



## IMPORTANT DATES AND REMINDERS

- November 25, 2015  
*Fall Curriculum Potluck Breakfast 9:15-10 am*
- November 25, 2015  
*Early Release: 1:30 pm*
- November 26-27, 2015  
*Thanksgiving Break: NO SCHOOL*
- Citywide School Preview @ MHS 9 am-1pm
- December 17, 2015  
*Governance Board Meeting 5-7 pm*

November 20, 2015

Volume 19, Issue 9

## *Student Engagement*

Dear Mission Hill Students, Families, Staff, and Friends,

This week was full of examples of students taking initiative to get involved at school. Typically, when educators talk about student engagement, they are talking about student interest in the material being taught or the learning exercise. Is the student paying attention and putting effort into learning from the lesson or experience? This letter to you is about students that are involving themselves in our school community in wonderful ways, beyond their daily lessons and experiences.

As I was observing a teacher in a kindergarten room, two older students found me and presented a proposal to me. The proposal was for Fun Fridays. Around 4:00 pm or so on Fridays we would play a variety of games together at school as a community. The students thought about the games that would be played and the supervision needed. They will present this idea at our Tuesday staff meeting for approval. This is a great example of students thinking about our whole school. (Another reason I'm mentioning this is because Fun Fridays would need adult volunteers. Please consider this if the proposal moves forward and you're called upon.)

Three students asked if they me. That afternoon I had to feedback. I told the students needed to do. They wanted to watching me take descriptive They each followed a student, engaged with the classroom

paying such close attention to their schoolmates and providing notes to the teacher. It was great having them follow the work of other students. Having students as part of teacher improvement just might grow into one of our practices.

**“Get ready for students to take on more responsibility and ownership of their school by doing things they love.”**

could spend some time with observe a teacher and provide where I had to go and what I come along, so they did. After notes, they did the same. focusing on how the student literacy work. They loved

“When are student jobs going to start back up again? Kids keep telling me I did a good job sharing at Friday Share”, said one of our students. Student jobs were a popular feature of our school for students last year. Posting of the student jobs will happen after the December break. Get ready for students to take on more responsibility and ownership of their school by doing things they love. Helping our youngest children at lunch or rest time, assisting at Friday Share, being a Green Team member, helping with family conference logistics, and giving school tours to visitors are examples of jobs that will be offered.

I'm feeling pretty good about these bits of evidence that some students are thinking about schoolmates and teachers beyond their own classrooms. I hope it continues.

### KINDERGARTEN

#### Room 108

We have been observing our snails so closely that we have learned a few things. Did you know that snails REALLY like maple leaves? When we filled the habitat with maple leaves, we saw more snail droppings than ever before. Did you know that snails can climb walls and poop at the same time? We saw it happening! And lastly, did you know that when a snail gets a small crack in its shell, the crack will heal in a few days? We watched this happen, too. We do still have some questions to be answered such as...are our snails girls or boys? We are working to try to figure this one out. What are you wondering about garden snails?

-Geralyn, Donna & Kyra

#### Room 106

This week we looked closely at the wingspan of birds. We first became interested in this on our trip to the Blue Hills Trailside Museum. We did not realize birds' wingspans were so long.

I shared with them a picture of a Canadian goose. I shared that I had learned that their wingspans are between 4-6 feet long. We laid four rulers down so that we could have a true understanding of how long it really was.

Students chose birds and researched their wingspans. Lola chose the snowy owl. She learned its wingspan was two feet long. While Lola was working she said, "I am making the mommy and the daddy and a BABY! I think I know how to do it. Wait! Do I remember? I remember how to do it. Wait! When I was at the zoo I think the snowy owl was standing." She started out by getting two rulers



Lola works on determining the wingspan of a snowy snowy owl.

and laying them down for the wingspan. She then drew the wings and the body with pencil. She asked for black paint to make the spots on the owl's outer feathers. She asked, "can I have gold paint for the eyes? Come by room 106 to see them up close.

-Kathy D'Andrea

#### Room 107

Last Monday, we visited the New England Aquarium. While there, we saw many marine animals that at times seemed to perform for us. We touched some sharks, stingrays, clams and starfish. We also observed jellyfish, turtles and were extremely excited to see schools of fish traveling together in the large tanks. Most importantly (in connection to our theme) we were able to see a baby

shark moving inside its egg sack and lobsters in various stages of development. We wrote about our experience in our journals the next morning. The children had this to say: Shona: I liked touching the stingrays. Josie: I saw a stingray and a turtle. Avian: I saw a lot of turtles at the aquarium.

Ava: I liked seeing the sharks.

Sophia: I liked the penguins.

Wren: I saw a shark.

Jayden: I saw fishes!

