



Pathways

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

January 10, 2016

Volume 2, Number 18

Upcoming Dates

- January 11 – (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- January 12 – (6:30 p.m.) PTO Budget Meeting at Coolidge
- January 13 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release (9:00 a.m.) Joshua Eaton Principal's Coffee; (1:00 p.m.) District PLC Meetings; (6:30 p.m.) PTO Budget Meeting @ Parker
- January 14 – (after school) Elementary Building Meetings; (4:00 p.m.) RETELL in Rooms 321 & 320 @ RMHS; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in Superintendent's Conference Room; (7:30 p.m.) RMHS Acting Class Showcase in the Endslo PAC
- January 15 & 16 – (7:30 p.m.) Coolidge Musical in the Endslo PAC
- January 17 – (2:00 p.m.) Coolidge Musical in the Endslo PAC
- January 18 – (No School) Martin Luther King Day; (9:30 a.m.) Martin Luther King Day Celebration in the Endslo PAC

FY17 Budget Meetings Begin This Week

Beginning this week, Superintendent of Schools John Doherty will begin presenting the FY17 Superintendent's Recommended Budget to the School Committee and Community. The FY2017 Superintendent's Recommended Budget is \$40,847,667 representing an increase of \$1,374,314 or 3.5%. This recommended budget includes the base budget that follows the Reading Finance Committee's recommended amount of \$40,697,667, an increase of 3.25%, **plus** an additional \$150,000 to fund the first year of a three year K-12 science curriculum implementation. The Finance Committee's recommended guidance is based on an analysis of current and future town revenue and expense projections of the Community, which are restricted by an annual structural revenue deficit, combined with an inadequate Chapter 70 funding formula and minimal state aid funding increases. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, this budget is not a level service budget, which would have required a 4.89% increase. As a result, the Superintendent's Recommended FY17 budget is a reduction of \$658,193 from a level service budget. In order to reach the 3.25% budget, \$658,193 in budget reductions to both personnel and non-personnel areas, combined with offset increases were made. This is the third consecutive year that the level services budget has had to have been reduced. In the FY16 budget (current year), \$825,000 was reduced from the level service budget, resulting in a small number of personnel reductions and several non-personnel reductions. Unfortunately, the FY17 recommended budget will result in further personnel reductions.

The base budget attempts to achieve the multi-year goals and priorities of our school system, while staying within the fiscal constraints of our available community resources. As part of this base budget, partial funding was restored from an FY16 budget reduction to add regular education paraeducator hours at each elementary school. In addition, per pupil funding was restored at the FY15 levels for the building based budgets which allow schools to have adequate supplies and materials for the classrooms. Both of these areas were significantly reduced in last year's budget. Finally, one new position, a social worker has been proposed for the district wide student support program at Killam to support the growing needs of those students.

The Superintendent's Recommended FY17 budget includes funding to primarily address the following budget drivers:

- All salary and benefit obligations to employees per the collective bargaining agreement
- Non-union salary and benefit increases in line with COLA adjustments for collective bargaining units

- January 19 – 22 – RMHS Midterm Exams and Real World Problem Solving for all Juniors; RMHS Music to Visit Middle Schools
- January 20 – (3:00 p.m.) District MTSS Team Meeting; (7:30 p.m.) Financial Forum at the Senior Center
- January 21 - (4:00 p.m.) RETELL in Rooms 321 & 320 @ RMHS; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Music Department Grade 8 Orientation
- January 23 – (8:00 a.m.) SAT Testing – RMHS is NOT a Test Center

- Anticipated increases in regular day mandatory transportation (For students in Grades K-6 who live over 2 miles from their school) and special education transportation. We are currently in the final year of both bus transportation contracts.
- Anticipated increases in known out of district special education tuition increases.

