



# Pathways

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

January 24, 2020

Volume 7, Number 14

## Upcoming Dates

- January 27 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester begins @ Middle & High School; (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Schettini Library; FY21 Budget Vote
- January 29 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (6:30 p.m.) RMHS Guidance Sophomore Parent Night in the RMHS PAC
- February 6 – (7:00 p.m.) School Committee Meeting in the Schettini Library
- February 11 – (7:00 p.m.) SEPAC Meeting in the Schettini Library
- February 12 – (6:30 p.m.) RMHS Future Freshman Night @ RMHS
- February 17 – Presidents Day – No School/Offices Closed
- February 18 – 21 – February Vacation – No School/Offices Open
- February 26 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (10:30 a.m.) SEPAC Meeting @ Reading Public Library

## FY21 Budget Process and Timeline

Based on known and projected needs, district and school administrators developed the FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget using the financial guidance provided by the Finance Committee in October 2019. This process will continue throughout the month of January when budget presentations for each cost center will be given to the School Committee, who will deliberate the Superintendent's Recommended budget and take a final vote on January 27, 2020.

The budget process for the next fiscal year begins 11 months in advance with the analysis of enrollment and performance data; the development and refinement of district, school, and educator goals based on the needs of students and performance gaps; and the identification of resources needed to achieve effective progress towards those goals and objectives. This part of the process begins at the start of the school year and is completed by the end of October.

In mid-October, as part of the budget process, the town convenes its annual Financial Forum, a joint meeting of the elected and appointed Boards and Committees. At this time, the town establishes its revenue projection as well as its estimate of its "accommodated costs," which are the fixed costs to which available revenues are first allocated. These costs include employee and retiree health insurance, debt service, energy and utility expenses, and special education tuition and transportation expenses. In FY21, accommodated costs also include funding for a community priority for a 1.0 FTE Payroll/HR Administrative Assistant for the School Department budget. The accommodated cost expenses are subtracted from available revenues and the remaining revenues are allocated to municipal and school budgets based on a historical ratio of 64.1 percent of the net revenue allocated to the school department budget and 35.9 percent to the municipal government.

During the next step of the budget process which occurs in early to late-November, the Chief Financial Officer distributes budget development guidelines and instructions to district and school administrators. Department and school budget requests are then submitted to the Finance Office by the end of November. Throughout November and December, the Superintendent and the Chief Financial Officer review the budget requests as well as the programmatic and financial implications of these requests taken as a whole. By late December, the Superintendent determines the size and scope of the budget.

In early January, the Superintendent's Recommended Budget is submitted to the School Committee for consideration. The FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget will be presented on the following dates:

- Monday, January 6 (Overview, Administration, District Wide, Facilities Cost Centers, FY21 Capital)
- Thursday, January 16 (Regular Day, Special Education)
- Thursday, January 23 (Public Hearing)
- Monday, January 27 (School Committee Vote on FY21 Budget)

## Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to the boys hockey, girls & boys basketball, swim and gymnastics on wins last week.
- Congratulations to the cast and crew of the Coolidge Middle School production of "Thoroughly Modern Millie"

During the month of January, the Superintendent, Chief Financial Officer, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Student Services, as well as District Administrators present the program budgets to the School Committee for review and deliberation. The School Committee either requests changes to the budget or adopts the budget as proposed.

On January 27th, the School Committee is scheduled to vote and adopt a budget to present to the Town Manager. Once adopted by the School Committee, the budget is then delivered to the Town Manager who, in accordance with Town Charter, must submit a balanced budget to the Finance Committee in February. The Town Manager then presents a full Town budget to the Finance Committee which is within the available revenues for the Town. During February and March, the Finance Committee reviews the budgets of each municipal department, including the School Department. As part of this process, the School Committee, Superintendent, and Chief Financial Officer present their budget requests to the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee takes a vote on each departmental budget in Mid-March. It is the responsibility of the Finance Committee to make recommendations to Town Meeting on each departmental request. By statute, Town Meeting can only vote the "bottom line" of the School Committee budget. It may vote to increase or reduce the total dollar value, but it cannot specify the line item to which the increase or decrease is to be made. Annual Town Meeting is scheduled for April 27, 30, and May 4 and 7, 2020. Once approved, the School Department's FY21 General Fund Appropriation is set and is implemented for the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 2020.

