



# Pathways

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

April 3, 2016

Volume 2, Number 29

## Upcoming Dates

- April 3 – (2:00 p.m.) RMHS Formal Recital in the Endslo PAC
- April 4 – RMHS 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Begins; (8:00 a.m.) Coffee and Conversation @ RMHS; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- April 6 – (after school) Secondary Building Meetings; (6:30 p.m.) Joshua Eaton Open House
- April 7 – (8:30 p.m.) Coffee and Conversation @ Barrows; (6:00 p.m.) Barrows Grade K – 2 Open House; (6:30 p.m.) Barrows Grade 3 – 5 Open House; (6:30 p.m.) Killam Open House
- April 8 – Coolidge Daytime Open House; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Playwriting Show in the Endslo PAC
- April 9 & 10 – RMHS Broadway Trip
- April 12 – (9:00 a.m.) Parker Author Day; (5:00 p.m.) Annual District Artsfest @ RMHS
- April 13 – (3:00 p.m.) District MTSS Meeting; (5:00 p.m.) Annual District Artsfest @ RMHS

## Update on Birch Meadow Principal Search

The Reading Public Schools is pleased to announce that Julia Hendrix has been appointed as the Principal of the Birch Meadow Elementary School. Ms. Hendrix has been the Assistant Principal at the Harrington Elementary School in Lexington for the last three years. Prior to that, she was an Elementary Mathematics Specialist and Instructional Coach for the Lexington Public Schools. Ms. Hendrix has a Bachelor of Arts from Wellesley College, a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard University, and a Master of Education from Lesley University. Her collaborative leadership style, strong interpersonal and communication skills, and years of experience as both an administrator and instructional specialist will be an excellent match for the Birch Meadow School and our Reading community.

A special thank you goes out to the entire Birch Meadow community for their participation and feedback during this process.

Ms. Hendrix will begin as Birch Meadow Principal on July 1st. Please welcome her to the Reading Public Schools.

## Five Myths About Technology in Schools

In this article in *American Educator*, Pedro De Bruyckere (University College in Ghent, Belgium), Paul Kirschner (Open University, the Netherlands), and Casper Hulshof (University of Utrecht, the Netherlands) address some common misconceptions about how computers, smartboards, and tablets are affecting teaching and learning:

- *Myth #1: New technology is causing a revolution in education.* Actually, despite all the gadgets, classroom fundamentals have changed very little, say the authors. They quote Bill Gates saying, "Just giving people devices has a really horrible track record." What matters is teachers, their instructional strategies, and how they interact with students. Computers and other pieces of technology are the *medium* through which instruction passes and have no more influence on student achievement than a grocery delivery truck has on our nutrition. Situations where researchers have found positive effects from technology (blended learning is one) can almost always be traced back to how teachers use the technology to supplement or amplify their pedagogy. Three areas have been particularly disappointing in terms of the supposed impact of technology:

- Multimedia instruction accommodating different learning styles – Learning styles are not a robust foundation for customizing instruction.
- Multimedia facilitating constructivist and discovery approaches – High-achieving students can benefit, but lower-achieving students do better with direct instruction.

- April 14 – (11:00 a.m.) Grade PreK – 12 Early Release; (6:30 p.m.) Junior Prom @ Danversport Yacht Club
- April 15 – No School; Blue Ribbon Conference

- Multimedia providing students with autonomy and control over instructional sequence – Very few students get this benefit; for most students, it has a negative effect.

The bottom line, say the authors, is that “the medium seldom influences teaching, learning, and education, nor is it likely that one single medium will ever be the best for all situations.”

- *Myth #2: The Internet belongs in the classroom because it’s part of children’s world.* True, today’s youth are entranced (and skilled) with technology, but that’s mostly for social purposes. When students are polled about classroom preferences, there’s surprising support for traditional structures with only moderate use of technology. Given a choice of digital and real books, most students prefer the latter. Students advocate for regular access to human interaction and being able to work with a smart person at the front of the classroom.

- *Myth #3: Today’s “digital natives” want a new style of education.* In fact, there is little hard evidence that today’s youth are innately tech savvy, avid multitaskers and collaborators, naturals with the language of technology, demanding instant gratification, and more. Yes, young people use their devices and the Internet heavily for personal empowerment, staying connected with friends, and entertainment, but their use of technology for creating content for academic purposes is limited. One study of tech-rich European countries found that only 36 percent of 16-year-olds said they knew more about the Internet than their parents. Studies in other developed countries including the U.S. found that there is actually no such thing as a generation of “digital natives.”

