



Pathways

*A Weekly Collection of Information, Thoughts, Reflections and Accolades for
Reading Public Schools Community*

November 16, 2014

Volume 1, Number 11

Upcoming Dates

- November 16 - (3:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Fall Production – Urinetown in the Endslo Performance Arts Center; (6:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Set Strike
- November 17 - (3:15 p.m.) Expanding the Boundaries in the Superintendent's Conference Room; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Administrator Course in the Distance Learning Room; (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo Performance Arts Center
- November 18 – (3:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Auditions for Winter Play in the Endslo Performance Arts Center; (3:30 p.m.) Killam School Council Meeting; (7:00 p.m.) Killam PTO Meeting
- November 19 – (1:00 p.m.) Elementary Inservice – Conferences; Secondary Building Meetings – Check with your Principal for agenda; (3:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Auditions for Winter Play in the Endslo Performance Arts Center; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Guidance Financial Aid Night; (7:00 p.m.)

Lessons for Schools from Athletic Training

In this *New Yorker* article, James Surowiecki reviews the advances that have been made in athletic coaching since the 1970s and how they can be applied to improving classroom instruction. Professional athletes used to work out and get in shape but didn't do much weight- and skill training. "Most of the guys had this mental attitude that if you're not good enough the way you are, then you'll never be good enough," said Bob Petrich, a defensive end with the San Diego Chargers in the 1960s. Either you have it or you don't.

Kermit Washington changed that mindset. Recruited by the L.A. Lakers based on his American University record of 20 points and 20 rebounds a game, he was a major disappointment in his first three years in the N.B.A. His skills didn't match those of professional players and he spent more and more time on the bench and thought his pro basketball career was coming to an end.

But Washington didn't accept that his skills were finite, and spent the next summer working with Pete Newell, a Lakers special assistant, getting schooled in the basics of footwork, positioning, and shooting. The following season, Washington improved in all aspects of the game, and after another summer working with Newell, he got even better. By the end of the 1970s, he was an All-Star. The word got out, and more and more professional athletes began to engage in the same kind of intensive skill training.

"Today, in sports, what you are is what you make yourself into," says Surowiecki. "Innate athletic ability matters, but it's taken to be the base from which you have to ascend. Training efforts that forty years ago would have seemed unimaginably sophisticated and obsessive are now what it takes to stay in the game... What we're seeing is, in part, the mainstreaming of excellent habits." Athletes work harder – and smarter.

The same continuous-improvement process has happened among chess players, classical musicians, and in U.S. manufacturing. The quality revolution that began in Japan in the 1970s spread to U.S. industry, and the rate of defective automobiles, televisions, and other products has gone down dramatically. "The ethos that underlies all these performance revolutions is captured by the Japanese term *kaizen*, or continuous improvement," says Surowiecki. "In a *kaizen* world, skill is not a static, fixed quality but the subject of ceaseless labor."

This leads him to examine what's been happening in the world of K-12 schooling, where progress has been agonizingly slow. The problem, Surowiecki

Incoming
Kindergarten Parent
Information Night @
Killam Elementary
School

- November 20 – RISE @ Wood End Picture Day; (2:45 p.m.) RMHS Drama Call-Backs; Elementary Building Meetings – Check with your Principal for agenda; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Session 7 in Distance Learning Room; (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo Performing Arts Center
- November 21 – No School – Elementary and High School Parent Conferences; Middle School & Middle School Inservice; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS VOICE Karaoke Night in the Cafeteria
- November 24 – (2:30 p.m.) RMHS Drama Winter Play Tech Interviews; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Administrator Course in the Distance Learning Room; (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo Performing Arts Center
- November 26 – (10:00 a.m.) RMHS Pep Rally; (11:00 a.m.) Dismissal Grades PreK – 12
- November 27 – Happy Thanksgiving; (10:15 a.m.) Football Game at Stoneham

believes, is similar to the one other fields had to confront before they improved: a belief in the “natural-born teacher” – either you can teach or you can’t. “As a result, we do little to help ordinary teachers become good and good teachers become great,” he says. “What we need to embrace instead is the idea of teaching as a set of skills that can be taught and learned and constantly improved on.”

