

GEORGE WASHINGTON ACADEMY

Equipping Minds,
Building Character

News from our community, for our community

ECHO

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► Translator: Bouchra Mojtahid

FROM THE HEAD'S DESK

It's the Little Things

I recently noticed some "little things" that in the moment brought a mixture of pride and pleasure to my heart. Without going into great detail allow me to mention a few in hopes your imagination will complete the picture.

I recently noticed....

- ... two year olds holding hands and looking at an insect together
- ... the beaming smile on the face of a parent as they witnessed their child receiving an award
- ... generous outpouring of kindness to a fellow employee who had to have emergency surgery
- ... an entire team cheering when a fellow player scored for the very first time in her season
- ... a student carrying his friends heavy backpack
- ... an authority figure greeting a janitor with genuine warmth and interest
- ... a teacher shedding a tear over a challenging student
- ... an older brother giving up a valued opportunity to allow his sister the chance to participate
- ... a father gently helping his son with a misunderstanding.

I wonder what has impressed you today or this week? What has made a lasting impression? When your heart is warmed, when something brings a quiet smile to your face, when you observe something uniquely eternal in a persons actions or attitude, in the blink of an eye it arrives, somehow leaving a unique impression on our life.



FROM THE HEAD'S DESK *continued*

All of us have experienced very special nano-moments that put humanity and life where it is intended to reside. We can recall genuine examples that bring a meaningful internal smile. Many times these moments are also enjoyed at such a personal level that it is almost as if they were personally prescribed for us at that very instant. Most likely, in an attempt to verbally share the moment we fall short of words that fully describe the experience.

The inner joy resulting from these moments causes us to want more or at least attempt to reconstruct the memory or experience. In some way it should be contagious and addicting but then something tells us that any attempt to duplicate something so pure and real would take away the beauty and authenticity of the experience.



Somehow we are preconditioned and often even trained to pursue making “BIG” impressions. Outward achievements such as scoring the game winning goal, or owning the fastest car, become very alluring and attractive, but also have short-lived satisfaction. Everyone is going for the “BIG” impact on center stage. Everyone wants his or her moment of fame. Everyone wants to be noticed. The danger lurking beneath this appealing pursuit of the “BIG thing” is that too often we neglect and even disregard the smaller more meaningful moments that really count along this journey of life.

As our GWA vision states, here at GWA we are keenly in pursuit of two BIG things, “Equipping minds and building character”, that I believe must go hand in hand. Our overarching goal and purpose in everything we do must successfully weave the mind with inward character. The bond between our knowledge and our character sets the direction of our future.

One’s inward character has multiple opportunities every day to outwardly expose itself in the “little things”. There is no doubt that the process of character building lasts a lifetime. Helping our students discern between right behavior and wrong behavior is a fundamental part of the GWA learning experience. When we observe students finding value and worth in the “little things” we can be sure they are on their way to a joy-filled life.

Deepening our knowledge base in every discipline such as literature and the sciences equips us with the lens through which we can expand our mind well beyond the childlike fascination. Innovation and creativity are better achieved when a student is equipped with the tools and a broadened knowledge. Thank you for joining with us as we equip minds and build character. While educating the whole person, GWA believes that by encouraging the “little things” our moments for “BIG” impressions will be longer lasting and more meaningful.

Principal's Corner | Lower School

We had a spectacular start to the school year and are continuing with excellence as the second quarter draws to a close. As I wrote in the first quarter Echo, the partnership between parents and educators models collaboration for our children so that they can build similar skills with each other. We seek to equip adults and students alike in order to empower our community to make an impact on the world around us. Education is the avenue through which ideas are generated and change happens, and we do this together every day in the Lower School at GWA!

The first quarter Echo outlined one of the key program distinctives at GWA - our multilingual literacy program. I'd like to write about a second this month - building character.



Here at GWA, we believe that building character is an essential component of effective education. In addition to strong academics that equip students' minds, GWA has an intentional and comprehensive character building approach in all grade levels. Individual character traits are highlighted each month, complete with learning activities, books, and an assembly. Our faculty and staff are committed to teaching the whole child, in addition to investing in each aspect of all students' education and development.



The combination of strong academic preparation, investment in the whole child, and an emphasis on cultivating strong character enables GWA students to learn and develop holistically in a way that impacts each student and the people around them.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, concerns, or ideas that help promote GWA's vision and our program distinctives.