Not included in this budget are funds for unanticipated enrollment increases or unanticipated special education costs related to out of district placement tuition, transportation, or other services as required by a student's individualized education plan. In addition, as agreed upon by Town Meeting in November, 2015, the Town and School facilities budgets have now been transferred to a new budget line item called Town Core Facilities, which will be jointly voted on by the Reading School Committee and the Reading Board of Selectmen. This will be discussed more in the School Building Maintenance section of this budget book.

In addition to the above budget drivers, funding remains within the Superintendent's Recommended budget and other sources to continue several critical strategic initiatives that have been and are continuing to be implemented in our schools including:

- Implementing the Literacy, Mathematics, and Science Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, which includes research based practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
- Continuing to build the capacity of our professional staff through research based job embedded professional development and professional learning communities.
- Addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students through the implementation of the Multi- Tiered System of Support.

In addition, our base budget also allows us to continue maintaining recommended class sizes (18-22) in Kindergarten through Grade 2, the middle school interdisciplinary model, our behavioral health initiatives, our technology infrastructure and the adequate cleaning of our school facilities. Unfortunately, because of budget reductions, this recommended budget does not fully support all of the regular day programs from the previous school year and, as a result, a few programs will be eliminated or reduced.

Budget Reductions/Offset Increases

Unfortunately, in order to reach the Finance Committee budget guidance, several reductions in personnel will need to be made. These reductions will have an impact at all three levels in a variety of ways, including higher class sizes, reduction or elimination of a few programs, and reduced services to students. Although we do not support any reductions in personnel, we identified reductions that have less of an impact on student learning than other reductions. To reach a balanced budget that is below level service, the following program reductions, offset increases, and/or personnel reductions were included in the Superintendent's FY17 Recommended Budget:

Figure A: FY17 Budget Reductions/Offset Increases

Cost Center	Area	Amount
Regular Day	2.0 Elementary Teachers	\$110,000 Reduction
Regular Day	3.4 High School Teachers	\$199,000 Reduction
Regular Day	High School Stipends	\$9,693 Reduction
Regular Day	.5 Middle School Teacher	\$42,000 Reduction
Regular Day	1.0 High School Regular Education Paraeducator	\$23,000 Reduction
Special Education	.4 Speech and Language Pathologist	\$20,000 Reduction
Special Education	1 Out of District Placement with Transportation	\$55,800 Reduction
Various Cost Centers	Miscellaneous Reductions	\$32,000 Reduction
Revolving Account	Extended Day	\$90,000 Increase in Offset
Revolving Account	Full Day Kindergarten	\$30,000 Increase in Offset
Revolving Account	Special Education Tuition	\$15,000 Increase in Offset
Revolving Account	Athletics	\$16,700 Increase in Offset
Revolving Account	Extracurricular	\$5,000 Increase in Offset

The reduction of 2.0 FTE Elementary teachers will result in some class sizes in grades 3-5 to reach 25 students per classroom. The 3.4 FTE High School Teachers will result in the elimination of the Freshmen Advisory Program, as well as reductions in the High School Latin Program. The reduction in High School stipends will result in the elimination of a High School Department Head, the consolidation of two departments, and the elimination of another leadership position. The elimination of a Department Head will result in a savings of a .4 FTE teacher (included in the 3.4 FTE High School Reduction) because of the reduced teaching load that a Department Head has. The .5 Middle School Teacher will result in reduced reading services for some middle school students. The 1.0 FTE Regular Education Paraeducator will eliminate the Library Paraeducator at the High School, resulting in reduced staffing in the High School Library and possible times where the library will not be accessible to students. The .4 Speech and Language Pathologist reduction will result in reduced speech and language services at the elementary level. The reduction in one Special Education Out of District Placement with transportation is for an anticipated special education out of district placement. If funding is necessary for an additional out of district placement during the 2016-17 school year, we may need to request additional funding for this line item either with the Finance Committee or at Town Meeting.

