

This Week at Central Academy

September 14, 2009

This has been an exciting and energy-filled start up of the school year! We have had parents and teachers join together on a weekend to make the landscaping of our school as beautiful as the potential that lay within all of those weeds. We've held our first annual Middle School Retreat in which students planned and implemented a day-long session that bonded students together and communicated our values and norms. We have had an internationally recognized educator join us and work in our classrooms with students and teachers for 2 days, thanks to his generosity and interest in a school like Central, and to a partnership with Miami University. We've had one of our middle school advisories visit Butler Tech through the monies they raised last school year. And, on a daily basis, we have had students who want to be at Central, work their hardest to live up to our standards and high expectations.

Dr. James Beane's visit was certainly one of the highlights of the start of our year. Although he no longer visits schools and works with students and teachers, when he heard about our school, he volunteered to come to work with us free of charge. Fortunately, through a gift from Miami University, we were able to give him a small thank you for his work. But for the two and a half days that he was with us, we saw truly remarkable things happen.

Dr. Beane's work has centered around democracy in education, and helping students to find their passion in learning. He led a class at each of our levels (Early Primary, Late Primary, Intermediate, and Middle School) through a series of questions about what they wondered about themselves, and what they wondered about the world. As I worked with him in each of the classrooms, I was repeatedly astounded at the level of depth of the questions students have. If we listen to children's voices and thoughts, we will always be amazed at the depth of their thoughts and wonderings. If we let that guide us

in our learning, we will be equally amazed at the degree of engagement that we see in our students.

On the last day of his stay with us, 9 of our teachers, 2 students, 2 parents and I joined Dr. Beane in a panel discussion at Miami University, Oxford. We were surprised and happy to see a "packed house" in the auditorium who had come to hear about our school and Dr. Beane's work. The highlight of the evening, though, was our two students who spoke and answered questions about our school and their own learning with such power and sincerity, that everyone literally swarmed them at the end of the evening. Although neither *Stevie* (6th) nor *Zion* (5th) had ever done any public speaking at a university before, they both felt the evening had been relatively simple. As *Zion* put it, "You just had to listen to the questions, think about it, and then answer them."

This edition of *This Week At Central* is focused on how we help students find their sense of voice and choice. As we daily encounter the world around us, we can't help but find the importance for our citizens to understand the potential power of their voice in local and national matters. At Central, we see this as the way in which we structure our classes and school, to help students realize how important their voice is in the decisions we daily make about education. From that, we know they will leave us with the understanding that they not only have the ability, but also the *responsibility* to be a full member of a community – to share their individual gifts and perspectives about whatever is happening around them.

As always, I find the energy that I receive from our students' ideas and interactions is a truly welcome moment of each day. We are off to an exciting year. Please join us in that journey.

Dianne

IMPORTANT DATES

Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates Newsletters Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!)

www.middletowncityschools.com

(click on Central Academy)

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| Sept. 17 | Skating Party – 6:30 – 8:30 |
| Sept. 23 | Early Release at 2:00 |
| Sept. 28 | Picture Day |
| Oct. 13 | Team Bd. Mtg. 6:30 |

EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

Choice and voice are major components throughout the day here in Mrs. Jantausch's Early Primary class. Interestingly, students are called upon to make choices in most portions of our day, in both academic and social areas. For instance, students have been busy making choices during their independent reading time. Mrs. Brown, our wonderful new literacy coach, joined us this week for a series of lessons on the three ways to read. We discussed that readers sometimes choose to read all of the words in a book. Other times, they might pretend read by retelling a familiar story --- such as The Gingerbread Man. Finally, if a text is much too difficult, they may read the pictures by looking at them and talking to themselves about what they see on the pages. These three ways to read are used by students of all levels. Even emergent readers can pick up some ABC books and be able to read all of the words by using the picture cues.

With this new information in hand, the class set off on choosing independent books, and their methods of reading. *Liv* enjoyed retelling the story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* that she had heard before. *Khalil* and *Trevor* eagerly told stories from the pictures found in their dinosaur book. *Ethan* decided to read all the words in a mystery book featuring the character Cam Jansen. *Haley* also chose to read all the words in the popular Dr. Seuss book, *Hop on Pop*. It was wonderful to see all of them engaged and excited about their books!

