



The Student Newspaper of
Murch Elementary School

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The Blue and Gold

Architects Are Designing Many Changes for Murch

By Maia Bester and B&G Staff

A library/media center 4-5 times bigger than it is now, a cafeteria and a new gymnasium -- these are only a few of the changes that students can look forward to.

In a recent interview with The Blue and Gold, lead architect Ronnie McGhee revealed his design team's vision for the \$65 million Murch modernization project, scheduled to be completed in 2018.

The project will double the school's size and include a modern new building, a renovated cupola, a relocated soccer field, and lots of glass, tile, and bright colors, he said.

McGhee, a former Murch parent, said that the planners hope to keep kids and teachers at Murch during the construction, which is expected to start next year. Here are excerpts from the interview:

Q: Our principal said he wanted "a two-story library with a glass ceiling, a kitchen, a cafeteria, a full gym with bleachers, a Smart Board in every classroom, and a computer lab." Is that realistic?

A: Most of those we are going to do. It won't be a two-story library (but) a kitchen yes, a cafeteria yes, a full gym yes. We'll have Smart Boards and, yes, there'll be a computer lab.

Q: Have you designed other schools?

A: Yes. We designed the Peabody School on Capitol Hill, the addition to the Deal School (and, he said later, the modernization of Hearst Elementary).

Q: Which existing school will Murch most look like?

A: I can't say that it will look like any of the other schools.

Q: Can you describe it?

A: We haven't finished the design and it has a lot of reviews to go through. But there will be a new modern building (at least two stories high), and the existing Murch School will be rehabilitated. From the outside there will be a connection between the old and the new.

Q: Where will you put the new building?

A: Most of the new building will be in the southwest corner where the soccer field is now.

Q: So will we have a soccer field?

A: We will have a soccer field, yes. It will be on the north side.

Q: Will the soccer field be large enough for competition?

A: We probably need it to be smaller.

Q: What will happen to the cupola?

A: We will repair the historic cupola. It's in pretty bad shape right now.

Q: Will it be retained for any purpose or just because it's historic?

A: Just because it's historic. It won't be used for a bell or a clock or anything at this point.

Q: How will the classrooms be changed?

A: They'll be bigger than the ones you have here. There will be better lights, brighter colors, technology so there can be projections on the wall, the air will be cleaner, better insulation and efficient use of water.

(continued on Page 4)



Reporters discuss construction story -- and their own ideas (below).

What if kids could plan a school of their dreams?

By B&G Staff

Our student reporters were asked to invent some creative ideas of their own for the new Murch, no matter how wild or costly they may be.

Here are some of their suggestions:

Maia Bester: "A technology center that allows kids to have fun and explore their minds by doing activities such as Minecraft."

Lucy Chamberlain: "A water slide from the top of the school building."

Isabel Duarte: "A pool and an auditorium and unicorns instead of school buses. The unicorns could live on the hill."

Tessa Furlow: "Instead of stairs, roller-coasters with fireproof cars to take kids to floors where their classrooms are."

Journey Gianna: "A separate building for a theater with a stage, a projector, and a screen that drops from the ceiling."

Taylor Jackson: "A Starbucks-like place where kids can get smoothies and cookies, but teachers could get coffee only in emergencies and only with permission slips from the kids."

Mary Louisa Leopold: "Water slides with jet skis to get around the school."

Naomi Rea: "Trampolines in the classrooms so kids can move and learn at the same time."

Rigby Zentner: "Instead of a cafeteria, an indoor beach with a smoothie bar."

(Students are invited to email their own creative ideas for the new Murch to The Blue and Gold at aajacks@starpower.net. Please provide your name and grade, and write IDEAS in the subject line).

Blue and Gold Staff

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EDITOR: Aaron Epstein

FACULTY ADVISER: Vicki Otten

OUR FIRST COMMANDMENT:
Thou Shalt Not Bore the Reader

Teachers Get Embarrassed, Too

By Rigby Zentner

Kids often get embarrassed in school by tripping and falling to the floor or spilling things on themselves.

What they may not realize is that teachers have their embarrassing moments, too.

Such moments can get even worse for a teacher who accidentally does what she warned her students not to do.

That happened to 1st-grade teacher Heather Kuduk-Hsu on Pajama Day last year.