In addition, there are several recommended increases to revolving account offsets which are based upon an analysis over the last year in revolving fund accounts. The increase in the Extended Day offset is to support one hour of custodial cleaning each school day for the Extended Day and After School programs. The increase in the Full Day Kindergarten offset is consistent with the increase of students who are participating in the tuition-based Full Day Kindergarten. The increase in the Special Education Tuition Revolving account is based on last year's analysis and an anticipated increase in an additional student being enrolled to one of our special education programs from another school district. The increase in the Athletics and Extra-curricular offsets is due to the increase in user fees from last year which has not resulted in a decrease in participation.

Kudos and Accolades

- To the Reading Public Schools, especially Birch Meadow Elementary School, who were highlighted on the front page of the Boston Globe this week on an article on social emotional learning. Congratulations to Associate Principal Patty Beckman and the entire Birch Meadow Staff. Also, special recognition goes out to Sara Burd and Erica McNamara for their efforts in the article.
- To Boys Basketball, Girls Track, Boys & Girls Hockey, Swimming, Gymnastics, and Wrestling who all had wins this week.
- Thanks to the RMHS Guidance department for hosting the Sophomore Parent Night this week.
- A big thank you to the Reading Public Schools community for the total outpouring of support for the Carregal family and the Joshua Eaton community during this very difficult week.
- To Coolidge Secretary Marianna Zanni, Coolidge Principal Sarah Marchant, and Coolidge Science Team Head Coach Karawan Meade for all of their help in a very successful Coolidge Science Team Reunion in memory of John McCarthy on Saturday.

Upcoming Meetings

We will continue to inform Staff and Community about the FY17 Budget Process in this newsletter and the *Pathways Blog*. The upcoming budget meetings are as follows:

Reading School Committee Budget Meetings (All Meetings Begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Reading Public Schools Administration Offices)

- Monday, January 11th-Overview of FY17 Budget, Administration and Regular Day Cost Centers
- Thursday, January 14th-Special Education, District Wide Services
- Thursday, January 21st-Public Hearing, Town and School Facilities
- Monday, January 25-Final School Committee Vote

In addition to the meetings above, the Superintendent of Schools will be holding two budget presentations for parents on **Tuesday, January 12th (6:30 p.m., Coolidge)** and **Wednesday, January 13th (6:30 p.m., Parker)**. Both presentations will be the same. Child care will be provided.

There will also be a Financial Forum of the School Committee, Board of Selectmen, and Finance Committee on **Wednesday, January 20th at 7:30 p.m.** at the Reading Senior Center. The topic will be the FY17 budget and future budget discussions. This is a public meeting and all are encouraged to attend.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Reading Public Schools administration offices at 781-944-5800.

Saying Goodbye to a Great Person



This past week, the Reading School Community said a sad goodbye to Joshua Eaton Teacher, Jody Carregal, who passed away on January 1st from a courageous battle with cancer. Jody was a teacher at Joshua Eaton, Wood End, and Birch Meadow Elementary Schools for 11 years and touched the lives of hundreds of children, families and staff during that time. Her positive “can do” attitude, strong values about learning, and her willingness to support all students will always be remembered. Although Jody is gone, the impact that

she had on students and the positive memories she has left in our community will never disappear.

The Reading Community came together this week to support the Joshua Eaton school during this time of sadness. Staff from other schools and volunteers from the Community came on Friday to cover classes while Joshua Eaton teachers attended the funeral. The Joshua Eaton PTO provided food all week for staff and the district and Riverside Community Services provided counseling support for staff and students. We want to thank all of the individuals who supported the Joshua Eaton Community this week.

Our thoughts go out the Carregal Family, the Joshua Eaton Community, and all of Jody's close friends during this difficult time.

In Massachusetts Schools, A Focus on Well Being



JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

First graders in Maria Simon's first grade class took part in a mindfulness meditation at Birch Meadow School in Reading.

