in all classrooms, clearly describing behavior expectations. After just six weeks of school, the number of students sent to the principal's office for discipline referrals had decreased dramatically from last year.

Mrs. Cogan grew up in Cleveland Heights and, except for one year she served as an assistant principal in Twinsburg, has worked in the CH-UH system for her entire career. Before becoming an administrator, she taught at Oxford Elementary School for 10 years. "I love this district," she says. "We have great students, a wonderful staff and a supportive community." 📖



Common Area Expectations Improve School Climate

by Susie Kaeser, *Reaching Heights* volunteer

Each day, the youthful energy, shifting moods and diverse needs of more than 400 early adolescents converge on Wiley Middle School. All must be channeled into learning. And every day, students congregate in hallways, the cafeteria and restrooms, outside any individual adult's responsibility. As most office referrals at Wiley addressed behavior in these places, students' choices there set a tone for the school.

This year, Wiley teachers and administrators, working with Jeffrey Johnston, the school district's Coordinator of Student Support Programs, launched a plan to create respectful and calm behavior in common spaces. They defined procedures for organizing and monitoring students in the halls, cafeteria and restrooms, then clearly stated expectations for student behavior in each location. Teachers used role-playing exercises and class discussions to teach expected voice volume, where to walk, appropriate language, and other appropriate behavior.

Wiley's improved school climate

— part of a three-tier Positive Behavior Support plan — strengthens the school community and frees staff to intervene with the few students who need more support and encouragement. "Kids want to know what is expected of them," says Wiley principal Kelli Cogan. "It helps them, and reduces sources of conflict." The plan uses relationships and targeted interventions, not punishment, to help students meet behavior expectations and engage in learning.

Referrals for behavior in common areas are down 80 percent from last year — but Principal Cogan acknowledges that "setting expectations is the easy part." Motivating students to meet those expectations can be more difficult.

Behavioral expectations are tied to academic expectations. "Research states that when students are actively engaged in classroom lessons, negative behavior becomes almost non-existent," explains Mrs. Cogan. That's why she and Wiley's staff address student behavior and academic effectiveness simultaneously. "This will take time," Mrs. Cogan cautions, "but will ultimately lead to student success." 📖

Heights Seniors Earn National Merit and Achievement Scholarship Recognition



Heights seniors who received National Merit and Achievement Scholarships: Front Row, left to right, Meike Ernst, Megan McCoy and Kimberly Wilkins. Back Row, left to right, Hari-Gaura Ziyad, Joseph Fox, James Wherley, Terance Ashford, Murray Davis, Maria Chan, Terrence Banks II, John Waltrip and John Kenniebrew. Not Pictured, Lee Deadwyler.

Four Cleveland Heights High School seniors are semi-finalists in the first round of the National Merit Scholarship and National Achievement Scholarship programs.

National Merit Scholarship semifinalist: **Joseph Fox**

National Achievement Scholarship semifinalists:

Terance Ashford, Terrence Banks II, and Hari-Gaura Ziyad

National Merit Commended students:

Terrence Banks II, Maria Chan, Murray Davis, Meike Ernst, Megan McCoy, John Waltrip and James Wherley

National Achievement Outstanding Participants:

Lee Deadwyler, John Kenniebrew and Kimberly Wilkins

Semifinalists will compete to become National Merit and National Achievement finalists and scholarship winners. Merit Scholarship semifinalists can continue in the competition for 8,200 awards worth \$34 million; Achievement Scholarship semifinalists are eligible for 800 awards worth \$2.5 million. ■

Workshops Help Parents Help Students On the Path to College

by Joy Henderson, Reaching Heights

“The college-going process starts in 6th grade,” says Heights High College Counselor Dr. Kristie Cooper. “That’s when families can encourage and support their children to take rigorous classes, preparing them for high school and college.”

Of course, not all students take honors-level courses in all subjects, but all students have strengths in and should take an honors-level course in at least one subject area, according to Dr. Cooper.

The Heights High guidance department offers this and many other tips during a seven-part workshop series for parents. “The world has changed so much in the last generation,” says Dr. Cooper. “Today’s students will need some kind of education after high school to make a decent living and

expand their career options.”

The workshop content was outlined by Ms. Cooper with input by parents. A Parent Connection Council advisory work group, set up last summer, helped fine-tune the content and offered advice on how to promote the workshops.

Parent/guardian support in the college-going process is extremely important beginning with talking to toddlers to encourage vocabulary development, making time for regular trips to the library and talking about college as a family expectation. When students are in high school, making trips to local or distant colleges to spend time on a campus are important, whether Tri-C, Case, Cleveland State, John Carroll, or out-of-state schools.

Dr. Cooper values parents as important drivers of much of the

college-going process. “Parents lead most of the process when students are younger and parents are still needed in a different way through high school,” she says. Parents, guardians or other helpful adults are needed at every step: keeping track of deadlines, knowing about fee waivers for college entrance tests, or helping with college applications. The workshops at Heights High provide a great resource to help parents help their children get ready for, get into and graduate from college.

For more information call Dr. Cooper at 216-320-3067. ■

Remaning Workshops
College Realities, April 14
 DVDs of all College 101
 workshops for parents are
 available at the Heights Library.