

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Good news about Neighborhood Schools, Inc. Vol. 18, Issue 2 * Winter 2019

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Learning Fair

Tues., April 9 &
Wed., April 10, 6:30PM,
Forest Hills Covenant
Church
(455 Arborway, Jamaica Plain, MA)

Grad. Project Night

Thurs., May 23, 6:30PM,
Forest Hills Covenant
Church

Graduation

Fri., June 7, 6:30PM,
Forest Hills Covenant
Church



34 Peter Parley Road
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
(617) 522-0880

www.neighborhoodschooljp.org

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Meet You at the Fair!



Opening scene from Learning Fair 2017

What could be better than spending an hour with motivated, engaging young learners? You have the opportunity to do just that at **Learning Fair 2019** on Tuesday, April 9 and Wednesday, April 10, beginning at 6:30 p.m. on both evenings. Our students, from ages 5 – 12, will be your hosts for the evening and will encourage you to visit their booths to experience learning the Neighborhood School way. **Level One** friends will help you develop focus as you “Spoon and Pour” as well as encourage you to deepen your knowledge of penguins and try your hand at portraiture. **Level Two's** Wax Museum (stemming from their study of biographies) will be back by popular demand with new and interesting characters to meet. And their study of the human body will no doubt get visitors moving! **Level Three** will take us on a continental journey through Asia, complete with guided tours of seventeen countries. Their deep research and artistic renderings of the earth's biomes will also engage your mind and senses. You will time travel and learn about societies around the world with **Level Four's** ancient civilizations choose-your-own-adventure story games, and get hands-on experience with their science learning about mummies & cells and heredity & plants. Whew! We promise to keep you happily learning from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. and we'll even throw in some music, drama, and a snack sale to benefit City Life/Vida Urbana. Come one night or both, and invite your neighbors to this free, family-friendly learning extravaganza! *

Level Four Turns 20!

By Johnny Blazes, Level Four teacher



Ribbon cutting for Level Four's new classroom. March 7, 2001

As teachers and students, we know that growth happens gradually: limbs and branches grow imperceptibly each day, concepts develop and our minds reconfigure to allow them to come to ripen into juicy ideas and new ways of understanding. And sometimes, growth happens in a big spurt, all at once!

Twenty years ago, Neighborhood School had a noticeable and remarkable growth spurt. We went from being a three-level school of kindergarten through 4th grade, cozily ensconced in 34 Peter Parley Road, to being a four-level school with a multi-building campus, serving kids and their families up through 6th grade. As with all moments of transition, there were plenty of challenges and uncertainty along the way.

The seed of Level 4 was planted by parents. NS was

founded on the mission of serving the children of families of Boston, and after about a decade of a school that stopped at 4th grade, Tricia had noticed that many families were moving out of Boston after their time at Neighborhood School. Private school for 5th and 6th grade wasn't accessible to many families, and finding a fit in public school was difficult for many. With a deep commitment to Boston and the Jamaica Plain/Roxbury community especially, it seemed in fitting with the school's founding principles to listen when a group of Level 3 parents approached Tricia with a request: consider adding a 5th and 6th grade classroom to bring the NS experience up to the end of the elementary school experience. NS Parents Linda Camp (currently president of the NS board), Leslie Belay (current chair of the fund development committee), Josh Abrams (now director of our sibling school Meridian Academy), David Wean, and Miliken Tyler worked tirelessly at looking for spaces we could annex, searching for the right teacher to add to the team, and helping Tricia build the infrastructure needed for an expansion. Along with all of their work, they and a few other parents took the ultimate risk: they committed to sending their kids into NS's very first 5th grade class – without a physical classroom yet confirmed.



Level Four inside their new classroom. Spring 2001

(continued on page 3.)

"We had a hope and somewhat of a promise from the city," Tricia says when talking about the decision to take the leap. It had taken a long time to find just the right building. The Morrows had received a letter of intent from the seller in February, but as folks with experience around buying property know, the process can take a long time, and uncertainty about timelines always abound. The 4th grade families had gone ahead with applying to other schools, but waited until the very last moment to decide whether to accept other offers, trying to give Tricia as much time as possible to let them know whether Level 4 could possibly be a reality for the fall of 1999. It was April 9, and Tricia had no more information than she had had in February. She prayed for a sign. Moments later, as she walked out of the front door of 34 Peter Parley, she saw that a Good Friday processional from St. Mary's had stopped in front of 35 Peter Parley, in honor of the previous owner who had just passed away that year. The priest laid a eucalyptus branch on the threshold as a sign of peace. Tricia turned around on the spot, went up to the office, and contacted the rising 5th grade families. Level 4 was a go!