Open communication and ongoing dialogue are essential for us to carry out our mission. Thank you for partnering with us as we empower students to serve Morocco and the global community with wisdom and compassion!



*Kevin R. Brenner
Lower School Principal*

Principal's Corner | Upper School

Greetings from the Office of the Upper School:

The second quarter has continued after our busy Fall semester, letting me focus here in more detail on two things mentioned in the previous issue of The Echo.

First, we have put a premium not only on planning lessons, but on doing so in the best possible way. Our faculty have put much time and effort this year into learning how to translate our curriculum into the Understanding by Design framework. UbD is a “backward design” approach to writing curriculum that improves our pedagogy by shifting the emphasis of what teachers do from merely covering material in a lesson plan to focusing on how well students understand the material being taught. Inherently, this also furthers our commitment to a student-centered culture that never loses sight of why our school exists, and that embodies our ultimate goals captured in GWA’s Vision Statement. On the periodic early release days when students go home at noon, our entire faculty gathers in the Multi-Purpose Room for professional development sessions prepared and presented by our academic leadership team to deepen our teachers’ understanding of UbD. Then they break into collaborative groups to work on redesigning units they can teach. This process, stretching out over a long period, is just part of a larger strategic effort to make GWA’s education even stronger, to make students the center of what we do, and to prepare our graduates even better for what lies ahead for them in college and in life.



Second, extracurricularly our Speech & Debate team provides a wonderful example of how GWA students pursue excellence outside the classroom. In December, 26 high school students on GWA’s Speech & Debate team packed warm winter clothes and traveled to Al Akhawayn School of Ifrane for a weekend-long competition against students from across Morocco. With contests in categories ranging from Lincoln-Douglas Debate and Public Forum Debate to poetry and dramatic recitations, the students spent many hours researching, preparing, and rehearsing their cases and presentations. It was a pleasure to chaperone the team on this trip, getting to see the results of their hard work come to fruition. Spending time with our students off campus also served to reconfirm what fabulous young men and women we are developing at GWA. Their school spirit, mutual support of each other, and strong sense of sportsmanship were warm contrasts to the cold weather that greeted us in Ifrane. They represented GWA well in how they performed in their events and by their actions around Ifrane. I look forward to the next Speech & Debate competition



in February when nearly 50 middle school and high school students -- a significant portion of our Upper School -- will travel together to Fes to make us proud again.

With so much happening throughout the Upper School, we cannot detail everything that goes on; however, these two examples give a sense of the great work of our students and teachers alike.

Wishing you all the best,

*Dr. Audrey Menard
Upper School Principal*

Lower School Character Assemblies

Character is a vital part of every child's education and development. Every month during the school year our character team presents a character assembly for all Kindergarten to 5th grade students. We also plan activities to reinforce the character traits and have guest readers go to each classroom and read a book about the month's character trait. In January, we focused on the character trait of self control and patience.

To demonstrate self control Mrs. Cooper, a 5th grade teacher, made a video with 2 of our student character team members, Ghita Chekkoury and Rania Boutaleb about using self-control in the midst of competition. The video was shown at our character assembly on January 13 and sent to each K-5 classroom teacher to show again and have discussion.

A quote we learned about self-control is: "If it is to be, it is up to me" by Dalton Anderson.

Each month we encourage our students to make a donation of 10 dirhams on assembly days for casual dress day. All monies are used to help local charities. So far this school year we have used the money to buy toys, apples and bottles of water for children at a local children's hospital and buy paint and supplies to help a preschool just outside of Casablanca. Our students have also been a part of collecting items for specific charities. They collected about 15 bags of clothes for our Adopt-a-Village program and those clothes were delivered to the villagers. Our marvelous Mustangs also collected 568 cans of milk formula for a local orphanage. Our student character team was able to go to the orphanage and deliver the milk. Watch the GWA Weekly for upcoming collections as we teach our children about being charitable.

Each month a few of our student character team members, along with a handful of teachers and administrators, read books to each class to highlight the character traits. In January some of the favorite books about self control were, *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes, *Bad Habits* by Babette Cole, *Alexander, Who Used to be Rich Last Sunday* by Judith Viorst, *Llama Llama, Mad at Mama* by Anna Dewdney, and *My Mouth is a Volcano* by Julia Cook.

The following character traits will be emphasized for the remainder of the school year: cooperation, fairness, honesty, perseverance and courage. Although we call attention to one trait each month, all of the traits are important to equip students to be people of strong character.



