

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Child Street

In Memory

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

This may seem an unusual topic for a school newsletter, but how we cope with death in our school community is a topic I'd like us to think and talk about together. This past summer was a particularly difficult one. Three parents in our school community passed away. For each one of those families, there was the immediate outreach of support from friends, family, school and other communities. However, Mission Hill staff knows that the care and attention a child needs to continue learning and growing into a robust adult when a parent or caregiver dies is present for many years. This knowledge about loss will be considered in our knowing the whole child for years to come.

This fall a beloved grandparent died. Then over the last two weeks, two of our staff members lost parents. How do we cope with death in our school community? What roles do our different school community constituencies play in assisting others to heal and addressing needs of a family or staff member?

REMINDERS

December

Thu. 12/13, Family Night:
Meeting our Neighbors
12/13 & 14, Book Fair
12/24 - 1/2, Holiday Break

If someone in your family, or someone who plays a significant role in your child's life dies, please let your child's teacher know. Sadness, confusion and anger come out in different ways. Not having all information can make the teacher's ability to understand behaviors difficult. Courtney Bruno, our City Connects Site Coordinator, can assist with food, clothing or shelter if needed as a result of tragedy. You can reach her through the main school number 617-635-6384.

Writing, talking, movement breaks and creating art at school are ways that we allow children to process such difficult times and honor loved ones. At the same time, the routine of school and familiar faces offers normalcy of everyday life that is needed. Plans are in the early stages for a healing garden on our school grounds. The garden will be planted this spring as a living memorial and tribute to the lives that meant so much to our students and to us. There will be a ceremonial planting in the healing garden. Your attendance can be to show your support for others or to recognize someone in your child's life who is no longer present. Family to family support and recognition is just as important as school to family. In the meantime, we give daily thoughts to those we miss. Take a moment to give a hug and/or loving words to those in your presence now. Pause, notice, and acknowledge something or someone beautiful. Don't wait.

~Ayla Gavins

From the Classrooms

3 and 4 year-olds

Room 108

No news this week.

Kindergarten 1 & 2

Room 106

If you enter our classroom around 1:30 you will find students bustling to put their lunches away and heading to the bathroom. They find their toothbrushes and they start to brush their teeth. When the toothpaste is finished you can be sure there will be a commotion.

The Butterflies class loves to brush their teeth. It is a great habit they have formed. It is one of their favorite parts of the day. Some students try to brush their teeth twice. I gently say, "Once is enough for right now."

On Monday morning dental students from Boston University visited us. They brought a giant set of teeth and a giant toothbrush to help us learn the proper techniques for brushing. They also taught us about things to eat that are good for our teeth and things that are bad. They were very impressed that the children knew the difference between the two. When a BU student held up a picture of a piece of cake and ask, "Can we feed this to the mouth?" The kids would say, "NO." They also taught us how to say teeth in Farsi: *denedānehā* – امن‌ادن, and Spanish: *dientes*.

When the demonstrations were finished I asked the children in the class to tell these future

dentists what things children like when they go to the dentist. One student yelled, "The treasure chest." I suggested they put carrots in their treasure chests. Happy brushing!

~Kathy D'Andrea

Room 107

Let the campaigning begin!

Last week we put the final touches on our voting booth. As the paint from our handprints dried (a symbol of ownership and a reminder that our voice counts), a group of students decided that the box wasn't enough. They insisted on a table, curtain, pencils and a basket to put our ballots in to make it official. Later, our political parties (*The Train Yard* and *The Patriots*) were created. Campaign posters fashioned after one JFK used in his campaign were designed and posted and then it was time for the campaigning to begin.

At our "Convention", our first candidates (Shirley & Braxton of the Patriots and Alma & Miles of the Train Yard) came dressed to impress in fancy dresses, new hairstyles, buttoned-down shirts and ties. They gave riveting speeches and the crowd applauded as the candidates made promises about what they would do for (according to Peter) the "United States of Room 107". Finally able to use our voting booth, students lined the hall outside our room and held their ballots, waiting patiently for their turn to vote. There was a clear sense of pride and eagerness on everyone's face. When the last person had voted, we counted the ballots and found the victory had

gone to the Patriots party.

