

# Soar Newsletter

Winter 2014-2015

## Ending Bullying Means All Hands and Voices on Deck



For the third year, the school honored Unity Day, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. Unity Day, a day the PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights) pushes nationally to raise awareness, helped guide the school in two weeks of readings, activities, and projects related to coping with and putting an end to bullying.

Each of the ten homerooms worked together to talk about and better understand how each one of us can help stop the hurt, and spread kindness and acceptance for all.

Some of the activities completed by classrooms involved class collages, a school-wide 'Everyday Heroes' poster project (that is displayed around the school), and students and staff also made canvas flags that are hanging in the gymnasium. The flags show positive messages and artwork that remind us we are each unique and need to take care of one another.

The 6/7<sup>th</sup> grade continued the tradition of making and giving out over 200 orange, braided bracelets, to be reminders of Unity Day and that every day should be Unity Day. The class also created, distributed, and collected a survey. They have since statistically analyzed the results. Students have made banners to post, that will report the findings of our schools' knowledge around bullying.

In addition to honoring Unity Day, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom that organized Unity Day last year, was very motivated to bring in a speaker to address bullying. Time became the hurdle for last year, but they helped do the research

and hard work to get it in place for this year. Therefore, the Unity Day events were made that much more meaningful with a presenter, whose roots are in Vermont. John Halligan, who spoke to our school in 2008, returned Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>. Although not a Vermont resident now, while he lived in Vermont, he experienced tragedy that he has turned into teaching.

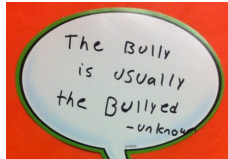
In 2003, his son took his own life due to the effects of bullying and depression. Since this time, Halligan has devoted his life to travelling around the country and speaking at schools. He has visited thousands of schools since 2004.

Halligan firmly believes that bullying awareness and character education should be part of curriculum in every school, starting very young. In addition to speaking at schools about his son's life and

how we can prevent other teenagers from experiencing the same pain, the Halligans pushed for legislation change. They were critical in the Vermont Bully Prevention bill signed into law in May 2004, and also worked for the mandatory suicide prevention education act, passed in April 2006.

When John Halligan speaks at schools, to grades five through twelve, his goal is to spread "Ryan's story, and the powerful healing messages of forgiveness and unconditional love".

Halligan presented to the middle school, the high school, and also to staff and community in an afternoon presentation. It was quiet, very quiet, during each of the student presentations. The stu-



dents sat focused and were engaged in Mr. Halligan's every word. After he told the story of his son, he opens the time up for discussion and questions.

Students asked about Ryan; his favorite color, foods, and activities. They asked about Mr. Halligan's life now and how hard it must be to spend his life presenting at schools, away from his family. One student asked about one of John's favorite memories of Ryan. Mr. Halligan couldn't help but smile as he painted the picture of a day where Ryan and his younger brother were riding a bike together, scaring the life out of their mother, but he said he could see the joy on both boys' faces.

After each presentation, there was a line. The line was to speak to Mr. Halligan, shake his hand, share an experience, or simply say a heartfelt 'thank you'. One high school student waited patiently to share his story of struggles with bullies. Mr. Halligan gave him some really encouraging and supportive words. The student shook his hand and then began walking away. The next student in line walked up to Mr. Halligan and said, "I was a jerk and used to bully that kid, (pointing to the previous young man). I don't do it anymore. Thank you for coming. I'm sorry about your son."

There is definitely a greater awareness of bullying in our school, and many students were deeply touched by Mr. Halligan's message. Soar Learning Center is grateful for the compassionate work he does, everyday. We will hopefully have him back to visit soon.

For more information about Unity Day or John Halligan, visit: [www.pacer.org/bullying/](http://www.pacer.org/bullying/) and [www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org/index.htm](http://www.ryanpatrickhalligan.org/index.htm).



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**Left:** A mural in the high school, 'Speak Up Against Bullying', displays students' words about bullying, such as the speak bubble (left).

