



IMPORTANT DATES AND REMINDERS

- April 20-24, 2015
Spring Break: **NO SCHOOL**
- Monday, April 27, 2015
Grades 3&4 to Farm School
- Tuesday, April 28, 2015
Grades 1&2 to Farm School
- Tuesday, May 5, 2015
School Picture Day!
Tres Gatos Music Fundraiser (see page 6)

April 17, 2015

Volume 18, Issue 26

Working Together Through a Challenging Year

Dear Friends, Families, Students and Staff:

Last week the teachers of grade 3/4 met with families. Amina began the meeting by leading us in the song *Step by Step*. With all of the original lead teachers gone now for one reason or another, our team has been shaken about as hard as it could be. This has created a feeling of uncertainty for many of our students and families. Rumors about why our teachers left the school that have grown among our students and families (maybe staff too). Rumors have only added to the uncertainty and a sense of panic for some people—creating a divide between school and family.

It is shocking to all of us when a teacher leaves before the school year is complete. This is the situation we are in and we have to remember to pull together during this time, not splinter apart. For the remainder of the school year I'll be the lead teacher in one of our grade 3/4 classrooms with two supporting adults. Kristina and Amina, a great team, will continue in their classroom. We will work together to provide the best experience possible for students given the transitions they have been through.

Of course we have to ask, what lesson can be learned from all of this? Are we making the right hires? If not, why not? Are we supporting new hires well enough? Should our evaluation and process to excess staff be more transparent? Is there a pattern revealed from exit interviews? Should we make it clear to our family community that sometimes the school decides to not invite someone back and that's not public business?

By the time you read this newsletter, much of our hiring for next year will be complete. We really hope we nailed it this time with our new teammates. We want teachers who are creative, flexible, not easily rattled, people that stick to tasks that are tough, are leaders, are excited about curriculum and assessment development, are a pleasure to work with, and are committed to be at Mission Hill for the long haul with our students, families and staff.

As I watched the bees in my beehive fly around this weekend, I found inspiration. The bees huddled together during our cold stormy months and survived a brutal winter. It was the huddle (and me shoveling out the hive after every snowfall) that led to their survival. So here we are in a tough time. Let's take a lesson from the bees and pull together so we can come out flying too.

****Step By Step***
Step by step, the longest march
can be won, can be won.
Many stones can form an arch,
singly none, singly none.
And by union what will,
can be accomplished still.
Drops of water turn the mill,
singly none, singly none.

KINDERGARTEN

Room 108

How does one approach the school wide theme Struggle For Justice through the Lens of the African American Experience with three and four year olds? That is a question I have been reflecting on in recent months and weeks. Our lens in Room 108 will be Empathy and Action. We will be using books and stories (starting with an author study of Todd Parr) and then moving to the powerful children's books around social justice action such as *Amazing Grace* by Mary Alice Hoffman. If you have other ideas of children's book where a child stands up for an injustice, let me know! Our aim is that students will begin to understand...

- *Everyone has a voice and everyone's voice is important*
- *It is important to accept everyone - including that which makes them different from you*
- *Everyone has something to offer - we can learn from everyone*
- *Everyone has feelings, and those feelings are important*
- *You can help someone who needs help*
- *If you see something that is wrong - you can help make it right.*

Please let us know if your child is thinking about any of these ideas with you at home - and how the conversations are unfolding.

-Geralyn McLaughlin

Room 106

It's hard to believe, but the warm weather is officially here! The Sparkling Birds are taking advantage of the wonderful change in the weather, and we are spending as much of

our afternoon outside as we can. Our first long afternoon outside was this past Monday, and as I watched the children in room 106 laughing and playing happily outside, I was overwhelmed with an appreciation for springtime. The warm weather means drawing with chalk, riding trikes, playing soccer, and exploring mud, dirt and water in our sensory tables. However, it also has brought about something equally exciting.