- *Myth #4: Technology is rewiring our brains in a harmful way.* The authors are both reassuring and wary on this issue. There’s little evidence that devices and the Internet are making us dumber. In fact, say De Bruyckere, Kirschner, and Hulshof, being able to outsource retrievable memory items to Google may be making us smarter. But there is evidence that when children spend more than 1-2 hours a day looking at screens, they tend to gravitate toward shallower information-processing behaviors and develop patterns of multitasking that increase distractibility and depress executive functioning. More research is needed to draw firmer conclusions.

- *Myth #5: Young people don’t read anymore.* This usually refers to book reading, and indeed, there has been somewhat of a decline across the developed world. However, kids are doing a lot of reading on their devices, much of it for pleasure, so the total amount remains quite high.

The authors feel good about successfully puncturing these five myths, but they’re discouraged that the myths persist in spite of the evidence. Why? First, myths serve a function in any society, propping up “obvious” beliefs. Second, there’s no filter on the free flow of information these days – anyone can blog or post on Facebook without the intervention of an editor or fact-checker. Third, critical thinking skills aren’t what they should be and people blithely circulate and strengthen myths. After too much of this, it becomes difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

What is to be done? The authors believe we need theories based on solid research methodologies rather than legends and hype. And they say educators should always keep this maxim in mind: “If something sounds too good to be true, it probably isn’t true.”

In a sidebar accompanying their article, the authors offer the following research-based rules of thumb for effective use of technology in classrooms:

## **Kudos and Accolades**

- To RMHS Seniors Emma Meehan and Greg McHale who are this week's RMHS High Five.
- To the Wood End and RISE at Wood End staff for their management of the Shelter in Place situation that was held last week.

- Use graphic images in place of text wherever possible.
- Stick to the most relevant material – students are distracted by irrelevant subtitles, nonessential illustrations, and duplicative narration.
- Spoken narration accompanying images is better than text – it allows students to concentrate better on the visual information and avoid splitting their attention.
- Work with relatively small chunks of learning material – better four 5-minute segments than one 20-minute marathon.
- Let individual students stop, review, and repeat videos, animations, and dynamic images, but keep the sequence the same for all students.
- Build in plenty of opportunities for students to practice what they're learning in technology-based lessons.

“Technology in Education: What Teachers Should Know” by Pedro De Bruyckere, Paul Kirschner, and Casper Hulshof in *American Educator*, Spring 2016 (Vol. 40, #1, p. 12-18, 43), <http://www.aft.org/ae/spring2016/debruyckere-kirschner-and-hulshof>; this article is drawn from the authors' book, *Urban Myths About Learning and Education* (Academic Press, 2015). Reprinted from Marshall Memo 630.

## **9 Ways to Introduce Students to Random Acts of Kindness**

BY CINDY LONG

April is the cruelest month, says T.S. Eliot, but not in Leon Lewandowski's third grade classroom at Franklin Elementary School in Santa Barbara, Calif. His students practice random acts of kindness on each day of April, tracking their progress online, writing their acts of kindness in journals, and developing self-confidence along the way.

Research consistently shows that volunteering and helping others not only encourages civic responsibility among students, but also helps them develop social skills, strengthen their communities, and learn about their interests and talents and how they can be applied in the real world. There's also a **new emphasis on “soft skills,”** like respect, responsibility, perseverance, compassion and kindness that some experts say are more important to a child's future success than hard skills like reading, math and science.

“It's also a great exercise in awareness,” says Lewandowski, who first started practicing kind acts with his friends and family throughout April before introducing Random Acts of Kindness (RAOK) Month to his students in 2012. “It felt good to see what was needed and help fill the void, with everything from adding quarters to empty parking meters, mowing a neighbor's lawn, making cookies for the local firefighters, buying food for the homeless, or just surprising coworkers with an anonymous candy bar.”

At school, the RAOK project crosses the curriculum and offers lessons in social studies and current events, math (the students graph different RAOK types), writing, and speaking (they give class presentations using the Haiku Deck app).

But the benefits the project brings to students' character and sense of self is the real reward. The students at Franklin all receive free and reduced meals. Seventy-six percent are English language learners. The average parent education level is second grade, and the average family of four must survive off of less than \$20,000 a year.

“Yet, these kids can share RAOK. And this is an experience that after a month, starts to redefine their mindsets,” Lewandowski says. “They start to realize they can make a positive

difference in their schools, their communities and their world. It strengthens the soft skills of confidence, compassion and kindness.”

