



# Southwest Baltimore Charter School

*Where academics, family, and community come together.*

Explorer, Volume X, Issue 1

Spring 2015

## Is Our School an Agent of Positive Change?

*By Erika Brockman, Executive Director*

Ten years ago, when SBCS first opened, we had big dreams. We wanted to do more than educate kids; we wanted to transform our neighborhood and change the world! Now, a decade and two mission statements later, I think we actually know what we meant.

We have always been outward looking; over the years, we have formed partnerships, signed MOU's, and created joint programming with many community comrades -- all with an eye towards achieving greater impact. The University of Maryland - Baltimore, Young Audiences of Maryland, and Parks and People are three of our strongest partners. We also found out recently that we will be joining forces with Middle Grades Partnership in the upcoming year. What we give and get from these relationships is transformational. Together with our partners, we provide extraordinary experiences that change kids' lives: UMB graduate students coach our students for the Maryland Science Olympiad; Young Audiences brings us art residencies in puppetry, playwriting, and so much more; Parks and People provides transportation and uniforms for a girls' volleyball team that travels all over the city. I could go on and on.

In addition to supplementing our regular programming, our partnerships also allow us to create very visible change for those Baltimore City residents



who live and work around our school. Ruppert Landscape Company recently completed our vision of a beautifully landscaped garden in front of the school. Last year, key members of our staff worked with the Carroll Park Foundation to create a natural play space near the Park's playground. The B&O Railroad Museum, City Schools, and Parks and People cleared out truckload after truckload of brush, trash, and dead wood along our back fence, and now the railroad tracks behind our school are used less often for illicit activities. Each of these changes to our outside environment may seem like a small, isolated win, but taken together, they signal that we value the space we share with our community.

Just as our campus and our external partnerships reflect positive change, what happens inside our walls has a profound impact beyond SBCS. We invest heavily in our teachers' professional growth because, at a time when conversations about teacher accountability and student achievement engender distrust between and among public school stakeholders, we want our teachers to maintain their focus on their primary objective: the education of our students. It is our responsibility to empower teachers who truly understand how kids learn, who know how to create the conditions necessary for kids to learn, and who resist the urge to settle for a "one-size fits all" approach. Our teachers' clarity on what really matters helps them become models of excellence. People who come to see our teachers in action often end up engaged in provocative conversation about what public education can and should be.

The same SBCS teachers who engage in the ongoing dialogue about what and how kids learn are creating the conditions for our students to find their individual voices. Whether students learn how to advocate for their own well-being, or for the well-being of our school and our larger community, they leave SBCS ready to be engaged citizens who genuinely care about themselves and others. Our students advocate for everything from having monthly "uniform free" days, to making our playground handicapped accessible, to installing solar tubes in our building, to using the written word to express outrage over police brutality. Ultimately, when they leave us, our students become ultimate agents of community change. All our efforts -- our partnerships, our campus stewardship, our laser-focused teaching -- have simple goals: to give our students a sense that they matter, a sense of purpose and responsibility, and a sense of their individual and collective power. At SBCS, we are preparing our students to be the change we want to see in the world.



## Explorer

Volume X, Issue 1

February 2015

**Congratulations SBCS on 10 years of empowering each student to achieve authentic academic success by harnessing the kindness, cooperation, and trust of faculty, family, and community.**

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*SBCS students at Harpers Ferry*

## Back to Nature

*By Gladys Graham, Head of School*

You may have noticed that the SBCS campus has undergone some positive changes during over the last year or two. One of the most visible transformations has occurred outside the building in our new front yard courtesy of Ruppert Landscape Company and their wonderful employees. Soon, the rear courtyard will undergo Phase 2 of the Campus Master Plan designed by Landscape Architect Stephanie Truite. This spring we'll see grass, vegetable beds, and flowers beautifying our campus. A fantastic new "outdoor learning space" will spring up where the asphalt used to be, using giant boulders that have a unique place in Baltimore's railroad history.

All this activity is very much in keeping with the Expeditionary Learning model that encourages our community to create beautiful spaces for learning and to build a respectful relationship with the natural world. A recent reflection by our new Head of School gives us some background on why this is so important to SBCS.

*"Imagine a classroom with sky for a ceiling and earth for a floor. A room without walls or desks, where young scientists explore the world of bugs; mathematicians measure rainfall; budding writers record their observations; and actors rehearse on a natural stage."*

- The Boston Schoolyard Initiative

The natural world is a powerful tool that invokes a variety of emotions, from calm peaceful bliss to anxiety and stress and from excited enthusiasm to fear and distress. Research from various disciplines supports the proposition that nature has an inherently positive effect on the physical and psychological well-being of humans.

