

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Child Street

A Coalition School

Dear Mission Hill School Friends, Families, Students and Staff,

Last Friday and Saturday, seven Mission Hill staff members attended the Fall Forum, a national conference. What attracts people to this conference every year are the 10 common principals of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Each educator at the Fall Forum is unique in so many ways and yet, we have like minds. These are the common principals we all aspire to in our work:

Learning to use one's mind well

Schools should not be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

Less is more, depth over coverage

The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge... The aphorism "less is more" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of

thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort to merely cover content.

Goals apply to all students

The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary.

Personalization

Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students in the high school and middle school and no more than 20 in the elementary school.

Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach

The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services.

Demonstration of mastery

Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks.

A tone of decency and trust

The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress

values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance).

Commitment to the entire school

The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

Resources dedicated to teaching and learning

Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include student loads that promote personalization, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff, and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent.

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REMINDERS

November

Wed. 11/21, 9:15 - Family

Breakfast - Who Counts?

Wed. 11/21, 1:30 dismissal

11/22 & Fri. 11/23 - No School

Thanksgiving

December

Thu. Dec. 6, 5 - 7:30 - Governance
Board mtg.

Thu. Dec. 13, 5:45 - 7 - Family
Night - Meeting Our Neighbors

Fri. 12/7, 6 PM - MHS

Coffee House

12/13 - 14 - MHS Book Fair

From the Classrooms

3 and 4 year-olds

Room 108

When we signed the Mission Hill School Home/School compact earlier this fall, one of the things that I agreed to was to “participate in professional development opportunities that improve teaching and learning”. Last week, I traveled to Atlanta Georgia to do just that. I attended and presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC is the largest group of early childhood education professionals in the nation. I was eager to attend to help promote quality play in children’s lives today, and to urge NAEYC to take a strong stance against the Race to the Top (and the push down of developmentally inappropriate standards into early childhood classrooms).

In the last few years, while I was away from MHS, I deepened my connection with TRUCE (Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children’s Entertainment) and also became the director of a nonprofit project, Defending the Early Years. Both of these organizations have at the core, a mission that includes teachers as advocates and activists. Now, back at MHS, I am thrilled to be able to teach young children even as I continue my activism. I believe now, more than ever, that teachers have an obligation to speak out about policies that are not good for children. I am honored to be at a democratic

school that respects all voices and that encourages children and adults to be agents of change.

On a related note: Just before I left for Atlanta, our students in Room 108 made their voices heard as we voted to break the tie for our class name. As you may remember, we had narrowed the choices to The Caterpillars and The Rocks. And the winner is... The Rocks!

~Geraldyn McLaughlin
& Donna Winder

Kindergarten

Room 106

In the Butterflies class we have been talking about using our voice to make change. We read the book *If I were President*, by Catherine Stier. I asked the children to think about things they would do if they were President. Tafari said, “I would buy hotdogs.” Anna said, “I would help them (the people) get back their house.” Shane said, “I would protect the people.” And Luis said, “I would get the attention of everyone.”



We continued our conversation about how we can make change and become changemakers. I asked them what we could teach our community about. Without hesitation, the idea of trash came

up. We could help people to not litter. We could make signs. We could perform at the Coffee House. These were all ideas they had.

We then invited Wendy from SLUG to help us make worm bins. We talked about why worms are important and how worms are helpful to trash.

We made a book together on How to Make Worm Bins. They chronicled the steps so that other classes could make them as well. The students also talked about visiting other classes to inform people about how worms are important to trash. Luis summed it up very well. He said, “The worms eat stuff that you don’t eat and would throw in the dumpster.”

~Kathy Clunis D'Andrea

Room 107

Last week's election day was met with great excitement. Instead of continuing to take surveys about ourselves, we chose to change the subject to the presidential candidates. After voting for who they believed the next president should be, it was clear that only one candidate came out on top, with all the votes! It was interesting to listen to what each student had to say about the candidate for whom they were not voting as they voted. For example: “Well I don’t like him.” “I don’t believe anything he says.” “He’s not a nice man.” While some say that children are unable to learn about government at this age, this is clear evidence that they know

more and are more in tune than we think.

After our election day celebration, we were excited to see that the results from our classroom survey matched that of the real elections. Since then the excitement about the presidency has risen to new heights. The fascination with the White House continues to grow and talks of building one are brewing. We have been busy building a podium, window and desk from cardboard boxes. Following their curiosity, we read that the White House took eight years to build, and that George Washington never lived there. In addition, there are a bowling alley, movie theater and a putting green on the premises!

Finally, we have written and signed our classroom Constitution into law. Being dressed to impress, we used quill pens for authenticity and took many pictures. Come by and see our governmental replicas in progress and read our Constitution.

*~Jada Brown
& JoAnn Hawkesworth*

Room 109

The Magic Dragons have been story telling and story acting for six weeks now. On October 1st, two children told their first stories. We sat with my laptop, and I wrote down what they said, word for word, with as little prompting as possible. Later on, with the whole group back together on the rug, the stories were read to the class. The storytellers chose actors, and the

children acted out both stories line by line.