"I was on the hill telling people that the concrete road was very slippery. Then all of a sudden I slipped down the hill and got covered in mud," she said.

An embarrassing moment for pre-k teacher Alicia Garfinkel happened when she entered a race with her kids -- and lost,

"I should be faster than a pre-k student," she said.

Some teachers reported embarrassing problems with pants.

Christine Popadich, a special education teacher, recalled the day when she left the bathroom "with toilet paper stuck to my bum."

"I did not notice it until Ms. Canter (Ariel Canter, pre-k teacher) said 'you got a little something there.'"

Kindergarten teacher Sarah Seltzer remembered sitting on a chair with red paint on it. "I did not realize that I had paint on my pants until one of my students mentioned it."

Vicki Otten's most embarrassing day, she said, happened a couple of years ago while she was teaching her 5th-grade class.

"I was sitting on a table, and when I stood up, my pants ripped. Half of the people in my class started laughing and pointing at me while the other half shushed the ones who were laughing."

Second-grade teacher Meribeth Heitbrink recalled "the day I screamed when (a custodian) showed me a mouse stuck to a glue trap."

Now imagine being embarrassed in front of the principal. That almost happened to 3rd-grade teacher Tim Brady on a professional development day:

"I wasn't wearing my shoes -- only socks -- while sliding down the hall. When I saw Mr. C starting to walk towards me, I hid behind a corner."

School's No.1 Patient Tells her Story of Visiting the Nurse Again -- and Again

By Tessa Furlow

In case you're wondering, I can tell you what really goes on in the nurse's office.

I'm pretty sure I went there at least 20 times, more than any other kid, I think.

Back in January, I visited the nurse a lot because I kept getting stomachaches.

My stomach always hurt in math class. If I have to have a stomachache, I'd rather have it during math, especially when we're dividing fractions because that's the worst kind of division.

But stomachaches weren't my only reason for visiting the nurse. I also went because I scraped my knee at recess.

Anyway, let me tell you about the nurse's office, if you don't already know. It has cream-colored walls. The nurse's desk is right by the door. In the far corner is a bed for people who have a headache or a stomachache or something like that.

At the edge of the bed is a bathroom stall that would creep me out whenever I would use it because it's not exactly soundproof. Next to the bed in the right corner is a sink and paper towel dispenser.

Luckily for me, the nurse, Viktoria Holly-Trimmer, was really nice. Whenever I went there, Ms. Trimmer greeted me with a warm smile and said, "Hey Tess, whatcha need?" When I told her, she checked my temperature and told me to lie down on the bed.

If I didn't feel too bad, she brought me a glass of water and some orange slices. She called me her "little helper" because I filled up bags with ice for her while she made sure I was okay before I went back to class.

When I was running around, such as going to the office or answering calls for Ms. Trimmer, it was pretty obvious that I was up and ready to go.

Ms. Trimmer joked that I'd rather stay with her than go back to class. Of course, she was right -- at least while the class was studying division.

She always had long, interesting chats with me. A couple of times, I stayed so long that I fell asleep.

I remember one chat that went kind of like this:

Ms. Trimmer: "So, Tess, where are you going for the long weekend? I'm going to White-tail ski resort."

Me: Oh, what's that?

Ms. Trimmer: Let me show you on the computer. (pause for clicking noises) Aha! Here it is!

Me: Looks cool. You going with anybody?

Ms. Trimmer: Yeah, actually my besties (best friends) and I are going.

Me: Cool. I'm going to Charlottesville.

Ms. Trimmer: Cool.

Sadly, Ms. Trimmer left Murch after that. There were rumors that she was sick or had moved to Mexico.

But the truth was much simpler: Key Elementary School didn't have a nurse at all. Childrens Hospital, which supervises nurses in DC schools, transferred Ms. Trimmer to help out at Key.

I wish she'd come back because I loved the conversations we had.

If I have to have
a stomachache,
I'd rather have
it during math...
-- Tessa Furlow



Cartoonist Maia Bester comments on the worldwide craze of selfies.

Favored Fads at Murch

By Taylor Jackson
and Maia Bester

Thinking Putty and Minecraft appear to be the leading mad fads at Murch this year. The first is a squishable putty that can be kneaded, bounced, torn or stretched.