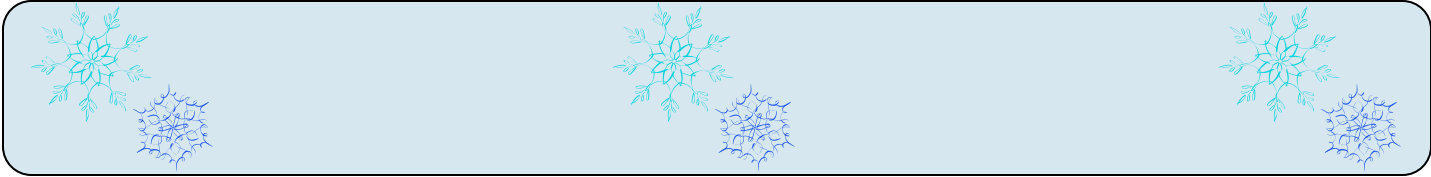
**Above:** A similar mural in the elementary, 'Climb Above Bullying', gave younger students a place to voice their thoughts around kindness and understanding.

**Below:** One student chose his mother for the Everyday Heroes project.



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# SLC After-School Program

This fall, an after-school program has launched at SLC. Eight elementary students were invited to join the program, coordinated by Brad Messier. Supported by several other behavioral interventionists from both the high school and elementary school, Messier plans a variety of learning activities for the students.

Running from 2:30-4:45, students spend their Monday and Wednesday afternoons playing games, going into the community, and baking, there has been lots of baking! So far this year, there have been crafts, gym activities, ornament making, a community scavenger hunt, and theme based



learning. Messier has plans for work with topics such as drug awareness, and hopes to bring in community members to help teach these concepts. As the program continues, there will be activities related to music, art, literacy, anti-bullying, and service learning.

The after-school program provides a safe, educational, and positive space for students, when the school day is done. Students are challenged to push themselves, and through experiencing new things, will hopefully gain



valuable concepts around self-wellness and ways to positively manage leisure time.



While currently the program is offered twice a week, Messier hopes it will expand to more days. As it expands, more students will be incorporated in the program.

One student reports 'I just like being able to hang out with my friends and do the different activities'. Another student enjoys the different snacks and baking they do each day.

Already, the after-school program has become a part of the day to which several

# Winter Concert

On Tuesday, December 23rd, students and staff were on stage for the holiday concert. Prior to departing for winter break, the school and community gather together to celebrate not only our talents but each other.



This year, among the performances, were singers, break dancers, actors, and musicians. The beginning act was performed by several of

our youngest students. This dance was entitled 'Waltz of the Snow Creatures'. There was a middle school skit that led into a bell ringing act. Another middle school student demonstrated his break dancing skills. A seventh grader spent her fall learning and dutifully practicing 'Carol of the Bells' on the keyboard. Playing a duet with our music teacher, Ms. Whitmore, she proved that hard work and determination pays off.



In addition to these acts, there were also numerous vocal performances. We listened to 'Hippopotamus for Christmas', 'Do you Want to Build a Snowman', 'Rudolph', a joint effort by two classes for 'Jingle Bells', Elvis' 'Blue Christmas', 'Santa Clause is Coming to Town', 'Mary, did you know', and 'Feliz Navidad', performed by a staff ensemble.



Thanks to the mentors that assisted student performers, to all of our brave and talented student performers, Ms. Whitmore, our music teacher, and our emcee, Deana Paquette.

# SLC Students and Extracurricular Activities

While students attending SLC often spend their school-day outside of their home community, many students return to their sending school and home-town to participate in a variety of activities each day.

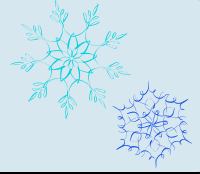
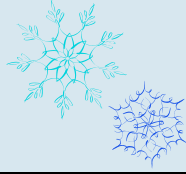
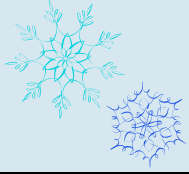


In the elementary, almost one forth of the students are involved in extracurricular activities in their community. Students play team sports such as basketball, baseball, soccer,

and football. We have students that participate and compete in Tae Kwon Doe and swimming. We also have boy scouts, students attending dance class, and even a student that volunteers at the Humane Society. In addition to the elementary students, there are several high school students that not only attend school, but also work a part-time job (see story on page four).







