How Good Is CCS?

Last March, eight Cornwall Consolidated School parents sent out a questionnaire to 152 local households with children currently or recently enrolled at the school.

What follows is a summary of the survey’s major findings based on the 63 returned questionnaires (a remarkable 41 percent response rate). Space limitations and statistical nuances may create minor distortions in some instances. A copy of the completed survey is available at the Cornwall Library.

From 83 percent of the responding parents, CCS gets a favorable rating. Asked to identify the most positive attributes of CCS, the respondents favored its “overall nurturing spirit,” with “quality of teachers,” in second place and “ease of communication” third.

But the parent respondents also feel a definite need for improvement. (Nine in ten “overwhelmingly believe” in expansion for a new gym and more classroom space.) Parents of children in K to fourth grade were more enthusiastic in their praise than those involved with fifth to eighth grades. Subjects receiving high marks included reading and upper-grade math and social science. But upper-grade English (especially spelling and grammar) and science generated considerable disapproval.

Unhappiness over classroom management and school administration ran fairly strong.

And though teachers were given credit for responsiveness to parents’ concerns, the Board of Education was widely criticized for lack of “openness to community input.”

Some of the more interesting results came from questions involving “special subjects”—including art, computers, music and physical education. Eighty-four percent said they were “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with the teaching of art, though one parent commented, “Please, full-time teacher.” This level of approval was nearly matched by computer courses, with 78 percent in favor. Music, one parent commented, was “the best thing at the school.” But though 60 percent expressed satisfaction, 27 percent turned thumbs down—perhaps because the music teacher is only part-time.

If the respondents to this survey had their way, mastery tests would get the boot from CCS. Only two of 57 respondents expressed wholehearted agreement with the suggestion that the tests are a “crucial gauge of the performance of our school.”

Mastery tests may fade, but “general homework” is probably with us for a long time. Still, whatever kids may think, it is somewhat surprising to find only nine of 59 respondents in any degree satisfied with their own children’s homework situation. One complained of “unfocused assignments”; another pointed out that not every household has a computer for research assignments.

Much less surprising is the 60 percent rejection of “entertainment videos” in classrooms during school hours, even at recess. On another important classroom management issue, disruptive classroom behavior, 52 percent of lower-grade parents feel it is under control while only 34 percent of upper-grade parents agree and 20 percent feel strongly otherwise.

When it comes to management, fewer than half the respondents, 42 percent, said they had a good understanding of the role of the Board of Education. Forty-five percent of the respondents suggested that the board should offer a “little more creative leadership,” and only seven percent felt the board should stick to “primary business issues,” e.g., money and labor relations.

Although some individual board members may have read the report, the full board had not reviewed it as of press time.

The CCS parents who prepared and distributed the survey were: Ruth Daley, Diane and Ian Ingersoll, Dominique Lasseur, Laura Macdonald and Richard McCarty, and Jamie and David Monagan.

To this writer, a taxpayer with no school-time. Still, whatever kids may think, it is and Ian Ingersoll, Dominique Lasseur, Laura commented,
That was one of the easier rides.

Mike Root and Bill Gold, along with Jim Terrill have been prime movers in the group. They are joined by John and Jim LaPorta, Dwight Hatcher, Peter Busby, Jim Whiteside, John Van Doren, Bill Zekas, and Nora Hulten.

In addition to riding for fun, the group raised funds for the La Casa Project by getting friends to pledge donations for the successful completion of a 100-mile ride. Bill Gold says they will do a fund-raising ride again next year with an ambitious goal of as much as $10,000.

Anyone who likes to ride and can keep up is welcome to join the group. Call one of the riders for information.

—Stephen Senzer

**The Great Walls of Cornwall**

During a lull in the construction work on Route 4 between Cornwall Village and Cornwall Bridge, I decided to take a look at what the Department of Transportation (DOT) has wrought so far. I found the scene wonderfully deserted—no cranes lifting steel girders, no cement mixers, no trucks, and, best of all, no cops standing in the midst of things chatting and now and then gesturing casually to the waiting motorists. A sole worker was stooped atop the new 300-foot retaining wall, brushing on some preservative. “Think this wall will do the job?” I asked. “It’d better,” he answered, “considering what it cost.”

The winning bid was for $1.25 million, 80 percent of which is federally funded, but the cost could rise to $1.5 million, according to Project Engineer Linda Pregno. What we have gotten so far has been the demolition of the picturesque if somewhat dilapidated crib walls, built in the early thirties, and their replacement by two immense concrete structures faced with decorative stone facing called Rustic Ashlar. The longer one, some 300 feet long and tapering at both ends from about 10 feet in the middle, does, in the words of a friend who stopped by while I was there, “resemble a wall,” but the other, a rectangular block about 110 feet long, “looks like a tomb.” My grandson says, “It should have a statue on it.”

By the time you read this, work will probably have resumed on the third and final wall, where the movable Jersey barriers have been. It will be almost the size of the longer one.