Fourth-grader Lilly Shaw said that she sees kids trading their putty for different colors and playing with it during class times.

And Thinking Putty actually is "not academically helpful," said 4th-grader Tessa Furlow.

The video game Minecraft qualifies as a fad "because of how much kids talk about it," Lilly said. It's about using blocks to protect against monsters, or to create imaginative things.

Since a fad, by definition, is a temporary fashion followed enthusiastically by a group, there are many Murch fads whose time has passed.

For example, 4th-graders remembered seeing kids walking around last year with stacks of colorful, plastic Rainbow Loom bracelets decorating their wrists.



Photo by Aaron Epstein

Third-graders Ayan Jacob (left) and Josie Walker stretch their putty.

But the once-popular loom seems to have lost its spark. Poppy Knight said she still has a Rainbow Loom but doesn't use it much anymore and doesn't see many kids wearing the bracelets.

Remember TeenyMates, the tiny sport action figures that kids could collect and trade? "They were only popular because it was the football season," Maxwell Stone said.

What about Silly Bandz, those little bracelet bands that could be shaped into different forms? Gus Confalone said they're another faded fad, adding, "I liked Silly Bandz in kindergarten."

Juliet Franklin remembered that Japanese erasers "used to be a big hit but people don't collect them as much anymore." (Those erasers looked like a fruit, a toy or a doll).

And those big eyeglass frames? They were "kind of popular, but they have lost their style," Havana Uriegas said.

Meet Scorpions and Snakes

By Maia Bester
and Rigby Zentner

Every Wednesday after school, Dorsey Keith's students got to hold an Arizona blond tarantula and look at scorpions and snakes from around the globe.

At one meeting of the Safari Club, Mr. Keith quizzed his students: "How many legs do spiders have?"

"Eight," a student replied. Mr. Keith smiled and exclaimed, "Yes!"

Then he brought out the first animal, a desert hairy scorpion, the largest scorpion in the United States. Next he showed another large scorpion, an Asian forest specimen. It was eating a cricket.

A flat rock scorpion came next. It had a flat, broad body.

Finally, Mr. Keith showed the last cage. Inside was an Arizona blond tarantula. It was a female, which has a soft blonde coat. Males are black.

A few students said they were scared at first but excited. Others said they were never afraid.

"I've held snakes and I wasn't scared," a first-grader named Ellen said. Another kid said, "I liked the bearded dragon with spikes. It was very cool."

A bearded dragon is a lizard that has spiked scales under its head that can look like a beard.

The Safari Club kids liked seeing Mr. Keith's animals, then drawing them and their habitats on paper.

Mr. Keith's interest in animals began at age five, when he bought a lot of harmless ones,

such as hamsters.

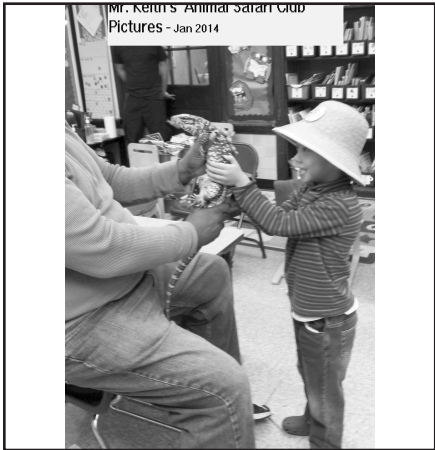
Later, his grandpa bought him a poisonous snake. But his mom wouldn't let him keep it.

"I like teaching kids about animals and how they live in the environment," he said.

His favorite animals are snakes. Why? Because of the things they can do without arms, he said.

Mr. Keith rescues the animals that he uses to teach. He keeps at home in his reptile room.

"I'm always scared so I'm careful, and that's okay," he said.



Minh Nguyen, now in 1st grade, touches an Argentine tegu lizard.

With a little help, the garden flourishes

By Lucy Chamberlain
and Taylor Jackson

On a recent visit to the Murch garden, trees were swaying, birds were singing, vegetable plants were sprouting, and the smell of fresh potting soil was in the air.

"I am excited that the students have been geared up and ready to work in the garden," said science coordinator Tashima Hawkins, who is in charge of the planting this school year.

"They were very enthused about preparing the garden beds for their new plants."