By James Vaznis GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 05, 2016

READING — The only sound that could be heard in Maria Simon's first-grade classroom one December morning was the soothing hum from a vibrating Tibetan singing bowl. Her students had gathered on a brightly colored rug at the back of the classroom, sitting with their eyes shut, their legs crossed, and their arms extended outward palms up.

Each time a classmate struck the small bowl with a mallet — releasing a low sounding gong — the students breathed in. Then as the sound faded away, they breathed out. The exercise lasted about five minutes, and they started their math lesson.

"It helps give us a few minutes of peace and quiet so we can focus on our work," said one student, Grace Hayes.

This moment of "mindfulness" in Simon's classroom is part of a broader effort at Birch Meadow Elementary School and Reading's eight other schools to help put students at ease

Quote of the Week....



"Dare to...Ask for what you want. Believe in your dreams. Count your blessings. Do the right thing. Enjoy the moment. Fail and dare to succeed. Have no regrets. Give more than you receive. Kiss and make up. Inspire kindness. Join in more. Never settle for less. Love all you can. Make a difference. Question authority. Overcome adversity. Practice moderation. Take personal responsibility. Reinvent yourself. Shoot for the moon. Veto hate and negativity. Understand more, judge less. Exercise body and mind. Walk your talk. Be zany. Yodel more, yawn less."

– Unknown (Quote on the door outside Jody Carregal's classroom at Joshua Eaton)

and get them more in tune with their emotions, and one another, so they can concentrate on learning.

Across Massachusetts, schools are devoting more time to address the social and emotional well-being of their students. Educators stress the movement is not simply "feel good" education. They say teaching students at every grade to manage their emotions can help them deal with a multitude of serious issues, including bullying, mental illness, substance abuse, or trauma.

Such problems, educators say, can present immense barriers to learning and, if left unaddressed, could exact heavy tolls like suicides, drug overdoses, or even school shootings.

Reading, a town of 25,000 north of Boston, has emerged as a state leader over the past few years in what is known as social-emotional learning. Like many communities, Reading grapples with students struggling with depression, anxiety, or alcohol use, among other issues.

But the town stands apart because it has devised an aggressive plan to reach out to students before signs of problems arise, and its initiatives go well beyond the school doors.

"You treat every child as if they need a safe and supportive environment," said Sara Burd, Reading's district leader of social-emotional learning. "You never are going to know every student in a classroom who is experiencing trauma. They are not going to have a name tag that says, 'Yes, I have a trauma history.'"

Starting in preschool, instructors lead students in yoga. In elementary and middle schools, teachers gather students in circles to talk about issues on their minds and teach strategies for dealing with certain situations, such as bullying, and they use a common approach to discipline that emphasizes rewarding behavior instead of punishment.

At the town's high school, teachers embark on more deliberate conversations about students, making sure they know something about everyone and, if not, making a concerted effort to reach out to them.

Educators stress it is a challenging undertaking because it is not always clear which students are experiencing distress. Some may signal they are struggling by acting out in class or bursting into tears. But others can appear well-adjusted — putting on a smile — as turmoil swirls inside.

In one noteworthy endeavor, the town is training more than 350 educators, town librarians, clergy, crossing guards, bus drivers, and police to be "youth mental health first aid responders," instilling them with the skills to identify students who might be in trouble and the know-how to respond.

Reading officials acknowledge they have not found all the answers. While the school system has seen lower rates of alcohol and drug use among teenagers, it has experienced a slight increase in the percentage of students reporting depression over the last decade, according to a behavior survey of middle- and high-school students in 2015.

Superintendent John Doherty, in a state of the schools address in November, stressed the importance of remaining vigilant. He noted that 55 Reading Memorial High School students had been hospitalized for depression, anxiety, or suicidal tendencies last school year.

In an interview, Doherty said that in many cases the hospitalization rates reflect the enormous pressures many suburban students face to take the most rigorous classes and pile on extracurricular activities — often at the expense of sleep — to get into the best colleges.

