



Pathways

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

December 11, 2016

Volume 3, Number 15

Upcoming Dates

- 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 – (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
- December 20 – (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- December 21 – (after school) Secondary Building Meetings – Collaborative Proposal Time
- December 22 – (after school) RISE/Elementary Building Meetings – Grade Level Common Time
- December 23 – Winter breaks begins at the end of the school day
- December 24 – Chanukah begins at sundown; Christmas Eve.
- December 25 – Christmas Day
- December 26 – District Offices closed – Holiday observed; Happy Kwanzaa;

RMHS Litigation Settlement Approved by Town Meeting

For the last nine years, the Town of Reading has been in litigation with TLT Construction Company who was the general contractor for the Reading Memorial High School Construction Project. On Thursday, December 8th at a Special Town Meeting, that litigation process came to an end when Town Meeting voted to appropriate 6 million dollars to settle the lawsuit with TLT and to approve the agreement. If Town Meeting did not vote to support the agreement and approve the funding, the litigation would have continued most likely into late next year and the amount would have been closer to 6.75 million dollars. You can view a copy of the presentation given at Town Meeting and the settlement agreement [here](#). An RCTV You Tube video of Town Meeting can be accessed [here](#).

Some Details of the Case

The litigation began nine years ago as a result of two major issues, a disagreement between parties on the amount of asbestos that was removed from the demolition of the old high school structure and that the project was completed 22 months after the agreed upon deadline. This and a series of other issues led the School Committee at that time to withhold payment for work that had already been completed in the belief that the amount of liquidated damages, rejected work, and punch list work would offset amounts owed. As a result, TLT Construction Company filed a lawsuit in Middlesex Superior Court seeking payment by the Town for the amount owed. In response, the Town filed a counterclaim alleging that TLT did not complete the contract work on time and that the Town had to correct various parts of the project work that TLT did not perform, including the Town's replacement of the outdoor track and correction of site work that was done around the school. The litigation discovery process continued on for several years and in 2013, both parties agreed to refer the case to a Special Master Judge who had expertise in construction litigation. The Master Judge heard the case and in January, 2016 began to issue draft rulings on the different components of the case. Several of the draft rulings resulted in TLT's favor totaling up to this point \$2.875 million dollars, which includes the undisputed amounts withheld for work performed prior to December, 2007. In addition to the amount in the draft rulings, a 12% annual interest charge (mandated by state law) is added from the original date of the complaint in November, 2007. As a result, the current amount owed would have been a little over six million dollars.

Lessons Learned

The remaining details of the case, the settlement agreement, and how the settlement is being funded is further described in the presentation, which can be accessed at the above link. However, as was also presented at Town Meeting, we

believe there are several lessons learned from this nine year process that should be applied to any future endeavors.

The first lesson learned is the importance of a permanent building committee, consisting of town citizens who have expertise in building construction and architecture. When the RMHS Building Project was approved in 2003, there were not requirements either in Town bylaws or by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) on the composition of a School Building Committee. In 2003, there was not a permanent building committee to oversee the project, and as a result, the School Committee became the building committee. The School Committee at that time did not have the level of expertise and project oversight necessary to oversee such a complex renovation and addition building project. This seems to have led to many decisions being made by the Owner's Project Manager, the Architect, and the former Superintendent—rather than a Building Committee. In 2015, Town Meeting approved a bylaw to have a permanent Building Committee with members of different types of expertise, which has now been selected. In addition, MSBA adopted specific requirements on what roles should be on the Building Committee for School Construction Projects.

Another lesson learned is that key project decisions, such as withholding payment or entering litigation should be made with full understanding of applicable laws, including statutes governing public construction and the 12% interest accrual. During Town Meeting it was discussed that the 12% interest accrual obligation may not have been fully understood as a potential liability early in the process when decisions were made regarding litigation. It is obviously important also that legal counsel have expertise in construction litigation in order to give sound and prudent guidance. If the interest obligation was more fully understood, for instance, the withheld payments may have been paid prior to filing a lawsuit. This could have reduced the large amount of interest that accrued over the last nine years. As a result of this lesson learned, current Town Counsel is now much more integrated into the process of all decision making when it comes to possible litigation—and other expert consultation can of course also be sought when necessary if officials feel it would be beneficial to the town's interests.

