

The Saklan Monthly

April 2003

Issue 5

Head's Column



The results are in evaluating workshop presentations at the annual East Bay Independent School Association (EBISA) Faculty Symposium. 18 workshops were presented by teachers of the member schools, two of them by our own faculty: Mrs. Ellis on a mathematics project analyzing “perfect squares,” and Mr. Bladt and Ms. Magnifico on an integrated science and social studies unit called the House Project. Attendees evaluated workshops on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being highest; only three sessions received scores higher than an average of 3.75, and two of those three were the Saklan presentations! Comments received included “fascinating analysis,” “perfect application,” “extremely interesting(!)” and “got some good ideas.”

At the recent California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) professional day, March 10, our faculty took the initiative in presenting four separate sessions. Mrs. Ellis repeated her math project presentation, and then joined Ms. Magnifico, Madame Amy Sullivan and myself for a session facilitating a discussion of Dr. Mel Levine’s book, *A Mind at a Time*. Madame Amy also conducted a session attended by more than forty foreign language teachers; her workshop covered methods in using portfolios for instruction and assessment. Finally, Ms. Magnifico and Mr. Bladt led a session on the web-design curriculum done with the fifth graders.

Other teachers are distinguishing themselves as well. As we ramp up to prepare for our CAIS/WASC re-accreditation process next year, Mrs. Schofield and Ms. Mitchell have taken on the challenge of managing the longest self study chapter in our re-accreditation process, that of the “School Program.” Experts in curriculum, they are with their full committee synthesizing data and analyzing our school program from preschool through eighth grade in order to articulate its features and plan for its ongoing review and revision.

Clearly we feature a faculty expert in their field and passionate about their teaching. In the most recent edition of *Independent School* magazine, NAIS (National Association Independent Schools) President Pat Bassett sharply distinguishes “high quality” teachers from “highly qualified,” a term that reflects bureaucratic paper-punching rather than necessarily indicating teaching excellence. What is a high quality teacher? According to the Secretary of Education’s 2002 report on teacher quality, student achievement is highest in schools where teachers are impassioned about their subjects, caring toward the kids, and possessing of high verbal skills. (www.title2.org/secReport.htm)

That makes for a perfect description of a Saklan teacher, I’d like to think. Saklan teachers make their “avocation their vocation,” as Frost put it. When we hire, we seek those for whom teaching is truly a life’s calling, truly a passion,

In This Issue

Head's Column	Pg. 1
The Parent's Corner	Pg. 2
The Board Corner	Pg. 2
The Student Scoop	Pg. 3
April Calendar	Pg.5

Continued on page 4

2 The Parent's Corner

Dear Saklan Valley Families,

The purpose of the Parent Association is to “foster a sense of community, promote volunteerism and support the students as well as school activities. This includes but is not limited to sponsoring community-building and fundraising activities for the betterment of the school.” Our annual auction has become a special event that includes our families and friends. I would like to thank all of our families, whether you joined us the evening of March 15th at the beautiful Claremont Country Club, bid on an item, brought a friend, or made a donation. A very special thank you to all of our room parents who organized all the great class art projects and class baskets.

This year we had two terrific co-chairs, Mrs. Vicki Filter and Mrs. Elena Toohey. We thank this team for organizing and running such a successful event. Every year there is a

challenge to come up with a theme that will inspire people to attend and be a part of this rewarding event. This year's *Believe in the Magic of a Great Education* incorporated two fun elements, music and magic.

While it may seem that we have a ways to go before the end of the year, planning for next year has already begun. The Parent Association Board is looking for parents who are interested in joining our board; we are also looking for a team who is interested in running next year's auction. Please see me or Martha Goodbar, or send us an e-mail.

Thank you for your continued support,

Annie Barendregt
Parent Association President

• Please read the article *Believe in the Magic of Saklan's French Program* by Cheryl Rinker, Parent added to the end of our Saklan Monthly.

The Board Corner

Dear Saklan Families:

First, let us express our deep gratitude and great admiration for the terrific work of our Auction Co-Chairs this year, Vickie Filter and Elena Toohey. The event was classy and entertaining, the venue superb, and the items for purchase fabulous. Approximately \$45,000 was raised for the school and for the Oakland East Bay Symphony Music in the Schools program, representing certainly a grand achievement! Thanks too to everyone else who helped by donating items, buying and bidding, and bringing friends along to this special event.