Over the past few weeks, I have noticed a tremendous leap in the students' confidence to sound out words, recognize sight words, and begin to read more and more books on their own. All of the hard work they have been doing all year is falling into place. The students are excited about reading, and motivated by their success. It is such a rewarding moment to see the looks of accom-

plishment and excitement on their faces when they read a new and challenging book. This accomplishment is one that has been made possible by the hard works the students, teachers, and families, and I am so joyous that I am able to share this moment with your children.

-Liz & Renee

Room 107

Last week ended with a bang. We performed our drumming at Friday Share and shared what we knew about Nubia with the audience. We then were free to celebrate Dress Like a Book Character day. Madison dressed in Nubian garb. Geneva came as Snow White; Eamon dressed like Toothless from *How to Train Your Dragon*; Gerson came as a ninja from Ninjago and both Farrah and Ava came dressed as Elsa from



Children of all ages have been taking advantage of the beautiful weather.

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Frozen. Jonathan and Jeremy wore Spiderman costumes; Max came as King Tut; Wren was dressed as Ariel; Romeo wore a Sonic mask and Keith came as Batman. Nyla dressed like a character from *Monster High*, Natalia came as Rapunzel and Josie came as Ladybug Girl. Our Princess Dragon Hot Wheels were overly elated as they acted out the characters they were dressed as throughout the morning. In some cases, students brought in a book that went with their costume. As they snuggled up on their cots towards the end of the day, many listened intently as some of them met these characters for the first time, while others were so familiar that they mouthed the words as I read.

-Jada Brown & Jo-Ann Hawkesworth

Room 109

This is my take-over week as a student teacher. So far, the children have been doing a plant experiment along with scientific observations. It began with a read aloud of the *Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle, and a discussion in small groups about what helps a plant grow and what harms it, both in the story and from personal knowledge. The children then planted their own pea seeds in a clear plastic cup with only damp paper towels to easily see the roots as they start to grow. Later this week, we will be tying the story, *A Weed is a Flower: The Life of George Washington Carver* by Aliko to the MHS theme and my science unit. The story talks about his life story of overcoming adversity through his success in science and agriculture as a black individual during the time of slavery. This is the first of many African American biographies we will study this spring.

-Angelina Amato, Student Teacher



A map of Boston, which will be used by Emma's class to study *The Struggle for Justice*. Their focus will be buses.

GRADES 1 & 2

Room 204

Coming next week!

-Jenerra Williams

Room 205

As we begin our new theme *The Struggle for Justice: The African American Experience*, students shared what they thought the word struggle means and told about times when they have struggled. Amos said, "In baseball, if a team is losing they're struggling." Azad added, "You can be fighting physically or fighting with words. You want to be happier or better than other people." Emile

shared, "I struggled in soccer because I wasn't good at it." Cyrus also commented about how sometimes when you learn something new you might struggle. When have you struggled? What do you struggle with? Have a conversation with your children.

-Ashleigh L'Heureux

Room 217

"What's our next theme?" the class eagerly asked on Monday. Theme breakfast last week, empty bookshelves, and bare walls signal to the class that we will be studying something new. I told the class that we will be learning about buses, how buses are part of making our schools

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and communities more inclusive, and how buses were part of the Civil Rights Movement. During the next theme, the Struggle for Justice: Through the Lens of the African American Experience, students will be learning about the desegregation movement in Boston. To launch this study, we have talked about where we go on buses and have identified the neighborhoods where we live. We worked carefully on making a large map of Boston so that we can use this tool throughout the study.

-Emma Fialka-Feldman

GRADES 3 & 4

Room 207

“Woah, that’s a lot of books!” exclaimed students as they walked into the classroom and found several stacks of books in our meeting area. “What are they all about?” “Our next theme!” another student replied enthusiastically. The room was abuzz with excitement and wonderings. Now that the PARCC is finally over, the Spectacular 21 can really start to dig into our next theme- The Struggle for Justice: The African American Experience. We will be focusing on biographies of activists and change-makers, both historically and today. That morning, students picked out a few books that interested them and sat with their friends to read and study the photographs and illustrations. Students read books about activists they have learned about before such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and Harriet Tubman, and also learned the names of activists and change makers that are new to many of them such as- Josephine Baker, Frederick Douglass and Marian Anderson. In art this week students drew beautiful portraits of individ-

uals they have read about and in the coming days they will begin to think about someone they are interested in studying further.