“We are trying to do everything we can so students know they have adults they can talk to if they are in crisis,” he said.

With Reading ranking almost at the bottom in the state for per-student spending, the town has relied on three federal grants, totaling about \$2 million, to help support social and emotional programs in school and its communitywide effort to combat substance abuse among residents of all ages.

The growing emphasis on social-emotional learning represents a ground shift in Massachusetts.

For decades, schools had provided some lessons in those areas, especially in the early grades. But many tossed aside or substantially scaled back the lessons to devote more time to boosting standardized test scores in reading and math, in an effort to avoid state sanctions for poor performance.

Many educators saw it as a misguided trade-off: If students are not in a healthy state of mind, they will struggle academically and perform poorly on state tests; more alarmingly, it could set them up for a lifetime of failure.

“People are stepping back on that full focus on reading and math scores and are looking more holistically at all the skills that really matter,” said Sara Bartolino Krachman, executive director of Transforming Education, an education nonprofit in Boston. “Social-emotional learning is not only crucial to academic success, but also career success and lifelong being.”

A landmark study in 1998 often quoted by educators today — the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study — established a disturbing link between childhood trauma and increased risks for alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, suicide, severe obesity, and sexually transmitted diseases.

It suggested that participants who had four or more adverse childhood experiences — such as sexual or emotional abuse or living in a household where someone was mentally ill, suicidal, or abusing drugs — had a fourfold to twelvefold increase in the chance that they would experience risk behaviors as adults. The study, published in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, involved 17,000 adults. Almost two-thirds of them had at least one adverse childhood experience.

Social-emotional learning received a boost last year in Massachusetts with the enactment of a gun-control law that called for creating “safe and supportive schools.” The law encourages schools to integrate such initiatives as bullying prevention, trauma sensitivity, dropout prevention, and truancy reduction.

In Boston, Superintendent Tommy Chang added a Cabinet-level position this school year to ramp up an expansion of programs that address students’ social and emotional well-being. Over the last five years, Boston has been expanding its programs, raising more than \$1 million to support the effort. But only about a third of the city’s 125 schools offer robust programming in the area, and the school system has only 55 psychologists and 14 social workers to serve 56,000 students.

Disney Tweet of the Week



"The thing to do isn't the easiest thing to know."

—Pooh

Many Boston schools taking part in the effort use some similar strategies as Reading, such as gathering students in circles, and have forged formal partnerships with Boston Children's Hospital and other medical centers to provide mental health services for students grappling with trauma. Some schools also have teachers fill out behavioral assessments on students to determine whether some need specialized interventions, such as working directly with a psychologist.

In Reading, an uptick four years ago in student hospitalizations for anxiety, depression, and other issues prompted much soul searching.

School officials moved the discussions out of their administrative offices and into the community, kicking off a dialogue by showing a film, "Race to Nowhere," which explores the lives of students who have been pushed to the brink by pressures to excel.

The community dialogue was a natural outgrowth of an effort the town began about a decade ago to address substance abuse in a public way after a series of fatal overdoses — many involving residents in their 20s or 30s — stunned this bedroom community. That effort led to such changes as requiring teenagers caught with alcohol anywhere in the town to go through an alcohol awareness program.

Conversations about substance abuse, and subsequently those about mental health, were nevertheless tough.

"We faced a lot of denial in the beginning," said Erica McNamara, director of the Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse, which pushed the substance abuse changes and has been working with the school system on social-emotional learning. "A lot of people moved to Reading because it's a lovely little community. You don't necessarily want to know what happens behind closed doors."

School officials also undertook a review at that time that concluded the district lacked a comprehensive approach to fostering the social and emotional well-being of its students. In some cases, schools lacked programs. In other cases, schools left it up to teachers to craft their own lessons and approaches, creating uneven quality.

