



Pathways

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

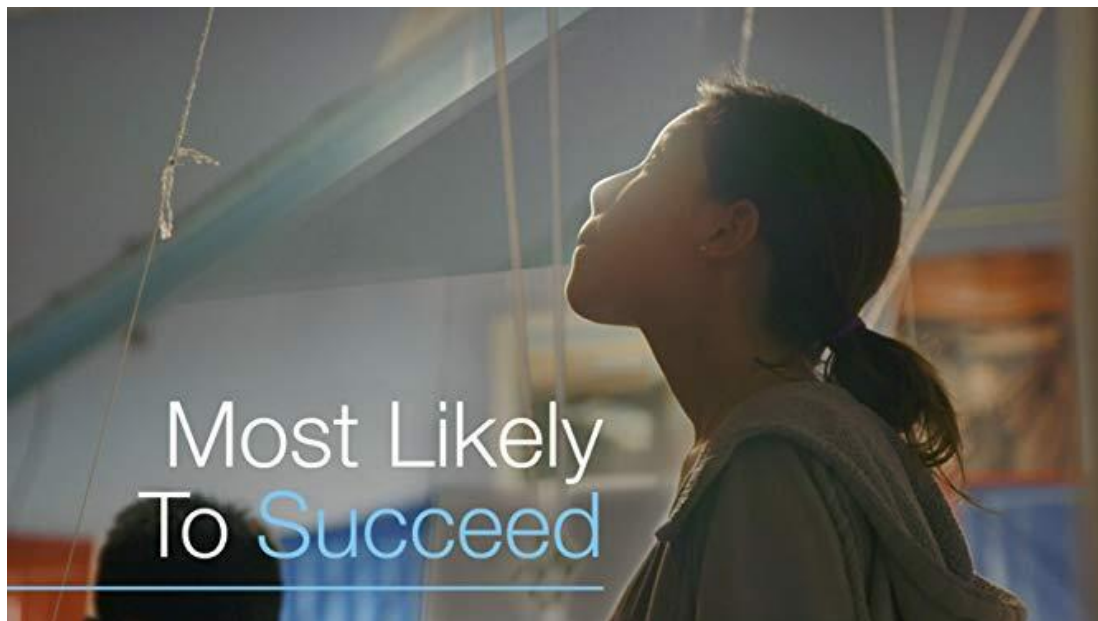
February 21, 2020

Volume 7, Number 17

Upcoming Dates

- February 26 – Grade 6 – 12 Early Release; (10:30 a.m.) SEPAC Meeting @ Reading Public Library
- March 3 – Local Election and Presidential Primary in the Hawkes Field House
- March 6 & 7 – (7:30 p.m.) RMHS Winter Play – “A View from the Bridge” in the Endslo PAC
- March 8 – (2:00 p.m.) RMHS Winter Play – “A View from the Bridge” in the Endslo PAC
- March 10 – (2:00 p.m.) RMHS Jazz Festival @ RMHS; (7:00 p.m.) SEPAC Meeting in the Schettini Library
- March 11 – Grade 6 – 8 Early Release
- March 12 – (6:30 p.m.) Parker Musical – “The Little Mermaid, Jr.”
- March 13 – (7:00 p.m.) Parker Musical – “The Little Mermaid, Jr.”; Misster RMHS in the Endslo Pac
- March 14 – (8:00 a.m.) SAT Testing @ RMHS; (2:00 p.m.) Parker Musical – “The Little Mermaid, Jr.”
- March 16 – RMHS Spring Sports begin; (7:00 p.m.) Parker Grade 5 Transition Night
- March 20 – No School for Students; Reading Spring Institute
- March 21 – (6:30 p.m.) RMHS Sophomore Semiformal in the Cafeteria