-Kristina Voss & Amina Michel-Lord

Room 216

Please welcome Amanda McCarthy to our classroom team. Amanda was at Mission Hill in the fall working with Jenerra and then Amina. She is excited about joining our team and we are fortunate to have her.

It seems that during every closing meeting I remark on how busy our day has been. It’s amazing how uniquely full each day can be. Last Friday we went to a theatre to see the Boston Ballet perform. This Friday we had a special guest come in to speak with us about the wonderful tribute he makes to others. As soon as we return from the break, we are heading to the Farm School. These experiences are best with reflection, an opportunity to consider connections between new and old experiences. Ask your child to tell you about the ballet, our special guest or the upcoming farm trip.

-Ayla, Shaina & Amanda

GRADES 5&6

Room 210

Over the years we have figured out ways for students to engage with their report cards. We discuss why it’s important to review and see what adults they work with are saying about them as learners. The report cards are for them and about them, and therefore they need to be able to process the contents. Below are a few comments students made in direct response to comments written in their reports.

“One of his closest friends is no



Portraits of Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and Duke Ellington, from students in room 207.

longer in the school, however it does not seem to have impact him in the way I would have imagined.”

Student reply: (student) had been saying things I didn’t really like. Everyone would do what (student) wanted to do now, so now I feel free. “(Student) remains an important part of our community.”



Nicole Caceres from the MHS class of 2014, at her portfolio presentation.

Student reply: I like that it says I'm an important part of the community.

"As of late, he has been a little more reactive, irritable, and resistant."

Student reply: I just felt bummed out because I didn't have a good week and I felt sick.

"He has a difficult time working independently, often times relying too heavily on adult support."

Student reply: I do that because if there is no grown-up, one of my friends will make a joke and get me off of my focus and i will get in trouble.

"She could benefit from a little vocabulary work."

Student reply: I think that's right because I say a word in a book but sometimes I dont know what it means.

"Because she is responsible, there are times when people ask a lot of her..."

Student reply: What do you mean people ask a lot of me ?

-Nakia, June, & Meron

Room 215

On Thursday all fifth and sixth graders attended *Afrika Lives!*, Boston Arts Academy's ninth grade Humanities exhibition. Our students had concluded the theme study of ancient Nubia; BAA's students were exhibiting their own studies of the kingdoms of west and sub saharan Africa, Kush, Ile-Ife, Songhay, among others. 16 years ago I'd co-authored this curriculum; the vision to have students re-create the rich legacies of Africa through the arts has become a rite of passage for all ninth graders at BAA, Boston's only public high school for the arts. Here's what our students had to say:

Bryan: I think our trip to BAA was cool because of the acting and the singing.

Uly: I liked going to see the *Afrika Lives* at BAA. I thought some classes were more prepared than others. But all the classes were very talented.

Angel: I liked looking at the ancient Nubian stuff.

Tandin: I like *Afrika Lives*. I liked all the dancing...I went to one classroom and they did a play and I thought

that was interesting.

Tato: It was so cool at that school.

Dario: I liked my experience a lot. I liked how they put their education to work with how they work as artists.

Jaylin: I learned many things about them, changing the way we think about Afrika than just people being homeless or have nothing to do.

AJ: I think that it was very interesting how they showed the audience what the cultures were like and how they incorporated all of the arts majors.

Chantal: It was good. I saw a lot of singing and dancing. They were acting so well.

Zack: When I went to *Afrika Lives* I enjoyed the skits they did.

Joel: I liked when the people were dancing when we first came in to see the performance.

-Abdi, Angela & Carlos

GRADES 7&8

Room 213

If spring is in the air, then portfolio season is soon to follow. As seventh graders are beginning to understand what this means for them, they are voicing disbelief. Eighth graders, however, are quick to reassure: "Yes, you can do it. You just have to do your work."

