



# Pathways

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

December 13, 2015

Volume 7, Number 15

## Upcoming Dates

- December 14 – 17 – Challenge Day @ Parker & Coolidge
- December 15 – (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Guidance Financial Aid Night in the Endslo PAC
- December 16 – (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Winter Band Concert in the Endslo PAC
- December 17 – (4:00 p.m.) RETELL in Rooms 321 & 320 @ RMHS (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Winter Songfest in the Endslo PAC
- December 18 – (8:30 a.m.) Joshua Eaton Holiday Concert; (6:00 p.m.) RMHS Select Chorus Caroling
- December 19 - (6:00 p.m.) RMHS Select Chorus Caroling
- December 21-(7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting
- December 23 – Winter Break begins at the end of School. Full school day.
- December 25 – Merry Christmas
- December 26 – Happy Kwanzaa
- January 1 – Happy New Year
- January 4 – Welcome Back

## Creating Safe and Supportive School Environments for our Transgender Students

On July 1, 2012, Chapter 199 of the Acts of 2011, the *Act Relative to Gender Identity* became effective. This series of amended statutes prohibited discrimination on the basis of several categories, including discrimination on the basis of gender identity. As part of these amendments, General Law Chapter 76, section 5 prohibits discrimination against students who enroll or attend the public schools. The law specifically states:

*“No person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin or sexual orientation”*

As with all students, we need to create a school environment where our transgender and gender non-conforming students feel safe, supported, and fully included. Recently, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed a document, *Guidance for Massachusetts Public Schools Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity*. This document is an excellent resource in helping schools and districts create that safe and supportive environment. It contains guidance on areas such as proper use of names and pronouns, privacy and confidentiality policies, appropriate names and gender markers on student records, appropriate access to locker rooms and restrooms, participation in physical education and athletics, and education and training for teachers.

### **What this means for our school district**

In the Reading Public Schools, we currently have transgender or gender non-conforming students at all levels. When a student is transitioning from one gender to another in a school, we will be preparing staff on ways that we can create a safe and supportive school environment for those students, as well as, educating families and students how important it is to create that safe environment for all students. In addition, over the next few weeks, we will be changing over some of our boys, girls, and adult restrooms in our schools to gender neutral restrooms with the appropriate signage, key locks, and security. Cameras will be installed in hallways outside of these bathrooms to help address potential bullying and harassment issues of our students. We will be also looking at our locker rooms to make sure that we have appropriate private shower and changing areas.

We encourage you to read the guidelines above to get better educated in this important topic. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact your building principal or the Reading Public Schools Administration Offices.

## School Accountability Ratings Released

Last Wednesday, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released the 2015 school and district accountability and assistance levels based upon performance on the 2015 MCAS and PARCC state assessments. The Massachusetts' state system of accountability places schools and districts on a five-level scale, ranking the highest performing in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5 Schools. A description of the levels and the accountability system are located [here](#). The levels for our schools are as follows:

Barrows-Level 2  
Birch Meadow-Level 2  
Coolidge-Level 2  
Joshua Eaton-Level 3  
Killam-Level 2  
Parker-Level 2  
RMHS-Level 2  
Wood End-Level 2

Most schools in our district have received a designation of Level 2, which means that although the general population of students is doing well on our state assessments, we are not on pace in narrowing the achievement gap between all of our students and our high needs subgroup. The high needs subgroup, as designated by the state, include students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English Language Learners.

Over the last several months, we have been transitioning our classroom practices and curriculum to the state frameworks. We are encouraged by the results we are seeing on our local and state assessments. However, we realize that some of our students are not succeeding as defined by our state assessments and we will continue to focus on addressing the needs of our struggling learners.

For more information about accountability and assistance level designations, visit <http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/reports/>.

For each school's results please go [here](#).

