

Mission Hill School News

Letter from Mission Hill

Reading in Massachusetts

Dear Mission Hill School Families, Friends and Staff,

Everyone (parent, student, teacher, community at large) wants the members of the community to be literate, fluent readers. I thought it might be helpful if I laid out the path of literacy for students at Mission Hill with the goals of the district and the state.

The path to becoming a reader at Mission Hill begins with a language rich environment. Conversation, song and text are everywhere. In the early age groups, morning meetings have word recognition components and literacy blocks are filled with a blend of direct reading instruction and independent exploration or reading.

REMINDERS

November

Mon-Wed, 11/14-16,

Grades 7&8 to Farm School

Thu, 11/17: Family Council, 5:45

Wed. 11/23: Theme Breakfast,
early dismissal

Mon, 11/28: School reopens

December

Thu, 12/1: Governance Bd. mtg.

Tue, 12/22: Family Night, 5:45

Fri, 12/23: Winter Break begins

As children get older this model continues with more emphasis on the habits of mind. Fluency and comprehension lead to more enjoyment of the reading experience. Read aloud for all age groups brings the rhythm of text to each listener's ear, provides a group dialogue and enhanced comprehension experience.

Students are assessed in a variety of ways. First, the teacher listens to the child read on a regular basis. Stumbling points in decoding, fluency and/or comprehension are noted. The observational notes are used to inform the teacher's (or team's) instruction to move the child forward as a reader. Children whose reading obstacles are puzzling to the teacher are discussed with a team of teachers who act as problem solvers. The team is responsible for putting a plan in place to address the reading barrier. The teacher and other adults who work closely with the child monitor the progress these students make as well as other readers.

We have a tight literacy plan in place for children, from environment to one on one work with an adult when needed. Most children thrive in their literacy world at Mission Hill. Others plug away and become satisfactory readers. Still, some children mystify us and we keep returning to the discussion table about what the barriers to reading might be.

Boston Public Schools requires that 80% of grade 1 students are readers by the end of grade one. By the end of grade three the district goal is to have fluent readers with strong comprehension skills.

The Common Core standards are worth taking a look at for a number of reasons. The district is in line to adopt the Common Core Standards. It is important to know the greater context of standards that your children are being expected to reach. It is also important to know which ones align with your personal values as a parent. You can find them at www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/ela/0311.pdf. There are many pages to the frameworks document. Here's some advice. For grades K-5, go to pages 6 through 22. These pages include information ranging from the guiding principles of the standards to the specifics of each grade level. Pages 47 through 52 cover grades six, seven, and eight. You can focus on the grade levels most relevant to your children. These common core standards are being rolled out, not instantly implemented. Take time to learn about them as you develop your own set of standards for your children.

~Ayla Gavins

From the Classrooms

5 to 7 year-olds

Room 203

In their efforts to record observations of our caterpillars as a group, our students came up with the following story recounting their experience.

Caterpillar Disappearance and the Little Caterpillar

Once upon a time there was a little caterpillar. When it was small it was tiny. It ate a lot and it grew a lot. It ate lots and lots and lots of milkweed. It had 16 legs and it pooped a lot. We saw the fat caterpillar and a big caterpillar. One day one of our caterpillars drowned into the water and there was only one left. The other caterpillar climbed and climbed and climbed like Jack and Annie in the Magic Tree House. It hung in a "J" for a long time. We thought that it would turn into a chrysalis, a cocoon or a pupa. Then it would pop open and out would come butterfly!

But that did not happen. One morning the caterpillar was gooey on its head. The caterpillar almost turned into a butterfly. Then there was a mouse inside the container. The caterpillar disappeared and the caterpillar turned into a mouse! But caterpillars don't turn into mice because if that was true then that would be crazy and we would know. We know that caterpillars really turn into butterflies. So, it must be that the mouse got in and then it ate the caterpillar. We don't know how the mouse got in.

Due to this very hungry mouse, we continue to review the correct stages in this life cycle. But, what

do you do when your mind tells you one thing but your eyes tell you another?