The findings prompted school officials to orchestrate an overhaul. They were also encouraged by research that showed the benefits of robust social-emotional learning programs on student performance.

For instance, a 2011 meta-analysis found that well-structured programs not only significantly improved students' social and emotional skills and behaviors, but students also enjoyed an 11 percentile point gain in achievement over students who did not participate in the programs. The study, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Child Development*, examined 213 social and emotional learning programs involving more than 270,000 students nationwide in kindergarten through 12th grade.

The overhaul appears to be paying off. In a report this fall, the Rennie Center, an education research and policy organization in Boston, highlighted Reading, along with Fall River and Gardner, as glowing examples for their work in student behavioral health, specifically because they made it a community effort rather than just a school initiative.

The Birch Meadow school in Reading, with about 400 students, uses a variety of strategies. A few years ago, the school instituted a common approach to discipline that rewards students at all grade levels for good behavior by stamping paw prints on their hands —

giving them immediate gratification. If they get 20 stamps, which they call “yays,” they get a brightly colored bracelet.

The school also uses a program called “Open Circle,” which provides students with tips on weathering tough situations and allows them to frankly discuss common problems and break down stereotypes or misconceptions about their classmates.

One Tuesday afternoon last month, fourth-graders in Jolene Tewksbury’s class arranged their blue desk chairs in a circle at the back of the classroom. The topic of conversation: the difference between playfully teasing and making fun of someone.

Students said the conversations were enlightening.

“It’s nice to talk to people about similar things that have happened to you and learn new ways about what you could do differently the next time,” said Kelsey Murphy.

Maria Simon, the first-grade teacher, said she is glad that school systems are realizing education is about more than the MCAS; it’s about nurturing the whole child.

“The amount of academic work we do in a day is really overwhelming to many children and many teachers,” Simon said. “My goal is for them to feel more comfortable in their learning environment and to use mindfulness the rest of their lives so they’re more comfortable with themselves.”

Mary Shanahan, a parent volunteer in Simon’s classroom, said she is impressed with how Birch Meadow has made social-emotional learning part of the school’s fabric, adding that the mindfulness activities have given her daughter, Abby, another way to self regulate her emotions at home.

“Sometimes she will say, ‘Mommy, I’m going to take a moment’ and she will close her eyes,” Shanahan said. “It blew me away the first time she did it on her own.”

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Is Drive for Success Making Our Children Sick?

By VICKI ABELES for **New York Time Opinion Blog**

JANUARY 2, 2016

STUART SLAVIN, a pediatrician and professor at the St. Louis University School of Medicine, knows something about the impact of stress. After uncovering alarming rates of anxiety and depression among his medical students, Dr. Slavin and his colleagues remade the program: implementing pass/fail grading in introductory classes, instituting a half-day off every other week, and creating small learning groups to strengthen connections among students. Over the course of six years, the students’ rates of depression and anxiety dropped considerably.

But even Dr. Slavin seemed unprepared for the results of testing he did in cooperation with Irvington High School in Fremont, Calif., a once-working-class city that is increasingly in Silicon Valley’s orbit. He had anonymously surveyed two-thirds of Irvington’s 2,100 students last spring, using two standard measures, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. The results were stunning: 54 percent of students showed moderate to severe symptoms of depression. More alarming, 80 percent suffered moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety.

“This is so far beyond what you would typically see in an adolescent population,” he told the school’s faculty at a meeting just before the fall semester began. “It’s unprecedented.” Worse, those alarming figures were probably an underestimation; some students had missed the survey while taking Advanced Placement exams.

