

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Child Street

Partners in Teaching and Learning

Dear Families, Friends, Students and Staff,

Last year a parent made a really good point to me. She said that she really appreciated the opportunity to contribute to my evaluation, but felt that it was more important to her that she contributes feedback to her child's teacher. I gave this some thought over the summer. What could we (as a school) put in place so parents could more easily share thoughts and questions with teachers about what they do? How can parents and guardians be more involved in providing feedback to teachers in ways that might positively impact the way we work with children? After all this is a partnership. I see it as a form of development on both ends. This is also another avenue for parent voice and involvement in the school in general.

What's the best way to include parents and guardians in our professional development and reflection as teachers? After talking about this idea with staff, we agreed to test three different methods of gathering feedback from parents and guardians. We'll test three ways to determine what method of collection might be most informative. These different ways include a school-based survey, a survey from the district and teacher observation.

The Boston Public School's School Climate Survey will be sent home this spring. Our participation on this survey wasn't great last year. This year we are looking for 100% participation from several classrooms. Teachers will look over the survey results with colleagues and consider areas of strength and areas that need more

attention. Information from this survey gives us school-wide and classroom-based information.

Parents and caregivers in several classrooms will be asked to complete a survey that has been created by the school. This survey will provide the teacher with information about things that are more specific to Mission Hill. These questions will come from a bank of survey questions developed by Wheelock College in a study of family engagement in schools.

A third group of parents and caregivers will be asked to come into the school to observe teachers and how students engage with their work and environment. Parents will present written questions to the teacher for him or her to consider. The questions will be used as a basis for discussion between the teacher and his or her colleagues.

These efforts are intended to provide parents and guardians with another way of working with staff to create the best school possible for children. It's also to share in the joy of the work we do with young people and have a broader shared investment in the success of all involved.

~Ayla Gavins

Breaking News: Boston Speak Up! Learn how to harness the power of negotiation at a workshop for girls 8-13 presented by Carnegie Mellon's PROGRESS and held at Simmons College on Saturday, May 3, 2014. \$10 registration fee and scholarships are available. Register online at: progress.heinz.cmu.edu/events/.

From the Classrooms

3 and 4 year-olds

Room 108

Today you should have received your child's report card. This comprehensive report card documents your child's learning in a range of domains: language and literacy; mathematical thinking; theme; social/emotional; physical development and health; music and art. I have been working on the reports for the last few weeks – in close consultation with Donna and Angel. We use a range of evidence – from informal anecdotes and more formal one-on-one interviews and observations, to student work and photo documentation. We are looking to capture who your child is right now at school – strengths and challenges, likes and dislikes, how far they have come and where they are heading. Although report writing takes a great deal of time, I believe it is time well spent. I cherish the time spent reflecting on each child's uniqueness and documenting each child's learning. The last page of the report card is a place for you to respond. We look forward to reading your thoughts and feedback about your child's report. Thanks so much.

~Geraldyn Bywater McLaughlin
& Donna Winder

Kindergarten

Room 106

Our Taíno documentation panels are finished and up for viewing. Each student chose a topic to write about, did multiple drafts of his or

her art and writing, and directed the framer (me) how they wanted their work presented.

Tafari drew multiple drafts of a yucca by looking at a piece of yucca we had in the class. He also worked with me to sound out his words as he wrote, "They used cassava to make cassava bread. Cassava came from plants."

Yesvirlin drew a picture of the coquí frog by looking at a book in our class. She then dictated to me what she wanted to write. She said, "The coquí frog is a girl. The Taíno see the coquí frog."

Julia said, "The Taínos sleep on a Hamaca (Taíno word for hammock) and they tied it onto a heavy wood." I wrote it over where she was to write and she wrote it below. She also looked at pictures of hammocks to help her draw. They are up outside class 106. Come by and see them.

~Kathy Clunis D'Andrea

Room 107

"This smells good." "I think it smells like blah."

Last week we and began our Taíno food taste tests. We began by looking at a coconut and then tasting coconut water. Later came tamarind juice. As I explained what Tamarind tastes like, I struggled to remember the name of the candy I loved and ate as a little girl. However, Natalia piped in and said, "Oh. You mean Tamarind Ball?" It brought a smile to my face that there was yet another personal connection being made to this theme.