I love that this reading time is separate from when they must choose “just right” books. Here, students are encouraged to choose books they are interested in and find the style of reading that suits them best. This interest-based reading really helps build a love of reading for enjoyment. And of course, a love of reading often translates into a love of learning down the road!

In Miss Miller's Early Primary Class the students have been able to use their voice to help create a classroom climate that works for everyone. Every morning we have a meeting where every student has a chance to share something. We created classroom goals/expectations as a class because this gives the students ownership for their classroom, and also allows them to personalize their classroom expectations for one another. There were several great ideas that we used such as *Au'Laila's* idea of how to be great listeners all day. *Mason* also had a great idea for our expectations, which was to keep our hands and our

feet to ourselves. Once we created our expectations, we had to agree on each one and promise to each other to go by the expectations.

We also have a lot of choice in our room. During our Writing Workshop, the students were able to choose what topic they would like to write about, and *Alex* thought for a long time about what topic he was going to choose. When he decided to write about the skate park, he started working really hard with his picture and writing. *Kirsten* also thought for a long time about what to write about, and she came up with a story about her dog. When it was time to share what we have been working on in Writing Workshop, they both were very excited to share their work. It is very important for each student to be able to use their own voice and make choices to help create and enrich their own learning experiences.

The students in **Ms. Roe and Miss Smith's** class are growing in their confidence to use their voices each day. Many of our youngers came to school with "first day jitters" that lasted much longer than that first day. For this reason, we begin every morning with our group circle time known as our Morning Meeting. During this time, students greet one another by name and have the opportunity to share an important event (previous or upcoming) with the class. This gives the students an opportunity to get to know one another better, connect through their similarities, build a sense of community and trust in one another that empowers each one of them to use his/her voice without fear or ridicule.

This week *Katie* shared that she played *Bree's* soccer team. *Alayna* shared that her cat had baby kittens during the night. *Austin* told everyone that he was excited to see *Dallas*, a friend from class, at his first Boy Scout Meeting this week. *Jace* had so much to share! His grandma was here visiting from Florida because he had become a big brother to a new baby sister!

I am excited to announce that **Ms. Roe and Miss Smith's** class earned their first class reward for their first ALL YELLOW day this week as well! This meant that everyone kept his/her behavior card on yellow. They were all yellow shining stars! When the class earns an ALL YELLOW day, the students use their voice to brainstorm a list of options for rewards. Then they vote on what their class reward will be. Each student had a voice in the choice of: a s'more party, a pajama day, a popcorn party, bring your stuffed animal to school day, eating lunch in the classroom or picking a toy from Ms. Roe's goody bag. The chosen reward was . . . a toy from the goody bag! If you see any of our Early Primary friends, please congratulate them on their great behavior choices! I can't wait to hear what they'll choose for their next all yellow day!

As we began the new school year, **Mrs. Uhl's Early Primary Class** was happy to see familiar faces and excited to welcome many new ones. In learning about one another we discovered that in order to have our classroom run smoothly we have to work together and agree on common ideas. A big piece of working as a community of learners is meeting as a group and having conversations about what we all value and need to help us be as successful as we can in school. We also learned that if we don't use our voice and share what is important to us, our values wouldn't be reflected in our school community.

After reading a book about the "*Best Me I Can Be*", we realized we were all experts too! So, we brainstormed what our "expert talent" was. *LaTeria* said that she was good at reading. *Noah* mentioned that he was a good helper. A few days later, some students in our class noticed that we needed jobs in order to keep our room organized. So, we decided to talk about what jobs we thought we needed in our classroom. *Tye* thought it would be a great idea to have a person be a "Nice Pal". The responsibility of that job was to make anyone sad feel better and also to resolve any conflicts between students. In addition to brainstorming jobs, our class discussed some rules and how we thought we should treat one another. *MyOnna* said we should trust one another.

Another unique aspect of Central Academy, in addition to student voice, is student choice. While some parts of our day are set by me, as the teacher, there are also times throughout the day where the students have choice and ownership of their learning. Currently, the students in our class have a choice about which Math Workshop activity they would like to practice each day as well as what center they would like to work at during Project Time. *Isaiah* chose to go to the Number Compare game during Math Workshop while *Hanna* chose to go to the listening center during Project Time. As the year progresses, the students will have more opportunities to contribute their voice and choice into their learning.

