DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE:

1-1 COMPUTER ACCESS INITIATIVE

The Compass School tradition of excellence in education has been built upon a foundation of providing opportunities for every child to find success, connecting our students to the world beyond our classroom walls, and seeking to continuously improve our work as a school.

To build on these foundations, this year we are working to integrate modern technology throughout our educational program. In the dynamic 21st century world, we view access to technology as essential for the student and the school’s educational development. Compass School is in a unique and exciting situation to address the “digital divide” of access to this technology within our school by ensuring every student has access to a computer device to enable each student to develop skills in digital citizenship and technology use for learning in the 21st century.

Why is this important?

* Students that do not have 24/7 access to technology, information, and each other are at a disadvantage in this rapidly changing environment.
* Today’s students and graduates need to use technology to quickly synthesize and communicate information and collaborate with colleagues—not just within their own organization but within a global community.
* Distribution of devices to every student levels the playing field within the school and puts Compass on par with other schools throughout the state, nation, and world. Over 100 other schools across the state have already implemented a similar response to address their “digital divide.”
* Digital devices provide a variety of tools that can help all students and have shown particular benefit to those who have difficulty learning in a traditional classroom setting.
* We believe incorporating 1-1 access to technology pushes our thinking as a school about how to better personalize learning to help every child succeed.

We have partnered with the Tarrant Institute for Innovative Education (TIIE) from the University of Vermont for this initiative. TIIE works with over 25 schools in Vermont and is focused on how computers can transform learning to be more personalized and responsive to each child’s needs and interests.

I am no technophile, yet I have been continually impressed so far with the possibilities unlocked by having all our students have their own computers. On a most basic level, the use of Google Classroom to assign and collect work has massively improved workflow. For less organized students who formerly struggled to keep track of assignments or not lose papers, Classroom keeps all the work in one place and archived, thereby freeing up energy for students to focus on the more essential learning of course content and skills.

For teachers, Classroom is providing efficiencies in workflow while also allowing teachers to be more responsive to how a class evolves. Teachers can change an assignment right after class and have it in all students’ email boxes before the end of the school day. New material or thoughts the teacher may have over the weekend or after school can be pushed out any time to enhance student learning.

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ALUMNI PROFILE

I appreciate the focus that Compass gave to an area like critical thinking—a skill that I now believe is the most valuable tool I have for inquiry and engendering greater understanding and compassion in a world that so desperately needs more thinkers and, importantly, more feelers.

-Asa Jen Galen, continued on page 3

“I enjoy coming to school now; even when learning is challenging I know Compass is a good place for me to learn.”

- Tobias Souza, grade 7

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DIRECTOR’S MESSAGE (continued from page 1)

While computer access is helping with management of materials, the more exciting promise of technology is in making learning more personalized and effective for individual students. We are seeing the potential for greater personalization in ways both small and large. Instead of a class where everyone is focused on the same thing, learning can be individualized in countless ways. For example, instead of just projecting a reading or video on a screen, when each student has a computer, individuals can read a document at their own pace, or slow down or speed up a video or repeat sections to enhance understanding. Students can choose among a range of videos to follow their interests or processing speed. Or students can draw widely from the Internet to find materials in all sorts of formats on the topic of interest.

Working with TIIE, we continue to expand our understanding of what is possible. One area of particular interest is helping our students access human resources well beyond our walls who might add to student learning. A student might ask a question of a professor in Russia on her study of mushrooms, or another might share his health and wellness survey with a class in India. Students may connect with others interested in a particular topic, whether it be an on-line international gaming community or hobbyists passionate about coin collecting.

The potential for more individualized learning with better computer access is immense. From on-line classes to almost endless youtube how-to videos to opportunities for students to pursue coding, art, music, or research with the help of computers, there is a world of learning out there to access.

At Compass, we know the heart of learning lies in the human relationships and this continues to be fundamental to our program. We know that computers are merely a tool and not a necessity for living a good life but we also know they are likely to be a fundamental part of most of our students’ lives at they mature. We still believe in face-to-face interaction and wrestling with ideas and shared experiences in the real world. But we also see that assuring each student has equal access to computer technology can enhance learning, expand our horizons, and promote more equitable opportunity for every student to find success in school and beyond.

NOTEWORTHY NEWS

Haunted House
Culminating an eight-week Humanities unit on fear, Compass School 9th and 10th graders turned the Westminster Institute into a Haunted House to put the fright into local youth. The Haunted House was one of these big accomplishments where every student contributed to a wonderfully successful evening of entertaining the community while demonstrating their creativity, energy, and attention to detail, while raising over $200 for the local food pantry.