We then looked at yucca/cassava and several students were fascinated by what it looked like once it was boiled. After adding a little salt, many of our students could not get

enough of it but not everyone was impressed. We saved some for the following day to fry and this time, everyone asked for more saying it tasted like fries.

Our last exploration of the week was a papaya. Students said, "It looks like a teeny watermelon." "This smells like a pickle." "I think it smells like a cucumber." Intrigued by the seeds, each student was able to get one to hold. As they rolled it around in their hands, they said things like, "It feels slimy." "It feels like flowers." "It feels like seeds." "It's soft." Once one student realized that the soft part of the seed was hiding something inside, everyone investigated further by squeezing it between their fingers. "It looks like a seed water when you squish it." "It has bumpy parts on it because I squished it." "It looks like a raisin." Keith took it a step further and found that there was yet another layer we did not see. He excitedly proclaimed, "The inside looks white." We finally tasted the papaya, and to our surprise almost everyone liked it!

~Jada Brown
& JoAnn Hawkworth

Room 109

Hello Mission Hill! The Original Stars have been winding down our unit study on the Taíno. This week we have been looking at two more crops that were extremely important to the Taíno people: yucca and batata. Both are root vegetables that can be prepared and eaten like a potato. The students in room 109 have been using our five senses to observe these foods. We also have been doing multiple

drafts of observational drawings. We even got to taste test the two vegetables, and take a class vote on which one we preferred! We have enjoyed our time studying the Taíno culture, but are excited to move on to our next topic: *The Peopling of America!* Have a great weekend!

~Liz Borson

Grades One & Two

Room 204

We were greeted at our classroom and after a few quick questions we marched over to the music room. The Magic Learners sat in a circle and were captivated as Billy (our new music teacher) began to play a melody on his trumpet. This was not the only moment they were captivated. In fact, their attention was held by many things during our half hour. Billy did call and response between his trumpet and their voices. He talked about the melody he played on his trumpet and helped them think of other melodies they knew. When asked what a melody was, Vitoria said, "It's like the tone of what you sing." They then clapped a rhythm to accompany their melody. At one point he informed them that they would be working in teams and half the circle worked on rhythm and melody while the other half practiced listening and supporting the rest of the group.

At the end of the session, Billy brought out a drum from Puerto Rico and made the connection to our study of the Taíno. He began

playing and dancing and as he moved around the circle, he allowed each person to tap a rhythm on the drum as everyone shouted, "Good job! Well done!" to the beat. Well done indeed Billy. We look forward to our next sessions!

~Jenerra Williams

Room 205

We're about to wrap up a very exciting unit on the Taíno. Everyone reflected on their work and here are some highlights: **Anand, Sara, and Euan** liked making bohios for our Taíno village model. "We used hay, yarn, and glue." **Amos** said, "I liked going up and down with the weaving – it's like the monkey bars at school." **Braxton** said, "I learned about what they made – like baskets, maracas, boats, and masks." **Chrisvely and Olivia** loved the weaving! "We got to make stuff like purses and bags." **Justin** said, "I liked making boats because they're brown." **Miles** said, "I liked learning about how the coquí can make a really loud sound even though they're very small." **Zuhri** said, "I made fishing nets like the Taíno. I really concentrated when I was tying the knots." **Kaylon** said he liked learning about where the Taíno live. "They live on islands. There's a lot of water to catch fish." **Destiny** said, "I made nets to catch fish. They put it under the water and scooped fish into the net." **Gianna** liked making fish in the art room. **Shawnmathew and Shane** made a canoe with clay. **Hamse and Lukas** learned "The

remora fish stick to things and catch other fish." **Skye** liked making the people and the chief's house for the model. Stop by room 205 to see what we've been working on!

~Ashleigh L'Heureux

Room 217

Coming next week

Grades Three & Four

Room 207

Sometimes a picture says it best. Here are some students using everyday classroom materials to make rectangles and squares while learning about perimeter.