Third, in order to best serve and inform our community, it is clearly essential that there be ongoing reports and greater communication among all involved in such a process—including elected officials, town counsel, special counsel, and town/school administration. In the future, the permanent Building Committee will work with Town Counsel to craft engagement terms for any special counsel services requiring regular communication and reporting. It also seems important for a Building Committee, Superintendent, and other officials to be aggressive and proactive in managing the earliest stages of possible litigation and settlement efforts.

Finally, there needs to be a more proactive approach to look at any ongoing financial risks that may arise from decisions such as litigation—and to communicate those risks on an ongoing basis. As a result, the Superintendent, Finance Director, Director of Students Services, and Assistant Superintendent will be giving quarterly updates at School Committee meetings during the financial update to communicate any potential financial risks that we need to be aware of in our district. This keeps any such topics in the forefront in order to avoid any unanticipated consequences.

Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to this week's RMHS High Fives: Taylor Perillo and Ben Fischer
- Special thanks to our music teachers and their students for the fantastic holiday performances that are occurring during this holiday season.

As Superintendent, I take this history very seriously and will work closely with appointed Town and School [leaders](#), Town and School elected officials, legal counsel, and the community in order to always ensure a proactive and strategic approach to these types of issues and other financial risk situations. It is critical of course that the limited resources that we have are spent as efficiently and effectively as possible in the best interest of students and our greater community.

Over 4,000 High School and Middle School Students Attend **RMHS Students Attend Massachusetts Youth Summit on Opioid Awareness**

On Tuesday, December 6th, students from the RMHS Interact Club and Child Development Class attended the Massachusetts Youth Summit on Opioid Awareness which was held at the Tsongas Center Arena in Lowell, Massachusetts. Over 4000 High School and Middle School students attended. Below is a story from the [December 7th edition of the Lowell Sun by Rick Sobey](#). The summit website is <http://www.drugfreeisuptome.org/>.



Youth opioid summit in Lowell 'an all-out war on addiction'

LOWELL -- Jeff Allison had a professional baseball career and millions of dollars in his hands. But then the Peabody pitcher threw it all away.

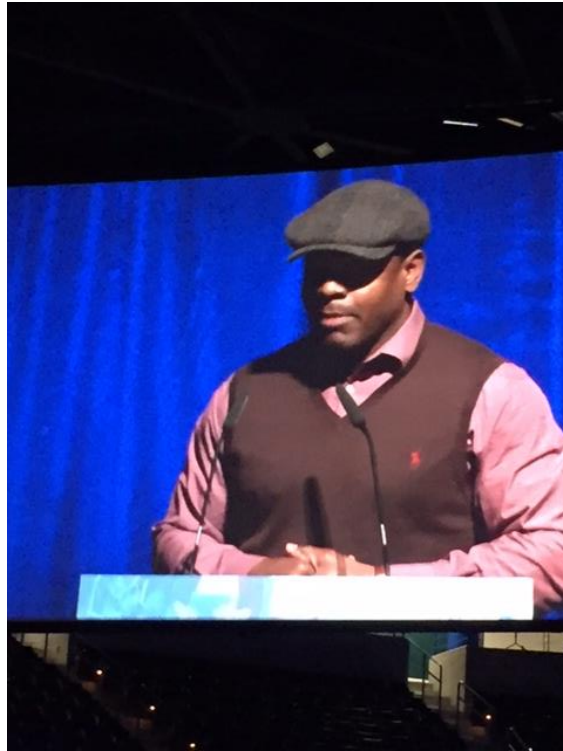
The first-round pick in the Major League Baseball draft used pills and heroin, destroying his athletic career. The former Miami Marlins pitcher hit rock bottom as his \$1.85 million contract disappeared in only three years "because of my addiction and disease."