Lu Edwards
Lower School Vice-Principal

Grandparents Day

Preschool and Kindergarten students celebrated Grandparents Day on Thursday, January 26th. Grandparents were invited into the classroom to play games, color, and listen to stories with their grandchildren.



Literacy Parade

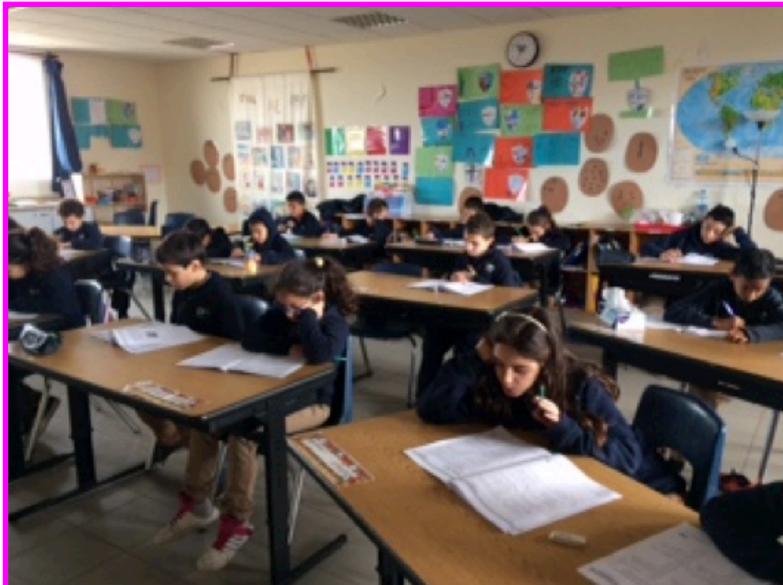
In December we held our first Literacy Day in lower school! The excitement was palpable as students (and teachers!) chose their favorite books and came to school dressed up as one of the characters. Rooms were abuzz with kindergarteners sharing their stories to attentive fifth graders. Third graders presented exciting books to awed first graders. Fourth graders visited star-struck nursery, discovery, and pre-K students, and the second graders shone with their new English reading skills. Students were encouraged as they shared their love of reading and were challenged to dig into the books so that they were able to read or summarize the story with their buddy class. It was incredible to walk into classrooms and see forty little heads bent over books, discussing why they loved the characters and stories. What was even more exciting was to hear students reading to each other in French, Arabic, English, Dutch, and Spanish! What an inspiring way to express our love for reading!



Data Driven Instruction

My students work really hard all day, everyday. At this time of the quarter I look at each individual and know that they have accomplished so much in their studies. I do my best to accommodate or modify work so that each little soul in my care has every opportunity for success; hence, the Benchmark assessment in Language Arts.

Periodically we will have the students complete an assessment that focuses on reading, comprehension and writing. This assessment is not for grades but rather it is a tool to guide teachers in planning for the student's strengths and challenges. The information that we collect from the benchmark assessment informs my planning, for example, which students needs help with reading comprehension and who needs support with reading. The students know that this assessment is not for grades and that it is vital to helping us help them achieve their highest potential.



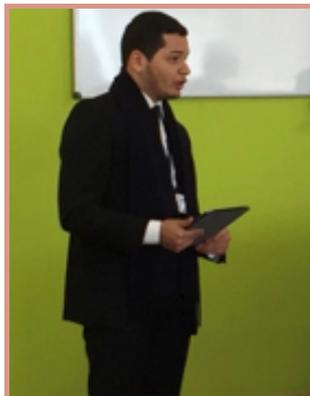
Model United Nations in Rabat

From January 19-22, Model United Nations (MUN) delegates participated in the 1st conference for the 2016-2017 school year. Led by the Rabat American School, this year's Maroc Model United Nations theme was "Peace in Securing a Unified World." During the conference, our delegates worked diligently and cooperatively with others from five American schools in Morocco and one American school in New York. They all focused their time and attention on trying to come up with solutions for diverse world problems that ranged from land disputes to environmental concerns to human rights violations.

Our 24 delegates represented France, Israel, Turkey, Uruguay, Nigeria, and South Korea, in 10 different committees — including the most prestigious, the International Court of Justice. GWA also brought three students that held leadership positions as Chairs within the committees. Ghali Chtatou El Mghari, Manale Mourdi, and Alia Lahlou represented MUN and GWA exceptionally well in how they handled themselves and managed committees of delegates.

