



# Southwest Baltimore Charter School

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

Explorer, Volume IX, Issue 1

January 2014

## A Decade of Inscaping

*By Erika Brockman, Executive Director*

Next year we will be celebrating our DECADE ANNIVERSARY! Not surprisingly, we are reflecting on where we've been, where we are, and where we are going:

- We opened the school with 60 kids, grew to 425, and are considering additional growth or even replication.
- We started with 12 staff members, now have over 70, and are considering bringing on additional people to launch new programs.
- We started with a curriculum-based integrated thematic units, moved on to an Expeditionary Learning (EL) school design, and are considering whether to seek formal designation as a Certified Model EL school.

We've been around the block a few times, and have lots of lessons learned.

After thinking about our ongoing evolution, it is clear that the single most significant factor in our success has remained the same: we re-

cruit, hire, and develop exceptional teachers. In order to get and keep great talent, it is imperative that we create the right climate for students and teachers. One way we do this is to tap into a phenomenon called "inscaping."

Inscaping is a phenomenon that has been researched and discussed at length by Warren Nilsson and Tana Paddock. Nilsson is a senior lecturer in social innovation at South Africa's University of Cape Town (UCT) Graduate School of Business and a faculty member of the UCT Bertha Centre for Social Innovation. Tana Paddock is the coordinator of Organization Unbound, a global community that explores the organizational dimensions of social change.

Nilsson and Paddock describe inscaping as "the surfacing (or sharing) of inner experiences of organizational members during the normal course of every day work." Our school is featured in much of the research they have done to understand social innovation—how it happens and what organizations do to sustain it. In interviews and focus groups, SBCS staff describe the school as, "the most vital, engaging, and innovative learning environment they have encountered."

When I read Nilsson and Paddock's work, I was struck by how lucky we were when we started the school. I don't think we intention-

ally cultivated inscaping; rather, we simply knew we wanted to create a climate that was transparent, inclusive, trusting, and caring. We did not deliberately set out to create a climate that was also empathic and emotionally safe. It just kind of happened during that first year. We worked hard, laughed hard, and cried hard – together. We had so many crazy, sad, wonderful stories to share with one another! There was no hierarchy, there was no place to hide, and there was no way to check out.

Somewhere along the way, I remember coming to the realization that the adults at SBCS were learning and growing as much as the kids. Just like our students, our teachers were taking risks, and sharing out, and being kind to one another. We often talk about meeting the academic *and* social/emotional needs of our kids. Our teachers and leaders are no different. People, young and old, grow into their full potential only when they feel emotionally safe and connected to the people around them. Our job is to serve kids, but we know that if we don't feed and nurture our staff members, our staff members can't feed and nurture our students.

In those first years, inscaping happened organically, but since then, our staff size has quintupled and personal connection does not

*Continued on page 2, Inscaping*





## Explorer

Volume IX, Issue 1  
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To empower each student to achieve authentic academic success by harnessing the kindness, cooperation, and trust of faculty, family, and community.

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## Inscaping: *continued from page 1*

come as easily. In response to our tremendous growth, and thanks to insights from Nilsson and Paddock's research, we have institutionalized and given structure to much of what was just a natural response to being overwhelmed by all the challenges that come with starting a school: we have weekly check-ins with staff, we share our failures without fear of judgment, we have hard conversations with co-workers just as we might with family. The majority of these interactions are about the work—the lesson plan, the rigor of the Expedition, the pedagogical underpinnings of our model. We aren't just sitting around chatting and emoting; we are working really hard to create an incredible school. Our inscaping environment allows us to share our goals openly, to take risks along the way as we seek to achieve them, and to celebrate with friends once we have reached a professional summit.

At a time when education reform has become a national priority, I believe that inscaping in

schools is absolutely critical. Ongoing, effective teacher development is at the heart of exceptional, sustainable schools. In a profession that is as personal as teaching, I don't know how teachers make meaningful growth without inscaping.

After nearly 10 years, it has become clear that in many ways, we aren't that different from our colleagues around the country. Like them, we are trying to figure out what teacher accountability means, how to align our progressive educational model with the worthy expectations of the new Common Core, and how to work collaboratively with collective bargaining units. What sets us apart, I am proud to say, is that despite a decade of distractions and roadblocks, and despite extraordinary growth and transitions, we have been able to protect and sustain the aspects of our organizational culture that allow us to remain a close knit, open, inspiring, and engaging educational community. This is what inscaping is all about, and it makes SBCS a great place for kids and adults to learn and grow.

