



Pathways

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

January 4, 2015

Volume 1, Number 17

Upcoming Dates

• **Happy New Year!**

- January 5-7-(7:00 p.m.)-Special Town Meeting at the William Endslow Performing Arts Center
- January 5 – (3:15 p.m.) Expanding the Boundaries in the Superintendent's Conference Room;
- January 6 – RMHS Guidance Alumni Day; (2:45 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.) Voluntary Staff Budget Meetings at the Coolidge Middle School Multipurpose Room; (6:30 p.m.) Budget Parent Meeting in Superintendent's Office
- January 7 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (1:15 p.m. Elementary Building PLC; (1:30 p.m.) Secondary Building PLC; (1:30 p.m.); (RMHS Band – MENC Senior Districts in Lowell; (5:30 p.m.) Parker School Council; (7:00 p.m.) Parker PTO
- January 8 – (8:00 a.m.) Parker Daytime Parent Visitation; RISE @ Wood End Picture Retake; (3:15 p.m.) Elementary building PLC; (4:00 p.m.)

FY16 Budget Presentations Begin This Week

During this week, Superintendent of Schools John Doherty will begin to present the Superintendent's FY16 Recommended Budget to the School Committee and the Community. The budget will be sent to staff on Tuesday and the first School Committee Presentation will be this Thursday, at 7:00 p.m., in the School Committee Room of the Reading Public Schools Administration Offices. The remaining School Committee dates are as follows. All meetings begin at 7:00 p.m., unless otherwise noted.

- Thursday, January 8 (Overview, Administration)
- Monday, January 12 (Regular Day, Special Education)
- Thursday, January 15 (District Wide Services, Town/School Facilities)
- Wednesday, January 21 (Financial Forum)-7:30 p.m., Senior Center
- Thursday, January 22 (Public Hearing, Questions)
- Monday, January 26 (School Committee Vote)
- Wednesday, March 18 (Finance Committee Meeting)-7:30 p.m., Town Hall
- Monday, April 27 and Thursday, April 30 (Town Meeting)-7:30 p.m.

Due to the continuing fiscal constraints of our community, driven by an annual structural revenue problem and an inadequate Chapter 70 funding formula and funding increases, we will be presenting two budgets: a 2.56% or base budget which stays within the Reading Finance Committee recommendations and a 4.7% budget, which provides the same level of services as in the FY15 budget. The 2.56% budget results in \$849,620 in budget reductions and offset increases. This budget results in reductions to both personnel and non-personnel areas. The 4.7% budget includes the \$849,620 that was reduced in the base budget. There are also proposed increases in user fees for athletics, extra-curricular activities, and non-mandatory bus transportation. These fees have not increased since 2010. The base budget attempts to achieve the multi-year goals of our school system, while staying within the fiscal constraints of our available community resources. It also restructures several areas to fund needed positions and services in the areas of learning and teaching and special education.

There will be a voluntary staff meeting on Tuesday at 2:45 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. in the Coolidge Multipurpose Room. At that time Superintendent Doherty and Director of Finance and Operations Martha Sybert will present an overview of the Superintendent's FY16 budget.

RETELL Session 11 in Distance Learning Room; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee in the Superintendent's Conference Room – FY16 Budget

- January 9 - (3:30 p.m.) RMHS Band – MENC Senior Districts in Lowell;
- January 10 - (9:00 p.m.) RMHS Band – MENC Senior Districts in Lowell; (5:30 p.m.) (10:00 a.m.) RMHS Drama Set Build/Safety Class
- January 12 – (3:15 p.m.) Expanding the Boundaries of Teaching and Learning Class; (7:00 p.m.)- School Committee Meeting: FY16 Budget Presentation on Regular Day and Special Education Cost Centers

Carol Dweck on Fixed and Growth Mindset Thinking Among Teachers

In this article in *Educational Horizons*, Stanford professor Carol Dweck applies her “mindset” theory to the problem of teacher attrition – almost half of new teachers leave the classroom within five years. All too many teachers, she says, have a “fixed” mindset about the profession – either you’re born to be a great teacher or you’re not. Here are some of the agree/disagree statements Greg Gero of Claremont Graduate University used with teachers to ascertain their mindset:

- The kind of teacher someone is, is something very basic about them and can’t be changed very much.
- Teachers can change the way they teach in the classroom, but they can’t really change their true teaching ability.
- Some teachers will be ineffective no matter how hard they try to improve.
- No matter how much natural ability you may have, you can always find important ways to improve.
- Every teacher, no matter who they are, can significantly improve their teaching ability.
- The value of trying new teaching methods outweighs the risk of making a mistake.
- I discuss problems in my classroom teaching with others in order to learn from them.

