

School Calendar

This Week

Tuesday, October 1

Rosh Hashanah – SCHOOL IS CLOSED

Thursday, October 3

7th Grade Class Trip to Renaissance Faire
Committee for Social Justice Meeting 6:30-7:30 pm

Saturday & Sunday, October 5 & 6

8th Grade Yard Sale at the Brunell's yard

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, October 8

1st & 8th Grade Class Trip to Solebury Orchards

Wednesday, October 9

Yom Kippur – SCHOOL IS CLOSED, Faculty in-service

Thursday, October 24

Board Meeting 6:30 pm

How to Contact Us

info@rivervalleyschool.org
lc@rivervalleyschool.org
bot@rivervalleyschool.org
pc@rivervalleyschool.org

Eighth-Grade Project Mentors Needed

Our eighth-graders are embarking on an independent learning project with the goal of learning a new skill! They are looking into our community for adults willing to act as a mentor to motivate and inspire them. If you are an adult with a skill to teach and would be happy to volunteer your time to help them learn this skill, please let Mrs. Solomon know! The mentorship requirements are to provide a minimum of 5 teaching interactions with the student.

Knowing the talent and creativity of our community, I am confident our students will have a wide range of opportunities for independent learning!

Thank you so much in advance for considering!

Please contact Genevieve Solomon, 8th Grade Class Teacher, with questions or to volunteer.

Eighth Grade Fundraisers

Bake Sale Friday

The 8th grade would like to invite the community to their very first **Friday Bake Sale - this Friday October 4th**. Goodies will be available at pick up. Bring home some treats for the weekend!!

Yard Sale Saturday & Sunday

Also, the 8th grade is holding a multi-family yard sale this weekend to fundraise for their end of year trip.

Saturday, 10/5 from 7:00-3:00 and Sunday, 10/6 from 8:30-12:00

Come for treasures or to grab a hot dog and cider!

Thank you for supporting the 8th grade!!

After-School Program Begins this Week

Josh Laker's After-school program will begin this Wednesday, October 2nd. Registration forms with more details are at the end of this week's Current.

The Committee for Social Justice

Join us for this year's first Social Justice Committee meeting on Thursday, October 3 at 6:30pm-7:30pm. We will be meeting on the first Thursday of every month in the 3rd grade classroom.

This will be a workshop-like meeting with engaging discussion as we work together to shift our school culture toward a more inclusive and just world. Open to all!

Outreach News

River Valley will be having a table at the following events, parents are welcome to come say hi or stay to help talk to prospective parents about our school:

- Perkasio Fall Fest - Oct 6 - 1pm
- Alexandria Autumn Fest - Oct 12 – Noon
- Easton Farmer's Market - Oct 19 - 9am
- Quakertown Alive - Oct 19 - 10am

Is there a festival or event in your town that RVWS should attend? If so, please let Erica Nichols know: enichols@rivervalleyschool.org



From Administration

Amazon Smile

River Valley received a check last week for \$61.41 from Amazon Smile. Thank you to everyone who orders through Amazon Smile and donates to our school. If you shop on Amazon, please go to Amazon Smile first and register so that a portion of what you spend is contributed to River Valley.

Substitute Teachers Needed

River Valley is looking for substitute teachers for the 2019-2020 school year. Early Childhood substitutes must have experience with young children. In the Grade School, teacher training and/or teaching experience are preferred. If you or someone you know is interested, send a letter, resume, and references to: lc@rivervalleyschool.org or call (610) 982-5606 for more information.

What is EITC?

The PA Education Improvement Tax Credit program allows Pennsylvania entities paying income tax to the State to earmark their payable taxes to the registered education institution of their choice, in this case, RVWS. After applying for the tax credit in early May, entities receive approval notification from the State and then make their tax credit donation directly to River Valley.

Do you know or are you the principal of a legal entity paying income taxes in Pennsylvania? Do you want to participate in or learn more about EITC?

If so, please contact Ron Ferguson (rsferg@gmail.com), Chellie Bader (michelle@smorgasb.org) or Josh Holtz (josh@cecassociates.biz)

More Opportunities to Learn About Waldorf Education

RVWS Waldorf/Steiner Study Group

Beginning September 18th, a casual study group will meet every Wednesday from 3:30-4:30. Led by Gabrielle Nembhard (Grade 3 teacher), each week will focus on a different excerpt from a book or lecture related to Waldorf education. The group will warm up with an activity or artistic work, read together, and then discuss. Feel free to come only once, occasionally, or every week, and invite your friends--this is open to anyone and everyone as long as they are adults (babes in arms are welcome).