Our class is off to a fantastic start! I look forward to watching them work cooperatively and continue to grow as a community of learners.

LATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

In Mrs. Andrade and Miss Zumbahlen's Room, voice and choice are a huge part of the classroom culture. Deciding on our 'Who Dey Rewards' was a perfect example of using our voice. First, let me explain 'Who Deys.' It's not about making a touchdown at Paul Brown Stadium. Rather, it is a positive point earned by a group of students for a job well done (if only the Bengals could do it as well as we do it in our room). Lately, we have been naming these actions as automatic choices. One good example is during our transitions. An entire table works well together to put away their supplies and then waits patiently and attentively showing that they are automatically prepared for learning. Or, a 'Who Dey' could be earned by the entire class during a special (music, gym, art, even library) showing that they are cooperative and respect each other's instructional time in such a way that they earn a five for their combined effort. Each time one of these little 'Who Deys' is earned, the student teacher or table captain puts an orange, black, or white cube into a Bengal's cup. Once the cup is filled, the class earns a reward.

Next, the class had to decide (brainstorm) and list options for appropriate Who Dey Rewards. If only extra recess did it every time, how simple life would be. But when you have a taste of voicing your likes and interests such as the students at Central, it gets really interesting. One of the things we took into consideration when children started calling out all of the tasty delights is the district's new healthy initiative, so we switched our thinking about edible treats. The list of possibilities ranged from Favorite Team Shirt Day to Pin the Tail on the Bengal. In the end, we wound up with ten possible choices.

You might be asking how we chose the order. We is the key word. Each child (*Emily, Hayden, Rowan, Austin, Madison, Jake, Amalia, Allison, Daniel, Briella, Day'Sean, Jocelynn, Gabe H., Anna, Aly P., Anastasia, Briley, Gabe B., Savanna, Chris R., Kya, Chris J., Aaron, Chelsea F., and Chelsea S.*) voted for their favorite choices. Four choices tied which made us then do a tie breaker. Thankfully, we completed the ranking today.

Ask your child the importance of being part of a class that respects your voice and has lots of choice incorporated in daily transactions. It's all about making your voice count in our room, even when it comes to something as simple as earned rewards.

MMM...One voice, all it takes is one voice...in our room, we like to start off our paragraphs with a song that relates to the topic that we're writing about. Could you guess the theme from this old Barry Manilow song? If you guessed "Voice", you're right!

Welcome to Mrs. Van Ostrand's and Mrs. Amburgey's (a.k.a. VanBurgey's) room. Joining us this year, we have our tutor Stephanie Zahora, and our teacher interns Lizzy Price and Sarah Qua. In our room, we have been learning to use our voices. From the start, 49 voices have come together as one. The

students started the year off by creating their own set of classroom rules. One rule is staying on task. We asked the students “What does staying on task mean to you?” *Bobby* said, “being in the right spot at the right time”. *Caleb* said, “This is a learning classroom, so we want to stay focused”.

Then, we had a discussion about bathroom procedures. While we are one big teaming room, our students occasionally carry out procedures according to their homeroom (Amburgey or VanOstrand). There was much debate about how each homeroom should handle bathroom procedures. *Zach* (a future politician) decided a compromise would be the way to go. He said, “At Central, do we all have to do it the same way? What if one side does it one way and the other side does it another way?” It’s wonderful watching the students find their voices. Until next time, use your voice. GO CENTRAL!

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

A favorite part of the day in **Mrs. Larison’s Intermediate** class is when we all gather and sit on the floor for a class meeting. We call this time Circle Time because the students and I sit in a circle. This is a time for students to share about themselves, to give compliments and appreciations to others, and to share frustrations and concerns. We pass around a small, beanbag turtle as a way to indicate whose turn it is to talk. Circle is a safe environment because what is shared in Circle must stay there; therefore, students feel that they can talk freely about themselves and about classroom situations. We learn about each other’s lives and how they feel about things.

