

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Child Street

Coming to a Computer Near You

Dear Friends, Families, Students and Staff,

Since the first day of school students have been asking, “When is the film coming out?” For those of you who are new to our school community, you should know that a fantastic thing happened last year. Two filmmakers followed Mission Hill staff and students at school for one year. Their goal was to create a made-for-TV documentary about urban public school teachers (our teachers) who have the freedom to design their own curriculum, participate in school wide decision-making, and to use and analyze a wide variety of assessments—really teach.

Amy, one of the filmmakers, came to visit us this week for a few more pieces she needed. She also had some news. She explained to staff that segments of the film would be released via internet beginning in January, one week after President Obama’s inauguration. This is an opportune time to show and use such footage of our school.

In Boston, the continued focus on less desirable schools has been magnified during the reconstruction of the enrollment and school assignment process. No one wants to send their child to a school that has a bad reputation, even if it’s right next door. The film clips, and ultimately the film itself, is great material for clarifying ideas about the wants and needs of a school community. It provides a visual for discussion. Discussion is at the heart of creating, or transforming or sustaining a great school.

It’s time that state and national educational policy makers recognize that there is more to a child than a test score. There is so much more to value and so much that cannot be measured by paper and pencil alone. It’s time for us all to make some

noise about the current trend of testing and what it has done to teaching and learning. The loss of learning through play, exploration and learning by doing has swept across our country because of the focus on test scores. Let’s push back on this narrow view of our children. Send the film clip and a letter to your local newspaper or politicians.

As soon as the date for the first film segment is released on the internet, I’ll let you know and where to find it. Once it’s out, send it to people you know. Use it to make changes for the better in our local schools and those across the country.

~Ayla Gavins

REMINDERS

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

12/24 - 1/3/13 - Holiday Break

From the Classrooms

3 and 4 year-olds

Room 108

In our classroom, math experiences are embedded throughout each day – our routines, experiences and materials are intentionally chosen and designed to support each child's development. We are supporting the students' math development in a range of areas: solving math problems; curiosity around numbers and counting; sorting objects; geometry and spatial relations (this includes using positional words such as "over", "under" and "next to") and beginning measurement (this includes using words to describe size, such as "big", "little", "short", "long", etc.).

When we have snack, children might be instructed to serve themselves a specific amount (such as three carrots) – and many spontaneous conversations evolve when a child serves himself more or fewer than that. When we gather together each morning, we use our home/school chart to count how many children are here and how many are missing. Last Wednesday, we were amazed to have five children at home and eight at school – since we are usually missing only one, two or even zero friends.

Our picture schedule helps us keep track of the day—a way to measure our time together. Our daily songs include clapping/tapping rhythms and counting. Materials, such as mini unit blocks create spontaneous sorting opportunities, as students

search for the specific rectangle he or she needs to complete a structure. Magna tiles come in a variety of shapes and colors – and children sort these blocks many ways as they build. Children problem solve around sharing trains and cars – they compare how many they have and work to make it more fair.

These are just a few of the ways that math experiences are embedded in our day.

~Geraldyn McLaughlin
& Donna Winder

Kindergarten

Room 106

In the Butterflies class we are very fond of the story of the Gingerbread Man. We have read the story aloud, listened to it on tape, created Gingerbread men out of Keva blocks and playdough, and acted out the story in dramatic play. We are even in discussion about putting on a play.

All the Gingerbread hype reached the home of Eli. He and his mom Amy came in to make Gingerbreads with us.



She also found a book called *The Gingerbread Girl* by Lisa Campbell Ernst. Eli brought it in to share. We read the book and compared and

contrasted it the *The Gingerbread Man* by Jim Aylesworth. In the Gingerbread Man story he says, "Run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me I am the Gingerbread Man." In the Gingerbread Girl story she says, "I'll run and I'll run. With a leap and a twirl. You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Girl!"

We also noticed that the end of the stories were different. We won't tell you what happens You can read and discover for yourself.

As the cookies cooled, we enjoyed them. There is a recipe write on the back of the Gingerbread Man story. Thank you Amy for a wonderful day!