This is still pretty much what the routine looks like today, yet the Magic Dragons are continuously adding to and refining a shared culture of storytelling. In early October, responding to fighting scenes in some stories, we developed stage rules to guide our interactions on stage. If there is fighting in a story, the children know to hold themselves at least an arms length away from their opponent. The idea to bow for the audience popped up several weeks later, when one child prompted the actors to “stand in a line and bow”. This morning, James told a story about his family landing in a land of candy. The audience was so caught up in this fantasy that many children joined the actors in the stage area to excitedly pretend to eat candy. After the story, James reflected that he felt “frustrated because I want this to be like a real show. No one comes up on stage in a real show.” The children now have a new understanding that as audience members, if they would like to participate in a story, they should do so from the audience.

~Jenny Goldstein

Grades One & Two

Room 204

Last week in room 204 we voted for our new class name. After an exciting week during which the children shared their arguments in support of their favorite name, I am happy to announce that we are officially The Fantastic Crew! Our new

name is truly a perfect description of our class. Every day I discover more and more things that make each and every child in our class truly fantastic individuals and a fantastic group. These past weeks have been especially important for me in this process as I entered my takeover week. Having the privilege to assume full responsibility for the class has shifted my viewpoint more than I expected. I am looking at every activity, routine and moment in our classroom from a completely new perspective. More importantly, I am seeing each one of my students from a brand new place, and this has allowed me to learn new amazing things about them. I look forward to continuing this never-ending process of seeing everything that makes my class a fantastic crew.

~Juan Cortes

Room 205

How Are Children in Room 205 Similar and Different – continued:

Laudys and Maya are good at riding bikes.

Shawnmathew wants to get better at drawing hexagons and Vitoria wants to get better at drawing noses.

Amber, Daniel and Sofia love to draw and they are all very good at it.

Both Justin and Amishai want to get better at opening and closing stuff like bottles and containers.

Daniel enjoys playing kickball while Jovanni loves to play baseball.

Richard loves banana splits and Maya is good at doing splits.

Both Amber and Laudys love to eat pizza.

Athena enjoys nature and Janira loves gardening.

Vitoria needs help with clipping her nails and Ruby needs help with tying her shoelaces.

Ceva loves Mrs. Piggie-Wiggle and Shawnmathew loves the Ninja Turtles.

Sofia is good at climbing and doing the monkey bars while Kelise is good at jump ropes.

Both Abidemi and Justin love to eat spaghetti.

~Brenda Lau

Grades Three & Four

Room 207

As the end of 2012 approaches, our room is starting to look great! The students in room 207 have helped me plan and organize the set-up of our classroom. Students are always excited when something new arrives for our classroom. In the past weeks we have received a large meeting area rug, wooden bookshelves, and various school supplies. Every item that is received is then placed in one of our designated areas (as planned by the students). This has allowed the students in room 207 to feel a part of the new changes this year has brought us. We encourage all families to come by and take a peek. In the upcoming weeks we will have a room 207 classroom official opening celebration, which family members will be invited to join. Please watch for future details regarding this event.

Hope all is well and enjoy the holiday seasons.

~Robert Baez

Room 216

Forty-four students and teachers go on a field trip using vans that each hold no more than eight passengers. How many vans does the school need? That was one of the questions on our fourth grade math practice sheet. Before getting started with this challenge the class had been studying a few division strategies. We had investigated the relationship between multiplication and division. We had drawn illustrations and used objects to divide groups of things. We had even divided the students in our math class into groups made up of different numbers of students or into different numbers of groups. Sometimes we found that the numbers did not quite fit evenly; there were numbers left over, "remainders". When this happened we had to decide what to do with the remainders. We asked, "Could they themselves be divided?" To understand this, to decide what to do, we discovered that it was very important to look carefully at and think deeply about the problem itself. Forty-four people, vans that seat eight... we quickly figured out that we could fill five vans with forty people. But that leaves four people standing on the sidewalk. That just did not seem fair. I guess we need another van. So, while the equation students were using to answer their question was $44 \div 8 = 5r4$, they needed to understand the context of the

question in order to get to the real answer: six vans, so that everyone can go on the field trip.

~James McGovern, Jessica Watt
& Erica Switzer

Grades Five & Six

Room 210

As another election day came and went, many kids had things to share about their experiences leading up to and after the various elections. There were a few kids who were wearing stickers that showed their allegiance to a particular candidate. Another child shared about how he had an aunt over, who happens to be the loudest in the family, and made no apologies why it came to loudly voicing her opinions when it came to her candidate by chanting loudly. Others retold stories of family members standing in long lines just to cast their ballots. I was among those who shared, detailing my cold, three-hour long experience. Another child talked about the sadness that came across the house since "...none of the people we were hoping for won." And, "...my grandfather was really angry after they announced who won". One child said, "We wanted Obama to win, but they weren't super happy like we were before, it was just like 'yeah, he won, we still have to go to work and school in the morning'."