Study Group for Current and Future Middle School Parents

Parents of students in grades 5-8 are warmly welcomed to join in study of the book *Tending the Spark: Lighting the Future for Middle School Students* by Betty Staley. Rachel Howard, 7th grade teacher, will lead the study and discussion as we celebrate this incredible period in our children's lives and all the changes that come along with it. Dates: the second Thursday of each month at 6:30 pm, starting October 10th. If you are interested, purchase a copy of the book and email Rachel at rhoward@rivervalleyschool.org.

Sunbridge Institute Introductory Experiences

October 16, 2019 (Wednesday morning) - OPEN DAY

Exploring Waldorf Education, Teaching, and Teacher Education
With Linda Ogden-Wolgemuth, PhD,
and the staff of Sunbridge Institute

January 24-25, 2020 (Friday evening and Saturday full day) - EXPERIENTIAL WORKSHOP

Waldorf Weekend: Foundations and Fundamentals of Waldorf Education
Lead Instructor: Linda Ogden-Wolgemuth, PhD,
of Sunbridge Institute

February 12, 2020 (Wednesday morning) - OPEN DAY

Exploring Waldorf Education, Teaching, and Teacher Education
With Linda Ogden-Wolgemuth, PhD, and the staff of Sunbridge Institute

From the Anthroposophical Society

Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives. The need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a feeling of responsibility—these three forces are the very nerve of education. - Rudolf Steiner

We are celebrating 100 years of Waldorf Education--and we have exciting news! This year, the ASA produced a beautiful video, [The Wellspring Of Waldorf](#), for teachers, parents, administrators, board members and anyone interested in Waldorf education and its connection to anthroposophy. You are invited to watch it and share. [This one hour video](#), with experts Liz Beaven, Ed.D and Melanie Reiser, Ph.D includes eight short segments:

- Origins of Waldorf Education
- Anthroposophical View of the Human Being
- Evolution of Human Consciousness
- Human Development
- Innerwork of the Teacher
- Freedom and Responsibility of the Teacher
- Pedagogical Practices
- Waldorf School Culture

Be sure to check out the beautiful supporting materials that can be shared with board members, parents, teachers, and homeschool families. In fact, some folks are using the video and materials as a group study.

Along with this [link to the video](#) there is [a special invitation for teachers, parents, administrators and board members](#) to join the Anthroposophical Society in America. Why? Because the ASA can help them connect with and deepen their spiritual lives through our enriching educational webinars, podcast, and events.

Teachers are busy, and we've created our accessible online offerings and podcast just for them! [Our webinars](#) include topics that apply to modern life like meditation, the festivals, healthy aging, and star wisdom. Tune in to hear informative interviews about trauma, education, poetry, and more on our podcast, [The Anthroposopher](#). [Click here for our special Waldorf 100 membership offer](#) and receive two free webinars just for educators! [Access the Wellspring of Waldorf video and resource guide at this link](#). Please share widely with your friends and feel free to spread the word by [posting this link](#) on social media.

Happy Waldorf 100!

From The Faculty

What the Children are Learning:

First Grade – Language Arts

Second Grade – Language Arts

Third Grade – Math/Measurement

Fourth Grade – Math/Fractions

Fifth Grade – Botany

Sixth Grade – Rome

Seventh Grade – History/Middle Ages/Renaissance

Eighth Grade – Physics

Knitters Needed

Miss Molly is looking for a few good knitters!! Inspiration has struck but time is not on my side. I'm looking for a few people to help me knit up some hats for my class. Being able to use double pointed needles, follow a simple pattern, do decreases is important. I'll provide the yarn and the pattern.

Looking for Old Towels and Washcloths

Tina Quintana, our handwork teacher, is looking for some OLD towels and washcloths to be used for felting. They can be torn and well worn. Please drop them off at the front desk or in the new handwork room.

From the Community

House for Sale

Former home of the George family (recent RVWS graduates Lydia and Lloyd) is for sale. 3 bedrooms, 1 1/2 baths. Full basement. Detached, oversize 2 car garage. Recently painted. Hardwood floors. Country setting on nearly 3 acres. 77 Honeysuckle Lane, Milford, NJ. 5 minute walk to shops in Milford. Less than 2 miles from RVWS.

