



Pathways Newsletter

A Weekly Collection of Information, Thoughts, Reflections and Accolades for the Reading Public School Community

October 12, 2014

Volume 1, Number 6

Upcoming Dates

- October 13 – Columbus Day – No School
- October 14 – Districtwide Teacher In-Service Day – No School for Students; (3:30 p.m.) Killam School Council Meeting; (7:00 p.m.) Killam PTO Meeting; (7:00 p.m.); Facility Naming Subcommittee Meeting (6:30 p.m.)
- October 16 – (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Session #3 in the Distance Learning Room; (6:30 p.m.) Wood End MCAS Presentation; (7:00 p.m.) Parker MCAS Presentation
- October 17 – Coolidge Daytime Open House; (3:00 p.m.) RMHS & Middle School Band Day; (7:00 p.m.) Football vs. Belmont in the Stadium
- October 18 – RMHS Marching Band Competition in Billerica; (8:00 a.m.) PSAT testing @ RMHS; (12:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Set Build
- October 20 & 21 – Birch Meadow, Wood End & Killam Grade 5 to Camp Bourndale
- October 20 - (3:15 p.m.) Expanding the

So, What is Really Happening on October 14th?

On many occasions we are asked questions about the value of professional development days when the students are not in school. Some of the questions that we are asked include: What are staff doing on those days? Why are these so valuable? Can't we eliminate the day so that we can have a shorter school year?

These are all important questions, and as we continue to transition to the higher expectations of the new Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, providing professional learning time for staff is critical to the success of our school district. Staff will need opportunities to work together by team, department, and grade level to fully understand the frameworks, how to best teach those frameworks, how to assess how students are doing, and how to address students who are struggling with the concepts and expectations of the learning standards.

Throughout our district, our teachers are focused on four critical questions:

1. What is it we want our students to learn? What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do we expect them to acquire as a result of this course, this grade level, and this unit of instruction?
2. How will we know if each student is learning each of the skills, concepts, and dispositions we have deemed most essential?
3. How will we respond when some of our students do not learn? What process will we put in place to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning in a way that is timely, precise, diagnostic, directive, and systemic?
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

The opportunities to answer these questions are provided in a variety of ways including after school meetings, early release days, and full inservice days. This Tuesday, October 14th, the Reading Public Schools will be using their full inservice day professional development time to continue working on answering the above questions.

At the Elementary level, teachers will be reviewing the new first quarter report card reporting and conference format, identifying the key data that will be reported on the new conference report form, and developing a process where all

Boundaries in the Superintendent's Conference Room; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Administrator Course in the Distance Learning Room; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room; (6:30 p.m.) Coolidge MCAS Presentation

- October 22 – Grade 6-8 Early Release Day; (6:30 p.m.) Early Childhood Working Group Meeting at Superintendent's Office
- October 23 – (3:00 p.m.) Home Grown Writers PLC; (7:00 p.m.) Regional World Café on Opiate and Substance Abuse in RMHS Field House; (7:00 p.m.) Special Education PAC Meeting at Birch Meadow Library
- October 24 – Parker Picture Make-Up Day; (6:30 p.m.) RMHS Drama's Shocktoberfest @ RMHS
- October 25 – (10:00 a.m.) RMHS Drama Set Build; (5:00 p.m.) RMHS Band & Color Guard Hosts NESBA Show @ Reading; (4:00 p.m.) Birch Meadow Spooky Fun Fair & Monster Mash

subject areas have the opportunity to give feedback on student progress. Some elementary staff will be visiting other schools to observe math lessons from the new Math in Focus program. In addition, each school will be working on building specific initiatives, such as MCAS data analysis, that are focused on school and team goals to improve student learning and success.

At the middle school level, our math teachers will be attending a day-long training with the new Pearson curriculum material that we received through a grant this year. Other grade level departments from both Parker and Coolidge will be meeting together in professional learning communities to answer the important questions above on student learning.

At the High School, staff will also be working in a professional learning community format on creating and reviewing common assessments (also known as District Determined Measures) which will be administered across a grade level subject area to all students. These assessments will help teachers assess how students are learning and what areas need to be reinforced and strengthened. In addition, Math teachers will be receiving training on the new Pearson curriculum material that was received through a grant.