"It was 4:30 in the morning on a December day about 10 years ago," Allison told thousands of students in Lowell on Tuesday, "and it was raining and cold, and I was only in my T-shirt, shorts and sneakers.

"I was 33 miles from my house, and I had to decide: Would I rot here or stand up and do something about it? Well, I stood up and started walking.

It was the first day of the rest of my life."

Allison and many others -- from former New England Patriots players to radio disc jockeys to James Wahlberg of The Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation -- spoke to more than 4,500 students at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell on Tuesday, the site of the first Massachusetts Youth Summit on Opioid Awareness.



Former Patriots Player Troy Brown Spoke at Summit

The Mark Wahlberg Youth Foundation presented this educational event promoting healthy choices and a drug-free lifestyle to students from Greater Lowell and across the state. It was designed to address the growing, deadly epidemic of opioid abuse.

When students entered the event, they saw the following statistic: 185 heroin-related deaths in Massachusetts from January to March of this year.

"Drug-free is up to me -- that's the message," said James Wahlberg, executive director of the youth foundation and brother of Hollywood star Mark Wahlberg. "It's up to you to make healthy choices for yourself."

"This is an all-out war on addiction," added Troy Brown, a three-time Super Bowl champion with the Patriots.

He told the audience that he rejected painkillers after knee surgery years ago.

"Hopefully you can make a decision like I made and say, 'No. I don't need that. I can deal with the pain,' " said Brown, wearing his three Super Bowl rings on his left hand.

The event featured a showing of "If Only," a short film co-produced by James Wahlberg with support from Recovery Centers of America and Millennium Health. The film tells the story of

Quote of the Week . . .



Be thankful for all the struggles you go through. They make you stronger, wiser and humble. Don't let it break you. Let it make you.

-Unknown

two teenagers battling addiction to prescription opiates. One of the boys gets help to beat the addiction, while the other dies of an overdose.

Then the ending of the movie has dozens of names, one after another, accompanied by a shot of someone holding a picture of the brother, sister, son, daughter, mother or father lost to opiate addiction.

Following the movie, more than 50 family members went on stage for a moment of silence in honor of their loved ones lost to an opioid overdose. They, too, held photographs of their loved ones.



"We cannot and will not lose this next generation to this insidious disease," said Louise Griffin, of Lowell, who lost her son, Zachary Gys to an opiate overdose in 2013 at age 21.

Robert Wahlberg, another brother of the actor, appears in the film. He told students on Tuesday, "Don't put your parents in this group (on stage)."

Others who spoke included former Patriots player Matt Light, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration special agent Jon Delena and Lowell boxing legend Micky Ward, who was portrayed by Mark Wahlberg in "The Fighter."

This summit was the state's largest gathering of youth to directly address this crisis, organizers said. There were more than 700 students from Lowell, and others from Greater Lowell Tech, Tewksbury and Dracut, among others.

At the end of the event, organizers handed out opioid safety tips, provided by the Rotary Club of Littleton.

Follow Rick Sobey on Twitter and Tout @rsobeyLSun.

Disney Tweet of the Week



I know every mile will be worth my while. When I go the distance, I'll be right where I belong.

—Hercules

Reading ELA Teachers Involved in Literacy Training

Some teachers of English Language Arts have been using the book *DIY Literacy: Teaching Tools for Differentiation, Rigor, and Independence* by Kate Roberts and Maggie Beattie Roberts, as part of their PLC collaboration in order to identify effective instructional strategies for reading and writing, to motivate students to reach for new learning goals, and to better differentiate instruction for their students. Author Maggie Roberts virtually joined this week's PLC meeting in person (via Google Hangout) to discuss several components of the book with teachers.