Community Showing of *Most Likely to Succeed* on February 27th



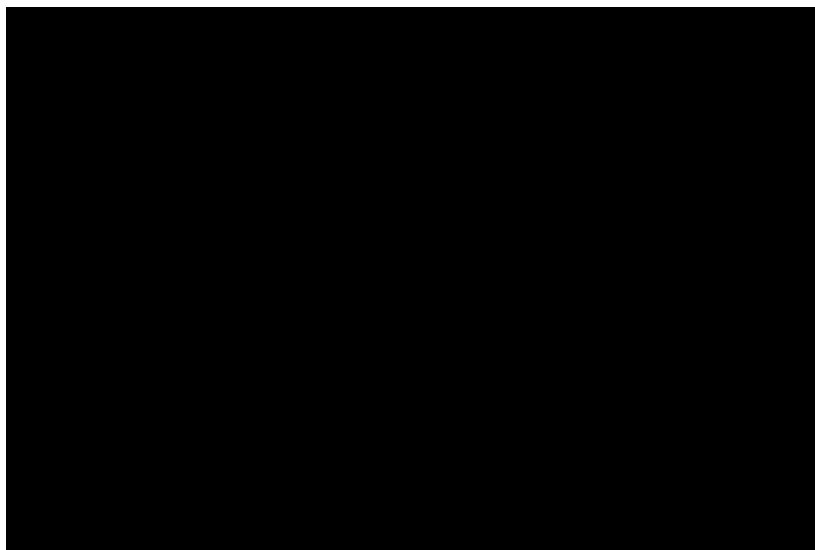
The Reading Public Schools is embarking on a six month journey in designing a PreK-12 Portrait of the Graduate. As part of this experience, a Portrait of the Graduate Design Team, composed of educators, community members and students will be overseeing this process.

The POG design team will be hosting a community showing of the documentary, *Most Likely to Succeed*, by Ted Dintersmith and Tony Wagner. A powerful documentary examining education in America and inspiring school communities to reimagine what students and teachers are capable of doing. This showing will be on **Thursday, February 27th, at 6:00 p.m. in the RMHS Endslo Fine and Performing Arts Center**. There is no charge to attend this event. A link to the trailer is below.

A feature-length documentary that examines the history of education in the United States, revealing the growing shortcomings of conventional education methods in today's innovative world. The film explores compelling new approaches that aim to revolutionize teaching as we know it, inspiring school communities to reimagine what students and teachers are capable of doing. To date, *Most Likely To Succeed* has screened for thousands of audiences around the world, igniting conversations and empowering change along the way.

Kudos and Accolades

- Congratulations to the boys & girls basketball and on wins last week.
- Congratulations to the gymnastics team for an undefeated season and winning the Middlesex League Championship.
- Congratulations to boys & girls hockey and boys & girls basketball, gymnastics and boys track for qualifying for the MIAA tournament.
- Congratulations to the RMHS Jazz Band on winning a gold medal at the Norwood Jazz Festival.
- Good luck to Andrew Benassi who is competing in the All-State track meet in the mile.
- Congratulations to the RMHS Jazz Band, under the direction of Joseph Mulligan, which received a Gold Medal at the Norwood Jazz Classic Festival at Norwood High School last week. Their next performance is at the MAJE Northeast Festival that we host here at RMHS on March 10th.



As part of this evening, we will be getting feedback from those who attend on three important questions:

- What are the hopes, aspirations, and dreams that our community has for our young people?
- What are the skills and habits of mind that our children need for success in this rapidly changing and complex world?
- What are the implications for the learning experiences we provide in our school systems?

The members of the Portrait of the Graduate Design Team are below.

Name	Occupation	Sector
Sean Whalen	Probation Officer	Law Enforcement
Mary Giuliana	Director of Nurses	Health/Education
Kit Lonergan	Episcopal Priest	Clergy/Education
Cheryl Moschella	Certified Residential Property Appraiser	Real Estate
Paula Curren	Substitute Nurse/Clinical Instructor	Health/Education
Soni Clarke Lee	Web/Interface Designer	Technology
Justin Perry	CEO and Founder, Conduit Innovation	Business
Prabhav Morje	Senior Principal Engineer	Business
Amy Lannon	Director, Reading Public Library	Public
Jeffrey Theis	Professor, Salem State University	Higher Education
Danielle Theissen	RMHS Math Teacher	Education
Eileen Manning	Project Manager	Business
Vanessa Fisher	Paraeducator, RMHS	Education
Grant Hightower	METCO Director	Education
Erica McNamara	Executive Director, Reading Coalition for Prevention and Support	Public
Chris Kelley	Assistant Superintendent for Learning and Teaching	Education
Kate Boynton	RMHS Principal	Education
Ricki Shankland	Parker Middle School Principal	Education
Theresa Wiggins	Founder of Village Parenting	Business/Education

Superintendent's Office
Half-Hours this Week

All are welcome

2.24.20 7:30 a.m.
Coolidge

2.25.20 2:30 p.m.
Killam

2.27.20 4:30 p.m.
Superintendent's
Office

John Doherty	Superintendent of Schools	Education
Jamie Michaels	Senior Pastor, Old South Church	Clergy
Nick Boivin	Lawyer	Business
Miguel Borrero	Student	Student
Lynna Williams	Director of Guidance	Education
Michelle Hopkinson	RMHS Teacher	Education
Danja Mahoney	RMHS Teacher	Education
John Parks	School Committee Member	Community
Quonekuia Day	College Professor	Higher Education
Julia Hendrix	Principal, Birch Meadow	Education
Jack Nelson	Student	Student