It is with great pride and pleasure we report to you the progress of our efforts to purchase and thereby secure a permanent site for our school. Just as for an individual person, shifting from renting to owning represents a huge

and dramatic upward evolution toward greater maturity, independence, and stability for an organization. Since becoming a not-for-profit corporation in 1978, Saklan has rented 1678 School Street from its former proprietor. Throughout those twenty five years we have lived with the threat of losing our lease, with the loss of all those rent dollars with no equity to show for it, with ever rising rents depriving our school programs of critically needed dollars, and with the sharply limited ability to shape the physical site to meet our educational program needs.

Come the end of May, we now expect to achieve for the school' security in its site, **equity** for its future, **savings** of many thousands of dollars annually on its rent, and **autonomy** to shape its physical environment for the future. Today, March 28th, we place a deposit of \$30,000 towards the purchase, taking the penultimate step towards *Taking Ownership*.

A great deal of work, it must be said, has brought us to this point. One critical beginning point began with the extraordinary act of generosity we received from former Head of School Pat Corlett and the estate of her mother: a donation of \$50,000 limited expressly for site purchase. After that, many months of dealings brought us financing of just over

Continued on page 4

Student Scoop

Robert E. Lee Spotted on Campus

Perhaps you have noticed some very famous historical characters walking around the campus of Saklan Valley School. March is biography month in second grade. They have been reading in social studies about people who have "made a difference." The class then undertook a very special project. Each student selected a biography to read. They drew a portrait of their character which is displayed in the second grade classroom. The next step was to take notes about their famous person, look up additional information on the Internet, and read additional books to learn as much as possible about their historical figure. The students then transferred their information to note cards and planned their oral presentation. Part of the assignment was to organize props and a costume in order to present this one-person show.

It was nice to see such a variety of historical characters come to life in one of our classrooms. A special thank you to the families who joined the class to witness first hand this historical event.



Thomas Jefferson played by Ian Goodbar

Robert E. Lee played by Gabriel Binder



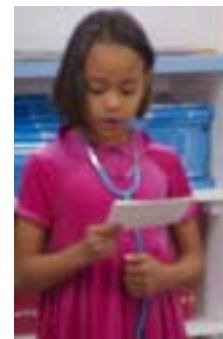
Paul Revere played by Cameron Russo
Elizabeth Blackwell played by Chloe Williams
Benjamin Franklin played by Courtney Norton
Margaret Wise Brown played by Elise Filter
Emily Dickinson played by Fiona Noonan



Robert E. Lee played by Gabriel Binder
Thomas Edison played by Grant Franklin
Florence Nightingale played by Hayley Wilcox
Thomas Jefferson played by Ian Goodbar
Eleanor Roosevelt played by Jenny Faddis
Laura Ingalls Wilder played by Jessica Wilcox



Eleanor Roosevelt played by Jenny Faddis



Elizabeth Blackwell played by Chloe Williams, who aspires to be a doctor when she grows up.

4 Head's Column

Continued from page 1

and truly a profession. The candidates we respond to are the ones who tell us things like "I've wanted to be a Kindergarten teacher since I was twelve," "I would do this for free if I could," and "Teaching is my whole life." My own path towards a career in schools began in second grade when my teacher had to push me out the classroom door at 4:30 and tell me that I had to go home already, dismissal having sounded ninety minutes earlier!

Collecting literally dozens of resumes for most openings, we scan them for evidence of passion for their subjects and compassion for children, and we employ writing samples to check for "high verbal abilities." Candidates come to campus in order to do a demonstration lesson, which we put under great scrutiny, looking for clarity of directions, an ability to deeply relate to and connect with children, a commitment to fostering creative and critical thinking, and a comfortable confidence in themselves. Other teachers interview finalists to consider their collegiality and their consistency with established Saklan norms. A candidate's commitment to lifelong learning and professional development is very important, but we are not just looking for those who attend workshops, but those who present them, as many of our teachers do.