~Nakia Keizer & Kailah Simon

Room 215

This week the Highlighters learned how to do sentence surgery! Sentence surgery is a fun, hands-on way to learn how to edit sentences. Aubrey came in and did this lesson as a part of her consult week. She started the lesson by writing a simple sentence on the board. She created different magnets to show the different editing marks. We used tongue depressors to stand for an error in capitalization, and different shaped and colored band-aids to show quotation marks, commas, periods and question marks. Students took turns coming up to the board and applied surgery to fix the sentences. After we practiced in groups, students wrote incorrect sentences and edited each other's work. This lesson was incredibly beneficial and we will continue to learn how to use proper punctuation to become better writers.

~Sarah DeCruz

Grades Seven & Eight**Room 213**

The presidential election provided an opportunity for rich discussion in the 7th/8th grade classrooms. The students identified a large range of issues in the campaign: education, taxes, economy, jobs, food stamps, welfare, debt, foreign policy, war in the Middle East, Obama care, manufacturing in China, environment, and immigration.

One of the most interesting discussions was in response to

the question, How do people form their political beliefs? Students weighed the impact of family, friends, TV, newspapers, commercials/ads, research, debates, and Internet. But the kids also raised the idea that personal experience and what an individual wants to see in the community would have a big influence. They predicted that a person who had a lot of wealth might not think about the importance of services like food stamps and welfare. When asked, How would the presidential campaigns change if the voting age were 13?, the majority of kids felt this would be a bad idea. "If that was true I wouldn't vote because I would be busy doing kid stuff." "I think it wouldn't change very much because most children are influenced predominately by their parents so they'd vote for the same candidate." "It would be horrible because people my age wouldn't have a reason to vote and everything would be horrible." Yet others had a positive response. "That would be a big difference! There would be more voices and opinions." "Children would be more interested in politics."

Although most didn't feel ready to take on the responsibility of voting, the kids showed good awareness of the issues and interest in the process. Our few 14 year-olds were amazed to realize that they would be able to vote for the next president in four years.

~Ann Ruggiero

Laura Nixon & Kendal Schwarz

Room 214

Works in progress...

Occasionally I come into the classroom in the morning, and before working on preparing for the day, I take time to just look around the classroom. These days I spend a lot of time thinking about how the room could be set up for students to work most easily and effectively, as the process of settling in to the new space continues. Today I am trying not to think about that, but instead to look at the artifacts of student work in progress.

On one bench a long sheet of plywood rests on a block of wood on one end, while large weights press down above a marked line in order to give it just the right curve for the tail of a skateboard. Several different mock-up hats made of cardstock sit on a pile of cut cloth that will become a prototype. An illustration of an asteroid about to encounter the Earth covers part of one whiteboard, representing one frame of an animation about the collision that produced our moon. A box of wires, motors, switches, and Plexiglas that is a partially assembled DIY RC car sits on a shelf. Posters about internal combustion engines, Lamborghini history, and helpful phrases in French cover part of one wall. Rolls of poster paper have lyrics for a children's song about animals in English and Spanish.

Come by Room 214 any morning to see the hands and minds busy making these projects.

~Jacob Wheeler & Chris Barnes

Hot Topics

Courtney's Corner

Check out Courtney's Corner 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" para información sobre varios programas y recursos para ti y tu familia.

Learn to Ski or Snowboard

Operation SnowSports is YES's (Youth Enrichment Services) flagship program that provides kids with the opportunity to ski, snowboard, and cross country ski during the winter months (December –April). Stop by to learn about being income eligible vs. non income eligible, the timeline of the registration process, and new cancellation policies on November 29 from 4pm - 8pm at YES's 412 Massachusetts Avenue Office. Operation SnowSports serves youth ages 7-18. See Courtney in Room 114 if you have other questions.

Overdue Book Amnesty

This November, the Boston Public Library is running a three-week drive to encourage the return of overdue materials to its shelves. Any overdue book, CD, or DVD returned to a Boston Public Library location from November 1 through Thanksgiving will have the associated fine cleared. This is a great opportunity to get back to utilizing all of the great

resources that the Boston Public Library has without the worry of having a fine on your record!

Help With Holiday Meals

During the coming months many families come together to share meals and gifts. Courtney can assist any family needing support around getting food on their table or gifts for children. Please do not hesitate to contact Courtney by email courtney.bruno@bc.edu, calling her at school 617.635.6384 or leaving a note in her box. If you have any questions, ask Courtney or let your child's classroom teacher know.

Ayuda con Comidas de Vacaciones

Durante los meses siguientes muchas familias se juntan para compartir las comidas y los regalos y Courtney puede ayudar a cualquier familia que necesite apoyo con obtener alimento o regalos para los niños. Por favor, no demore en comunicarse con Courtney. Puede encontrar a Courtney en la escuela o por su correo electrónico al courtney.bruno@bc.edu o dejar un mensaje por teléfono en la escuela 617.635.6384 o una nota en su cajón. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta busque a Courtney o déjele saber a la maestra de su hijo o hija.

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Democracy and equity

The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies.

Learning together as a staff is valuable all on its own. But, having conversations among friends who come from around the country and the world, gives our work context and makes what we stand for, as educators who believe in educating the whole child on a human scale, even stronger.

~Ayla Gavins

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A Boston Public Pilot School

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