~Kathy Clunis D'Andrea

Room 107

It was great to see all the families at our Fall Breakfast reading with students on the couch, singing patriotic songs, viewing our slideshow and handmade American flag, taking pictures and most importantly, helping us to paint our voting booth. Now that our governmental replicas have been created, it is time for us to begin our campaigning. When we told our students that they would have to make speeches like the character Judson Moon in *The Boy who Ran for President*, they were excited. They seemed to listen more intently to the story for tips on what to say. They have realized that as a presidential candidate, you must make promises that voters will buy into. Here is our first round of speeches:
If I were president...

Michelle: I would take everyone to

the store.

Rui: I would give everyone candy.

Liam: I would make school a better place.

Braxton: I would do homework for everyone.

Lucas: I would give good speeches.

Shirley: I would be the first woman to become president.

Alma: I would make cards for my friends.

Euan: I would tell people what to do.

Peter: I would get rid of homework.

Miles: I would get rid of all the name train movies.

Anand: I would give someone a toy.

Noah: I would get rid of all the children's toys and give them new Thomas trains.

Dianynette: I would play in the White House.

Brian: I would give toys to my sisters and brother.

We will keep you posted about our campaigning, party creation and elections.

~Jada Brown and Jo-Ann Hawkesworth

Room 109

It's report writing time, and I've been gathering student work, notes, photographs, and my thoughts in preparation for writing narratives about the 14 young children in our class. As I prepare to write about children as individuals, I have been reflecting on the Magic Dragons as a group.

We are artists, storytellers, constructors of knowledge, and block cities. The Magic Dragons

are extremely creative and articulate in communicating their unique ideas. They are budding scientists and mathematicians, exceedingly interested in studying nature and the world around them. They are dramatic and so very emotional. They have wonderful senses of humor, and know how to make each other laugh. They grapple with power dynamics, and ideas of good and evil. This comes out in their stories, their play, and their intense interest in superheroes. They love being in school, and are deeply invested in the culture we have created together. When there is a problem, they have learned to use their words to talk about their feelings and possible solutions. They seek help when needed. They are learning to look closely, and to listen deeply to the words and ideas of others. We are learning together, and from each other. I am so honored to be their first teacher at Mission Hill.

~Jenny Goldstein

Grades One & Two

Room 204

Thirteen weeks ago I walked through the doors of the Mission Hill School. Little did I know that I was about to enter into one of the best experiences I've ever had. The students of the Fantastic Crew as we are now called, have been surprising me every day, with their knowledge of subject matter, their passion, and caring for their work and friends. They also surprise me with their humor, even when they don't know that what they said or did was humorous.

Since day one, and I have seen the growth in many of our students.

They have grown in their writing, math and many other aspects of academics. But more importantly they have grown as people. The students have been and continue to work out their own problems such as sharing a Lego piece, and working with others.

As I begin my takeover week, I can't help but continue to think about how I have grown as person through my students, and about how much I have learned from them. There's saying that goes "you learn something new every day". I have learned so much already, and I look forward to all the future learning to come for every member of the Fantastic Crew.

~Jamie Aznive

Room 205

Hope you have noticed some of our children's wonderful campaign work as you walked through the second floor this week. Room 205 is in the process of choosing our class name. The class has decided to run a school-wide election and would like the input and support from families and the school community. The children have been working diligently and meticulously in small groups on this project, from discussing possible class names to creating campaign materials like signs, pins, bumper stickers, and posters, etc.

Room 205 would like to use our voice to make an impact on something that is very important and meaningful to us, and since we are a part of this larger community, your voice is important to us too. We would like everybody of the school community to vote and to

help us decide on our class name. The school-wide election will take place in early December. Children will go around to different classrooms to give speeches next week, and if you happen to have a minute or two, please stop by our classroom and I am sure the children will be thrilled to convince you to vote for their favorites!

