



Pathways

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

December 20, 2015

Volume 2, Number 16

Upcoming Dates

- 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; (8:00 a.m.) Coffee & Conversation @ RMHS
- January 5 – RMHS Alumni Day in the Endslo PAC
- January 6 – (after school) Secondary Building Meetings
- January 7 – Parker Parent Visitation Day; (8:30 a.m.) Coffee & Conversation @ Killam; (after school) Elementary Building Meetings; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL in Rooms 321 & 320 @ RMHS; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Guidance Sophomore Night; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room

A Letter From Santa

By: Mike Gorman (<http://21centuryedtech.wordpress.com/>)

Dear Teachers,

I have been meaning to write this letter for a long time! It is a letter that I feel is long overdue and with the elves getting all ready for my long ride, I finally found the time! I have been watching teachers for many years and I am amazed at the work they do. I have come to a conclusion that the teaching profession, like my own, must be filled with bits of magic! Please let me provide ten statements of evidence for my belief.

1. I travel the world one night of the year visiting all the boys and girls of the world. The teaching profession works with every boy and girl all year long. This equates to each teacher fulfilling educational needs for 30 – 200 children each and every school day. Seems like magic to me!
2. I deliver presents to all the boys and girls. From my Toy Repair Shop statistics I find many of these gifts are broken or no longer garner a child's interest within months! Yet teachers find inner gifts in every child. Teachers nurture these inner gifts until they develop into true presents that will last a lifetime. These kinds of gifts sure seem like magic to me!
3. I keep my naughty and nice list for every child. Some people believe this job is pretty amazing! Yet when I look at the teaching profession, teachers provide a constant evaluation of all their students! Their list covers all the aspects of developing and learning which they report to children's parents and to the children themselves! This evaluation is based on a wide variety of observations, data, and student performance. Teachers will then use this list to help improve each and every student! Wow, keeping track of every student's ability and prescribing ways to be successful must really be magic!
4. I leave presents to students who are on the nice list and who believe in me. Teachers work with all children because they believe in every student. Teachers continue to do so, even when students stop believing in the educational system's ability to help them achieve. That type of persistence has got to be magic!
5. I have operated my workshop using the same technology for hundreds of years and it has worked for me. Then again, I work with children when they are asleep, delivering presents in my own way. Teachers work with children when they are awake and they have spent time learning how to engage

children using googles, blogs, phlogs, glogs, prezis, and all these other words I really don't know! Being able to teach, transform, and accommodate for this new digital generation must really be magic!

6. I have made it a practice to leave coal behind for children who do not make my good list! It seems every year the same children always get the coal. Teachers refuse to leave coal, in fact, they are working hard at leaving no child behind. To work towards a goal of leaving no child behind is a true act of magic!
7. I read the news and I am always so thankful to read all the nice articles about my work. It really does provide me with motivation to keep up my vocation. I read news articles about the education profession and it seems that most articles are unsupportive. Yet, teachers keep working hard at providing success for their students! These teachers must be operating on a little bit of magic!
8. I have thousands of elves, of course the reindeer, and the community of the entire North Pole to assist me. Teachers work every day, many times by themselves, as they provide new opportunities for their students! Carrying that load alone must be much heavier than my bag of toys. It must really be magic!
9. I receive many a thank you and millions of pictures of happy faces as children open their presents each year. Teachers don't always get the thank yous, or may never see the present get eventually opened. When they do, appreciation may come from decades later! A thank you that appears after many years must be the result of pure magic!
10. I discovered a light in Rudolph brightens up a dark, foggy, or snowy night so that I can deliver joy to all the children across the world. Teachers provide the light that brightens our world in both the darkest night and brightest day! It is the light of learning and knowledge! The ability to keep that light burning bright must take a quite a bit of magic!

You see, I have found that magic does not come easily! It is made possible only by those who work hard and keep believing, and seek what they know is possible! As you can see, there must be a great deal of magic in the education profession! Please continue to keep this magic alive and know that you are all on my good list! After all, I had to learn all that I do from somewhere! So from across the years I know I have many teachers to thank! Last, to all teachers across the world... I really do believe in you!

Thanks for all the magic and what you do each and every day for children.

Santa

Kudos and Accolades

- A big thank you to RMHS Music teacher and the RMHS Select Choruses for an outstanding performance at the annual Merrimack Valley Superintendent's Association Holiday luncheon
- Congratulations to the RMHS Band and Choral groups on successful winter concerts.
- Thank you to RMHS Guidance Director Lynna Williams and the RMHS Guidance Counselors for hosting the annual Financial Aid Night.
- To Parker Teacher Renee Gelin who was recently had her book, *Adventures in Widowland*, published by CreateSpace Independent Publishing. As described on Amazon.com, "The book brings the reader along on Ms. Gelin's first five years of widowhood. We see into her heart and mind, primarily through posts she made to a young widow's online community bulletin board. Because Gelin writes with brutal honesty, humor and tenacity, the reader grieves with her, celebrates with her, and perseveres with her."