## Overview of FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget by Cost Center

### FY21 Expenses by Cost Center

The FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget is organized into five Cost Centers, representing the high-level program categories that comprise the District Budget. These cost centers align to the MA DESE Program Categories and include Administration, Regular Day, Special Education, Other District Programs (which includes Health Services, Athletics, Extra-curricular Activities, and District-wide Technology), and School Facilities. These cost centers were established as such by a vote of the School Committee. In accordance with that vote, the Administration is authorized to transfer funds within any cost center. The Administration must, however, obtain approval of the School Committee to transfer funds between Cost Centers.

As shown in Figure 2 below, the FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget reflects an increase of 3.5%. The largest dollar increase to the budget is in the Special Education Cost Center (\$772,212). This increase accounts for 47% of the total increase of \$1,652,315. The reasons for these increases are highlighted in the Budget Drivers section of this Executive Summary and described in more detail in the Financial Section of this budget document.

### Figure 2: Expenditures by Cost Center

	Actual Expended FY17	Actual Expended FY18	Actual Expended FY19	Adopted Budget FY20	Requested Budget FY21	% Change
Administration	\$ 908,483	\$ 904,568	\$ 1,018,321	\$ 1,093,892	\$ 1,205,585	10.2%
Regular Day	23,908,691	23,875,261	25,252,697	27,015,632	27,764,234	2.8%
Special Education	11,723,881	12,589,236	13,746,776	15,227,638	15,999,850	5.1%
School Facilities	1,238,283	1,155,318	1,302,588	1,388,844	1,427,974	2.8%
Districtwide Programs	1,786,694	1,711,896	1,879,817	2,041,343	2,022,019	-0.9%
Grand Total	\$ 39,566,032	\$ 40,236,279	\$ 43,200,199	\$ 46,767,348	\$ 48,419,663	3.5%

Below is a summary, by cost center, that highlights the major financial drivers. Details of each cost center can be found in the Financial Section of this document.

**Superintendent's Office**  
**Half-Hours this Week**

*All are welcome*

1/27 7:15 a.m. Coolidge  
1/29 4:30 p.m.  
Superintendent's  
Office  
2/03 8:00 a.m.  
Birch Meadow  
2/05 12:15 p.m. Barrows

**Administration Cost Center**

FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget: 1,205,585  
FY20 Adopted Budget: \$1,093,892  
\$ Increase: \$111,693 (10.2%)

The budget assumes a cost of living adjustment for the central office administrative staff, the Human Resources Administrator, the Chief Financial Officer, Assistant Superintendent of Learning and Teaching. The salary for the Superintendent of Schools represents guidance provided to the Chief Financial Officer from the School Committee as part of the overall budget development process. It should be noted that all salaries for non-represented staff represent placeholders in the budget and not actual salaries. The final determination for annual salaries of all non-represented personnel, except for the Superintendent, will be made by the Superintendent in June for the next fiscal year. The School Committee will determine the Superintendent's annual salary for the next fiscal year.

In the FY21 Budget, there is an additional 1.0 Payroll/HR Administrative Assistant to offset the shifting of 0.4 FTE town support back to the municipal (town) government and a significant increase in the School and Town HR/Payroll activity. This is a Community Priority accommodated cost in FY21. There is an increase of \$7,280 in labor counsel services due to commencing collective bargaining with all five collective bargaining units in FY21. In addition, there is an increase of \$5,000 in the Extended Day Revolving account offset due to increased administrative staff time to support the program (including payroll, accounts payable, accounts receivable, human resources support, procurement support and overall District Administration support).