~Brenda Lau

Room 217

The children in 217 have met some new characters, Yasmin, Noa and Danny. They are five and six years old and they are having a problem: they have different ideas about a block structure, and they are stuck in an argument. No one is having fun building anymore. Danny insists that he should get to decide how to proceed because he is the oldest; the other two don't think that's fair.

Nor do the children sitting in a circle around our classroom rug. They emphatically defend the younger children's right to participate and suggest ways out of this problem. Some of the things they suggest only make the initial problem bigger, while others make the problem get a little smaller. As our conversation continues about how to help these three children, the children reveal thoughtfulness and expansiveness in their thinking; they listen carefully to each other's ideas; they adjust and readjust how they express values of inclusion, kindness, integrity of work; and they ultimately build a viable course of action for the characters

who have already begun to be a little bit real. Yasmin, Noa and Danny are newcomers in our classroom in the form of "block people"—photos of unknown children stuck to blocks, used to tell problem stories.

This story is born from situations we have witnessed in the classroom, but the effort to solve a problem is not only about dilemmas of friendship and collaboration. When children are able to see from multiple points of view and consider alternate ways of accomplishing something, they develop the capacity to do this in all kinds of problems—in math, in reading, in pursuing scientific questions, and in being members of a democratic community. "They should all get to decide. Younger kids have good ideas, too."

~Melissa Tonachel

Amy Dolman & Ben Hallas

Grades Three & Four

Room 207

Last Wednesday was an eventful day. Many MHS families came together to celebrate the ongoing work students have been doing during the first two months of school. During these months we have worked on various projects to learn about the *Near & Dear* theme, and our current theme, *Who Counts*. Families also were able to see the new building and various updates since the beginning of the school year. Especially the classrooms, which are now starting to take shape. We hope to continue our positive growth.

It was great to see students who were eager to showcase the

building and their work as family members entered our breakfast foyer. Moments like these make our work with children rewarding and valuable.

I would like thank all of the MHS families for being an important piece to our school success. I look forward to seeing all you at future events.

~Robert Baez

Room 216

This week the Golden Rulers will be starting a new feature in our daily activities, a "Learning Journal". This journal will be a composition book that each student will use to record some interesting thoughts about themselves, their actions, and their learning. They will have a few regular lead sentences that they will thoughtfully address each day. For example, "One thing I can do well is..." and "One thing I will do today is..." and "One thing I did today that I am proud of is..." It will also be a place for their homework to be written down, their daily reading log to be recorded at home, and a space where they can write short notes to me or another teacher if they feel so inclined. It is expected that they will show you this learning journal by the end of the week. I am hoping that you will check in with your child as often as possible to see what they have written and to add your own comment or note from time to time; I have asked that at least they get a signature from an adult as evidence that they show you they are completing their reading logs. This journal is new and may

take some time for all students to get used to. Please let me know if your student requires any specific support.

~James McGovern, Jessica Watt
& Erica Switzer

Grades Five & Six

Room 210

Last week a group of students from the civil engineering department at Northeastern University came in to talk to us about the idea of bicycles as a sustainable mode of transportation. *Their presentation, Back Seat to the Bicycle*, had the goal of teaching children safe bicycle riding techniques in order to promote safe cycling (or walking in the case of children who do not ride bicycles) to get to and from school and around neighborhoods. They began with a slide show and discussion about the rules of the road. Students practiced hand signals and discussed the role of various traffic signs. Afterward, we went outside and were fitted for bicycles and walked them down to the Southwest Corridor Bike Path behind English High School. There, kids were split into two groups. One practiced crossing the street and looking both ways, while the other practiced riding on the path, observing signs, stopping and merging with other bike traffic, and yielding. It was a beautiful Friday afternoon and kids were really excited about the riding as well as learning about the rules of the road. To continue with the theme of safety, at the end of the class students were

given bike lights and bells to keep as reminders to bike more often, and to ride safely.

~Nakia Keizer & Kailah Simon

Room 215

The Highlighters started a new class novel titled *Loser*, by Jerry Spinelli. Students are working in small groups to read the text and have been practicing visualizing what they read to make inferences about what the characters are thinking or feeling. I've enjoyed listening to kids read, and hearing them share their opinions and thoughts about the book. The 5/6th grade team chose this novel to give us an academic lens to explore what it means to be a bully. My hope is that we can use this text to examine our behavior through making connections and work on being kinder to each other.