Special education teachers, specialists, school psychologists/behavioral staff, and therapists will be meeting in their PreK-12 groups in order to improve transitions between levels, coordinate curriculum, and share ideas.

In addition, art, music, health-wellness, library media, and technology will be meeting with their colleagues at the elementary and high school level to discuss how to better align their curriculum standards and skills to promote student success.

Our paraeducators and secretaries will also be involved in training opportunities with our paraeducators attending sessions on topics such as de-escalation techniques, behavioral intervention tools, anti-bullying, CPR, and strategies to address substance abuse and our secretaries learning receiving training on our financial management software system called MUNIS.

We appreciate the support that we receive from our community to give staff the time during the school year to work together as professional colleagues in doing what is best for the children of Reading. It is these opportunities that will continue to make our district stronger and more prepared to address the educational challenges that our students face today and help prepare them for their futures.

Seven Ways Assessments Can Build Student Motivation

"Many educators believe that success breeds success – that achievement leads to motivation," says Richard Curwin (David Yellin Academic College of Education, Jerusalem) in this *Educational Leadership* article. "However, that's backward. Motivation

Kudos and Accolades

- To the staff and parents who were involved in and attended MCAS presentations throughout the district this past week. Thank you for taking part in these discussions.
- To the RMHS Football Team, under the direction of RMHS Head Coach and Teacher John Fiore, for their victory over Lexington, 27-14, on Friday evening.

or effort leads to success, not the other way around. Cheating, luck, and easy work can all lead to success, but they do not increase motivation.” Tests, unfortunately, often kill motivation, says Curwin. Test scores and other extrinsic rewards may keep students working, but they create *finishers*, not learners.

Curwin believes certain assessment practices spur effort and motivation in students. Here are some examples:

- *Never fail a student who tries, and never give top grades to one who doesn't.* Effort should be counted as part of grades, he says – improvement should count, as should asking for help, offering to help others, and extra work. And students who coast to good grades should be seeking out (or given) more-challenging assignments.
- *Start with the positive.* Commend students on what they got right before correcting what they got wrong.
- *See mistakes as learning opportunities.* “In every life situation, from building relationships to playing computer games, except school, mistakes are important in the learning process,” says Curwin. Mistakes in school should be used as diagnostic tools.
- *Give do-overs.* Students should be able to learn from their mistakes and try assessments again.
- *Show students the final test as they begin a unit.* “This way, they can see what they need to learn, what the teacher’s priorities are, and how to organize their learning,” says Curwin.
- *Prioritize corrections.* Too much red ink overwhelms students and makes it more likely that the corrected paper will be thrown away. “Tell students you’ll give them a chance to fix those two most important mistakes, which you’ve marked, before moving on to two more,” he suggests.
- *Do not compare students.* Grades should be given based on standards, now how other students are doing, says Curwin.

“Can Assessments Motivate?” by Richard Curwin in *Educational Leadership*, September 2014 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 38-40), <http://bit.ly/1si36QU>; Curwin is at richardcurwin@gmail.com. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 553.

Myths About Testing

In this *Education Week* article, Sherah Betts Carr (Mercer University) and Anaya Bryson (a Gwinnett County, GA teacher) say that since No Child Left Behind, many teachers feel overwhelmed with the number of tests their students must take and the way mandated state tests overlap with district and classroom assessments. It seems that all the public and the media care about are test scores. “The accountability waters are as choppy as ever,” say Carr and Bryson, “but teachers don’t have to drown in them.” To maintain their sanity, educators need to push back on three myths:

- *Myth #1: Tests don’t allow schools to teach higher-order material.* It’s true that many standardized tests focus primarily on students’ ability to recall facts, proofs, and vocabulary and contain many abstractly constructed questions. But it’s not true that students will be harmed if teachers spend classroom time on deeper concepts and help

Quote of the Week....



**"Change your thoughts
and you change the
world."**

Norman Vincent Peale

students develop higher-order reasoning skills. Teachers need to stick to good pedagogy and effective curriculum, say Carr and Bryson, helping students connect concepts and skills in different subject areas and relating the curriculum to everyday life.

- *Myth #2: Test scores define a teacher's worth.* Educators need to look beyond raw test data and focus on their students' *growth*, say Carr and Bryson: "Teachers should document what they feel they've done well, identify what areas in their practice need improvement, and explore the steps required for growth." They also need to make good use of the amazing array of resources available today.