As educators, we know that natural world exploration can ignite intuitive, imaginative, and

contemplative ways of knowing that inevitably impact the natural world as well as our understanding of the relationship between human beings and the natural world. For this reason, we use the natural world to support and harness our thoughts, reflections, emotions, and behaviors. We use the natural world to help us look within and begin to understand what's inside of us and to dream of possibilities.

At Southwest Baltimore Charter School, we value and believe that a direct, respectful, and appreciative relationship with the natural world refreshes the human spirit and teaches the important ideas of recurring cycles and cause and effect. As a school community, we are constantly learning the natural world is a meaningful extension of classroom learning; that the natural world engages teachers and students in ways classroom learning can't; that the outdoors provides the venue and content for learning in a variety of disciplines; and that continuous, meaningful exposure to the natural world teaches responsibility, stewardship, and collaboration.

We are learning, living, and teaching for a better world. Who we are as a school community in nature and our relationship to the natural world is forever evolving. All of us, both children and adults, can grow by taking some time to reflect on these questions:

*Who am I in Nature?*

*Who do I want to be?*

*What do I need from my community to get where I want to be?*

*How can I improve my relationship with the natural world?*

As our campus transforms into a beautiful new space, let's all do our best to consider the amazing possibilities present in our neighborhood and city. Natural wonders surround us. We should take the time to cherish, protect, and enjoy them.

# Thank You!

The following individuals, companies, and foundations made generous contributions to Southwest Baltimore Charter School between January 1, 2013 and January 30, 2015. We gratefully acknowledge their Annual Fund gifts and special project grants. We also applaud the corporations, partners, and friends who have contributed goods, services, and countless volunteer hours to help make SBSCS a vibrant and thriving part of our community!

## PROJECT SUPPORT

### Arts Integration

Wright Family Foundation  
Maryland State Arts Council  
University of Maryland - Baltimore  
College Board Foundation  
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### Faculty and Staff

#### Leadership

Goldsmith Family Foundation  
Hoffberger Family Foundation

### Green School Initiative

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Golfer's Charitable Association  
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\* 2014 Next Generation Investing Event  
^ In Memory of Cameron O'Neill Mullin



## Special Thanks

### The Wright Family Foundation

Over the past three years, the Wright Family Foundation has supported SBCS's arts programming with a \$120,000 challenge. This extraordinary gift has been matched 1:1 by members of our board and friends of the school so that the total award to theater, poetry, visual arts, music, and dance programs was over \$240,000. We are grateful to the Wright family for their devotion to quality public education and proud that SBCS students and faculty have claimed success in so many arts disciplines and events. Since 2013, we have:

- Received the 2014 Maryland Visionary Arts School Award from Young Audiences of Maryland
- Participated in three spectacular gallery exhibits at the University of Maryland – Baltimore
- Published two complete volumes of original student poetry
- Won a national award for slam poetry in the Black Ink Café
- Congratulated two 5th graders for winning playwriting honors in the Center Stage Young Playwrights Festival
- Applauded the work of all our students during three school-wide Celebrations of the Arts

Our hallways and classrooms are proof that arts integration contributes to academic success.

### Hoffberger Family Philanthropies

In July, SBCS was awarded a \$35,000 Hoffberger Family Foundation grant to support middle school initiatives for outdoor expeditions, student mental health and support services, and faculty professional development. We applaud the excellent HFP staff and board members who are always willing to share and critique programs that strengthen middle grades achievement.

### The Goldsmith Family Foundation

Our K-8th graders have traveled thousands of miles and clocked hundreds of hours doing field work at national parks and cultural sites across the state and region. These trips have been underwritten in large part by two \$10,000 Goldsmith Family Foundation transportation grants. Our students, family members, and faculty have also ridden together in Carroll Park as participants in the Biking for Fitness and Fun Project, made possible by a \$3,000 gift from the Goldsmith Foundation. We are often on the move and the Goldsmith family has given us our wheels.

### Pride and Progress in Pigtown

After almost five years, we have begun implementing the magnificent campus master plan initiated by a grant from Neighborhood Design Center and created by engineer Stephanie Tuite. Phase 1 transformed the front yard of 1300 Herkimer with a beautiful new landscape design and a spectacular block-long treescape. Now we are on the verge of Phase 2 outdoor renovations of our rear courtyard.