Next SEPAC Meeting is February 26th

The Reading Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) encourages you to attend the following upcoming events:

- **Wednesday, February 26th, 10 AM**, daytime SEPAC business meeting at the Reading Public Library Conference Room. There will be time for public comment, a discussion of new and old business, and a district update from the director of Student Services, Dr. Jennifer Stys. If days work best for you, this is the meeting to attend!
- **Thursday, March 5th, 7 PM**, Parent Social at Biltmore & Main.
- **Tuesday, March 10th, 7 PM**, business meeting at the RMHS Schettini Library Media Center.

Visit [SEPAC's website](#) and follow [SEPAC on Facebook](#) for more information!

Reading Cultural Council Announces Grant Winners

READING CULTURAL COUNCIL

Supports 17 Reading Arts, Music, Cultural Organizations for 2019-2020 Activities

February 2020-- The Reading Cultural Council (RCC) has awarded \$14,000 in grants to support the arts and humanities programming of seventeen (17) Reading organizations for activities during 2019 and 2020. The Reading Cultural Council received 21 requests totaling \$21,943 for this funding cycle. A grant of \$5,000 from the Town Budget supplemented the funds available through the Massachusetts Cultural Council. "Thanks to the generosity of the Town of Reading, the Reading Cultural Council was able to be more generous in our support this cycle than in previous years," notes Donna Schenkel, committee chair. "It is exciting to see the range of cultural opportunities available in our community. We encourage all in Reading to take note of these rich cultural resources and join in."

We are excited to support the following organizations:

- **Killam Elementary School** for a visit by author Susan Hood for grades K-5
- **The JW Killam Elementary School** 50th Birthday Celebration

- **Killam Elementary School** for a Grade 3 field trip to DeCordova Museum
- **Birch Meadow PTO** to support Poet in Residence, Regie Gibson, during 2019-2020
- **Coolidge Middle School Science Olympiad Program**
- **No. Suburban Family Resource Network** for the Hula La Family Concert at Reading Public Library, February 2020
- **Pleasant Street Center** for a historical presentation about Martha Washington
- **Parker Tavern** for their Colonial Fair (first weekend in May)
- **Reading Community Singers** for their 2019 Holiday Concert
- **Reading Community Concert Band** for their Spring Concert
- **The Ivy Chord Coffeehouse**, for its Concert Series
- **Downtown Reading Art Walk** during "Hometown Days," June 2020
- **Porch Fest 2020**, June 13, 2020
- **Arts Reading** for the Discover Arts Day Cultural Festival
- **Northeast School of Ballet** for their Fall Series
- **Reading Irish Set Dancing**
- **Classic Repertory Company**

The Reading Cultural Council welcomes new members interested in arts and culture in our town. If you'd like to join us, please email Donna Schenkel, Reading Cultural Council Chair [donnaschenkel@icloud.com] or contact the Reading Town Clerk.

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:

2.24.20 7:30 a.m. Coolidge
 2.25.20 2:30 p.m. Killam
 2.27.20 4:30 p.m. Superintendent's Office

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.

An Old and Contested Solution to Boost Reading Scores: Phonics

As test scores lag, there's a growing debate between proponents of the "science of reading," which emphasizes phonics, and traditional educators who prefer to instill a love of literature.

By Dana Goldstein for the *New York Times*

WASHINGTON — "Bit!" Ayana Smith called out as she paced the alphabet rug in front of her kindergarten students at Garrison Elementary School. "Buh! Ih! Tuh!" the class responded

Quote of the Week . . .



“You only have what you give. It’s by spending yourself that you become rich.”

– Isabel Allende

in unison, making karate chop motions as they enunciated the sound of each letter. In a 10-minute lesson, the students chopped up and correctly spelled a string of words:
Top. “Tuh! Ah! Puh!”

Wig. “Wuh! Ih! Guh!”

Ship. “Shuh! Ih! Puh!”

Ms. Smith’s sounding-out exercises might seem like a common-sense way to teach reading. But for decades, many teachers have embraced a different approach, convinced that exposing students to the likes of Dr. Seuss and Maya Angelou is more important than drilling them on phonics.