Emma: I like all the seals.

Vidania: We were looking at fish in the big window.

Jeremy: I saw a penguin.

Jonathan and Agboola: I like the sharks.

Dixon: I saw a starfish.

-Jada Brown, Jo-Ann Hawkesworth,  
& Cristina Noonan



*Observing jellyfish and seals at the NE Aquarium.*

### Room 109

This week our fall study moved to pumpkins. We are beginning to think about pumpkins, read about pumpkins, and observe them closely. As we read about the pumpkin life cycle we are noticing similarities to the apple life cycle that we focused on earlier this fall. It is interesting to see the parallels and begin to notice how many plants, trees, and other parts of nature culminate their season in the fall and also get ready for beginning again in the spring. Right now we are reading books and doing observational paintings and drawings as well as thinking about pumpkin questions. Soon we will cut a pumpkin in half to really get a good look at the inside and study the seeds.

Students completed their second self-portrait of the year and are already noticing changes in their observations of themselves. We will complete a series of self-portraits over the year. You'll see them on the bulletin board over our book area.

*-Deborah & Stephanie*

### GRADES 1 & 2

#### Room 205

Last week, I attended the Fall Forum, which is a conference hosted by the Coalition of Essential Schools. I participated in many workshops, chatted with like-minded people, and left feeling very inspired. I've been reflecting on how I can adjust what I am already doing in the classroom to incorporate some of the ideas I heard at Fall Forum. How can I bring more moments of mindfulness into my students' day? How do I display and convey unconditional positive regard for all students? How do I teach children to ask meaningful questions that guide them to learning? How can I help my students take more ownership over their work and develop self-advocacy skills? What would happen if we all began to look at things from someone else's perspective? How can we begin to do this? As these thoughts swirl around in my brain, I am feeling thankful for the opportunity to continue learning as a teacher.

*-Ashleigh L'Heureux*

#### Room 212

We are always striving to be a healthy class in a healthy school. Earlier this year the children enjoyed making applesauce and fruit roll ups from the apples in our schoolyard. As part of our continued work on healthy eating habits I am asking that parents not send chips, cookies cake candy etc. to school. The whole class enjoys a snack of either crackers or pretzels and sometimes fruit; late in the morning, so your child does not need an individual snack. Thanks to everyone who has made a donation of a snack and please consider doing so in the future if you have not. Please talk to your child and explain that chips and sweets are not allowed in the room or during lunch. Occasionally at special times we will have a class snack and I will ask families to contribute. Thank you for support.

*-Suzanne Brown*

#### Room 217

What makes it hard to grow gardens in the city? What are some of the challenges urban gardeners face? Room 217 has been pondering the challenges of urban gardening during project time. Here is a snapshot of a recent conversation...

Keziah: The steam from cars makes it hard for the plants to grow.

Cole: Yeah the exhaust from cars is dirty. And busses too.

Ashton: There isn't good soil, you have to buy the soil. Like how we bought soil for our classroom.

Jackson: There's also not a lot of room in the city, there are lots of buildings but not a lot of dirt.

Gerson: There are a lot of cars that drive over the flowers.

Nyla: There are too many cars driving fast. The roads and sidewalks are in the way of the gardens.



## CLASSROOM NEWS

Julia: There's not that much space or good soil or worms because the buildings take up space.

Hiram: There are a lot of fires and smoke that make the plants stop growing.

Farrah: There isn't enough room for the seeds.

-Kate Needham

### GRADES 3 & 4

#### Room 203

Last Friday, we had project time while the 4th graders were at Urban Improv. We were building towers with Kapla Blocks. Kapla Blocks are skinny rectangular wooden blocks. We decided when we were building that we would race to our height- whoever built a tower as tall as himself first would win!

Lukas and Braxton were on one team, while Mr. Danny was on the other team. Lukas and Braxton are about 4'6" tall, while Mr. Danny is 6'3"! Lukas and Braxton's building fell down three times, but Mr. Danny's only fell down once. After his first building fell, Mr. Danny took his time and built a really strong structure that was able to reach his height!

Mr. Danny then took a tennis ball and threw it at his building, and it bounced off! That was one strong building! When he threw it again he missed. When he threw the tennis ball a third time, BOOM! The building was demolished! Ms. Jenerra recorded it all in slow motion, and we wanted to put the video on YouTube! Dun dun dun dun (trumpet sound)! The end.