While a bit of dried eucalyptus still lives in Tricia's home in the upstairs of 35 Peter Parley, this sign of peace that encouraged her to have faith didn't guarantee an immediate and smooth transition. It took another two years for Level 4 to be settled into the first floor of the building it shares with the Morrow family. Construction, permitting, figuring out zoning, and negotiating with neighbors take time, and often more time than we hope! The "somewhat of a promise" from the city seemed stymied by neighbors who were dismayed by the prospect of more school presence on the block, and by miscommunications with the zoning board. So in the fall of 1999, an intrepid group of 10 year olds met in the back room of the Level 3 classroom for their initial homeroom meeting of the day, and then piled into the van to commute over to Forest Hills Covenant Church. They spent most of their day there, with music and PE and art interspersed with social studies, math, and science – and occasional trips back to Peter Parley Road for inter-age and all-school gatherings like Reading Buddies and Assembly. They were tended by incredible gardener Drew Curtis, with a lot of support from Lisa Masotta (Music, Rock Band, Visual Art teacher) and Jai Underhill (Visual Art teacher), as well as the rest of the NS faculty and parents.



Barter Day, a Level Four ancient civilization tradition.

With the hope and promise of a physical space, Tricia had been interviewing teacher candidates with help from Linda Camp, and a new-ish tool called The Internet, when one day a tall, personable, friendly man showed up on the porch. "I'm a neighbor from up the street, and I heard through Leslie Belay that you're looking for a new teacher for 5th and 6th grade." Another branch laid at our doorstep; Drew turned out to be just the right person for the job, and our roots connecting us to our neighbors grew deeper. While Drew hadn't been actively looking for a new job at the time, working so close to home would give him the flexibility to be with his baby son, Max (now an NS and Meridian grad who is in college!) Drew spent the summer with Josh Abrams looking through curricula, piecing together the original beds and rows that became the garden of Level 4's enduring themes.



Grad Trip breakfast, a Level Four tradition. 2009

(continued on page 4.)

Themes of injustice, oppression, and solidarity woven through the learning of history and literacy, while tying math and science themes to the historical events and transitions being learned about – this commitment came early on, and has blossomed over twenty years into an alternating curriculum that connects with Rap Around, music, theater, and art. Drew's attention to integrating learning across themes helped build the foundation of a Level 4 rooted in justice and community.

As Drew describes it, "we had to create our own traditions" in those early days. Some early traditions that have continued on are Rock Band, Farm School adventures, capstone grad projects, and school plays. The all-school performances had been occurring since NS's inception, but the addition of Level 4 led to a few experiments in how to make this type of production work for such a large group. The school settled into the alternating Play/Learning Fair biennial rhythm, allowing for a crop rotation that gives space for lots of types of learning.

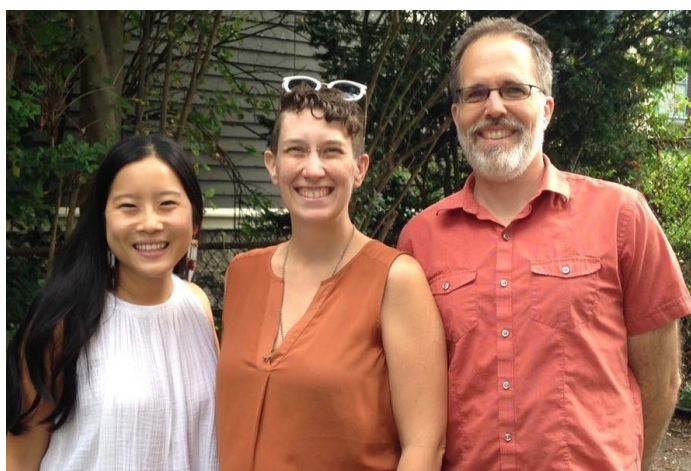
Throughout the first year and half of Level 4's existence, Drew and the kids faithfully inhabited the space at the church, and traipsed around the city finding their feet on sidewalks, subways, in urban gardens, and making their own maps of the city. Meanwhile, Tricia and Scott were raising their own kids on Peter Parley Road, learning lessons in collaborating with neighbors and allowing trust and friendship to grow. Over time, the neighbors of Peter Parley came to understand each other, and to find compromises around the growth of Neighborhood School. As this year's current Level 4 learns about gentrification, development, and neighborhood shifts in Jamaica Plain, it is helpful to look back at our own involvement in the changing landscape of the Eggleston neighborhood.