Lagging student performance and [newly relevant research](#), though, have prompted some educators to reconsider the ABCs of reading instruction. Their effort gained new urgency after [national test scores last year](#) showed that only a third of American students were proficient in reading, with widening gaps between good readers and bad ones.

Now members of this vocal minority, proponents of what they call the “science of reading,” congregate on social media and swap lesson plans intended to avoid creating “curriculum casualties” — students who have not been effectively taught to read and who will continue to struggle into adulthood, unable to comprehend medical forms, news stories or job listings

The bible for these educators is a body of research produced by linguists, psychologists and cognitive scientists. Their findings have pushed some states and school districts to make big changes in how teachers are trained and students are taught.

The “science of reading” stands in contrast to the “balanced literacy” theory that [many teachers are exposed to in schools of education](#). That theory holds that students can learn to read through exposure to a wide range of books that appeal to them, without too much emphasis on technically complex texts or sounding out words.

Eye-tracking studies and brain scans now show that the opposite is true, according to many scientists. Learning to read, they say, is the work of deliberately practicing how to quickly connect the letters on the page to the sounds we hear each day.

The evidence “is about as close to conclusive as research on complex human behavior can get,” [writes Mark Seidenberg](#), a cognitive neuroscientist and reading expert at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Phonics has gone in and out of style for decades, and the current conflict over how to teach reading is only the latest in a tug-of-war that dates to the 19th century. A major push for phonics instruction under President George W. Bush, through a federal program called Reading First, [did not produce](#) widespread achievement gains, raising questions about whether the current efforts can succeed.

Phonics boosters say they now know more about what works, and that phonics alone isn’t the answer. Alongside bigger doses of sounding out, they want struggling students to grapple with more advanced books, so they won’t get stuck in a cycle of low expectations and boredom. Some schools are devoting more time to social studies and science, subjects that help build vocabulary and knowledge in ways that can make students stronger readers.

States have passed laws [requiring](#) that schools use phonics-centric curriculums and screen students more aggressively for reading problems — or even [hold back those](#) who struggle

Disney Quote of the Week



"It's up to you how far you'll go. If you don't try, you'll never know."

– Merlin, The Sword In The Stone.

most. In January, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos castigated [colleges of education](#) for teaching what she described as “junk science” about reading.

But the education establishment is [pushing back](#), worried that too many lessons like Ms. Smith’s could be stultifying — a poor substitute for a teacher reading aloud from a book of Shel Silverstein poems, or guiding children through lushly illustrated stories by Ezra Jack Keats. They blame low student performance on such factors as inexperienced teachers, school funding inequities and homes that lack books or time for parents to read to their children.

The guardians of balanced literacy acknowledge that phonics has a place. But they trust their own classroom experience over brain scans or laboratory experiments, and say they have seen many children overcome reading problems without sound-it-out drills. They value children picking books that interest them and worry that pushing students into harder texts could turn them off reading entirely.

Karen K. Wixson, an author of a [recent report](#) warning that too much phonics can harm children, called the new push “incredibly, scarily naïve.”

A Growing Demand for Phonics

In Ms. Smith’s classroom in Washington, Madisyn Hall-Jones, 5, demonstrated her progress by reading aloud a short story about picking apples that she had written and illustrated herself.

“It’s not rote,” the school’s principal, Brigham Kiplinger, said of the phonics-driven curriculum. “It’s joyful.”

Washington is one of only two jurisdictions, along with Mississippi, to [increase](#) average reading scores on National Assessment of Educational Progress tests between 2017 and 2019. Both did so despite high-poverty student populations, and both are requiring more phonics.

“For us, this is social justice work,” Mr. Kiplinger said. The majority of students at Garrison Elementary come from low-income families. If parents express concerns about the new curriculum, he invites them to visit a classroom like Ms. Smith’s and see the difference.

Parents in suburban St. Louis are looking for similar results. More than a third of kindergarten to third-grade students in the highly regarded Lindbergh school district tested as “at risk” for dyslexia last spring, after Missouri instituted mandatory screening. Angry district residents sent an [open letter](#) to the school board in November, demanding that the district embrace the science of reading.

The district said it had added a new phonics sequence in the early elementary grades and retrained some teachers. But it stands by its broader balanced literacy approach, which it said gives teachers the autonomy to tailor instruction to students at all levels.

That’s not enough for parents like Diane Dragan. An attorney who has three children with dyslexia, Ms. Dragan noted that well-off parents in her area regularly pay thousands of dollars to have their children taught intensive phonics at private tutoring centers.