Improving Student Engagement in High-School Classrooms

"Student engagement in school is fundamental to positive educational and life outcomes, including learning, achievement, graduation, and persistence in higher education," say Kristy Cooper, Tara Kintz, and Andrew Miness (Michigan State University) in this *American Journal of Education* article. "By contrast, disengagement can be a precursor to negative outcomes, including low achievement, social and emotional withdrawal, and dropping out." What are the key variables in capturing and maintaining students' engagement? To answer this question, Cooper, Kintz, and Miness worked for three years in a diverse suburban Texas high school that had made student engagement its main priority. Each year, the researchers surveyed the school's 2,380 students on their perceptions of engagement and other classrooms factors, and also conducted PD sessions sharing research on engagement and helping teachers interpret their student survey data.

In preparation for their work in the school, Cooper, Kintz, and Miness synthesized research on factors that produce high student engagement in classrooms, starting with three broad categories:

- Behavioral engagement – participating, staying on task, and completing assignments;
- Emotional engagement – feeling happy, interested, and comfortable in class;
- Cognitive engagement – exerting mental effort to learn.
- Classroom climate – Students have a sense of belonging in a caring, structured learning environment with high, clear, and fair expectations.

Important Websites

RPS District Website

www.reading.k12.ma.us

Interface Health Services

<https://interface.williamjames.edu/community/reading>

Need help finding mental health care?



The Town of Reading has contracted with a unique **HELPLINE** service staffed by licensed clinicians that can help children, teens, & adults in Reading become connected with mental health care. Get provider matches that meet your specific needs, accepts your insurance & has available appointments.

Call 1-888-244-6843 (toll free) • M-F • 9am-5pm
<https://interface.williamjames.edu/>

- Teacher support – In their relationships with teachers, students form an emotional connection to the teacher and content.
- Academic rigor – There is an academic tone, high cognitive demand, and students are pushed to work hard.
- Lively teaching and active learning – Students have opportunities to learn in groups and work on projects that have real-life relevance.
- Efficacy – Students feel competent and have a degree of autonomy in the classroom.

None of this is new to most educators, which made the researchers wonder why some classrooms still have low student engagement. Perhaps, they speculated, “the problem rests in getting necessary information to teachers, framing that information in actionable steps for increasing engagement, and finding way to penetrate teachers’ existing belief systems so that new information impacts teachers’ practice.”

In the Texas school, that’s where the student surveys and PD sessions came in. Cooper, Kintz, and Miness surveyed all students in November of each year (2011, 2012, and 2013) and shared the results with teachers at a February PD session. Teachers got their results in a sealed envelope at the end of the meeting (the data were not given to administrators). Following each year’s PD session, the researchers conducted focus-group discussions with several groups of 5-8 teachers to assess their reactions to the survey and discuss what it told them about student engagement in their classrooms. Teachers weren’t asked to divulge their personal student-survey results; rather, the discussion focused on classroom engagement research and possible changes in their instructional practices.

Over the three years, student engagement (as measured on a 5-4-3-2-1 scale) improved slightly, from 3.52 to 3.84. The percent of students who reported being highly engaged went from 17% to 31%, those saying they were moderately engaged decreased from 33% to 22%, and those who said they were slightly engaged dropped from 10% to 6%. Since there were several initiatives being implemented in the school (including Schlechty’s *Working on the Work*), it was hard to pinpoint which factors were most important.

The researchers analyzed transcripts of all the focus-groups to compare the responses of teachers whose students rated them high and low on engagement. The differences were quite striking. High-engagement teachers were:

- Much more open to information from the PD sessions and student surveys and much more likely to integrate it into their practice;
- More likely to notice students’ level of engagement on their faces and modify classroom strategies or make sure troubled students saw a counselor;
- More likely to tune into students’ outside-of-school problems and address them in class or in private conversations;
- More likely to prioritize the Texas curriculum standards and work to make them engaging;
- More reflective about instruction, open-minded, inquisitive, and adaptive, with a stronger sense of agency. “There are things you can do to change engagement,” said one teacher. “It’s not just luck, or happenstance.”