Kindness is contagious, Lewandowski says, and he’s hoping to spread RAOK Month throughout the nation’s classrooms and schools. Here are his nine tips for starting it in your classroom or school:

### Videos

There are tons of short videos online that show young people doing acts of kindness. During April, as the students enter the classroom in the morning, I like to play one. They’re engaging, meaningful, inspiring and a great way to start a day. You can access many of these videos if you join our Facebook group ([“April RAOK”](#)).

### RAOK Journal

If your students already journal, for the month of April consider having them write about the RAOK they did the day before. They can write about *what* they did, *who* they did it for, *how* the recipient reacted, and how it made the student feel. I especially enjoy having students share their entries with one another because it inspires their peers and gives them RAOK ideas they may not have considered.

### Kindness Board

If you can’t squeeze in journaling, but your students are still taking on the 30-Day Challenge, have a stack of sticky notes for them, a bulletin board or even a blank closet door, and make it your “kindness board.” Kids can write a quick sentence about what RAOK they did and post it. I did this my first year introducing RAOK to my eight-year-olds and it became something like a social media site with students adding posts and reading other posts. It was incredible to see that closet door fill with notes throughout April.

### Empowered Through Cards

There are many places online where you as a teacher can download a [Kindness Card](#). These are great because the students have something tangible to pass along with their RAOK. The cards tell the recipient that they are on the receiving end of kindness and that now it’s time for them to be kind to someone else and pass the card along. It’s wonderful to see these cards flashed on campus in the cafeteria, on the playground, and in the halls.

### Ripil

Last year we found this terrific app called Ripil, a “kindness tracker.” It was a great match for my class because all of my students use tablets in the classroom. So, first thing in the morning we’d watch our kindness video, fill out our RAOK journal, then log into Ripil where my class was set up as a group. Each student could post their RAOK daily. The more RAOK, the more medals they earned. The app also displayed our class’ progress on the worldwide kindness leaderboard. My little third graders looked at the top of that leaderboard, saw a group from UCLA sitting atop and decided they wanted to be there by the end of April... and they did it!

### Kindness In Math

### Quote of the Week....



**"It's not what you look at  
that matters, it's what you  
see."**

**– Henry David Thoreau**

In my classroom we record the types of RAOK we do on a daily basis (in our journals): give something, do something, say something. Then at the beginning of May, each student creates a pie chart as well as a bar graph that reflects their April kindness acts.

### **Kindness and Writing**

In March I let the students know about the 30-Day RAOK Challenge in April and ask them to write about what they think it will be like, what acts might they do, who they might help. This gets them mentally prepared for April. Come May, they use their RAOK journals to write the second part of their paper which reflects the reality of the month, what they *really* did, who they *really* helped, and most important, what they learned.

### **Tell The World (Or, at Least the Class)**

Students can share their RAOK experience while learning technology and honing their speaking skills through kindness presentations. There are many apps and programs available, but one that has worked for my third graders is Haiku Deck. The students create a title page with an image that reflects kindness. Then they display their bar graphs and pie chart, and finally they share bulleted points of what they learned.

### **Flash Mob**

Taking RAOK from the classroom and school and into the community is a very powerful experience for students. Last year with the help of our principal, our local McDonalds gave students from our school 250 free ice cream certificates to pass out on a rainy Saturday morning on the main drag of our town. Parents, teachers, our principal and students were there, and the kids spread kindness throughout our community. They were nervous at first, but when they saw the joy they created in adults, these kids felt so empowered.

"On the April RAOK Facebook page there are lists of RAOK if you are not sure what your students should do," Lewandowski says. "The possibilities are endless."

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## **Using a Daily Poem to Jump-Start High-School English Classes**

In this *Edutopia* article, Pennsylvania teacher Brett Vogelsinger says that for several years he's started his ninth-grade English classes with a poem – among them, poems by Billy Collins, Mary Oliver, Robert Pinsky, Rumi, Basho, Shakespeare. "These voices, contemporary and classic, have helped define my classroom culture to such an extent," says Vogelsinger, "that on the rare occasion when I postpone the 'Poem of the Day' until later in the class period, my students interrogate me about it. I confess that it makes me smile." Here are four reasons he believes this is a valuable classroom routine:

- *Poems can pack a lot into a few lines.* It takes just a few minutes for students to read a short poem twice and dissect and analyze it. Some options:

- Filling in a sentence frame: When the poem says \_\_\_\_\_, it suggests that \_\_\_\_\_.
- Discussing the choice of words and the mood created by a poet;
- Having students change the mood by changing just five words and the title.