Big blue van trips to the church with mascot, Anna Morrow. 1999-2000

Listening is a skill we emphasize with students, parents, and teachers, and it is fitting that listening to our neighbors over time was a lesson learned in the creation of Level 4. The Morrows being residents of Peter Parley themselves, was a crucial aspect in the growth of that communication, and is further testament to our rootedness in the school-as-family philosophy. We live and work and play on Peter Parley Road, and we love our neighborhood! Here's to 20 more years of growth both gradual and swift, whether on Peter Parley Road or on a new, future campus, with love and family at the heart of our learning. 🌟

Tell us about your favorite Level 4 memories!
Email NeighborhoodSchoolOffice@gmail.com with photos, anecdotes, and celebrations of this anniversary.



Level Four teachers (l to r) Lisa Nam, Johnny Blazes, Drew Curtis



Signing Good-bye books, a Level Four tradition. 2013

Level 4 Takes Action!

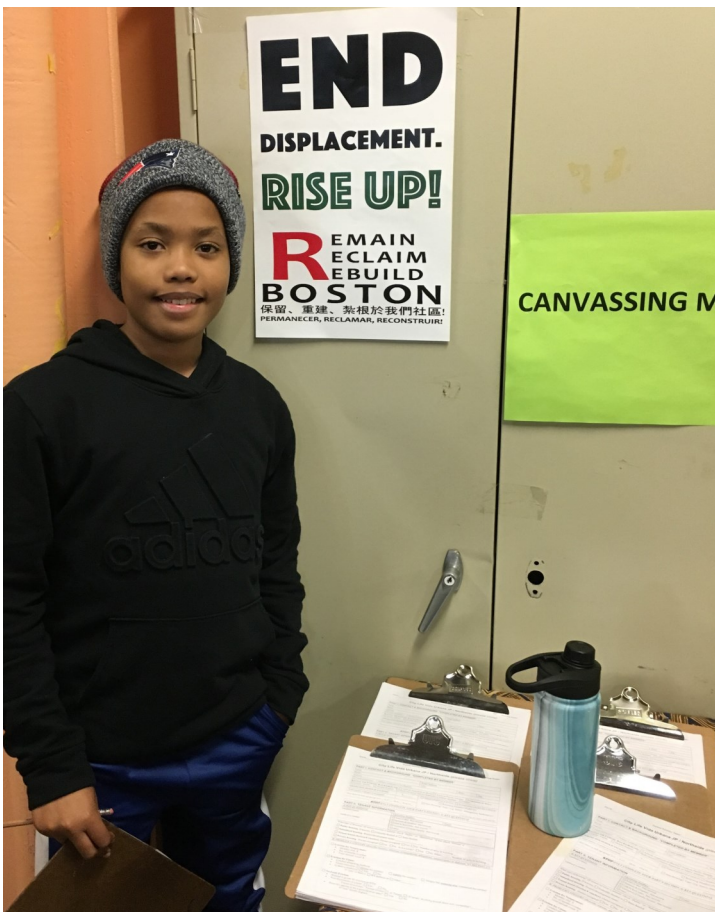
By Lisa Nam, Level Four teacher

This winter in Rap-Around, Level Four students have continued their social action project, supported by One Bead, a school partnership organization that supports youth development through community engagement. In the fall, students researched and pitched their own ideas about social issues in which they had a personal stake. As a class, they decided to focus on the issue of gentrification and community instability in Jamaica Plain. When asked why they chose this topic, students expressed that they wanted to learn more about how and why their own community was changing, and they knew they had a stake in the issue as students who attend school or live in the neighborhood.

