



Pathways

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

December 18, 2016

Volume 3, Number 16

Upcoming Dates

- 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;
- January 1 – Happy New Year
- January 2 – New Year's Holiday Observed – Schools and Offices Closed
- January 3 – Welcome Back
- January 5 – (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Superintendent's Conference Room
- January 6 – (7:00 p.m.) RMHS Drama Improvosaurus Show in the Endslo PAC

Thank You To Our Teachers and Staff

As we reflect on this holiday season and enter our final week before the winter break, we wanted to take a moment to thank our teachers and staff for what they do each and every day. Over the past several months, our staff, our schools, and our school district has faced some significant challenges ranging from the loss of colleagues, to disappointment and discouragement around our fiscal challenges, and to the personal struggles that individual staff and families and students have faced. In spite of those challenges they are doing amazing work in classrooms. This is a credit to their dedication, their perseverance, and their values as an educator. The results may not be immediate, but down the road the time that they have invested in helping a child will have an impact on them. As the historian Henry Adams once said, "A Teacher affects eternity, he/she can never tell where his/her influence stops."

To celebrate the work of our teachers we wanted to share with you a story which you may have heard at some point in your lives. The story, originally written by Elizabeth Silance Ballard in 1976, describes the work of a teacher, Mrs. Thompson, and the impact that she had on a little boy, Teddy Stoddard, who was struggling and heading down the wrong path. At first, Mrs. Stoddard was very skeptical that she would be able to help Teddy, but one significant moment changed her perspective. This story reminds us that teachers are some of the greatest leaders and most impactful people in our society. In the spirit of the holiday season, we hope this story is meaningful to you and the impact that our teachers have on students.

On behalf of the Reading Public Schools, I wish you a happy and healthy holiday season.

The Teddy Stoddard Story

By Elizabeth Silance Ballard

As she stood in front of her 5th grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big 'F' at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise.

Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, 'Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around.'

His second grade teacher wrote, 'Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle.'

His third grade teacher wrote, 'His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken.'

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, 'Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class.' By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself.. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume.. But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, 'Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to.'

After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her 'teacher's pets.'

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer.... The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story does not end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his

Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to this week's RMHS High Fives: Celine Bove and Ben Cooper
- Special thanks to our music teachers and their students for the fantastic holiday performances that are occurring during this holiday season.
- Congratulations to the boys and girls hockey teams and the boys and girls basketball teams for opening the season with wins this week.

father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. Moreover, she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

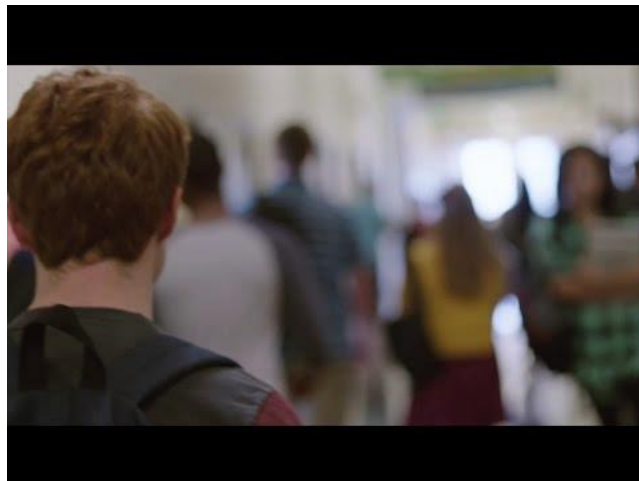
They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, 'Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference.'

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back.. She said, 'Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you.'