Teachers who agreed with the first three statements had a “fixed” mindset and often got discouraged when they encountered difficult students and learning problems in their early weeks in the classroom. “So,” says Dweck, “instead of rolling up their sleeves, using every resource at their disposal, and assuring themselves that they could only get better, they probably concluded that they didn’t really have the talent in the first place or that the kids were intractable – and fled.”

Teachers who agreed with the last four statements had a “growth” mindset. They cared more about learning than about having a good reputation as a teacher. They didn’t believe that a perfect, error-free lesson defined them as a good teacher. These teachers behaved in strikingly different ways than those with a fixed mindset:

- They engaged in more professional development, read more professional literature, and constantly picked up ideas and teaching techniques.
- They observed other teachers and volunteered to have well-regarded teachers teach demonstration lessons with their students.
- They confronted their teaching problems head-on and asked for feedback from supervisors and colleagues.

Teachers with a fixed mindset feared being judged negatively and were reluctant to be observed by others or collaborate with colleagues. They assumed it was their job to go it alone and that innate talent was the most important factor in success.

Dweck tells the story of one of her Stanford students who started teaching in a tough New York City school and had a horrible first year. “I naively thought that since I was young, energetic, educated, and driven, I would be a rock star,” this teacher wrote to

Kudos and Accolades

- Our RMHS Athletic Teams were very busy over vacation. Congratulations to all of the sports for their hard work and diligence during vacation week.
- Boys Hockey won the Bauer Invitational Tournament with wins over Arlington Catholic and Andover.
- Boys Basketball won the Saugus Invitational Tournament with wins over Saugus and Marblehead.
- Wrestling had two strong meets over vacation.
- Boys Indoor Track won a big meet vs Lexington 45-41

Dweck. Working “maniacally long hours” and seeing no progress in her students, she thought about quitting. But she remembered growth mindset thinking and set small, measurable targets. “Instead of a goal of ‘an amazing classroom with remarkable academic gains,’ I had to set goals like, ‘this week, everyone will line up safely for the bathroom’ or ‘today, the green group will identify a triangle.’ The class excelled at accomplishing these little goals, and slowly, our big goal of ‘an amazing classroom with remarkable academic gains’ started to materialize.” She began to video herself, flinching at what she saw but making daily improvements in how clearly she gave directions and how often she smiled. By her fifth year of teaching, every one of her fourth-graders passed the state math test, with 90 percent of them earning the top score of 4.

Dweck says that teachers stuck in the fixed mindset see underachieving, unmotivated, disruptive students as threats to their self-concept as good teachers. “But in a growth mindset, those students are challenges,” she says; “they’re opportunities to hone your skills, increase your understanding, and become a better teacher.” Growth mindset teachers believe, “Every student has something to teach me” and some even tell their students, “Every time you make a mistake, become confused, or struggle, you make me a better teacher.”

Is the fixed mindset fixed? No! says Dweck: “Research has shown that it’s never too late to develop a growth mindset about your abilities. The first step is to get in touch with your fixed mindset. We all have some of it tucked away somewhere, and it’s important to acknowledge that.” It says things like:

- *You’d be able to do this easily if you were a good teacher.*
- *You’ll never be as good as that teacher.*
- *You’ll never be able to get these students to learn this.*
- *If you take that risk and it doesn’t work out, you’ll lose your status/control/respect.*
- *You see, you took a risk and failed; don’t try that again. Stick to what you know.*
- *Why not face the facts; you’re just not cut out for this.*

These are thoughts from the fixed-mindset perspective. Hear them out, maybe share them in a discussion group with colleagues, and realize you’re not alone. Then start talking back with growth-mindset thinking:

- *Nobody is good at this right away. It takes experience.*
- *I really admire that teacher. Maybe I can ask her to observe my class and give me feedback.*
- *Maybe other teachers have some good ideas about how to teach this material more effectively.*
- *Maybe I need to find some new strategies or set different goals.*

Dweck suggests taking the mindset test <http://bit.ly/MindsetTest> to get a handle on the specific areas where you can change your thinking about growth and achievement.

“[U]nderstand that you have a choice,” she concludes. “Even when you feel anxious or discouraged, you can choose to act in a growth-mindset way... You recognize that the growth of your skills is in your hands, and you choose to make that happen.”

“Teachers’ Mindsets: ‘Every Student Has Something to Teach Me’” by Carol Dweck in *Educational Horizons*, December 2014/January 2015 (Vol. 93, p. 10-14),



**"Our lives begin to end
the day we become silent
about things that
matter."**

Martin Luther King

Skillfully Giving and Receiving Advice

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, David Garvin and Joshua Margolis (Harvard Business School) say that giving and receiving advice is a complex skill that's trickier than most people think. "The whole interaction is a subtle and intricate art," say Garvin and Margolis. "On both sides it requires emotional intelligence, self-awareness, restraint, diplomacy, and patience. The process can derail in many ways, and getting it wrong can have damaging consequences – misunderstanding and frustration, decision gridlock, subpar solutions, frayed relationships, and thwarted personal development – with substantial costs to individuals and their organizations."