Vogelsinger suggests these poems:

- "Fog" by Carl Sandburg - <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174299>
- "Wild Geese Alighting on a Lake" by Anne Porter – <http://bit.ly/1PAtk6c>



## Disney Tweet of the Week



**"Your talent makes you who you are. You should be proud of it."**

**—Tinker Bell**

- "Keeping Quiet" by Robert Bly – <http://writersalmanac.org/episodes/20150828>
- "The Balloon of the Mind" by William Butler Yeats – <http://bit.ly/22TWh6x>
- "We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar – <http://bit.ly/1Rnux6C>

He also recommends several books of haiku (Amazon links in the full article).

• *Poems are intense.* Unlike novels, which can take hours to forge an emotional link with students, poems can do so in a few minutes. "Even reluctant readers can be captured quickly by the right combination of words arranged into a powerful rhythm," says Vogelsinger. Some suggestions:

- "Tariff" by Michelle Boisseau – <http://bit.ly/1SqDESK>
- "The Terrorist, He Watches" by Wislawa Szymborska – <http://bit.ly/1WSEJEm>

- "Speak with Conviction" by Taylor Mali – <http://bit.ly/1SgGxDB>

• *Poems connect to other reading.* For example, a teacher might have students read "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks <http://bit.ly/1SgGVI8> to introduce underlying conflict in S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*. The 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet Rumi has written verses that presage specific lines in *Romeo and Juliet*:

<http://bit.ly/1WSEWr5>. "Incorporating writing from a completely different culture that speaks to the same aspect of the human condition sends a powerful message about inclusion and diversity," says Vogelsinger. He's also used a haiku about a falcon <http://bit.ly/1SqEU8q> by An'ya, a reclusive poet from the Pacific Northwest, to make a comparison with Atticus Finch's treatment of his children in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

• *Poems inspire writing.* "When we share poems with students and invite them to respond with their own ideas and musings while imitating the writer's form or style," says Vogelsinger, "we empower them to develop a voice, to work at something that will eventually become their own." When students read Elizabeth Coatworth's poem "Swift Things Are Beautiful" <http://bit.ly/1URjGEj>, they'll be off and running. The same might be true of "Shake the Dust" by Anis Mojgani <http://bit.ly/1Te8dxs>. Vogelsinger also suggests "Words That Make My Stomach Plummet" by Mira McEwan <http://bit.ly/21P05nj> and "What I Like and Don't Like" by Phillip Schultz <http://bit.ly/1pUgVpd> to get students' writing juices flowing.

"4 Reasons to Start Class with a Poem Each Day" by Brett Vogelsinger in *Edutopia*, March 11, 2016, <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/start-class-poem-each-day-brett-vogelsinger>. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 630.

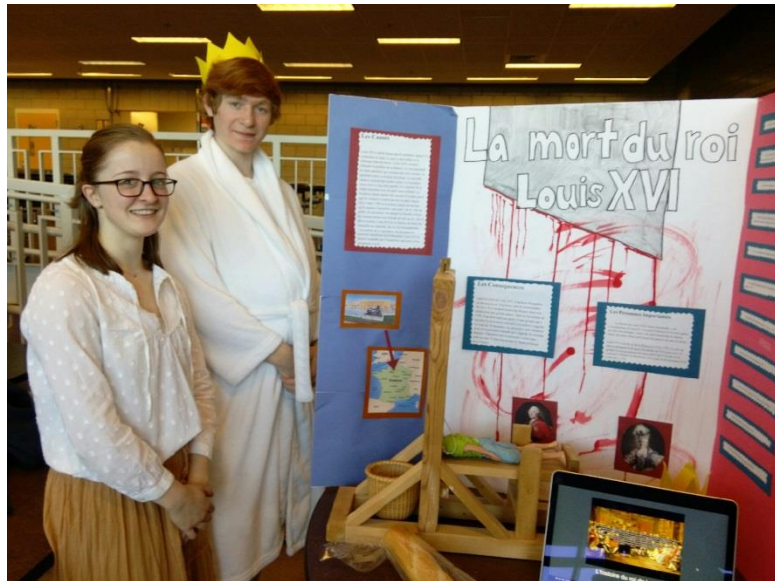
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## Reading Public School Happenings