Every year, students amaze us with what they have to say about their work, themselves as learners, their strengths and challenges, and their passions. Families are surprised by how their young ones have grown up. They marvel at their child, fielding questions, explaining projects, and accepting responsibility. It's an incredible process.

Dani Coleman, portfolio coordinator, will contact families to set portfolio presentation dates for the first three weeks of June. Portfolios are sched-

uled at 7 am, 10 am, 1 pm, and 4 pm, and last two to two and a half hours each. A committee comprised of student, family, peer, teacher, adviser, and external community member gathers to review the student's work and provide feedback. The presence of Mission Hill Habits of Mind and Work throughout the work is noted, and strategies and supports for continued growth are identified.

All this means you should expect your child to be busy with school-work the next few months! April vacation week is prime reading time for those who need more entries for their booklist. Please ask your child what they are working on and provide quiet time at home as needed.
-Ann Ruggiero & Letta Neely

Room 214

In history class, we are writing essays on African-Americans involvement in the American Revolution. I overheard an exchange recently that brought a smile to my face. The exchange was free and spirited, the students were at a table, typing away at the laptop then the questions came: "Who were the Tories again?"

"Did Washington want African-Americans on his side before or after Dunmore's proclamation?"

"How many former slaves fought with the rebels?"

Each question was followed by an answer from a classmate. It was one of those moments where things were clicking and the organic conversation among students confirm that they have a good grasp of the material.

As a teacher, I second guess myself

very often. Am I providing too much support? Too little support? Am I providing enough opportunities for students to collaborate? It's easy to miss it when things are clicking. I am really glad that I was able to register that conversation and take a moment to acknowledge and enjoy that things are going well.

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

SCHOOLWIDE NEWS

Spring Music Concert: Save the Date!

Join us for an evening of music in the MHS Auditorium with your amazing MHS children! The concert will feature choral performances and selections from our wind, string, guitar and percussion ensembles. Refreshments, a raffle and special gifts will be provided for those in attendance! Wednesday, May 20th 2015, from 5:00 - 7:30pm

The FOMHS Music Program Campaign Needs Your Support!

The Friends of the Mission Hill School has launched a new campaign to keep our music program going strong. Please consider a donation at any level, and please share with friends and family! Visit the web page: bit.ly/MissionHillMusic

Music Fundraiser at Tres Gatos

On May 5th, the JP restaurant, Tres Gatos, will host a fundraiser evening for the MHS Music Program. Come get some dinner and hear music teacher Billy Buss perform. A portion of the evening's proceeds will be donated to support music education

at our school. This is an adult-only event. Contact Bridget Lee for more information: bridgetelee@gmail.com

Get your Camp Physical!

Don't forget that summer programs ALL require a medical examination by a licensed physician within 12 months preceding the program. This is a state requirement for all children attending camp, so book your child's appointment now. Remember, Georgie needs updated copies of physicals as well, so drop a copy in her mailbox after your appointment.

SWSG is collecting tabs for Ronald McDonald House

The students in the Strong Women, Strong Girls group are fundraising to help provide housing for those in need as part of their spring service project. Please help them collect can tabs! Find tabs on cans of soup, vegetables, soda, juice, cat food, fruit etc. You can drop them off in the pink box in the office.

Free Eye Exams at MHS

New England Eye On-Sight's mobile vision van will be coming to our school on Wed., April 29. They'll provide the follow-up care from your child's initial vision screening at school-an eye exam and prescriptions for TWO pairs of FREE eyeglasses if needed. Please let either Georgie or Courtney know you would like a registration form ASAP, as space is limited. This is a service provided through your health insurance but if health insurance is a problem, please see Courtney so another agency can help get your child the care s/he needs.

Ayla Gavins, *Principal*

Deborah Meier, *Founder*

John McDonough, *Interim Superintendent*

Mission Hill K-8 School

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