~Robert Baez

Room 216

Coming next week

Grades Five & Six

Room 210

Coming next week

Room 215

Students in 215 have been complaining about the quality of the hot school breakfast options. In morning meeting a student got up and began complaining about the eggs by squeezing an egg patty, showing other students how squishy it was, and yelling about how disgusting she thought it was. I used that opportunity to talk to them about appropriate and respectful ways to instigate change. I told them

that when they yell, complain, and shove food in other people's faces it makes it hard to want to listen. That motivated them to take action. During journal time students got into groups and created surveys and began writing formal letters of complaint. We talked about how complaining and whining about things doesn't help the problem. They need to pose a solution. We are in the process of analyzing data and publishing our letters. Thank you to all the classrooms that returned surveys.

~Sarah DeCruz

Grades Seven & Eight

Room 213

Hello! My name is Joanna Gallagher, and I have the privilege of learning alongside Ann and her 7th/8th grade class this spring as an intern. I was first attracted to Mission Hill by the way you all "do things differently": integrated and project-based learning, and a commitment to developing democratic habits of mind. Now that I am here, it is getting to know the minds and personalities of students I most enjoy.

One of my primary responsibilities in Ann's class is providing math support during early morning math and class time. It's fascinating to see the variety of mathematical thinking among students in their approaches to math problems—when making sense of linear relationships, some

students' first impulse is to make a graph, others make tables, still others write equations, and all display great mathematical thinking!

I also lead large and small group reading and discussion of the collection of vignettes by Sandra Cisneros called *The House on Mango Street*. We have asked students to respond to the text with some analytical writing (wherein they cite evidence from the text to build an argument) and with some creative writing (where they create their own vignettes, inspired by Cisneros' style). Here, too, I've been impressed with the breadth and depth of students' thinking!

~Joanna Gallagher

Room 214

"But what is science anyway?"

Jah'von posed that deep question in the middle of a passionate discussion in our science class. We have been studying science and engineering in the 7th and 8th grades by looking at the birth of hip-hop. The early DJs of the genre used all sorts of engineering skills to solve problems. DJs had to figure out how to access electricity in the parks where they threw parties, and how to amplify their music so that it carried for blocks—all with very little money. We have spent months doing readings, watching video documentaries, and, of course, listening to music, to study this history.

However, the connections

between science and this genre of music that is an inescapable part of our world, are not obvious. So during one Eighth Grade class, Kaya raised a thoughtful and important question: "what does hip-hop have to do with science?" The question sparked a discussion in which Jah'von pushed us to consider a bigger question: how do we define science? Is everything science? The conversation required us to pause and a step back. After reading that scientists observe, investigate, experiment, and theorize—all to understand how things work—we concluded that there is a lot of science in hip-hop.

Whether in DJ Kool Herc's discovery that parts of dance songs could be combined to form new songs, or Grandmaster Flash's experimenting with beats at parties, early hip-hop was a scientific endeavor. One take-away is there are all kinds of scientists, including the first hip-hop DJs and 7th and 8th graders in our middle school science classroom.

~Khury Petersen-Smith

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.

Boston Explorers Urban Day Camp for Kids

For kids, ages 8-15

Explore the city this summer! In each of the two-week sessions, Boston is the campground and kids are urban adventurers. As they navigate the city, its neighborhoods and natural spaces, campers discover their connection to the people and the place they live.

Explorers do four things every day:

- Explore Boston (high and low, off shore, on foot, by bike, boat, and T).
- Create and build: learn woodworking, photography, cooking, arts and more.
- Get to choose the games and sports we

play.

- They treat each other with kindness!

Scholarships are available, making it affordable for all families.

Founded by longtime MHS teacher, Alphonse Litz, the camp is co-directed by Amina Michel Lord. Manny St. Vil, the all-around-guy at school is one of the counselors. For more information on registration, please see Manny, Ms. Amina or Courtney. Check out the web site at: bostonexplorers.org

Scholarships available! Looking for scholarships for summer opportunities? Courtney has a limited number of scholarships available to various programs throughout the city such as Hale Reservation and Farm School. Contact her immediately to be considered.

Good news?

Does your family have good news that we can publish in the newsletter?

A new family addition? A certificate earned? A goal accomplished? We'd love to know about it. Please send family good news to agavins@missionhillschool.org.



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