We would like to congratulate Kenza Mourji for earning the Best Delegate award for her performance in the International Court of Justice, as well as, Shalini Chugani and Nour Kherfi for highly contributing to one of only three resolutions taken to the General Assembly. However, Ms. Lopez, Mr. Sachon, and Ms. Bergerud felt very proud of all 24 students' performances and mature behavior of delegates and chairs during the duration of MaMUN.

We are looking forward to bringing the best group of delegates to this year's international conference held in St. Petersburg, Russia - March 25-30.

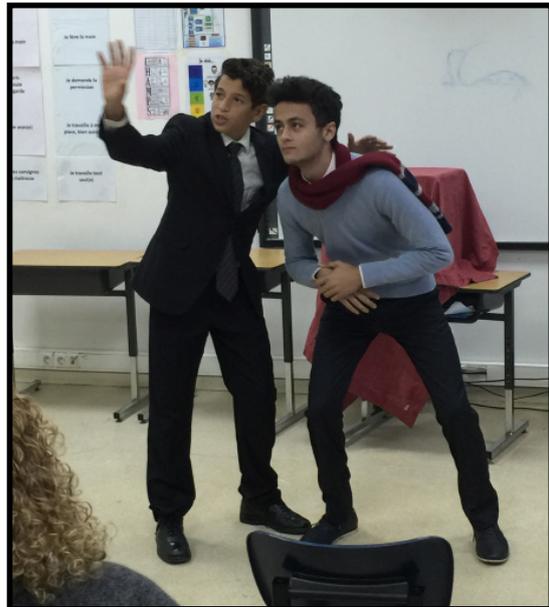


*Trista Bergerud
Permanent Substitute
MUN Adviser*

Speech and Debate Tournament

32 brave Middle School students went to CAS all day on November 12 to compete in a Speech and Debate tournament. The Mustangs, once again, did a great job. Here are the results:

- GWA had more students competing in the final round than any other school. We placed in the finals in 4/5 events!
- Impromptu: Out of 18 competitors, 4 of our students made the finals (top 8): Leul B., Ghita E., Imane B., and Marmik D. Marmik won the entire event!
- Storytelling: Out of 18 competitors, 3 of our kids made the Finals (top 8): Lina K., Adam B., and Hibatoullah D. Lina came in 2nd place with her rendition of the Appalachian folktale, "Jack and the Animals."
- Poetry: Out of 10 competitors, Samar E. made the Finals with her poems by Mother Teresa and Maya Angelou.
- Public Forum Debate: Out of 16 teams, the GWA team of Samar E. and Imane B. made it to the final round and earned a 2nd place finish!



The High School Speech and Debate Tournament in Ifrane took place on December 10th at Al Akhawayn University. Here are the results!

Duo: We had three teams place in the Finals; Salma Tarik and David Chang, Alia Lahlou and Lina Guennouni, and the 2nd place finishers, Youssef and Osama.

Public Forum: We also had three teams place in the Finals in PF; Hasnaa Tarik and David Chang, Fati Bouyaghroumni and Kenza Mourji, and Younes Reda and Jad Elamrani. Younes and Jad took 2nd place overall!

Poetry: Sara Bouftas and Khadija El Oudghiri made it to Finals.

Partnering with Parents for Success

School – Family collaboration is an important means to help students succeed during this season of their lives, whether it is 6th grade or 12th grade or the grades in between. By “success”, I mean more than academic accomplishment, but fulfilling experiences, rich interpersonal relationships, healthy living and joy. As 19th century American author Walt Whitman wrote, “Do anything, but let it produce joy.”

In my brief time here at George Washington Academy as Upper School Counselor since August 2016, I have already experienced the benefits of collaborating with par-

ents and I want to say “thank you” to all of you. Thank you to the parents who have shown the diligence to come meet with me, as well as with their children’s teachers and school administrators, to support, monitor, and advocate for their children. These activities all involve partnership, and foster success.

These concepts were reignited in my mind by a book recently recommended to me by Mr. Dusty Smith, Upper School Vice-Principal, entitled, *Partnering with Parents to Ask the Right Questions*. The book’s authors: Luz Santana, Dan Rothstein, and Agnes Bain, discuss the “Question Formulation Technique” or QFT to synthesize how parents can ask the right questions when they meet counselors, principals, or teachers at the parent-teacher conferences or at any other meeting.

Preparing in advance for a phone call or meeting has immense benefits. This is where the QFT method can help. In total the QFT has five steps, but I will just mention the first and third ones, which are “parents produce their own questions” and “[parents] prioritize their questions”.