- *Myth #3: Teachers are powerless when it comes to testing.* "Ultimately, what happens in the classroom must be about the students," say Carr and Bryson. Teachers need to be realistic about what they can change and what they can't, and continue to teach caring and collaboration to prepare students for life in a multicultural society. "They must concentrate on how their students learn, reflect on their practices, and seek the support they need to improve their instructional skills."

"Debunking Three Assessment Myths" by Sherah Betts Carr and Anaya Bryson in *Education Week*, September 17, 2014 (Vol. 34, #4, p. 28, 24), www.edweek.org
Reprinted from Marshall Memo 553.

Reading Public School Happenings

This past week, Coolidge Grade 6 students travelled to the Harvard Museum of Natural History to learn about early man. The photo below shows several students measuring the skull size of *Homo Habilis*.



The photo below shows Kindergarten students at Wood End using Geo Boards as part of their daily math lesson.



The RMHS Environmental Club has adopted the island at the intersection of Oakland Road and Birch Meadow Drive. Below is a picture of their work.



Stepping Stones....

- **We welcome the** following new hires to our school district:
 - ✓ Cheryl Flagg, District Substitute
 - ✓ Benjamin Oyer, District Substitute
 - ✓ Julie Callahan, District Substitute
 - ✓ Forrest Teutsch, District Substitute
 - ✓ Nicholas Johnson, Extended Day
 - ✓ Donna Palmerino, Special Education Para, Coolidge
 - ✓ Maria Joseph, Regular Education Para, Barrows
 - ✓ Elaine Murphy, District Substitute

Disney Tweet of the Week



"Grab a dream before it takes off."

Dusty (Planes)

Contact Us

The Journey newsletter is published weekly for the Reading Public School Community. If you have anything that you would like to share, please email your information to John Doherty at

john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us

✓ Jennifer Doncaster-Hamilton, District Substitute

- **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit www.schoolspring.com to view the job details.

Long Term Substitute Kindergarten Paraeducator, Wood End Elementary School	JOB ID #1093612
Middle School Math Teacher, Long Term Substitute (Anticipated), Parker Middle School	JOB ID #1089942
Part-time Math Tutor, Joshua Eaton Elementary School	JOB ID #1095662
Long Term Substitute – Integrated Preschool, RISE Preschool	JOB ID #1100112
0.6 FTE Special Education Teacher, Reading Memorial High School	JOB ID #1101752

Blazing Trails....

"Policymakers Recognize Standardized Testing Burden." In the latest ASCD Capitol Connection newsletter you'll read that parents and educators alike have increasingly lashed out against the high number of standardized tests students must take. As criticism for standardized testing grows, policymakers are taking note. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has stated that he shares over-testing concerns and wants the department to be part of the solution. [Read More](#)

"Massachusetts Schools Embrace New Technology for Learning." It's not your parents' blackboard or even your children's whiteboard. Whiteboard technology is helping elementary-school students in one Massachusetts district learn core subjects such as math and reading. Teachers say the interactive boards have boosted student engagement and lesson efficiency. [Read More](#)

"3 Lessons to Teach Students How to Answer Their Own Questions." Teachers in student-centered classrooms must allow students to become comfortable with the unknown and then teach them the skills to find the answers to their questions, educator Heather Wolpert-Gawron writes in this Edutopia blog post. She shares three early-year lessons on Internet literacy, including a timed scavenger hunt. [Read More](#)

"There and Back Again: A Teacher's Personal Journey with Kelly Gallagher's Article of the Week Assignment." Kelly Gallagher is a 'genius.' Before the Common Core were a twinkle in David Coleman's eye, Kelly introduced an assignment into his classroom called article of the week. In the assignment, students read complex informational texts and responded to them in writing. That writing was nearly always a blend of the explanatory and argumentative modes, and it often culminated with a discussion of the issues in the text. [Read More](#)

"Harvard-MIT Partnership Opens MOOCs for High Schoolers." High school students looking to prepare for Advanced Placement exams, or simply expand their academic knowledge, now have free access to an array of classes through an online platform created by two of the nation's top universities, in one of the most ambitious and direct efforts to date to bring MOOCs into K-12 education. EdX, the online learning platform created two years ago by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, announced this month the release of 26 free "massive, open, online courses" covering AP, high school and college-level material. [Read More](#)

Have a great week!