By contrast, teachers who were rated lower on engagement by their students were:

- More likely to see survey results as confirming what they already believed rather than sparking reflection;
- Less likely to see students' responses as providing guidance for improving their teaching;
- More removed, abstract, and theoretical when talking about their teaching, using phrases like "teachers should do" rather than "I do";
- More likely to feel overwhelmed by the Texas curriculum standards and see them as impossible to get through and engage students;
- Lacking in a sense of agency about being able to change and improve student engagement, often ascribing students' lack of engagement to negative factors outside the school or just the way students were. "There's a pattern in the family, you know," said one teacher. "Brother dropped out. Now younger brother's gonna say, 'Look, why should I care?'... How do you teach this kid?" Another teacher said, "The motivation for education comes from the home."

The researchers drew several major conclusions from their intervention and analysis of the data:

First, all teachers in the study said they believed student engagement was important in their classrooms. They heard the administration's emphasis on engagement loud and clear and at least gave lip service to the issue.

Second, despite the availability of student survey data and the three PD sessions on engagement, there was almost no change in the level of student engagement in different teachers' classrooms – that is, teachers whose students reported high engagement at the beginning of the study were still rated high on engagement three years later, and teachers whose students rated them lower in engagement were still that way at the end. "These consistencies," say Cooper, Kintz, and Mines, "suggest that broad increases in engagement are unlikely to come from the type of PD and survey data we used alone." This might have been because the administrators in the Texas school presented the PD and survey results without requiring teachers to make changes in their classrooms, perhaps believing that the information by itself was enough to spark improvements.

Third, there was a striking difference in how high-engagement and low-engagement teachers used the information they received in the PD and surveys. "High-engagement teachers," say the authors, "certainly encountered the same obstacles as low-engagement teachers (such as those from the accountability system and students' lives outside school), but they persisted in facing these challenges and believed they could increase engagement. By contrast, low-engagement teachers were more likely to view obstacles as insurmountable and to feel unable to engage students who faced those obstacles, despite the teachers' desire to do so."

Fourth, what distinguished the two groups was teachers' *sense of agency*. High-engagement teachers clearly had a growth mindset, believing they could change and their students could change. Low-engagement teachers had a fixed mindset – much more fatalistic about the way people are and will be.

Fifth, Cooper, Kintz, and Mines believe it's possible to change teachers' sense of agency through a somewhat different intervention. While some teachers are naturally

inclined to use information from PD and student surveys to fine-tune their teaching, others need more personalized support and direction through one-on-one coaching or collaborative groups. The researchers also believe PD should explicitly address mindsets and agency, using the work of Carol Dweck and others to address teachers' thinking and nudge them into a more reflective, adaptive approach to their students. Finally, supervisors and instructional support staff should get teachers to try different approaches, notice students' reactions, and develop a sense that they can actually change results.

"Reflectiveness, Adaptivity, and Support: How Teacher Agency Promotes Student Engagement" by Kristy Cooper, Tara Kintz, and Andrew Miness in *American Journal of Education*, November 2016 (Vol. 123, #1, p. 109-136),

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/688168>; Cooper can be reached at kcooper@msu.edu. Reprinted from Marshall Memo 664.

Reading Public Schools Happenings

RMHS Book Club Book Drive

During this time of year, there are several charity drives that are led by our students. One such drive was conducted recently by the RMHS Book Club, under the direction of RMHS Teacher Kara Gleason, which organized a book drive for new children's and young adult books. Nearly 100 books were dropped off at Lazarus House in Lawrence on Friday to be distributed as holiday gifts to children and teens living in poverty. A big thanks to all of the students and faculty who supported the drive.

Below are photos of RMHS Book Club leaders Srimitha Srinivasan, Anson Huang, and Jackie Lermond packing boxes and dropping them off at Lazarus House.



RMHS Book Club Members Srimitha Srinivasan, Anson Huang, and Jackie Lermond

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

Rotary Club Distributes Book Bags and Reads to Kindergarten Students

This past week and continuing the next two weeks, the Reading Rotary Club is visiting all Kindergarten Classrooms in the School District and distributing book bags and reading some stories to students. A special thanks goes out to the members of the Reading Rotary Club for donating their time for this worthwhile cause. A special thanks goes out to the Elementary Librarians for coordinating this event in their schools.