**Regular Day Cost Center**

FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget: \$27,764,274  
FY20 Adopted Budget: \$27,015,632  
\$ Increase: \$748,602 (2.8%)

The largest cost center in the budget includes cost of living adjustments, salary steps, and column increases for regular education teachers, regular education paraeducators and tutors, and school secretaries according to collective bargaining agreements. There are also cost of living adjustments for non-represented personnel including building level administrators and curriculum coordinators. It should be noted that all salaries for non-represented staff represent placeholders in the budget and not actual salaries. The final determination for annual salaries of all non-represented personnel within the Regular Day Cost Center will be made by the Superintendent in June for the next fiscal year. There is no additional staffing allocated in the regular day cost center for FY21, however, there are some shifts of elementary teachers between schools to accommodate changes in student enrollment. The Regular Day budget reflects a 0.4 reduction in the Data Coach position with the additional funds being reallocated to curriculum software expenses for analytical tools. The reduction occurred in FY19 and is anticipated to be consistent in FY20.

Expense increases include a contractual increase in regular day mandatory bus transportation. The increase in transportation also reflects a slight reduction in the number of paying students on the non-mandated bus as well as changes in the number of students identified as homeless which we are required to pay for transportation. There are also increases in curriculum materials, curriculum software, and professional development for the purchase and training of social studies curriculum implementation (Year 2), Algebra 1 materials, Foreign Language materials, and a new early childhood dyslexia screener. In addition, there is an increase in the full day kindergarten tuition revolving account offset of \$65,000 due to a steady increase in full day kindergarten tuition paying students.

### Special Education Cost Center

FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget: \$15,999,850

FY20 Adopted Budget: \$15,227,638

\$ Increase: \$772,212 (5.1%)

The increase in this cost center is due to cost of living adjustments, salary steps, and column increases for special education teachers and therapists, and special education paraeducators according to collective bargaining agreements. In addition, there is a net addition of 0.54 FTE Special Education Paraeducators and 1.6 FTE Special Education Teachers and related service providers due to current and anticipated in-district special education programmatic needs. The breakdown is as follows:

- 0.43 FTE Special Education Program Paraeducator at Killam (Hired in FY20)
- 0.32 FTE Special Education Occupational Therapy Assistant for the district (Increase in FTE in FY20)
- 0.50 FTE Special Education Program Teacher at Killam (Increase in FTE in FY20)
- 0.10 FTE Physical Therapist for District (Increase in FTE in FY20)
- 0.10 FTE adjustment districtwide for special education paraeducator support (Anticipated for FY21)
- 0.4 FTE Special Education Occupational Therapist (Anticipated for FY21)
- 0.6 FTE Speech and Language Pathologist (Anticipated for FY21)
- There are also transfers of FTE's between the Elementary Schools and the High School due to programmatic and student needs.

There are also cost of living adjustments for special education administrators and other non-represented special education employees. It should be noted that all salaries for non-represented staff represent placeholders in the budget and not actual salaries. The final determination for annual salaries of all non-represented personnel within the Special Education Cost Center will be made by the Superintendent in June for the next fiscal year. Expense increases include known increases in special education out of district tuition and transportation. In addition, there is a decrease in the special education tuition revolving account offset of \$30,000 due to less students being tuitioned into our in-district programs from other school districts next year. Currently there is projected to be one student tuitioned in for the upcoming fiscal year. There is also a \$20,000 increase in the RISE tuition revolving account offset to appropriately balance the amount of the offset with the tuition revenue that is being collected and the associated salary costs of the program

Not included in this budget are any unanticipated costs related to out of district placement tuition, transportation, or other services as required by a student's individualized education plan. We closely track additional potential cost increases throughout the fiscal year, and we will keep the Committee informed if any unanticipated costs emerge.

### School Facilities Cost Center

FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget: \$1,427,974

FY20 Adopted Budget: \$1,388,844

\$ Increase: \$39,130 (2.8%)

Built into this cost center are cost of living adjustments and salary steps for school custodians according to collective bargaining agreements. In addition, there is also a cost of living adjustments for the non-represented employee. An increase has been allocated in the custodial overtime line item to provide additional funding for coverage for vacation and leaves of absence within the department, as well as to assist in snow removal during winter months. In addition, there is the elimination of the 0.4 FTE Facilities Rental Coordinator. The duties and responsibilities of this position have been absorbed by other members of

## Quote of the Week . . .



“There is no royal road to anything. One thing at a time, all things in succession. That which grows fast, withers as rapidly. That which grows slowly, endures.”