The Sandy Hook Promise

This past week, our country marked the fourth anniversary of an unexplainable tragedy when 20 children and 6 educators were killed in a school shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. This school shooting, along with the many other school shootings that have occurred in the last four years, reinforces the importance of the work that we are doing in our school district to foster positive relationships with our students and to address their social and emotional needs. To that end, a national non-profit organization called the **Sandy Hook Promise** has been formed with the mission of providing programs and practices that protect children from gun violence. One of the pages on the website talks about **knowing the signs** of people who are at-risk of hurting themselves or others before an act of violence takes place. When you don't know what to look for, it can be easy to miss signs, or dismiss them as unimportant, sometimes with tragic consequences. It's important to know that one warning sign on its own does not mean a person is planning an act of violence. But when many connected or cumulative signs are observed over a period of time, it could mean that the person is heading down a pathway towards violence or self-harm. By knowing the signs, we have the power to intervene and get help for that person. Our actions can save lives.

On that website is a short, but powerful two minute video about a high school student named Evan. You can watch it [here](#).



Superintendent's Office

Hours this Week

All are welcome

12/21 (8:00-9:00 a.m.)-
Joshua Eaton

12/22 (2:30-3:30 p.m.)-
Wood End

Four Ways Teachers Can Reduce Implicit Bias

By Jill Suttie for **Greater Good E-Newsletter**

We're all subject to bias. Here are tips to help teachers treat all of their students with dignity and care.

A friend of mine recently told me about an incident involving students at Berkeley High School. On the first day of classes, African-American juniors and seniors were being asked by their honors course teacher to show him their schedule when they entered the classroom. The teacher, who was white, apparently assumed the black students were lost and in the wrong room, and his gesture made them feel unwelcome and humiliated.

This is an example of implicit bias—a behavior that arises from subconscious associations, which may even contradict someone's explicit values. Implicit racial bias plays a role in many classrooms and schools with potentially devastating effects. **In one recent experiment** with preschool teachers, researchers found that when teachers were primed to look for behavioral problems while watching a classroom video with black and white children (none of whom were misbehaving), teachers gazed much longer at black children than white children, as if anticipating the behavioral problems would come from the black children.

In another experiment from the same study, teachers read a vignette about a behavioral problem with a preschooler randomly identified as a black boy, black girl, white boy, or white girl, and then were given details about the child's background or not. Providing the background information on the child increased the severity of suggested disciplinary actions when the race of the teacher didn't match that of the child, supporting the idea that we are more inclined to punish those with who look different from us.

In fact, disciplinary actions are **more likely to be perpetuated against African Americans—**boys, in particular—than any other group of students, regardless of the infraction. And while it's understandable that teachers would want to prevent disruptions in the classrooms and take actions to avoid them, some seem to have little idea of how to do that without turning to ingrained biases.

Of course, teachers are not alone in having racial biases. Their behavior reflects how social messages are hard to escape, **even for people of color**. But studies like these show how racial disparities can be perpetuated in classrooms, too. If left unchecked, this kind of biased treatment can haunt a student well into elementary school and beyond, making the promise of "schools as the great social equalizers" a false one.

The good news is that teachers *can* learn to combat their prejudice, even the implicit kind, if they become more aware of it and take steps to actively fight it in themselves. Here are some of the ways that might help educators treat all of their students with dignity and care.

1. Cultivate awareness of their biases

Teachers are human and therefore influenced by psychological biases, like the **fundamental attribution error**, when we assume that others who behave in a certain way do so because of their character (a fixed trait) rather than in response to environmental circumstances. **In-group bias** leads us to assign positive characteristics and motivations to people who are similar to us.

Biases like these are natural, used as cognitive shorthand for making quick social judgments in ambiguous situations, especially those involving people from unfamiliar ethnic or social groups. They become a problem when we're not aware of their impact on other people. And if we're part of a majority group with more social, economic, or political power than a minority one, then accumulated unconscious bias can be extremely destructive, limiting the life opportunities and hurting the well-being of the minority group.

Quote of the Week . . .



Obstacles are placed in our way to see if what we want is really worth fighting for.

-Unknown

Many researchers believe that becoming more aware of our biases can help us improve our interactions with others, decrease our sense of unease in interracial contexts, and **make better decisions**. Though most of this research has been done with other professional groups or the general public, the same lessons are likely to apply to teachers.