Contact listing agent Mary Alice Heimerl at 908-581-6411.

Join the Girl Scouts

Girl Scout Troop 21321 is excited about this year's journey for the girls. We are ready to embark on more exciting Girl Scouting adventures. Please join us this Friday, October 4th. Just fun, no obligation. We will be meeting with the girls directly after school from 3:30-5:00.

An information session for parents will follow. This will include the calendar, schedule, fees, and commitments for January - June. We will also be available to answer any questions.

Presently, we are serving grades 1-8 in Troop 21321. Of course, we are happy to assist if there is interest in the other grade levels. Questions are always welcome!

Autumn 2019 Story Time at the Riegelsville Library in the Banko Children's Room

Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22, 2, Nov. 5, 12, 19, Dec. 3, 10, 17

During story time we read books, conduct age-appropriate science experiments and explore music and art. Story time is designed for children 0-5 years, but all children are welcome to attend with a parent or guardian.

Any questions, please call the library at 610.749.2357 or www.riegelsvillelibrary.info

Fresh Connect Bucks County

Free Mobile Farmers Market available for Bucks County Residents at or below 200% Federal Poverty Limit

Every Tuesday at the Warminster Community Park – 12:00-1:00pm – 1100 Veterans Way, Warminster, PA

Every Thursday in Ottsville – 11:00am -12:00pm
At the Intersection of 611 & 412 (Previously Thompson Auto) Ottsville, PA

Every Friday in Bristol – 12:00-1:00pm at the Bristol Campus of Bucks Co. Comm. College, 1304 Veterans Hwy. Bristol, PA

Registration on site, one sign-up per household and please bring your own shopping bags.
For more info visit BCOC.org or call 215.345.8175

MOONSHINE & MILLET at IRONBOUND!

Sunday, October 27, 3 PM

Your favorite River Valley band is playing at Ironbound's beautiful outdoor Tasting Room! Come taste the hard ciders, have some locally sourced great food, and of course - do some dancing!

Ironbound Hard Cider, 360 County Rd 579, Asbury, NJ
(Just 15 minutes from school!)

The Lotus School of Liberal Arts Open House

Open House for prospective students on Thursday, October 10, 2019 from 2:00-5:00 pm.

Take the time to come by and tour our school, talk with the teachers, and learn more about our program. Knowing that small schools create less anxiety for teens, we create a community atmosphere that is responsive to their needs.

We look forward to seeing you! Please send an email to lotus@lotusla.org to register.

Tire Recycling

Saturday, October 12th 9:00am – 1:00pm

2320 Township Road, Quakertown, PA 18951

Hosted by the Springfield Township Environmental Advisory Board

Accepting: car, pick-up and SUV tires (\$2 each) and tractor trailer tires (\$10 each)

Please note: Tires must be rinsed clean and no tires on rims. We cannot accept lawn or farm tractor tires, motorcycle, ATV, mini bike, bicycle or wheelbarrow tires.

Questions: Contact the EAC at eac@springfieldbucks.org

House for Rent in Riegelsville

Newly renovated house available, 15 minutes from RVWS. 3 bedrooms, 1 1/2 bathrooms, W/D, lots new. Call Ani 908.797.2579

St. Luke's UCC Rummage and Bake Sale

Thursday, October 3rd, 9 am-8 pm; Friday October 4th, 10 am-7 pm; Saturday, October 5th – Bag Sale All Day 9 am-2 pm. Lunch available.

Sale will take place at the building located at the intersection of Routes 412 & 611 in Ottsville.

Donated items welcome. Please drop off items on the porch at the schoolhouse of St. Luke's UCC Church on Durham Road. No computers, fax machines, printers, TVs, CRT's, car seats, mattresses, encyclopedias, used paint cans, or items needing repair please.

For info call: 215-206-3277/3307 or 610-847-2633.

High-Quality Discount Woolens from A Toy Garden!

A Toy Garden, owned and operated by Erika and Pete Gustavson (parents of Adeline, grade 5 and Freya, grade 2), would like to offer River Valley families 15% off pre-orders of Engel of Germany's Organic 100% Merino Wool and Wool/Silk long johns. The high-quality woolens are available for babies and children, and are just what your little ones (and bigger ones) need to keep them warm and toasty through the cold winter months.