The "three sisters" (corn, beans, and squash), were planted by Deal Middle School 6th-graders and Murch 1st-graders.

The gardeners, including many kindergarteners, also planted such herbs as mint, chives, rosemary, and horehound, which is used as an herbal remedy and in candy.

"The pole beans and several of the herbs are growing very well," Ms. Hawkins said, maybe because "this year we started growing seeds in soil pellets."

The corn and squash haven't sprouted yet, she said.

The student gardeners are learning about more than planting vegetables. Fifth graders made bird houses and will place them around the garden.

Kindergarteners have been learning about the life cycles of plants, Ms. Hawkins said, and even dissected a lima bean.

"Keeping students from trampling through the garden beds has been most difficult," she said, despite the "Keep Off" signs.

Next year, she said, "we will need to begin planting earlier" to produce more vegetables before the students go on their summer break.

Kid Detectives Hunt for Buried Treasure

By Journey Gianna and Isabel Duarte

We are MAD, which is short for Murch's Awesome Detectives.

Early this year we heard a rumor that there is treasure (a time capsule, actually) buried deep somewhere beneath the grounds of our school.

Is the rumor true? We decided to make this mystery our first case.

We began by questioning Karen Levy, the 5th grade science teacher who has been at Murch for more than a quarter of a century, longer than any teacher at the school. Was she an eyewitness to the burial so long ago?

"I wasn't involved in it, but some of my students were," Ms. Levy said.

She suggested that we talk to Mr. Johnson, the crossing guard, because, she said, he was the school building manager when the capsule was buried.

We then spoke to Avis McCoy, the 5th grade math teacher. We thought she might know something.

Ms. McCoy said she had heard rumors that there actually were two time capsules, one near the 5th-grade trailers and the other under the rubber-carpeted playground.

After school ended, we went searching for Mr. Johnson. We found him on Ellicott Street helping kids in after-school programs to cross the street safely.

We waited until his job was done, and then introduced ourselves to him at his outdoor "office," which consisted of a stool on the grass and a radio tied to the fence.

Q: Do you know anything about a time capsule around here?



MAD believes that somewhere beneath this playground lies hidden clues to Murch's history of a quarter of a century ago.

A: Yes, I do.

Q: What do you know?

A: I know that a five-gallon metal container was buried in 1986 over there (pointing to a play-ground area. Another five-gallon container was placed in the area of the Kauffman Building at about the same time.

Q: Have you ever tried to find them again?

A: Well, they were supposed to be buried for 25 years. So for the 25th anniversary (in 2011), we decided to dig up the one near Kauffman. A lot of parents came to help. We dug up the whole area but we couldn't find anything. That capsule must have been stolen.

Q: Why would anyone want to steal it? What was in it?

Q: T-shirts, papers, pictures, school work and other memorabilia.

A: Who was the principal of Murch when the time capsules were buried?

Q: Mary Gill.

We searched the Internet and learned that Mary Gill was the principal of the Ben W. Murch Elementary School for 14 years, from 1984 to 1998.

That fits. But we had trouble finding her.

Finally, we went to look at the site of the buried capsule, the place identified by Mr. Johnson. It is a play area covered with a blue rubber rug.

We realized that no one will be digging up Murch's past until the construction of the new Murch begins in the middle of 2016.

By that time, we'll be away in middle school, unable to continue to follow the trail.

By that time, other students may volunteer to become MAD and finally complete The Case of the Buried Capsule.

Graduating with Memories

By Mary Louisa Leopold and Rigby Zentner

Fifth graders are about to graduate, and they will take away memories of exciting adventures, meaningful lessons and funny experiences.

One funny memory was shared by Taylor Lewis-Richardson: "In 4th grade at lunch we called ourselves the Cappuccinos and we made up a chant and hit ourselves with books."

Finn McNamara remembered when, in 3rd grade, "I jumped off the rock wall while playing tag and did a somersault at the bottom."

"My favorite memory," said Ghirmay Mesfun, "was either making new friends or being squirted in the face in a water gun fight. Also, I'll remember Ms. (Sabrina) Finberg, my favorite teacher. I got to have her for 3rd grade and 5th grade."

Reese Kolasky thought back to her first day in pre-k when she first met 5th-grader Jermanie Coleman. "I remember Jermanie was wearing a hot pink shirt with lots of small Doras on it." (a reference to Dora the Explorer, a TV show).