“The irony to me is that the public-school teacher who teaches balanced literacy during the day moonlights to do science-based tutoring for kids who fail to learn to read,” Ms. Dragan said.

Important Websites

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

[Interface Health Services](https://interface.williamjames.edu/community/reading)
<https://interface.williamjames.edu/community/reading>

In Mississippi, all prospective elementary schoolteachers are now required to pass a test in the foundations of reading, including phonics. The state has also dispatched literacy coaches to struggling schools.

More controversially, it passed a law in 2013 requiring third graders to be held back if they score poorly on an end-of-year reading exam; last year, about 10 percent of them were retained, for reading difficulties or other reasons.

Some reading experts have called Mississippi's recent gains into question, arguing that by retaining so many of the lowest-scoring third graders, the state had stigmatized students and manufactured a higher-performing pool of test takers. But Shannon D. Whitehead, the principal of McNeal Elementary School in Canton, Miss., supported the state's decision to get tough.

Her school put in place a phonics sequence that continues through fifth grade, and started assigning more challenging literature, including Langston Hughes poems. It hosts early-morning, after-school and Saturday tutoring sessions for students at risk of failing state tests. Scores have improved modestly.

As painful as it can be to tell a child they have to repeat a year, Dr. Whitehead said, "in order for us to ensure that our students are able to compete globally, we have to have an accountability system."

A Curriculum Guru Embraces (Some) Change

One of the most popular reading curriculums in the country — used in about 20 percent of schools, including the Lindbergh district near St. Louis — was developed by Lucy Calkins, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. She is widely admired for her emphasis on helping students develop a love of reading and writing.

But her curriculum, which follows the balanced literacy model, has come under increasing fire from critics who say it devotes too little time to phonics practice and gives teachers and students too much choice over what books to read, allowing them to avoid more challenging texts. Earlier this month, the public schools in Oakland, Calif., told staff members that the district would move away from Professor Calkins's materials after the city's N.A.A.C.P. chapter and parent activists demanded the use of "research-proven" strategies.

In an interview, Professor Calkins decried what she called a feeling of "animosity and mistrust" between the camps in the reading wars. She acknowledged that many teachers needed more training on how to teach phonics effectively, and said she was working with schools in her network to provide that.

But she pushed back against a key argument of many phonics activists — that there is no downside to all of the children in a classroom getting the type of repetitive practice in letter-sound relationships that struggling readers need.

"There's not a chance we're going to want to hold an entire class to the pace of the 5 percent that have dyslexia," she said. "Other children need opportunities for comprehension, for writing instruction and for analytic thinking."

Wiley Blevins, a phonics expert who considers himself to be in the center of the reading wars, acknowledged that phonics instruction is often implemented badly. Texts created to help students practice sound-letter combinations can be boring and even nonsensical, he said.

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

Ideally, students in early elementary school would spend about half of their reading and writing time on phonics, he said, using quality materials. If this happened consistently, by third grade, most students would not need explicit phonics anymore.

Even some leading researchers in the science of reading, including Professor Seidenberg, acknowledge that studies do not yet point toward specific curriculum materials that will be most effective at teaching phonics.

"The science that you need to know it is good," he said. "The science on how to teach it effectively is not."

Ms. Smith, the Washington kindergarten teacher, has embraced her school's new focus on phonics, which she said had engaged both low-achieving and high-achieving students.

She reads to her class each day from beloved children's literature, like the "Elephant and Piggie" series by Mo Willems. But it is the simple phonics texts, she said, that have done the most to build the students' confidence, because over time, they are able to accurately read them aloud to their classmates.

"They will get to the end of the sentence and see a period," she said, "and their face will light up."

Reading Public School Happenings

RMHS High Five of the Week

Congratulations to RMHS Senior Tatiana Burcy who is this week's RMHS High Five of the Week.



Tatiana Burcy

- **Favorite Book:** *Divergent* by Veronica Roth
- **Favorite Quote:** "For every dark night, there's a brighter day." Tupac Shakur
- **Favorite Subjects:** Art and Poetry
- **Activities/Clubs/Sports/Employment:** Tatiana plays of RMHS softball, RBI and plays tournament ball in the summer
- **Plans for after RMHS:** Tatiana plans to pursue a degree in the dental field

RMHS Music Department Holds 1st Annual “Guys Night Out”

On Friday, February 7th, the music department held their first annual Guys Night Out. Male choral students from Coolidge, Parker, and RMHS, as well as guests (including dads, uncles, grandpas, brothers, and friends) came together to socialize, rehearse, and perform a short concert. The combined group included over 50 singers ranging in age from 11 to 84. In addition to their performance, the concert included a short set by the Crescendudes, solos by two graduating seniors, and the inaugural performance of the RMHS Barbershop Quartet. RMHS choir director Anna Wentlent led the event, with help from middle school teachers Jenny DiMuzio and Lisa Wistrom.