This multi-phased project was made possible by the generosity and tenacity of many people. The list begins here:

- Neighborhood Design Center (Kristen Humphrey)
- Stephanie Tuite (Landscape Engineer and Designer)
- Harry and Jeannette Weinberg Foundation (Rachel Monroe and Kate Sorestad)
- Parks and People Foundation (Guy Hager, Christina Bradley, and Bill Pickens)
- Baltimore City Public Schools Facilities (Larry Flynn and Blaine Lipski)
- Baltimore Green Healthy Smart Schools Sustainability Project
- Pigtown Mainstreet (Ben Hyman)
- Fisher, Collins, and Carter, Inc. Engineers
- Ruppert Landscape Company (Ken Hochkeppel and Ken Thompson)

Come visit our flag court, take a stroll into Carroll Park along our tree-lined street, enjoy our natural playground and school garden – all courtesy of our energetic faculty and students and our Green School Partners.



*Ruppert Landscape Volunteers and SBCS Middle Grades Green Team members installing native plants on September 18, 2014.*

## We Are Crew, Not Passengers

By Gena Proctor, Middle Grades Education Director



In 6th grade, SBCS students are assigned to a crew which they will be a part of for the three years of their middle school experience. Crews meet daily for 30-45 minutes of structured academic and social development. The crew structure and process support the healthy development of relationships, provide ongoing and effective academic and social oversight, and create a more effective transition from the elementary grades to middle school. Crews are safe environments where students are known well and supported by adult leaders who become the primary contacts between home and school.

“We are crew, not passengers.” is a quote that comes from *Outward Bound* and emphasizes the work community members do together to accomplish collaborative success. Crew leaders balance supporting each student’s individual development with support for the healthy evolution of the group. They set the expectations and the tone for their crew using a collectively agreed upon structure as well as their own individual style. Consequently, crews often take on the collective qualities, desires, passions, and talents of both students and adults.

Students use journals to reflect upon their growth as individuals and members of their crew. Students over the years have written some pretty amazing things about the power of crew. Some of the strongest observations have come from students who experienced crew for the first time in 2010 when SBCS absorbed Diggs Johnson Middle School:

*“8th grade year was one of the craziest years I ever had, but I could not have done it without my crew. Ms. Mitchell was my motivation for doing my best. She told me that trouble would not get you anywhere in life. Without her I would not have reached my current maturity level.”*

- Shaynnia Elliott, former Diggs student

*“My crew and I went through a lot this year. We had our ups and downs, but we still got up and soared beyond expectations. We formed a strong relationship and became better friends.”*

- Phillip Adams, former Diggs student

*“Crew is your starting line and finish line. It can take you all the way, but it depends on whether or not you want to run the race and finish it. The things I have learned from crew are perseverance, being focused, and encouraging one another.”* - David Stokes

*“We learned and learned and learned. We made it through five days at Outward Bound and plenty of Crew Fridays. We’ve come a long way and I wouldn’t be who I am or who I’m going to be without the support of my crew, my friends, my teachers, and my family.”* - Stachal Harris

*“Ms. Sanders and I have developed a relationship that allowed us to understand each other. She has pushed me hard with academics and helped develop my personal characteristics. She helped me be a positive person in school and has been there for me when I needed her.”* - Lyndsay Sewell

SBCS is focused on ensuring that each student’s needs are met and individual strengths are discovered, but we also want our children to feel strong community connections. Our culture is planned for, developed, and sustained through structures like crew that promote shared understanding and encourage productive citizenship. On life’s journey, we are crew, not passengers.

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## December Culminating Event Rocks the Trimester



Culminating Events are tri-annual celebrations of student work. On December 12, work from expeditions, case studies, art projects, and units were displayed on bulletin boards outside the classrooms. Here is a sampling of some of the work that was done last fall and winter.

### Farm to Table

Kindergarten students studied where food comes from and how we use it to build community. They visited Great Kids Farm and learned to make butter and cheese from milk. For their art project they created collages of the many shades of green that appear in nature. They shopped for nutritious food and hosted a delicious feast for their families.

### Making Waves: The Impact of Sound and Light

In their science expedition, first graders studied how sound, light, and color affect mood and energy. They discovered that sound and light can be disruptive or calming depending upon how they are used. They

*Continued on page 7*

## 2014 Baltimore Next Generation Event Breaks the Record

In November, the Next Generation Investing Event celebrated its fifth anniversary by featuring four prominent portfolio managers and their stock picks for the coming year. Over 300 investment professionals attended the event held at Legg Mason Corporate Headquarters. Net proceeds from ticket sales and contributions topped \$150,000 this year, making it possible for Southwest Baltimore Charter School, KIPP-Baltimore, and the Children's Scholarship Fund Baltimore to receive nearly \$50,000 each.