Other 5th-graders told how Murch most influenced them:

Sean Maxfield: "Murch helped me learn and the teachers pushed me to ask a lot of questions. I also really learned a lot in basketball. Mr.

(Tim) Johnson was pushy, but in a good way, and basketball made me mentally stronger."

Genevieve Gallant: "Murch made me more responsible with homework planners and helped me learn not to push things to the last minute."

Olivia Biggs: "Our (5th grade) teachers taught us how to plan ahead and organize our time."

Marie May: "Murch introduced us to new skills every year, such as music and guidance."

And here are more recollections of laughter from other graduates-to-be:

Sean Maxfield: "In 2nd grade, I was in the Murch lip sync and I did the splits at the end of (the song) Party Rock. I thought it was really funny."

Less amusing was Fereshteh Roshen's memory of a Nature Bridge trip. "We went hiking and saw a poisonous copperhead snake," she said.

But friendships were most important to many students.

"The friends I made when I came to Murch in 3rd grade are still my closest friends now," Rebecca Lopez said.

Of Earaches, DNA and m&m's

By Mary Louisa Leopold and Naomi Rea

Student projects at the Murch Science Fair had a wide range -- from simply counting m&m's to understanding diseases in the human body.

"My project talked about different diseases such as fevers and colds," 2nd-grader Sam Cuaresma explained.

"What interested me most was earaches, especially how they formed, when lots of fluid builds up in the ear."

Josephine Diggs-Galligan's project explained how temperature and pressure can affect an object.

"'Phenomenal Phase Changes' is what I called my project," the 4th grader said. "I was surprised how dry ice sublimed (went from a solid to a gas). Also, I thought that how it did not boil at the boiling point was really cool."

(Dry ice is solid carbon dioxide. It does not boil but changes directly from a solid to a gas, which actually is, as Josephine said, "really cool").

But the most popular science station was special education teacher Denise Cherry's exhibit, which showed how to extract and see DNA in strawberries.

"I researched why the strawberry was the perfect fruit for science. It has eight copies of each of its DNA strands," Ms. Cherry said.

"We should learn all we can (about DNA) to help students think about being future scientists in DNA research" and produce "healthier and smarter humans" and "amazing robots," she said.

The science fair would not have happened without Tashima Hawkins, who was a teacher at Murch for 21 years, left for five years and came back as a science specialist.

In directing her first science fair, Ms. Hawkins wanted "a learning experience and a passion for science," not a competition.

If you're wondering about the candy project mentioned at the beginning, it was kindergartner James (Jet) Turner's attempt to estimate the number and the leading color in 10 bags of m&m's.

He missed the count by 10. Red turned out to be the most common color, blue the least -- the opposite of what Jet had predicted.



Sashima Hawkins, director of the 2015 Murch Science Fair

good. I knew something was up. But other kids helped me figure it out," Ms. Phillips said, chuckling a little as she told the story.

Ms. Banks and Ms. Phillips gave several reasons why they enjoy being subs.

"I like meeting students from various countries and cultures from around the world," Ms. Banks said.

"While I'm teaching, sometimes I'm learning new things, too," Ms. Phillips added.

Each has her favorite subjects to teach. For Ms. Banks, it's art, reading and music. Ms. Phillips enjoys social studies and reading.

In her free time, Ms. Phillips likes to travel because it "gives me a greater knowledge of world cultures and food." She also enjoys music, art and being with her family.

She said she has six brothers and four sisters and "my grandpuppy since I don't have any grandchildren."

When not subbing, Ms. Banks does many things.

"I love the ballet, art, listening to music, traveling, reading, and spending time with my family and friends. I also attend church on Sunday, and I enjoy movies," she said.

Tales of Two Subs

By Lucy Chamberlain and Tessa Furlow

Ever wonder what it's like to be a substitute teacher at Murch?

Patricia W. Banks and Linda Phillips can tell you. Ms. Banks has been a sub for more than 25 years, 18 of them at Murch. Ms. Phillips has been subbing for three years.

Usually, they are notified to report to a classroom only one day in advance, Ms. Banks said.

Their workday starts earlier than the average kid's day. Ms. Banks, for example, gets up at 5:45 in the morning and arrives at school around 8.

