



Pathways

A weekly collection of information, thoughts, reflections, and accolades for the Reading Public School Community

November 20, 2016

Volume 8, Number 12

Upcoming Dates

- November 20 - (3:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Presents "The Wedding Singer in the Endslo PAC
- November 21 - (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo PAC
- November 22 - (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- November 23 - (9:30 a.m.) RMHS Pep Rally in Field House; (11:00 a.m.) Early Release for PreK - 12 Students
- November 24 - Happy Thanksgiving (10:15 a.m.) Football Game in Stoneham
- November 25 - No School for Students & Offices Closed
- November 27 - (3:30 p.m.) Annual Tree Lighting on Reading Common
- November 30 - (7:00 p.m.) RCASA BREAKING POINTS Film Screening & Panel in the Endslo PAC; (7:00 p.m.) SEPAC presents Distracted & Dyslexic at the Reading Public Library
- December 1 - (5:00 p.m.) Downtown Reading Shop the Block Event
- December 3 - (8:00 a.m.) SAT Testing RMHS NOT a Test Center; (12:00p.m.) REF Festival of Trees @ Parker Middle School; (time to be determined) Division 1A Super Bowl

Teachers Rick Downes, Nancy Najmi, Kate Crosby, Frank Buono, Nina Balfe, Karesa Encarnacao, Patricia Piacentini, Jennifer White, Erica LeBow, Giulio Binaghi, and Kara Gleason recognized.

Students and Teachers Recognized by Superintendent at Annual State of the Schools Address

Last Thursday, November 17th, Superintendent of Schools John Doherty gave the Annual State of the Schools Address. In his remarks, Dr. Doherty recognized several students for overcoming challenges in their lives or who are making contributions to our community/society and the teachers who had an impact on their lives. The following students and teachers were recognized:

- **RMHS Senior Alisyn Bourque**-Received one of the two Massachusetts Association for School Superintendent (M.A.S.S.) Superintendent's Awards for Academic and Community Achievement. Alisyn said that the teachers who had the greatest impact on her educational journey were recently retired **Birch Meadow teacher Rick Downes** and **RMHS Physics Teacher Nancy Najmi**.
- **RMHS Senior Anson Huang**- Received one of the two Massachusetts Association for School Superintendent (M.A.S.S.) Superintendent's Awards for Academic and Community Achievement. Anson said that the teachers who had the greatest impact on his educational journey were **RMHS English Teacher Kate Crosby** and **RMHS Chemistry Teacher Frank Buono**.
- **Grade 3 Killam Student Ottavio** was recognized for overcoming his challenges with cancer. Ottavio has been impacted by several Killam teachers including **Nina Balfe** and **Karesa Encarnacao**.
- **The Birch Meadow K-2 Compass Program** for students diagnosed with autism was recognized and the teacher who has had a significant impact on those students is **Birch Meadow Teacher Patricia Piacentini**.
- **Nakeya and Victoria** are Grade 9 students who attend RMHS through the METCO program and endure the challenges of coming to school each day from Boston. The teacher who has had an impact on their educational journey is **Coolidge Physical Education Teacher Jennifer White**.
- **Ali** is a RMHS Grade 12 Student who has dedicated his life to pursuing a career in public health after he lost his father to cancer in 2012. The teachers that have had a significant impact on his life include **Coolidge ELA Teacher Erica LeBow** and **RMHS Spanish Teacher Giulio Binaghi**.
- **Laura** is an RMHS Grade 12 Student who has recently published a book on the life of Sergeant Joshua Eaton as a part of her Girl Scout Gold Star Project. The

RMHS Football vs. King Philip @ Gillette Stadium

- December 4 – (10:00 a.m.) REF Festival of Trees @ Parker Middle School
- December 5 – (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo PAC
- December 7 – Grades 6 – 12 Early Release Day; (after school) District PLC Meetings; (6:00 p.m.) Coolidge Middle School Grade 6 Winter Concert; (7:30 p.m.) Coolidge Middle School Grade 7 Winter Concert
- December 8 – (after school) RISE/Elementary Building Meetings – Collaborative Proposal Time; (7:00 p.m.) Parker Middle School Grade 8 Winter Concert; (7:00 p.m.) SEPAC presents An IEP for my Child in the Superintendent's Conference Room; (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo PAC
- December 10 – (8:00 a.m.) RMHS Drama Dickens Holiday Craft Faire
- December 12 – (7:30 p.m.) Town Meeting in the Endslo PAC – if needed
- December 13 – (6:00 p.m.) Parker Grade 6 & 7 Winter Concert; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- December 14 – (8:30 a.m.) Joshua Eaton Holiday Concert; (after school) Secondary Building Meetings; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Band Winter Concert
- December 15 – (after school) RISE/Elementary Building Meetings; (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Winter Songfest

teacher who advised her and supported her throughout this 18 month project was **RMHS History Teacher Kara Gleason.**