Here are some of the pitfalls of advice-seeking and advice-giving:

For those seeking advice:

- *Thinking you already have the answers* – People tend to put too much trust in their own judgment and sometimes ask for advice only to validate what they already believe.
- *Choosing the wrong advisors* – People often go to like-minded colleagues who will confirm biases and incorrect beliefs. "Though friendship, accessibility, and nonthreatening personalities all impart high levels of comfort and trust, they have no relation to the quality or thoughtfulness of advice," say Garvin and Margolis.
- *Defining the problem poorly* – Advice-seekers may give too much detail, leave out important facts, or take for granted essential background information. They may also focus too much on *how* a decision will play out rather than *why* they are making it.
- *Discounting advice* – Many leaders have an "egocentric bias" and don't take advice that runs contrary to what they already believe. "Individuals in powerful positions are the worst offenders," say Garvin and Margolis.
- *Not distinguishing between good and bad advice* – People tend to embrace advice from those who project confidence, reject advice from those with whom they have personality conflicts, and distrust advice when advisors disagree among themselves. There's also a tendency to not take into account conflicts of interest, even when they're clearly declared.

For those giving advice:

- *Overstepping boundaries* – Giving advice that hasn't been asked for or chiming in when one is not qualified can leave a sour taste all around.
- *Misdiagnosing the problem* – "Advisors tend to avoid asking basic, probing questions because they don't want to jeopardize their expert status," say Garvin and Margolis. They may see false similarities to other situations or miss important biases in the advice-seeker.
- *Offering self-centered guidance* – It's off-putting and ineffective to frame one's advice as "how I would respond if I were in your shoes." It's important to be truly empathetic about the other person's situation.
- *Communicating advice poorly* – It can be vague, jargon-filled, or overwhelm the advice-seeker with too many ideas. "Nothing causes paralysis like a laundry list of options with no explicit guidance on where to start or how to work through and winnow the list," say Garvin and Margolis.
- *Mishandling the aftermath* – Some advisors get offended when the other person doesn't take their advice, poisoning the relationship. "The reality is that recipients rarely take one person's advice and run with it," say the authors. "More often they modify the advice, combine it with feedback from others, or reject it altogether..."

To avoid these potential pitfalls, Garvin and Margolis offer the following guidelines:

- *Stage 1: Find the right fit.* It's helpful and time-efficient to be able to turn for advice to a small group of trusted advisors with diverse perspectives who have your best interests at heart and can be relied on to tell you what you don't want to hear. Then it's a question of deciding who can be most helpful with a particular decision you have to make (whether or not to promote a subordinate, for example), providing counsel on how to navigate an unfamiliar situation, coaching on developing a particular skill (such as running meetings), and long-term mentoring on building and sustaining professional and personal effectiveness.

- *Stage 2: Develop a shared understanding.* The key here is for the person seeking advice to convey just enough information so the advisor can grasp the problem without getting lost in the weeds, see areas of discomfort and stress, and understand the goal. Advisors need to listen actively and suspend judgment, ask open-ended questions and then more specific probes, and clarify what kind of advice is needed.

- *Stage 3: Craft alternatives.* Decision-making improves dramatically when several options are available, says Garvin and Margolis, so advisee and advisor should work to develop possible courses of action and the pros and cons of each. Here are some possible advisor roles:

- Serve as a sounding board. Restate arguments and ask questions to sharpen the issue.
- Test a tentative path. Probe the seeker's reasoning with hypotheticals and questions.
- Expand the frame of reference. Provide breadth and depth on the nature of the problem.
- Provide process guidance. Examine the interests involved and alternative steps.
- Generate substantive ideas. Increase the number and range of options being considered.

"If you're the adviser, think of yourself as a driving instructor," say the authors. "While you provide oversight and guidance, your ultimate goal is to empower the seeker to act independently... You can never fully step into the advisee's shoes, and it is important to acknowledge that clearly."

- *Stage 4: Converge on a decision.* Advice-seekers often fall prey to confirmation bias or picking the easiest solution. It's important to keep an open mind, get a second or third opinion, and test out ideas that were initially discarded.

- *Stage 5: Put advice into action and make real-time adjustments.* "Advice is best treated as provisional and contingent," say Garvin and Margolis: "It should be a cycle of guidance, action, learning, and further guidance... Skilled advising is more than the dispensing and accepting of wisdom; it's a creative, collaborative process – a matter of striving, on both sides, to better understand problems and craft promising paths forward."

