



# Pathways

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

May 3, 2015

Volume 1, Number 32

## Upcoming Dates

- May 3 – (2:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Production – The Legend of Sleepy Hollow in the Endslo PAC
- May 4 – 9 - RMHS AP Testing; Teacher Appreciation Week- Thank you for what you do!
- May 4 – (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo PAC
- May 5 – (2:00 p.m.) RMHS MAJE Junior Jazz Festival; (7:00 p.m.) Grade 4 Camp Bournedale Parent Information Night; (7:00 p.m.) Parker Grade 5 Parent Orientation Night; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS PTO Meeting/Community Forum in Schettini Library
- May 6 – Nurse Appreciation Day- Thank you for what you do!; Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (1:15 p.m.) Elementary PLC Meetings; (1:30 p.m.) Secondary PLC Meetings; (1:30 p.m.) Special Education Vertical Meetings; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Session 10 in Distance Learning Room; (5:00 p.m.) Parker School Council Meeting;

## Teacher and Nurse Appreciation

This week is Teacher Appreciation Week and Wednesday, May 6, is Nurse Appreciation Day. This week gives us an opportunity to reflect on the positive impact that all staff can have on our students. This week's Pathways blog post located [here](#), highlights some inspirational stories of the impact that our staff have had on our current students. The stories were first presented at the Blueprint of Excellence Conference a few weeks ago.

## Building Schools' Capacity for Improving Teaching and Learning

In this *Education Week* article, Jack Schneider (College of the Holy Cross) says the current conversation around improving teaching is "disturbingly misguided." Some advocates talk as though the profession is full of rotten apples who need to be discarded, and the teachers who aren't rotten need to be prodded into stepping up their game. Implicit in this approach is a threat: *Get better or else*.

"There is a logic to this kind of thinking," says Schneider. "Yet it is also characterized by a fundamental assumption about what shapes teacher quality... What if the problem isn't with our teachers, but, rather, with teaching as a profession?" Actually, he says, most teachers in the U.S. are well-educated, highly motivated, hard-working, and quite competent. The problem is a set of professional working conditions that thwart growth:

- Large caseloads – Teachers work with as many as 150 students at a time, all of whom have different backgrounds and distinct needs.
- Not enough downtime – Teachers work with students most of the day, and there is little time for practice, reflection, and innovation.
- Isolation – There is insufficient collaboration with and learning from colleagues.
- Lack of autonomy – Teachers control few of the key variables: students, curriculum, textbooks, and standards of achievement.
- Lack of feedback – It's difficult to see one's impact on student learning, says Schneider: "Current data efforts are focused almost entirely on student standardized-test scores, which often tell teachers little that they don't already know."
- Evaluation - Current practices, says Schneider, "only encourage teachers to hide their flaws, and have been generally ineffective in transforming the labor force."

A small number of teachers succeed despite these workplace shackles. "But the vast majority could be better," says Schneider. "Not because of who they are. But because of how their jobs have been structured."

If we want to improve teaching and learning, he contends, we need what countries with a strong professional corps of teachers have put in place: a national philosophy and strategy for teacher development. Here are Schneider's suggestions:

(7:00 p.m.) Parker PTO Meeting; (7:00 p.m.) SEPAC Meeting @ Coolidge; Joshua Eaton Principal Finalists Interview (7:00 p.m., Joshua Eaton Cafeteria)

- May 7 – (3:00 p.m.) Elementary Building Meetings; (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting (if needed)
- May 9 – (Afternoon) MICCA Solo Festival Recital
- May 11 – 15 - RMHS AP Testing
- May 11 – (6:00 p.m.) Grade 5 Instrument Night for Wood End, Barrows & Birch Meadow; (6:00 p.m.) RMHS Singers Rehearsal
- May 12 – (2:30 p.m.) RMHS Select Chorus Rehearsal; (4:00 p.m.) Killam School Council; (6:00 p.m.) Grade 5 Instrument Night for Killam & Joshua Eaton; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Scholastic Awards Night; (7:00 p.m.) Killam PTO Meeting
- May 13 – (2:30 p.m.) Secondary Building Meetings; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL Session 11 in Distance Learning Room; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Spring Concert
- May 14 – (9:30 a.m.) Killam WASH Committee Meeting; (3:00 p.m.) Home Grown Writers PLC; (3:00 p.m.) Elementary Building Meetings; (3:00

• *Time for collaboration* – Through rethinking the weekly schedule and school year and creative use of extracurriculars and paraprofessionals, teachers can be given time that is essential for planning, reflection, and collaboration.

• *Curriculum* – Teachers need access to common, high-quality instructional materials. “Developing a small set of world-class tools to replace a grab-bag of idiosyncratic resources should be a priority,” says Schneider. “Given the emergence of the Common Core State Standards, this is increasingly possible.”