Seniors Alisyn Bourque and Anson Huang

The remarks describing each of the students and teachers is below. You can access the full set of remarks on the [Pathways Blog](#). The teachers and students listed here are examples of the many outstanding students and staff that we have here in the Reading Public Schools. As we celebrate Thanksgiving, we are grateful for the hard work and dedication that our teachers put forward for our students. Thank you to all of you for what you do each and every day and Happy Thanksgiving!

Excerpt from Dr. Doherty's Speech recognizing students and teachers.

I am delighted to start my remarks this evening, as I do each year, by introducing to you the two Reading Memorial High School Seniors who are receiving the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Award for Academic and Community Excellence. Each year, it is always difficult to select only two students, given how many deserving candidates we have here at Reading Memorial High School. Both students being recognized this evening have demonstrated strong academic skills, participate in extracurricular and community service activities, and are currently in the top 5% of their graduating class. In addition, I have had the opportunity to meet with both students and they are genuinely great kids. It is with honor and pride that I present this award to our first recipient who was a student at the Birch Meadow Elementary School and Coolidge Middle School and has served in a leadership position as President of the RMHS French Club. In this role, this student organized a fundraiser last year in support of the people of Paris after the terrorists' attacks. She tutors younger students in French; and she co-founded an after school program for elementary school children to help them acquire an appreciation for a different language and culture. Academically, this student has excelled in rigorous classes including AP Calculus, AP Physics, Honors Engineering, Honors Film and Literature, AP French, and AP Chemistry. She has attended summer courses in Engineering and Biomedical Systems at Brown University and a Congress of "Future Medical Leaders" in Biotechnology at the Tsongas Arena in Lowell. In addition, this

student is involved in a number of meaningful activities but is most passionate about dance, a creative outlet requiring both physical and artistic strength. For the past 10 years, she has performed in The Nutcracker in roles ranging from Clara to a reindeer to a point mouse. She sees herself continuing dancing in college. This recipient envisions a career in engineering and has applied early decision to Vanderbilt, Boston University, and Northeastern where she would like to major in Mechanical or Biomedical Engineering. She dreams about a career where she can have an impact on the lives of others. When asked which teachers had the greatest impact on her educational journey, she said recently retired Birch Meadow teacher Rick Downes and RMHS Physics Teacher Nancy Najmi. It is with great pleasure tonight that I recognize Alisyn Bourque. Alisyn, please come forward to receive the 2016 Massachusetts Association of School Superintendent's Award.

Tonight's second recipient attended Killam Elementary School and Parker Middle School and has excelled as a member of the RMHS Jazz Band. Academically, this student is a curious and engaged learner who has taken several high level courses including AP Calculus, Honors English, Band, AP Physics, AP French, and AP Chemistry. During 10th grade, he represented the school as a first-year chemistry student at the Ashdown Exam, which was held by the Northeastern Section of the American Chemical Society. He was one of the top scorers in the region, which opened up a second opportunity to take the qualifying exam for the United States National Chemistry Olympiad team. Additionally, he took on an independent study in undergraduate-level organic chemistry this year through MIT's OpenCourseWare. He has also been named as a national Merit Semi-Finalist, a significant achievement where only 1% out of 1.6 million students in the country who took the PSAT qualify. In addition to academics, this recipient is an avid piano player and fiction writer. He participates in online forums for writing and also has submitted his fiction works to publications. He also devotes time to our public library where he is a frequent volunteer. He has led tours of the new building, helped plan children's programming and has been a "NetGuide" helping mostly elderly patrons learn how to more effectively access resources online. Next year, he plans on majoring in Chemical Engineering and is applying to Yale, Columbia, and MIT.

The teachers who have had a significant impact on this student's journey in the Reading Public Schools include his Freshman English Teacher Kate Crosby, who opened up his world to creative writing, and Chemistry Teacher Frank Buono who turned a difficult class with a dense amount of information into a class he could freely enjoy.

It's a great honor to introduce to you, Anson Huang! Anson, please come forward and accept the MASS 2016 Superintendent's Award for Academic Excellence....

The students mentioned this evening have all overcome their own personal challenges or they have made contributions to our community through the hard work and dedication of teachers who have made a difference in their lives. In short, they are what the Reading Public Schools is all about—and we could never find better models of the power of community, teamwork, and perseverance.