For instance, we all know that *Brooke* has a dog, named Shelby, because she often shares stories about what the two of them do together. We learned that *Elijah* went to Cincinnati to watch the Labor Day fireworks display because he excitedly recounted the events of the evening to us. *Violet* gave an appreciation to *Madysen* for helping her type on the computer. I have learned so much about the students through this simple act of sharing. Circle gives students an opportunity to voice what is on their minds and they seem to truly enjoy having a time during the day to share with others. Knowing that your voice is just as important as anyone else’s voice is important, and Circle Time is a special time in our day for all voices to be heard.

In **Muenchenburgey Land**, the students have had many opportunities over the past three weeks to use their voice and make choices about their learning! We began the year by creating our Classroom Constitution, where the students created statements that reflect their ideas of how we will all function together in our community. First, the students independently reflected on how they learn best. They then each shared their ideas with their table groups and found ideas that they all had in common. From there, the students shared their ideas in our large community group, and we created guidelines that we *all* agree will enable the most learning to occur in our classroom community. We have all signed the Classroom Constitution, indicating that we will hold ourselves, and each other accountable to the statements we created and agreed to!

The students have also given very valuable input about the procedures and expectations during specific activities in the classroom. They have helped us create anchor charts, which identify the norms that are expected during the different parts of our day. For example, one of the norms they identified for our Self-Selected Reading time is that the room should be silent with everybody “real” reading. During our Writer’s Workshop time, the students have identified that they should not interrupt any peer or teacher conferences that are occurring. Another example of a norm the students created for our Book Club time is that their discussions should only revolve around the book they’re reading. Because the students have had voice and choice in these norms, they have taken more ownership of them!

Another opportunity for the students to voice their ideas and make choices about their learning has been during our theme time. The theme for this trimester is *Counting on Us*, with the essential question being, *How do I count?* The students shared their ideas about what this theme meant to them and then began brainstorming possible research topics that would go with this theme. *Alexis F.*, *Gracie*, and *Lily* have chosen to research poverty and are in the process of discovering how people become poor and how the community can help those people. *William*, *Marcus*, and *Matthew* have decided to research heart disease, including the causes of heart disease, how to prevent it, and the organizations that support people with heart disease. Animal abuse is the selected topic for *Au'Lauren*, *Amari*, and *Diondra*. This team is discovering the reasons people abuse animals, how abused animals find good homes, and what the community can do to help these animals. These are just a few of the theme topics the students have selected to research based on their interpretation and understanding of our theme, *Counting on Us*. We are so pleased with how our year has started! The students are shining, and we are very proud of them and their wonderful ideas. We look forward to getting their input into the many decisions we will make in our classroom throughout the year!

Finding our student voice in **Ms. Thinnies' Intermediate** classroom is a large part of our classroom democracy. Students began deciding many community ideas and decisions at the very beginning of the year. *Bri Johnson* volunteered to write down our Social Contract and Workshop Expectations during one of many class meetings. The students offered many ideas for both items, and everyone had an equal voice in what was decided by the class. A few aspects of our class Social Contract are: share materials, and express honesty with one another. The students then signed the agreement to show their responsibility to the important community aspects that our class values. Ideas that were discussed as important values of our Workshop time are: follow directions at all times (no running in the classroom- safety first), and respect one another despite individual differences.

Students have also found their voice by reaching a consensus on their Investigations Math work in their teams. The teams write equations and multi-problems to share from their Math Journals with each other. Students are working collaboratively analyzing each other's work, and then students have to agree or have consensus first with the problem they choose to represent on their team's whiteboard. The students volunteer to represent their team in leading math discourse in the center of the class. The rest of the class provides positive feedback for the student work, and makes connections to their own student response. Many higher thinking skills are present while the Investigations and CGI Math instruction is delivered through an active student learning environment.

Students have many opportunities to experience student choice in the classroom as well. Students are able to choose their own Theme Time topics to research and later present. After Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) the students are able to choose daily books of interest for them and place those self-selected books in team book bins. Some self-selected books include informational text such as books on different animals and space that are also being used during Theme Time.