Was all this expensive work really necessary? First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, for one, doesn’t think so. “The state, having replaced all the roads in the area, looked around for other ways to spend tax-payers’ money and came up with this. I said my concern was not with the crib walls but with all the accidents on that bad curve that’s banked the wrong way—twelve in one year alone. But they weren’t interested in that, only in building big things out of concrete. I questioned the need to replace the walls, but too much money had already been allocated, so they had to do something. We did get some concessions, though: at two of the five sites where the crib walls were removed, the slopes were stabilized by grading. And the DOT finally agreed to do something about that dangerous curve.”

Spokesmen for the DOT say they acted in response to the wishes of the townspeople, and it is true that at sparsely attended meetings in May and November of 1998 some voiced support for replacing the old walls, and when someone suggested that a stone veneer would look nice, the DOT agreed. “Of course,” says Ridgway, “there was no incentive not to do it expensively.”

And so, work goes on. The third wall will take about a month. And that dangerous curve? “If we can do it in time to pave the road afterwards, we’ll do it this fall,” says Pregno. “Otherwise, it will have to wait until next spring.” And if that’s the case, we can expect more accidents this winter. But take heart: the DOT says that “this section of Route 4 may be reclassified as a scenic road in the near future.”

—George Kittle

**Good-bye to a Friend**

Philip Bishop

**Congratulations**

Leslie Margaret Elias to Lawrence Howard Saed

Benjamin Cooley to Jennifer Konner

Thomas Baird to Elisabeth Lapina

**Land Transfers**

Wolter and Haide Russell to Halbert R. Cliff, house at 96 Dibble Hill Road for $270,000.

Federal Home Loan Mtg. Corp. to Stephen M. Smith, house and 1.12 acres at 303 Kent Road for $70,000.

Frances G. Barnes to Bradford Hedden, 3 acres on Grange Hall Road for $35,000.

Marshall and Elizabeth Blake to Bruce A. and Kathleen C. Vakienier, house and 10.4 acres at 192 Great Hill Road for $850,000.

Albert Miles Clark to C & D Farms LLC, house and 2 parcels of land containing 107.8 acres on Clark Road for $850,000.

Marvin A. and Ruth Mass to Emily Mioriarty Stone, 22 acres on Whitcomb Hill Road for $100,000.

Philipp Kraker to Patrick Testa, house and land at 4 Frederick Drive for $109,500.

**Upbeat Library News**

If all goes well—including state approval and final revision of specs—the new library will go out for bids sometime in the next two months for a probable spring start, according to the latest estimate from President Lisa Lansing Simont.

Library trustees also received several pieces of good news:
Jump, the young ox, lay in the corner and Jump has belonged to Garrick since May he has fed and cared for since birth. for Garrick's blue jeans and tugged and fringed ears wagging at the flies. Garrick golden and ivory hides glowing, black into the old whitewashed barn to see the Petronella, Anne Arundel, Dulcinea, Kokal-Rose, Daisy, of the Jersey calves, Dot Lee, Portulaca, and Alisa, now 18 years old, is the boss cow. Of the celebrities who spoke out at the march recalled in Heather Dinneen's letter [July Chronicle], Rosie O'Donnell, has since had her bodyguard apply for a Connecticut Concealed Carry Permit to use a handgun in the defense of her adopted daughter when she begins school in Greenwich. Criminologist Gary Kleck of Florida State University and Professor John Lott of Yale (formerly of the University of Chicago) have proven that guns are used more times to defend against criminals than to commit crimes (usually without a shot being fired—my own daughter defended herself against a would-be rapist in clear plastic bags; judging from noise inside tin, bat still alive. TAHD suggests drowning.

Garrick Dinneen has a dream and he's got a plan to make it come true. He's going to raise, train, and work a team of oxen under yoke. Garrick, the son of Bill and Vera Dinneen and a member of the sixth grade at CCS, works three days a week for Debra Tyler of Local Farm. He's been on the job "since June 23, 1999, at 8 A.M.," he recalls. His main responsibility is the care of the young offspring of the Jersey herd. Jump, a yearling ox trained by Garrick to pull a converted garden cart, was the star of the Fourth of July Parade of Wheels.

On a recent Saturday, Garrick led a visitor into the old whitewashed barn to see the calves, Petronella and Button, both of which he has fed and cared for since birth. Petronella, almost five months old, reached for Garrick's blue jeans and tugged and chewed. "She likes the taste of the soap left in the cloth," he said.

The herd rested in a nearby shed, their golden and ivory hides glowing, black-fringed ears wagging at the flies. Garrick walked among them introducing Ruby, Anne Arundel, Dulcinea, Kokal-Rose, Daisy, Dot Lee, Portulaca, Dee Dee, PONY, and Alisa. Jump, the young ox, lay in the corner and watched as Garrick explained the mother-daughter relationships among the herd. Jump has belonged to Garrick since May through an arrangement with Debra.

Alisa, now 18 years old, is the boss cow. Garrick and Debra gather the herd by calling "Come boss, come boss" and Alisa lifts her head and starts for the barn; the others follow along behind.