-Lukas, Braxton & Mr. Danny

#### Room 204

This week I watched students sweat

it out during their 10-minute math time, showing their strategies for solving multiplication and division. After many attempts, Keysha was very excited to find a strategy that worked for her and was able to demonstrate her understanding to her classmates. During math class while working on a division problem she came over to me announcing excitedly, pointing to her work, "Ms. Brown, look I used the way that I did it yesterday to find the answer to this one" While practice might not make one perfect, effort sure goes a long way when you don't let each failure stop you from trying again and again. As we continue to be presented with many challenges for teachers and students alike, I am seeing the relevance of perseverance as a habit of work and how it comes in tall orders on any given day, and to be kind and work hard no matter what kind of day it is.

-Cleata & Shaina

#### Room 207

This week I was fortunate to have yet another opportunity to spend three days and two nights at the Farm School in Athol, MA with the 7th and 8th graders. It is awesome to share this experience with our oldest children; for some whom this is their 9th visit, while others are experiencing the farm for the very first time.

Watching our middler-schoolers navigate the farm is fascinating. They are asked to do many things out of their comfort zone like milk a goat or cow. Some approach these situations without hesitation while others are totally freaked out! With encouragement from the awesome farmers, MHS teachers and each other, most are able to walk away feeling confident as they conquered that fear.

What an awesome opportunity it is for our children to come to the Farm School. Cooking together,



Braxton and Lukas work on tall-as-you towers.

completing farm chores and bonding during evening activities, helps to solidify this learning community. For days, months and possibly years to come, they will be able to look back on these cherished days spent at Farm School.

-Amina Michel-Lord & Amanda McCarthy

### GRADES 5&6

#### Room 210

Here is the latest installment of our End of the Week Reflections. Enjoy “Something I’m looking forward to doing next week is finishing a book I’m currently reading. *The Candy-makers*. It’s a really good book that got recommended to me by my friend. Right now, I’m at a cliff hanger. I’ve got about 50 pages left...”

“Something I learned this week was math, we are learning how to do factors. It’s kinda hard for me but I try my best.”

“Something that went well this week was math. We started working on geometry and I worked with a new partner \_\_\_\_\_. I found that I work well with him.”

“One thing I wish went better was that Joelle wasn’t leaving because she is a really nice good person and when I first came to this school she was really nice to me and she wanted to sit next to me at lunch and we talked and stuff...”

“Next week I’m going to try to stop fooling around when I’m at the meeting area because I’m the one who makes a lot of people laugh in the classroom, I can still be funny outside but not inside in any classroom.”

-Nakia, Manny & Elsa

#### Room 215

What is research? What repertoires,

habits do researchers use? What drives research? These are questions that have intentionally and spontaneously come up in our theme work. “Research is asking a bunch of questions;” “research helps you find out if what you think is true is really true.”

The FireFlies of 215 are ready to investigate the health of our Boston’s neighborhoods. They are in teams, with prepared questions for each classroom, and they will begin to conduct survey interviews of our whole school.

The FireFlies may or may not get to our main aim, to conclusively determine the healthiest and the unhealthiest neighborhoods in Boston. The 2014 Boston’s Health Report (<http://www.bphc.org/healthdata/health-of-boston-report>) provides strong researched information. The FireFlies are connecting the dots: playgrounds and parks play an important role in determining a community’s health, and that asthma, violence and traffic indicate that a neighborhood is unhealthy. Looking forward to sharing our research at the theme breakfast!

-*The FireFlies, Carlos, Cindy & Abdi*

### GRADES 7&8

As Leah walked into the bunk house she exclaimed, “Reginald, I milked a goat” then went on to tell me how she was able to get over her fear and to milk a goat on her first farm school trip.

Visiting the Farm School is always an exciting experience. However, this year seemed more packed than usual. The farmers, well aware that many of our students have visited the farm since kindergarten and might take for granted the routine of the farm, made changes to the schedule

designed to keep our students engaged. These changes honored some Mission Hill traditions such as early thanksgiving dinner while adding new wrinkles by having the 8th grade class cook the meal from scratch and present it to the 7th grade class.

In many ways the changes added a lot of excitement to our visit and our collective memory. Some of the highlights were:

Square Dancing to live music

Tea at bedtime

Cooking and eating an early thanksgiving dinner

Walking to visit a porcupine habitat

Chopping wood

Dismantling the old pig pen in a fire pit

Roasting marshmallows

Making name tags by wood burning for the 8th graders

Meeting the farm veterinarian

Watching a ten day old calf drink milk from a bottle

Spirited “capture the aprons” games

Sharing Farm School “snapshots” in closing circle

-*The Grade 7 & 8 Team*

## SCHOOLWIDE NEWS

### Free Turkey

Boston City Councilor Tito Jackson’s 5th annual Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway! Turkeys are on a first come first serve basis (one per household). This event is on Sunday, November 22nd at 2pm at the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center 1350 Tremont St, Boston 02120.

### Curriculum Breakfast

Come hear about and see the Life Science topics we have been learning about over the past few months. It’s a potluck, so bring a dish to share with our community.