Barrows Holds Kindness Assembly and Donates Beds to Mission of Deeds

Just prior to vacation, Barrows students held a monthly assembly which focused on the core value of kindness. As part of this assembly, Barrows students presented a donation of 24 beds to the Mission of Deeds. Below are some pictures from the event.



Barrows Honors Retirees

Recently, Barrows staff held a reception to honor long time employees Alice Ricardo and Roberta Guarciarello, who retired at the beginning of the school year. Congratulations and thank you for your years of service to our children.



Stepping Stones...

- Congratulations to Joshua Eaton teacher **Adam Derosier** on the birth of his son Caleb Edward on February 14th.
- Congratulations to Birch Meadow teacher **Bethlynn McCarron** on the birth of her daughter, Nora Catherine on February 19th.
- We welcome the following new staff to the Reading Public Schools:
 - ✓ Alexandra Sliwoski, Social Studies Teacher, RMHS
 - ✓ Hannah French, Substitute, District
 - ✓ Erin McGovern, Substitute, District
 - ✓ Brooke Jamison, After School Teacher, Birch Meadow & Killam
 - ✓ Angela Bennett, Accounting Assistant, Central Office
 - ✓ Kaleigh Laventure, Math Teacher, Parker
 - ✓ Vanessa Silva, Special Education Paraeducator, Coolidge
- **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 Wellness Teacher, Coolidge Middle School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=896

Extended School Year Special Education Paraeducator https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=897

Extended School Year Special Education Teacher https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=898
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Extended School Year Speech-Language Pathologist https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=899
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Extended School Year Nurse https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=900
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Extended School Year Physical Therapist/PTA https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=901

Extended School Year Occupational Therapist/COTA https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=902
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Extended School Year School Psychologist/Adjustment Counselor https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=903

Interim Business Manager https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=904
Business Manager https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=905
Special Education Paraeducator, 60 hours biweekly, Parker Middle School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=906
1.0 FTE Long Term Substitute Grade 2 Teacher, Birch Meadow Elementary School https://reading.tedk12.com/hire/ViewJob.aspx?JobID=907
Town Posting https://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/uploads/2020_library_i_-_research_reader_services.docx.pdf

Blazing Trails...

"Free ASCD Resources to Support Social-Emotional Learning." The need for social-emotional learning is clear. The U.S. Department of Education recently announced its budget, which includes a \$1.3 billion increase in education funding, and sets aside dedicated funds for education initiatives that support social-emotional learning programs. We've gathered some useful resources from our archives and recent releases to help you understand the importance of social-emotional learning and how to build your students' skills. [Read More](#)

"Program Supports Students After Mental Health Crisis." The Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition program, in use in 137 schools in Massachusetts and piloted in several other states, is seen as a successful model to help students re-enter school after they have experienced a mental health crisis. Students who participate receive a months-long reintegration plan that includes clinical support, parental outreach and a targeted plan to make up missed work. [Read More](#)

"Making (Low-Stakes) Practice Tests More Effective."

Frequent, low-stakes quizzes help boost memory. In a 2014 study, students who simply reread material for an upcoming exam scored 50 percent, on average. But students who took practice tests did much better-scoring 66 percent on the exam. In this Edutopia blog post, Research shows that when students rely exclusively on reviewing or rereading the material, they can develop a false impression that they understand the topic. Practice tests help close the gap between what students know and what they think they know. [Read More](#)

"Transform Your School with a Whole Child Approach." As an educator, you have a tough job ahead of you: Promote the long-term development and success of each and every student in your care. That's the ASCD Whole Child approach to education. Be a part of ASCD's mission of educating the whole child by joining the ASCD Whole Child Network, a global network of schools focused on the same goals; engaged in the same processes; and with whose educators you can discuss issues, share insights, and exchange support. [Read More](#)

"Students Create Documentaries on Global Conflicts." High-school students in Illinois recently created documentaries focused on world conflicts, including Myanmar, Darfur and Kashmir. Edwin Lipowski, an AP Human Geography teacher, says the assignment was intended to nurture creativity and give students new ways to learn about different conflicts. [Read More](#)

Have a Great Weekend and Week Ahead!