



IMPORTANT DATES AND REMINDERS

- Week of January 12, 2015
Mix It Up Week at MHS
- Thursday, January 15, 2015
Family Council Meeting, 5:45-7:00 pm
- Monday, January 19, 2015
Martin Luther King Jr. Day: NO SCHOOL

January 9, 2015

Volume 18, Issue 14

Mix it Up

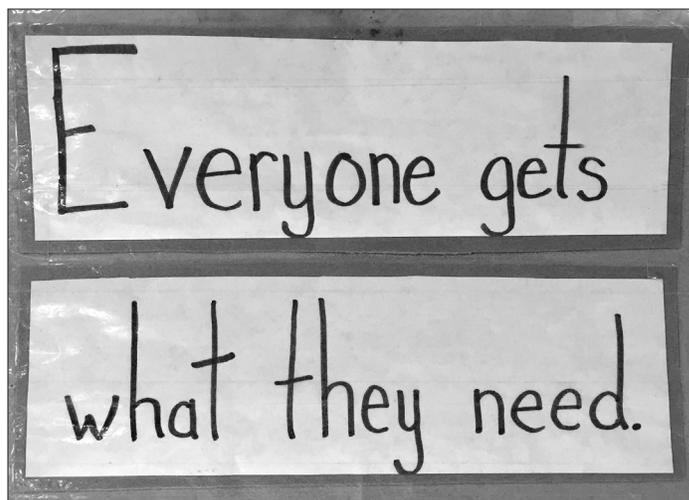
Dear Families, Students, Staff, and Friends,

I'm reading a book titled *Soar* by David Banks. The author writes about lessons he learned as the founder of a series of public schools for boys. In one part of the book he describes the need for boys to feel like they belong, experience healthy competition and have positive peer pressure. These three things are about young people and their peers, but adults set the stage for these things to happen. When these things don't happen children may be pushed to the margins, excluded, and not reach their full potential.

We all want to feel that we belong, that we are welcomed to be present. One way to achieve a sense of belonging is to connect with people and to be known. Next week students will participate in activities that allow them to meet new students or get to know a familiar face better. We are calling this Mix-It-Up week, inspired by Mix-It-Up at Lunch Day from Teaching Tolerance. Mix It Up week will include a range of activities beyond lunchtime, providing more opportunities for students to meet and get to know each other. Connecting and expanding friendships helps everyone feel more together and less alone.

Competition can bring out the worst or the best in our children. It can drive children to desire loss, exclusion, or set back for others or it can build a team, develop empathy, strengthen coping skills, and a climate of encouragement. What competition looks like depends largely on the influence of the environment. It's our adult responsibility to make sure all children have fair access to the activity even if it means changing the rules or traditional conditions of the play. It's our responsibility to create an environment where children encourage one another to succeed and children assist when they see a teammate, classmate or community member falling behind. A spirit of encouragement goes a long way toward the success of everyone.

When children are very young, parents have the most influence. As they grow older their peers eventually take the number one spot. However, adults can and should use this circumstance for good. Adults can set the stage for positive peer pressure by providing positive or healthy activities that children will want to do together and in adult company. This includes encouraging older children to invite others into their activities. Having play dates with a variety of children is great for your child and the other children invited. The shared experiences outside of school may create stronger connections that transfer into positive peer pressure and a general sense of belonging.



KINDERGARTEN

Room 108

One of the things I treasure about our school is the diversity we embrace. There are many ways to learn, to be, to communicate and to grow - and at Mission Hill School we work and play together. Everyone is valued and respected.

Some folks are surprised by how much we mix-it up here. They are surprised to see multi-age classrooms with children of various abilities learning together. But isn't that how the real world is? A place where one-size-does not fit all? Learning, playing, working and growing in an inclusive, "mixed up" community isn't easy, or simple. It is hard work - complicated, fulfilling and exciting. Next week we are going to mix-it up even more when we spend time in multi age groups spanning many grades on Wednesday and Thursday morning. Our goal is to build more connects and grow as a community and as individuals. Please take some time to talk to your child about Mix-it Up Week!