## SCHOOLWIDE NEWS

### Images of Farm School

When: November 25, 2015  
Where: K-Quad and 2nd Floor  
Time: 9:15-10:00

#### Interesting Opportunity For Family Volunteers

The Children's Archive at MHS is an ongoing collection of children's work in all areas of the curriculum. The collection, established at the founding of the school, in 1997, is a valuable resource, unique in BPS. The Archive is useful to children and teachers in the school as direct, qualitative evidence of learning. It is also of potential interest to the wider educational community and schools of education.

Brenda Engel, who originally established the Archive, is about to retire (at the age of 92). We are looking for one or two interested family members who, with the help and advice of a faculty team, would take over management of the Archive. Brenda is happy to help with the transition, explain the organization of the Archive and the established procedures for collecting and storing work.

The time commitment is only three hours per week and the only qualification necessary is an interest and appreciation of children's creative and academic work. Contact Dani if you are interested: [dcoleman@missionhillschool.org](mailto:dcoleman@missionhillschool.org).



Ayla Gavins, *Principal*  
Deborah Meier, *Founder*  
Tommy Chang, *Superintendent*

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# FOCUS on the Boston Schools

An Educational Program offered by Project STEP  
(String Training and Educational Program)

## ***What is the FOCUS program?***

FOCUS aims to introduce children in kindergarten from underrepresented Boston communities to the general study of music at an early age. The program provides high-quality beginning music instruction combined with demonstrations of many types of music and instruments. For all students, FOCUS enriches the music program in their schools. For many students, this head-start training will hopefully encourage them to pursue the study of a musical instrument. FOCUS is not an instrumental program, but rather an introduction to music class.

## ***Who is eligible?***

Students from communities traditionally underrepresented in the world of classical music (i.e. Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino) that are currently enrolled in Kindergarten (students in K1 are not eligible until they enter K2) in Boston and surrounding areas' public, parochial, private, home school, charter, and parochial schools and in the METCO program can apply for admission to FOCUS.

## ***What is FOCUS?***

FOCUS is a 15-week introductory course on the fundamentals of music that takes place on Saturdays at the New England Conservatory of Music or Wednesdays at the Community Music Center of Boston. Students take weekly hour-long classes in the elements of music and movement ('Eurhythmics'). Additionally, there will occasionally be guest performers who will demonstrate various musical instruments including strings, woodwinds, brass and piano, among others. FOCUS is not an instrumental program, but rather an introduction to music class.

## ***What are the primary responsibilities of FOCUS students and families?***

Students are expected to be on time and attend each class. Also, students must practice their assignments every day at home.

## ***What is the cost?***

FOCUS is offered by Project STEP at no cost to the participants with the exception of a **\$35 registration fee**. Project STEP is a non-profit organization funded by generous corporate, foundation, government and individual contributions from throughout the country. All FOCUS classes, instruction and materials are provided for the students.

## ***What happens at the end of FOCUS?***

All students will perform for family and friends at a recital in May. After successfully completing the course, students will also be given referral information to continue their musical study and/or begin a musical instrument at a variety of different Boston-area music schools. A small number of students will be invited to **FOCUS II**, a 7-week summer session of group violin or cello lessons. There is a \$35 registration fee for FOCUS II and classes, instruments and materials are provided for each selected student.

***What is FOCUS II?***

FOCUS II is designed to provide early instrumental training for children interested in playing classical stringed instruments (violin, viola, cello and bass). The course consists of seven weeks of twice-weekly group violin or cello lessons. Approximately twenty students from FOCUS will be selected for FOCUS II. The selection criteria are based primarily on the child's talent, ability to focus and teacher recommendation. Enthusiasm, attendance, and dedication as well as parent participation during FOCUS are also key factors.

Students who complete FOCUS II and who are interested in continuing the study of a string instrument will be given contact information for Boston-area music schools. A few students will be invited to join the core Project STEP program to continue their string instrument training.

***What is Project STEP?***

Project STEP is a non-profit organization devoted to preparing exceptionally talented students of color for careers as string players in the classical music profession. The program was developed to address the historic lack of representation of people of color, especially African-American and Latino musicians in classical music.

***Why does Project STEP offer the FOCUS program?***

We believe that the study of music can be an enjoyable and meaningful activity in a child's life. The FOCUS program strives to provide early access to musical training, allowing students to be exposed to different types of music and instruments. The FOCUS program aims to be a link between students and our partner Boston-area music schools, enabling those who are interested to more easily pursue musical study.

If you have questions about the FOCUS program or Project STEP, please feel free to contact the STEP office: [info@projectstep.org](mailto:info@projectstep.org).

