



Pathways

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

May 29, 2016

Volume 2, Number 36

Upcoming Dates

- May 30 – Memorial Day – Thank you to all that have served and continue to serve our country; No School
- May 31 –(5:00 p.m.) Senior Cruise and All-Night Party
- June 1 & 2 – RMHS MCAS Testing
- June 1 –(7:00 p.m.) Reading Scholarship Foundation Awards Night in the Endsow PAC; (7:00 p.m.) Community Listening Meeting in the Coolidge Multipurpose Room
- June 2 – (8:30 a.m.) Coffee & Conversation @ Eaton; (10:00 a.m.) RMHS Seniors Marching Practice; (after school) Elementary Building Meetings; Multipurpose Room; (6:30 p.m.) Parker Open House; (7:00 p.m.) Baccalaureate @ St. Agnes for Families of Seniors
- June 3 – (7:30 a.m.) RMHS Class Day in the Endsow PAC; (9:00 a.m.) RMHS Seniors Marching Practice; (12:00 p.m.) RMHS Senior BBQ; (6:00 p.m.) RMHS Choral Celebration in the Endsow PAC

RMHS Art Students Participate in Memory Project



Memory Project
Romania, 2016

This year, for the first time, the Reading Memorial High School Art Club participated in the Memory Project. The Memory Project pairs up artists with children who have been orphaned throughout the world to create portraits as keepsakes of their childhood. These children have faced substantial challenges, such as neglect, abuse, loss of parents, and extreme poverty.

For further information, please see the link below. Special thanks to Veronique Latimer for her efforts with this project.

<https://memoryproject.org/>

Killam Principal Search Update

The Killam Principal Search is well under way. We have had 22 applicants apply for the position, which is an excellent showing for an elementary school administrative position. The candidates who have applied have a wide variety of education and administration backgrounds and experiences. This week, the Killam Elementary School Screening Committee interviewed 9 candidates who have strong backgrounds in administration, teacher leadership and elementary classroom experiences. This part of the process is confidential so that we are able to attract that largest number of qualified candidates possible. Based on the interviews, reference checks, and application review, a small group of finalists will be announced to the Community next week. These finalists will participate in a public process which will include site visits and open microphone sessions with the Killam Community. More details will follow on that process in a future communication.

We would like to thank the members of Killam Screening Committee who are participating in this process. The members are as follows:

- Micheala Saunders, Human Resources Administrator-Facilitator
- Joanne King, Wood End Principal
- Kelley Bostwick, Team Chairperson
- Erline Trites, Paraprofessional
- Amy Hussey, Killam Teacher
- Julia Doherty, Killam Teacher
- Ann Sweeney, Killam Teacher
- Marc Moll, Killam Parent
- Bryn Burkhart, Killam Parent
- Nancy Cresta, Killam Parent

We will update you on the process when more information becomes available. If you have any questions, please contact the Reading Public Schools administration offices at 781-944-5800.

Successfully Educating Children Who Have Experienced Toxic Stress

In this article in *The Atlantic*, author Paul Tough notes three recent developments in U.S. schools: (a) As of 2013, a majority of public-school students (51 percent) were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; (b) Despite two decades of national attention, the achievement gap between poor and better-off students has not appreciably narrowed; and (c) Research on non-cognitive skills – resilience,

- June 4 – (8:00 a.m.) SAT Testing – RMHS is NOT a test site.
- June 5 – (1:00 p.m.) RMHS Graduation in the Hawkes Field House
- June 6 – (8:00 a.m.) Coffee & Conversation @ Parker; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the RMHS Schettini Library – Staff Recognition
- June 7 – (1:00 p.m.) Community Listening Meeting at the Senior Center; (3:00 p.m.) RTA General Meeting in the Endslo PAC; (6:00 p.m.) Parker Grade 6 Spring Concert; (7:45 p.m.) Parker Grade 7 Spring Concert; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Acting Class Showcase; (7:00 p.m.) SEPAC Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- June 8 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (9:00 a.m.) Birch Meadow Field Day; (1:30 p.m.) secondary PLC Meetings; (7:00 p.m.) Coolidge Spring Concert
- June 9 – (8:30 a.m.) Barrows Field Day & Joshua Eaton Field Day; (after school) Elementary PLC Meetings; (5:00 p.m.) RISE Picnic @ Memorial Park; (7:00 p.m.) Parker Grade 8, Select Chorus and Jazz Band Spring Concert
- June 10 – (8:30 a.m.) Joshua Eaton Moving On

Ceremony; (9:00
a.m.) Birch Meadow
grade 5 Living
Museum; (5:00 p.m.)
RMHS Drama
Banquet

conscientiousness, optimism, self-control, and grit – has captured the attention of educators and parents as a key variable in student success.