Depending on the focus of the meeting, write down all the questions you have ahead of time covering topics such as report cards, curriculum, changes in schedule, school policies, testing, graduation, college planning, behavior, social and emotional needs, etc. Then prioritize the questions in their order of importance to you. There may be 1 or 2 questions that require more in-depth responses and dialogue.

Another suggestion I recommend for parents from the book is the type of questions to ask: “closed-ended questions can be answered with one word (e.g., yes or no). Open-ended questions require an explanation or more information.”

Example of a closed-ended question: Is my daughter doing well in class?

Example of an open-ended question: What can my son do to improve his performance in your class?

Both types of questions can be useful, but more information may be necessary to get to the real answers related to your son or daughter.

School – family collaboration through asking the right questions can be a useful tool for the success of your child at GWA. Please give it a try and let me know if you see results. I look forward to our continued partnership the rest of this school year.

Robert Varnay, MA, LPC is the Upper School Counselor at GWA. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the State of New Jersey.



Education Beat | Upper School

On November 16th and 17th our Guidance Counselor, Ms. Casey, attended the Council of International Schools (CIS) Forum on International College Admission and Guidance in Barcelona, Spain. Over 350 college and university admission representatives and more than 300 international high school counselors attended the event which included workshops, networking, a high school fair, and a university fair.

Pictured: Ms. Casey represented GWA at the 2016 CIS Forum on International College Admission and Guidance.



*Kathryn Casey
Upper School Guidance Counselor*

Updates from the Guidance Office

The guidance office has had a busy quarter! Many seniors have submitted university applications and some have already received acceptance letters! Juniors have been busy with a web portfolio project which will be completed by the end of the school year. The portfolio project includes many elements designed to prepare students for the university application process next school year. Throughout the semester, university admissions counselors have continued to visit GWA students during lunch hour and after school. Students and parents with questions about university admissions should contact Ms. Casey.

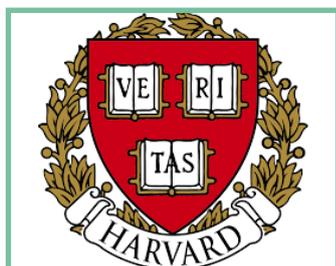
Harvard at GWA

On January 17th, Mouad Ibno Bachir, a member of Harvard's Hometown Ambassador Program, gave an informational presentation and Q&A to GWA students about life at Harvard College. As a Harvard Ambassador, Mouad's goal is to make Harvard more accessible to high school students from his home country by providing a sense of what it is like to be an undergraduate at Harvard including:

- Harvard's diverse academic opportunities
- The unique aspects of student life at Harvard
- Harvard's generous need-based financial aid program

College Reality Check

A big thank you to MAC students and staff who made the College Reality Check a great success. On January 4th, GWA alumni participated in an open panel discussion about their college experiences. Current junior and senior students asked questions and engaged in discussion with the alumni about a variety of topics including: time and money management, living with roommates, stress, academics, cultural adjustment process, and staying healthy.



Athletic Highlights

GWA Mustangs



The first semester of athletics at George Washington Academy has definitely been a “WIN” for the Mustangs. Our athletic department has competed in and won almost all of the varsity and middle school sports MASAC championships to date.

The Championship run all started on October 11th with all three middle school teams winning their respective divisional championships. The varsity girls’ volleyball team continued the Mustang dominance by winning their own MASAC title on November 12th.

Our boy’s varsity volleyball team finished in fifth place but showed a lot of growth throughout the season and should be a force next season. The boys and girls JV volleyball teams finished in 2nd Place (Runner-Up) and 3rd place respectively at the JV tournament in Rabat.

The month of December saw a DOMINATING performance by the Mustangs as we ran away with the MASAC Track Championship beating our closest competitor, RAS, by 218 points. GWA Athletes were named “Overall Male and/or Overall Female Athlete” in 5 of the 6 categories.



Next up for the Mustangs will be the JV boys and girls basketball championships on Saturday January 28th at CAS while the varsity boys and girls travel to Tangier for their respective tournaments February 9-11.

Badminton along with boys and girls middle school basketball tryouts begin the week of January 30th. If you or your child had any questions please contact Coach Red at rjohnston@gwa.ac.ma for more information.

