



Pathways

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

January 25, 2015

Volume 1, Number 20

Upcoming Dates

- January 25 – Start of the Second Semester – High and Middle Schools; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting FY16 Budget School Committee Vote
- January 27 - (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Make-Up Session 1 in Distance Learning Room
- January 28 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (1:15 p.m.) Elementary PLC Meetings; (1:25 p.m.) High School PLC Meetings; (1:30 p.m.) Middle School PLC Meetings; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Make-Up Session 2 in Distance Learning Room; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Future Freshman Night
- January 29 – (3:00 p.m.) Home Grown Writers in Reading; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Make-Up Session 3 in Distance Learning Room
- January 30 – (6:00 p.m.) RMHS Band Coffee House
- January 31 – (10:00 a.m.) RMHS Drama Set Build; RMHS Music – Jr. District Auditions in Methuen

Martin Luther King Celebration A Powerful and Inspirational Event

On Monday, January 20th, the Reading Public Schools and the Town of Reading Human Relations Advisory Committee presented the Annual Martin Luther King Day Celebration at the William E. Endsloew Performing Arts Center. Over 300 families and community members attended this inspirational event. The event featured beautiful music by the Reading Memorial High School Singers, the METCO Elementary School Chorus, the Korean Church of the Nazarene, and the Reading Community Singers. RMHS students Hannah Byron and Jennie Dockser from the A World of Difference Club talked about how Martin Luther King, Jr. and Leonard Zakim have been role models in standing together for justice. In addition, RMHS students and members of the Gay Straight Alliance Club Shayla Leary and Lily Mitnigh talked the powerful impact that Harvey Milk and Malala Yousafzai have had on our world.



Elementary METCO Chorus at MLK Event

One of the many highlights of the event was the inspirational "Hero Art" program by Rob Surrette. In his presentation, which included a multimedia celebration of heroes in history, science, social studies, literature, art, music, athletics, drama, Rob created portraits right in front of our very eyes of Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, and Abraham Lincoln. Rob's message was to inspire us to be our "best self."

- February 1 – (12:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Q2Q in the Endslo PAC
- February 2 – (3:15 p.m.) Expanding the Boundaries of Teaching and Learning Class; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting
- February 3 – (7:00 p.m.) PARCC Community Information Session @ Coolidge
- February 4 – Grade 6 – 8 Early Release; (1:30 p.m.) District PLC Meetings at Middle School Level; (2:30 p.m.) District PLC Meetings at High School Level; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Session 1 in Distance Learning Room; (5:00 p.m.) Parker School Council Meeting; (7:00 p.m.) Parker PTO Meeting; (7:00 p.m.) PARCC Community Information Session @ Parker
- February 5 – (3:00 p.m.) Elementary Staff Meetings
- February 6 – (6:00 p.m.) Birch Meadow Intercultural Potluck Dinner; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Production – Fools – in the Endslo PAC
- February 7 – (8:00 a.m.) First Lego League Competition @ Coolidge; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Production – Fools – in the Endslo PAC

Rob will create four additional portraits, Martin Luther King, Leonard Zakim, Harvey Milk and Malala Yousafzai which will be proudly displayed on the walls of the Patrick A. Schettini, Jr. Library at Reading Memorial High School. In addition, due to a generous donation from Board of Selectmen Member John Halsey, the four portraits that Rob created at the event will be on display in Reading as well.



RMHS Chorus at MLK Event

Special thanks goes out to Eastern Bank, Kohl's Department Stores, the Reading Cultural Council, and Moynihan Lumber for sponsoring this event. Also, a special thanks to the Reading Human Relations Advisory Council and Linda Snow Dockser for coordinating this event.

The Role of Classroom Discussions in High-Level Learning

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Ronald Gallimore (UCLA), James Hiebert (University of Delaware), and Bradley Ermeling (Pearson Research and Innovation Network) question the “clarion call” of many education reformers for teachers to increase the amount of “rich classroom discussion.” A key assumption behind this goal is that good discussions produce higher-quality student thinking, expression, and achievement. Reformers’ aim is to replace traditional teacher-dominated discussions with “students talking in class about their ideas, asking questions of peers, engaging in debates with peers, explaining their reasoning, and sharing some roles traditionally assumed by teachers.”

This push seems justified in light of sobering statistics about classroom interactions over the years. A 1912 study found that teachers across all grades and subjects talked an average of 64 percent of the time, and nearly 80 percent of classroom discourse involved rote memory or superficial comprehension. And apparently things have not changed much since then: A 1997 study of 9th-grade ELA classes found that 85 percent of classroom time was lecture, recitation, and seatwork.