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## Resilience

“Human beings are more resilient than we’d earlier thought,” says David Brooks in this *New York Times* column. “Many people bounce back from hard knocks and experience surges of post-traumatic growth.” Only about 13 percent of 9/11 first responders experienced post-traumatic stress in the six months that followed, and society-wide, at least three-quarters of people who experience a life-threatening or violent event emerge without a stress disorder. And even those who experience PTSD are likely to recover and rebuild their lives. “These are the people you sometimes meet who have experienced the worst in life but still radiate love and joy,” says Brooks, and lists what researchers believe are the key factors:

- *Unconditional love* – “The people who survive and rebound from trauma frequently had an early caregiver who pumped unshakable love into them,” he says, “and that built a rock of inner security they could stand on for the rest of their lives.”

## Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to our Elementary All-District Chorus and Elementary Music teachers on a wonderful performance this week.
- Congratulations to the Coolidge Middle School on the successful winter concert.
- Thank you to all of the organizations that donated trees to the Annual Festival of Trees.
- Thank you to Mike Foley, President of REF and all of the volunteers who made this year's Festival of Trees a great success.

• *Positive beliefs about themselves* – “These people are often deluded in good ways about their own abilities, but completely realistic about their situations,” says Brooks. They have “an optimist’s faith in their own abilities to control the future. But they have no illusions about the world around them. They accept what they have lost quickly. They see problems clearly. They work hard. Work is the reliable cure for sorrow.”

• *Storytelling* – Traumatic events disrupt a person’s self-narrative, and some people wallow in dark ruminations about the past. But survivors are able to write a new story “that imagines a life better than before,” he says. “Book 1 is life before the event. Book 2 is the event that shattered the old story. But Book 3 is reintegration, a reframing new story that incorporates what happened and then points to a more virtuous and meaningful life than the one before... The stories super survivors tell have two big themes: optimism and altruism.”

Reprinted from Marshall Memo 615-“The Tales of the Super Survivors” by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, November 24, 2015,

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/24/opinion/tales-of-the-super-survivors.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/24/opinion/tales-of-the-super-survivors.html?_r=0)

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## Getting Students Talking to Each Other About Math

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Megan Franke, Angela Turrou, Noreen Webb, Jacqueline Wong, Nami Shin, and Cecilia Fernandez (University of California/Los Angeles) and Marsha Ing (University of California/Riverside) examine ways to get students to engage with each others’ mathematical ideas. “Researchers increasingly recognize,” say the authors, “that promoting mathematical learning requires teachers to engage students in ‘productive struggle,’ where students expend effort to make sense of mathematics and figure out something that is not immediately apparent. One way students can productively struggle with the mathematics is through their communication with others – both through explaining one’s own thought processes (e.g., reasoning about mathematical concepts and how to solve problems) and discussing other students’ reasoning process.”

This sounds good in theory, but implementing it in classrooms is not a simple matter. It’s relatively straightforward to get students talking about math problems, say Franke and her colleagues, but getting classrooms to the level of “productive struggle” is quite challenging. Here is a continuum of students’ degree of engagement with other students’ ideas, from low to high:

- ✓ Saying “I agree” or “I disagree” with an idea that was shared.
- ✓ Pointing to the strategy that most closely resembles their own strategy.
- ✓ Repeating the details of what a student shared.
- ✓ Explaining another student’s strategy after it was written on the board.
- ✓ Adding further detail to another student’s strategy.
- ✓ Providing a correction to an problematic portion of a student’s solution.
- ✓ Proposing an alternative solution and explaining how it differs from the idea already posed.
- ✓ Co-constructing a solution with another student.

The researchers observed a number of teacher “invitations” designed to elicit higher-level mathematical discourse:

- ✓ Asking a student to explain someone else’s solution – “Joey, can you explain what Natalia did?”
- ✓ Discussing differences between solutions – “Let’s look again at what Dylan said. Dylan said it is a whole number. Stella, do you want to respond to that, given what you said to start with?”
- ✓ Making a suggestion to another student about his or her idea – “What is he going to have to do with that set of numbers, with 387? What does he have to do, Grayson?”
- ✓ Connecting students’ ideas to other’ ideas – “Joaquin, can you see what Enrique is doing or what Natalia is doing and see if it looks like yours? Or if it’s different?”
- ✓ Getting a student to create a solution with another student – “Griffin, why don’t you sit down and work on the problem together with Easton?”
- ✓ Using a solution that was shared by another student – “See how Paige counted? Could you take this problem and count like her?”