First, I would like to introduce to you Ottavio, a third grade student at the J.W. Killam elementary school. In September, 2014, when he was in first grade, Ottavio was diagnosed with Medulloblastoma, a highly malignant brain tumor. Since then, this

Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to the RMHS Cheering Squad for finishing 6th in the North Regional Division 2 Meet.
- Congratulations to the Cast and Crew of *The Wedding Singer* for the amazing job they did this past weekend.
- Congratulations to the girls swim team for finishing 3rd in the Sectional Meet.
- Congratulations to the girls swim team medley relay for finishing first and the 200 free relay for posting a new team record and finishing 2nd.
- Kudos to swimmer Alana Loughman for a first place finish in the 50 yd. free style and Maddie Doyle for a second place finish in diving.
- Kudos to cross country runners Jacquelyn Iannuzzo and Andrew Riffe for qualifying for the All State Meet on November 19th in Gardner.

little boy has endured numerous surgeries, radiation, and chemotherapy treatments. Through it all, whenever possible, he attended school and was happy to be with his Killam friends. During his first and second grade years, Ottavio missed a total of 156 school days. But he persevered, attending school when he could, although some days were more difficult than others. This year, for the first time in two years, Ottavio started the school year cancer free. Ottavio has had many teachers who have made a difference in his life. His first grade teacher, Nina Balfe, shown here in this photo with Ottavio and his third grade teacher, Karesa Encarnacao. Both have shown extreme dedication, compassion, and support, not only to Ottavio, but to his entire family. Ottavio is encouraged by his teachers who remind him, "I will love you, push you, and encourage you to do your best. It will be hard but I will not give up on you or let you give up on yourself." School is hard for Ottavio and he works hard every day. This school year, Karesa Encarnacao is his personal cheerleader—guiding and encouraging him along the way. Ottavio has a long way to go, but he is certainly in great hands with caring teachers and a supportive community.

As many of you know, we have many special education programs in our school district, but perhaps some of our most fragile students are in our K-2 Compass Program at the Birch Meadow Elementary School. The Compass Program is a program for students who are diagnosed with autism. Some of these students have a difficult time transitioning to school. These are students who may have had difficulty at first expressing themselves, identifying shapes, numbers, and letters, and interacting with other students. The families of these students may have had their own challenges as well, adapting to the needs of their children and the support they require to be successful in school.

Fortunately, these students have an outstanding teacher named Tricia Piacentini, or "Mrs. P" as she is so fondly called by parents and students. Tricia has done an amazing job with these students. She challenges and pushes them, and the children have shown amazing growth in their academic learning and social emotional health. She teaches each of her students with compassion and perseverance because she believes each child can learn, regardless of the challenges and disabilities they may face. As one parent put it, "Mrs. P has a rare and special gift to be able to help kids find the best within themselves and let them see just how smart and how good they can be."

This past spring, Tricia was recognized by the Teamsters Local 25 at their 10th Annual Light up the Night Gala for Autism in Boston, an event that recognizes outstanding educators who work with students with autism. We are very fortunate in the Reading Public Schools to have Tricia, a talented teacher, who opens the world for students with disabilities. Tricia is here this evening. Tricia, thank you for what you do for our students.

Meet Nakeya and Victoria, who are ninth grade students at RMHS. Nakeya and Victoria are in our METCO program, a program that gives students from Boston the opportunity to attend suburban schools. Reading is very fortunate to have a strong METCO program with students in Grades K-12. What you may not know about our Boston students is that they make a significant amount of sacrifices to attend the Reading Public Schools. Their day starts at 5:00 a.m. or earlier so that they can catch their bus to Reading. It is sometimes difficult to make connections with their Reading

Quote of the Week . . .



Everything happens for a reason: live it, love it, learn from it! Make your smile change the world but don't let the world change your smile

-Unknown

peers because they are not able to stay late after school or participate in activities that would develop those friendships. They then have a long bus ride home, where most Reading students have a short 5 or 10 minute walk or ride. When Nakeya and Victoria first entered Coolidge as sixth grade students, they initially struggled with the transition from elementary to middle school and had difficulty making new friends. Their first year at Coolidge was very challenging.