### RMHS French Culture Day

On March 18th, RMHS French students, under the direction of RMHS French teachers Emeline Festa, Janet Klein, and Tanya McSorley participated in a French culture Day. They researched some historical events and eras ranging from the prehistoric caves of Chauvet and Lascaux all the way to the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015. Some other topics were Joan of Arc, the black Plague, the Sun King, the execution of the King during the French Revolution, the Dreyfus affair during the third Republic, the Vichy Regime, the D-day landings, and the riots of 1968. Students made tri-fold posters, a digital presentation and wore costumes related to their topics. They shared their presentation with all the other students of French in the cafeteria. The day went really smoothly. Other teachers came to take a look and students enjoyed sharing their presentations with them.





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## Stepping Stones...

- ✓ **We welcome** the following new hires to our school district:
  - ✓ Andrea Barry, Long Term Sub, Wood End
  - ✓ Joanne Murphy, Daily Substitute, District
- **We have posted** new positions. If interested, please visit <https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/index.aspx> to view the job details.

Adjustment Counselor (Temporary Assignment), Parker Middle School	
Special Education Team Chair, Reading Public Schools	
2016-2017 Elementary School Advisorships	<a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=12">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=12</a>
2016-2017 District Advisorships	<a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=13">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=13</a>
2016-2017 Middle School Advisorships	<a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=14">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=14</a>
2016-2017 High School Advisorships	<a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=15">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/admin/JobPosting.aspx?JobID=15</a>

- **Reading Police Department to Offer Free Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) Courses for Women**-The Reading Police Department with support from the Reading Municipal Light Department and the Young Women's League are pleased to offer a Rape Aggression Defense Course for Women. Two courses are being offered with the following dates:

**Class 1:** Monday, May 9, 2016                      6pm-10pm  
Wednesday, May 11, 2016                      6pm-10pm  
Monday, May 16, 2016                              6pm-10pm  
Wednesday, May 18, 2016                      6pm-10pm

**Class 2:** Tuesday, June 7, 2016                      6pm-10pm  
Thursday, June 9, 2016                              6pm-10pm  
Tuesday, June 14, 2016                              6pm-10pm  
Thursday, June 16, 2016                              6pm-10pm

The class is free of charge. Call 781-942-6752 or email Community Service Officer Stasiak at [KStasiak@ci.reading.ma.us](mailto:KStasiak@ci.reading.ma.us) for sign-ups and questions.

- **RCASA Offering Courses** –The Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse and the Reading Public Schools are offering free courses in March-June on Mental Health First Aid for staff. The dates are below. To register or to receive more information, please contact RCASA Director Erica McNamara at [emcnamara@ci.reading.ma.us](mailto:emcnamara@ci.reading.ma.us).

**All courses meet from 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**

**Tuesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Friday, May 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Friday, May 13**

**Thursday, June 2**

**Friday, June 3**

## Blazing Trails....

**"Four Predictions for Students' Tomorrows."** To make students' futures better, we need to consider what skills they will need-and teach them. If we really want to prepare students for life beyond school, we could begin by asking ourselves what pieces of our own education we are using *now* as adults. That is an edgy question, and many teachers will take offense if anyone suggests that, in spite of their personal, deep love of haiku/Shakespeare/geodes/the Articles of Confederation/cosine, most adults have never needed deep knowledge of any of those to succeed. [Read More](#)

**"More Teachers Can't Afford To Live Where They Teach."** Teachers in some parts of the US say they would like to live in the communities in which they teach, but they are priced out of the local real estate market. Some say this affects their ability to engage with the community through activities such as volunteering and coaching. [Read More](#)

**"Districts Increase Life Span of Aging EdTech."** The average life span of a school-issued laptop is about three years, according to the State Education Technology Directors Association. Some school districts are getting more life out of aging devices through recycling and retrofitting. [Read More](#)

**"Beyond Initiative Overload: Putting Teachers Back in Control."** How do we empower teachers and put them back in control of the profession? On the latest episode of ASCD Learn Teach Lead Radio, authors Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral ponder this question with ASCD Emerging Leader Jeff Bradbury. The guests discuss ways for teacher leaders to make an impact, and also share thoughts on best practices for reflective teaching and learning. [Read More](#)

**"Schools in Asia Place Priority on Student Happiness."** Several countries in Asia are taking steps to promote happiness in schools, in partnership with UNESCO. Students throughout the region recently participated in a contest in which they were asked to create a visual of a happy school. [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)