"The Art of Giving and Receiving Advice" by David Garvin and Joshua Margolis in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2015 (Vol. 93, #1/2, p. 60-71), <http://bit.ly/1HVNKnj>. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 567.

Reading Public School Happenings

Coolidge Grade 8 Students Visit Birch Meadow for Hour of Code

As part of the National Hour of Code initiative, Coolidge Teachers Marcia Grant and Christine Steinhauer's 8th Grade Enrichment classes visited 3rd and 4th grade classes at Birch Meadow. The 8th Grader's worked with the elementary students (see below), helping them to create computer programs. For more information about the Hour of Code activities visit <http://hourofcode.com/us>.

Disney Tweet of the Week



"My father said,
Differences can make you
stronger."

Mulan II





Stepping Stones....

- Our thoughts and prayers go out to former Joshua Eaton teacher and current Barrows parent, **Jen Maldonado**, who lost a family member recently.
- **PARCC Information Documents for Mathematics and Literacy**- PARCC has released a set of test specification documents, including assessment blueprints and evidence statement tables, to help educators and the general public better understand the design of both the PARCC End of Year and Performance Based Assessments.

Mathematics-<http://parconline.org/mathematics-test-documents>

Literacy-<http://parconline.org/ela-literacy-test-documents>

- **Grit self-assessment** – This link <http://bit.ly/EHGritTest> has the University of Pennsylvania's survey of determination, tenacity, and long-range thinking. Check it out! And here's the TED Talk by Penn professor Angela Lee Duckworth <http://bit.ly/DuckworthTED> that put "grit" on the map.
- **Rubric-making tools** – This link <http://bit.ly/RubricTools> from *Educational Horizons* has five free tools for constructing rubrics assembled by Christopher Pappas: RubiStar, Technology General Rubric Generator, iRubric, Annenberg Learner Build a Rubric, and Essay Tagger Common Core Rubric Creation Tool.
- **12 Years a Slave toolkit** – The National School Boards Association has partnered with New Regency, Fox Searchlight, and Penguin Books to make copies of the film, book, and study guide for *12 Years a Slave* available to U.S. high schools. Visit this website www.12yearsaslave.com to request a school toolkit, which includes parental consent suggestions and a letter from Steve McQueen, the film's director.
- **36 formative assessment tools** – This link <http://bit.ly/36Tools> has 36 ways of measuring students' content and skill knowledge, assembled by Kathy Dyer.
- **ShareMyLesson resources** – At www.sharemylesson.com/21stCenturyLessons, teachers can access a variety of lesson and unit plans crafted by Boston Public School educators, searchable by subject, grade, and topic. A few examples:

- Short Stories and Themes: *The Lottery*
- Citing Textual Evidence: Salem Witch Trials
- Athens and Sparta
- Greek Culture: Intro to Alexander the Great
- Statistics Questions and Data
- Introduction to Integers
- Introduction to Solving Equations

Blazing Trails....

"Education Experts Predict 2015 Learning Trends." Students will play a larger role in instructional design in 2015, ASCD Executive Director Judy Seltz predicts. Seltz and other education experts highlight trends educators can expect to see next year, including the continued growth of differentiated instruction fueled -- in part -- by technology. [Read More](#)

"Tinkering Is Serious Play." "The maker movement celebrates creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship through the design and construction of physical objects," write ASCD Educational Leadership authors Bronwyn Bevan, Mike Petrich and Karen Wilkinson. In their article, the authors describe how makerspaces can help students become interested in science, feel capable of doing science, and want to do science. [Read More](#)

"Necessary Skills Leading Us Deeper Into 21st-Century Schools." Transformative leaders are needed to guide schools as they prepare for a changing and uncertain future, K-12 leadership experts Jill Berkowicz and Ann Myers write in this EdWeek blog post. Traits of such leaders include the ability to share a vision and energize people to realize it, along with forming coalitions and engaging deeply with their team, they write. [Read More](#)

"How to Help Students Focus on Learning, Not Grades." Students can become so focused on grades and how to "do school" that they must be "deprogrammed" to actually learn, according to this KQED Mind/Shift article. Educator Adam Holman made the decision to switch to standards-based grading and adopt an inquiry-style teaching approach to help his high-school students focus more on learning and collaborating, rather than grades. [Read More](#)

"Shanghai Students Spend the Most Time on Homework." Students in Shanghai, China, spend the most hours per week -- about 14 hours -- doing homework when compared with their international peers, according to a recent report. Students in Finland have the least amount of homework, at about 2.8 hours a week. [Read More](#)

Have a Great Week!

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