-Geraldyn McLaughlin

Room 106

Since I can remember, my mother has always been a strong advocate for individuals with special needs. She began this path when she was sixteen and started working at a summer camp for children with a wide range of both physical and mental/emotional special needs. She has worked with adults, middle schoolers, and is currently working at an alternative high school for students challenged by a traditional school setting. While I was in high-school, so many of her students would tell me "your mom is the



only reason I'm graduating". She was such an inspiration to me that when I turned sixteen I followed in her footsteps and began working at the very same summer camp she had worked at so many years ago. I immediately fell in love. I loved working with children who saw the world differently than I did. Children who had their own unique skill sets. Children who it pained me to know were often outcast and overlooked. This place seemed almost magical to me. It was aptly named Camp Happiness, and that's truly what it was. The children and adults alike enjoyed every second they spent there. I worked at this camp for nine summers before painfully telling my supervisor that I would be spending the summer in Boston and unable to return. However, the knowledge and memories I gained there are with me every day and I know that working with children of all learning styles is the only place I can see myself. I feel

blessed to be in a new place where I can find this happiness again.

-Elizabeth Borson

Room 107

Throughout our science theme, differing entry points were provided for students to experience "power", whether through definition or expenditure. Before the break, we were able to witness firsthand the merging of the two...human power being turned into electricity. One morning, as students entered the room, they made observations of and predictions about why our class lamp was connected to what they would later learn was a pedal generator. They hypothesized:

"If you ride the bike the lamp will turn on. I see the plug and if you plug the lamp into the bike, the light will go on with electricity".

"In the book we were reading, I think they pedal fast to turn on the light".

We took time to hear all possible theories and finally tested them. Everyone, regardless of age, strength/ability, were focused on one goal... lighting the lightbulb. As each person pedaled away, students cheered one another on and shouted words of encouragement. Each time the bulb lit, there was an uproar. When reflecting they said:

“The power was made by our strength. The more you pedal, the more power you make. When you pedal slow it turns off”.

“If you ride it fast in circles, then it will turn on but if you go slow it will only be dots of light”.

-Jada Brown & Jo-Ann Hawkesworth

Room 109

I used to think about inclusion almost exclusively in terms of education, and how children learn. I believed, and still do, that best practices in inclusive education are best practices for everyone. I believed that children have so much to teach each other and to learn from each other, and that we can all learn best together. I still believe all of that, yet...

My understanding is growing. I now see that inclusion is not just about children learning together in the same classroom. Inclusion is about complete access to and membership in a community. In inclusive schools, all children have the right to participate, to have a voice, and to be fully accepted. They have a right to access the curriculum and to make friends. They have right to be taught in a way that is conducive to their learning. They have a right to be fully supported academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. They have a right to thrive.

-Jenny Goldstein

GRADES 1 & 2

Room 204

Happy New Year! Feliz Año Nuevo!

A new year usually brings thoughts of what will be new, different, better. My thoughts as we begin the second half of our year are not centered on what will be new, but what has been. Time off always allows me to reflect and in that reflection I remember how truly grateful I am for the MHS community, all it has given me and how it has allowed me to grow. I am coming back with a renewed spirit and a renewed sense of gratefulness. Grateful that MHS is a community in which we welcome and celebrate everyone. Grateful that we are a community that honors the voices, gifts, and talents of everyone. Grateful that we are a community that works on seeing everyone and making everyone visible.

Though there are many things going on in the world that are still not the way we want them to be, we must remember all that we have.

We must remember how fortunate we are, despite what we lack, to be whom and where we are. We are the Mission Hill School community and we are fortunate to have this place, this space and each other. We must remember that a new year brings the opportunity to continue sharing with each other in kindness, honesty and love.

Half time is over. Players are on the field. Looking forward to a great second half!

issue.