• *Embedded professional development* – Rather than delivering PD in periodic one-shot workshops, it should be an integral part of teacher teamwork around strategies, goals, and analysis of student work.

• *Observation, coaching, and evaluation* – “If we are serious about teacher quality,” says Schneider, “we need to make a universal commitment to training and engaging instructional coaches and teacher mentors to regularly observe teachers, debrief with them, and help them set challenging personal goals. We also need to reorient our teacher-evaluation systems away from punitive ‘valuation’ and toward support for improvement.”

• *Career ladders* – Teachers who demonstrate their effectiveness should be given more autonomy, responsibility, and compensation, says Schneider, so they can spread their effective practices to colleagues within their schools and districts.

“Problems with Teaching Lie in the Profession” by Jack Schneider in *Education Week*, April 15, 2015 (Vol. 34, #27, p. 20-21), [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org); Schneider is at [jschneid@holycross.edu](mailto:jschneid@holycross.edu). Reprinted from Marshall Memo 583.

## How Teams Can Overcome Some Common Group-Process Problems

“To be high functioning, teams must embrace disagreement and encourage individuals to voice their perspectives while acknowledging others’ viewpoints,” says executive coach Beth Strathman in this article in *Educational Leadership*. “Doing so encourages active participation, which brings forth thoughtful, relevant, and forthright contributions from group members.” Strathman identifies four common pitfalls that prevent honest, productive discussions:

• *Problem #1: The group meanders and gets nowhere.* Solution: Communicate the essential information up front, including:

- The reason the group has convened;
- The expected outcome of the meeting;
- The skills, knowledge, and abilities each member adds;
- The timeline for the work;
- Any standards the group must adhere to;
- The group’s role – to provide input, make a recommendation, or make a final decision.

With this kind of prologue, a group is much more likely to be focused, assign tasks, set timelines, and produce results.

• *Problem #2: Things get personal.* People misunderstand each other, and feelings are hurt – for example, “He’s impossible to deal with” “She doesn’t care about kids, just her ego” and “He thinks he’s so smart with his National Board certification, but he doesn’t know anything about my classroom.” Solution: Establish and enforce group norms. “Not everyone on a team or committee will want to be best friends, but personal attacks, criticisms, and judgments cannot be tolerated,” says Strathman. Ground rules govern the time, place, and manner of group members’ behavior. Some examples:

- Be on time;
- Cell phones off;

p.m.) Jennifer Minahan - Breaking the Behavior Code Workshop @ Killam

- May 15/16 – RMHS Broadway Trip

- Avoid restating what's already been said;
- Use "Yes, but..." to build on areas of agreement;
- State disagreements by focusing on known facts, not judgments about people.

Of course ground rules are worthless unless they're enforced. Sometimes the leader has to make a statement like, "Sam, instead of referring to the 1<sup>st</sup>-grade teachers in your building as 'incompetent,' let's home in on possible issues related to the curriculum. What skills do students lack as they enter second grade?"

- *Problem #3: Members have group-related conversations outside of meeting times.*

This can signal that some members don't feel heard or validated during meetings and feel the need to argue their points or do their complaining off-line. "As factions coalesce, bonding over gossip or feelings of superiority, exclusion, or unfairness, teams can begin to split," says Strathman. Solution: The leader holds group members accountable for bringing up issues at meetings and pushes back when they bring up issues off-line.

- *Problem #4: Discussions are lackluster, important angles aren't explored, some members dominate, dissent is not heard, and the group goes off on tangents.* Solution: Team leaders need to dig deeper, ask for examples, flush out underlying assumptions, and give weight to dissenting viewpoints – for example, "I'm intrigued by Jennifer's comment, which seems to run counter to the group's general opinion. Jennifer, what assumptions are you operating under?"

"Making Team Differences Work" by Beth Strathman in *Educational Leadership*, April 2015 (Vol. 72, #7, p. 60-64), <http://bit.ly/1D68x4b>; Strathman can be reached at [beth@bethstrathman.com](mailto:beth@bethstrathman.com).

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## Reading Public School Happenings

### RMHS Girls Hockey Team Visits State House

Last Wednesday, the Division 1 State Champion RMHS Girls Hockey Team were honored at the Massachusetts State House in Boston for their accomplishments. Below is the proclamation honoring the team and a picture of the team with State Representative James Dwyer.





## Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to the Girls & Boys Track, Boys & Girls Tennis, Boys & Girls Lacrosse, and Softball and Baseball who all posted wins recently.
- Thanks to the Reading Rotary for the annual tree distribution to all fifth grade students in recognition of Arbor Day.
- To Killam Librarian Kim Adamo and Principal Cathy Giles for their presentation to the School Committee on Monday night.
- To the cast and crew of the RMHS Drama Production *Sleepy Hollow*, under the direction of Natalie Cunha, for the great job that they did this past weekend.
- To Director of Food Service, Kristin Morello, who spoke at the State House this past week as part of the Massachusetts Legislative Action Breakfast. The link is located [here](#).
- To RMHS Department Chair Michael McSweeney on his appointment as RMHS Assistant Principal, effective July 1<sup>st</sup>.
- To the Wood End Staff and PTO/School Council for hosting a great Open House



### The Legend of Sleepy Hollow

This past weekend, the RMHS Drama Club presented, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. This show was based on the Washington Irving folktale and adapted by the cast. As Director Natalie Cunha put it, the show “has been a labor of love by the cast and crew. Choosing to adapt the script as a cast of 42 may seem like a daunting task; having only two weeks to write the show, and two weeks to stage and design the show then may seem even more unnerving. Yet, we took on the challenge with stride, all with the same goal in mind, to create a piece of theatre from the first letter of the last curtain call.” You certainly did reach the challenge and kudos goes to the entire cast and crew on a job well done.



### Quote of the Week....



“To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt.

### Sixth Congressional Art Awards



Sophomores Aimee Casavant and Margaret Sweeney shaking hands with Congressman Seth Moulton and the president of Montserrat College of Art after winning 3rd Place and an honorable mention at the 6th annual Congressional District High School Art Show at the Cabot Gallery in Beverly.

### Stepping Stones...

- We welcome the following new hires to our school district:
  - ✓ Greg Sheridan, Substitute, District
  - ✓ Katrina Svenson, Substitute, District
- **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit [www.schoolspring.com](http://www.schoolspring.com) to view the job details.

Anticipated Regular Education Tutor, Barrows Elementary School	JOB ID #1477892
Regular Education Paraeducator, Long-Term Substitute, Wood End Elementary School	JOB ID #1480832
Kindergarten Classroom Teacher, Wood End Elementary School	JOB ID #1480842
Custodian Substitutes (3), Reading Public Schools	JOB ID #1480982
0.7 FTE Grade 6 Science/Grade 8 Robotics Teacher, Coolidge Middle School	JOB ID #1446292
Integrated Classroom Preschool Teacher, RISE Preschool	JOB ID #1491772
Head Girls Ice Hockey Coach, Reading Memorial High School	JOB ID #1502792

### Blazing Trails....

**"The 5 C's of Accountability for Continuous Improvement."** "Continuous improvement through accountability requires that our responsibility is no longer to a number. Our responsibility is to educate the child behind the number," writes ASCD EDge community member Nashett Garrett. In a recent blog post, Garrett

## Disney Tweet of the Week



"Things don't always work out the first time, but keep trying."

—Donald Duck.

### 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](mailto:john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us)

explains why test scores should be only one of many components of accountability for continuous improvement. [Read More](#)

**"Ed Tech Must Do More to 'Advance Equity,' Says Duncan."** U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recently announced a new, free developer's guide for education technology. The downloadable guide identifies 10 key challenges in education such as family engagement, professional development and assessment creation. [Read More](#)

**"Our Brain Knows How to Stop Thinking, Start Learning."** Letting go of a focus on strategies and problem-solving while learning a skill may help students learn faster, according to a recent study. Researchers say the findings could enrich learning for children and adults and help shape classroom-based instruction. [Read More](#)

**"The Power of Teacher Led Professional Development: How 700 Educators Learned Together."** A Massachusetts school district recently coordinated a teacher-led professional-development program for about 700 educators. In this blog post, elementary-school principal Tom Martellone describes the event and its benefits. [Read zMore](#)

**"Swiss Education: Challenges and Advice."** Even the best education systems have their challenges, but they recognize them and are constantly pursuing new solutions. EdWeek's Heather Singmaster continues her interview with Ursula Renold, head of education systems research in the KOF Swiss Economic Institute." [Read More](#)

**A visual history of Lower Manhattan** – Check out this video of an imaginary ride up the elevator of One World Trade Center showing the development of that part of the city over the centuries: <http://nyti.ms/1DtcbFz>

**Videos of school leadership** – These five films created by the Wallace Foundation show effective principals in action: <http://bit.ly/1FqWPHz>

**A grammar website** – Grammar Bytes [www.chompchomp.com](http://www.chompchomp.com) has a variety of material to help with English grammar: definitions, tips and rules, diagnostic tests, presentations, exercises, handouts, a MOOC, and YouTube videos.

**A dictionary for ELs** – The free, online Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary (2015) [www.learnersdictionary.com](http://www.learnersdictionary.com) is specifically designed for English language learners. It has quizzes, words frequently requested by users, core vocabulary, a word of the day defined and illustrated, and a place for students to save words they're learning.

**Have a Great Week!**