“But here’s the problem,” says Tough. “For all our talk about noncognitive skills, nobody has yet found a reliable way to teach kids to be grittier or more resilient. And it has become clear, at the same time, that the educators who are best able to engender noncognitive abilities in their students often do so without really ‘teaching’ these capacities the way one might teach math or reading – indeed, they often do so without ever saying a word about them in the classroom.”

So how are noncognitive skills shaped? For fortunate children, they come from a number of subtle, intricate environmental forces at home and in classrooms. Kids who grow up with calm, consistent, warm, and responsive parenting, and without significant adversity, internalize these messages: *You’re safe; life is going to be fine. Let down your guard; the people around you will protect you and provide for you. Be curious about the world; it’s full of fascinating surprises.* Almost all of these children will do well when they get to kindergarten.

But toxic stress at home produces physiological and neurological adaptations that have a very negative effect on children’s development. There is a very strong correlation between adverse experiences in the home – abuse, neglect, and adult dysfunction – and later health and behavioral problems. “When parents behave harshly or unpredictably – especially at moments when their children are upset – the children are less likely over time to develop the ability to manage strong emotions and respond effectively to stressful situations,” says Tough.

Children’s threat-detection system – which links the brain, the immune system, and the endocrine system – is shaped by severe and chronic stress, raising blood pressure, increasing the production of adrenaline, and heightening vigilance. “On the emotional level,” says Tough, “toxic stress can make it difficult for children to moderate their responses to disappointments and provocations. A highly sensitive stress-response system that’s constantly on the lookout for threats can produce patterns of behavior that are self-defeating in school: fighting, talking back, acting up, and more subtly, going through each day perpetually wary of connection with peers or teachers.” Executive function is also weakened, impeding children’s ability to navigate the complexity and constant distractions of school.

“In the classroom,” says Tough, “neurocognitive difficulties can quickly turn into academic difficulties. Students don’t learn to read on time, because it is harder for them to concentrate on the words on the page. They don’t learn the basics of number sense, because they are too distracted by the emotions and anxieties overloading their nervous systems. As academic material becomes more complicated, they fall further behind. The more they fall behind, the worse they feel about themselves and about school. That creates more stress, which tends to feed into behavioral problems, which leads to stigmatization and punishment in the classroom, which keeps their stress levels elevated, which makes it still harder to concentrate – and so on, throughout elementary school.”

Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to Boys & Girls Lacrosse, Baseball and Softball for posting wins last week.
- Congratulations to the baseball & boys lacrosse teams for capturing the Liberty Division title.
- Congratulations to girls tennis doubles team of Ellie & Ruthie Wilson for finishing second in the Division 2 North Tournament.
- Good luck to the RMHS Track athletes participating in the Division 2 Individual Track Meet this weekend.
- Congratulations to Seniors Melissa Gandevani and Paul Chong who are the final RMHS High Five recipients for this school year.
- Congratulations to the Coolidge Science Olympiad Team for finishing 26 out of 60 teams at the National Science Olympiad Competition that was held at the University of Wisconsin last weekend.
- Thank you to Marcia Grant, Janet Dee, Meg Powers, Kathy Santilli, Julian Carr, Andy Strutt, Scott Mullen, and Karen Sawyer for all of their help in setting up the technology necessary for the PARCC.

When these children reach middle and high school, problems escalate. Teachers and principals tend to assume that when students misbehave, “they’re doing so because they have considered the consequences of their actions and calculated that the benefits of misbehavior outweigh the costs,” says Tough. “So our natural response is to increase the cost of misbehavior by ratcheting up punishment.” Suspension rates for poor and minority youth are orders of magnitude higher than for their more-affluent and white peers. But the forces leading to misbehavior are far from rational, and harsh punishments are ineffective in motivating troubled youth to behave, concentrate, and succeed.

Most school suspensions and other punishments are for non-violent infractions – talking back to teachers, breaking the rules, disruptive behavior. “With the neurobiological research in mind,” says Tough, “it’s easy to see that kind of behavior – refusing to do what adults tell you to do, basically – as an expression not of a bad attitude or a defiant personality but of a poorly regulated stress-response system. Talking back and acting up in class are, at least in part, symptoms of a child’s inability to control impulses, de-escalate confrontations, and manage anger and other strong feelings – the whole stew of self-regulation issues that can usually be traced to impaired executive-function development in early childhood.”