-Jenerra Williams

Room 205

The social curriculum in a school or classroom is just as important as the academic curriculum. Learning how to be member of a community (we talk a lot about “just me thinking” vs. “group thinking”), learning how solve conflicts, or learning how to work collaboratively on a group project requires work and it takes practice to learn the skills needed in those various situations. For some of us, those skills take longer



to learn than others. For those of us who may have already learned some of those skills, they are learning how to respond when someone else does not follow these norms or needs more time to work through something. Someone may need reminders everyday about the same thing; someone's work may not look the same as yours; someone may do something that made you mad. Our goal is to learn that as we go through life we will encounter people who learn differently than us; people who will challenge our ideas, people who will look different than us, or people who have various life experiences, and then learning how to acknowledge those differences, use our voice, ask for help, and make others feel valued.

-Ashleigh L'Heureux & Kate Needham

Room 217

A recent Washington Post article read, "The new Congress is 80 percent white, 80 percent male and 92 percent Christian" and described how this was one of the most diverse Congressional groups ever. Our

country has a long way to go before all people believe that their voice is valued in political decisions. In order to make our political spaces more diverse, we have to think about giving young people opportunities to learn from and learn alongside peers that are different from them. We have to learn that everyone's voice is valuable. We must have authentic experiences for this to happen. I respect Mission Hill's commitment to having a school community that reflects the diversity of Boston. This means my classroom is full of students who have small families and big families, students who are learning their second or third language and students who speak one language, and students with disabilities and students without disabilities. When we work and learn in a diverse community, we all grow. We learn how to deal with conflict, how to ask for help, and how to celebrate accomplishments. I am grateful that my classroom represents who lives and works in Boston and not who works in Congress.

-Emma Fialka-Feldman

GRADES 3 & 4

Room 207

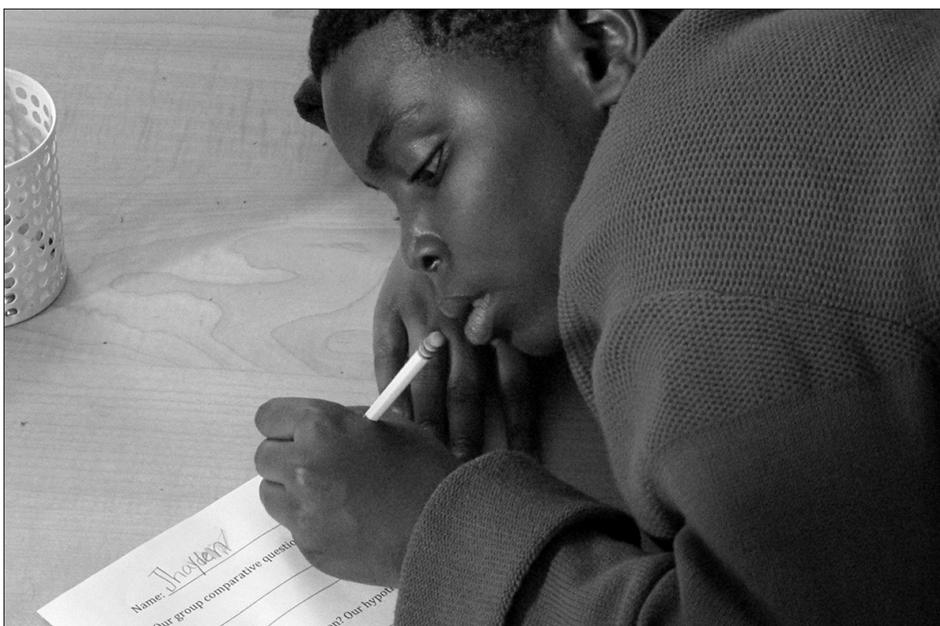
I often have the pleasure of helping when we have visitors at Mission Hill. Most times, people ask about what inclusion looks like here. I explain to them that in some schools children who have specific needs identified, academic and/or social emotional, are put into separate classrooms with other children who have similar designations. Here at Mission Hill children with specific academic and/or social emotional needs are integrated into classrooms with "typical" children.