However, many teachers feel pressures not to cop to those biases, perhaps out of fear they will be accused of racism. This leaves them blind to the ways that biases work at an unconscious level. Pretending to be colorblind is *not* helpful and in fact adhering to a color-blind philosophy has been shown **to increase implicit bias**, at least in college students. Admitting that we are all subject to biases creates a safer space to examine them more carefully and to take steps to fight them.

2. Work to increase empathy and empathic communication

Empathy—the ability to understand another’s perspective and emotions—is important in all human social encounters, including teaching. Yet, often teachers have little understanding of the communities where their students live and have trouble understanding their perspectives, leading them to treat these students more harshly.

One solution: learning about the lives of students and **showing that you care**. At least **one study** has found that actively trying to take the perspective of another person—as opposed to trying to be “objective”—increased one’s ability to not fall prey to stereotypical views of others. Actively inducing empathy for another person **has been tied** to a willingness to consider environmental circumstances more closely when handing out punishments for misbehavior. And, **one recent study** has found that training teachers in empathy cut down student suspension rates in half.

Though perhaps more research has been done on empathy in other professionals (such as **physicians and police officers**), teachers may want to take note of the ways that they have learned **to increase their empathy** through a combination of stress reduction, learning how to manage difficult emotions, and practicing empathic communication. **Treating students with kindness** and consideration is a sure way to bring out kindness in them, too.

3. Practice mindfulness and loving-kindness

Mindfulness practices—such as paying attention in a nonjudgmental way to one’s breath or other sensations—has been shown to **decrease stress in teachers**, which can indirectly have an effect on reducing bias. But according to **some research**, mindfulness may also have a direct effect on bias reduction as well.

In **one study**, young white participants who listened to a 10-minute audiotape with instructions in mindfulness showed less implicit bias towards blacks and older people than those who listened to a 10-minute discussion of nature. This suggests that nonjudgmental awareness, even when not specifically focused on reducing prejudice, can help reduce unconscious biases.

Loving-kindness meditation—a practice that involves consciously sending out compassionate thoughts toward others—may also help. In **a recent study**, the random assignment of a short-term loving-kindness meditation reduced implicit bias toward a targeted group, though it didn’t decrease implicit bias for other groups not targeted by the meditation.

4. Develop cross-group friendships in their own lives

While it’s important to take steps in the classroom, the relationships we form outside of the classroom can also have an impact on bias.

Disney Tweet of the Week



“The flower that blooms
in adversity is the rarest
and most beautiful of
all.”

—Mulan

Cross-group friendships have been shown in several studies **to decrease stress** in intergroup situations, **to decrease prejudice** toward outgroup members, and **to decrease one's preference for social hierarchy** or domination over lower-status groups. These findings alone might encourage teachers to seek out cross-group friendships in their lives so that they can be more receptive to the diverse students they find in their classrooms.

Another reason for teachers to consider developing cross-group friendships is that they may influence their students to do the same. When people see **cross-group friendships** working out in positive ways, they tend to be more willing to engage in cross-group friendships themselves.

In addition, positive cross-group friendships can have **contagion effects** in other people within social groups, turning whole communities into warmer, more receptive spaces for cross-group interactions. All of this bodes well for teachers role-modeling the kind of behavior they want to see in their students.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean teachers should indiscriminately approach someone just because they are from a different racial group. Instead, teachers can reach out to colleagues at work, or get involved in activities or perhaps attend events where people with different backgrounds and perspectives come together for a common cause. Developing friendships can be one of the best ways to break down barriers of prejudice, and it's more easily done when people have some common interests.

Is this a lot to ask, given all the burdens our society heaps on teachers? Perhaps. Teachers should get more support than they do, and, ideally, school districts should make reducing implicit bias a priority backed up with money, policy, and training. Individual teachers can only do so much.

Luckily, the teaching profession tends to attract altruists who *want* to teach in a way that helps their students. By working at countering implicit bias in themselves, they can truly make a difference in the lives of their students, making them feel safe, cared for, and welcome in the classroom.