What this suggests, says Tough, is that we need to rethink classroom pedagogy, taking into account the burdens with which many children are entering school. He reports on one failed effort: Harvard professor Roland Fryer conducted a number of experiments in large school districts using monetary rewards to get students to read books, come to school, study harder; to get teachers to teach in ways that improve test scores; and to get parents to attend report-card conferences. Fryer’s incentive studies are one of the biggest and most thorough educational experiments ever. They had virtually no impact, and in one case students who were given rewards did worse. “The impact of financial incentives on student achievement,” says Fryer, “is statistically zero in each city.”

Why didn’t monetary rewards work? Tough believes that children growing up in difficult circumstances already have important extrinsic incentives to do the right thing in school – the prospect of higher earnings, better health, and less chance of being arrested and incarcerated. “Young people know this,” he says. “And yet when it comes time to make any of the many crucial decisions that affect their likelihood of reaching those educational milestones, kids growing up in adversity often make choices that seem in flagrant opposition to their self-interest, rendering those goals more distant and difficult to attain.”

A better explanation of these young people’s behavior, says Tough, is self-determination theory. Its leading proponents are Edward Deci and Richard Ryan of the University of Rochester. They believe people are driven by three basic needs – competence, autonomy, and human connection – and that intrinsic motivation is sparked when these needs are being satisfied. “The problem,” says Tough, “is that when disadvantaged children run into trouble in school, either academically or behaviorally, most schools respond by imposing more control on them, not less.

This diminishes their fragile sense of autonomy. As these students fall behind their peers academically, they feel less and less competent. And if their relationships with their teachers are wary or even contentious, they are less likely to experience the kind of relatedness that Deci and Ryan describe as being so powerfully motivating for young people in the classroom. Once students reach that point, no collection of material incentives or punishments is going to motivate them, at least not in a deep or sustained way...

"If we want students to act in ways that will maximize their future opportunities – to persevere through challenges, to delay gratification, to control their impulses – we need to consider what might motivate them to take those difficult steps." Deci and Ryan believe that if teachers are able to create an environment that fosters competence, autonomy, and connection, students are much more likely to feel motivated to work hard.

Tough goes on to describe an intriguing study done by Northwestern University economist Kirabo Jackson on two data points from North Carolina's ninth graders: their standardized test scores, and a composite measure of their noncognitive status (attendance, suspensions, on-time grade progression, and overall GPA). Jackson found that his noncognitive measure was a better predictor than test scores of students' college attendance, adult wages, and future problems with the law.

Jackson then looked at English and algebra teachers' impact on students' test scores and noncognitive status. Some teachers were consistently successful at raising students' standardized test scores, but there was another cohort of teachers, overlapping only a little with the first, who reliably raised students' performance on his noncognitive measure. "If you were assigned to the class of a teacher in this cohort," says Tough, "you were more likely to show up to school, more likely to avoid suspension, more likely to move on to the next grade. And your overall GPA went up – not just your grades in that particular teacher's class, but your grades in your other classes, too..."

"Jackson's data showed that spending a few hours each week in close proximity to a certain kind of teacher changed *something* about students' behavior. And that was what mattered. Somehow these teachers were able to convey deep messages – perhaps implicitly or even subliminally – about belonging, connection, ability, and opportunity. And somehow those messages had a profound impact on students' psychology, and thus on their behavior. The environment those teachers created in the classroom, and the messages that environment conveyed, motivated students to start making better decisions – to show up to class, to persevere longer at difficult tasks, and to deal more resiliently with the countless small-scale setbacks and frustrations that make up the typical students' school day. And those decisions improved their lives in meaningful ways. Did the students learn new skills that enabled them to behave differently? Maybe. Or maybe what we are choosing to call 'skills' in this case are really just new ways of thinking about the world or about

themselves – a new set of attitudes or beliefs that somehow unleash a new way of behaving.”

What is the secret sauce of these teachers? Tough believes the scholar doing the most thoughtful work on this question is Camille Farrington, a former high-school teacher now working at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research. The 2012 report she wrote with her colleagues, “Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners” (available at <http://bit.ly/1pwnNJ3>) contains some answers. “There is little evidence that working directly on changing students’ grit or perseverance would be an effective lever for improving their academic performance,” the report said. “While some students are more likely to persist in tasks or exhibit self-discipline than others, *all* students are more likely to demonstrate perseverance if the school or classroom context helps them develop positive mindsets and effective learning strategies.”