Josiah Gilbert Holland

the Facilities Department. Also reflected is the costs associated with the new three-year contractual cleaning contract executed this year for the Coolidge Middle School and Reading Memorial High School.

### **District Wide Programs (Health Services, Athletics, Extra-curricular Activities, District Wide Technology) Cost Center**

FY21 Superintendent's Recommended Budget: \$2,022,019

FY20 Adopted Budget: \$2,041,343

\$ Decrease: \$19,324 (-0.9%)

Overall, this cost center is decreasing from FY20. One area of increase in this cost center is a result of cost of living adjustments, salary steps, and column increases for nurses, athletic coaches, advisory stipends and the athletic secretary according to collective bargaining agreements. In addition, there is a cost of living adjustment for the non-represented employees including the assistant principal for athletics and extra-curricular activities, District Network Manager, Technicians, and the Director of Nurses. It should be noted that all salaries for non-represented staff represent placeholders in the budget and not actual salaries. The final determination for annual salaries of all non-represented personnel in the District Wide Program Cost Centers will be made by the Superintendent in June for the next fiscal year. Other increases include athletic software and support related to known increases in the HUDL software package.

Turf 2 will be available in the spring, and as such reductions were made in the FY21 budget for athletic transportation which were increased in FY20 to accommodate more away games or games that required temporary field lighting. Decreases have been reflected in field maintenance as the cost of maintaining Turf II and the Stadium are included within the Town-Core budget. Athletic facilities rentals have decreased due to changes in practice times associated with the High School's late start.

The district wide technology budget has a decrease in software licensing and support due to a decrease in software license and maintenance renewals in FY21.

There are recommended adjustments in the offsets to the athletic revolving account (\$30,000 increase) and extra-curricular revolving account (\$10,000 increase) due to increase user fee participation and ticket sales. These revolving accounts will be reviewed as additional information is obtained on participation figures and the impact of reducing the number of annual shows from four to three.

### **Contact Information**

Copies of the budget document are available at the Office of the Superintendent, the Reading Town Library, the main office of each school, and on the Reading Public School's website at [www.reading.k12.ma.us](http://www.reading.k12.ma.us). For additional information or clarification, please feel free to contact the Central Office Administration for assistance.

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## Disney Quote of the Week



**“Laughter is timeless,  
imagination has no age,  
dreams are forever.”**

**Walt Disney**

## From the Office of Student Services

As a district our goal is to create program descriptions for our substantially separate special education programs and Learning Center support. These descriptions will serve as an ongoing reference aide for families and staff. The descriptions will be a transparent and welcoming look into programming options with the understanding that any program can adjust and revise its elements to respond to the ever changing needs of our students.

We welcome feedback from our Reading families, staff and the residents on our draft Program Descriptions. Our goal is to use your feedback, along with the work that has been completed with staff, to publish updated descriptions within the next few months. The surveys will be available through February 1, 2020.

There is a section of survey links available on the Reading Office of Student Services website at <https://www.reading.k12.ma.us/departments/student-services/>

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## Preparing Social Studies Students to Think Critically in the Modern World

Vetting primary resources isn't easy—but doing it well is crucial for fostering engagement and deeper learning in a rapidly changing world.

By [Sarah Gonser](#) for [Edutopia](#)

In an era when students must sort through increasingly complex social and political issues, absorbing news and information from an evolving digital landscape, social studies should be meaningful and engaging—a means for preparing students for the modern world, writes [Paul Franz for EdSurge](#). Yet much of our social studies curricula emphasizes content knowledge over the development of foundational, critical thinking skills such as understanding the context in which primary sources were created, and determining the credibility of resources.

“The consequence of this approach, coupled with a preference by many schools for multiple-choice assessments, turns out students who are disillusioned with social studies—and creates an environment where “accumulating knowledge and memorizing information is emphasized because that’s what counts on standardized tests,” writes Franz.