~Sarah DeCruz

Grades Seven & Eight

Room 213

At the Fall Breakfast, Room 213 shared our literacy projects as evidence of learning. The collections of writing related to Jerry Spinelli's *Wrinker* and the theme of peer pressure were displayed on tables along with the project requirements. Significantly, every member of the class presented work, although not all were complete.

Students sat at the tables and used sticky notes to critique each other's work. Our guidelines, "Be kind, specific, and helpful," kept the focus on the work. The kids really appreciated the time to read

the stories they had been hearing about in brief exchanges during class. Their feedback, excerpted below, will help each writer to improve her/his work.

"Add title page, spell check, capitalization. I LOVE your story. I also enjoyed your use of language! I can see you need to finish your story. Great job so far!" "I like it, but too many cuss words." "Effective dialog." "I liked your story – it was really suspenseful. I liked how you ended it. It was really like a cliff hanger." "Good explanation of peer pressure." "You should go back and make sure all the names are upper case." "Outline? Next time, organize and plan before you write." "Your reflection could have more detail in it." "On the table of contents, instead of writing project #, write the name and page number." "I enjoyed your good description. I loved how it's detailed and it sounds scary, too." "I like the hook." "I think the reflection is thoughtful." "Run-on." "Some of your pronoun I are lower case. Also, I think you should add how you used the habits of mind and work." "Your research is well-written. I also like how you structured your ideas. Good job!" Students also discussed why the critique process was important. One student said, "It's helpful. You can learn a lot about a person through their writing."

If you haven't yet read your child's fictional or research based writing about peer pressure, please ask them to share it with you.

~Ann Ruggiero

Laura Nixon & Kendal Schwarz

Room 214

7th and 8th grade students have entered the last module of our "*Who*

Counts?” theme. In Room 214, where we have been focusing on a science component of the theme, we are studying evolution. We started by talking about what knowledge and questions students already had about the topic. Genes and DNA were mentioned, as were the changes from early hominids to modern Homo sapiens. But it was the questions and the discussion they stimulated that most fascinated me.

“How can we prove that the Earth is really 4.6 billion years old?”

“Are the rocks at the bottom of the Grand Canyon definitely older than the ones near the top?”

“So if I’m a scientist I can say whatever I want as long as I can prove it? What about God? You can’t just prove that.”

Our first example of evolution in action was a video about an experiment conducted in Russia over the last 50 years in which foxes were selectively bred for aggressiveness or tameness. The aggressive group maintained the look of the native silver foxes but became so aggressive that they would throw themselves at the fence when humans came by. The tame group, however, was affectionate and calm around humans. Oddly, many of them also started to grow floppy ears, curly tails, and different colored coats. This brought us back to our study about dominant and recessive genes from previous weeks and gave us a new connection with the theories of evolution.

~Jacob Wheeler & Chris Barnes

Hot Topics

Sitting Pretty, Pretty Soon

We are raising money to buy music chairs for the music room. A **Donors Choose** website is set up to accept donations toward the cost of the chairs. After only five days, we are already more than halfway there!

If you can help, please visit www.donorschoose.org/betsy.caruso, to help us reach our goal by the end of the year.

Thank you so much!

Some Facts of Lice

It’s a fact, head lice happen. In the U.S., lice are most common in children aged 3 - 12. Having head lice does not mean someone is dirty. They spread from person to person through direct contact, either with a person who has lice, or with a hat, brush, comb or hair, or hairbands and holders. Washing with plain soap or shampoo doesn’t get rid of them. See the last page of this newsletter for information on treatment and prevention.

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.

Congratulations to our new Family Council Co-Chairs: Neathery Brenzel and Amina Michel-Lord and to our Secretary: Amy Banzaert and Treasurer: Bridget Lee! Next meeting is January 17th.

Mission Hill School

A Boston Public Pilot School

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