When the students entered seventh grade, a new Physical Education teacher, Jennifer White started at Coolidge Middle School. Almost immediately, Jennifer made a positive impact on those students. She arrived early to school and hung out in the cafeteria so that she could connect with Nakeya, Victoria, and other students who arrived very early. After school, the students would hang out with Ms. White until the bus came. Because of Ms. White's interest in these students and her willingness to serve as a role model, Nakeya and Victoria grew over their last two years at Coolidge going from fairly disconnected 6th grade students to involved and happy 8th grade students. As the students stated when I met with them, "She would be there for us. She was our own personal guidance counselor." At last year's 8th grade promotion ceremony, both girls awarded Jennifer White a Starfish Award for making a difference in their lives. Even today, as ninth grade students, Nakeya and Victoria still go to Ms. White when they have a problem even though they are not in the same school anymore. Jennifer, who is here this evening, is an extremely humble, caring teacher, a leader by example, and we are proud and honored to have her as a teacher in the Reading Public Schools. Jennifer, thank you for what you do for our students.

Next, I would like to introduce you to Ali, a very thoughtful and humble senior at Reading Memorial High School. In 2011, when Ali was in 6th grade, he lost his father to cancer. Ali was naturally devastated, but from that day on, he has been committed to pursuing a field where he can do research to find a cure. The summer after his Freshman year, Ali participated in a program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center where he was exposed to a variety of different aspects of the medical field. In the summer of his sophomore year, he was accepted into a research program at Beth Israel and for the last two summers Ali studied protein networks in a laboratory setting at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute. He presented his findings to physicians and scientists. Ali has applied to several Boston area schools including Boston University, Tufts, and Northeastern where he would like to major in Neurobiology. When asked about what teachers have had an impact on his journey, Ali said his Honors Spanish 4 teacher Giulio Binaghi and his 7th and 8th Grade English Teacher, Erica LeBow. Mr. Binaghi taught him not only Spanish, Spanish literature, and history, but a great deal about life. Ali said that Mr. Binaghi has been an essential aspect of his character and intellectual curiosity development. He stated that Erica LeBow was the catalyst to many of his academic pursuits. Ali stated that "Her influence led me to take a keen interest in reading, but also reflection upon finishing a piece of literature. I often relate data that I collect in experiments at Dana-Farber to the words in a book and how they mean absolutely nothing unless I take the initiative to analyze it, detect trends and overriding themes, and formulate my own conclusions. I thank her for editing each and every one of my essays and providing critical feedback that helped polish my grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary. Ms. LeBow is truly passionate about teaching and I'm grateful to have known her as a teacher, mentor, and a friend." Because of Ali's experience in the Reading Public Schools and his outside work at Beth Israel and Dana Farber, he is

Disney Tweet of the Week



Remember, the journey
of a thousand miles
begins with the first step.

—Rafiki (The Lion King
1½)

passionate about public health and health care and he wants to focus on eliminating the ethnic and racial disparities in health care.

Finally, meet Laura, a Senior at Reading Memorial High School. For more than a year and a half, Laura has been working on her Girl Scout Gold Award project which has culminated in a published historical fiction children's book on the life of Sergeant Joshua Eaton, who at age twenty was the only Reading man to die in the American Revolutionary War. Laura's work was based on a clear need to educate the community about the importance of the life of Joshua Eaton and why the school is named after him. This year, thanks to Laura's work, Sargeant Joshua Eaton was recognized at the Town Memorial Day Ceremony. To prepare for writing her book, Laura conducted extensive research on Sgt. Eaton including use of Reading resources, visits to Lexington and Concord and Saratoga, NY, extensive consultation with Everett Blodgett, town historian, research at the Massachusetts Historical Society and State Archives, and use of many primary and secondary research sources. She received a historical preservation grant from the Town of Reading to help fund the publication of a high-quality, large, color, glossy edition of her book. In October, Laura presented to the students of Joshua Eaton at an all school assembly and read passages from her book to the students to help educate them on who Joshua Eaton was and why the school was named after him. Copies of her book will be distributed to the school and the public library. Laura continues to work to find a publisher for "mass market" copies of her book so as to get a classroom set and copies for the general public.

Laura's Project Advisor for this work was RMHS Social Studies Teacher Kara Gleason who worked diligently with her to provide guidance and historical information so that she could pursue her dream of publishing this book. Kara is here this evening. Thank you Kara for having an impact on Laura's journey.

Alyson, Anson, Ottavio, the students in the Compass Program, Nakeya, Victoria, Ali, and Laura are just a few of the 4,431 students that we have here in the Reading Public Schools. Each of our students have meaningful stories to tell and each of our students have caring adults, teachers, administrators, and other staff, who have made a difference at some point in their educational journey. Over the last few years, our schools have focused our efforts on those structures and supports so that each student will have at least one adult in the school that they can go to when they are in need. Our goal is to provide a strong and robust curriculum that all students can access and a support system above and beyond what all students receive to help those students that are struggling. By developing this system of supports, it will make all of our schools strong and benefit all students, just like the student stories you heard this evening.