Following the example of President Obama, Shirley and Braxton, with the help of their opponents, decreed (as did Washington) that a White House be built. Students worked busily that afternoon, but as history would have it, it was not finished in time for the first President to occupy.

At the end of the day, Ms. Kathy asked if her class could use our voting booth. Our students watched contentedly as her students voted because in that moment, the booth served not just as a place for 107's voices to count, but a vehicle with which others would do the same.

*~Jada Brown
& JoAnn Hawkesworth*

Room 109

Last Saturday, I spent my day at a *Life is Good* Playmaker Training. Formerly Project Joy, the Life is Good Playmakers train early childhood educators to bring a playful approach to working with young children. From their website, their "approach to playfulness provides children with opportunities to feel creatively engaged, safe, loved and joyful. This type of transformative play helps children build relationships with the key people in their lives and enables them to build resilience in the face of life's greatest challenges." I am so grateful for and inspired by their work. I arrived back at Mission Hill Monday morning with a renewed

sense of excitement and joy. This time of year, life can be so busy, and it can be easy to feel overwhelmed. I am reminded that joy and playfulness are not only for games and pretend play. A joyful approach can be applied to everyday moments like doing the dishes and photocopying papers. In the classroom, small moments like lining up and putting on our coats, as well as structured lessons can also become more engaging and meaningful when infused with joy and playfulness. I am reminded that every moment with my young students, is an opportunity and a gift. I am reminded to sing, dance, and laugh my way through the day, and that I will be a better teacher for it.

~Jenny Goldstein

Grades One & Two

Room 204

Several weeks ago I attended the Coalition of Essential School's Fall Forum. Our founding principal Deborah Meier, along with her colleagues, started Fall Forum over 20 years ago. This national conference of progressive educators is always refreshing to attend. It is invigorating to attend workshops and spend time with like-minded educators from all over the world.

I attended two workshops and presented one. One workshop I attended was presented by staff and one student (Jenerra's son, Dominic) from Fenway High School. They talked about the Obama Group at their school, which supports boys of color.

Their presentation inspired me. I am looking forward to taking information they shared and use it at Mission Hill. The second workshop I attended also focused on working with adolescent boys. I left this workshop with other things to consider in my daily work. Lastly, Ayla and I presented a workshop titled "Singing for Message and Meaning: Songs of Equity and Trust". We shared and sang 12 favorite Mission Hill Songs. It was fun to share our beloved songs and to know that they will be taught in other schools.

It is always good to go out into the world to see what other work is going on in education as it helps us to continually improve our work with children. Already I am looking forward to my next opportunity.

~Amina Michel-Lord,
& Jenerra Williams

Room 205

Room 205 Class Name Election Speeches (Election will take place on Tue, Dec 11):

"We are called The Super Kids because we do an excellent job and because we are kids. Please vote for us because we do good things. We really want to be called The Super Kids."

"We are called The 205 Helpers because we like to help people, and because nobody is perfect and everybody needs help. Helping is awesome and we are pretty good at helping. Please vote for us because we want our reputation to be that we are good helpers. We are very nice and we will help everybody everywhere. We just

help."

"We are called the Concentrators because we concentrate. We get everything done very fast. You can reach all of your goals once you concentrate and put your mind to it. Please vote for us because we are strong mentally and physically. We want only the best for the class and we listen to other people's ideas."

"We are called The Wonderful Wonderers because we are wonderful and we wonder. Wonder means you think about things and we do a lot of that. Please vote for us because we think about stuff like math and writing and reading, and we are good at it. We like the name The Wonderful Wonders and we hope that you like it, too!"

~Brenda Lau

Room 217

I've been watching children's faces. In the course of an hour, one child shares such a range of expressions that I am wondering anew about how the experience of a single school day might feel to each of the children in our care. A child's face is calm while reading a book, breaks into a smile and then urgency as he calls a friend to join him, *Look! Look at this!* Twenty minutes later, here is a flash of anger—as a resource, a cylindrical block or blue colored pencil, perhaps, makes its way from this child's work space to another's—and then confusion, frustration, determination, and openness as we talk through this problem. And then a smile, maybe wary, maybe earnest, to

accompany an agreement and return to work. Children's faces show us delight, pleading, fidgeting, the pursuit of a new idea. They give us imaginary characters and full concentration. All in a day, or less than a day.