Coolidge Concert

Last week, the Coolidge Middle School performed their annual winter holiday concert. Below is a photo from the event.



Coolidge Hour of Code

Recently, Coolidge Middle School conducted an Hour of Code event with Grade 4 students at the Birch Meadow Elementary to celebrate Computer Science Week and encourage students to learn coding. Students used the free programming language, Scratch, to create their own animations. Below are some pictures of the event. Special thanks goes to Coolidge teachers Marcia Grant and Chris Steinhauer, and Birch Meadow Teachers Patti Beckman, Tammy Murzycki, Melissa Kirby and Katherine Breen for coordinating the event.



Reading Memorial High School
HIGH FIVE CLUB



**TAYLOR
PERILLO**
Class of '17

Taylor Perillo is being recognized for her leadership and for her excellence in academics, athletics, and service. Taylor is an Honor Roll student, who demonstrates perseverance in her studies and has particularly enjoyed Spanish and History. Athletically, Taylor has been a four year varsity member of the compete and cheerleading teams, as well as the softball team. This year, she is also the captain of both teams, and in cheering, helped the Rockets to once again win the Middlesex League Championship, where they scored the highest overall at this year's competition. In softball, Taylor has helped the team qualify for the tournament in consecutive years--most notably winning the Middlesex League in 2015 and then making it to the State Championship. Playing 3rd base and pitcher, Taylor was recognized as a Middlesex League All-Star in 2016 and is excited about this upcoming season. Taylor also finds time to volunteer as a Pop Warner cheerleading coach and has helped the A cheer team to qualify for the National Competition at Disney World. Next fall, Taylor will be attending college and pursuing a career in nursing. Congratulations, Taylor!

Reading Memorial High School
HIGH FIVE CLUB



**BEN
FISCHER**
Class of '17

Ben Fischer is being recognized for his leadership and for his outstanding achievement in academics, athletics, and service. Ben is an Honor Roll student, who embraces the rigor of all of his classes here at RMHS and has particularly enjoyed the discussions and topics of History. Athletically, Ben has excelled as a four year member of the baseball and football teams, helping the Rockets to successful tournament runs during his time here at RMHS. Ben was also named as a Middlesex League All-Star in football and serves this year as one of the captains helping to lead the team to yet another Super Bowl appearance at Gillette Stadium. Beyond the walls of RMHS, Ben finds the time to volunteer with Special Olympics, helping children with disabilities to enjoy fun events such as bowling among other things. He also gives back to his community by serving as a Eucharistic Minister at St. Agnes Church. Next year, Ben will be attending college and will be pursuing a major in finance. Congratulations, Ben!

Stepping Stones...

- Congratulations to Joshua Eaton teacher **LeeAnn Atkinson** on her recent engagement.
- Congratulations to RMHS custodian **Moe Hillis** on the birth of his grandson John on November 4th weighing 7 lbs. 13.8 oz. and 20 1/2 inches long.
- We welcome the following new staff to the Reading Public Schools:
 - ✓ Kristen Gohr, Substitute, District
 - ✓ Linda Trimble, Substitute, District
- **We have posted** a new position. If interested, please visit <https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/index.aspx> to view the job detail

After School Head Teacher, RISE Preschool https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=196
Long Term Substitute 3rd Grade Teacher, 1.0FTE Killam Elementary School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=197
Long Term Substitute School Psychologist, 1.0FTE Birch Meadow Elementary School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=198
Long Term Substitute School Psychologist, 1.0FTE Joshua Eaton Elementary School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=199

- **Sights of Reading Calendar Now On Sale**-The 2017 Sights of Reading calendar is now available with 12 beautiful photos of Reading that could adorn your wall for all of 2017. The profits will support the high school girls' community service efforts in Reading as well as the Reading Girl Scout Achievement Award. The calendars can be purchased at The Hitching Post or you can go to www.sightsofreading.com for further information.
- **Reading Education Foundation Thanks Tree Donors**-The Reading Education Foundation (REF) would like to thank everyone for their tree and/or silent auction donation to our 15th Annual Festival of Trees. This year you assisted us in raising over \$25,000 which we will use to fund teacher initiated grants throughout Reading Public Schools that go beyond the normal scope of the classroom.