I would be remiss, if I did not also honor five teachers who were beloved in our school community, but passed away in the last several months. Retired Coolidge teacher John McCarthy, Retired Birch Meadow Teacher Irene Bourne, Retired Teacher, Sally Mucica, Joshua Eaton Teacher Jody Carregal, and Birch Meadow Teacher Jolene Tewksbury each had an impact on hundreds of students during their time as teachers in our district. They connected and cared about children, challenged them, supported them when they struggled, and never gave up on their students. Although they will be missed, the impact that each of them had on students will carry on for generations to come.

Important Websites

Help Desk (To submit a ticket)
help.desk@reading.k12.ma.us

RPS District Website
www.reading.k12.ma.us

Access Your Email
<https://login.microsoftonline.com/>

Baseline Edge
<https://baseline.ioeducation.com/Site/login>

Festival of Trees Coming Soon!



Reading Education Foundation
Outside the box ~ Inside the classroom.

Festival of Trees CRYSTAL ANNIVERSARY Celebrating 15 Years! December, 3-4, 2016



Want to Donate a Tree? Interested in Volunteering?

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Learn more

Ten Ideas for Improving Results for Students with Special Needs

“No one seems satisfied with the state of serving students with special needs, and for good reason,” say Nathan Levenson and Christopher Cleveland in this *District Management Journal* article. “In nearly every school district across the country, the conversation is the same. Parents are concerned that their children aren’t well enough prepared to succeed in life, college, and career. Students themselves often feel excluded or frustrated by ever-higher standards that they can’t seem to meet. Classroom teachers feel underprepared to address ever-mounting student needs, and special-education teachers feel stretched thin. Despite the hard work of so many caring people and the mounting resources dedicated year after year, disappointment and frustration persist.”

But Levenson and Cleveland believe there are steps that can be taken to produce better results. Based on what their organization, District Management Council, has learned from the research and working with special educators across the country, here are their suggestions:

- *Focus on student outcomes, not inputs.* When results are disappointing, all too many districts pour money into more staff, more paraprofessionals, more co-teaching, and more hours of service. “History shows that continuing to add resources and layer in solutions does not yield results,” say Levenson and Cleveland. “If the current approach isn’t achieving great outcomes, current practice must be reviewed and modified.”

- *Focus on effective general education.* According to NAEP data, when general education teachers are effective with Tier I instruction and take responsibility for all students, those with special needs do better. “If we want students to master the general education curriculum,” say Levenson and Cleveland, “general education teachers have to be a big part of the solution.”

- *Ensure that all students can read.* Low reading skills are at the root of many special education referrals – hence the spike in third and sixth grade when reading deficits make it especially difficult for students to learn math, science, and social studies. “An overwhelming majority of students who have not mastered reading by the end of third grade will continue to struggle throughout high school and beyond,” say Levenson and Cleveland – and that includes behavioral problems. Fortunately, there are specific steps districts can take to increase reading proficiency in the primary grades:

- Setting clear and rigorous grade-level expectations;
- Identifying struggling readers starting in kindergarten;
- Frequently measuring achievement and using the data to improve instruction;
- Giving students at least 90 minutes a day of balanced core instruction;
- Explicitly teaching phonics and comprehension;
- Providing at least 30 minutes a day of additional time for all struggling readers;
- Tightly connecting remediation to core instruction;
- Fielding highly skilled and effective teachers of reading;
- Putting one person in charge of reading curriculum and instruction;
- Making effective use of instructional coaching and professional development.

- *Provide extra instructional time for struggling students every day.* “In many schools, struggling students are provided extra adults, but not extra time,” say Levenson and Cleveland – teaching assistants, paraprofessionals, co-teachers. “Extra ‘help time’ should not be confused with extra instructional time.” To catch up on missing foundational skills, correct misunderstandings, and master current material, these students need at least 30 minutes of *additional* reading instruction every day at the elementary level, an extra period at the secondary level. In a sample schedule, the authors suggest that students with special needs in math are part of a regular-education classroom for the initial presentation of content, learning from effective instruction and peer questions, and then have an extra period of math support taking the place of Spanish.

- *Ensure that content-strong staff provide interventions and support.* “Districts that have made the most significant gains among struggling students have done so by providing these students, whether or not they have IEPs, with teachers skilled in content instruction during extra instructional time,” say Levenson and Cleveland. They note that special education teachers know pedagogy and are not always expert in math or ELA. Content-strong support (versus generalist support) looks like this: associating students’ incorrect answers with the underlying concept, inferring misunderstandings from incorrect answers, teaching prior, foundational skills, and teaching correct material using two or three different approaches.

