Mission Hill School News

Letter from Mission Hill

More Than a Good Teacher

Dear Families, Staff, Friends and Students,

A friend of mine told me about an article connecting a good teacher to the future income of his/her students. Here’s an excerpt of the article by Nicholas Kristof from the New York Times. “... but a landmark new research paper underscores that the difference between a strong teacher and a weak teacher lasts a lifetime. Having a good fourth-grade teacher makes a student 1.25 percent more likely to go to college, the research suggests, and 1.25 percent less likely to get pregnant as a teenager. Each of the students will go on as an adult to earn, on average, $25,000 more over a lifetime — or about $700,000 in gains for an average size class — all attributable to that ace teacher back in the fourth grade. That’s right: A great teacher is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to each year’s students, just in the extra income they will earn.” You can read this entire article at www.nytimes.com/2012/01/12/opinion/kristof-the-value-of-teachers.html.

I’d known for some time that if a child has a good teacher for three years in a row, the chances of that child being highly successful in life are great. The article above renewed my thinking about good teachers in relation to Mission Hill. Students at Mission Hill School get to have the same good teacher for more than one year. With the exception of changes in staffing, this is generally true. A benefit of being with a teacher for two years is that a deep relationship to a learner (and whole person) is developed in a long-lasting way. There is less learning time lost in transition from one year to the next. The learning just continues. When a school has a stable staff with many great teachers, children have the benefit of enduring relationships among multiple adults and have opportunities to revisit people connected to their learning over time.

How do we know that our teachers are good (or great)? Lead teachers are reviewed every other year. The review includes looking at student work, observing in the classroom, viewing and discussing a video of the teacher, and discussing results of a survey from peers. Everyone gets feedback on areas of growth. If concerns about the teacher are present, a course of action begins. The first action involves clear feedback with recommendations, reflection, and time for change. If the change in behavior or classroom environment is not sufficient a teacher may be released. The time this process takes depends on the concerns raised. When a staff member leaves for any reason, it is difficult for our school community. However, sometimes it is important and necessary in order for each child to have a teacher he or she deserves.

Great teachers and successful students are certainly on the minds of staff right now as we begin the hiring process to add teachers to our school. I am eager to come together as a new team of great teachers that Mission Hill students will learn from for many years to come.

~Ayla Gavins

REMININDERS

May
Thu. 5/17: Adult Health Night 5:45
5/29-31: Promotion Meetings
Thu. 5/31: English Language Development mtg.
Thurs. 5/31: School Picture Day

June
Thu. 6/7: 8th Grade Art Show
Fri. 6/8: Exhibitions and 5th Grade Recollections
Sat. 6/9: MHS Yard Sale
Thu. 6/14: Graduation
Fri. 6/15: Field Day
5 to 7 year-olds

Room 203
Last week Kelise and Saeeda graced the Friday Share stage, and led our community in song through drumming. As my eyes paced the audience, what I saw was encouraging. Adults, older students and their younger peers alike bopped their heads to the beat, swayed in their seats and had looks of wonderment on their faces as these ladies confidently and seemingly effortlessly drummed their hearts out.

In the beginning of the year we worked consistently at having a drumming time each week to introduce various beats. Unfortunately that time ended up being removed from our schedule. However, the learning clearly did not stop. As we sang songs each morning, Jo-Ann and I noticed students drumming the beats on the floor.

Several weeks ago, several students decided to show what they knew. They were amazing! Not only have they shown true mastery of one particular beat, but have moved on, extending it and adding their own spin and “riffs”. So, when you walk past Room 203 and you hear the drums filling our air space, don’t assume it’s Jo-Ann or me. It just could be one of our many drummers!

~Jada Brown, & Jo-Ann Hawkesworth

Room 204
The story of the Little Red Hen has been on the minds of the Parachuting Snails class. The students have been listening to many stories and comparing and contrasting them. So far we have read six different versions of the book. The children worked in small groups to take a close look at the books. In each group they had to write down the title of each book, the author, the characters, what the Little Red Hen baked, and if she shared.

Our findings were very interesting. In all six books no arrangement of characters were the same. All books had the Little Red Hen. One book had the Little Red Hen, a Cat, a Mouse, and a Dog. Another book had the Little Red Hen, a Sheep, a Horse, and a Dog.

In three books she shared her food and in three books she did not. The children came to realize that there were some things about each story that were predictable and some things that were often a surprise. In two books she baked a cake, but in the rest she baked breakfast, pizza, matzo, and bread.

The children also looked closely at where the Little Red Hen lived, how the characters were ordered, viewpoint, and how all the animals might have felt.

~Kathy Clunis D’Andrea

Room 205
Leia has arranged a trip on a T boat for us. The children are incredulous as the rumor spreads: We’re really going on a boat?? We are. The children know that a T boat is like a T train or bus: it takes you places you need to go. We will take the train to the Aquarium stop and then get aboard to travel to Charlestown Navy Pier and back.