The fact that most Americans don’t buy this idea has resulted in weak teacher preparation and training. “If American teachers – unlike athletes or manufacturing workers – haven’t got much better over the past three decades,” says Surowiecki, “it’s largely because their training hasn’t, either.” Countries whose students far outperform the U.S. – Japan, Finland, Canada – “all take teacher training extremely seriously. They train teachers rigorously before they get in the classroom, and they make sure that the training continues throughout their work lives.” Here are some specifics:

- Teachers observing each other at work and discussing what they see;
- Using videos of lessons for close scrutiny of effective and ineffective practices;
- Teachers reviewing curriculum materials and designing lessons together;
- Developing specific classroom techniques that work, like the Japanese *bansho*, the art of writing out a math problem with possible solutions on the board;
- A relentless focus on small details and constant feedback;
- Refining sets of specific practices that work (the Japanese term is *jugyokenkyu*);
- Deploying a staff of full-time trainers and coaches.

Will this cost money? Of course, says Surowiecki – but probably not as much as the cost of continuously replacing failing, discouraged teachers, or the societal costs of churning out mediocre students year after year.

“And there will be some teachers who will find all the feedback intrusive,” he says. “But what’s happened in sports over the past forty years teaches that the way to improve the way you perform is to improve the way you train. High performance isn’t, ultimately, about running faster, throwing harder, or leaping farther. It’s about something much simpler: getting better at getting better.”

“Better All the Time” by James Surowiecki in *The New Yorker*, November 10, 2014 (p. 81-85), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/10/better-time>. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 560.

Student-Led Discussions

“Some of my happiest, most rewarding moments as an educator have been hearing what comes out of learners’ mouths when I get out of the way,” says Elizabeth City (Harvard Graduate School of Education) in this *Educational Leadership* article. “Talking matters to learning. Although it’s possible to think without talking – and to talk

Kudos and Accolades

- To RMHS Teacher s Jesscia Bailey and Heather Lombardo for organizing the National Honor Society Fall Induction Ceremony
- To Joshua Eaton teacher Jill Mayberry for her role in the Town Veteran's Day Ceremony held on Tuesday.
- To Joshua Eaton teachers Lauren Fusco, Linda Lydecker, Bethany Nazzaro, Liz McGevna, Jody Carregal, Michelle Ofilos, and Jesscia Ellis for organizing the Joshua Eaton Family Math Night last Thursday.

without much thinking – each can strengthen the other. Talking also provides windows into what students are learning.” Rich classroom conversations also go to the heart of democratic schooling, she says: the better students get at thinking, speaking, and listening, the better off we’ll all be.

So why do teachers do most of the talking in classrooms? And why is so much student talk unimpressive? City believes there are five reasons:

- We have other priorities. Curriculum coverage. Test preparation. Even if “accountable talk” is in the school-improvement plan, other things push it aside.
- It’s hard to step outside the traditional paradigm: the teacher steers discussions, the students follow in familiar roles.
- We’re afraid. Teachers fear losing control. Students fear not knowing how to play the game of school. Both fear sounding stupid.
- We believe that only “advanced” learners can drive discussions.
- Everyone thinks silences should be avoided at all costs.

There’s no question that having rich, authentic discussions is difficult, says City. It involves balancing each of these elements: safety, challenge, authentic participation, and ownership.

Students must feel safe from being attacked, but discussions shouldn’t be so safe that no one takes risks. The level of challenge must be just right – not too hard and not too easy. This is tricky, but City believes we often underestimate what students can handle. “Authentic participation means students offer questions or comments that deepen their own and others’ understanding and make space for multiple voices and ideas to be heard,” she says. And ownership is key: not anarchy, in which students “veer wildly from one side of the intellectual road to another while the teacher sits back like a powerless passenger,” nor dictatorship, with the teacher saying, “I want you to discuss...” In a successful discussion, says City, “students ask most of the questions, connecting with and building on one another’s ideas, taking responsibility for the tenor of the conversation, and talking with one another... The teacher is valued and respected as a member of the discussion community – albeit one with more experience and expertise – but she or he is not deferred to as the authority.” How can this happen?