## High School Stock Market Simulation: More Than Number\$

In Diane Mock's high school, Personal Finance Class, students have been doing more than book work. They have been working in teams and participating in NSMS: National Stock Market Simulation.

Through this game, students work with peers in their own class and compete against teams around the nation. Used in classes such as math, social studies and business education, students are given \$100,000 to invest in stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. The teams then work daily to buy and sell these assets, with the goal of achieving the greatest value portfolio.

The game lasts a total of ten weeks, and all the while, students are gaining practical understanding of what the stock market is really about. From this simula-

tion, students better understand economic concepts, financial terminology, as well as computer and technology applications. In addition, students make connections between forms of media that report these numbers daily such as websites, television news broadcasts, newspapers, and magazines.

For Mock's class, they had a team that placed 21st in the national competition. Since the game parallels the actual stock market and they can follow their trades in real time, it provides students with an authentic experience of the stress and excitement that can come with financial gains and losses.

Beyond the simulation, the website,

www.nationalsms.com, also supplies educators with lessons, supporting activities and worksheets, as well as stock research and information, and important investing strategies.

The seven-student class finished the simulation on December 8th, with their winning team having gained \$4,000 virtual dollars for their portfolio. Throughout the class, students made insightful choices regarding stock investment, even using the time of year and upcoming holiday season. For this project, not only were students engaged, but they gained valuable and practical, real-world experience.



## Therapy Dog Visits

Continuing visits with Sherri Bushee and her therapy dog, Holland, students in the 6/7 class have embarked upon a new challenge: introducing Sherri and Holland to more classes in our school.

The 6/7th graders met with Sherri and Holland twice this fall before putting together a short presentation for their peers. The presentation gave each student an opportunity to share important information about therapy dogs, where they

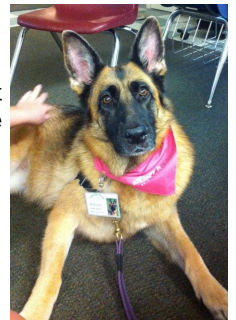


work, the benefit they share with clients, and special information about Sherri and Holland and their relationship over the years. The students took pride in this and have so far presented to two different classrooms.

During each presentation, the middle school students shared their information and then opened it up for questions from the peers experiencing Sherri and Holland for the first time. The students in the K-4 classes truly enjoyed their time getting to know Sherri and

Holland. There were great questions asked such as 'where does Holland sleep' and 'would she protect Sherri if she were threatened'.

Students are already looking forward to their next visit, and the middle school students are eager to continue sharing Sherri and Holland with even more peers.



## Thanksgiving: SLC-Style

On Thursday, November 20th, SLC celebrated their annual Thanksgiving. While each homeroom decides upon a dish to prepare and contribute to the feast, the culinary classes have many behind the scenes tasks that help make the feast nothing short of incredible.

Once classes have chosen their dish, the culinary students must balance quantities of ingredients, timing of when things will be cooked, and also schedule the use of the kitchen. All of this is organized and overseen by vocational coordinator, Claire

Thompson. With students and staff by her side, the feast, feeding nearly 150 people, is always a success.

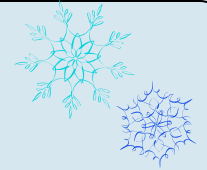
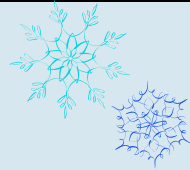
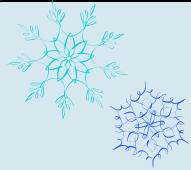
This year, Tommy Hamlin and Jesse Le-Clair deep fried five, twenty pound turkeys. There was also a great deal of assistance when it came to setting up the tables, decorating the gym, and cleaning up after the meal.

As tradition, prior to the meal, several students from each homeroom get up in front of the school. They share the things

for which their classmates are thankful, which often range from personal belongings, to people in their lives, to even opportunities their school, family, or community provide them.