Since then, the class has been learning about the complex causes and effects of gentrification by watching documentaries, hearing first-hand accounts, and even visiting local activists at City Life Vida Urbana (CLVU) who organize for equitable

housing practices. Students have also learned more about the history of federal housing policies in the past century. This has allowed them to see that current community concerns are inherently connected to institutional oppression based on race. With all this knowledge and inspiration from those who have already been fighting for our JP community, Level Four wanted to contribute their time and resources (such as the \$1000 budget from One Bead) to support these community organizers. They learned that CLVU has been organizing JP tenants and business owners to fight back against City Realty, a group that is using predatory tactics to evict and displace long-time residents of our community. Most recently, and with community support, CLVU was able to delay City Realty from receiving a permit for their next project, until the group agrees on a Community Agreement with more humane business practices. Learning about this process, Level Four thought of a concrete way to show our solidarity.

Currently, the class is producing an informative video, which will feature the voices of JP community members affected by displacement and the lack of affordable housing - a key facet of the complicated process of gentrification. The goal of the video is to show the perspectives of community members who have often been labeled as victims, because they are low-income people of color. The video will show their individual and collective resilience, while also explaining the oppressive systems and ideologies that created these housing inequities in the first place. It will also have a call to action for the viewers, reminding them that with power in numbers, the JP community can make a real impact on how groups like City Realty choose to negotiate with tenants and organizers. Through this project, Level Four students have practiced skills like identifying their stake in community issues, speaking publicly about their ideas, ideating creative responses to complex dilemmas, analyzing how historical events connect with contemporary concerns, interviewing people to hear their perspectives, telling a story through visual techniques, and calling people to use their power for good. *




Zachary Breneus, Level 4, at City Life / Vida Urbana

Spring Sustainers Gathering

The NS Sustainer Circle will gather on **Sunday, March 24 from 3-5 p.m.** at the home of Eleanor Chin and Kevin Gillespie at 18 Boylston Street, JP. This gathering will include parents of NS Alums who are both new and familiar to the Circle. **NS Sustainers** are individuals (or families) who have been connected to Neighborhood School as either parents, alums, relatives of alums, or friends. They have demonstrated their support for the school through their donations (monetary or in-kind), volunteer efforts and/or expertise and resource sharing consistently over time. **The Sustainers' Circle** is the group of Sustainers who have formally committed to be a part of this group, to receive regular communications about this group, attend periodic meetings, and who occasionally commit time and resources to support the Neighborhood School and its ongoing mission. Our first Sustainer Circle convened two years ago in the spring of 2017. A Sustainer's Circle of support is now growing around the board!

There is more sustainability work to be done in shepherding NS to grow beyond its founders than seven board members can accomplish. Sustainers collaborate with board members and form working groups to address five priorities to help NS sustainability and succession planning. Those priorities include **Leadership** (Eleanor Chin, Jeremy Phillips, Marta Gredler), **Fund Development** (Leslie Belay, Jude Goldman, Beth Schultz, Malaika Moses, Naveen Hariprasad), **Technology** (David Gibson, Francis Kubala, SueEllen Beers, Keeran Hariprasad, Bobbi Katz), **Communication /Tell the Story** (Joyce Mallory, Linda Camp, *plus members/leader needed*), and **Space** (*members/leader needed for launch in 2019*). Contact Tricia or Linda Camp if you are interested in joining the Circle or a specific working group. *

NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL LEARNING FAIR



Learn Alongside Our Students
Admissions is FREE
Bake & Cake Sale Available!

APRIL 9 AND 10 6:30PM

at FOREST HILLS COVENANT CHURCH

455 ARBORWAY, JAMAICA, PLAIN, MA



Neighborhood School • 34 Peter Parley Road • Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
(617) 522-0880 • www.neighborhoodschooljlp.org

Annual Giving Update

We're over half-way (thank you, friends!) to meeting our goal of raising \$70,000 this school year. That means we still have stories to tell and work to do before May 31. One new way of supporting NS is via our Learning Fair program booklet. Visitors (300+) will read children's writing and connect with local businesses and individuals who support the work of NS! Ads and sponsorships can easily be purchased by contacting us. Donations fuel our Scholarship Fund and provide access to NS education to one-third of our students. If you care about NS, please send a gift of any amount before May. Online donations (one-time or recurring) are also welcome! *