Kudos and Accolades

- RMHS Sports Teams were busy this past week, with Boys Swimming, Girls & Boys Hockey and Wrestling all winning.
- Congratulations to the Reading Food Service Department for getting recognized in the top 50 out of all school districts in Massachusetts for outstanding school lunch programs.
- To all of the staff and volunteers who helped make the Real World Problem Solving event at the High School a complete success.

The curious thing is that, according to the 1999 TIMSS Video Study of Mathematics, countries with better student achievement than the U.S. are not better when it comes to the amount of rich classroom discussions. If anything, American classrooms have more opportunities for student talk than those in higher-achieving countries. So are rich classroom discussions not the key variable in classrooms that foster truly impressive learning? Gallimore, Hiebert, and Ermeling believe this is a good question and suspect that something deeper is involved.

“What distinguished higher-achieving countries from the U.S. was the nature of learning opportunities provided to students,” they say. “With varying degrees of frequency, all higher-achieving countries slowed down instruction at some point in some lessons to ensure that students had *rich opportunities to learn* – time to grapple with the key mathematics ideas and connect them.” These moments seemed to be the “critical and significant distinction between the U.S. and higher-achieving countries.”

The authors have come to believe that these slowed-down, concentrated, students-grappling moments are the goal, and rich classroom discussion is one tool among many others for making them happen. In other words, principals and other supervisors shouldn’t be looking so much for rich classroom discussions in classrooms as for those rich learning opportunities that “nurture the advanced competencies and more-ambitious achievements U.S. reformers seek.”

John Dewey was not against teachers “telling” students important information, say the authors. But Dewey warned that students are unlikely to hear things they are unprepared to hear. How do we get students to the point where they hear what we’re telling them? This question needs lots of study, say Gallimore, Hiebert, and Ermeling, and it’s closely tied to another one: How do we create rich opportunities to learn advanced concepts? They identify three key elements:

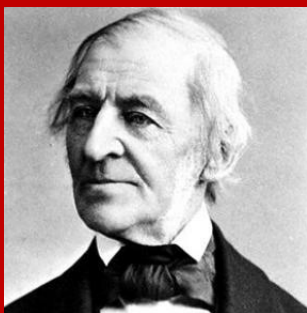
- High-quality, sustained collaboration between teachers and researchers;
- Studying curriculum and classroom practice to pinpoint the key learning opportunities in each unit that might benefit from rich classroom discussions;
- Helping teachers as they get better and better at managing complex decisions and making the best instructional choices.

The authors believe rich classroom discussion is much more likely to be productive if it’s seen as a means to that end, rather than an end in itself. This, they say, “seems a more realistic vision than advocating for its greater use without respect for why, when, and for whom.”

“The pathway to improvement,” conclude Gallimore, Hiebert, and Ermeling, “lies not in the increased use of a single compelling instructional method, but in building of a full repertoire of effective methods, and a nuanced understanding of how and when each will propel a teacher’s students toward ambitious learning goals.”

“Rich Classroom Discussion: One Way to Get Rich Learning” by Ronald Gallimore, James Hiebert, and Bradley Ermeling in *Teachers College Record*, October 9, 2014; to purchase this article, go to <http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=17714>; Gallimore can be reached at ronaldg@ucla.edu. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 570.

Quote of the Week....



"By persisting in your path, though you forfeit the title, you gain the great."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Making Later High-School Start Times Work

"Anyone who's ever tried to rouse a high-school student from bed to catch that 6:55 a.m. bus to arrive at school on time knows how tenaciously that teen will cling to the bedcovers," says Merri Rosenberg in this *School Administrator* article. "Pity the teacher who has to instill complicated algebraic concepts at 7:30 in the morning or discuss the subtler points of the American Revolution during that groggy first-period class." Influenced by an ongoing stream of research, the American Academy of Pediatrics said in August 2014 that school shouldn't start earlier than 8:30 for adolescents. And indeed, about 1,000 of the nation's 18,000 high schools have moved their start times forward or are planning to do so, including the 187,000-student Fairfax County district in Virginia.

What exactly does the research tell us? In a sidebar article, Kyla Wahlstrom, director of the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota/ Minneapolis, says the most important finding is the "sleep phase shift" that takes place during adolescence, making it difficult for teens to fall asleep before 11:00 (this is aside from their fascination with their peers and electronics). Despite a strong body of research pointing to the wisdom of later school start-times, the issue has been contentious in many districts, with concerns about bus schedules, increased costs, after-school athletics, after-school jobs, and teens having less time to care for younger siblings after school. Some districts have tried to win over opponents by making incremental changes in start times – for example, moving from 7:30 to 7:50, or phasing in later times over several years. But Wahlstrom has found that "every change, no matter how small in scale or limited in the amount of the time shift, caused the same amount of community disruption." Better to go for broke, she says.