Candidates are always highly responsive to the appeal of Saklan; coming to campus, their eyes light up at the beauty of our location, the fine condition of our facilities, the sunny brightness of our classrooms, and the inspiring evidence of student achievement displayed on the walls. A recent candidate with extensive teaching experience at multiple schools e-mailed me immediately after her visit: "It was so nice to go away from your school with the sense that there are innovative and passionate schools out there." This is a very attractive opportunity for teachers, and provides us great advantages in recruiting for excellence.

Not that very much recruiting is necessary. We place a strong value on teacher stability, and we are very pleased to be reporting that in a time of widespread societal transition, with the next year's signed teaching contracts already in hand, we are projecting a second straight year of greater than 80% faculty retention. But for those positions which do arise, we will take heed of NAIS President Bassett's admonition to "Hire Happy People: Whole, Engaging and Optimistic."

Jonathan Martin
Head of School

Board Corner

Continued from page 2

50% from the neighborly California bank, Mechanics Bank. Negotiations with the property owner brought a signed purchase agreement and an entry into escrow in October. To launch our Capital Campaign, *Taking Ownership*, we first secured \$150,000 in donations from our twelve current board members, and a \$50,000 gift from one past trustee, for a new total, along with the Corlett gift, of \$250,000. Our school parents and other friends have since stepped up to bring us more than \$50,000 additional, and earlier this month the seller, former Head of School and current Saklan grandmother Mary Elena Straub helped us close a critical gap with a gift of \$50,000! Even though our campaigns are still underway to meet our goals, we are very proud of such a great accomplishment to date.

Subordinate financing has been secured for the remaining 25%, and some murky title matters have been cleared due to the fine work of our broker, Ed Del Beccaro of Colliers. This is an historic occasion, and will have both an immediate impact on the educational experience of our children next year, with tens of thousands of dollars being able to be redistributed from rent to program, and a powerful long term impact securing permanence for our school that it will be here to educate our children's children.

All told, more than \$350,000 has been donated for the purchase, and almost another \$100,000 for Annual Giving, nearly all of it from the sixty some odd Saklan school families who have stepped forward thus far. Soon a very special and very permanent plaque will be constructed to honor all those who have made this possible; we hope that those of you who have not yet joined the 75% of Saklan families already on board our campaign will do so soon and help us in this home stretch.

Come the day of closing, expect a grand celebration on what will be then, in every sense of the word, **our** campus. We thank you for your support, and hope you will take as much delight in the occasion as we know we will!

Paul Nathan
Ruth Bailey
Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees

April 2003

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

		1 Spring Break -School Closed	2 Spring Break -School Closed	3 Spring Break -School Closed	4 Spring Break -School Closed	5
6	7	8 Kdg FT to Oakland Zoo Parent Association Meeting 7PM	9 ** 3rd Grade FT to Mt View Sanitary Dist. 4th Grade FT to Coloma	10 4th Grade FT to Coloma	11 4th Grade FT to Coloma	12
13	14 MS FT to Goldman Prize Ceremony 4-8PM	15	16 2PM Dismissal- Extended Care Available	17	18	19 MS Camping Trip
20 MS Camping Trip	21	22	23	24 3rd Grade Pioneer Camp Volleyball game at JMSG	25 3rd Grade Pioneer Camp 5-8th Gr. FT to Marine Mammal Center Family Groups	26
27	28 Teacher Appreciation Week	29	30 Free Dress Day KDG FT to Palace of Fine Arts	<div style="text-align: right; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; margin-bottom: 10px;">April</div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>9 5th Grade FT to Palace of Fine Arts Volleyball Game at Tehiyah Day</p> </div>		

March

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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

May

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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Believe in the Magic of Saklan's French Program

By Cheryl Rinker, Parent

"Bonjour, Rainbow Kids," said Monsieur Vincent.

The preschoolers looked up from tot-sized tables and turned their attention to the lanky man standing at the classroom door. Upon eyeing the familiar backpack in his hands, the children scurried to the rug and sat "criss-cross applesauce." The man soon joined them.

On cue, the Rainbow Kids, six girls and four boys strong, joined Monsieur Vincent in an off-key, albeit sweet, rendition of "Bonjour Mes Amis, Bonjour."



Welcome to the Saklan Valley School French program. Madame Amy Sullivan and Monsieur Vincent Hermosilla are committed to inspiring a love of the French language in our children, as well as an appreciation for French-speaking cultures. The program is an integral part of our school's academic curriculum of which we, as parents, should be very proud.