Global Connections: Heading to Peru
After investigating some worrisome government policies in the Dominican Republic and researching about other possible travel destinations, the junior class decided this year’s Global Connections program will be going to Peru this spring. The students have been busy making plans for their travel, service, and cross-cultural connections, as well as extensive fundraising. It is always exciting to be planning for a new location!

Student Board Members
After years of Board discussion, we will be adding two student members to the Compass board in December. We’ve had alumni on the board for years and we welcome the voice and perspectives of students more directly involved in board deliberations.

Tom Lowell Memorial Scholarship
It was a profound loss to Compass and the larger community when Tom Lowell passed away due to cancer in late November. Tom, who served as chair of the Compass board, was one of those rare great human beings who brought light to every life he touched. In honor of his commitment to promoting learning outside the classroom, we are creating the Tom Lowell Student Activities Fund. We are hoping to raise $5,000 to match a challenge grant Tom had offered before his passing.

Town Meeting
To help Compass students learn about and experience our Vermont tradition of participatory democracy, we hold Town Meeting when an issue warrants this format. In November, we had a superb example of thinking together as a community about the very complex issue of dress at school. The beauty of the town meeting format is that it allows many voices and viewpoints to be heard and to encourage continued conversation in the community after the meeting ends. Our meeting helped us hear this range of perspectives and to appreciate that our policy and our actions need be considerate of wide ranging viewpoints.

Alumni Network
We keep trying to expand our connection with alumni. Starcie Grout ('13) is volunteering to help with this work, and Halifax Taylor ('16) will be trying to connect with alumni as part of her senior project. Please contact the school to get us your most recent information (and that of other Compass alumni) so we can include you in future events.

Junior Class Fundraiser at Putney Fest
ALUMNI PROFILE

ASA JEN GALEN (COSTLEY-BUPP) - CLASS OF 2006

Current Location: Westminster West, VT.

What are you up to? This year I spent 2.5 months living and volunteering in the Ecuadorian Amazon Rainforest with people who have become an example for Indigenous resistance, still living on their ancestral land, a place to which no road leads. I tried to assist in and learn about their struggle to protect their land, culture and the natural balance of the living rainforest.

I love to hike, walk on the land and be within nature, although at times it feels very challenging to do despite that I know I love it, that it costs nothing and returns so much and is outside (both literally and figuratively) the context and distractions of the current cultural system we live within. It is a meditation that brings meaning and inspiration to my life, something I am called to do many times barefoot or with very little clothing and sometimes to be a conduit for poetry that comes from the presence and wisdom of Nature.

Where you think you are heading: I would like to help create a future where Indigeneity is more central to our understanding of ourselves as human beings, our common heritage and our connection to place within the natural world and the order and harmony that exists here. I seek to help educate others to the efficacy and viability of truly living sustainably and honoring all that we are given freely and without charge by the Earth and within ourselves.

Most interesting experience at Compass: I still remember the year our ultimate frisbee team won the first ever Vermont state championship (there was only one other team). I remember the year that Eric Rhomberg introduced us in Chemistry class to molecular structure and while playing with a wooden molecule building set we believed we'd discovered a previously unknown molecule. Turned out it had been discovered... Darn!

How Compass has helped you in your current life: I believe that Compass challenged me to think about the foundations of learning rather than just the memorization of rote facts and test preparation. Compass gave me a voice and an opportunity to be enfranchised in the structuring of my learning experience through student democracy. I appreciate the focus that Compass gave to an area like critical thinking—a skill that I now believe is the most valuable tool I have for inquiry and engendering greater understanding and compassion in a world that so desperately needs more thinkers and importantly more feelers.

Anything you want to communicate to people in the Compass community: Keep questioning, never stop learning, let your mistakes humble you and never settle for what no longer serves you or those around you, take action. It’s never too late.

If you feel inspired to donate to a good cause I’ve created a crowdfunding campaign to support the indigenous people and community of Sarayaku where I lived this year. The indigenous peoples of the world are truly our greatest leaders in relearning how to live sustainably on this planet and the guardians of an ancient wisdom that protects the Earth, honors it and lives in balance with it while safeguarding it so that future generations will continue to have a healthy environment and rich living ecosystem to exist within. http://igg.me/at/the-living-rainforest

Asa in Ecuador
CURRICULUM CORNER

The New Hydroponic Lab

SCIENCE

7/8: Recent labs in this chemistry course included a heat transfer candle challenge and an experiment involving the melting point of stearic acid. Their study of chemistry culminated with wonderful presentations at Westminster Center School in December.