Sometimes inclusion looks unfair. To this I say, it isn't unfair because we work hard to make sure everyone gets what they need (not necessarily what they want). This might mean that during morning meeting someone gets to sit on a chair because that helps them do their best. It isn't unfair, because everyone doesn't need to sit in a chair to help them do their best. This is often hard for children (and some adults) to understand. We will continue to help all members of our community understand and remember this.

-Amina Michel-Lord & Kristina Voss

Room 212

Welcome back! It's great to be back in the full swing of things. This week we will be celebrating Mix-It-Up, which is intended to provide opportunities for students to socialize with others they may not necessarily know. For me, it goes deeper than just talking to someone else for a few minutes. It's about learning to understand someone else's differences and celebrating/embracing the differences. We encourage friendships and want to enhance their opportunities to



learn from one another and learn from each person's contribution to the community. This time is about involving all students in an activity that everyone can partake in, have fun and connect with in ways they may not have necessarily known about by just seeing them in the building. I see this opportunity as a wonderful way to foster a culture of respect, feel welcomed and to participate in order to learn from each other.

-Josh, Brendan, Heron, and Sarah

Room 216

There's something amazing about the New Year! The New Year is a time for renewal and transformation. Like September we can again begin anew. We will start again with routines and revisit our goals. We will look at our individual and class goals, both academically and personally to make sure that we are on target to meet them.

During this time, and all year, we will remember, highlight and celebrate our differences. Our unique traits, learning styles, cultures and abilities are what help shape our great society (classroom and school for now) and our individuality can not be ignored. Inclusion means that we are recognizing and respecting these differences and as a teacher and class we will work together and help all to reach his or her highest potential.

One of the best things about inclusion is that we teach children that all of us have different needs in order to be successful. For example, I need my glasses to be successful. Students at MHS learn that although our work might look different and our books have varying levels we can be successful together.

-Alicia & Shaina

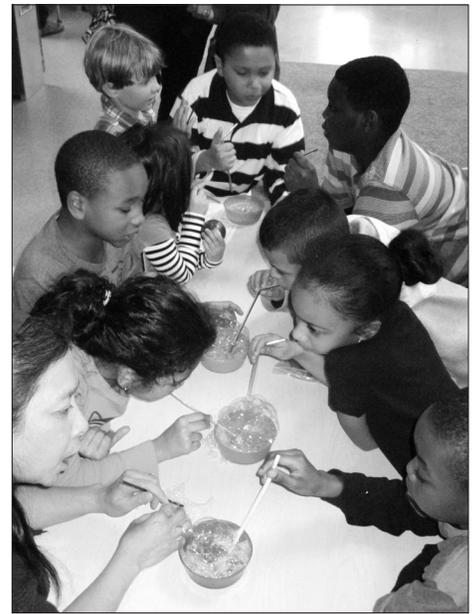
GRADES 5&6

Room 210

"Zinkoff" That is title of the last chapter of the book *Loser* and the last name of the lead character. Names play a big role in the story. "His name is Zinkoff," says Hobin... "he went to my school. He's a nobody." These are the words of a former classmate describing now middle school-aged Donald Zinkoff who, though never articulated in the story, has many characteristics of a child on the autism spectrum. Up to that point, many of his former classmates had taken to calling Zinkoff "loser". In this chapter the new B.M.O.C, Bonce, is in the painful process of selecting players from a wall of hopeful adolescents to participate on teams for football.

Aside from it being a great story, we have been reading this in part to open more dialogue about differences among us. "I think it starts to change around fourth grade" comments one student. "That's when you can start to tell if someone is different or weird ...before then it's not as big of a deal." Other students chimed in that a big part of being "Noticed" (another chapter from the book) has to do with social status and all that comes with pre-adolescence. Many more thoughtful and candid comments were shared during the various discussions of the story over the time. More importantly, I was able to see evidence of those thoughts in action on occasion.