- *Allow special educators to play to their strengths.* It’s smart for a school to take advantage of particular areas of expertise among teachers – for example, some may be strong in math content, some in specific pedagogical areas (scaffolding, differentiation, chunking), some in social-emotional support, and some in case management.

- *Focus paraprofessional support on health, safety, and behavior needs versus academic needs.* Paraprofessionals can play a vital role with students who have severe disabilities, autism, health needs, and behavior issues. But Levenson and Cleveland don’t favor having paraprofessionals provide academic support. They cite evidence that students with special needs do best when they are fully engaged during Tier I instruction and then get extra time with content-strong teachers, RTI interventionists, and other trained specialists focused on academic and other specific needs. When aides are present during core instructional time, it can decrease the amount of instruction a student receives from the classroom teacher, who may believe the student already has an adult’s attention. In addition, an aide hovering beside a special-needs student “creates a social barrier, stifling peer interaction and thereby defeating one of the primary benefits of inclusion,” say Levenson and Cleveland.

- *Expand the reach and impact of social, emotional, and behavioral supports.* It’s hard for teachers to be successful when students can’t communicate, connect with others, resolve conflicts, and cope with challenges, say the authors – hence the critical importance of counselors, social workers, psychologists, and behavior specialists. But Levenson and Cleveland have found major differences in how well these professionals are used. In some districts, they spend 75 percent of their time with students while in others they spend only 45 percent; in some districts psychologists spend five days for each initial or three-year

evaluation while others complete the same work in 1½ days (staff moving from one district to another quickly adapt to the prevailing standard).

The bottom line: it's possible to expand direct services for students simply by streamlining meetings and paperwork. It's also far more effective, say Levenson and Cleveland, to stop relying on paraprofessionals as hand-holders and crisis interveners and beef up the role of behaviorists, who are expert at diagnosing why a student has a disruptive outburst, providing the student with coping mechanisms, and guiding teachers to avoid triggers. Better that paraprofessionals report directly to behavior specialists and provide ad hoc support to multiple classrooms. If there aren't enough psychologists, social workers, counselors, and behaviorists, a district might forge a partnership with a local nonprofit counseling agency.

- *Provide high-quality in-district programs for students with more severe needs.* If a district has at least three high-need students, it may be more cost-effective to provide special education services within the district, saving long bus rides for students to out-of-district placements and strengthening connections to their town or neighborhood. Of course the key is hiring staff with the right skills and training and providing dedicated leadership.

- *Know how staff spend their time, and provide guidance on effective use of time.* Unlike regular-education teachers, most of whom are working as part of teams with clear curriculum and assessment guidelines, special educators "are typically left to themselves to figure out how best to help their students, how best to juggle the many demands on their time, and how best to schedule services," say Levenson and Cleveland. "This serves neither the student, the teacher, nor the budget well." When districts do careful time-and-motion studies, "both staff and administrators are often surprised at how much time is spent in meetings, how much service is provided 1:1 or 2:1 even though IEPs call for small groups, and how much instruction is provided by paraprofessionals." Often the master schedule is a culprit, forcing teachers to pull students from core instruction in reading or math and preventing grouping of students with similar needs. Once these problems are confronted, sometimes with the help of an outside scheduling expert, much more effective use can be made of everyone's time.

Implementing these ten suggestions is not an easy process, conclude Levenson and Cleveland. "Districts that have been able to expand and improve services, increase inclusion, and close the achievement gap have generally devoted three or more years to the effort," they say – including assembling cross-functional teams, involving parents, and wrestling with the budget. There was also a sense of urgency: "While they understood that moving too fast could erode trust and understanding, they also knew that waiting to start would delay helping students in need. Clear goals, careful planning, and lots of communication helped pave the way."

"Improving Special Education" by Nathan Levenson and Christopher Cleveland in *The District Management Journal*, Fall 2016 (Vol. 20, p. 12-27), can be purchased at <http://bit.ly/2f9t9Fq>

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 info to John Doherty at: john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us

“Instructional Rounds” in a California Elementary School

In this article in *Principal*, San Jose principal Aaron Brengard says that a few years ago, he realized his teachers didn’t have a chance to see what he observed as he cruised around the building every day – new ideas being tried, effective practices in action, students learning. Sure, teachers shared ideas in team meetings and at lunch time, but were they appreciating and delving into the finer points of teaching and learning?