Use the attached order form to indicate quantities, and return with payment to the front desk. Orders will be delivered to the school in October when the shipment arrives.

Any questions, please contact A Toy Garden at 267-377-9448, or email them at shopkeeper@atoygarden.com.

Morning Drop-off Assistance

Selwin, Megan, and Vernon Briggs are looking for someone who could occasionally be available to get Vernon (age 4 - Acorn Room) ready for school in the mornings and drop him off. Mornings vary throughout the year, but we would be able to give at least two weeks notice for a request. Time for arrival also varies, but could be anywhere from 6:45 - 7:30 am. Morning drop off rate is negotiable. If interested, please contact Megan Briggs at meganbarnesbriggs@gmail.com.

Apartment Needed

In search of a 1 or 2 bedroom apartment rental for two seniors with immaculate credit. Minimal stairs, \$1200/month max, the closer to Frenchtown the better. Please contact Gina via text or email: 805-570-7943, ginaricci@live.com. Thanks in advance for any leads!

Muck and Gold presents:

From Nothing to Something Spooky!

A Thursday Afternoon Theater workshop for ages 9-15, Starts Sept. 19 and culminates with a Halloween show, Oct. 26.

Collective Effervescence - A super fun class for Adults! 1 Sunday/month - first one is Sunday, Sept. 22 and free! Both take place in our home studio in Stockton, NJ For details and registration - www.muckandgold.com

House for sale in UBE

Perfect location for RVWS families! 2 miles from school, tucked onto a quiet private lane (no traffic) with easy canal path access. Just under 1 acre including stream and organic veg garden. Backs on two acres of woods. 3 bedrooms, small in-law suite/home office, sheds. Call Alison 646-942-3451

Artyard

New Exhibition:

Janet Ruffenberg: Beholder

September 14 – December 29, 2019

Curated by Elsa Mora and Charles Stuckey

Upcoming Events:

Saturday, October 5, 6 pm – **We are the River**, Baker & Tarpaga Dance Project

Saturday, October 19, 7:30 pm – **Radioactive: Stories from Beyond the Wall**, a film by Maria Gaspar who will host a Q & A after the film.

Sunday, October 27, 3 pm – **Silenced Voices**, a Concordia Chamber Music Program

Saturday, November 2, 7 pm – **Poetry Reading** with Toi Derricotte and Hayden Saunier

Saturday, November 9 – **Songwriting Rodeo** with Kira Willey, Eve Sheldon, Noah Jarrett – Collaborative Songwriting Session #1 – 10-10:45 am, Session #2 – 11:45-12:30 pm – Public Performance, 7:30 pm

Saturday, November 23, 7:30 pm – Filmyard screening of **Spettacolo**

Saturday, December 14, 4-6 pm – **Holiday Lantern Walk & Pop Up Choir** – 4-5 Rehearsal, 5-6 Caroling with Paper Lanterns on the Towpath in Frenchtown, Benefitting Rolling Harvest.

For more information go to: www.artyard.org

Gallery hours: Wednesday Through Sunday, 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Address: 62A Trenton Ave. Frenchtown, NJ 08825

From The Atlantic

Elementary Education Has Gone Terribly Wrong

In the early grades, U.S. schools value reading-comprehension skills over knowledge. The results are devastating, especially for poor kids.

By Natalie Wexler

At first glance, the classroom I was visiting at a high-poverty school in Washington, D.C., seemed like a model of industriousness. The teacher sat at a desk in the corner, going over student work, while the first graders quietly filled out a worksheet intended to develop their reading skills.

As I looked around, I noticed a small girl drawing on a piece of paper. Ten minutes later, she had sketched a string of human figures, and was busy coloring them yellow. I knelt next to her and asked, "What are you drawing?" "Clowns," she answered confidently. "Why are you drawing clowns?" "Because it says right here, 'Draw clowns,' " she explained.

Running down the left side of the worksheet was a list of reading-comprehension skills: finding the main idea, making inferences, making predictions. The girl was pointing to the phrase draw conclusions. She was supposed to be making inferences and drawing conclusions about a dense article describing Brazil, which was lying facedown on her desk. But she was unaware that the text was there until I turned it over. More to the point, she had never heard of Brazil and was unable to read the word.