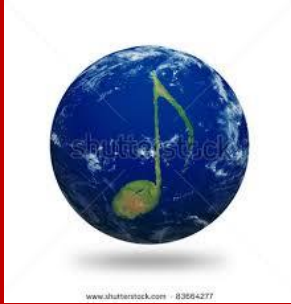
- *Set the stage.* Students should be in a circle or U so they can see each others’ faces.

- *Think-pair-share.* Getting students to think, jot down ideas, and chat with an elbow partner is an excellent way to ramp up participation and authenticity.

- *Use discussion protocols.* In *Save the Last Word*, students read a text in advance and choose a sentence or passage they consider important or striking. A group convenes, one person reads the passage he or she chose aloud, the others have one minute each to respond, then the first person gets “the last word,” with 2-3 minutes to explain the choice and connect with what others said. In *Four A’s*, students read a text with four questions in mind: What do you *agree* with? What *assumptions* does the author hold? What do you want to *argue* with? And what parts of the text do you *aspire* to?

- *Use texts.* It’s possible to have student-driven discussions without texts, says City, but well-chosen texts are very helpful. They provide common ground for a

Quote of the Week....



**"The earth has music for
those who listen."**

William Shakespeare

conversation and offer pathways to ideas, experiences, and feelings. They don't have to be print – art, music, maps, primary documents, essays, political cartoons, and math problems are fine. One discussion used two photographs of Abraham Lincoln, one taken shortly before he became president, one shortly before his death.

- *Focus on process.* Content is the central focus, says City, but "a little attention to process can make a big difference in quality." Facilitators and participants can set goals – "Talk more," "Listen more," "Ask a question" – or a collective goal like "Let's try to connect with one another's ideas" or "Let's refer to the text more." And at the end of the discussion, it's good to reflect on how it went. How did we do on safety? How challenging was the conversation? Who participated and who didn't? How authentic and educative was it?

"Talking to Learn" by Elizabeth City in *Educational Leadership*, November 2014 (Vol. 72, #3, p. 10-16), <http://bit.ly/1wMkBce>; City can be reached at elizabeth_city@gse.harvard.edu. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 560.

Reading Public School Happenings

Wood End Veteran's Day Assembly

On Monday, the Wood End School Community held its annual Veteran's Day Assembly, in the photo below, the Wood End Chorus, led by teacher Melissa Steiger sing a song.



In the photo below, six Veterans, including Lieutenant Colonel Derrick Lee, United States Army; Mr. David Branga, United States Air Force; Mr. Mat Cusolito, United States Navy; Sergeant Patrol Supervisor Corey Santasky, United States Marines; Mr. Stanley Robinson, United States Army and WWII Veteran and Lt. James Keelan, United States Army, are shown with several Wood End students, Principal, Joanne King, and Assistant Principal Lisa Norcross.



Town Veteran's Day Assembly

On Tuesday, the Town of Reading, under the direction of Veteran's Administrator Frank Driscoll, held its annual Veteran's Day Ceremony on the Town Common. Reading Public School students participated in the event. In the photos below, Joshua Eaton teacher Jill Mayberry is assisting one of 14 Joshua Eaton students who participated in the event on Tuesday. In the other photo below, the RMHS Band participated in the event with Veteran's Day music, including America the Beautiful, Star Spangled Banner, and TAPS.





National Honor Society Induction Ceremony

On Thursday Evening, five RMHS students were inducted in the National Honor Society Fall Induction Ceremony. Congratulations to inductees James Bedingfield, Colin Hetherington, Joseph Presho, Eric Seferian, and Leonard Zhong.



Stepping Stones....

- **We welcome the** following new hires to our school district:
 - ✓ Lisa Tighe, Regular Education Tutor, Barrows
 - ✓ Assunta Bello – Substitute, District
- **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit www.schoolspring.com to view the job details.