To bridge this gap, the school adopted “instructional rounds,” with grade-level teacher teams (freed up by substitutes for an entire morning two or three times a year) systematically visiting 3-5 classrooms at another grade level for 10-15 minutes each and debriefing and discussing next steps afterward. Their focus was on the “instructional core” – the minute-by-minute interaction of teachers, students, and curriculum content. “Anything of value in classroom instruction is connected by the content and what the teacher and students are saying or doing,” says Brengard. “Teachers may have the best intentions or a curriculum may be perfectly aligned to standards, but what matters most is what students actually do.”

From the beginning, Brengard made clear that these classroom visits were not evaluative; there was a firewall between what teachers saw and what he wrote up in his formal evaluations at the end of the year. In addition, to avoid any tinge of evaluation, observers didn’t give feedback to the teachers they observed. (If observees were curious, they were encouraged to ask the observers for feedback.)

Before each morning’s classroom visits, teacher teams agreed on a “problem of practice” – for example, improving small-group math work or increasing student engagement during the literacy block. Criteria for a good problem of practice: it’s directly related to student learning, focused on the instructional core, directly observable, and high-leverage. Once in classrooms, teachers jotted low-inference notes and chatted with students, trying to appreciate what was going on, assume good intent, and not judge their colleagues.

After each visit, teachers caucused in the corridor sharing impressions on each person’s assigned facet of the instructional core (teacher, students, content – they rotated their focus with each classroom). After completing the morning’s observations, teachers met with a facilitator (either Brengard or a staff-designated staff member) and followed a set protocol:

(a) describing what they saw in each facet of the instructional core; (b) analyzing trends across facets and classrooms, especially promising practices; (c) using the evidence to make claims and develop a theory of action – for example, if we embed small-group literacy instruction into projects, then students will become better readers, and we know this because of increased fluency, accuracy, and comprehension assessment results; and (d) discussing ways to move instruction to the next level with action steps related to the problem of practice; this included deadlines, who’s in charge, and what data would be collected to measure progress.

“Rounds have brought a new energy to our campus,” says Brengard. “Instead of me, the principal, being the only one seeing amazing practices going on each day, every teacher

has spent a significant time analyzing what teaching looks like in other classrooms.” An upper-grade teacher summed it up: “I see rounds as a coaching clinic where you go in to learn from other practitioners in their field of expertise in real time. You learn to evaluate what works and what doesn’t for your own personal practice.” Brengard believes this has helped teachers “develop a shared understanding of high-quality instruction and reflect on their own practice.” As teachers have increasingly taken ownership for the process, he reports, they “have not only expanded our teaching capacity, but are improving our leadership capacity, too.”

“Instructional Rounds: A Handbook for Principals” by Aaron Brengard in *Principal*, November/December 2016 (Vol. 96, #2, p. 8-11), <http://bit.ly/2fRhiiV>; Brengard can be reached at abrengard@eesd.org. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 661.