## A New Streetscape for SBCS and Our Neighbors

*By Marilyn Powel, Director of Development*

During the month of August when we were in the midst of building renovations and roof replacements, Baltimore City replaced the curbs, sidewalks, gutters, and paving on the 1300 block of Herkimer Street. The construction went all the way from South Carey Street to the edge of Carroll Park across the front of our building. The project provided an excellent opportunity to realize a big chunk of the Streetscape Master Plan developed by Landscape Architect Stephanie Tuite back in 2011. The City cut 15 deep planting beds in the new sidewalk and filled the beds with top soil and mulch. While the Herkimer Street project was being finished, Parks and People Landscape Designer Christina Bradley carefully prepared a long list of sturdy perennial plants that would form the basis of our tree beds.

The culmination of this grand effort came on October 3rd when 40 environmental attorneys from across the United States who were attending a national conference here in Baltimore, arrived with picks and shovels, ready to do magic. The lawyers planted 15 fully matured Flame Amur Maple trees in the beds and filled in the spaces around the trees with over 530 native ground cover plants like



Creeping Lilies, Yarrow, White Coneflowers, Hostas, and Maryland's State Flower, the Black-eyed Susan.

The volunteers and Parks and People professionals, completely transformed our block into a beautiful environment with spectacular flowers and a canopy of bright red leaves.

The streetscape will present our neighborhood with lovely textures and subtle shades of red and brown during the fall and winter. Then, in spring and summer, we can look forward to gorgeous flowers and foliage to delight us.

*Continued on page 5, Streetscape*

*Volume IX, Issue 1, January 2014*

# Thank You!

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\* 2013 Next Generation Investing Event  
+ In Memory of Jane Breiseth  
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# In Memory of Raul and Regina



# Teacher Feature

The SBCS faculty is energized by some of the City's most talented and dedicated professional educators who know their students well. Our teachers foster student responsibility for learning in inclusive and engaging instructional environments where each student's academic and social needs are identified, monitored, and satisfied.

There are over 60 full-time teachers at SBCS. Although we can't get to know them all in a single newsletter, we want to highlight a few of the talented individuals who help make our school a great place to learn and grow.

## Lisa Dannenberg *Kindergarten*

Lisa was born and raised in Baltimore and attended Garrison Forest School before heading south for college. She earned her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education at the College of Charleston and her Master's of Education with a reading speciality from Loyola University of Maryland. She has been part of the SBCS elementary grades team for six years and has taught First grade, K/First, and now Kindergarten. When she isn't teaching, she loves to spend time with friends and family. She's an avid Ravens fan and goes to all the games! She also loves being around water and visits the beach during any free moments.

## Gay Claudio *Special Education (Autism Classroom)*

Gay received her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and Master of Arts degree in Special Education from the Philippines. She has been teaching for over 22 years – 14



## Susannah Maynard *Middle Grades Science*

Susannah is in her fifth year at SBCS. She began her work here as an elementary grades teacher, but moved into the role of 7th and 8th grade science teacher last year. She is fascinated by the scientific world, so she was thrilled to take the position! Ms. Maynard comes to SBCS all the way from Portland, Oregon. She got her B.A. in Linguistics from Oregon State University where she also minored in Spanish and Music. Her Master's in Arts and Teaching comes from the University of Portland. In her free time she enjoys playing the piano, reading, hiking, and playing sports.

## Brad "Coach" Hunter *Elementary Grades Fitness and Adventure*

Coach Hunter has held this position at SBCS for four years. He teaches our elementary students fitness classes such as kickball, soccer, and tag. His adventure classes take students canoeing at Middle Branch, biking in Carroll Park, and camping at Thorpewood. He also takes our students on visits to regional parks with Baltimore Inner City Outings (BICO). Brad has worked with children in numerous capacities including coaching little league basketball and leading treks with the Boy Scouts to New Mexico and Hawaii. He holds a Bachelor's degree in



*Clockwise left to right: Lisa Dannenberg; Susannah Maynard, Brad Hunter, and Gay Claudio.*

years of which she spent as an elementary educator. Since 2005, she has been one of SBCS's special educators. In addition to being a "founding teacher," Gay is an SBCS parent. Her eldest daughter graduated from SBCS last school year and is now a freshman in a Baltimore County Magnet School. Her two younger daughters are currently in 4th grade and Kindergarten.