In his book [Why Learn History \(When It’s Already on Your Phone\)](#), author Sam Wineburg, a professor at Stanford’s Graduate School of Education, examines how historians approach resources and argues that this is how teachers should be rigorously vetting—and teaching students to vet—social studies materials for the classroom.

Wineburg first describes how an AP US History student analyzes a [New York Times article](#) from 1892 about the creation of Discovery Day, later renamed Columbus Day. The student criticizes the article for celebrating Columbus as a noble hero when, in fact, he “captured and tortured Indians.” However, when real-life historians examine the same article, Wineburg notes that their approach is “wildly different.”

“When historians encounter this resource, their first move is to source it and put it in context, not to engage with the content,” writes Franz. “This article, to

## Important Websites

### RPS District Website

[www.reading.k12.ma.us](http://www.reading.k12.ma.us)

### Interface Health Services

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

them, isn't really about Columbus at all. It's about President Harrison, who was responsible for the proclamation, and the immigration politics of the 1890s."

The skills demonstrated by the historians are the same skills that should form the core of effective social studies education, according to Franz:

- Assessing the point of view of an author and source
- Placing arguments in context
- Validating the veracity of a claim

It is critical that teachers model this process for students: "Vetting social studies resources is important not just because we want to ensure students are learning from accurate, verifiable materials. It's important also because the ability to ask questions about sources, bias, and context are at the heart of social studies education and are essential skills for thriving in the modern world."

Much like historians, professional fact-checkers verify digital resources by using lateral reading. As opposed to vertical reading, where a reader might stay within a single website to evaluate a factual claim, fact-checkers scan a resource briefly, then open up new browser tabs to read more widely about the original site and verify its credibility via outside sources. This process mirrors how historians vet primary sources.

Teachers may also, of course, choose to rely on vetted social studies resources and lessons published by reputable sources—Franz recommends Newsela, Newseum, The National Archives, and the Stanford History Education Group.

Encouraging students to seek out knowledge and ideas, and then to deeply explore the reliability of their sources by considering their context, perspective, and accuracy should be the core skill of any rigorous social studies curriculum.

Sponsored by **READING GIRLS VARSITY HOCKEY**

# **PINK THE RINK!**

**Saturday, January 25, 2020**



**READING VS. STONEHAM**

**Burbank Ice Arena**

**Boys @6:00pm - Girls @7:45pm**



## Contact Us

*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](mailto:john.doherty@reading.k12.ma.us)

## Grand Canyon by Jason Chin Book of the Month Resource Sheet February 2020



### Teaching Points and Corresponding Standards:

*Teaching points are suggestions to pick and choose from and do not have to all be used together. Teaching points are written generally, teachers may revise and refine them to make sense for their grade level/audience.*

- Throughout the book there are opportunities to discuss measurement and size including standard measurements (Grand Canyon Statistics) and length of time (Measurement & Data standards)
- Front inside cover has a map providing great highlights of map components (key, compass, labels, etc.)
- Varied ecosystems exist in the canyon due to differences in weather/temps/elevation (LS: Ecosystems)
- Erosion, sediment, rock layers, fossils, and changes in earth's surface over time are all addressed during the description of the formation of the canyon (ESS: Earth's Systems)

### Discussion Points/Questions

- This text offers opportunity to discuss genre - narrative nonfiction in particular. Highlight how Chin is able to tell a story while still providing the reader with factual information
- Discuss the awards and acclaim the book has received.
- How are the layers of the Grand Canyon like the levels of the rainforest?
- What is most surprising to you about how the Grand Canyon formed?
- How do the ecosystems change within the canyon?
- What do you think the Grand Canyon will look like in 200 million years into the future?

### Vocabulary

chasm  
oases  
primitive  
barren  
ascend  
canyon  
sediment

### Text Highlights and Features

- There are so many entry-points or approaches to reading this book - the back matter, margins, and main text all offer multiple opportunities for reading and studying the book in different ways and for different purposes.
- Cut-outs - Chin uses the cut-outs not only to illustrate the fossils of each layer but also to signal flashbacks to the reader.
- Non-fiction book includes some imaginary images when the child travels back in time or under the ocean. This helps create a visualization of what it would have looked like back in time.