We arrive just as the 11:00 boat is pulling away from the dock. No matter: we will have snack and watch the seals outside the Aquarium. What we don’t expect is to find people in the seal tank, too: they arrive wearing tall rubber boots and with buckets and other tools in their hands. They spread out across the rocks and crouch down just above the water. It isn’t long before the seals come to greet them and gobble snacks. What is the job of these people? Why is it important? Another Aquarium worker outside the tank narrates what’s happening. We can’t believe it when a person kisses a seal right on the mouth!

And then we are headed to the boat. A conversation begins about seasickness, and we revisit what we learned when an acupuncturist came to visit our class during our Ancient China study: there is a spot on our wrists we can press to settle our bellies. But as soon as...
the boat turns from the dock we forget all about feeling yucky: we are on the water! Look at the harbor!

~Melissa Tonachel & Leia Baylor

7 to 9 Year-Olds

Room 201

“What do you want to do when you grow up, and why?” Ali asked his eighth grade friend Maurice. This interview was a small part of Room 201’s study of biographies. Each student chose a person to learn about, conducted an interview, and will use the information to write an original biography. Some students picked family members: Uly learned that his father had eaten lunch with Joe DiMaggio, and Eli learned that his father loved school as a child and is proud of his children. Others chose classmates, and buzzed around the room asking questions about hobbies, families, and hopes for the future. They marveled in their new discoveries about the lives of their old friends.

As students worked, they drew upon the many picture book biographies we had read as a class as inspiration. Salma explained that she knew exactly how to order her biography about her sister Sumaya because biographies tell the stories of peoples’ lives from their births to the present or their deaths. Others recalled our discussion about role models, and told their interviewer that they hope to inspire others someday.

When we began studying biographies, I asked the students, “Why do authors retell stories about peoples’ lives?” Through writing biographies, students are forming their own answers to the question.

~Lydia Krooss

Room 207

It was Thursday morning when I witnessed it. There were math choices out and a 2nd grader and a 3rd grader sat down to play Tapatan. Tapatan is a logic game in which you have to get your three pieces in a row and block your opponent from doing the game. They sat down and right before my eyes, it happened. Dylan turned into…a teacher! Here’s how it all happened:

“Why are you letting me win?” Zachary asked.

“I’m letting you win so I can kinda show you how to play.”

They play and Dylan tells him every move to make and forfeits moves that would allow him to win himself.

“I don’t like that. Go hard on me!” Zachary says.

“You sure?” asks Dylan

“Yes! I want to REALLY play.” assures Zachary.

They play. Dylan doesn’t say a word and beats Zachary with ease.


They play again and Dylan only gives him a few hints here and there, not holding back good moves he finds for himself.

At the end of this unwitting lesson, Dylan had won all the games. Zachary however, was a winner too. He not only learned a new game, but he saw the value of learning from a peer.

This situation is evidence of many of our beliefs as educators: mixed-age classrooms benefit all students, children can learn through play, and that teaching is not only done by the “teacher” nor is learning only done by the student.

“Come on Dylan” says Zachary. “Let’s play this game. I don’t know how to play this one either!”

~ Jenerra Williams, Amina Michel-Lord & Jesse Begelfer

9 to 11 Year-Olds

Room 202

Last Tuesday our class had a challenging day. There were several small disruptions during work periods, complaints from the kids about each other, and a few complaints from other adults about rowdiness and attitude. We finished the day with a brief closing discussion about mindfulness and respect. On Wednesday we began the day with our morning meeting and the topics of conversation were taking responsibility and learning from our mistakes. After I began the discussion, the class asked if I would leave the room so that they might try to talk about their feelings on their own. They called me back after a few minutes and filled me in, and as the day passed, the issues that students discussed continued to be referred to. On Thursday afternoon I
thought I would take advantage of the dynamic the class had established and asked two fifth graders to facilitate a follow-up discussion without me. This discussion was to lead to a writing assignment for homework. The class wrote about the discussion they had and about the feelings they had that related to their sense of responsibility as members of a community. Several students wrote about how they did not like feeling ignored by their peers talking, mumbling, or laughing when they were trying to say something to the class during a lesson or discussion. Others wrote about wanting their peers to look at them when they were speaking, not at “clay or something else in their hands.” Mostly, students referred to the need to listen more carefully to each other, or as two of them wrote, to “walk the walk, not just talk the talk.”

~James McGovern

Grades 6, 7 & 8

Room 206

After a bit of an hiatus, here are the End of the Week Reflections from the Falcons class.

“Today I got to watch Frankenstein for my elective with Rayon and Alexa.”

“On Thursday we had MCAS. After, we had to clean up but right after that we went outside. On Friday we went to different classes at the end of the day. I got sent to Jacobs class, it was really fun!”

“On Wednesday we had wellness, I played 50, I won the first two games.”

“This week for yoga we learned about our muscles.”

“What I learned in math class is algebra and I thought it was going to be hard but all it is is this: \(^7 = 12\).

The \(^5 = 5!\)”

“One great suggestion I have for the school is to clean the lunch tables between lunches. I really want to some time for Legends of the Game (Elective) watch a documentary on Doug Flutie.”