That girl's assignment was merely one example, albeit an egregious one, of a standard pedagogical approach. American elementary education has been shaped by a theory that goes like this: Reading—a term used to mean not just matching letters to sounds but also comprehension—can be taught in a manner completely disconnected from content. Use simple texts to teach children how to find the main idea, make inferences, draw conclusions, and so on, and eventually they'll be able to apply those skills to grasp the meaning of anything put in front of them.

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In the meantime, what children are reading doesn't really matter—it's better for them to acquire skills that will enable them to discover knowledge for themselves later on than for them to be given information directly, or so the thinking goes. That is, they need to spend their time "learning to read" before "reading to learn." Science can wait; history, which is considered too abstract for young minds to grasp, must wait. Reading time is filled, instead, with a variety of short books and passages unconnected to one another except by the "comprehension skills" they're meant to teach.

As far back as 1977, early-elementary teachers spent more than twice as much time on reading as on science and social studies combined. But since 2001, when the federal No Child Left Behind legislation made standardized reading and math scores the yardstick for measuring progress, the time devoted to both subjects has only grown. In turn, the amount of time spent on social studies and science has plummeted—especially in schools where test scores are low.

And yet, despite the enormous expenditure of time and resources on reading, American children haven't become better readers. For the past 20 years, only about a third of students have scored at or above the "proficient" level on national tests. For low-income and minority kids, the picture is especially bleak: Their average test scores are far below those of their more affluent, largely white peers—a phenomenon usually referred to as the achievement gap. As this gap has grown wider, America's standing in international literacy rankings, already mediocre, has fallen. "We seem to be declining as other systems improve," a federal official who oversees the administration of such tests told Education Week.

All of which raises a disturbing question: What if the medicine we have been prescribing is only making matters worse, particularly for poor children? What if the best way to boost reading comprehension is not to drill kids on discrete skills but to teach them, as early as possible, the very things we've marginalized—including history, science, and other content that could build the knowledge and vocabulary they need to understand both written texts and the world around them?

In the late 1980s, two researchers in Wisconsin, Donna Recht and Lauren Leslie, designed an ingenious experiment to try to determine the extent to which a child's reading comprehension depends on her prior knowledge of a topic. To this end, they constructed a miniature baseball field and peopled it with wooden baseball players. Then they brought in 64 seventh and eighth graders who had been tested both for their reading ability and their knowledge of baseball.

Recht and Leslie chose baseball because they figured lots of kids who weren't great readers nevertheless knew a fair amount about the game. Each student was asked to first read a description of a fictional baseball inning and then move the wooden figures to reenact it. (For example: "Churniak swings and hits a slow bouncing ball toward the shortstop. Haley comes in, fields it, and throws to first, but too late. Churniak is on first with a single, Johnson stayed on third. The next batter is Whitcomb, the Cougars' left-fielder.")

It turned out that prior knowledge of baseball made a huge difference in students' ability to understand the text—more so than their supposed reading level. The kids who knew little about baseball, including the "good" readers, all did poorly. And all those who knew a lot about baseball, whether they were "good" or "bad" readers, did well. In fact, the "bad" readers who knew a lot about baseball outperformed the "good" readers who didn't.

About 25 years later, a variation on the baseball study shed further light on the relationship between knowledge and comprehension. This team of researchers focused on preschoolers from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. First they read them a book about birds, a subject they had determined the higher-income children knew more about than the lower-income ones. When they tested comprehension, the researchers found that the wealthier kids did significantly better. But then they read a story involving a subject neither group knew anything about: made-up animals called "wugs." When the kids' prior knowledge was equal, their comprehension was essentially the same. In other words, the gap in comprehension wasn't a gap in skills. It was a gap in knowledge.

For a number of reasons, children from better-educated families—which also tend to have higher incomes—arrive at school with more knowledge and vocabulary. In the early grades, teachers have told me, children from less educated families may not know basic words like behind; I watched one first grader struggle with a simple math problem because he didn't know the meaning of before.

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As the years go by, children of educated parents continue to acquire more knowledge and vocabulary outside school, making it easier for them to gain even more knowledge—because, like Velcro, knowledge sticks best to other, related knowledge.

