



Hello Greenspire Community,

Several years ago a friend and I, both long-term educators, brainstormed an ideal middle school model. After reading the Greenspire prospectus I was amazed by the correlation. Place based, project orientated curriculum focused on environmental stewardship, collaboration, exploration, inquiry, that is student driven and encompasses the development of the whole child and her relationship to her community – wow! It is the progressive education ideal, and I am delighted to play a part in a model I believe is long overdue.

As a native of the area (I was born in Frankfort) I know the importance of place, and the impact of geography on human systems. Having traveled some – recent journeys include South Africa last year and an extended stay teaching in China this year - I am acutely aware of the great blessing of living in Northern Michigan, a place where one can still breathe the air, drink the water, and walk the land among maple and beech on the way to swim the big lake or snowshoe a cedar swamp. My daughters – Madigan 18, Flannery 16, and Norah 11 - their father and I live in a sustainable home we built in Leelanau County with wind generator and solar array, a large organic garden and orchard, small sugar bush, chickens, goats, a pottery shop, a rabbit named Cappuccino and a nutty Cairn terrier named Finn.

I hold a BFA in ceramics and creative writing, an MA in writing and pedagogy, and Michigan teacher certification. Stories, poems and essays of mine have been published in a variety of small literary magazines, and I am a seasonal potter. I have diverse educational experience, having taught parenting skills, child development, preschool, library science and middle school, as well as college composition. I've worked in family advocacy, social services, and co-owned a restaurant, Café Bliss, where we specialized in local and ethnic foods. As a life long alpine skier, I have coached many young area skiers. Biking, hiking, swimming, camping, canoeing and climbing have also been part of my experiences with children. I was lucky to have parents (both teachers) who encouraged their children to wander. With lunch, bathing suit or sled they would turn us out and tell us to be home by dark. We biked for miles, swam, picked mushrooms, fished, hiked, scrounged cherries, and built elaborate forts. I am a firm believer in environment as teacher; the natural world remains my truest guide.

For the last nine years I've taught sixth grade language arts and social studies and was school librarian at the Pathfinder School. Recent project based curriculum included building shelter and identifying wild foods during a unit on early humans, constructing a pyramid and creating artifacts for Egyptian studies, recreating Greek city states and researching (and eating!) Greek food, while reading and discussing related literature, writing plays, narratives, poetry and essays, watching pertinent film, and framing ideas with through lines and big questions. Students created blogs, pod casts and videos to facilitate development of crucial technical communication skills.

After early childhood, adolescence is the most significant window of opportunity for brain reorganization and development. The adolescent brain is a brain in training, and hands-on learning tied to real world application provides stimulation the burgeoning brain craves. Norah is excited about seventh grade at Greenspire, and I am thrilled this meaningful opportunity is available for our children.

I will be out of the country until early summer; feel free to contact me by email with questions, comments or insights.

Take care, Sarah Johnson
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