*Above: Students and staff write things for which they are thankful on the leaves and then tape them onto this tree.*



## Back to School Students in the Community

As the Back to School program continues to keep students involved and working in the community, one of these activities is not something you'd typically see in an average school day. Twice a month, four students travel to South Hero to spend some time at CHAMP.

CHAMP, Champlain Adaptive Mounted Program, is located in South Hero, and is a valuable asset to our community. The facility offers boarding for horses, lessons for riders of all ages, and also provides summer programs and camps.



Most importantly, since 1987, CHAMP has been providing therapeutic experiences with horses for people with special needs. Serving three surrounding counties, and relying greatly on volunteers, the services provided by CHAMP is very client centered. Riding lessons and programs are designed to highlight a client's strengths and build their confidence.

For Back to School students, goals that are sometimes challenging to work on within classrooms walls, are more easily tackled. Students work on goals that range from occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language related goals. Being outside, working with animals, and

building community connections are just incredible extras that come with this opportunity.

While at CHAMP, students enjoy interacting with the horses and playing a variety of games. One game requires them (on horseback) to find and match letters on rings to corresponding ones hung on pegs. The activities directly relate academic, social, and behavioral skills to ones that challenge them physically, mentally, and emotionally.



## Balancing Work and School

There are some very motivated students within the Soar Learning Center high school. Several students not only work hard while they are here each day, but they then leave school and head to work.

These students are working between 15-20 hours per week in different placements. Each student applied and interview for their job. One student says he was 'excited' for the interview because of how prepared he felt. In addition to the supportive high school staff, Claire Thompson-Vocational Coordinator, is a responsible party when it comes to helping these high school students embark on

working within their community.

Students are working at restaurants: washing dishes, waiting on customers, and even learning prep-cooking skills. Others are stocking shelves, working customer service, and running the register at hardware stores. A couple of students are even spending their afternoon and evenings gaining experience in every aspect of farming, from feeding calves to daily chores. One student was preparing to switch jobs, he even had one lined up, when he was given a raise at his first job. He is now working both jobs!

A senior, working at a restaurant, admits that the most challenging part of balancing a job and school is the time management. However, the extra money the job provides, and also the potential opportunities make it all worth it.



In addition to these hard working students, other students are participating in job shadowing and will learn the important life-skills involved with completing a job application, preparing for an interview, and being an employee that any employer wants to keep.

## Published High School Student

Students in Ms. Lusk's high school writing class spent time this fall writing editorials as a means of practicing persuasive writing techniques. Focusing on not just arguing their point, but rather acknowledging both sides of an argument, required a great deal of work. Students spent time conducting research and finding ways to convince their reader, while maintaining an academic and credible tone.

Students chose topics and embarked upon the assignment, urged by their teacher to pursue being published. Our local newspaper, the St. Albans Messenger,

happily received and published one student's work.

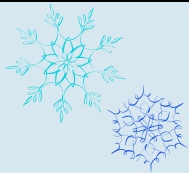
The weekend edition, November 15-16th, put in print an editorial written to highlight misconceptions about one specific breed of dog. 'Learn the truth about pit bulls: be free of all the myths', discussed the many reasons pit bulls are wrongly judged 'mean and aggressive'. Ms. Bishop (author), addressed issues such as nature vs. nurture: how important socialization and how they are raised contributes to a dog's behavior. She also disproved a myth, supported by research, that pit bulls have any different jaw anat-

omy that could make their bite more vicious than any other dog.

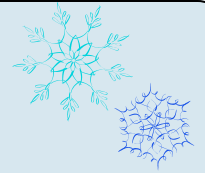
Ms. Bishop balanced opinion, fact, and research well throughout her editorial. She ended by asking her readers to at least make an educated decision when it comes to pit bulls. After giving the facts and disproving myths, she pleads that people not judge pit bulls by the misleading and misinformed reputation they have unfortunately gained over the years.