~Jada Brown,
Jo-Ann Hawkesworth,
& Kimberly Rogers

Room 204

Every Wednesday we cook a hot cereal for snack. The hot cereals we cook are made with whole grains. They fill children up and hold off hunger for longer periods of time than other kinds of food. It is not only a way for us to have a delicious warm snack, but also to help children try new foods they may have not tried before.

"Is that cornmeal porridge?" Jada asked as she stuck her head in my room. "It is," I said with a grin. Later in the day Alton came in the room. "Kathy, that looks like cornmeal porridge." "It is," I said. It was no surprise that Jada and Alton knew what we were cooking. Cornmeal porridge is a typical Jamaican breakfast. Every bite it takes me right back to childhood.

We continue to talk in class about healthy minds and healthy bodies. Cooking food ourselves instead of buying pre-made snacks helps us know exactly what is going into our bodies. The families in the class have been bringing in snack that they could prepare at home, and we welcome it. One morning I was greeted by a big dish of broccoli and plantains. Just this week we had oatmeal chocolate chip cookies one day and cornmeal porridge another.

I have added a couple websites that discuss the benefits of cooking with kids. Take a look and pick which ones you like. Happy,

healthy eating!

www.webmd.com/food-recipes/guide/cooking-with-your-children

www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=541

www.cookingwithkids.com/part1/challenges.html/

~Kathy Clunis D'Andrea

Room 205

The children have been working on collages of the beach, reflections of our trips and what they are learning about the place where the ocean meets the land. We began with a piece of stiff mat board and four directions: Paint water; Paint sky; Add sand; Let it dry (we have been working on rhyming after all). It's more direction than I usually give, but I'm determined to help the children form a background that will make sense as they build their images.

What else will you find on your beach? We are also thinking about what makes a piece of work feel "finished." Sometimes we just want to get something out of the way; but the project becomes so much more satisfying when we take another look, a little more time. With real sand, seaweed, shells, and sea glass, with paper cutouts of beach grass, seagulls and horseshoe crabs, with painted clouds and drawn parts, too, the children begin to see their beachscapes come to life. They offer one another suggestions about what else they might include, their eyes light up when they imagine the next treasure a beachcomber might discover.

Water washes over sand in some pictures, sand piles up at the edge of the waves in another. Like the beach itself, the collages keep changing...

~Melissa Tonachel,
Leia Baylor & Richard Leak

7 to 9 Year-Olds

Room 201

*For the earth forever turning;
For the sky, for every sea;
For our lives, for all we cherish,
Sing we our joyful song of peace*
(words and music by Kim Oler)

“Could you write your own lyrics to this song?” Allegra, our singing teacher, asked us at the end of chorus on Tuesday. Heads turned to look around the circle. Their eyes said, Maybe? Sure! Want to do it with me?

Ms. Donna made copies of the sheet music and passed them out to a group of seven lyricists. Recognizing that the group was on the large side, they split up into pairs. Some tried substituting words in the original lyrics while others worked on writing entirely new words to match the tune.

Twenty minutes into quiet writing, the pairs took turns coming to the piano. I played the melody while the lyricists sang their new compositions, checking to see if the words they had written worked with the tune.

“Maybe we’ll change this last part. It has too many words to sing.”

“If we just add “that’s” then we have just the right amount of words.”

A sample of their work in

progress below:

*For the trees forever growing
For the leaves that change from
green
For the trunk that’s always
standing
Sing we our joyful song of peace*
~Emily Schubin & Donna
Winder

Room 207

In the seven weeks we have been in school, we are getting used to routines. The following are some suggestions on how you can help your child to be successful with the routine of getting their homework done each week.

Our homework cover sheet is divided into two sections: “Must Do” and “And Choose Two or More”. When the homework packet comes home on Friday, look it over with your child. Decide together what activity is going to be completed on each night. Writing the day directly on the page will help your child know ahead of time what needs to be completed each evening.

Reading and filling out the Reading Log is a “Must Do” every week! Reading should happen *five days each week*. Let me know if your child wants to borrow books.