Farrington’s report drew a distinction between stable character traits like grit, which are difficult to change, and academic perseverance, which is highly dependent on the specific context. A student might demonstrate academic perseverance in math but not in history, in tenth grade and not in eleventh. “In essence,” says Tough, “what Farrington found was this: If you are a teacher, you may never be able to get your students to *be* gritty, in the sense of developing some essential character trait called grit. But you can probably make them *act* gritty – to behave in gritty ways in your classroom. And those behaviors will help produce the academic outcomes that you (and our students and society at large) are hoping for.”

The key to academic perseverance, says Farrington, is students’ academic mindset, and as Stanford researcher Carol Dweck and others have shown, adults have a tremendous impact on this. “Messages that teachers convey – large and small, explicit and implicit – affect the way students feel in the classroom, and thus they way they behave there,” says Tough. Farrington has distilled the voluminous mindset research to four key beliefs that, if students embrace them, produce academic perseverance:

- *I belong in this academic community.*
- *My ability and competence grow with my effort.*
- *I can succeed at this.*
- *This work has value for me.*

But there are two problems: First, many students who experienced trauma early in their lives are resistant to these beliefs – they’re more likely to think, *I don’t belong here. This is enemy territory. Everyone in this school is out to get me.* Second, many U.S. schools don’t do a very good job nurturing these four beliefs, especially for disadvantaged youth – in fact, “no excuses” discipline policies often create a downward spiral of negative beliefs that are diametrically opposed to the Farrington four.

The good news, Tough says, is that a small number of educators are using the recent insights about the impact of toxic childhood stress to reshape school environments. “These efforts,” says Tough, “target students’ beliefs in two separate

Quote of the Week....



I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

– Rabindranath Tagore

categories, each one echoing items on Farrington’s list: first, students’ feelings about their place in the school (*I belong in this academic community*), and then their feelings about the work they are doing in class (*my ability and competence grow with my effort; I can succeed at this; this work has value for me*.)” Tough cites two examples of promising efforts:

- Turnaround for Children, whose intervention teams of 3-4 people are working in New York City, Newark, and Washington D.C. schools addressing the psychological needs of potentially disruptive students, helping teachers become more strategic and less confrontational with classroom management, and encouraging student-centered instructional approaches like cooperative learning.

- EL Learning (formerly Expeditionary Learning), which is working in 150 schools nationwide to develop students’ academic mindsets using two strategies: belonging and relationships (through Crew, a daily, multiyear discussion and advisory group for students); and highly active, engaging classroom pedagogy – lots of student discussion, group activities, demanding long-term projects conducted by groups of students, and regular student self-assessments, including student-led report card conferences.

“Teachers and administrators at EL schools talk quite a bit about character,” says Tough, “– their term for noncognitive skills. The central premise of EL schools is that character is built not through lectures or direct instruction from teachers but through the experience of persevering as students confront challenging academic work... In general, when schools do try to directly address the impact that a stress-filled childhood might have on disadvantaged students, the first – and often the only – approach they employ has to do with their students’ emotional health, with relationships and belonging.” But belonging isn’t enough. To be truly motivated, students also need to believe they are doing work that is challenging, rigorous, and meaningful.

“How Kids Really Succeed” by Paul Tough in *The Atlantic*, June 2016 (Vol. 317, #5, p. 56-66), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/how-kids-really-succeed/480744/>; this article is excerpted from Tough’s new book, *Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). Reprinted from Marshall Memo 638.

Reading Public School Happenings

Memorial Day Observances

Several schools were involved in Memorial Day observances last week. Below are some photos. A special thank you to all of you who have served our country.

Disney Tweet of the Week



All my troubles and obstacles have strengthened me.

—Walt Disney



Parker Middle School Assembly



Coolidge Flag Display in Front of School



Students in John Fiore's Social Studies Class Learn more about the Memorial Wall

Coolidge Team Polaris Participates in "Red Nose Day"

Recently, Team Polaris participated in Red Nose Day, which is a day to bring awareness to poverty and hunger (especially in children) in the United States and across the globe. The students raised \$120.00 which will be donated to the Reading Food Pantry





RMHS Chorus Concert

On Thursday evening, the RMHS Choral Department, under the direction of Kristin Killian, held its annual spring concert featuring the Fermata Nowhere, the Crescendudes, the RMHS Singers, and the Mixed Choir. Some pictures of the concert are below. Congratulations to the students on an outstanding performance!