After finding the assigned classroom, she starts preparing for the day -- with the help of the absent teacher.

"Each teacher has plans and books for me that I read and review," Ms. Banks said.

"I depend on the teacher to leave me information," Ms. Banks added. "Sometimes I have an assistant help me."

But no matter how well prepared a substitute is, there often are difficulties and surprises.

The toughest part, Ms. Phillips said, is trying to develop a connection quickly with students she doesn't know.

"I find it important to remember names," Ms. Phillips said. "That shows attention and mutual respect...Each student has a uniqueness and I want to embrace it by letting them know I am making an earnest effort to acknowledge who they are."

But often, she admitted, "I may not remember the students' names as easily as I remember their faces."

She recalled a day when the students didn't choose to help. Instead, they played a trick on her. They switched their names.

"I knew something wasn't right. It didn't feel

Is school testing (a) too long, (b) too short or (c) just right? Editorial writers check (a)

An editorial by Tessa Furlow and Lucy Chamberlain

If you think there's too much testing at Murch, you're not alone.

Many kids at Murch think so, too. Third-grader Teo Penati, for example, said the testing is "a little overwhelming."

Fifth-grader Edgar Hake disagreed: "You just have to focus on it," he said. If students finished faster, he added, they'd have time to check their answers.



Tessa Furlow



Lucy Chamberlain

Teachers give classroom tests of their own.

Students in some grades take such standardized tests as the half-hour Fountas and Pinnell reading level tests and the hour-long iReady math test.

They help teachers figure out what kids need in order to reach Common Core standards.

But the biggest test of the Murch school year is the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). About five million students in grades 3-11 in 11 states and Washington, D.C., took the PARCC tests online this year.

The PARCC math and reading tests took about eight hours for 3rd-graders and 9 hours, 20 minutes for 5th-grade students -- spread out over two months.

That was a real pain, even for students who were not being tested at all. It messed up their schedules and made the teaching day shorter.

We think the PARCC testing is too long, is spread over too long a time, and causes unnecessary stress.



Computerized PARCC tests are meant to find out whether students are on track for colleges and careers

Fifth-grader Sierra Madison remembered past years when "there were three days of testing...and then you were done with it. Now it's like two weeks of testing spread out over three months."

Another problem is what teachers call "teaching to the test." That's when they spend time preparing students for tests rather than teaching them new things that they should be learning.

In the weeks just before the PARCC test, about half of our learning time was spent practicing for the test. It was non-stop practice. And when we finished the test, we had to review what we were studying before, so we could catch up.

We are glad that the people behind the PARCC testing have announced that next year the PARCC testing will be 90 minutes shorter.

But we think they should also schedule all the tests at once, one day after another, for about a week. That would make it seem faster and reduce disruption to the class schedule.

Some people might think that it would be more stressful to do the PARCC all at once. We disagree. We think that by getting it all over with, there would be less stress.

The Rhode Island Department of Education, in fact, is seriously thinking about combining the two PARCC testing periods. The District of Columbia should do that, too.

Rhode Island and DC might be two of the smallest places in the United States, but together they could make a huge difference for students and teachers.

the school year, and finish in 2018.

Q: Everybody's been saying that we're going to be transferred to another school while construction's going on...Will that happen?

A: Well, that's the most expensive solution. If we can provide a way to phase the project so you can stay on site, it's better for everybody...That would be our goal, keeping everybody together.

There were questions, too, for Mr. McGhee's daughter Kiva, a Murch graduate who now studies business at the University of Michigan:

Q: What are your most vivid memories of Murch?

A: For some reason, I remember PE class...outside running around the track. I remember field days and having so much fun at those. I was in the play. (She had the title role in the musical "Oliver"). I'm still friends with a lot of my good buddies from (Murch), even though they're in college.

Q: What changes do you suggest for the new Murch?

A: I remember that I always thought it should be more airy, have more space...I always wanted a new gym, a more modern building. It's dated. My dad really likes bright colors. I think bright colors would add a lot.

Kids Taste the Core Of Critical Thinking Amid U.S. Conflict

By Lucy Chamberlain and Rigby Zentner

All you kids at Murch may not know it, but you're learning English and mathematics differently now.