~Nakia Keizer

Room 211

No news this week.

Room 209

This spring, the 7th and 8th graders are participating in a nine-week curriculum at Urban Improv, an educational theater program for middle school students. For nearly twenty years now, Urban Improv has drawn on imagination and creativity to help students develop problem solving, decision-making, cooperation, and leadership skills. Each week, the kids learn songs, perform with professional actors, and create scenes in small groups.

Although this is the first year of middle school Urban Improv for the 8th graders, the 7th graders attended last year as 6th graders. They recognize that as a group, they are more mature and able to attend to serious discussions and share their ideas respectfully.

The kids are eager to participate in. They have been presented with scenarios addressing cyber bullying, response to authority, the desire to defend family, premeditated versus spontaneous fights, and the prevalence of violence. Professional actors begin a scene based on the day’s topic. The scene is frozen at a key decision making point; students take turns jumping in to show how they would resolve the problem. Please check in with your child about the Urban Improv program. You may not have realized how energizing and reflective theater experiences can be!

~Ann Ruggiero & Elsa Head

Room 208

No news this week.

Hot Topics

Courtney’s Corner

Check out Courtney’s Corner, outside Room 101, for information on various programs and resources for you and your family.

Rincón de Courtney

Mira la información que esta fuera en el “Rincón de Courtney” en salón 101 para información sobre varios programas y recursos para ti y tu familia.

Box Tops

Keep sending in those Box Tops for Education! We collect them all year long (and even over the summer) and each one adds up. Drop them off in the library, the main office, or directly to
Courtney in Room 101.

Get your camp physical!
Don’t forget that camps all
require a medical examination
by a licensed physician within
12 months preceding camp. This
is a state requirement for all
children attending camp, so
book your child’s appointment
now. Remember, Georgie needs
updated copies of physicals as
well, so drop a copy in her
mailbox after your appointment.

CAMPS: See Courtney for
applications and details about
these and other camps

Camp Joy
Boston residents ages 3-22 with
disabilities and their siblings ages
3-7 may register for BCYF’s
Camp Joy, July 16- August 10.
This camp provides structured
daily opportunities for campers to
make new friends, have fun, learn
and grow during the summer
months. First come, first served.

Love Animals?
Zoo Camp is for you! Spend a
week or two at Franklin Park Zoo
behind the scenes, learning all
about the animals and how to care
for them. Campers 6-13 will get
to learn about a different family of
animals each day, and even get to
pet some! Financial aid is available until May 20th.

Camp Ponkiwanee – something
for everyone
This camp is for 6-13 year olds
and offers a general camp
program each session or campers
can pick from specialized
programs like drama, art, sports,
or crazy science creations.
Financial aid is available until
May 20th.

Serve and Volley!
Sportsman’s Tennis Club has
summer camp programs for: 10 &
Under Tennis, Beginner,
Intermediate and Competitive
players. They offer full and half
day programs. In addition to
tennis, campers will go
swimming, create arts and crafts,
play recreational sports, and take
field trips.

Spend summer on the Charles
River
For as little as $1 you can spend
the summer learning to sail!
Community Boating Boston is for
any child 10-18 who can swim 75
yards and has parent/guardian
permission to participate. Take
sailing classes or just drop in to
use the boats during open sailing.

Boston Explorers
Former MHS teacher Alphonse
Litz invites you to spend the
summer exploring Boston with
his camp, Boston Explorers.
There are three, one-week
sessions in August to choose from
where you will do woodworking,
cook your own food, swim, and
explore Boston and the Harbor
Islands. Financial aid is available
but space is limited.

Boston Nature Center
Love spending time with Andrew
and learning about nature? Spend
summer at the BNC - a nature-
based day camp right here in the
city for ages 5-16! Each week
features a unique theme tailored
for every age group and each day
is packed with outdoor activities,
science exploration, arts & crafts,
and camp songs!

Affordable Sleep Away camp in
scenic VT
Like to be outside? Enjoy
camping under the stars? Then
Earthen Vessels camp is for you! 11-
12 year olds can spend a week up at
the Vermont camp mountain hiking,
swimming, painting, dancing,
cooking, exploring the stars, playing
soccer, and so much more! Camp is
just $25 for the week and there is a
bus from Boston up to Vermont. 13-14
year olds can do the same, but for two
weeks and it is only $50. There are
limited slots and they are going fast.

Agassiz Village
Located in Poland, ME on a beautiful
400-acre lake-front property, kids ages
8-15 can enjoy affordable, fun and
educational overnight summer camp
opportunities that develop character,
life-skills and self esteem. You can
choose from one or two week sessions
and there is financial aid available in
addition to the already reduced rate for
all campers. Bus transportation from
Boston to Maine is FREE.

Brantwood Camp
Overnight camp in New Hampshire
for children ages 11-15. The five
Brantwood ideals: Honesty, Loyalty,
Cooperation, Good Sportsmanship,
and Unselfishness are honored by both
campers and staff. Spend the summer
hiking, swimming, canoeing,
and having camp-outs. Transportation
from Boston provided.

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