As they observed classrooms in a California elementary school, Franke and her colleagues noticed three challenges that teachers faced as they tried to orchestrate good mathematical discussions:

- ✓ Students sometimes seemed unable to engage with each others’ ideas.
- ✓ Students sometimes provided little or no detail about others’ thinking;
- ✓ At times, students provided details but didn’t address the mathematical ideas underlying other students’ strategies.

In other words, say the researchers, “just inviting students to engage with others will not guarantee that students will, in fact, engage with each other, nor necessarily engage in ways that are supportive of mathematical learning.”

When discussions fizzled, there were big differences in how teachers reacted. Some provided their own solution. Some moved on to another topic. But some teachers had a broader repertoire of in-the-moment strategies: probes (pressing students to engage further); scaffolding (providing some information or clarification); and positioning (interacting with students in ways that acknowledge the students’ connection with the math idea being discussed – for example, “What Aaron’s saying is that four-fourths is a whole, or one. That’s what he says. What do you say to that?”). These teacher moves, say the authors, “require not only pedagogical skill and knowledge, but also pedagogical content knowledge and mathematical content knowledge, and well as identities as teachers who see each of their students as capable. We need to better understand how teachers draw on their knowledge and identities as they make their in-the-moment decisions.”

“We never saw a teacher use the same series of support moves more than once,” say the researchers, “even in response to the same kinds of challenges. This implies that the teacher support moves were not a set of fully planned actions that could be applied repeatedly in the same way, but rather served as a repertoire of pedagogical moves that teachers drew upon in the moment. Our findings resonate with those of previous researchers and suggest that understanding the teacher moves that support student

## Quote of the Week....



**“Eventually all things fall into place. Until then, laugh at the confusion, live for the moments, and know everything happens for a reason.”**

**– Unknown**

thinking requires looking beyond the first move a teacher makes and toward how teachers extend their interactions with students to support opportunities for productive struggle.” This involves a sophisticated knowledge that takes into account the student, the math, and the context – something teachers develop with years of experience, interaction with colleagues, and high-quality professional development.

The researchers close with a description of what happens when classroom mathematics discussions are at their best: “Teachers learn about content, about the development of student thinking, about their students as mathematics learners and people, and about how to support their students. The students, while learning mathematical content, learn how to listen to one another, how to ask a question that moves the mathematics forward, and how to position their ideas in relation to others’ ideas. The interaction among the teacher and students supports students to learn to persevere as they communicate with each other and productively struggle to understand and articulate each others’ ideas.”

“Student Engagement with Others’ Mathematical Ideas: The Role of Teacher Invitation and Support Moves” by Megan Franke, Angela Turrou, Noreen Webb, Marsha Ing, Jacqueline Wong, Nami Shin, and Cecilia Fernandez in *The Elementary School Journal*, September 2015 (Vol. 116, #1, p. 126-148), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/1NezQjd> Reprinted from Marshall Memo 615.

## Reading Public School Happenings

### **Hour of Code**

This past week, schools across the country, including Reading schools, participated in Hour of Code, an activity designed to promote computer programming skills in our schools. Below are several pictures of Hour of Code in action. Special thanks to our technology integration specialists and library media specialists for coordinating these events in their schools and for all of our teachers who used this activity in their classrooms.