Provide your child with a work space that is free of distractions. Because ALL homework should be completed in pencil, have pencils and erasers that are easily accessible. Each night, the completed packet should go back into their folder and be placed in the same place, like in a desk drawer or backpack. On Thursday evenings, your child will know

exactly where to find the folder so that *they* can put it into their backpack and return it to school on Fridays.

If you are having difficulty with homework routines, please let us know so that we can work together in finding strategies that work best for your child.

~Amina Michel-Lord
& Jenerra Williams

9 to 11 Year-Olds

Room 202

Last week our class had a very interesting discussion following a life science related reading assignment. The text concerned “food webs” and “food chains” and the roles of “producers,” “consumers,” and “decomposers” in nature. Our students easily identified, defined, and explained these terms based on the text and our earlier investigations. “Food webs” and “food chains” are ways of showing the interconnectedness of how energy moves through organisms. For example, producers (seeds, seaweed, etc.) will be eaten by primary consumers (mice, fish, etc.) which are eaten by secondary consumers (snake, seal, etc.) which are in turn consumed by tertiary consumers (hawks, orcas, etc.). These are all steps in relationships linked together in direct chains and complex webs. Organisms that break down the wastes or remains of all these organisms are called decomposers.

Using prior knowledge, our class – having explored

predator/prey relationships, understanding that some animals are carnivores, some herbivores, and so forth – discussed what kinds of food chains and webs they knew of or could imagine. They were able to classify organisms, plant and animal, as producer, consumer, or decomposer. And, as usual, some very interesting questions came up. Are all plants producers? If so, what about the Venus Fly Trap, which consumes flies? Does the fact that humans eat dead animals make us decomposers? Where would we be in the food chain in “the old days?”

In addition to some great discussions, readings, and research, this theme unit has also led to some fantastic art work. Over the last few weeks, students have produced beautiful posters illustrating ecosystems, science concepts, and content vocabulary.

~James McGovern
& Kevin Kareckas

Room 206

As I mentioned briefly last week, our study of life science began with the study of our school. In looking at ecosystems and the connectedness of living and non-living things, we first examined the elements in the ecosystem of the Mission Hill School. Children made note of different components both general and specific.

“The pencils, desks and white boards are all not living,” commented one child.

“Desks used to be living,”

rebutted another.

Once we had strong list, kids began to examine the connections that existed between different elements and how they need each other.

“If we took custodians out of our system then the school would be a mess and uncared for... We need students so that teachers and support staff can have someone to teach.”

“We also need to have class pets and they are living,” said Kianna.

This sparked a discussion about what we actually need for our school to function well. Later that day, the adults met to continue discussing the proposed move of our school. Coincidentally, we made a very similar list of things that we need to teach children well and to keep being Mission Hill School.

~Nakia Keizer

Grades 6, 7 8

Room 211

In Literacy we have begun to examine techniques authors use to engage their readers. We have been reading Gary Paulson’s novel, *Hatchet*, which is an excellent piece to study an author’s craft. One technique that Paulson uses to create suspense is by slowing the action down, repeating key words, and using sound words (onomatopoeia). Students listened to a chapter out loud, so they could hear how his writing is meant to be read and listen for suspense. After they listened to the chapter they went back to the text and identified lines from the text that they thought were suspenseful and

explained how it created suspense for readers. Once we brainstormed a list of ways Gary Paulson created suspense, students had an opportunity to free write about any topic and try to make it suspenseful.

Siobhan wrote:

It looked like a normal classroom except for something in the center of the rug. It was very hard to see in the dim light, so one of the officers reached for the light switch and flicked it on. There was a loud piercing scream and a green blob emerged from the rug. It looked like a brain...

~Sarah DeCruz

Room 209

“Are we going fishing today?” This is a question I was asked a lot in the last two weeks. The 7th and 8th graders are enacting a simulation game that situates us as fishermen/women on a small Eastern Caribbean island.