Disney Tweet of the Week



"We started this thing together, and that's how we'll finish it. I promise."

Mushu (Mulan)

30 Hour Per Week Special Education Paraeducator - Learning Center Position; Parker Middle School	JOB ID #1144122
Assistant Boys Winter Track Coach, Reading Memorial High School	JOB ID #1147542
Assistant Boys Spring Track Coach, Reading Memorial High School	JOB ID #1147552

- **2015 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year Award Call for Nominations-** On November 3, 2014, the **National Center for Families Learning** (NCFL) began accepting nominations for the **2015 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year Award**, which will award a \$20,000 to an exemplary teacher engaging families in education. Educators working with families through schools, libraries, and many other community-based organizations will be considered, and nominations are due December 31, 2014. The selected educator's school or program will receive the \$20,000 prize to further efforts to engage families in learning together and join an elite group of educators across the country that have been recognized as such for nearly two decades. NCFL will award the second prize winner a \$2,500 prize. Both winners will be announced in March at the **2015 Families Learning Summit**, which will be held this year in Houston, TX. The grand prize winner will deliver a speech to summit attendees alongside keynote speaker Leland Melvin, former astronaut, NASA deputy director, and NFL player who currently co-chairs the White House STEM Council. Educators can be nominated via the brief online application, and learn more about winning criteria and Toyota Family Teacher of the Year benefits, [here](#). For inspiration, [read](#) about last year's winner, Liz Atack (Nashville Public Library).
- **REF Annual Appeal-** REF is proud to offer grants for innovative and exciting programs that go beyond the typical funding for our schools. Last year, we were proud to fund over **\$50,000 for teacher grants**, benefiting every public school in the Reading district. **They can't do this without your continued support!** Please consider making a generous tax-deductible gift to REF to help us bring "Outside the Box and Inside the Classroom" ideas to the Reading Public Schools! Over the past decade, REF has awarded over **\$425,000 in grants to the Reading schools** across all grades and areas of curriculum.

The results are priceless:

- Cutting-edge technology across the District
- A thriving Robotics program in the High School
- Ukulele strings programs in all Elementary Schools
- Technology to serve special needs students
- Flip classrooms
- State-of-the-art Physics laboratories
- Student leadership and Behavioral Health support
- Piano laboratory
- Digital art technology

To name only a few! Visit the REF [website](#) and read their [annual appeal letter](#) to get the complete picture!

Please help REF keep the momentum growing! **Make a tax-deductible donation to REF now!**

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Mail a check: PO Box 265, Reading, MA 01867

On behalf of the REF Board, thank you for making a difference in our community.

Blazing Trails....

"12 Qualities of Good Teachers." "I want to try to bring back the discussion to what is really important to think about with regards to good teaching and good teachers," writes ASCD EDge community member Elliott Seif. In a recent blog post, Seif shares a list of twelve qualities of good teachers that don't get discussed very often, but are important and relevant to consider in order to improve teaching excellence. [Read More](#)

"Too Many Kids Quit Science Because They Don't Think They're Smart." Proper praise from parents and educators can help students learn how to persevere and learn from errors, Carol Dweck, a professor of psychology at Stanford University in California, says in this interview. Such praise involves recognizing students for the process instead of placing too much praise on ability, talent or intelligence, she says. [Read More](#)

"'Fliperentiated' Instruction: How to Create the Customizable Classroom." Teachers can customize students' learning using what educator Joe Hirsch refers to as "fliperentiated" instruction -- the combination of differentiation and flipped instruction. In this Edutopia blog post, he shares tips for adopting this method. [Read More](#)

"Fun, Exercise Boost Kids' Attention, School Performance; All It Takes Is 4 Minutes Study Shows in Canadian Schools." Second- and fourth-grade students in Canada were more attentive and less fidgety in class after spending four minutes engaged in physical activity, according to a recent study by researchers at Queen's University. They found that engaging students in what they called FUNtervals improved students' attention and performance in school. [Read More](#)

Have a great week!

Contact Us

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

john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us