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

- Most Unusual Tree: Tin Bucket
- Most Creative Tree: Lee Kimball and DKJ Foundation
- Favorite Tree: Reading Education Foundation
- Best Under Tree Display: Rocket Independent Video
- Best Tree Topper: J.W. Killam PTO
- Best Youth Sports Tree: Reading Youth Field Hockey
- Most Spectacular Tree: Reading Education Foundation

Big plans are already in the works to celebrate our 16th Annual Festival of Trees and we want you to be a part of it! Remember: trees and ornaments go on sale on December 26th at most retailers, so get your tree items at a discount for next year! We truly appreciate your support! We wish you all best for a happy and healthy 2017!

Blazing Trails....

"Massachusetts BOE Considering Mandating Special Needs Have Access To Recovery

Schools." The Gloucester Times reports that the Massachusetts Board of Education is considering making "it easier for special education students to attend one of the state's five recovery high schools," which "were established in 2005 to help students struggling with

drug and alcohol addiction." Advocates for the schools "say some school districts have balked at sending special education students because recovery schools are not approved special education schools." The new proposed rules "say a special education student with addiction problems has the right to attend a recovery school and compels local districts to work with the recovery school to create an education plan for the student." [Read More](#)

"Teachers' Ratings May No Longer be Tied to Students' Test Scores." The state's education commissioner, aiming to end a long-brewing controversy, is proposing to scrap a rule requiring school systems to develop individual ratings for teachers and administrators based solely on student test scores. "I heard loud and clear from teacher unions and administrators that having a separate rating has more downsides than upsides," Mitchell Chester, commissioner of elementary and secondary education, said in an interview. His proposal, however, would not entirely do away with the use of student test scores in evaluating teachers and administrators, prompting mixed reaction to the proposal Tuesday. Instead, it would require school systems to fold the scores into a separate system of judging educator performance: the annual job review, a process that has been based largely on observations, and a review of other evidence, such as lesson plans. [Read More](#)

"Millions Have Dyslexia, Few Understand It." Is dyslexia the most misunderstood learning disability? As many as 17% of people in the United States have dyslexia, and it is the most common learning disability, but a range of misperceptions prevent widespread understanding of it. NPR, in the first part of an "Unlocking Dyslexia" series, reports the disability is not tied to a lack of comprehension or having a low IQ, and it is not simply a matter of confusing the order of letters in words - dyslexics have a hard time seeing words on the page and connecting letters with their proper sounds. [Read More](#)

"Eight Questions for Better Lessons." Find out what students have previously learned that relates to what you are teaching. Your lesson plan will build upon that foundation. Otis Kriegel, a veteran elementary and middle school teacher, gives multiple tips to build a stronger lesson plan for both novice and veteran teachers in this ASCD Education Leadership article. [Read More](#)

"Finnish Teachers Report More Autonomy Than American Counterparts." The Atlantic reports on the experience of Kristiina Chartouni, a veteran Finnish educator who began teaching American high-school students this autumn, and other Finnish teachers working in American schools. The Atlantic says that she "has encountered a different teaching environment from the one she was used to in her Nordic homeland - one in which she feels like she's 'under a microscope.'" The report says "she's adjusting to relatively frequent observations and evaluations of her teaching, something she never experienced in her home country." Meanwhile, according to a National Center for Education Statistics report, "teacher autonomy is positively associated with teachers' job satisfaction and retention. And while most U.S. public-school teachers report a moderate amount of control in the classroom, many say they have little autonomy." [Read More](#)

Have a Great Week!