### Additional Resources

- Author's website: <http://jasonchin.net/educators/>
- National Park Service website: <https://www.nps.gov/grca/index.htm>
- <https://grandcanyon.com/>
- <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/nature/grand-canyon/>
- There are also several related titles & sites listed on the last page of the book.

## Superintendent Office Hours Continue This Week

Starting this week, Superintendent of Schools John Doherty will begin to hold office hours at the different schools. Superintendent Office Hours will be scheduled for 30 minutes and are open to all members of the community and staff. The purpose of office hours is for staff and community members to discuss any topics related to the Reading Public Schools with the Superintendent. We will try to schedule two office hours per week.

The next few week's office hours are as follows:

- 1/27 7:15 a.m. Coolidge
- 1/29 4:30 p.m. Superintendent's Office
- 2/03 8:00 a.m. Birch Meadow
- 2/05 12:15 p.m. Barrows

No appointment is necessary. If you are attending an office hour, please go to the Main Office of the school that is holding the office hour.

If you cannot make one of the advertised office hour times and you would like to schedule an appointment with Dr. Doherty, feel free to call the Reading Public Schools Administration Offices at 781-944-5800 or contact Linda Engelson at [linda.engelson@reading.k12.ma.us](mailto:linda.engelson@reading.k12.ma.us).



Reading Public Schools 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual

# PARENT UNIVERSITY

2020 Theme - "Raising Healthy and Happy Children"

## WHEN

**Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>**  
**8:00am – 12:30pm**

## WHERE

**Reading Memorial High School, 62  
Oakland Road**

**Benefit from FREE workshops presented by community experts  
on a variety of topics.**

**FREE childcare for children in grades K through 5 will be  
provided by the Extended Day Program. You must pre-register  
for childcare when you are registering for Parent University  
workshops.**

**Registration and more information available at (starting 1/27):  
[https://www.reading.k12.ma.us/community/adult-and-  
community-education/](https://www.reading.k12.ma.us/community/adult-and-community-education/)**

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Reading Education Foundation  
*Outside the box - Inside the classroom*

## Schedule

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER:**  
**CHRISTOPHER  
WILLARD, PSY.D.**



## PRESENTS:

"Growing Up Mindful in  
the Age of Anxiety.  
Resilience Skills for  
Everyone"

8:40am – 9:40am  
Performing Arts Center

Workshops to follow on  
topics related to our  
partnership with  
raising healthy and  
happy children.

## Reading gymnastics squad has big goals

By Matt MacCormack **Globe Correspondent,**



Senior captain Jordyn Castelli (left) and freshman Sophia Isbell are two of the standouts on the Reading gymnastics team. MARK LORENZ FOR THE GLOBE

*(Third in a series in which the Globe profiles a winter varsity high school team from Eastern Massachusetts.)*

Gymnastics runs deep in Reading, and head coach Zach Stein is a great example. A town native, Stein grew up on the beams and bars of the Reading Gymnastics Academy — just a 10-minute drive up the road from Reading Memorial High School. He then starred for the Rockets and returned in 2010 to coach the girls' team while working full-time as a club coach at the Academy.

"He's a really hard worker," Reading senior captain Jordyn Castelli said of Stein. "He loves his athletes. He's one of those types of guys that always pushes you forward."

Stein preaches constant improvement in his program. After placing fifth at the all-state meet and fourth at New Englands in 2019, the three-time reigning Middlesex League champion Rockets (3-0) have set their sights on more.

Castelli and fellow senior captain Aly Goodwin lead a talented group headlined by freshman Sophia Isbell, a Level 10 star. Juniors Hannah Whitney and Rachel Spezzaferro also return after heavily contributing last season.

Assistant Jillian Stira is back for her 11th season on the coaching staff. Stein says he "cannot imagine coaching the team without" Stira, who also coaches at Wilkey's Gymnastics in Tewksbury.

All of the ingredients are there for Reading to shine. "We're always trying to be better and better," Stein said. "We try not to peak too early."