Reading Public Schools Happenings

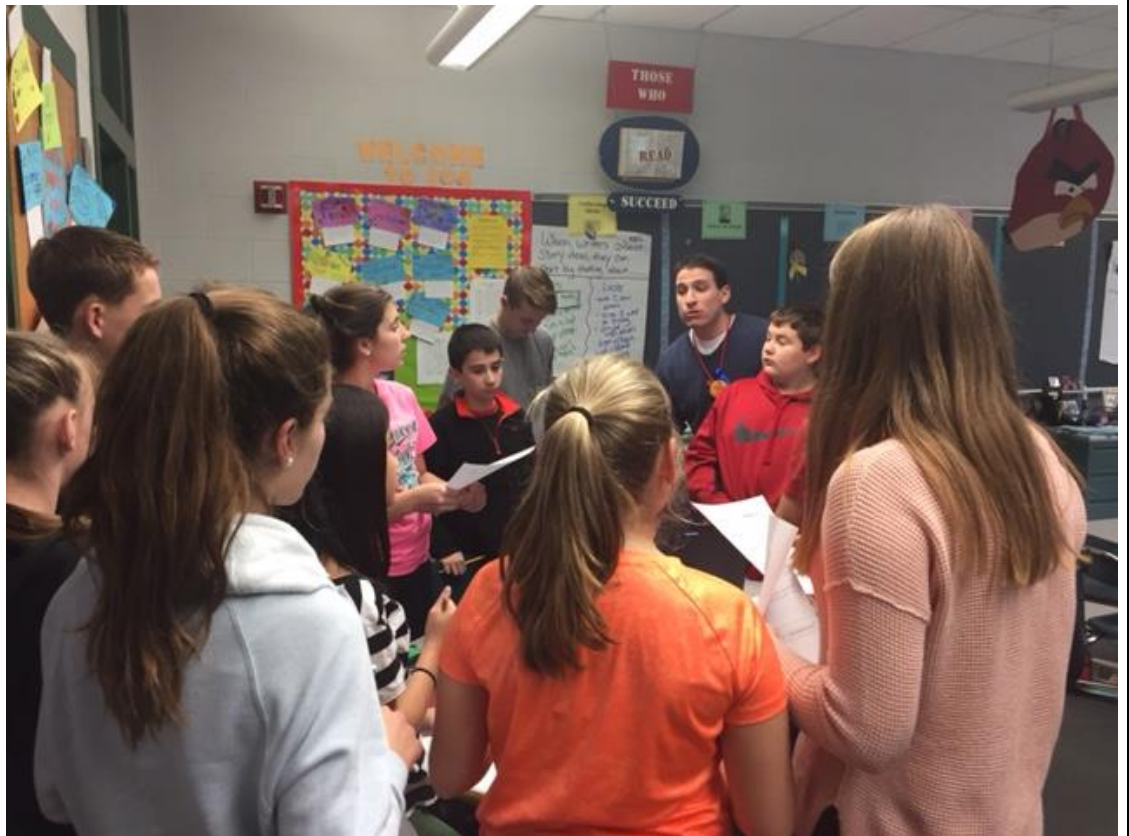
Parker Students Explore the Universe

Students in Matt Williams Grade 6 Science Class are exploring the universe as part of the new Grade 6 Science Curriculum. The students created the universe from "household junk" they brought in from home. Here is a final project of the universe created by Avery, Liam, Kailey, and Timmy.



Parker Students Engage in Debate Over Value of Electoral College

Students in Parker Teacher Andrew Spinali's Grade 7 Class began debate preparation last week on the pros and cons of the Electoral College. Students were given a side of the argument and began to prepare statements to support their side and rebuttal statements. The students will be debating the topic this week.



POST Program Students Prepare Thanksgiving Dinner

Students in the POST Program, a joint venture of the Wakefield and Reading Public Schools, prepared and served a Thanksgiving Dinner for staff last week.



Stepping Stones...

- Our thoughts and prayers go out to retired RMHS teacher **Angela Tenedios** on the recent loss a loved one.
- Congratulations to **Coolidge Math Team Coach Irene Martinoli** on the birth of her grandson, Matthew John was born on November 16th at 1:17 a.m. weighing in at 8 lbs. 10 oz. and 19" long.
- **We have posted** a new position. If interested, please visit <https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/index.aspx> to view the job detail

1.0FTE Physical Education Teacher, Coolidge Middle School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=189
Regular Education Paraeducator, 32.5 hours biweekly Joshua Eaton Elementary School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=190

Blazing Trails....

Can a Kind Culture Promote Academic Success?" Amid election-related stress and division, school leaders are called on to model a kind and humble culture in the classroom and in leadership, K-12 leadership experts Jill Berkowicz and Ann Myers suggest in this blog post. Research has shown a decline in disciplinary problems and an increase in academic performance in schools that promote kindness, they note. [Read More](#)

"15 Resources to Overcome Stress in the Classroom." In honor of National Stress Awareness Day, we've compiled a list of ASCD resources you can use to help recognize and alleviate stress in your classroom. Being an educator is stressful, being a student is stressful and working in education is stressful. That's why ASCD has put together a list of resources to help you de-stress yourself, your students and your school. [Read More](#)

"Massachusetts Instructional Tech Specialist Urges Critical Thinking." Dianne Pappafotopoulos believes it is time for a paradigm shift in the way schools offer technology education, adding in lessons on ethics and the potential downsides of tech advancements. [Read More](#)

"Boston Schools Encourage Unity for Students, Staff." The Boston Globe reports that Trump's "stunning" victory "rippled through schools in Massachusetts and beyond Wednesday, prompting administrators to offer support for students, teachers, and families and to encourage unity and tolerance." Superintendent Tommy Chang "offered advice and resources" in a letter to the city's school community, saying "counselors were available for students and staff who might have fears or concerns after Tuesday's vote." Administrators "said they believed this was the first time the district had ever offered such support after an election." [Read More](#)

"Pen Pals 2.0: Can Technology Foster Global Tolerance?" Educators around the globe are using technology to broaden students' horizons. Students in a classroom in Sejong City, South Korea, recently met peers in the US via webcam as part of a project created in collaboration with nonprofit organization Intercultural Virtual Exchange of Classroom Activities. [Read More](#)

Have a Great Week and a Happy Thanksgiving!