To see her full editorial, visit: <http://digitaledition.samessenger.com/?iid=106839#folio=4>





# Student Corner and More



## If I Could Fly Like a Bird

If I could fly like a bird,  
I would probably hit a tree.  
If I could fly like a bird,  
I could fly over the sea.  
If I could fly like a bird,  
I probably wouldn't get a flea.  
If I could fly like a bird,  
Then I would love to be me.



Left: Poetry written by a younger elementary student  
Right: Poetry from a middle school student using one topic and two voices

FOOTBALL	
<b>REFS</b> I am a Ref. I go to help the game stay in control. Being a ref can be irritating. I help run the game. When I throw a flag or call an incomplete, the fans and crowd yell at me. Being a ref can be hard. I get fired up easily, But I do it because I love football.	<b>FANS</b> I am a fan. I go to watch the game. Being a fan can be ecstatic. We cheer and scream for the team we support. When ref throws a flag on something that didn't happen, We yell louder. Being a fan is crazy. I go to watch the games because I love football.

Right: Two students cook fried rice while learning about China during elementary clubs.  
Far Right: A 'tri-orama' of an ocean scene (students are currently learning about habitats).



## Recipe Corner

Between NCSS board meetings, breakfast for the Family Center, Open House, and the Thanksgiving Feast, the famous Friday Lunches have been nothing short of delicious. Here's one of their recipes from this fall. Enjoy!

### Alyson's Broccoli Salad (allrecipes.com)

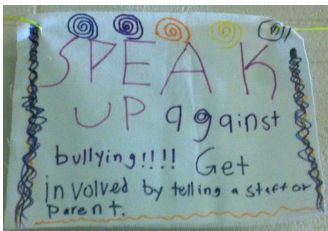
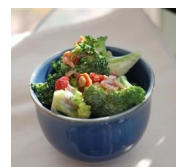
Prep Time: 15 minutes  
Cook Time: 15 minutes  
Serves 6

#### Ingredients:

- 10 slices bacon
- 1 head fresh broccoli cut in small pieces
- 1/4 cup red onion chopped
- 1/2 raisins
- 3 tbsps. white wine vinegar
- 2 tbsps. white sugar
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup sunflower seeds

#### Directions:

1. Place bacon in a large, deep skillet. Cook over medium high heat until evenly brown. Drain, crumble, and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the broccoli, onion, and raisins. In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar, sugar, and mayonnaise. Pour over broccoli mixture, and toss until well mixed. Refrigerate for at least two hours.
3. Before serving, toss salad with crumbled bacon and sunflower seeds.



Left: One of many flags created by students and staff in our school and displayed in our gym. The flags shared anti-bullying messages.

Below: The contraption shown was created in a high school math class and is called a pantograph. It is used to create an enlarged copy of a drawn image.

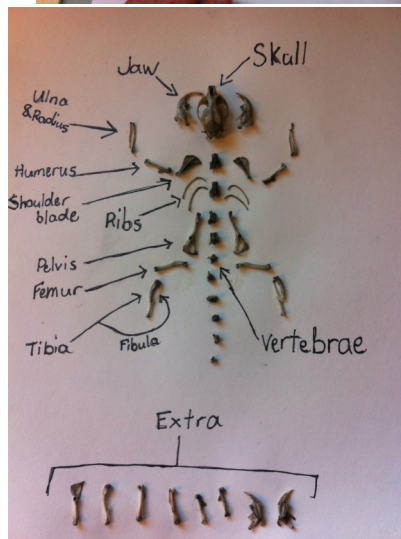


## November

On November 1st, there were some very clean shaven faces around Soar Learning Center. A group of staff members prepared themselves for a month of mustache growing, in honor of Movember. Movember is a national organization that works to raise money for men's health, cancer research and treatment, as well as mental health.

This cause is not only for the guys though, by joining a team you can be a 'Mo Bro' or 'Mo Sista' (and for the ladies, they don't expect you to grow a mustache).

The SLC team, led by Lee Trombley, impressively raised over \$300 this year.



Left: After learning a great deal about owls and the process around eating and digestion, students in the 6/7th grade dissected owl pellets. They then identified the bones and created skeletons of the rodents they found.