Business Management from Johns Hopkins University and a Master's Degree for Leadership in Teaching from Notre Dame College of Maryland. Outside of school/work, Brad owns "Party Central," a DJ company that provides entertainment for private and community events. He spends as much time as possible with his almost 2 year-old daughter whose current favorite word is "Up".

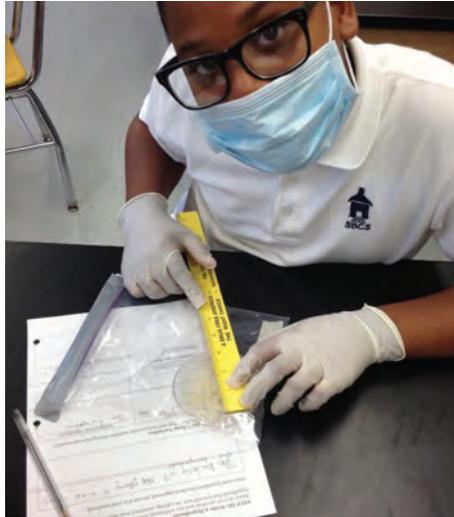
# The Fall Middle Grades Expedition

## Science Focus:

### Civil War and Medicine

By Susannah Maynard,  
Middle Grades Science

7th and 8th grade science students collaborated with the Humanities classes for an integrated examination of the harsh conditions that existed in Civil War camps and field hospitals. Students studied the diseases that overwhelmed soldiers in both armies and visited the National Field Hospital Museum in Frederick. The Civil War research piqued their interest in micro-organisms and they went on to study bacteria using cultures taken from around the school. The results were both disgusting and fascinating.



8th Grader, David, studies bacteria.

## Humanities Focus:

### Civil War and Civil Rights

By Geoff Godfrey,  
Middle Grades Humanities

This trimester's Humanities Expedition was titled "What's Worth Fighting For?" We studied images from antebellum America to make predictions about the Expedition, and to learn how historians analyze photographs,

maps, and text. We learned about the cultural and historical backdrop of the Civil War, including the 3/5th Compromise, the Missouri Compromise, what life was like on plantations, and what Abolitionists believed. We focused specifically on John Brown and his early life in order to identify what motivated him, and what factors made him unique among Abolitionists. We learned about Brown's famous raid on Harper's Ferry before completing fieldwork there and at Antietam Battlefield in order to deepen our understanding of the historical impact of these events. To



Students hiking at Antietam.

finish the trimester we focused on terrorists, martyrs, and religious fundamentalists. This provided an interesting lens through which we could question John Brown's methods and evaluate whether or not he fit into any of these categories. Students also interviewed adults who had taken a stand or who had fought for positive change. Their interview notes and findings were used in literacy class to create biographical sketches of their interview subjects. These sketches will be published in a book called "What's Worth Fighting For?"

## Streetscape, continued from page 2



We are grateful to Guy Hager and Christina Bradley of Parks and People for their leadership in bringing about the miracle on Herkimer Street; to Stephanie Tuite for her vision of all our campus can be; and to the Conference on Environmental Law attorneys who took time out of their day to volunteer at SBCS.

In 2004, the Parks and People Foundation will make another monumental contribution to our neighborhood by cleaning up the trash and

litter on the B&O Railroad tracks that form the northern boundary of our school. Our Master Plan will continue to evolve with grass planted on the areas behind SBCS that were once covered by asphalt.

*SBCS received the Parks and People Foundation's Exceptional Schoolyard Garden Project Award this year. Students, teachers, neighbors and parents made some great "green" environmental projects in 2012-13. Let's keep going!*

## Voices of Experience

By Shanell Johnson

Mr. Raymond Johnson and Mrs. Gloria Johnson are my grandparents. They visited SBCS to be interviewed by a group of 7th graders in Mr. Geoff's Humanities class, where they answered questions about their life experiences and what they believe is worth fighting for. Their journey together though the years was interesting to all of us.

