

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

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Level Four Teacher, Lisa Nam
(right) greets students at
Bump Handle.



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Reunited on Peter Parley Road

Reflection on the beginning of a new school year
by Tricia Morrow, Director



NS Teachers (from left) Jai Underhill, Joyce Mallory, Johnny Blazes, Haeli Warren, Scott Morrow, Malena Castilla, Anna Slavin, Malika Walker, Drew Curtis, Tracy Pimentel, Shari Feibel, Caitlin Palm.

“I know I can always come back to Neighborhood School.” It’s a deeply affirming sentiment that I’ve taken for granted because I have heard it so many times through the years: from 7th graders at the holiday concert, from new college graduates with contributions to make, and most recently from adults looking to reconnect with their roots. This past year, though, had more to teach me about the fundamental values at the heart of that statement. What does it mean to come back to Neighborhood School -- after the first year of a still-raging pandemic? During a time of social reckoning? After a new space negotiation that didn’t come together?

Neighborhood School is built on, for, and about relationships. And I can tell you that **coming back to Neighborhood School has been joyful this year** – in spite of the many challenges we face – because of our relationships. Most fundamentally, you see it between the children. During the Pump Handle tradition on the first Friday (this year reconfigured as the “Bump Handle”, look left for photos), as old friends greet each other with big smiles, and new students have their nerves washed away in the fun of the game and the warmth of the community, we lay the foundations that anchor the spirit of the school. You see it when teachers share lunch on the porches, delighted to be reunited on one campus. You also see it between the teachers and the students. For example, in addition to relying on and learning from

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Anna & Malena, Level 3 students coming back to Peter Parley after a year of being off-campus are eagerly anticipating their opportunities to regularly see and interact with their Level One teacher, Tracy, during Reading Buddies, and reconnect with Malika, last year's Support Teacher, during Afterschool. Jai has magically created more space in the art room and children are delighted to meet her there.

Whether it's child to child, teacher to child, parent to teacher, teacher to teacher, or the whole parent community to the organization – **the thing about Neighborhood School relationships is that you can count on them.** And this year as we come back together to put together a productive, healthy school experience on Peter Parley during the uncertainty of the ongoing pandemic, and as we continue to plan for the school's future during a time of transition and change, we are leaning into and relying on those relationships.

Good relationships that you can count on don't happen overnight. They need to be cultivated, invested in, and tested, and they depend upon a shared vision. Neighborhood School started in 1986 with 3 teachers, 7 students, and operated on just a little bit more than a shoestring, but with a vision of what it takes to **build a child's education rooted in joy and justice.** We have learned that it really does take a village to raise a child, and organizationally, **we have invested most heavily where it matters: in our community of staff and students. Investing in staffing builds our capacity** to offer the best support and expertise to meet the needs of all of our 59 students and their families. We have been especially mindful of and attentive to the staffing needs presented by our current challenges of operating during a pandemic while also planning for the next stage in our growth. Investing in our Fair Share Tuition commitment strengthens our student community by ensuring that our classrooms reflect our neighborhoods and our communities. Both investments are key to our success.

The recent investments that we've made include a current staff of 17 to support our school community, and a Fair Share Tuition commitment representing 44% of total enrollment. These investments are a significant commitment, but we were willing to make them because we know that they will be worth it and because we trust in the strength and the wisdom of our community. We are beginning to see the adults our first Neighborhood School students have become. **"NS helped me become a good person,"** was repeated feedback heard when we hosted alumni reunions on Zoom last winter. We are seeing the multitude of ways they are choosing to engage with and change the world they are inheriting. When we look at NS adult alums like Ruby Sarron and Luke Walker (see profiles), we are seeing what happens when we believe in relationships, when you engage in community, and when you see, respond to, and support children and what they bring to the learning relationship.

It is with this hopeful vision for the future, that **I ask you to join us.** We are unequivocally, enthusiastically, and passionately here for our current students, our staff, our current families, as well as our alumni and alumni family – and we hope that you are there for us as well as we write this next chapter of the Neighborhood School history together



Alumni Profiles

Why do you count on NS? What's remarkable to you about NS?

Ruby Sarron, NS Class of 2005

During her impromptu visit to Boolie Day in June, Ruby shared: "I just had to turn around my car when I glanced and saw a bouncy house at the church. These are my people! I'm an original Boolie and it's Boolie Day! How cool that this tradition is still happening in a pandemic nearly 20 years after we did that play. Neighborhood School is where I made friends, had fun, and developed confidence. The plays were a good challenge. And I started to develop social consciousness. I've worked for Emily's List and now for ActBlue and NS is part of who I am as an activist."

Ruby lives in Boston, is getting married this fall, and works as Director of Training for ActBlue.



Luke Walker, NS Class of 2005

"The teachers and curriculum at NS helped me to become curious - curious about myself, others, and the world we live in. I was continually reminded that I am special and encouraged to know that this specialness is worth exploring and sharing! From finger painting, African dance, physical ed, panorama projects, rock band, and school plays, I was given opportunities to show up boldly and without shame. My years at NS gave me a deep inner confidence, something I've come to recognize as a rare and invaluable blessing."

Luke (pictured right) and his brother Sam Walker (NS Class of 2003) operate Walker Brothers Beverage Company, based in Nashville. Check out Drink Walker Brothers and try their high gravity kombucha!



Kaitlin (Harris) Thomas attended NS in the early 1990's and remembers the Neighborhood Garden show. She and her family are moving from Utah to New England this fall. Kaitlin is a member of the NS Development team!



Jai Underhill, NS Specialist teacher, with Nikoi Coley-Riberio (NS Class of 2006) at Spontaneous Celebrations where Nikoi teaches capoeira among other work in his life.

2020-21 Contributions

We exceeded our goal and raised \$131,000! Our sincere thanks to the more than 150 individuals who contributed to the Annual Fund in support of the Neighborhood School Scholarship Fund.

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