Meanwhile, their less fortunate peers fall further and further behind, especially if their schools aren't providing them with knowledge. This snowballing has been dubbed "the Matthew effect," after the passage in the Gospel according to Matthew about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Every year that the Matthew effect is allowed to continue, it becomes harder to reverse. So the earlier we start building children's knowledge, the better our chances of narrowing the gap.

While in some respects American schools vary tremendously, in nearly all elementary classrooms you will find the same basic structure. The day is divided into a "math block" and a "reading block," the latter of which consumes anywhere from 90 minutes to three hours.

In perhaps half of all elementary schools, teachers are supposed to use a reading textbook that includes a variety of passages, discussion questions, and a teacher guide. In other schools, teachers are left to their own devices to figure out how to teach reading, and rely on commercially available children's books. In either case, when it comes to teaching comprehension, the emphasis is on skills. And the overwhelming majority of teachers turn to the internet to supplement these materials, despite not having been trained in curriculum design. One Rand Corporation survey of teachers found that 95 percent of elementary-school teachers resort to Google for materials and lesson plans; 86 percent turn to Pinterest.

Typically, a teacher will focus on a "skill of the week," reading aloud books or passages chosen not for their content but for how well they lend themselves to demonstrating a given skill. The demonstration of that skill may not involve reading at all, however. A common way of modeling the skill of "comparing and contrasting," for example, is to bring two children to the front of the room and lead a discussion on the similarities and differences in what they're wearing.

Then students will practice the skill on their own or in small groups under a teacher's guidance, reading books determined to be at their individual reading level, which may be far below their grade level. Again, the books don't cohere around any particular topic; many are simple fiction. The theory is that if students just read enough, and spend enough time practicing comprehension skills, eventually they'll be able to understand more complex texts.

Many teachers have told me that they'd like to spend more time on social studies and science, because their students clearly enjoy learning actual content. But they've been informed that teaching skills is the way to boost reading comprehension. Education policy makers and reformers have generally not questioned this approach and in fact, by elevating the importance of reading scores, have intensified it. Parents, like teachers, may object to the emphasis on "test prep," but they haven't focused on the more fundamental problem. If students lack the knowledge and vocabulary to understand the passages on reading tests, they won't have an opportunity to demonstrate their skill in making inferences or finding the main idea. And if they arrive at high school without having been exposed to history or science, as is the case for many students from low-income families, they won't be able to read and understand high-school-level materials.

The Common Core literacy standards, which since 2010 have influenced classroom practice in most states, have in many ways made a bad situation worse. In an effort to expand children's knowledge, the standards call for elementary-school teachers to expose all students to more complex writing and more nonfiction. This may seem like a step in the right direction, but nonfiction generally assumes even more background knowledge and vocabulary than fiction does. When nonfiction is combined with the skills-focused approach—as it has been in the majority of classrooms—the results can be disastrous. Teachers may put impenetrable text in front of kids and just let them struggle. Or, perhaps, draw clowns.

In a small number of American schools, things are beginning to change. A few years ago, there was no such thing as an elementary literacy curriculum that focused on building knowledge. Now there are several, including a few available online at no cost. Some have been adopted by entire school districts—including high-poverty ones such as Baltimore and Detroit—while others are being implemented by charter networks or individual schools.

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The curricula vary in their particulars, but all are organized by themes or topics rather than skills. In one, first graders learn about ancient Mesopotamia and second graders study Greek myths. In another, kindergartners spend months learning about trees, and first graders explore birds. Children usually find these topics—including and perhaps especially the historical ones—far more engaging than a steady diet of skills.

At schools using these new curricula, all students grapple with the same texts, some of which are read aloud by teachers. Children also spend time every day reading independently, at varying levels of complexity. But struggling readers aren't limited to the simple concepts and vocabulary they can access through their own reading. Teachers tend to be amazed at how quickly children absorb sophisticated vocabulary (like fertile and opponent) and learn to make connections between different topics.

As promising as some of the early results are, it seems reasonable to ask: With inequality increasing and a growing share of American students coming from low-income families, can any curriculum truly level the playing field? The relatively few schools that have adopted knowledge-building elementary curricula may have trouble using test scores to prove that the approach can work, because it could take years for low-income students to acquire enough general knowledge to perform as well as their more affluent peers.