The new way of learning is called Common Core. It's a set of harder and more complex skills that are meant to help students be better prepared for high school and college.

Fifth grade teacher Vicki Otten explained how it works in English Language Arts:

"Before Common Core, we used one textbook that had more fiction than non-fiction. Now ... we no longer use textbooks and use more non-fiction literature. We pull articles and information from different sources.

"I think Common Core is better than the way we taught before because it is helping me to make sure that the texts I use are really challenging for all of my students."

Under Common Core, students are asked to think more deeply and critically about the books they read. Instead of answering "what," "who" and "where" questions, there are more -- and tougher -- "why" and "how" questions.

As an example, Ms. Otten referred to "The Patchwork Quilt," a book about family connections and memories. In the book, a girl named Tanya loves to listen to her grandmother talk about the meaning of the colorful quilt that she is making from the clothing of family members.

Ms. Otten said teachers used to ask their students such questions as "What articles of clothing were in the quilt?" Now there are questions like "How do you think Tanya felt about her articles of clothing in the quilt?"

Math specialist Donnah Robinson, who is retiring this year, said that it used to be enough for students to solve math problems one way.

But now, she said, they are encouraged to explore other mathematical possibilities. Sometimes the teacher challenges the students by changing the facts.

Here's an example:

There were 12 adult penguins sliding in the snow. There were also five young penguins sliding in the snow. How many more adult penguins were sliding in the snow than young penguins?

In the past, teachers wanted students to focus on the phrase "how many more?" and realize that this is a subtraction problem. So the students would write "12 minus 5 equals what? Answer: 7."

But some students might see this as an add-on problem and think of it this way: There are five young penguins. So how many more do I need to add to get to 12? In other words, 5 plus what equals 12? The answer is 7.

Or suppose the teacher challenges the students even more by changing the problem: Two of the young penguins hadn't yet learned to slide and three of the older penguins had sore feet and couldn't slide.

How many more sliders than non-sliders were there?

Most states and the District of Columbia are using Common Core in classrooms. But many states don't. In recent surveys, about 60 percent of Americans said that they're against Common Core.

Why are so many people unhappy with Common Core?

For one thing, they say that Common Core standards and tests are too tough for many kids and aren't flexible enough to fit the needs of all students and all school districts.

Another argument against Common Core is that states and local school officials -- not the national government -- should decide how their students are taught.

(Editor's note: The dispute already is part of the campaigns for president. Democrats generally favor Common Core. Nearly all Republican candidates are against it).

Architect: Better Design = Better Learning continued from Page One

Q: What color scheme are you planning for Murch?

A: It's a little early for color schemes (but) we'll have bright colors, cheerful colors.

Q: Will there be a science lab?

A: We'll have the relative space to give the teacher a chance to design the room the way she wants. So we'll have that.

Q: Do you plan to ask Murch kids what they want or need in a new school?

A: We hope to involve the kids in the environmental design of the building...in how the building is kept up, low use of water and so on... And artists will come in and get kids' suggestions on what art goes where.

Q: How did you get interested in being an architect?

A: Well, when I was little, I always liked to build things and pull them apart...erector sets and Lincoln logs and things like that. My parents said, "He must want to be an architect." I didn't know what an architect was.

Q: Will the changes help children learn?

A: It's been documented that better air quality, better lighting, materials that pro-

mote energy and thought all help kids do better in school. An example is there's no fresh air in here (the principal's office) except for that open window over there. So over time most of the air becomes carbon dioxide and you start to fall asleep...The new classrooms will have monitors, so whenever there gets to be too much carbon dioxide, it turns on the air flow.

Q: Anything else to help learning?

A: The concept that's a little different is to have ... extra spaces outside of the classrooms that teachers can use to do collaborative work, or they can move walls to do team teaching.

Q: How will the library and media center change?

A: Media centers in the new schools are required to be about 4-5 times larger. It'll have computers and...the librarian now will get a chance to use all the skills she was trained to use because she'll have all the different media there...There'll probably be another eight rooms for special training, or for a visitor coming in to teach something, or for storage...

Q: What's the timetable for construction?

A: The current timetable is to start construction in 2016, probably at the end of



The blending of old and new in this interior view at Hearst Elementary School shows some of the style of the architects now in the early stages of designing the future of Murch.