*Birch Meadow and Coolidge Students*





*Killam Hour of Code*

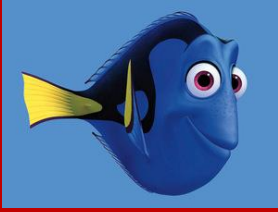


*Killam Hour of Code*



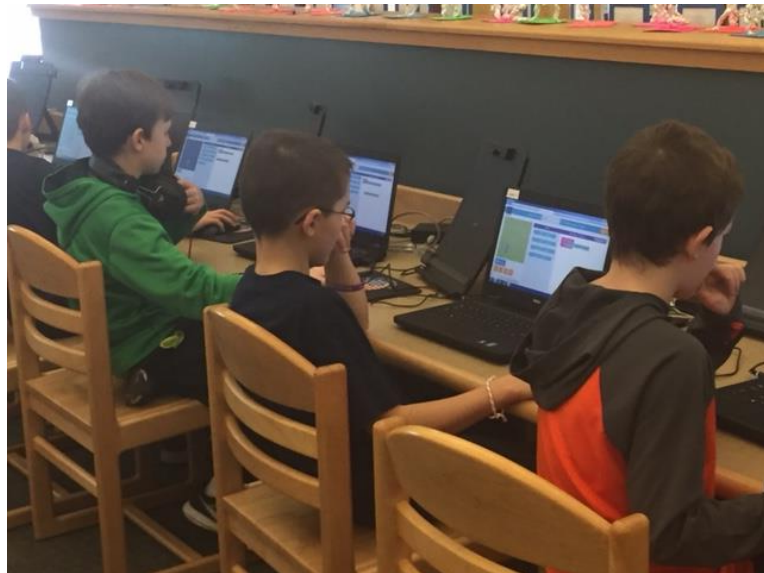
*Barrows Hour of Code*

## Disney Tweet of the Week



“When life gets you down, you know what you gotta do? Just keep swimming, just keep swimming.”

—Dory (Finding Nemo)



*Barrows Hour of Code*

### **Wood End Makerspace**

One of the goals of our Library Media Specialists this year is to develop makerspaces in each of the Library Media Centers. A Makerspace is defined as a community-operated workspace where people with common interests, often in computers, engineering, technology, science, [digital art](#) or [electronic art](#), can [meet](#), [socialize](#) and [collaborate](#). Below are students from an after school class in a Makerspace at Wood End where the students are using Makey Makey's to make a piano out of bananas and other objects.



### **Social Emotional Learning in Action**

Throughout our school district, classrooms are implementing different aspects of our MTSS and social emotional learning programs. Recently, the Boston Globe came in RISE and Birch Meadow to observe some of these programs in our classrooms. Below are some photos.





*Students in Birch Meadow Teacher Maria Simon's Class practicing mindfulness*



### **Elementary Chorus Performs**

On Wednesday, the District Wide Elementary Chorus Groups from Grades 3, 4, and 5 performed in front of a packed audience at the Endslo Performance Arts Center. Below are pictures of the event. Special thanks goes to Music Teachers Holly Gallant and Brittany Bauman for their outstanding work with these students.





*Grade 3 Chorus*



*Grade 4 and 5 Chorus*

## Stepping Stones...

- ✓ Congratulations to Deputy Police Chief **Mark Segalla** on his appointment as the next Chief of Police, effective January 1, 2016. Mark replaces Chief James Cormier who will be retiring on that day. A special thanks goes out to **Chief Cormier** for his leadership of his department and his collaborative work with the Reading Public Schools in continuing to improve school safety.
- ✓ **We welcome** the following new hires to our school district:
- ✓ Steve Willan, Daily Substitute
- ✓ Kelly Couture, Long-Term Substitute, Coolidge
- ✓ Lauren Turenne, Daily Substitute
- ✓ Alana Connelly, Extended Day Student Helper
- ✓ Elizabeth Crowley, Regular Education Paraeducator, Birch Meadow
- ✓ Jennifer Arthur, Regular Education Paraeducator, Barrows
- ✓ **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit [www.schoolspring.com](http://www.schoolspring.com) to view the job details.

Parker Middle School Cafeteria Worker, 4 hours per day	
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- ✓ **Parker Middle School Principal Search**-Beginning in early January, the Reading Public Schools will be conducting a principal search for Parker Middle School. This weekend, the position is being advertised with an application deadline of January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Our plan is to have a principal selected by early March with a start date of July 1, 2016. The timeline established for this search has been developed in a way to maximize the largest number of qualified candidates. As we have with previous administrative searches, we use an extensive process to find the best candidate possible, consisting of multiple interviews with different groups, reference checks, and site visits by the candidates. As part of the search process, a Screening Committee, consisting of parents, teachers, and administrators participates during the beginning of the process to recommend a set of candidates to the Superintendent as potential finalists. The chosen finalists will go through a public process with the school community that will lead to a final selection by the Superintendent of Schools.