We also benefited from the Next Gen Fund established by well-known portfolio manager William Miller III. Last year he donated \$100,000 to invest in stocks recommended by the guest speakers. Their annual return was almost 25% - which added an additional \$8,000 to the donations for each school.

SBCS Board member Suzanne Hurst introduced two students who joined her at the podium to speak on behalf of our school: David Stokes, who transitioned from 8th grade last spring and third grader Naima Cash.

Ms. Hurst introduced herself as a "proud and passionate" SBCS Board member. Naima talked about her love of reading, writing, art, and math. "To get to know me, I think it's important to understand how hard I work," she told her audience. "I want to go to a really good school and have a good job. I want to work with people who know how to work hard."

David Stokes went to SBCS and is now a freshman dance major at Baltimore School for the Arts. He told the audience that he couldn't remember his early years at school very well, "but my mom tells me I ended up in the principal's office almost every day from first through fourth grade. Through all that, everyone at the school was there for me. I remember my crew leader Mr. T. telling me, 'You need to stop playing before you fail.'" Today David keeps up with a rigorous BSA schedule that includes academic work, dance training, and rehearsals. "I feel like the School for the Arts wants the same success for me that SBCS did: to let me be creative, responsible, and the best I can be."

Ms. Hurst closed out the presentation by expressing our pride in students like Naima and David and reminding the audience that, "45% of last spring's transitioning eighth graders were accepted to competitive criteria and independent high schools and all 41 graduates made it into their first or second choice schools. To provide our award-winning, beyond the basics curriculum, SBCS must raise around \$2,000/student every single year."

We are grateful for the dedication of event chairs, Christy and Matthew Wyskiel who, with members of the Next Gen board of directors, volunteer their time and talents to support quality educational choices for Baltimore City students.



*Naima, David, and Suzanne Hurst represent SBCS at the 2014 Next Generation Investing Event.*

## Introducing Ms. Gladys

*By Jillian Temple, 8th Grade*



*Ms. Gladys hard at work at her desk.*

Unfortunately, last year we had to say goodbye to our previous Principal, Ms. Stone, whom many of us were close to. On the brighter side of things, this gave us the opportunity to meet and welcome another into our community. By interviewing her, I got to know Ms. Gladys Graham, our new Head of School/Principal. In this column, you'll learn a few things about her too.

Ms. Gladys started her career as a Para-professional in Cincinnati, Ohio. There she became fascinated with children and how they learn. She helped teach science and math in a school similar to ours. Ms. Gladys gained lots of experience teaching and working with kids, learning from a "fabulous teacher" for whom she was an assistant.

Her favorite subject was always science because she enjoyed doing experiments and questioning things. Ms. Gladys was also inspired by her mother, who was an educator as well.

Outside of school, Ms. Gladys enjoys gardening and the outdoors. When she's at school, she works hard to provide great learning opportunities for SBCS students and continues to impact children and the world in positive ways.

*Continued from page 5*

wrote letters to introduce themselves to families living in a homeless shelter and then created wind chimes and night lights to give to the children they met. The first grade classrooms became a gallery of light and sound during the Culminating Event.

## Native Americans in Maryland



Second graders explored the lives of the Eastern Woodland Indians who lived in and around the Chesapeake Bay for centuries. At the Irvine Nature Center, students learned how native tribes survived using natural resources. During the Culminating Event, third graders shared their knowledge of Native American communities by teaching guests about the foods they ate, the games they played, and the houses they built.

## The Journey of Discovery



Lewis and Clark were the subjects of third grade's fall and winter expedition. Students learned about the history of westward expansion in the early nineteenth century and worked with Black Cherry Puppet Theater to create a set, puppet characters, and a script telling the tale of the Journey of Discovery.

Visit us online at [www.sbc.school.org](http://www.sbc.school.org)

## Coming to America

Immigration was the central unit for fourth graders who researched and wrote papers on the ways different populations arrived in America from Africa and Europe. Friends and family members visited classrooms on December 12 to hear students read their reports and to play a board game they created to help them with their study.

## Civil Rights: A Universal Fight



Fifth graders grappled with the concept of positive change during their fall expedition. They researched the strategies and goals of civil rights leaders from around the world. They wrote many drafts and presented their final reports at the Culminating Event. Students also wrote "I Am" poems about their personal quests for positive change.