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Raymond was born on October 21, 1928 in Everett, Massachusetts where he was raised by his mother and aunt. He graduated from Everett High School in 1947 and attended Tufts University. He joined the Army Reserves in 1953, where he eventually rose to the rank of Colonel. During his time in the Army, Raymond was traveling cross country by bus.

Gloria was born on November 23, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. She and her siblings were raised by a single mother. She graduated from

Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta in 1948 and went on to attend Spelman College, where she majored in French and minored in History. After graduating from Spelman, she met Raymond on a bus, and they were married a year later.

In 1954, the Johnsons moved to Boston, Massachusetts where Gloria attended Boston State College and Raymond attended Suffolk University. They both graduated, Gloria with

*Continued on page 7, Voices*



## Dean Shireen Joins the Team

*Shireen Robinson,  
Dean of Students and Families*

We are delighted that Shireen S. Robinson has come to SBCS this fall in a new position created just for her: Dean of Students and Families. Her background makes her perfect for her task. She has studied responsive classroom approaches to teaching and learning since 1997 and is a co-founder of Power of the Parents (POP), a local initiative to educate and assist parents in the hardest and most important job of their lives: parenting. Before joining the SBCS administrative team, Dean Shireen spent years in the classroom as a Humanities teacher, staff developer, and literacy coach for Baltimore City Public Schools. For ten years she taught all subjects at all elementary grade levels in her hometown of Boston, Massachusetts. She is a National Board Certified Teacher and Candidate Supporter. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Howard University and her Master's from Lesley University. Her daughter is a sophomore at Baltimore School for the Arts.

# Teaching to the Dream

*By Brandon Bennett*

It begins with a dream; vivid, colorful, powerful, real . . . You awake each morning, and it's still there: A desire to do something you've never done before; to reach a little higher, stretch a little further, try a little harder.

Southwest Baltimore Charter School began nearly a decade ago that way. We were a wish made on a shooting star by a group of mothers and teachers who wanted something better for their children, their community, and a new generation.

The third-floor of an underused elementary school was all we had to call home. Like all new homes, it needed a little cleaning, some furniture, and life from a student body. Sixty kindergarteners and first-graders made up the inaugural SBCS classes of 2013 and 2014 – years in the way-too-distant future that we could only imagine. Those little people came in and took the hands of our staff and together we began the hard work of making the dream come true.

The days became weeks. The weeks became months, and before we knew it, a first year was ending. Another new school year began; then another and another, until many years had come and gone. Those little people? They *grew* —academically, socially, and of course, physically. They stretched themselves to achieve things they thought impossible. To be honest, we teachers stretched and grew as well, learning just as much as we were teaching.

Now, every day, I see a reflection of myself in the students I pass in the hallway or prod to raise their hands to give an answer. Like them, I entered SBCS wide-eyed, innocent,

and even a little afraid. But every time I faltered, there was someone waiting to pick me up and tell me, “You can *do* this.” And you know what? Eventually, I did.

There are lessons to be learned everywhere, every day. Teachable moments are like seconds on a clock keeping time on our continually unfolding journey. Are some moments challenging? Of course! All families face situations that test them and make them question their ability to roll with the tide and keep sailing.

The beautiful flipside to those tests occurs when the storm passes, the clouds dissipate, and we are surprised and relieved to find that we're still afloat. What began as hopeless floundering to stay above the water's surface is transformed into wonderful buoyancy. What was perceived to be stubbornness is revealed to be perseverance. Small difficulties turn into enormous breakthroughs. The “*aha moments*” mark time toward the realization of our dream.

At SBCS we are one body united toward a common goal of excellence. We bring our various quirks, talents, and experiences to the puzzle of educating young minds, bodies, and spirits. Our families, our staff, our community, and especially our scholars come together in the purest form of creation — trial and error. “You can *do* this!” is still our rallying cry as we take on the challenges of each new day and each new academic year. We reach behind us to uplift when necessary, and pay it forward in volumes as we grow and evolve into our fullest selves. And yes, we keep on dreaming.

*Brandon Bennett is an SBCS “founding teacher” in his 9th year at our school. To hear his narration of our recent SBCS video, visit [www.vimeo.com](http://www.vimeo.com) and click on the Southwest Baltimore Charter School link.*



*Brandon Bennett works with a 3rd grade student during word study.*



## Mayor's Reading Club Kicks Off at SBCS

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake kicked off the first month of her city-wide reading program on October 29th in the SBCS library. First and second grade students

welcomed the Mayor with a song and then listened intently as she used her talents to create a hilarious reading of Mo Willems' *Pigeon Wants a Puppy*, the October Book Club selection for young readers. In addition to the special visit by Her Honor, students were given new books to take home and participated in arts activities that centered on the theme of that month's selection.