Here are five things to know about the Rockets:

## Leading by example

Stein knew at a very young age that gymnastics was his calling. His mother enrolled him and his brother in karate classes, but Stein kept opting for headstands and handstands.

At 7, Stein began training at the Academy. There wasn't a boys' team at Reading High, so he went on to captain the girls' team as a senior in 2004, and captured a state title in the beam, as well as a second-place finish in the all-around.

"Some coaches appreciated it, some other coaches disagreed with it and thought it was unfair," Stein said of his presence in a female-dominated sport. "I wanted to prove them wrong. It kind of motivated me to be better."

Stein continued on to a cheerleading career at Elmira College, and later Florida International University. Castelli says Stein's courage to pursue gymnastics is inspiring, and others respect his skill.

"I think it's cool to hear how good he was at gymnastics," Isbell added.

## A family affair

Like Stein, Castelli is a perfect example of the deep roots of Reading gymnastics.

His father, Joe, was the head coach of the Reading High boys' team from 1988-1991, when the boys' program still existed. He also coached the girls for a year from 1991-92.

Joe Castelli is also a coach at the Academy, where he coached a young Zach Stein.

Now it has all come full circle. Stein has coached Jordyn Castelli since she was a Level 2; now, she has soared to Level 9 under Stein's tutelage.

"It's a really strong community in Reading gymnastics — it's multigenerational," Stein said.

## Middlesex perfection



Jordyn Castelli chaled her hands prior to her uneven bar routine, during Thursday's meet against Wakefield. MARK LORENZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

With its 142.85-139.6 victory over Wakefield Thursday, Reading is now in the pole position to win its fourth straight Middlesex League title. Castelli and Goodwin have never lost a match to a league opponent in four years, but the season is not over yet. Stein uses the prospect of a perfect league career as a motivational tool.

"I keep that in my back pocket when they're not performing to their full potential," Stein said. "We've created a legacy for Reading High School gymnastics and I'd like to keep that going."

Underclassmen such as Isbell strive for perfection for their senior leaders. "I want to always hit my routines so they can have that accomplishment," Isbell said.

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## Freshman phenom

Stein says Reading's recent run of conference success is "definitely fueling the talent pool."

One doesn't have to look far for evidence — Isbell is one of the program's most talented newcomers in recent memory.

"I have not seen a lot of people like Sophia," Castelli said.

Isbell upgraded to Level 10 status in December, after competing at Level 9 Eastern Nationals in Florida in May. Over the summer, she worked on improving her tumbling skills, and on the vault. Club gymnastics are very individualized, but Isbell said Castelli has helped her embrace the team mind-set at the high school level.

"She told me she was a little bit nervous coming on," Castelli said. "She changed into a whole new person."



Reading freshman Sophia Isabelis warms up on the uneven bars before Thursday's meet against Wakefield. MARK LORENZ FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## Postseason push

After placing fifth at last year's state meet, Reading assumed its season was over.

But top finishers Masconomet/Lynnfield, along with Mansfield, opted out, allowing Reading to be one of three to represent the state at the regionals. Normally, the top three teams in MIAA move on to New England regionals. But in 2019, Masconomet/Lynnfield and Mansfield opted not to take their spots because of club commitments from their student-athletes.

The Rockets then finished fourth in the competition at Hudson High.

"It definitely gets the team bonding," Stein said. "It's something they'll always remember when they graduate."

Castelli said the top finish created a bond. "I think it made us a lot closer," she said. "We want to get there again."

Matt MacCormack can be reached at [matthew.maccormack@globe.com](mailto:matthew.maccormack@globe.com).

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## Reading Public School Happenings

### **RMHS High Five For This Week**

Below is this week's RMHS High Five.