What Dr. Slavin saw at Irvington is a microcosm of a nationwide epidemic of school-related stress. We think of this as a problem only of the urban and suburban elite, but in traveling the country to report on this issue, I have seen that this stress has a powerful effect on children across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Expectations surrounding education have spun out of control. On top of a seven-hour school day, our kids march through hours of nightly homework, daily sports practices and band rehearsals, and weekend-consuming assignments and tournaments. Each activity is seen as a step on the ladder to a top college, an enviable job and a successful life. Children living in poverty who aspire to college face the same daunting admissions arms race, as well as the burden of competing for scholarships, with less support than their privileged peers. Even those not bound for college are ground down by the constant measurement in schools under pressure to push through mountains of rote, impersonal material as early as preschool.

Yet instead of empowering them to thrive, this drive for success is eroding children’s health and undermining their potential. Modern education is actually making them sick.

Nearly [one in three](#) teenagers told the American Psychological Association that stress drove them to sadness or depression — and their single biggest source of stress was school. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [a vast majority](#) of American teenagers get at least two hours less sleep each night than recommended — and [research](#) shows the more homework they do, the fewer hours they sleep. At the university level, 94 percent of college counseling directors in a [survey](#) from last year said they were seeing rising numbers of students with severe psychological problems.

At the other end of the age spectrum, doctors increasingly see children in early elementary school suffering from migraine headaches and ulcers. Many physicians see a clear connection to performance pressure.

“I’m talking about 5-, 6-, 7-year-olds who are coming in with these conditions. We never used to see that,” says Lawrence Rosen, a New Jersey pediatrician who works with pediatric associations nationally. “I’m hearing this from my colleagues everywhere.”

What sets Irvington apart in a nation of unhealthy schools is that educators, parents and students there have chosen to start making a change. Teachers are re-examining their homework demands, in some cases reviving the school district’s forgotten homework guideline — no more than 20 minutes per class per night, and none on weekends. In fact, [research](#) supports limits on homework. Students have started a task force to promote healthy habits and balanced schedules. And for the past two years, school counselors have met one on one with every student at registration time to guide them toward a manageable course load.

“We are sitting on a ticking time bomb,” said one Irvington teacher, who has seen the problem worsen over her 16 years on the job.

A growing body of medical evidence suggests that long-term childhood stress is linked not only with a higher risk of adult depression and anxiety, but with poor physical health outcomes, as well. The [ACE \(Adverse Childhood Experiences\) Study](#), a continuing project

of the Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente, shows that children who experience multiple traumas — including violence, abuse or a parent’s struggle with mental illness — are more likely than others to suffer heart disease, lung disease, cancer and shortened life spans as adults. Those are extreme hardships but a [survey of the existing science](#) in the 2013 Annual Review of Public Health suggested that the persistence of less severe stressors could similarly act as a prescription for sickness.

“Many of the health effects are apparent now, but many more will echo through the lives of our children,” says Richard Scheffler, a health economist at the University of California, Berkeley. “We will all pay the cost of treating them and suffer the loss of their productive contributions.”

Paradoxically, the pressure cooker is hurting, not helping, our kids’ prospects for success. Many college students struggle with critical thinking, a fact that hasn’t escaped their professors, only 14 percent of whom [believe](#) that their students are prepared for college work, according to a 2015 report. Just 29 percent of employers in the same study reported that graduates were equipped to succeed in today’s workplace. Both of those numbers have plummeted since 2004.

Contrary to a commonly voiced fear that easing pressure will lead to poorer performance, St. Louis medical school students’ scores on the medical boards exams have actually gone up since the stress reduction strategy was put in place.

At Irvington, it’s too early to gauge the impact of new reforms, but educators see promising signs. Calls to school counselors to help students having emotional episodes in class have dropped from routine to nearly nonexistent. The A.P. class failure rate dropped by half. Irvington students continue to be accepted at respected colleges.

There are lessons to be learned from Irvington’s lead. Working together, parents, educators and students can make small but important changes: instituting everyday homework limits and weekend and holiday homework bans, adding advisory periods for student support and providing students opportunities to show their growth in creative ways beyond conventional tests. Communities across the country — like Gaithersburg, Md., Cadiz, Ky., and New York City — are already taking some of these steps. In place of the race for credentials, local teams are working to cultivate deep learning, integrity, purpose and personal connection. In place of high-stakes childhoods, they are choosing health.