Students are also working through Dr. Beane's research, with the help of students that were involved, in Dr. Beane's lesson: *Alexis Gibbs*, *S.A. Collins*, and *Yulia Tyson*. These student helpers are leading the rest of the class through his work on democracy in the classroom and in the school curriculum. Dr. Beane's ideas include opportunities for students to choose the curriculum they want to learn by creating student self and world questions. These questions later develop themes to create curriculum that is of student interest. These themes will later be used by the Intermediate Teacher Team to create lessons on Standard Based Learning through learning contracts and other integrated activities. So, in **Ms. Thinnies'** classroom community, there are many democratic opportunities for student choice and voice!

MIDDLE SCHOOL

More so than any other part of the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights, the five freedoms of the First Amendment symbolize what is most sacred about America's historic commitment to create a free and responsible society. Yet in the United States most schools are leaving behind the five freedoms. At Central we cherish and encourage those five freedoms. One way that happens in **Mrs. Hodson's humanities classes** is by allowing our students a voice.

The First Amendments are about paying attention to balancing the rights of one with the rights of many, and realizing the promises that it gives us. The significance of the First Amendment isn't only about our individual rights; it is also about working on being responsible in guarding the rights of others. This is true even for those with whom we most deeply disagree.

The Middle School recently held its first retreat, to give our students a chance to bond, reflect upon, and communicate our values and culture. Some of our oldest students planned and led that retreat. *Braden, Alexis, Jacob H., Samantha, Mikala, Kashley* and *Paige* did an excellent job. Students in middle school are taking on more challenges and responsibility in all academic areas. It is clear throughout the day, that students feel they can talk openly, both in agreement and disagreement, knowing that their voice counts.

What's your take on YOUR five freedoms? Where do you see those rights being useful — maybe even essential — in your life? Where (and when) do you wish you had more of them?

The middle school students in **Kristi Joseph's** math class use their voice and choice while using math contracts. The students have choice in selecting their daily independent math activities from their contract. Part of the contract involves an independent math project they were able to choose themselves. The students were encouraged to propose their own independent math project if they so desired. *Corey* used his voice and choice and proposed his own independent math project. *Kameron* and *Jonathon* are enjoying math contract time and quickly become engaged in the math activities of their choice.

After the wonderful opportunity of working with Dr. James Beane, **Kristi Joseph's** Humanities class has also been involved in voice and choice during their independent research. The students worked individually or in small groups to create a proposal for independent research. *Aleah* voiced her concern with one of the themes developed through the work with Dr. Beane. Her voice addressed not only her concern but the concern of several of her classmates as well. Her willingness to speak out led to a beneficial discussion.

The beginning of this school year has been very exciting for all the middle school. With the addition of the eighth grade and a new crop of sixth graders, we have increased to 75 strong. **Mrs. Smith's home room class** is primarily made of sixth and seventh graders. I have to admit that I have the best homeroom ever. The students are self-directed and very studious. They have a unique opportunity to use their "voice and choice" in math class. The students start each day with a short review and OAT warm-up. After they complete these activities with their breakfast, they are allowed to work on independent choice math topics. Several topics are available and students may choose to work with a special group of friends on their favorite.

All members of the groups are responsible to carry their weight and be productive citizens. *Leah and Alison* have chosen “Made to Measure” focusing on different units of measure including nonstandard as well as converting and understanding the use of metric and English systems. *Ayreonna, Austin, Izzi and Kaleb* are working in “Packages & Polygons” which investigates the properties of various solids. They also will examine the importance of Euler’s formula. *Mikey, Davey, Andrew, Asia and Johnna* are “Comparing Quantities” by investigating patterns, developing strategies for problem solving and informally developing strategies to solve equations. This is the precursor to formal Algebra. I am really very proud of all my students and especially my hard-working morning crew!

ART, MUSIC, MATH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In the **art room** students also get a chance to have a choice and share their voice. I do this by presenting an artist or a process and having the students decide as a class what they want to do with the information. First, we set a goal that corresponds to the Ohio state standards for Fine Arts, and decide how we are going to meet our goal. We think about possible projects and needed materials. Then we take a vote and see which project has the highest interest level.

Our first unit has been learning about Wassily Kandinsky, a Russian artist who creates impressionistic works of art. He uses lines and shapes with color to create his compositions. We first looked at different types of lines and shapes. The students noticed that lines could go different directions and could be drawn differently (zigzagged, curly, Etc.) We discovered shapes by making lines. A shape is a line that connects to itself. Then, we talked about two different shape forms: Organic and Geometric. Organic shapes are formed in nature and are not named. Geometric shapes are named and can also be described using mathematic formulas.