The Art of Designing Lessons With Desirable Difficulties

In this article in *Education Week Teacher*, author/researchers Brad Ermeling, James Hiebert, and Ron Gallimore applaud U.S. educators' recent emphasis on growth mindset and "grit." They point to clear benefits in having students wrestle with complexity, uncertainty, and difficulty and coming up with their own answers rather than being guided through every step.

But Ermeling, Hiebert, and Gallimore worry that "struggle" may become an end in itself, rather than a means to higher levels of student learning. Cooperative learning has fallen into this trap, they believe: "In many classrooms, students have learned to be better 'cooperators' but often without any distinct benefit for deeper learning. To avoid a similar fate with growth mindset, the instructional goals must be richer learning, not just struggle." The key is getting students engaged with a task that captures the central idea of the lesson or unit.

Here's an example. A teacher is introducing the addition of fractions with unlike denominators (students already understand how to add fractions with like denominators and can solve problems like $\frac{2}{5} + \frac{1}{5}$). One approach would be for the teacher to ask, "Can you find a common denominator for the problem $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3}$?" But this doesn't focus students on the key idea, which is that units or wholes must be broken into same-size parts to find the exact answer to the problem. A better question would be, "Can you find how much juice we would have if we added $\frac{1}{2}$ cup and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup? Show how you found the answer by drawing a picture or writing how you thought about the problem." This gets students wrestling with the key idea they need to understand – how to think about the quantities of juice in smaller, equal amounts so they can be added together. When students have worked on this problem, they will be much more receptive to learning the concept, perhaps in a direct explanation from the teacher.

Designing learning experiences focused on worthy learning goals is challenging, say Ermeling, Hiebert, and Gallimore; it involves a lot of trial and error and teacher persistence. Here are some other key elements in successful "struggle" lessons:

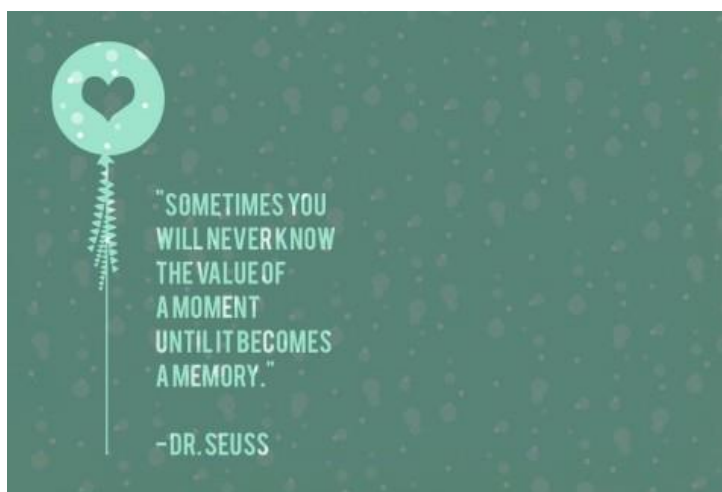
- Determining the timing and placement in a curriculum unit;
- Crafting the problem so it hits students' zone of proximal development (ZPD) – the level of difficulty that will challenge them without undue frustration;
- Making sure they have the prerequisite knowledge and skills – for example in the problem above, knowing how to add fractions with like denominators before tackling problems with unlike denominators;
- Doing ongoing assessments to gauge students' current level of understanding and proficiency;
- Providing a safe environment that encourages student thinking, collaboration, and risk-taking;
- Using probing questions to nudge students into their ZPD;
- Providing appropriate help – "Success depends on teachers recognizing when a little timely assistance sustains student persistence but does not prematurely terminate productive struggle and learning," say the authors.

- Following up each struggle episode with carefully structured lessons that build on students' ideas, address misconceptions, and help them reflect on their new understandings.

"Beyond Growth Mindset: Creating Classroom Opportunities for Meaningful Struggle" by Brad Ermeling, James Hiebert, and Ron Gallimore in *Education Week Teacher*, December 7, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1I52vKR>; Ermeling can be reached at brad.ermeling@gmail.com. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 616.

What Will Your Children Remember About The Holidays?

Posted by Dr. Dave Walsh • December 10 on [Mind Positive Parenting Blog](#)



Holiday spirit or holiday madness?