One that stands out to me occurred during a recent trip to the gym to play a few community-building games. One student who normally does not get the opportunity and is usually not willing to participate in



such activities, had a chance to do so in a controlled and safe environment. Not only did the child participate, but excelled. This prompted one of the more athletic, alpha students to exclaim, "Wow, did you see ____? She is a beast (which is a good thing for the record)! Did you see all of the people you got out?"

The chapter and book draw to an end as all of Donald Zinkoff's "frienemies" do their best to color Bonce's perception as he scans the few remaining kids, deciding who is worthy enough to join the teams. He is not quite swayed however. In fact, he is left with more questions than he is with judgements. This is goofy he thinks. He thinks of a thousand things to say, a thousand other ways this could go, but in the end there's really only one word; he knows that, one word from him and who knows where we go from there? He points and says it: "Zinkoff." And the game begins."

Sometimes all it takes is saying a kid's name.

-Nakia, June & Elsa

Room 215

In Room 215, we started the year exploring our differences and unique ways of thinking and experiencing the world around us. We struggled; we amused one another; we are learning to genuinely embrace our differences. Our essential question has evolved with our growing confidence in building a community. We voted on Tuesday for this new question, “How do we build a better community?” And we articulated these new goals: 1) play and have fun, 2) stay on task, and 3) be kind to each other.

There’s a power in sharing and co-creating a community with others. When each person participates in acts of co-creation we expand the possibilities for everyone to fit in, to belong, to be included, to be heard and to be honored. For us, inclusion of all our cognitive and cultural differences means that we keep envisioning and struggling for a community that we believe is possible.

-Abdi, Angela, & Carlos

GRADES 7&8

Room 213

Educator Jim Bellanca stated it succinctly: “Teaching is a strategic act of encouragement.” In my mind, I like that to become, “Being in community is a strategic act of encouragement.”

This doesn’t mean that everyone gets a pat on the back and a “good job” sticker. It does mean that everyone’s best self is called forth and supported as it continually comes into being.

So what might this look like in a classroom? First, it means choice. Everyone needn’t be doing the same thing, the same way, at the same time. We need different things to

become our best selves. My book might be written at a lower level than her book, and his book might be an audio file, but we each have access to the information we need to learn. My presentation might be an original dramatic reading, her’s might be a research paper, and his might be a physical model, but we each produce evidence to share what we learned. My reflection might be oral, hers might be an essay, and his might be a worktag, but we each think about how we used the Mission Hill Habits of Mind and Work, how we responded to challenges, and our next steps for learning.

And then we celebrate, acknowledging that each of us took a step towards becoming.

-Ann Ruggiero & Letta Neely

Room 214

What is inclusion? What does it look like in your classroom? At Mission Hill School? Inclusion is not a “disability” issue – it is how we live. Mix It Up Day is coming to MHS. Many of our students will be moving out of their comfort zones and getting to know other students from different cultures, backgrounds and genders in an effort to encourage

tolerance and exposure to diversity. Truthfully, “Mix it up day” should be a way of life. The focus on how you treat others in learning and how you live together, treasures our diversities and respects individual strengths and weaknesses.

How we build community is determined by sharing our gifts and talents. I like the National Down Syndrome definition of inclusion: “the practice of welcoming, valuing, empowering and supporting diverse academic and social learning among students of all abilities”. By participating in this event, our students have an opportunity to unite and find common ground with their peers as individuals as well as students from other age groups. The idea is acceptance for all students and a sense of belonging at MHS and in our classrooms.

Being new to MHS, I have become included and I am part of the community. I have felt welcomed, valued, supported and accepted by both the students and staff. This is what being inclusive looks like and feels like.