## Ancient Egypt



For their first trimester expedition, sixth graders submerged themselves in the study of the culture and customs of the ancient Pharaohs. They visited the Walters Art Museum to gather detailed information about Egyptian jewelry, household items, and funerary practices and made mummy masks in Art. They wrote research papers on the royal dynasties of the Egyptian Kings and created a board game based on their knowledge of the culture and topography of Ancient Egypt.

## Anatomy of an Adolescent Brain

Seventh and eighth grade scientists studied the areas of the brain that are most active during the teenage years. They tested their hypotheses on emotion and brain activity by observing the effects of exercise diet, sleep, and technology use on adolescent behaviors. Their science projects were presented during the Culminating Event.

## Power of Good

Seventh and eighth grade Humanities students explored the guiding question, "What is the Appropriate Use of Power" as part of an analysis of Hitler and the Holocaust. They did field work at the Holocaust Museum in Washington and gathered research on the psychology behind the roles of victim, bystander, rescuer, and oppressor. Digging deeper into their study, they examined the actions of civilians and police officers during recent events in Ferguson, Cleveland, and Brooklyn. Then they applied what they learned to the circumstances surrounding their real life stories of being victims and oppressors.

## Mathematician Mindset



While studying algebra and geometry, seventh and eighth graders grappled with the concepts of Platonism, Formalism, and Intuitionism: Ideas that often shape the ways mathematicians determine the role of numbers in the real world. Students used polygons to create symbols representing each mathematical theory.

*Work from the first trimester remains on display throughout the month of February*



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TIMONIUM, MD  
PERMIT 271

## Did You Ever Wonder . . . If art can help heal our hearts?

SBCS artists share their points of view:

Art provides an experience of seeing the world from another person's perspective. Art creates empathy. Empathy creates understanding.

– *Siobhan Nolan (Elementary Visual Art)*

Art is an outlet for emotion. It's a voice that tells us we're not alone. When we confront our problems with art, we share ourselves. Real change happens.

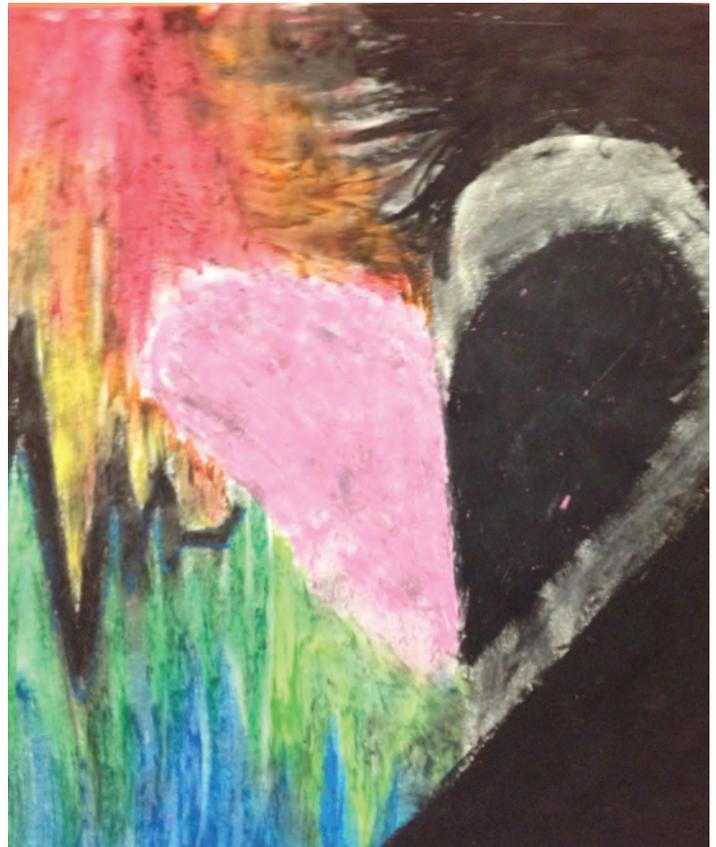
– *Janelle Sanders (Middle Grades Visual Art)*

Art is a universal platform to be seen and heard. It inspires us to think in different ways, to express what is most important, and to investigate what we can't find words to say. Art promotes change by bringing new ideas into the light.

– *Allison Seidenstricker (Dance)*

Music is the transformation of silence to sound, chaos to order. We create sound from nothing and give it order by arranging notes on a page. Music can stir the human soul and change the way we feel. It is a powerful tool that can create and recreate our sense of community.

– *Tony Bianca (Music)*



*The Teen Age Heart, by Analece Villeres, 7th Grade*