Information about events honoring Jolene Tewksbury

As you know, Birch Meadow teacher, Jolene Tewksbury, passed away unexpectedly in July. Over the summer the Birch Meadow Community had two community open houses to celebrate and mourn together and at the beginning of this year staff worked with students, especially 4th and 5th graders, to process her passing.

We are now planning some community events to celebrate Mrs. Tewksbury's life and work. On **Thursday, January 19th at 6:30 p.m.** there will be a meeting at Birch Meadow School to share some of the plans and get community input. Currently we are thinking about a celebration day in the spring "Together for Tewksbury" with funds raised to go toward a Jolene Tewksbury Scholarship. The Jump Rope challenge in the late winter will raise funds for this scholarship as well.

We will need many hands to make this work, so please come on January 19th if you are able to donate your time and gifts in honor of Mrs. Tewksbury. If you have any questions, please contact Birch Meadow Principal Julia Hendrix at Julia.Hendrix@reading.k12.ma.us.

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/>

Reading Public Schools Happenings

RMHS Financial Literacy Class Learns How to Buy a Car

Last week the RMHS Financial Literacy Class, under the direction of Shelley Lynch heard a presentation from Tiffany Souther and Brian McCaffery of Reading Honda Gallery about Buying/Leasing a car. The presenters provided the following valuable advice

- Know the difference between your needs and your wants and stay within your budget.
- Do your homework. It can take approx. 24 hours to research a car that fits your budget and lifestyle.
- Do not buy the car the day you look at it. Go home and sleep on it. A deal good that day is also good the next day.
- Don't be pressured into making a decision. Walk out if you are not comfortable.
- Research yourself such as your credit score as this will impact your finance rate.



RMHS Financial Literacy Class

RMHS Entrepreneurship Class Learns About Owning and Operating a Franchise

This past week the RMHS Entrepreneurship Class, under the direction of Shelley Lynch, heard a presentation from RMHS graduate and Reading resident Matthew Donnelly, who is the owner of the franchise "The Maids."

Matt presented a wealth of knowledge about owning and operating a franchising and what it takes to be successful. (persistence, networking, servicing the customer by meeting the customer's needs)



RMHS Entrepreneurship Class

A World of Difference Club Receives Donation from Reading Cooperative Bank

Recently, the Reading Cooperative Bank, a partner with the Reading Public Schools, gave a donation to the A World of Difference Club to help with expenses and training. Below is a picture of the AWOD Leadership Council and Advisor Heather Connor receiving the donation from Reading Cooperative Bank Branch Manager Michael Foley. We are very appreciative of the support that we receive from the Reading Cooperative Bank.



Killam Hour of Code

This past week, students at Killam Elementary School were involved in Hour of Code activities. As part of these activities, the students heard a presentation from Jessica Kaufman, Endicott Engineering Professor and Killam parent, who demonstrated how to program a Nao robot at the Hour of Code Kick Off Assembly. Funds from the Reading Education Foundation Grant were used to purchase coding robots. A special thanks goes out to Professor Kaufman and Killam Library Media Specialist Kim Adamo.



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



Barrows Students Donate Food to Reading Food Pantry

Recently, Barrows Student Council students loaded up the cars with dozens and dozens of can goods and non-perishable foods for the Reading Food Pantry. Congratulations to Barrows for a great job!



Reading Memorial High School
HIGH FIVE CLUB



**MEGHAN
DALEY**
Class of '17

Meghan Daley is being recognized for her outstanding achievement in academics, athletics and service. Meghan is an outstanding student and is a member of the National Honor Society. She has a passion for Math and the Sciences and is particularly fond of Chemistry and Anatomy & Physiology. Athletically, Meghan has excelled as a 3-year member of the girls varsity volleyball team, serving this year as one of the captains. Helping the Lady Rockets win a Middlesex League Championship in 2015-16, as well as an appearance in the Division 1 North Semi-Finals, Meghan received League All-Star recognition for two consecutive seasons. This season, however, was Meghan's finest, as she dominated the Middlesex League with a record number of kills, earning her the Most Valuable Player award and All-State Honors. Off the court, Meghan also has found time to teach CCD to 4th graders at St. Agnes Church, as well as coach volleyball to elementary and middle school aged children through the Reading Recreation Department. Every Halloween, Meghan also assists Birch Meadow and Joshua Eaton Elementary Schools with their annual Halloween Howl event. Next year, she will be attending college and will be majoring in either Math or one of the Sciences. Congratulations, Meghan!