Here are some of the kids’ comments: **Shantel:** *Overall, I think that this whole investigation with fishing and money is kind of cool. I get to learn more about the lives of fishermen and women. I’m so lucky that I don’t have that life.*

Mikaila: *I want to continue working independently. I want to buy more pots because I already have more than \$100 for the week with my savings. **Xin:** *At the end of the second day, I realized that I can put all my pots inshore for the next three days and I would still have a total of \$80. I did this because I didn’t want to risk any more pots. **Ike:** *I think something that***

I learned this week was that you should never really be that risky about placing your pots. I think it is a good idea to have some pots offshore though. (later) I feel like I have a good fishing plan. My plan is to put all my pots offshore on all of these days. I have realized that most days are good so I will make a lot of money. I will also easily cover my expenses on bad days.

I am reminded of the rich quality of dramatic play that helps young children to explore their world, try out roles, and practice solving problems. In our case, the problems are complicated. How can a fisherman support a family if the hotel that buys her catch can decide to not pay for a day's work?

~Ann Ruggiero & Elsa Head

Room 208

Interview with 7th grader Shantel Mercedes

How do you like Workshop?

I love it.

Why?

Because we get to do projects that you can't do in other schools. You get to use tools that you wouldn't normally and learn how to use them.

What are some of the projects you have worked on this year?

I've been working on my astronomy project that is about Uranus. That project is about making a papier mache model with a wooden structure to support it. I also worked on building butterfly cages.

What are some things that you learned from working on those projects?

I've learned how to use tools more carefully than last year. I've learned to work with more than one partner. When you put your decisions together you can create one great big thing. I learned how to work hard every time.

Have there been projects you have seen other people working on that you admired or found interesting?

Kavon's project on black holes.

Have you learned anything from being around that project?

No, not really.

What is something you really enjoy about workshop?

Working with things that can be really messy, like when your hands get really hard from the glue in the papier mache, and then you have to clean everything.

What is something you would change if you could?

Seating arrangements. Moving kids to places where they can work harder.

Is there anything that excites you about the rest of the year in Workshop?

Learning things I have never learned before.

~Jacob Wheeler & Letta Neely

Hot Topics

Courtney's Corner

Check out Courtney's Corner, outside Room 101, 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" en salón 101 para información sobre varios programas y recursos para ti y tu familia.

Help With Holiday Meals

During the following months many families come together to share meals and gifts and 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 the 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.

Mission Hill School

A Boston Public Pilot School

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Interested candidates for a position in the Family Council at Mission Hill School

My name is **Amina Michel-Lord** and I am running for **co-chair** of the Family Council. I have been connected to Mission Hill since the doors opened in 1997; my daughter, Ayanna, was in one of the first second grade classes. In 2005, my son, James, came to Mission Hill as a Kindergartener and is now a 6th grader in Sarah's class. Additionally, this is my 13th year teaching at Mission Hill. That being said, my family has been a proud Mission Hill School family for all of Mission Hill's 15 years of existence and remains near and dear to me.

I am very excited about the work I was able to begin last year as a co-chair and would love the opportunity to continue working with Mission Hill families in that capacity. I maintain the feeling it is important to welcome all family members of our community and encourage them to participate at our school in any way that they can. I want to help represent families and assist the school in providing meetings with topics that interest families. It is my hope that the Family Council meetings will become a time and place that family members look forward to coming to, participate in and leave with helpful information.

My name is **Neathery Brenzel** and I hope to serve as the **secretary** of the Family Council. My two oldest children currently attend and love Mission Hill. Ulysses is in 3rd grade in Emily's class and Athena is in 1st grade with Melissa.

I would really like to see the Family Council improve even more this year with increased organization of parents willing and able to volunteer and participate in fundraising. I would also like to improve the Family Council's communication with the MHS community. Many of us are interested but unable to attend meetings and the Family Council can do a better job of getting the information out there to both attendees and interested but absent parents and guardians.

My name is **Bridget Lee** and I would like to serve on the Family Council as **treasurer**. I have a son in Melissa's class and am excited to get involved with the Family Council.

I would like the opportunity to work with other Mission Hill families and share information that helps us raise our children. I'm looking forward to creating fundraisers that will benefit the school and all our children.

Mission Hill School Family Council Election Ballot

Co-chair:

Amina Michel-Lord _____

Secretary:

Neathery Brenzel _____

Treasurer:

Bridget Lee _____

Please return ballots by November 11th to Courtney in Room 101 or her mailbox in the office. Thank you.