It is December and the holidays are in full swing. Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah or something else, the break from school and work can be a great opportunity for togetherness, reflection and family. It can also be a time of way-too-many-things-to-do and way-too-little-time-to-do-them. It doesn't help that stores started their holiday marketing strategies at Halloween and only amplify their messages as the holidays near. Of course, the marketers tell us that the right gift, beverage, decoration, or holiday party will be the key to happiness.

While many of us cognitively understand that these "things" aren't what make us happy, it is easy to forget this during the holidays. Too many of us can get fixated on getting the right gift for our kids or cramming in yet another holiday social engagement out of fear of missing out. Kids can be especially vulnerable to the "gimmies" since the latest toys and goodies are touted everywhere they turn.

Making memories

To make the season special it can be helpful to reflect on our own childhood holiday memories. While one or two coveted toys may bubble to the surface of our memory, the most powerful recollections tend to be triggered unexpectedly and overwhelmingly by songs, smells, decorations and traditions. The positive feelings of warmth, safety, or happiness are examples of "emotional memories." Emotional memories are very powerful and very important. Just as experiences link together different connections in our brain, experiences also wire together emotional connections. Emotions are especially powerful because they focus our attention and are a major determinant for what we remember. Sadly, not everyone has heartwarming emotional memories connected with the holidays.

Quote of the Week....



**“Prove yourself to yourself
not others.”**

– Unknown

Past holidays marred by strife, conflict or trauma may find difficult and painful emotions triggered at this time of year. Some find the holiday season a time to be endured, not celebrated.

Creating positive emotional memories

While presents might feel important now, the greatest gift we can give our children is to create a rich set of positive emotional memories. Creating family traditions, focusing on the meaning of the season, and carving out time for reflection can help buffer stress and provide a foundation for memories that last a lifetime.

Check out [more tips for creating emotional memories](#) at the holidays.

“But I hate this family.” Emotional memories in adolescence

While the tips above make all of this sound warm and delightful, every parent knows that carving out time for family is not always met with cooperation and love. At times, our children can definitely test our holiday spirit – especially when there are teenagers in the house.

Our family celebrates Christmas, and one of the traditions in our family was to decorate the tree together. When our kids were young, they delighted in the ornaments, Christmas cookies, and holiday music. For a few years between the chaos of early childhood and the rollercoaster of adolescence, this tradition seemed to genuinely fill us all with the Christmas spirit.

This honeymoon ended abruptly when our son Brian was fifteen. He informed us in no uncertain terms that he wanted nothing to do with this family tradition and that he would rather listen to his own music behind the closed door of his bedroom, thank you very much.

If I am being honest, there was a big part of Monica and me that wouldn't have minded if Brian had stayed in seclusion that year. Our happy holiday elf of a child had transformed into Scrooge as of late and he generally wasn't the best company.

Monica and I looked at each other and realized that we had a choice to make – let him go or bring him in? Monica took the lead. “Brian,” she said, “I understand that you would rather not participate, but this is an important tradition for our family. You don't have to hang any ornaments on the tree but you do need to be in the same room with us and you have to be respectful.”

Monica made it clear that there weren't any alternatives to this plan. Brian stomped down the stairs and took a seat facing the wall, hoodie up. Even Bing Crosby emanating from the stereo sounded a little less cheerful with a new backdrop of stormy silence.

The evening went on without much event. Brian did eventually turn his chair around and asked (ordered) Erin to put his favorite ornaments in ideal places on the tree. By the end of the night he even hung one or two himself. Let's be honest though, this wasn't the kind of night that Hallmark cards describe.

Memories that last a lifetime

Even though all three of my adult children went on to live in different cities, they always managed to get time off to come home for the holidays. One of the first Christmases that we celebrated as a family once all three kids were out of the house reminded me of the power of emotional memories. We were all gathered around the Christmas tree catching up and sharing stories. Brian got up and put Bing Crosby on before he sat back down on the

couch. Looking at the tree, he spontaneously said “You know my favorite memories growing up? Decorating the tree together as a family!”

Monica and I could hardly contain ourselves. As I burst out laughing. Brian, confused, asked why. When I reminded him that there were years when he didn’t want any part our tree decorating tradition, he was incredulous. “No way,” he responded. I always liked decorating the tree together.” He was in complete denial about some of his teenage obnoxiousness.

Loosen but don’t let go

Maintaining family rituals and traditions is a great way to stay connected. It’s reasonable to make allowances as the kids get older. Although they want and need some freedom, don’t give up on traditions just because they become such a hassle. Teens need to know that they are still part of a family. They may not be happy about that fact at the time, but it’s still important to hang on to the particular things that make your family unique. When holiday festivities send family members in a thousand different directions, it’s even more important to plan for connection time. It won’t happen if you leave it to chance.