Reading Memorial High School
HIGH FIVE CLUB



**PETER
SQUEGLIA**
Class of '17

Peter "Squigs" Squeglia is being recognized for his outstanding performance in academics, athletics, activities, and service. Academically, Peter challenges himself with a rigorous course load, currently taking two AP courses in European History and Statistics. Athletically, Peter was one of the captains of this year's golf team and received Middlesex League All-Star recognition, helping the Rockets to a League Title and participating in the annual Middlesex League Shootout. In hockey and lacrosse, Peter captained last year's JV hockey team to an impressive 12-3 record and has served as a 4-year member of the boys varsity lacrosse team that has earned two consecutive Middlesex League Championships. In activities, Peter has been a 3-year participant in the annual Misster RMHS and is also a member of the Improvasaurus Club. Additionally, he is an active member of Student Council-- helping to organize this year's Pep Rally --acting as one of the event's very entertaining MC's. Peter also helped MC the 2016 Powderpuff Game--making its debut under the lights. Outside of RMHS, Peter finds the time to volunteer with Special Skates, where he teaches children with disabilities how to skate and also supervises children ages 5-7 at St. Joseph's School in Wakefield. During the summers, you can also find "Squigs" eating ice cream and passing out golf clubs at Hago Harrington's in Stoneham. Next year, Peter will be attending college and majoring in Business. Congratulations, Peter!

Stepping Stones...

- Congratulations to Joshua Eaton teacher **Jessica Cornetta** on the birth of her son Joseph John on December 13th weighing 6 lbs., 10 oz.
- Our thoughts go out to Killam Secretary **Priscilla Osterlind** who recently had surgery.
- We welcome the following new staff to the Reading Public Schools:
 - ✓ Molly Lynch, Substitute, District
 - ✓ Thomas Lynch, Special Education Paraeducator, Coolidge
 - ✓ Maria Koehler, Substitute, District
- **We have posted** a new position. If interested, please visit <https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/index.aspx> to view the job detail

Regular Education Paraeducator, 34 hours biweekly Barrows Elementary School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=200
Per Diem Custodial Substitute https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=201
Mathematics/Technology Integration Teacher, 1.0FTE Reading Memorial High School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=203
Assistant Football Coach, Reading Memorial High School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=204

Blazing Trails....

"The Risks of Guesstimating Homework Time." Studies show that homework is ineffective beyond a certain amount per night. In this Edutopia post, educator Stacey Goodman points out how many teachers guess how much time their homework should take their students, but often these guesses are not correct. [Read More](#)

"How Do You Judge a School? Mass. Looks to Expand the Criteria." The Boston Globe reports that officials in Massachusetts "are looking to broaden the way school performances are judged to comply with new federal standards, moving beyond test scores and graduation rates to other measures, such as the atmosphere a school creates and availability of art, music and college-level courses." State Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester said, "We want to make sure that collectively the indicators in the system provide more signals than noise," adding, "One concern I have is if we have too many signals, it might not be clear where things are going well and where schools need to buckle down." [Read More](#)

"Why Play is Essential for the Classroom." When play is taken out of the curriculum it hurts our students in all areas of development. A standardized test is not going to help a child develop social or problem-solving skills. A student's education should be based off of what is going to help them grow in all areas of development as mentioned in this ASCD Inservice blog post. [Read More](#)

"PISA Results Reveal Mixed Bag for US Students." US students performed near average in science and reading on the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment. However, assessment data released today show a dip in math performance on the exam. [Read More](#)

Have a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season!