The early childhood students (Preschool and Pre-K) begin learning French through songs and games. A simple activity, such as "laver les mains," washing the hands, is performed to the syncopated beat of the Addams Family theme song. New activities and concepts are introduced as the children progress through the grades.

By the time students reach middle school, they've developed a meaningful level of language proficiency and cultural understanding in French.

But justice simply can't be done to the French program by repeating the curriculum text verbatim.

Then, how best to describe the magic that Madame Amy and M. Vincent bring to the classroom?

The answer was simple. I transformed myself into a "student" and observed the French program through the eyes of the children. By doing so, I witnessed the energy and enthusiasm brought to the classroom by the two teachers.

The Honey Bears' faces beamed as they turned to face Monsieur Vincent. He stood at the sliding door that separated the Preschool and Pre-K classrooms. The children's cherubic faces and glowing smiles were comforting and inviting.

Monsieur Vincent entered, singing the oft-repeated song, "Bonjour Mes Amis, Bonjour." He took his place on the floor, and engaged his charges in a simple activity, "Comment Ça Va?" (How are you?).

The children wiggled and clapped their hands. The rhythm echoed the beat of the ubiquitous chant, "we will, we will, rock you." Hands held high into the air, they clamored to share their responses to the question. The "thumbs up" sign and strong voices proved that all were "Ça va bien!"

Budding language skills were evident when Monsieur Vincent was informed by the children, en Français, that they were also "comme ci, comme ça," "fatigué," "mal," and "j'a faim."

The next activity utilized a variety of illustrations of weather, each labeled with the corresponding word in French.

"Quel temps fait il?" asked Monsieur Vincent "Est-ce qu'il fait beau?" Looking toward the windows, the children answered with great enthusiasm, "Oui!" They noted that "le soleil," the sun, was shining on this February morning. It was clear that the children felt a strong sense of accomplishment with the "call and response" song.

The Weather Song also afforded the children the opportunity to be silly while, at the same time, exhibit their French comprehension. The Honey Bears, unable to stifle high-pitched giggles, insisted there was "neige," or snow, in Little Yard.

I peered out the window and saw the bright sun. Then, I remembered what it was like to be five years old and to possess such an imagination.

The children sat semi-circle around the outline of a body on the classroom floor. Each held a small drawing that depicted an article of clothing. Intrigued, they stared at the silent and anonymous figure.

Children as crime scene investigators? Thankfully, no. This was another opportunity to play and learn with a variation on “Pin the Tail on the Donkey.”

Out came a blindfold from Monsieur Vincent’s backpack. Like a magician, he secured it over a young girl’s eyes.

“Can you see?” asked Monsieur Vincent.

“No,” she said, with a gentle shake of her head. In her hands was a miniature pair of pants made of paper. She slid it along the body outline in an attempt to position the clothing in its proper place. Guided by her classmates’ shouts of “chaud” (hot) and “froid” (cold), the body became properly attired.

The children expressed the desire to continue the game so that each had a turn. However, much to their disappointment, the time with Monsieur Vincent came to an end before this could be done. Proclamations of “Au revoir mes amis” chimed in the classroom.

I took special interest in Ms. Haesloop’s fourth grade class because it was the level at which I began French instruction. It didn’t take long to realize Madame Amy’s proactive method of teaching was superior to the instruction I received in public school.

My own lessons emphasized memorization and recitation. During each session, classmates and I viewed filmstrips with, perhaps, a half-dozen drawings. The individual frames, similar those in a comic strip, portrayed the daily lives of the Thibeau family members. Individual scenes were synchronized with “dialogue” played on reel-to-reel audiotapes.



I learned generic phrases such as, “le crayon est sur la table” (the pencil is on the table), and “l’autobus arrête au coin de la rue” (the bus stop on the corner of the street).

In retrospect, I must admit the static saga of the Thibeau family did have redeeming value. However, what I wish had been communicated by my own teacher was that a connection could be made between classroom learning and real life.

Of course, in the event that my journeys take me to France, I’m confident that I’ll be able to find the Thibeau family. After all these years, I still remember them.

There’s a pencil on their table and they live near a bus stop on the corner of the street . . .