2016-17 ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

High School

Varsity Girls Volleyball – MASAC Championship
Varsity Boys Volleyball – 5th Place
JV Girls Volleyball – 3rd Place
JV Boys Volleyball – Runner-Up 2nd Place

Middle School

Boys Soccer – MASAC Championship
Girls Soccer – MASAC Championship
Developmental League Soccer – MASAC Championship

Upper School

Track & Field – MASAC Championship



*Red Johnston
Director of Athletics*

Events

Christmas

All dressed in red and green, our dear Kindergarten students enjoyed singing Christmas songs. Some, very observant, were happy to see the decorations they made in class hanging on the walls of the gym room.

Suddenly, Ho Ho Ho, Santa Claus arrived with gifts for all the children.

Once back in the classroom, the students opened their gifts, eyes filled with joy.

See you next year Santa Claus!



*Amal Hafidi Slaoui
Preschool Lead*

1st and 2nd Grade Musical



Events

Better Together

Again this year, our high school students received a group of students from Collegiate School, Michigan, for one week.

Our guests and their chaperons were accommodated in host families; the best way to discover Moroccan customs and hospitality.

Through this visit, our guests wanted first to immerse themselves in the French language and to discover our school as well as some Moroccan cities.

The Head of our French department set up a very interesting program so that our guests could make the most of their stay.

Our guests hosted a day of games and songs for elementary students.

Throughout their stay, Collegiate students were accompanied in their trips by the ladies of Better Together. Together, they visited different places in Casablanca and went to Rabat and El Jadida. They also had the opportunity to enjoy the Moroccan gastronomy.

To top off their stay in Morocco, a GWA parent hosted an afternoon of Henna and Moroccan cookies.

Our guests and their chaperons found it hard to leave Morocco. As soon as they arrived, they posted pictures and comments on their blog.

They promised to return to Morocco!



Library Corner

This quarter the Library kicked off Winter Reading with two Book Fairs; a Scholastic and an Arabic and French Book Fair. Besides purchasing and enjoying an assortment of books, students participated through fun drawing and writing activities tied to the theme of the Scholastic Book Fair.

During Library lessons we highlighted the value of and how to use library resources, through a mixture of lecture, discussion and hands on activities. My focus was to incite upper Elementary and Middle School students to think more deeply about their information habits and seeking techniques.

Research has found that students are not equipped with necessary skills to differentiate between good and not so good sources. So now and more than ever, judging and evaluating our information sources, at an early stage, is a critical skill for students to develop as they navigate multiple forms of media or search engines regularly. Therefore, we seize every opportunity- whether during a library lesson or a class group project- to incorporate the importance of filtering through reliable and trustworthy sources of information.

On the other hand, I marketed and reached out to Middle School and High School students through hands on classes and video tutorials on the use of a citation platform “Noodletools” that helps students with their note taking, annotations, project sharing and resource referencing.



Asmaa Rias El Idrissi
Library Manager

Behind the Scenes

The GWA Media-Tech center continues to come to life - the shell of the building is complete and now we focus our efforts on the interior. After a thorough bidding process, subcontractors are now lined up and the interior work on the building has started. It has been exciting to plan for the academic spaces and all our staff are looking forward to utilizing the new space.

Many departments at GWA truly work 'behind the scenes' to keep GWA running smoothly: Bus maintenance is happening. Security manuals are updated. Curriculum materials and educational supplies are ordered. Routine maintenance is performed. Classrooms are cleaned. Necessary HR paperwork is completed. Networking is taking place to recruit future quality faculty. In short, there's a lot going on behind the scenes!



Danielle Bult
Chief of Operations

Nurse's Corner



The Nurse Office has been busy behind the scenes!

Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Skalli with C.M.P.A. we were able to have an audiometer on campus for 1 week this fall and successfully screen 81 Lower School students. We are really excited, through the support of GWA administration, to have purchased our own audiometer and look forward to screening ALL students in the coming months and years!

Also, a big “thank you” to our library staff for letting us use their teacher resource room to complete the screen!



One of the long-term goals is to have all GWA staff trained in basic first aid, CPR and AED (automated external defibrillator) use. We are getting started!

October 29 - Miss Hair taught a core group of GWA staff who are more readily available during school hours in the Basic Life Support course with Danielle Bult, Joey Lincoln, Estelle Najem and Trista Bergerud.



January 14 - The focus was PE staff in adult and child CPR with Paul Sandoval, Nicole Grudda, Amy Botha, Thomas Oddie and Justin Sachon (our non PE teacher).

For a healthy GWA,

*Hannah Hair, RN BSN
Estelle Najem, IDE
GWA School Nurse/Health Educator*