

## *Class Acts*

# **Benjamin Martin students make historic discoveries**

By Jessica Banov  
Staff writer

**Davious Moore and Rebecca Keenan carefully stacked logs on top of each other to build a cabin on the classroom carpet. They placed the cabin next to the log hotel and the log playground in their make-believe ghost town.**



Mary Horner looks through a microscope held by second-grader **Mackenzie Vergari** at the science center at Benjamin Martin Elementary School.

**“They don’t have real ghosts,” Davious explained. “They call them ghost towns because there’s nobody there,” added Rebecca.**

**With a complete town, they grabbed rulers to measure each of the log buildings: 4 inches high and about 8 inches long. Davious and Rebecca didn’t know it, but they were learning history and math at the same time.**

The log cabin activity was one of many activities the children at Benjamin Martin Elementary School have participated in as they study the United States. Throughout the school, each grade level has adopted a portion of United States history to

study. The schoolwide theme of “Journeying through time with our great states” started last week and will continue through Feb. 15.

**Davious, who is in the third grade, and Rebecca, who is in the second grade, are studying the westward movement, to include cowboys, pioneers and wagon caravans.**

The kindergartners are taking up Hawaii and Alaska. Fourth-graders are exploring the Southeast. First-graders are looking at the colonial movement and the fight for independence.

Each teacher has come up with dozens of activities to incorporate the theme into the standard curriculum. **Many create centers, such as the log cabin activity, where children can progress at their own pace. “This environment allows every child to be successful every day at something,” said Lisa Stewart, who teaches a multiage class of second and third graders. Stewart’s room has about 20 learning centers.**

In another room, first-grader Desarae Lesley draped a fuschia feather boa around her shoulders, a prop sometimes used by singers, and grabbed a microphone. She sang the song “Silent Friend,” about the letter “e.” Two other girls put on cowboy hats and played a game of “quick draw,” where they competed to see who could identify geometric shapes the fastest.

“Thematic teaching,” as it is known to educators, is a key part of Benjamin Martin’s Accelerated Schools philosophy. Several times a year, the school weaves a theme into every class. They have studied American Indians and plan to study ecosystems.

**“Thematic teaching gives us unity of purpose and pulls us together as a school,” Stewart said. “Just as kids are on different levels, so are teachers. We can help each other.”**

At the end of the United States unit, the school will have a culminating event where classrooms show off what they’ve learned during the unit.

## **Accelerated Schools**

Benjamin Martin’s Accelerated Learning Academy has been a school of choice for four years. The Accelerated Schools philosophy is employed in seven other North Carolina schools and about 1,000 schools across the country.

On Friday, about 40 educators from Virginia and North Carolina were at Benjamin Martin to observe how teachers integrate the Accelerated Schools philosophy into the classroom. The visitors chatted with students and teachers and gleaned ideas to use in their own schools.

Accelerated Schools philosophy builds on children’s strengths by treating every child as if they are gifted, said Eleanor Herr, director of the Partnership for Accelerated Schools, based in Durham. Children take part in activities that traditionally have been reserved only for students identified as gifted and talented.

“What we’ve done for gifted kids can really be used for everyone,” Herr said. “It’s the belief and commitment that kids have strengths and interests. We have a lot more mileage with that.”

Barbara Anderson, a teacher at Benjamin Martin, said students’ test scores have risen at the school with the Accelerated Schools philosophy. Anderson also coordinates the implementation of schoolwide themes.

“Our goal is to keep going higher and higher,” said Anderson, who added that teachers make sure not to teach to the test. “Being an accelerated school, children take control of their learning. They’re more engaged.”

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