All this watching of faces makes me think, too, about the demands we place on children and the experiences we offer them. If a child's face were to settle into the expression she carried most in a day, what would that face look like? What's the sum of her day?

~Melissa Tonachel

Grades Three & Four

Room 207

As we enter the *Ancient Greece* theme, room 207 is very excited about the planned activities and projects. During our pre-thinking stage of Ancient Greece we have talked a lot about the various gods and goddesses within the culture. One student said, "I would really love to learn about the powers of a Greek god." Another student asked, "How about what they wear and dress like?" Others asked, "Why don't we have more than one god?" As a class, we discussed how we could investigate the questions we have. Many suggested we could research our questions through books, internet resources, surveys, and a possible field trip to our local library. Next week we will begin our first Ancient Greece theme project by researching a god or goddess.

We will learn about their powers, how they dress, the meaning of their names, and much more. We are excited and ready to investigate.

~Robert Baez

Room 216

Last Friday morning a few minutes before our students were to arrive I noticed that our pet snake had escaped his tank. Someone – perhaps it was I – had left the top unlocked and the little guy had found a way out. My first concern was for his safety, and after a quick look around the room one of our student teachers found him hiding in a milk crate under a table none the worse for his adventure. When the class arrived I told some of the students what had happened and one of them asked why the snake would have left his tank in the first place. The student explained that the snake lived there, he got fed there, it was warm, and a nice cave to live in; what would make him leave a safe place for something unknown and unpredictable? Interestingly, as soon as we put the snake back in his tank he went right back to the top and began searching for openings along where he must have found one before. He was trying the same strategy again. We watched as the snake continued to explore the edges of the top of the tank, testing the seam between the locked top and the tank's edge seeking an opening. We wondered what would have happened to him if we had not found him when he escaped. Everyone agreed he

would most likely have died. We decided we were glad that people had the chance to think about their actions beforehand and learn from their mistakes afterward.

~James McGovern

Erica Switzer & Jessica Watt

Grades Five & Six

Room 210

Here are a few holdover End of The Week Reflections from the last month or so...

"One of my strengths as an educator is building relationships, creating a healthy learning environment, and motivating kids to think and learn."

"What would make lunch fun is if there was a lot of things in common and everyone was true friends. Like they wouldn't do anything that involves anyone getting in trouble. Just being friends and sharing."

"This week I missed two days cause' I was sick and on Thursday we took out the guts of pumpkins."

"The one great suggestion I have for the class is for Nakia to get us a pet for the class. I want the pet to be easy like a lizard, a frog, a fish, a snake, or a turtle. Something that will give us responsibility and keep us happy....but out of all those an African Dwarf Frog would be the easiest because they eat once a week and they only live in water."

"Something that went well was my math homework because I

did most of it at the beginning of the week. I also really liked being able to ride bikes on Friday. I also liked the chance to do a mock vote because I felt older. I also like my hurricane poster because I got most of it done.”

“One great suggestion I have for the class is that we should have permanent places for the pillows because people are using four pillows or taking pillows from the places against the walls. Then when other people want to use them they can’t. Also we should make the seat places more permanent because they get moved around and it ends up looking like a mess. We shouldn’t be able to turn the chairs [either] because then they end up facing the wall. That is why I think the meeting area chairs and pillows should have more permanent places.”

“Something that went well this week was Strong Women Strong Girls because there was no drama. But on a happier note me and Autumn won the contest for best structure made out of gumdrops and toothpicks. I’m really happy there was no drama and that the snack was finally good.”

“Something that went well this week is going to the library. Let’s start us off saying I love the library. Especially this year when I can find books better and the library is super sunny this year. But when I went this time I was going to get *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Then I saw a bunch of books that looked good, by Madeline L’Engle. I plan to get that later but I found

three really super good excellent books. They were *How Does Chemistry Work?*, *Warriors* in comic book form and *Sherlock Holmes*.”