-Reginald Toussaint, Carol East-José & Manny St. Vil



SCHOOLWIDE NEWS

Family Council News

The January 15th Family Council meeting will (for the second time this year) be facilitated by MHS partner, Urban Improv. Urban Improv uses improvisational theatre techniques as a teaching tool to help young people with conflict resolution. Urban Improv will provide pizza and MHS will provide childcare. Dinner is from 5:45-6:00 and the workshop will take place from 6:00-7:00 pm. Please contact Joni if you need childcare 617-635-6384.

Ringworm Alert

There have been a few cases of ringworm seen in the school this month. Ringworm is caused by a fungus which lives and spreads on the top layer of skin and on the hair. It is contagious and is spread by skin-to-skin contact with a person or animal that has it. It can also be spread when you share things like towels, clothing, or sports gear. Ringworm often makes a pattern in the shape of a ring, but not always. Sometimes it is just a red, itchy rash. Your health-care provider will be able to treat and prescribe creams. Children can be at school with ringworm, but it needs to be covered well so that it does not spread to others. Please contact the school nurse if you have any questions or concerns.
-Nurse Georgie

Free Cooking Classes!

Join the All Dorchester Sports League for Fit Kitchen, a series of 5 cooking and nutrition classes on Saturdays from 10:00-12:00 starting

on January 24th. Open to children ages 10-18 and their families. You may register for one or all classes but space is limited and first come, first serve. Call 617 287 1601 to register.

Boston SpedPac Special Needs Camp and Resource Fair

Thursday January 22, 2015 from 6:30 - 8:30 pm at The Richard J. Murphy School Cafeteria, 1 Worrell Street, Dorchester 02122.

Ping Pong, Anyone?

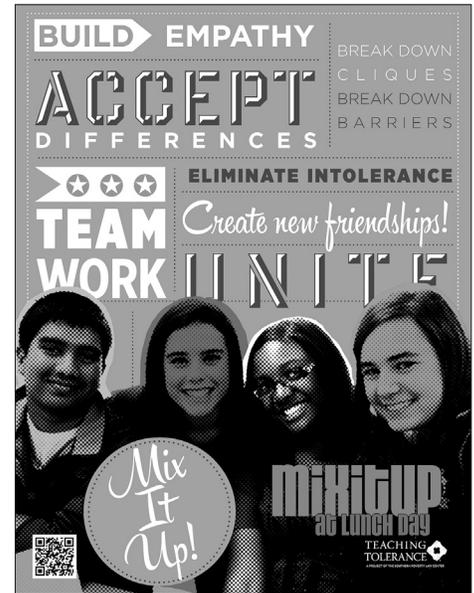
Wellness Coordinator Laura Golitko has a project up on DonorsChoose.org to purchase ping pong tables for MHS Wellness. Check it out at <http://www.donorschoose.org/teach/2638507>. The project is open until April, 2015.

MHS Online Family Forum

Did you know that the MHS online family forum is a GREAT resource for parents, caregivers, and staff? Get to know the community better, stay informed about exciting school celebrations, accomplishments, and fundraisers, join initiatives, as well as get and share news and plans. To join, please email Amy Banzaert (parent of Eli in Jenerra's class) amy-banz@mit.edu.

Cold Weather Reminder

Please remember MHS students of ALL ages play outside as much as possible. Remember to send your child with layers and appropriate clothing, according to the day's forecast. If they enjoy playing in the snow, please send them with an extra change of clothing for that day. If you need extra gloves, scarves, or a jacket



for your child please let your child's teacher know or call Courtney at 617.635.6384. We are happy to assist in any way we can.

Lost and Found

There are several large bins in our Lost & Found area (adjacent to the main office). Several winter coats, hats and gloves are included in this large collection of wayward clothing. Please stop by or contact your child's teacher if he or she has lost anything.

GOT NEWS?

Do you have news or information that you would like to share with the MHS community?

Email submissions to Dani Coleman:
dcoleman@missionhillschool.org.

Ayla Gavins, *Principal*

Deborah Meier, *Founder*

John McDonough, *Interim Superintendent*

Mission Hill K-8 School

A Boston Public Pilot School

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