Our goal for this unit is to use the information to make a piece of artwork for Art to Remember. Art to Remember is a company that allows families to buy their artwork on different products such as mugs or key chains. More information will be sent home about this once the artwork is completed. Students brainstormed how to complete this artwork. Some students wanted to add their names, so we talked about block/bubble letters. Other students wanted to use the shapes and lines we had learned about. *Emma* in Ms. Larison’s class decided to use different pictures of things that she liked and her name. She is making a self-portrait as a background behind her name; and although it is not finished it looks great already.

I feel that it is very important for every student to find his or her voice in art. I encourage the students to make their own artwork! It is fine to take another artist’s idea, and then add something to it to make it truly your own. Art is a great way for students to express themselves visually!

In a literal way, students in **Mrs. Hick’s music classe** are always using their voices during music class! This can be through singing songs or speaking rhymes. Students often also use their voices to make choices in music classroom activities.

In Early Primary, each class has created its own “verse” for the song called “Down By The Bay.” We used the book version of the song to see how rhyming patterns were established; and then created ideas within that structure. When we move to music to help learn how to keep a steady beat, students use their

own movement ideas. Did you know that you can show a steady beat by gently pulling your own hair or by flopping your shoes together? Never a dull moment!

Among other things, Late Primary students are working on their hand drumming and mallet percussion technique and have used their names as a springboard for improvising rhythms of their choice in various activities.

The Intermediate classes are learning several singing games/street rhymes. (You know, those things that we used to do to entertain ourselves and our friends before electronic devices were so commonplace?) When singing the songs and playing the games, students get to choose their own groups and also change group members often. They also make musical decisions about how fast they want the tempo to be or how long the musical introduction should be.

The Middle School choir members are off to a great start and are working well together! Even though we are already learning various pieces of music, soon they will help decide what other music we will work on this year.

Even though, as a **Math Coach (Mrs. Brubaker)**, I do not have a classroom, I still work with lots of students and teachers. I plan math lessons with teachers, and then reflect with those same teachers after we have team-taught the lesson. I am in and out of classrooms all day long. Every room has its own culture and has spent the beginning of the year creating their unique community. The students and teachers have spent time determining how they are going to live, learn, and work together as a community this year.

In Mrs. Thinnes' room during the sharing of math strategies, the students agreed to wait for their respect so that all students' voices are heard and valued. Already the students are training and teaching one another to value each other's voice by going to the share chair and waiting to speak until everyone shows them that they are ready to listen to their mathematics. In Mrs. Larison's room the students choose the CGI problem (math story problem) that interests and challenges them, as well as choosing the tools they need to solve their problem; using the strategy of their choice.

Math is all about problem solving; and finding your voice is something that is fostered during math instruction. The students are expected to learn how to communicate their strategies, ask questions of other students and the teacher, and debate each other's answers and reasoning – all of this help students find their voice. A key to being a successful mathematician is to be flexible in your thinking, being able to solve problems in more than one way – our fostering and respecting the different ways students approach, attempt, and solve problems enhances and reinforces student choice.

Mrs. Carroll and Mr. Perdue have been in and out of classrooms throughout the school. Our school theme for the first trimester is, "How Do I Count?" We have both noticed the many bulletin boards and signs that let the students show and discuss how they count. One large bulletin board just outside the front office is a dialogue board, where any member of our school community can write his/her feelings about the theme, as well as respond the writing of others. Many of our students have taken the opportunity to share. *Sommer* wrote that I count because I have a voice. Another student anonymously wrote how s/he counts because Central Academy cares what I think.

We are both outside in the mornings each day to greet the students as they arrive. **Roger** has noticed how his new safety patrol members *Brianna* and *Lizzy* remind students to use the crosswalk and express

safety concerns about parents dropping their children off in places other than the drop off zone. *Matthew* and *Amari* used their voices to find out what time to report to their posts of 7:45. This is 5 minutes before parents drop off their children. **Joy** noticed how *Tonia* and *S.A.* were smiling as they greet students each morning and afternoon. They are off to a fabulous start of the year.