#### **High Five: Mary Bertocchi**

- Favorite Book: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- Favorite Quote: "What good are wings without the courage to fly"- Harper Lee
- Favorite Subject: Anatomy



- Activities/Clubs/Sports/Employment: Best Buddies, Rocket Ambassador, Boston Medical Preschool Intern
- Plans for after RMHS: Mary plans to study nursing in college



Mary Bertocchi

#### **High Five: Isabella Pastore**

- Favorite Book: To Kill a Mockingbird- Harper Lee
- Favorite Quote: "Never let your memories be greater than your dreams"- Douglas Ivester
- Favorite Subjects: History & French
- Activities/Clubs/Sports/Employment: Cradles to Crayons, Model UN, Sunday Swim, Swim Team
- Plans for after RMHS: Isabella plans to attend college as a political science major



Isabella Pastore



Last weekend, Coolidge Middle School Students performed the musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Congratulations to the cast and crew on a show well done!



#### **RMHS Students Selected for Senior Districts**

After a competitive audition process, 11 RMHS students were selected to perform with the sr. district festival honor choir and band. This is an opportunity for the top students in our area to come together and work with a renowned collegiate conductor. Rehearsals were held on January 8th and 10th, followed by a concert on January 11th. Julia Mullen, Baovy Phan, Jack Mendez, Ryan Cain, Charlie Lloyd, Liam Synnott, Laurie Wise, and Smritha Srinivasan performed with the honor choir. Amogh Morje, Zachary Nichols, and Ethan Norton performed with the honor band.



## Stepping Stones...

- Our thoughts and prayers go out to Killam math tutor **Michele Williams** on the loss of a loved one recently.
- We welcome the following new staff to the Reading Public Schools:
  - ✓ Kathryn Boucher, Regular Education Tutor, Barrows
  - ✓ Michelle Williams, Food Service Substitute, District
  - ✓ Marnie Littleford, Food Service Worker, District
  - ✓ Lynne Cerretani-Clarke, Special Education Paraeducator, RISE
- **We have posted** a new position. If interested, please visit <https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/index.aspx> to view the job detail

1.0 FTE Long Term Substitute Grade 5 Teacher, Joshua Eaton  
Elementary School (repost)  
<https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=880>

Long Term Substitute Special Education Program Paraeducator, 58 hours biweekly, Wood End Elementary School <a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=881">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=881</a>
Regular Education Paraeducator, 31 hours biweekly, Birch Meadow Elementary School <a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=882">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=882</a>
1.0 FTE Math Teacher, Parker Middle School <a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=884">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=884</a>
Special Education Paraeducator (one-year), 30 hours biweekly, Killam Elementary School(repost) <a href="https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=885">https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=885</a>

## Blazing Trails...

**"Melrose, MA, Shifts to Competency-Based Learning."** Melrose, Massachusetts School District has adopted a competency-based education program -- sometimes referred to as proficiency-based learning -- that allows students more autonomy over their learning. Students in one fourth-grade classroom are learning how to set their own goals, assess their learning and lead check-in conferences with their parents. [Read More](#)

**"5 Ways Teachers Can Bring Out the Best in Middle School Students."** It's not always easy to be a tween-or to teach one. School counselor Phyllis L. Fagell recommends 5 ways teachers can bring out the best in middle school students in this ASCD Express article. [Read More](#)

**"Involving Families: A Relationship-Centered Approach."** Focusing on fostering relationships with families leads to trust, parent empowerment, and collaboration -- as this district found when it changed its approach to making family connections. Ari Gerzon-Kessler, director of equity and partnerships for Boulder Valley School District in Colorado, shares the four pillars for intercultural understanding that guided his district's work in this Online Exclusive for ASCD Educational Leadership. [Read More](#)

**"How Making A Podcast Enriched Students' Lives."** As NPR opens its Student Podcast Challenge, grand-prize winners of the first contest -- students in Tennessee and New York -- reflect on how they were affected by the process of creating their winning podcasts. High-school juniors in Tennessee say working on their podcast gave them confidence and helped them discover previously unknown passions. [Read More](#)

**"Students Send Help to Australian Wildlife Affected by Fires."** Middle-school students in Ohio are helping to make pouches to be sent to Australia to help wildlife that have been harmed by wildfires that continue to devastate the continent. Students are constructing the pouches using sewing machines available through their school's maker space. [Read More](#)

**Have a Great Long Weekend and Week Ahead!**