Mixed Choir



RMHS Singers



The Crescendudes



Fermata Nowhere

Coolidge Greek Day

On Friday, Coolidge 6th Grade students, culminated their Ancient Greece unit by celebrating Greek Day. Below are some photos of the event. Special thanks goes to Coolidge teachers Ann Jacobsmeier and Mike Bernard for coordinating the event.



Barrows Fun Run

Last Tuesday, Barrows Elementary School participated in the Annual Fun Run. Below are pictures of the Grade 3, 4, and 5 winners. Congratulations to all of the students and special thanks goes to PE/Health teacher Sarah Atwood for coordinating the event.



Grade 3



Grade 4



Grade 5

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

Food Service Department Recognition

Last week, the RMHS, Parker, and Barrows Food Service Staff were recognized at the Healthy Kids, Healthy Programs Summit, provided by DESE and the John C. Stalker Institute, for their participating in the Smarter Lunchrooms Initiative. Schools who participated in this initiative worked with outside trainers to impact how we market and promote healthy foods to the students in Reading.

In the photo below, Nutrition Site Coordinator Karleen Sayman and Food Service Director Kristin Morello represented RMHS, Parker and Barrows for their participation in the Smarter Lunchrooms initiative. Congratulations to the staff below for their efforts!

RMHS:

Manager-Patricia Dady-Guarino, Connie Kurchian, Joanne Fuccione, Mary Messuri, Nancy Learned, Dolly Souther, Laura O'Brien, Muriel Hall, Martina O'Keeffe, Linda Ott-Palmisano, Katrina Ferrari

Parker:

Manager, Suzanne Joos, Linda Slade, Diane Feely, Maureen Franey-Passatempo

Barrows:

Manager, Dianne Ferguson, Nelly Barrera, Karen Bryant

Karleen Sayman, nutrition site coordinator



Stepping Stones...

- **We welcome** the following new hires to our school district:
 - Ronald Jordan, Daily Substitute, District
- **We have posted** a new position. If interested, please visit <https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/index.aspx> to view the job detail

Preschool Teacher - Substantially Separate Classroom

https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=47

Night Shift Custodian, 2016-2017 – Parker Middle School
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https://reading.tedk12.com/Hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=49

Night Shift, 2016-2017 – Coolidge Middle School
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https://reading.tedk12.com/Hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=48

Blazing Trails....

"Schools in State Striving to Cope with Rising Mental Health Needs." When 16-year-old Jasmin Duarte feels anxiety at Assabet Valley Technical Regional High School - often after lunchtime chaos in the cafeteria - she slips inside a small room, lit dimly with floor lamps and miniature lights, with the sound of trickling water in the background. It is here that Duarte found solace in the weeks after her hospitalization last fall for depression and an eating disorder, and where she received counseling to help her deal with her anxiety and tutoring to catch up in her classes. The room continues to be a lifeline that could prevent a relapse. "It's a safe environment," Jasmin said one recent morning. "Everyone is caring. We are all here for each other." Such sanctuaries are becoming necessary as Massachusetts schools confront an alarming rise in the number of students who are hospitalized for mental health disorders. Over the last decade, many schools have seen the number of cases grow from just a few a year to upwards of several dozen, often transforming guidance offices into de facto psychiatric wards, educators say. [Read More](#)

"The Working Lives of Educators." Educators today face new pressures, scrutiny, and demands. In this issue of *Educational Leadership*, researchers and practitioners delve into "The Working Lives of Educators" and share fresh ideas for how to thrive as an educator in 2016. Topics include what makes teacher teamwork work, how to make mentoring work, what to do to improve teacher retention, and how to identify self-directed professional learning opportunities. [Read More](#)

"The Open-Ended Question." *There are no multiple choice questions in life:* we must learn to evaluate many possible solutions to an array of issues. In the May issue of *Education Update*, get tips for helping students construct evidence-based responses to open-ended questions. Also, read "Homing In on Family Relationships" for a roadmap to conducting effective strengths-based home visits. [Read More](#)

"Special Education After 40 Years: What Lies Ahead?" Over time, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has evolved from providing access to the schoolhouse to allowing students' full participation in general education. Today, the focus has moved to increased expectations and better academic outcomes-goals that will overlay the upcoming IDEA reauthorization. This brief previews what's necessary to meet these goals. [Read More](#)

"What Do Globally Competent Students Look Like?" Finland's approach to education can serve as inspiration to educators worldwide, William Doyle, a Fulbright Scholar who joined the faculty of the University of Eastern Finland last year, writes in this commentary. He suggests the system offers global best practices, such as an emphasis on the whole child and research-based practices. [Read More](#)

Have a Great Week!