And yet, there is evidence—on a large scale—that this kind of elementary curriculum can reduce inequality, thanks to an unintentional experiment conducted in France. As E. D. Hirsch Jr. explains in his book *Why Knowledge Matters*, until 1989, all French schools were required to adhere to a detailed, content-focused national curriculum. If a child from a low-income family started public preschool at age 2, by age 10, she would have almost caught up to a highly advantaged child who had started at age 4. Then a new law encouraged elementary schools to adopt the American approach, foregrounding skills such as “critical thinking” and “learning to learn.” The results were dramatic. Over the next 20 years, achievement levels decreased sharply for all students—and the drop was greatest among the neediest.

The United States can't simply adopt the kind of comprehensive national curriculum that France once had (and that countries outperforming us on international tests still have). By American law and custom, curriculum is determined at the local level. Still, much can be done by individual schools and districts—and even states—to help build the knowledge that all children need to thrive.

A couple of years ago, in a low-income suburb of Dayton, Ohio, a fourth-grade teacher named Sarah Webb decided to try out a new content-focused curriculum that her district was considering adopting. The adjustment from a skills focus wasn't easy, but soon Webb could see that students at all levels of reading ability were flourishing. They wanted to know more about certain topics featured in the curriculum, so Webb took books out from the public library to satisfy their curiosity. She told me that after the unit on “What Makes a Great Heart?” one girl “talked about plasma all year long.” This was the way Webb had always wanted to teach, but she'd never been able to make it happen.

Like other teachers I've spoken with, she said kids who were previously considered low achievers were particularly enthralled. She remembers a sweet kid I'll call Matt, who had a history of reading difficulty. As the year went on, Matt found himself keenly interested in everything the class was studying and became a leader in class discussions. He wrote an entire paragraph about Clara Barton—more than he'd ever written before—which he proudly read to his parents. His mother said she'd never seen him so enthusiastic about school.

Before, Webb says, Matt felt permanently consigned to what kids see as “the dumb group.” But at the end of the year, he wrote Webb a thank-you note. Reading, he told her, “was not a struggle anymore.”

*Natalie Wexler is a journalist based in Washington, D.C. She is the author of *The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System—And How to Fix It*.*

**2019-20 After-school Program
Fall Semester Registration Form**

Our 2019-20 Fall After-school Program will begin on Wednesday, October 2nd. Josh Laker is ready once again to challenge and entertain RVWS grade school children. Below is a description of activities that will be held on each day.

Classes will be held on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from October 2nd through December 18th. **Dates are listed next to each class because the program will not be held during vacations, assembly days and early dismissals.** The cost is \$20 per class with a \$10 materials fee for the session.

Tuesday – Sports and Running Games (5th grade and up)

(October 8, 15, 22, 29, November 5, 12, 19, December 3, 10, 17)

10 classes - \$210

Any and all sports, indoor and out, four square, battleship, shark attack, capture the flag, flag tag, handball, wall ball (big and small), indoor Olympics, obstacle courses, etc.

Wednesday – Games, Drama, Challenges and Puzzles, Crafts, Outdoors

(October 2, 16, 23, 30 November 6, 13, 20, December 4, 11, 18)

10 classes - \$210

Park bench, improv, Dinner party, dramatic reading, hunter, skits, storytelling, treasure and scavenger hunts, simple ball games, group challenges, nature art, cooperation puzzles, hand and nature crafts if desired, etc.

Thursday – Cooking and Crafts (Class size is limited; first come, first served.)

October 3, 10, 17, 24, November 7, 14, 21, December 12)

8 classes - \$170

Baking bread (especially in the outdoor wood burning oven) pasta, tomato sauce, pickling, desserts, bagels, pizza, sushi, etc. These are just some of the things that were and could be done again, it will be tailored to students' desires.

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Child's Name _____ Child's Teacher _____

Parent's Name _____

Parent's Phone Home: _____ Work: _____ Cell: _____

I would like to register my child for the following After School Program(s):

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------|--|------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tues. | 3:30-5:30 | Sports and Running Games (5th & up) | <u>\$210.00</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Wed. | 3:30-5:30 | Games, Drama, Challenges | <u>\$210.00</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Thurs. | 3:30-5:30 | Cooking and Crafts | <u>\$170.00</u> |

NOTE: Materials fees are included in the prices.

TOTAL: _____

Payment in full must be attached to the registration form. Payment is non-refundable and is set regardless of the number of classes actually attended by your child. Classes will be filled on a first come first served basis.