For a moment, I thought I’d walked into a classroom of contortionists. Fourth grade students twisted and stretched their growing bodies on unyielding desk chairs. The students’ distinct personalities intersected with their pent-up energy, and created a lively session.

Madame Amy began by asking the students “Comment ça va?” A mélange of answers was offered, supported by animated hand gestures and laughs.

She next led the children in songs about the weather and the concepts, “over, under, inside, outside, front, behind, and next to.” Performed to the familiar melodies of “London Bridge” and “Here We Go ‘Round the Mulberry Bush,” the children moved with ease through the French lyrics.

To augment their understanding of “location,” Madame Amy involved the children in an activity using two, small beanbag toys, a monkey and a cow. She followed with directions on where to place them.

The mammals were launched, then snagged mid-air by the students. When Madame Amy directed a student to place the monkey under the trash can, the ear-splitting cacophony reached its zenith. Cries of “poor monkey” transformed into hearty laughter as the hapless simian met his fate.

“Quel temps fait-il aujourd’hui?” Madame Amy asked. “Il fait froid et il pleut,” the class responded in song.

A gentle drizzle fell from the platinum sky and left the school grounds slick. The inclement weather did nothing to dampen the spirit of Alecia Magnifico’s fifth grade class on this day, February 14th, Valentine’s Day.

The students, bolstered by a small mountain of pillows, sat in a circle on the rug. Each held a laminated card that depicted “Magic Man,” a simply-drawn figure who was unfortunate enough to be missing one body part or another. Madame Amy instructed the children to keep their individual cards hidden. It was time to participate in a guessing game of “Il n’a pas de/ Est-ce qu’ila” (he does not have/does he have.”

Asked to speak in French and complete sentences, the students went around the circle and took turns guessing. By process of elimination, they determined which body part “Magic Man” was missing.

Middle school students enter with the French program with confidence and enthusiasm. There are no body outlines, weather charts or “magic man.” During 6th – 8th grades, students focus on the proper usage of the language, both oral and written. Conversational French, with an occasional word of English, is spoken in the classroom. Students sat in their chairs, bodies in middle school poses – draped over the desk, or stretched back, with legs twisted into oversized pretzels. Body language can be deceiving, however. I knew their slouching bodies didn’t translate to apathy or disinterest. I thought back to the June 2002, when the Saklan group departed for France.

“Mom, I need to experience France by myself,” Erin said during the planning process. “I’d rather that you didn’t go.”

Ouch, that hurt. Blunt and to the point.

When I was eleven, my parents wouldn’t even allow me to go to the mall with friends. To this day, they continue to insist it’s dangerous to go to the movies by myself.

As difficult as it was to cut the apron strings, I knew Erin couldn’t be denied the opportunity to explore France with her classmates. I respected her wishes and stayed home.

Departure day. Early in the morning, before the stars disappeared and the indigo sky crossed paths with the dawn, Bill, Erin and I drove over the Bay Bridge to SFO. I sat in silence, and contemplated the rite of passage she and the group were about to participate in.

At the airport, a long line of human cargo snaked its way through the terminal and to the American Airlines ticket counter. Sleepy-eyed travelers, resistant and unaccustomed to the post 9-11 airport security, grumbled and cursed. One angry woman paced like a

caged lion. She lashed out at anyone who was unlucky enough to cross her path. I crossed my fingers and hoped she wasn’t on the same plane as our group.

In the middle of the chaos were the Saklan middle school students. Full of confidence and well prepared for the 15-day journey, they carried on animated conversations, despite the early hour. Their excitement was contagious and it spread to those of us who were left behind.

I know it was an incredible trip for Erin because, nine months later, she continues to share stories about “La Belle France.”

As I left the Pre-K classroom, I looked back at the Honey Bears, with their boundless energy. I imagined the children as middle school students, saying “goodbye” to their parents at the airport, just before the departure for France. I smiled and thought about how excited they will be.



Mark Your Calendar

Mar. 31-Apr. 4	Spring Break
May 1	Camp Saklan Registration is Due
May 2	Spring Concert
May 10	Car Wash
May 12-16	ERB Testing 2nd to 8th Grade <i>(Please be sure that your family is in town during this week.)</i>
May 17	Carnival