We couldn’t make Brian hang ornaments on the tree. But we could communicate that we cared too much about him to let him go entirely. And while in the short term, the holidays don’t always feel picture perfect, the end game is a rich set of emotional memories that last a lifetime.

Reading Public School Happenings

RMHS Annual Winter Band Concert

Last week was Holiday concert week at Reading Memorial High School. On Wednesday, the RMHS Band held its annual Winter Concert, which was directed by Joseph P. Mulligan and Eric Blackman. The photos below show some of the highlights of the concert which was attended by hundreds of people. Congratulations to the RMHS Band on a job well done



RMHS Jazz Band

Disney Tweet of the Week



"The past can hurt, but the way I see it, you can either run from it, or learn from it."

—Rafiki (The Lion King)



RMHS Stage Band



RMHS Marching Band



RMHS Symphonic Band with Trombone Soloist Scott Dumas

RMHS Chorus Concert

On Thursday evening, the RMHS Choral Groups, under the direction of Choral Director Kristin Killian, held its annual Winter Songfest with songs from the RMHS Singers, Fermata Nowhere, The Crescendudes, and Mixed Choir. Below are some photos of this performance which was attended by several alumni and families. Congratulations to these groups on a job well done!



RMHS Singers



Mixed Choir



The Crescendudes



Combined Choirs and Alumni Singing "Let the River Run" at the End of the Concert

Stepping Stones...

- **We have posted** a position on School Spring. If interested, please visit www.schoolspring.com to view the job details.

Parker Middle School Principal	Job ID# 2213924
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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 22nd. 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 with a detailed explanation of why you are interested in being on the Screening Committee. The deadline to submit your interest is **Wednesday, December 23rd**.

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

- ✓ **A Special Thank You from the Reading Education Foundation**-The Reading Education Foundation (REF) would like to thank our schools for the trees and/or silent auction donations to our 14th Annual Festival of Trees. This year you assisted us in raising almost \$25,000 which we will use to fund teacher initiated grants throughout Reading Public Schools that go beyond the normal scope of the classroom.

During the festival, guests voted for their favorite tree and the winners are...

- **Most Unusual Tree:** Tin Bucket's Tin Bucket up Cycled Tree.
- **Most Creative Tree:** Wood End PTO's Nothing Trivial about Recycling Tree.
- **Favorite Tree:** Girls U-12 Soccer's Pass, Shoot, Score & Be Merry! Tree.
- **Best Under Tree Display:** Sassy Paws Pet Styles - Sassy Christmas Tree.
- **Best Tree Topper:** Social Good - The Two Seasons of New England Tree.
- **Most Spectacular Tree:** Reading Education Foundation's Candy Cane Lane Tree.

Big plans are already in the works to celebrate our 15th Annual Festival of Trees and we want you to be a part of it! Remember: trees and ornaments go on sale on December 26th at most retailers, so get your tree items at a discount for next year!

We truly appreciate your support!

We wish you all best for a happy and healthy 2016!

Blazing Trails....

"A Psychologist's Guide to Understanding the Teenage Brain." Understanding teenagers' brains can help inform how teachers practice, psychologist Bradley Busch writes. Busch shares four insights about how teens differ from adults: They take more risks, struggle to get enough sleep, have less self-control and have trouble reading emotions. "While they have a responsibility to manage their own behavior, by understanding the changes and challenges they face, teachers can guide their practice to help them navigate this as happily and successfully as possible," Busch writes. [Read More](#)

"Saying What You Mean Without Being Mean." In this ASCD Educational Leadership article, Marceta Reilly shares ways to give a colleague feedback that will both promote change and preserve your professional relationship. Conversations involving difficult feedback are never easy, she notes, but good frames can help you enter them without immediately igniting defensiveness. "By speaking your truth honestly and listening to the truths of others, you'll help the conversation become more authentic and your relationships become deeper and more trusting." [Read More](#)

"What is 'Unschooling?'" A number of public schools nationwide have modeled their instruction after the "unschooling" approach, which focuses on student-centered instruction. Among are schools in the Big Picture Learning network, which has expanded to 100 schools worldwide. [Read More](#)

"How Attending National Conferences Can Improve Local Schools." School leaders can use experiences and information gathered at educational conferences to improve their own schools and districts, K-12 leadership experts Jill Berkowicz and Ann Myers assert in this blog post. "Experiences from outside the walls of the school and district can inform and refresh," they write. [Read More](#)

"First Lady Urges Global Educators to Help Let Girls Learn." US first lady Michelle Obama spoke at the recent World Innovation Summit for Education about the importance of expanding access to education for girls worldwide. She also stressed the need to make more workplaces welcoming to women. [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

On behalf of the Reading Public Schools, have a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season and a restful vacation week!