"The districts making the most significant moves to later high-school start times tend to be the places that carefully and completely gathered and discussed all the factual information now available," reports Wahlstrom. "The medical research about the development of the teen brain and the role of sleep in academic learning, healthy choices, and emotional well-being is so strong that it is difficult to ignore those facts... Individuals still skeptical are generally those who are unaware of the strength of research or those who choose not to believe the facts." Wahlstrom says research has shown that later dismissal times (say 3:30) have had no negative impact on the level of participation in sports and extracurricular activities. Some coaches, after initially objecting to later times, have found that students are more mentally alert with more sleep. Nor do most teens stay up later because they don't have to get up so early in the morning.

From districts that have made a successful shift to later secondary-school hours, here are some problem-solving suggestions:

- To address transportation challenges, some districts have flipped secondary and elementary bus tiers, resulting in little or no budgetary impact. This does necessitate additional parental supervision of younger students waiting for buses in the dark during the winter months.
- For some parents, earlier elementary start times mean they can drop kids at school on the way to work rather than first taking them to day care.
- Some districts have increased the number of buses, which is costly.
- Another approach is creatively rethinking bus routes (hub-and-spoke or combining multiple ages and schools on the same bus) and coordinating with the city transit system.

- To accommodate parent work schedules, some districts have added or expanded after-school programs and partnered with day-care providers. Rosenberg goes on to profile three districts that have successfully shifted secondary-school start times forward:

- *Edina, Minnesota* – Nineteen years ago, Edina became the first U.S. district to move its secondary-school hours. After a six-month study of research and ramifications (the strongest pushback came from athletic coaches and local employers who had students working part-time right after school), the district changed the middle school opening time to 7:50 and high school to 8:30. When there are out-of-town games with districts with earlier dismissal times, teachers allow student athletes to leave early. “The kids were on board right away,” says then-superintendent Kenneth Dragseth, and parents saw the benefit of having older students around the house to watch younger children in the morning. The district has maintained the later hours ever since and is proud of having made a decision based on what was best for student learning.

- *Columbia, Missouri* – The opening of a new high school in this spread-out 18,000-student district prompted a discussion of start times in 2012-13. A committee consisting of the school-board president, deputy superintendent for transportation, principals, teachers, and parents made its recommendations and the board decided on an 8:50 opening time for the high school and earlier hours for younger students, with some having bus pick-up times as early as 6:30. Because of extensive outreach and communication with parents, resistance has eased, and student attendance K-12 has increased from 85 to 90 percent among all demographics.

- *Jackson, Wyoming* – The district explored later hours in 2006-7 but encountered such strong resistance that the idea was tabled. But chronic student tardiness and parent complaints about the struggle to get kids in gear in the morning resurfaced the issue. “We have learned that when you enact change, you need to have a powerful ‘why’ first,” says Teton County Superintendent Pamela Shea. “It has to be very purposeful and address a need. You have to engage communities. People want to know and be involved.” The district ended up moving the high-school kick-off to 8:55, one of the latest in the country, mostly to ensure that kindergarten students weren’t waiting for buses too early. The initial cost was \$250,000, including new buses and drivers and revamping bus routes. The result: 220 fewer tardy students and a 70 percent reduction in car accidents involving teens. In three years, the district will review the results and decide if changes are needed.

“Clearing the Snooze Hurdles” by Merri Rosenberg and “Creative Solutions for the ‘Sleep Phase Shift’” by Kyla Wahlstrom in *School Administrator*, January 2015 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 14-20), www.aasa.org; Rosenberg and Wahlstrom can be reached at merri.rosenberg@gmail.com and wahls001@umn.edu.

Reading Public School Happenings

Coolidge Museum of Fine Arts Trip

Grade 6 students at Coolidge Middle School recently attended the Museum of Fine Arts to study Ancient Egypt. Below are some students enjoying some of the artifacts.

Disney Tweet of the Week



"People often ask me if I could tell others how to make their dreams come true. My answer is, you do it by working."

Walt Disney



Wood End Grade 3 Colonial Day Presentations

Last week, students in Grade 3 at Wood End participated in a Colonial Day Celebration as part of their social studies curriculum. The photos below show some of the activities that were going on during that day.