The Mayor's Reading Club is designed to get students excited about reading by introducing them to different grade-appropriate books each month. SBCS is one of nine schools chosen to participate.

Third graders were given *Make Way for Dymonde Daniel* by Nikkie Grimes as November's book selection. During the month, third graders met with Art with a Heart artists for a special project called "Sticks and

Stones." They created their own stick and stone sculptures and selected words like peace, hope, and determination to decorate their objects. The results were beautiful and reminded us that our words have the power to hurt *and* heal.

Winter Book Club offerings for fourth and fifth graders will include books by award-winning authors Christopher Paul Curtis (*Bud Not Buddy*) and Avi (*Sophia's War*). The spring round of selections will begin with five sets of new books.

We are grateful to the Weinberg Foundation, individuals, and organizations that have come together to make a difference in the lives of Baltimore City students. Community partnerships to support the Mayor's Book Club will be available in the spring.

## The 4th Annual Baltimore Next Generation Investing Event Makes Gains For SBCS Students

The 2013 Next Gen event took place on September 25th and was a smashing success. SBCS and the Children's Scholarship Fund Baltimore were joined by KIPP: Baltimore as recipients of over \$100,000 in ticket sales and contributions from local investment firms and individual donors. Premiere investors Henry Ellenbogen (T. Rowe Price), William H. Miller (LMM, LLC), John Rogers, Jr. (Ariel Investments), and J. David Schuster (Brown Advisory) presented their top equity investment ideas to 300 attendees gathered at Legg Mason Capital Management Headquarters.

Christy and Matt Wyskiel did another exceptional job of planning and hosting Next Gen. To top off the afternoon's activities Bill Miller, who has been a speaker at all four Next Gen events, contributed \$100,000 to be invested in the 2013 stock picks highlighted by the speakers. If those investments prove profitable over the next 9 months,



Next Generation chair Christy Wyskiel and Erika Brockman

as have almost all of the featured picks from previous years, the proceeds will be divided equally among SBCS, CSFB, and KIPP. Genius!

## Voices, continued from page 5



Raymond and Gloria Johnson with SBCS Middle Grades students.

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a Master's in Education, and Raymond with a Bachelor's in Business Administration. Soon after, Raymond received a job with the Social Security Administration and they moved to South Bend, Indiana where their first son Michael was born. After two years, Raymond was transferred to the Social Security Administration Headquarters in Baltimore and their second son Brian (my father) was born.

Gloria was taught at Harlem Park Elementary School in Baltimore, Clarksville Middle School in Columbia, and finally at Patapsco Middle (my old middle school) in

Ellicott City. In 1984, her granddaughter (me) was born. Gloria retired from teaching three years later.

My grandparents worked very hard to accomplish everything they have achieved in life. When asked what they believe is worth fighting for, they say their Christian faith in God, family, education, and the pursuit of happiness.

*Shanell Johnson has been inspiring SBCS students with her passion for education since 2010. She is also a talented disc jockey who performs at events all over Baltimore and gets us up and dancing during school-wide meetings.*



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## Did You Ever Wonder . . . Who is quoted outside of the library?

“Yours is a journey that has just begun,” the quotation that appears outside the entrance to our library, describes the limitless life journey of artist, writer, lawyer, diplomat, and educator James Weldon Johnson.

Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida in 1871, the son of a free-born Virginian father and a Bahamian mother. He graduated from Atlanta University before studying law and becoming the first African American to pass the Florida State bar examination. His interest in poetry and music led him to New York City where he studied literature at Columbia University.

In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Johnson to diplomatic posts in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Upon his return to the United States, he began numerous collaborations with African American artists. He wrote over 200 songs for the Broadway stage and produced hundreds of poems and stories as part of the Harlem Renaissance. During the 1920s, Johnson became involved with the NAACP and served as the organization’s chief executive officer until his retirement in 1930.

Johnson devoted the last years of his life to writing and teaching at New York University. He died in a tragic car accident while visiting Wiscasset, Maine in 1938.