9/10: During the first semester students engaged in a quarter of Chemistry and a quarter of Light, Sound, Waves, and "How Do You Know What to Believe"? In Chemistry, the explorations included self-designed experiments investigating ethyl alcohol combustion, testing the effectiveness of antacids, creating formal digital presentations on chemical elements, and comprehensive digital "booklets" on the chemistry we studied. In physics, we are doing the physics of waves, light, sound, reflections, and refractions. This has tied into the question, "How do you know what to believe?" In the second semester, 11th and 12th graders will have electives including Neurobiology, Advanced Chemistry, Space and Time, and Filmmaking.

MATH

Calculus: We are focusing on the three big ideas of calculus: limits, rate of change, and area under a curve, culminating with the Fundamental Theorem of Calculus. Our emphasis is on depth of understanding and independent thinking. Next semester, we will explore how these ideas apply to non-polynomial functions. We also have 3 students studying AP calculus -- two preparing for the AB exam (college-level calculus 1) and one preparing for the BC exam (college-level calculus 2).

Pre-Calculus: We have been working with a great deal of graphing reflections, symmetry and exponential growth. As we finish up the semester and head into the exam we are ending with logarithms.

Geometry: Students have done an extensive and accurate investigation into the Euler Line and Nine-point circles. Onward to similar triangles and circle relationships!

Algebra 1: Students are embracing the study of slope, currently focusing on word problems related to this fundamental concept. Students will review and evaluate each other’s posters and continue with exercises from Khan Academy as well as other resources before moving onto quadratics.

Math Foundations: In this highly individualized math class, students have been building arithmetic and pre-algebra skills at their own paces though Khan Academy and one-on-one time with the teacher. They have also been doing a variety of problem-solving activities with the ultimate goals of learning to think flexibly and knowing what to do when faced with an unfamiliar problem.
SPANISH

Middle School 1: We’re finishing up how to ask people what things are. They already know how to talk about where they live, and what they and their families are like. They are working on asking questions and retaining answers to communicate clearly, as well as finding the wisdom and grammar points in teachers’ favorite quotations.

Middle School 2: Students are working with the language, expanding vocabulary, learning new grammatical rules, and enjoying their increased ability to “use” Spanish. For the “¿Qué hora es?” unit students designed their own clocks and are practicing telling analog time (still a valuable skill in this digital age).

High School 1: Students now are able to talk about where they live and how to discuss and describe themselves and their families. They are working on their ability to self-direct their learning by building their skills to inquire as to what things are, as well as translating philosophical quotations. Students are also learning the finer points of the verbs SER and ESTAR, and exploring the strange and wonderful complexities of beginning Spanish.

High School Intermediate: We’ve been combining some training on the dynamics of language structure with an in-depth look at daily routines and chores. The intersection of language and culture will prepare them to explore the world of a teenager in the Dominican Republic. The 11th graders will look at Peru in preparation for their Global Connections experience in the spring.

High School Conversation and Current Events: We’ve just finished learning about El Día E, an annual celebration of Spanish language and Culture through which students explored the question, “What is your favorite word?” Some of their videos are on the school’s website. Check them out!

HUMANITIES

7/8: We’ve spent this semester thinking about how our own histories are connected with the history of our region and our nation, culminating in a colonial diary project where each student wrote from a different perspective about historical events leading up to the Declaration of Independence. We’ve also recently finished reading Laurie Halse Anderson’s Chains, which helped students with the task of analyzing history from multiple perspectives.

9/10: Gabe’s and Julia’s 9/10th graders are in the midst of an especially relevant study of the role of technology in our lives. Students completed the dystopian novel, Feed, to explore the potential losses to your culture as a result of Internet technology and avid consumerism. They are now writing editorials that examine and take a stance on one aspect of technology. We will culminate with debates that apply some of the research from their editorials.

11/12: Philosophy: Proverb and Wisdom: This philosophy survey course covers a range of topics through the lens of various philosophical concepts across time and culture, starting with ideas about proverbs and wisdom, analyzing and conceptually implementing various concepts from Kierkegaard, Confucious, Nietzsche, Buddha, Camus, Plato, Lau Tzu, Foucault, Marx, and Sen-no-Rikyu.

Memoirs: Julia’s group is working on writing (abridged) memoirs, having completed a unit on literary theory.

Senior Seminar: Seniors are planning senior projects and completing college applications.

