

Clubbers bring energy to Lincoln Park after school

By **Delia Marshall**/ For the Journal
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A fresh infusion of energy has come to the after-school scene at the Lincoln Park Community School. Four afternoons a week, students from grades four through eight have been making music, playing sports, honing their writing and math skills, and gaining a new appreciation of their surroundings. Part of a joint initiative of the Somerville Public Schools and the Somerville Community Schools, these tuition-free clubs are funded through a 21st Century Grant from the state Department of Education. Each day's schedule includes supervised homework time and outside-of-the-box learning adventures.

"Athletic Math" is taught by Lincoln Park teacher Lorne Murphy. In this club, sports and number sense meet. While shooting hoops, for example, participants track and time the trajectory of the basketball and then graph their data. Or they figure the probability of that next free throw actually going in. On a different afternoon, they might explore geometry and spatial relations, using pencil and paper to map out the gymnasium from a bird's eye view, then measure and draw it precisely to scale.




Dolores Porziella, who also teaches at Lincoln Park, is advising the "Figure It Out" club. Through board games, palindromes, math visuals, fill in the blank, multiplication bingo and other playful activities, Porziella has been getting kids excited about lightning-quick mental math. In "Math Through Art," Lincoln Park staff member Susan McGillicuddy is guiding children in making highly intricate, carefully measured drawings and sculptures that increase their understanding of geometry. Their projects require discipline and focus, but also allow for free-wheeling creative expression.


"Writers' Express" and its instructor, Lucine Eusani, come to the school from the educational company by that name in Union Square. Using methods that are refreshing, unconventional and sometimes even edible, Eusani helps kids work on their writing and revising skills. One afternoon in the school library, for example, students gripped large Zip-Lock bags and shook them like crazy. They had read and followed instructions, carefully measuring cream, sugar, cream of tartar and vanilla into the bag, then placing the mixture inside an outer bag of ice cubes and rock salt. When these liquid ingredients solidified, the kids dipped spoons into their bags for a taste. Later, sitting down to journals and writing about this adventure, they drew on the sights, smells, tastes, textures and sounds they'd encountered.

Verbal skills also propel the Drama Club, taught by Adriane Cioppa. Students are currently writing, directing and acting in a tale that moves far beyond "happily ever after." Their setting is the forest, some time after Snow White has left with her prince. These young playwrights have been reaching some surprising, and funny, conclusions as they "dig, dig, dig" into the next chapter on the seven dwarves.






Digging is just as fundamental to the garden club, taught by Amber Espar and Jennifer Keohan of Groundwork Somerville. When this local organization created Lincoln Park's vegetable garden in 2003, it turned three forlorn patches of earth into treasure. Espar and Keohan have been showing kids the nuances of cultivating, weeding, harvesting, preparing and enjoying fresh vegetables. And, as these young gardeners

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become acquainted with every earthworm in the area, they're exploring the connections among all living things.

Locating the "Lincoln Park Drummers" on a Thursday afternoon is easy. Even if you're standing on the Bumpus Bridge. Their thunder rumbles out over the tracks, vying with the roar of passing commuter trains. If you're inside the school, you just follow the beat, by ear or by the soles of your feet, as the building vibrates around this exultant epicenter. Taught by professional drummer Artemesia, and by Lincoln Park music specialist Paul Barringer, the students focus on Brazilian samba, Maractou, Afuebe and samba-reggae rhythms.

Most of Lincoln Park's 21st Century Clubs will run through late January. "Cycle Kids," however, was a pilot program that finished up on Dec. 3. Brief as it was, this bicycle-riding club generated a huge amount of enthusiasm. Instructor Annette Kennedy and her assistants, Lauren Scopaz and Nathan Brahams, are passionate cyclists who know the rewards of cycling as a reliable means of transportation and a lifelong source of exercise and fun. They're also earnest about safety. A bike helmet was issued to every child, as well as a "no-exceptions" attitude toward properly adjusting that helmet and wearing it every time they ride. With each club meeting, this pioneering group of Cycle Kids biked with more savvy, alertness and agility. In addition, their teachers challenged them to think like champions when choosing "fuels," consciously selecting foods that sustain and strengthen their bodies.

One of the highpoints of the club was the Cycle Kids Bike Rodeo, which began with a "slow race" in the school parking lot. Wobbling and laughing all the way, each contestant tried to be the last one to cross the finish line. Speedier events, requiring slalom skills, bunny hops, sprints and proper use of hand signals, took place on the grassy field nearby.

Julie Idlet watched this rodeo with a look of rapture on her face. She's the founder of the brand-new nonprofit organization behind Cycle Kids, and no school ever hosted a Cycle Kids club before Lincoln Park did this fall. Idlet hopes there will be many more such clubs in the Boston area some day. She's an avid cyclist, and the coach of the Harvard University Cycling Club. And she wants to spread the fun of safe, healthy bike riding to children who might otherwise never know it.

As the sun set on this chilly, late-autumn afternoon, Idlet spoke with awe about the ground these Lincoln Park cyclists had gained in a few short weeks. "They love the bikes. They're learning about using them daily in their lives. Learning how to ride safely. Learning about eating for energy." After a slight pause, she added, "Learning to be curious about the world around them."

On Jan. 18, from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Lincoln Park Community School cafeteria, family and friends are invited to help mark the end of the fall session of the 21st Century Clubs. This celebration will include exhibits, readings, and live performances by students. Site coordinator Carol Simone, and her assistant Monica Chianelli, encourage fourth- through eighth-graders at the Lincoln Park to sign up for the next club session, which begins in February and will run through June. To learn more about the 21st Century Clubs at the Lincoln Park, Healey, West Somerville, East Somerville or Winter Hill schools, please call Nancy Meehan of the Somerville Community Schools at 617-625-6600, ext. 6975.