Vicki Abeles is the author of “Beyond Measure: Rescuing an Overscheduled, Overtested, Underestimated Generation,” and director and producer of the documentaries “Race to Nowhere” and “Beyond Measure.”

Reading Public School Happenings

Barrows Teachers versus Students Basketball Game

On Wednesday afternoon, several staff from the Barrows Elementary School played Barrows students in a friendly, but competitive basketball game. The team photo is below.



Barrows Kindergarten Students

Students in Bethany Granoth's Kindergarten Class are working on a story.



Stepping Stones...

- Wishing School Committee member **Gary Nihan** a speedy recovery from his recent surgery.
- **We have posted** new positions on School Spring. If interested, please visit www.schoolspring.com to view the job details.

Freshman Girls Lacrosse Coach – RMHS	Job ID# 2261324
Anticipated Baseball Assistant Coach - RMHS	Job ID# 2261354

- ✓ **Upcoming Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) Events**-The Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) are announcing a series of events that helps support students with disabilities. All parents are invited to attend. The events are listed below. If you have any questions, please contact the SEPAC at sepacreading@gmail.com.

- **January 5th at 7:00 p.m. Coolidge Multi Purpose Room**
Bylaws Subcommittee Meeting
- **January 12th at 7:00 p.m. Superintendents office Conference Room.**
Johanne Pino from Mass Advocates for Children will present on Basic Rights Parent Workshop. It's a great way to learn about your rights, do's and don'ts with your IEP.
- **January 14th at 7:00 pm. Superintendent's Conference Room**
FY17 Special Education Budget - School Committee Meeting
Carolyn Wilson will be presenting the budget for Special Education to the School Committee. Please know, she will be coming to a future SEPAC meeting to give a summary of what she presented. The budget really impacts our kids! Come listen!
- **January 28th at 7:00 p.m Superintendent's Conference Room**
Extended School Year and Transitions-There are changes coming! Come find out what they mean for your kids! ESY is the summer school program to keep kids on IEPs in a routine. If you are new to it, please come this impacts you, and if you are already part of it, you may learn something new! Transitions within programs will also be discussed.

Blazing Trails....

Study: Socially Influential Students Can Reduce Bullying With Training-Philly (PA) (1/6, Giordano) highlights a new study that found socially influential students can have an impact on bullying. The study trained the most social students at many New Jersey middle schools how to take a stance against bullying and found that the schools with the most students who received the training experienced the greatest reduction in bullying. **US News & World Report** (1/5, Camera) outlines the methodology used in the study. The researchers from Princeton, Rutgers, and Yale made social network maps of 56 New Jersey middle schools by surveying students to find out which students were the most popular. The researchers then gave training to the biggest “social influencers” at some of the schools to address bullying and then tracked the number of student incident reports at all the schools. The study found that the schools with the most social influencers who received the training experienced the greatest reduction in student conflict reports. According to ED data, 22% of students from ages 12 to 18 report being bullied.

ED Releases Fifth National Education Technology Plan-Education Week (1/6, Herold and Doran) reports ED’s fifth National Education Technology Plan outlines steps to be taken to address the “digital-use divide.” ED’s deputy director for education technology Joseph South said, “We really see the plan as a vision for the country of what ed tech could be in our classrooms if it’s implemented in the way we think is best.” South also emphasized that the plan also calls for additional teacher training on using new technologies. The new plan says technology can support “engaging and empowering learning experiences in both formal and informal settings” and help students develop persistence and other “non-cognitive competencies.” The ED’s Future Ready initiative supports superintendents collaborating with each other and community leaders to implement personalized learning models.

Using Periscope to Connect Classrooms to the World-Tips for using this free video broadcasting tool to spark inquiry in students and engage parents.

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

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