~Nakia Keizer & Kailah Simon

Room 215

The 6th grade Math-Bots created math games for James, Nakia's and Robert's classrooms, in response to what those teachers said their classes needed to practice more. The 6th graders worked in teams to create engaging and challenging games. They made board games, card games, and dice games. *Math Landia* is modeled on Candy Land™ while *The Party* is an addition and subtraction math game. Each group wrote directions for how to play their game in clear steps and presented the games to their respective classes on Friday afternoon. It was wonderful to see them explain concepts they understood and teach the younger kids how to play a game that helps them become better mathematicians. Younger students eagerly rolled dice, strategized how to get the highest score, and showed off their math skills as they tried out the games. Some even made suggestions for modifications and enhancements to the games. Congratulations to the inventor teams and to all the game testers!

~Sarah DeCruz

Grades Seven & Eight

Room 213

Hello! I want to introduce myself to the MHS community. My name is Kendal Schwarz and I’m currently an intern in Ann’s classroom. To give you a little idea about my educational background, I am in the process of receiving my Master of Arts in Teaching for middle school math at Tufts University. This past spring, I graduated from Union College in New York with a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics.

I’m originally from Vermont and grew up there with my two younger sisters and multi-po puppy, Bo. Teaching is something I have pursued since I was in high school and I am so excited to continue learning and perfecting the craft. I have really enjoyed getting to know your children these past three months and was lucky enough to have a chance to really get to know them during our trip to the Farm School - which has been one of my favorite parts of the year so far. I look forward to meeting you and continuing to work with your children. Please be sure to drop by Room 213 and introduce yourself!

~Kendal Schwarz

Room 214

A couple of projects in the 7th grade workshop have really intrigued me recently. I think what has really captured my interest is the way in which an idea is transformed through hard work, response to feedback and growth of a learner, into a product that amazes the learning community and the creator that produced it.

One project is the sun symbol ornament that Yavi and Nicole are working on. It began when Yavi brought in a book of Mexican tin ornaments that she came across and really liked. Since we did not have tin or other sheet metal to work with, I suggested that they could work in wood to create their version of the ornament, and that they could decide on the scale of the product. Soon, a template about eighteen inches in diameter was created on poster paper. When the design was looking a little uneven, we discussed ways to use measurement to create a strong, balanced design. Another breakthrough was with the rays of the sun. The girls found that it was much easier to create one template that they could trace at each of the positions than to draw freehand each time. Materials were then selected and woodworking tools (frame saw, pull saw, rasp, sanding block) were introduced. The team practiced on scrap materials, received feedback, and began the work of creating the actual pieces.

As each new piece challenged them, I saw the team draw from their earlier learning experiences and apply them to the new problem. We hope to hang the result of this fine work in the "fishbowl room" at the end of the week.

~Jacob Wheeler & Chris Barnes

Hot Topics

Book Fairs by Book Ends is coming...

Greetings families and friends, We hope you can join us on Thursday, Dec. 13th and Friday, Dec. 14th for our fall book fair. A variety of books for all ages will be on sale. We encourage each family to send book money in a sealed envelope clearly marked with the student's name and classroom number on the book fair days. Book prices begin at \$5.00. Please do not send in more than \$10.00 per day with your child.

Thank you for supporting this important and fun event! Extra volunteers needed, please contact Ann Adams, Library Coordinator- aadams@missionhillschool.org

Join the Mission Hill School Family Forum!

The Mission Hill School Family Forum is an initiative by school parents and caregivers FOR school parents and caregivers, a place to forge connections in and across classroom communities. Staff is welcome, too.

To join the group:

(1) Request to join by sending an email to MHS Family Forum moderators Naama or Neathery (mizzgee@yahoo.com or neathery99@gmail.com)

Or,

(2) Visit the Mission Hill School Family Forum site, take a look at the homepage, and click the "Join This Group" link to submit a request that way:

<http://tinyurl.com/MHSconnects>
Please help to grow the forum as a community asset by bringing this invitation to the attention of

your MHS friends. It's always a good time to be in touch!

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.

Acts of Kindness



Autumn holds the door for people with their hands full

For more photos of Acts of Kindness at MHS, visit our website!

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