Real World Problem Solving

During this past week, all students in the Junior Class at RMHS participated in a week long *Real World Problem Solving* event that focused on four major problems: Food Waste, Water Conservation, Green Roofs, and Promoting Reading. The photos below show the final day activities which included each group presenting their work in front of judges and their peers, and an award ceremony.



Stepping Stones....

- **We welcome the** following new hires to our school district:
 - ✓ Dan McCarron, JV Hockey Coach, RMHS
- **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit www.schoolspring.com to view the job details.

Long-Term Substitute Special Education Teacher, Reading Memorial High School	JOB ID #1233782
Long Term Substitute 8th Grade Earth and Space Science Teacher, Parker Middle School	JOB ID # 1234962
MTSS Team Data Coach (Stipend), Reading Public Schools	JOB ID #1234812
MTSS Building Leadership Team Facilitator (Stipend), Reading Public Schools	JOB ID #1234882
District Wide Evaluator, Reading Public Schools	JOB ID #1236322

- **Fingerprint Background Check Reminder**-This is a reminder to all staff members and volunteers of their obligation to submit to a fingerprint-based background check as a condition of their employment. Employees and volunteers who have unsupervised contact with students must make an appointment at a MorphoTrust fingerprinting location (<http://www.identogo.com/FP/Massachusetts.aspx>). Many of you may have tried to make an appointment in the past but were discouraged by the limited appointment availability. We are happy to report that the backlog has been cleared and that in many cases, you may be able to get an appointment for the same day. Appointments are available during evening hours and several locations also offer Saturday appointments. All newly hired staff members are required to be fingerprinted prior to beginning work in the district. Staff members hired prior to September 2013 must complete their fingerprinting appointments by the time period listed below:
 - a. **Those current teachers with ten years or less employment** within the Reading Public Schools will be required to complete the process **before the start of the 2015-2016 school year**. In addition, all administrators, custodians/maintenance, food service, substitute teachers, coaches, advisors, paraeducators, and secretaries will also be required to complete the process at this time.
 - b. **All remaining teachers will be required to complete the process by the end of June 2016.**

Inserted below you will find a memo with instructions detailing how to schedule an appointment to be fingerprinted. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.



Updated SAFIS
memo for staff_11-24

Blazing Trails....

"A Post from Paris." Education researcher and author, Grant Wiggins writes in his blog about the terror attack in Paris and its connection to education. He asks, "What role, then, do we as educators have to play in this crisis? A very important one, I think. It is imperative that we aggressively fight bullying and all 'softer' forms of marginalization of students. But as importantly, it is imperative that we find countless ways - as part of curriculum - to make ALL learners feel competent and a part of something worthwhile." [Read More](#)

"Making Homework More Meaningful in the New Year." In this recent ASCD Inservice post, you'll read an excerpt from the ASCD book, "Grading Smarter Not Harder: Assessment Strategies That Motivate Kids and Help Them Learn" by Myron Dueck. In the excerpt, Dueck addresses how one of his strategies, in-class quizzes based on homework assignments, can help lead to student achievement. [Read More](#)

"Questioning Strategies." A good question is classroom gold. Researchers estimate that anywhere from 50 to 80% of instructional time is spent on questioning, so imagine the return on investment for fine-tuning this popular instructional tool. In the latest issue of ASCD Express, educators share their secrets for crafting meaningful, higher-order questions, for getting students to write their own questions, and for putting inquiry at the heart of everything. [Read More](#)

"Are You Using Technology Effectively? These 6 Questions Determine If You're Technology Rich, Innovation Poor." To apply technology in the most innovative ways, school leaders should be able to answer six critical questions about student assignments, including whether they build student capacity and broaden their perspectives, November Learning founder Alan November suggests in this commentary. "If you answer no to all six questions when evaluating the design of assignments and student work, then chances are that technology is not really being applied in the most innovative ways," November writes. [Read More](#)

"STEM Teaches Failure as an Opportunity to Learn." "We must remember that the pillar of STEM education isn't just the content but also the mindsets behind it," writes ASCD faculty member Andrew Miller. In a recent ASCD Inservice post, Miller discusses how STEM education can help foster the mindset that failure is an opportunity to grow and learn. He also explains how a Whole Child approach to education and STEM education are more connected than you might think. [Read More](#)

"Finland Just Seems to be Doing Everything Right in Education ... And Many Things We Too Can Do." Hundreds of schools in Finland have adopted "Finnish Schools on the Move," which seeks to keep students moving more throughout the day. A recent pilot program found that, of those participating, about half of elementary-school students and one-third of middle-school students saw an increase in movement. [Read More](#)

Contact Us
The Pathways 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

Have a Great Week!