“If you want an education that’s going to get you somewhere in life, you should commit to it.”
- Austin Ielpi, grade 10
Personal Memoir
Jaime Cohen, grade 12

I miss a life free of responsibility--when my afternoons consisted of nothing but romping through the woods, conjuring up elaborate stories within the confines of my toy chest, and staring relentlessly at a screen--for hours on end... Well, this isn't right. I do not mean to say that I miss this life, in the sense that you can not miss something that you never lost. I still find myself going home each night and unboxing my dragons and knights, my fast toy cars and my faster toy cheetahs. I still find myself going null under the soft glow of my computer screen. But as of late there is something now that there wasn't before. What I miss, in particular, is the absence of this thing. Responsibility, my antithesis, my enemy, my usurper.

Suspense Story Excerpts
Toby sprinted up the stairs and down the hallway to his bedroom. He slammed the door. He grabbed the small chair from under his desk and jammed under the handle of the door. He then crawled under his blankets and closed his eyes. The dull thudding footsteps were growing louder, approaching his door. When they were right outside the door they stopped. There was a moment of silence. Toby swore he could hear muffled, rasping breath coming from the hall. "Toby," a voice that was definitely not his mother's through the door, "Toby, what's the matter? Why did you bite me?"

Tricks of water began to leak into the room, washing the blood into the cracks in the cold stone floor. I knew how this would end. I reached into my wallet, sliding out a worn image of a young blonde girl, with bright eyes, who could have done great things, a boy with a wild imagination, eager for what the future might hold, and their father, a man who just like this city, and all of its inhabitants, wouldn't be around much longer. An ear-piercing crack resonated throughout the room, and for a moment, there was a deafening silence. Then the water rushed in. The picture was ripped from my hands, the body of the woman was thrown against the wall, I followed it. The picture fluttered in front of my face one last time before my eyes were clouded with water and blood, and then... darkness.

Hand Blown Glass Ornament for Peru Trip Funding
The Scales of Justice
Post High School Goal Setting
Colonial Diary  
Noah Sherrill, grade 8

Life as a free man hasn’t treated me as well as I had hoped. For one, I was mistreated by the white men in a way I had not expected. One man refused to sell me things on the grounds that, “I was created, by God, to be less than him.” The day after I came to Boston, I had a conflict with the owner of my inn. He said that the residents were bothered by me. They said I was a thief. One man said that I was a spy for the British army, and my freedom is a result of that. I assured them that I was no ally of the British, but I don’t think he believed me.

I had been thinking about the rebels. The image of that dying man, that dying black man was still burned into my head. The British needed to be stopped. Their soldiers were murderers, their king was a tyrant! In part, I wanted to join the rebels because the papers I had were still crude. If I fought with them I would become a free man, a real free man. My heart was thirsty for revenge, I needed credible papers, and the next step seemed clear but far away. I was not yet prepared to trade off my temporary freedom, even though it was less than the true equality shared among white men.

Finding Myself  
Jaya Solin, grade 12

I view my brain as a big glass jar filled to the brim with ideas and knowledge . . . infinite poems and math problems. The problem is that it is hard for me to articulate those thoughts into a product. Picture a marionettist who spends years perfecting his craft, creating an intricate combination of mahogany and twine. He spends hours learning how to control his puppet, to make it seem fluid and lifelike. But when he finally performs, the unthinkable happens; a string snaps and the marionette clatters to the floor. This is what it felt like countless times as I struggled to overcome my learning disability . . . Once I created tactics for myself, ways I could visualize the information in order to unstick the jar inside my brain, I learned to move past what I once believed I could not control . . . I reattached the string.
The very next period, one of my advisees sat at my desk and explained that he was assigning me homework. I listened intently as he detailed his idea for a proposed collaborative writing and performing arts project and how he saw my role in it. He mused that he may be the first student to assign his teacher homework. I was quick to point out that this was hardly the case.

So what motivates students to engage in this way? At Compass, students speak frankly and with a casual, familiar tone to adults about their learning needs, personal goals, and social concerns, not just their academic passions. These adult-student relationships are built through time together not just in classes, but at lunch, on Mountain Day, through winter sports, travel, exploratories, advisory, and just small interactions throughout the day.

The directness of student communication with adults at Compass can be quite jarring at first. Societally, we are too often in a mindset that places our youth as subjugates in the learning process, not participants, and certainly not at the helm. At Compass, education is a journey faculty take with the students, and on this journey the students are expected to take the lead. Students and faculty hold each other to high standards and maintain high expectations for one another. This creates a collaborative, supportive environment for student-driven learning. This is a rare thing in secondary education; it is no wonder people are surprised by the interactions people see at Compass.

- Ryan Hockertlotz, Teacher