

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Good news about Neighborhood Schools, Inc. Vol. 19, Issue 1 * Fall 2019

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Winter Concert

Wednesday, December 18
6:30PM Forest Hills Covenant Church

Winter Break

December 23 — January 5

Biennial Play

Friday, March 6, 10:30am
Saturday, March 7, 3:00pm
Roxbury Community College



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Books as Mirrors in the Classroom

Tracy Pimentel, Level 1 Teacher, NS Leadership Team



In all my years of teaching, I've never once underestimated the power of rich literature. Need to introduce a new topic like Backyard Birds? An introductory book on what makes a bird a bird does the trick. Need to introduce the topic of friendship? A book on how to be a good friend is a great start. Need to hold conversations around race, gender, and identity with 4-6 year-olds? A book can be a powerful tool. Books should play an intricate part of the curriculum the entire year. Reading a book or two about Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King, Jr. only before MLK Day doesn't aid in the development of healthy identities for children-especially children of color. Children need to see themselves in the stories read to them. They need to be able to draw inspiration from the stories they hear. Most importantly, children need to be able to make connections with stories in which they can identify with the characters.

We know that children, from a very young age, recognize differences in appearance. Teaching about how we are all different just isn't enough anymore. The "Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls and Boys Who Dared to Be Different" series changed the way I view curriculum in a multitude of ways. I'll never forget the day a student brought the book into class to share with friends. I introduced the book to the class, and talked a little bit about what "rebel" and "activist" could mean, and set the book aside while saying, "Perhaps the leader each day can choose a biography for us to

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read and discuss." From there, hearing the stories of people who made a difference in the world really captivated this group of young learners. The books became part of our everyday routine. The topics of our conversations ranged from racism, to stereotyping, rights of women, to the rights of the LGBTQ community. We learned about people who were young and afraid as they took steps to fight for justice and freedom. At times, we would revisit a biography and dissect the topics even more if they came up in conversation or in the form of a question. The children often made connections to themselves in relation to the stories:

"So Tracy wouldn't be our teacher, and I wouldn't be in this school if it was only for white people."

"I didn't want to wear nail polish any more when other people laughed at me, but now I put some on because the rebel boy had it on and he didn't care if anyone laughed at him."

"I'm going to tell my parents that even though I'm 5, I can still make posters and join the strike."

"I'm going to keep drawing and writing my stories like that rebel girl because she didn't give up."

Certainly, these rebel stories paired with "All the Colors We Are" and books centering around identity played a large role in our curriculum as well. Books such as "Island Born," "My Name is Yoon," "Ahmed's Secret," and "Dear Black Boy" (just to name a few) allow children to connect with characters whose language, skin color, family composition, and life situations could be similar or different to their own. Books that challenge stereotypes and celebrate writers, artists, actors, dancers, teachers, scientists, public servants, and others, become treasures in the classroom.



This past summer, teachers at NS were invited to create classroom book wish lists with special attention to equity and identity. In turn, NS Sustainers generously gifted the books to the school. It is encouraging to have rich, powerful literature focused on supporting healthy identity development flowing in from people who love NS and are committed to its mission of creating rebels to change the world. *

L4 Farm School 2019



Building Community

Tricia Morrow, *Director, NS Leadership Team*



Kids vs. Grown-Ups capture the flag is an annual favorite at Family Fun in Franklin Park!

Who's in your child's village? Who knows and loves your family's story? At its fullest potential, NS families become members of "the village" for one another. And the village can last beyond elementary school. The school is intentional about some events and daily rhythms that are conducive for connecting. Annual gatherings like the Parent Potluck, Parent Nights, and Family Fun get community brewing each fall. Daily flexibility during drop-off and pick-up times provide some time for parental chatting while kids play. Classroom teachers host open houses or student exhibitions that encourage parents to get involved with the learning of classmates, not just their own child. The school does its part to build community, but parent organizers sometimes go the extra mile and make a difference.

One such organizer is **Carolyn Rubin**, mother of Benny, who is in his third year at NS and a member of Level Two. Carolyn is dedicated to doing all she can to connect the families of Benny's class (which shifts slightly from year to year depending on whether he is in the younger or older half of the level). Carolyn is also a member of the CARE organizers (Conversations About Racism and Equity). I spoke with her recently about community building at NS.

Why do you make it a priority to connect the families of Benny's classmates?

When I got to Level One, I had this moment when I realized 'I'm going to be with this small group of families for 8 years. I feel very invested in the school and I really like these parents, so I want to help bring us together.' I wanted us to feel comfortable talking with one another, even when there are problems between our kids. That fall the CARE team organized "Fun and Slightly Awkward Parties" (FA-SAP) and I volunteered to help a group go apple picking. But it rained and so I opened our house for a Saturday morning party. Other Level One parents were there and people wanted to connect. I love to throw parties where people get to know one another on a very human level. I believe despite real differences and conflict, people can make very human connections. I also want Benny to know he's part of a community and that's not about getting everything you want. You give up things, you negotiate, and you make it work for everyone. I learned these values from my family. My grandfather came from China and I heard his stories from my father about how Chinese family associations formed to help one another as immigrants.

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Awesome Authors Day, circa 2017 when Carolyn was a new Level One parent.

What are some of the keys to connecting families and building community?

You need to be intentional about it. The sharing exercise Level Two parents did at the Potluck ("tell a story about your name") created a nice tone and brought more people into the circle. It sparked an intention to keep going and to have regular Level Two family get-togethers this year. Also helping one another when there are real needs is both a product of community and an intention.

A few years ago and NS parent wrote, "I had wanted my child to be the best and the brightest, but somewhere along the way that shifted to wanting his whole class to thrive." How does this resonate with you as you consider your connection with Benny's cohort?

Oh, yes, that's what I feel. I care about each child in his class getting just what they need. I know that every child doing well affects my child doing well. And I believe other parents feel the same.

What's next for the Level Two family community?

The relationship building we are doing now is deepening the trust and foundation we'll need when hard things happen – our kids will hurt one another or we will have troubling conversations about race and equity – but because we are a community, we will come through hard times, stronger and together. *

Common Cents

Giving is in the air among NS students as Development Coordinator, Malaika Moses (P '23), is involving each level in reaching out to alumni and their parents. Level Three students have written letters of encouragement to their former Reading Buddies who are now in middle and high school. Level Four students are devising a plan of how they can use their creative skills to both support the school and alumni outreach. Level One and Two students are giving their creativity to decorate envelopes that will carry cards to our supporters in November. Teachers are sending Care Packages to some of our college-age alums (hint, we need college mailing addresses for this project!). Watch for your decorated envelop and help us grow the giving culture at NS!

Please email Malaika (malaikamoses@hotmail.com) with questions and suggestions. *

Biennial Play in progress...



Students in Levels 3 and 4 are learning about finding balance, creating trust, and tapping into the power of the group through circus arts this fall. Partner acrobatics and group juggling provide us with new ways to build stories with our bodies and surprise the audience -- and ourselves! -- with what we are capable of when we listen deeply and work hard. *