We will be looking for a few parents and teachers to serve on the Parker Screening Committee. Members who are on the screening committee would need to commit to two afternoon meetings, as well as, up to two full days of interviews. If you are interested in being considered to be on the Parker Middle School Screening Committee, please send an email to Human Resources Administrator Michaela Saunders at [Micheala.Saunders@reading.k12.ma.us](mailto:Micheala.Saunders@reading.k12.ma.us) with a detailed explanation of why you are interested in being on the Screening Committee. The deadline to submit your interest is **Wednesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>**.

We will be moving forward with a Principal for the Joshua Eaton Elementary School in mid to late January.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Micheala Saunders.

- ✓ **COFFEE & CONVERSATION - Facilitated by the District Leader of Social Emotional Learning**-Over the past few years, parents in the community have been asking for a forum where they can meet and share with and hear from other parents how they are navigating various issues with their students. Topics such as how to responsibly use technology, navigate social media, talk about substance use and anxiety, gender identity, grief, and so many other issues. This year, we are excited to be offering COFFEE & CONVERSATION! Once a month at the elementary level and once a

month at the secondary level, we will host a morning parent coffee where families can drop in and engage in facilitated conversation with other parents. We will have a topic of focus each month but will welcome conversation on any relevant issues that families bring to the table. Flyers with information (one for elementary, one for secondary) can be found by clicking the link below:

[Elementary Link](#)

[Secondary Link](#)

- ✓ **Every Student Succeeds Act:** President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) December 10, 2015. The act is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The White House and the U.S. Department of Education have released a number of materials to help educate the public about the ESSA on USED's [ESEA web page](#), including a side-by-side comparison of NCLB, ESEA flexibility, and ESSA.
- ✓ **Massachusetts FOCUS Academy Courses:** The application process is open for the spring 2016 Massachusetts FOCUS Academy (MFA) courses. This spring, ESE is sponsoring nine graduate-level courses for teams of educators working in identified districts and schools in Massachusetts to more effectively meet the needs of high-need student groups. [Information about the courses](#), the list of prioritized districts and schools, and the application process are all available online. The application process will remain open for prioritized districts and schools until January 7. During the week of January 11-15, any remaining seats will be made available to teams of educators from districts in Massachusetts that were not previously eligible to participate.

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## Blazing Trails....

**"Improve How You Differentiate Instruction."** Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching in which educators actively plan for students' differences so that all students can learn best. In a differentiated classroom, teachers divide their time, resources and efforts to effectively teach students who have various backgrounds, readiness and skill levels, and interests. This month, ASCD has gathered our full suite of differentiated instruction resources to help educators identify areas where improvement is needed and opportunities to enhance instructional ability. [Read More](#)

**"Supercharge Parent Communication."** Communication is key for establishing the partnership between schools and families, but it has grown far beyond newsletters and written notes sent home, writes instructional coach Bridget Stegman in this ASCD Education Update "Road Tested" column. Stegman shares how teachers can embrace technology to give families new insight into their child's school day and help them feel like they are a welcome part of the classroom. [Read More](#)

**"7 Ways to Thank People in Your Network."** There are plenty of ways to express gratitude, including making a phone call or sending a gift, writes Evan Baehr in this "Harvard Business Review" post. Whichever way you choose to say thank you, the important thing is to make gratitude a daily practice. "Small, regular practices of gratitude can change your life -- you'll be healthier and sharper, as will those around you," he writes. [Read More](#)

**"Do Students in China Have Too Much Homework?"** Students in China spend about three hours each day completing homework -- resulting in a lack of sleep, frustration and a decline in self-esteem, according to a recent study. Data show the amount of homework in China is about twice the global average. [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](mailto:john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us)