Five of the herd have been pregnant this summer. And this is where Garrick's plan comes in. He hopes that two of the calves are male and will become his dream team of oxen. So far the odds haven't worked in his favor; three of the births have been female. At press time, there were two more to go.

With help from Art Hine of Harwinton, a retired 4-H expert on the raising and training of oxen, Garrick will carve his own yoke one day and train a champion team. Garrick has other interests, among them playing the tuba. But, he says, "I will absolutely be a farmer. Going to the farm is the best thing that ever happened to me."

His boss, Debra, says about her helper: "I don't know how I got so lucky. It's a match made in heaven."

—Lisa Lansing Simont

As press time passed, the Chronicle learned that Garrick has just bought a pair of one-week-old bull calves from the cattle dealer who visits Local Farm now and then. They cost five dollars apiece and Garrick will be bottle-feeding for a while as the team gets used to its new home.

—The Editors
Events & Announcements

New Teachers: CCS welcomes two new teachers for the fall semester. Geraldine Samela of Torrington will be teaching math and computers. Samela has a master’s in middle school education as well as two years of experience teaching math at the middle school level. Suzanne Barber will be the new full-time transition teacher. Barber has recently earned her undergraduate degree at Central Connecticut State University and did her student teaching with grade four in a West Hartford school. A third position—upper-grade English teacher—remains to be filled.

An Informational Meeting on the proposed school building addition and renovation will be held at 7:30 P.M. on September 8 at CCS with the School Building Committee and Friar Associates’ architects.

Plans will be presented for the addition of a gymnasium, music room, art room, multi-purpose room/stage, new entrance, and bathrooms. Renovations include classrooms in the existing gym and larger bathrooms downstairs. Expanded parking and the relocation of Cream Hill Road are also part of the proposal.

This is the first of two informational meetings, the second to be held on October 7 in conjunction with a Town Meeting.

Cornwallians Teach Courses: Beginning September 11, the Taconic Learning Center (TLC) is sponsoring courses by Phyllis Wojan (Contemporary Genetics) and John Leich (Advanced French). TLC is also offering courses in Great Ideas of Philosophy, Issues in the News, the Sciences (what’s coming next), A Look at Modern Art, and Tolstoi’s Peace.

Never eat food that isn’t spelled right. Corn Flakes and Shredded Wheat are okay. Cheezits and Froot Loops aren’t. Tip courtesy of Jerome Doolittle’s website, www.badattitudes.com, which has other essential advice from his West Cornwall neighbors. Check it out. For this you owe us. See coupon.

Dietary Tip

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The Cornwall Swim Team successfully competed in the Housatonic Valley Swim League Championships, finishing a strong third.

Approximately 43 Cornwall children competed regularly in the youngest age divisions, about 15 swimmers in the middle division, but only four in the oldest two divisions. These numbers bode well for the future as the younger swimmers develop. The swimmers celebrated their season by swimming across Cream Hill Lake during the annual potluck picnic.

The Friends of the Library Book Sale will be held at the Town Hall/Library on Columbus Day weekend—October 7 and 8. Please leave your donations of books, videos, tapes, and CDs at the library any time between now and October 4. The Friends also need volunteers to help set up and sort books on October 4, 5, and 6 to sell on October 7 and 8. Please call Celia Senzer at 672-6898.

Community Birthday Calendar: The Republican Town Committee, as a fundraiser for the Washington Internship Program, is selling Cornwall Birthday Calendars. The calendars cost $5 each and this includes your family’s entries (birthdays and anniversaries) on the calendar. The deadline is Monday, September 11. For more information and to purchase calendars, contact K. C. Baird at Baird’s Store or call Annie Kosciusko at 672-6406.

Cornwall Play Group begins September 6 and meets every Wednesday during the school year. We gather in the basement of St. Peter’s Church in Cornwall Village at 10 A.M. Babies, toddlers, and preschool-age children are welcome when accompanied by a parent or care-giver. Come on September 6 with your ideas for play group so we can plan fun activities such as crafts, music, and field trips. Any questions? Please call Emile Pryor at 672-4226.

Art in Cornwall: At the Cornwall Library the exhibit of Ruth Gannett’s prints and original drawings will continue until September 23. Opening September 25, and continuing through October, will be a show of works on paper by Duncan Hannah. At the Wish House, Joan Hinchman’s exhibit of photographs from around the world continues through September.

Cornwall House Tour 2000 for the benefit of Prime Time House, the Northwest Corner’s only psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouse for people recovering from a mental illness, will be held on Saturday, October 7, from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M. Tim Prentice and the Benefit Committee have lined up 6 homes—Colonial to Victorian to Contemporary—and need room volunteers for morning and afternoon shifts. Volunteers may visit each house and attend the reception following the tour as guests of the benefit committee. Please call Amy Cady at 672-0233.

“Dive Into Reading” Book Lists may be delivered to the Library until September 9, and children will receive their earned prizes from the fish bowl and treasure chest. Further, a grand total of all books read this summer will be translated by sponsors into $1 per book toward our new library building.