



Beacon Parents Bulletin

September/October 2010 • Issue I

FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL

Welcome to the 2010-2111 school year! We are so excited about all that is ahead and look forward to a year of challenge, growth and accomplishment.

Our experience has taught us that this year will be a tough one for students and families.

The opportunity of Beacon is tremen-

dous—but it requires sacrifice, humility and a tremendous amount of hard work. But it is certainly worth it! Our 92 graduates have earned more than \$9 million in scholarships for high school. Most are attending very competitive independent schools.

I am especially proud to report that from the founding class, 14 students are enrolled

in four-year college programs, and one is attending Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Cambridge. Each one of our graduates has gotten out of Beacon exactly what he or she has put in.

Always know that you can call any of us any time. We're in this together!

—Cindy Laba,
Founder, Head of School

B.A.P.A. to host two workshops

Volunteering through Beacon Academy Parents Association is a great way to meet other parents and to contribute to the school in a meaningful way.

B.A.P.A. is made up of current parents and graduates' parents. We have more than 100 participants.

We started B.A.P.A. as another way for us to stay connected to our graduates and to provide a forum for our graduates' parents to support one another in these competitive high schools.

We often bring in guest speakers on current topics.

For our meeting Thursday, Oct. 28 meeting, we will have two workshops.

Although these workshops are not targeted to current parents, current parents are certainly welcome to come.

We'd love to have them. We just know that they have a lot on their plates with Family Workshops and we do not want them to miss any of those.

Please come and meet B.A.P.A. leadership and graduates' parents and hear about some of the issues ahead. We will have workshops tailored specifically to parents of current students in the spring.

Workshop I is targeted to parents of sophomores and juniors and topics include reading between the lines on transcripts and teacher comments, understanding standardized tests required

of high school students, extracurricular activities and summer opportunities.

Workshop II is targeted to parents of seniors. Financial Aid Forms and timing will be addressed. Barbara Guilfoile, a Beacon Academy secondary school coach who has a lot of experience in this

area will be leading this workshop along with guests including Rodney Glasgow, Beacon parent and dean of students at Worcester Academy.

—Laura Coleman
director of volunteers/co-curricular
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Calendar of events October

Beacon Academy hosts an **open house** at Temple Israel Friday, Oct. 22 from 8:30-9:30. **Marks close** that day for Term I.

Meeting for Beacon Academy Parents Association, **B.A.P.A.**, is at Temple Israel Thursday, Oct. 28. at 6 p.m.

November

Along with their parents and coaches, all students participate in an **interview day** at cooperating schools Tuesday, Nov. 2.

All students take the **Independent School Entrance Exam** at the locations specified on their tickets Saturday, Nov. 6.

SSATs for all students are in a room to be determined at Simmons College Saturday, Nov. 13.

The second **interview day** for all students, parents and coaches is at cooperating schools Tuesday, Nov. 16.

WHO IS THE FOLLOWING FOR? Symposium and Secondary Schools Workshop WHEN AND WHERE IS IT?

Interim grades close Friday, Nov. 19 at the end of the day.

No school. **Thanksgiving break** Wednesday, Nov. 24 TIME?-Sunday.

Beacon Academy's traditional **homecoming** is Friday, Nov. 26.

UPDATES

on courses

MATH

Hello, parents! It was great to see all of you at Back to School Night. Now that we've really gotten down to business in math class, I have a few more thoughts that I'd like to share with you.

First, I want to mention something that you probably already realize. Your children and their classmates are coming to Beacon from a very wide range of educational environments. For example, some students come to Beacon with strong mathematical foundations, while others have struggled with the subject.

But regardless of where students begin in September, the value that they get out of Beacon depends primarily on the *progress* they make from September's "starting point." Prior knowledge is almost beside the point; with energy and initiative, any student can make **three or even four years of academic progress in these 14 months.**

To this end, I want to reiterate something that I mentioned on Back to School Night. It is absolutely critical that every student completes **two hours of study at home** on a nightly basis. If your child is currently struggling in math, intense study is the only way to build a new, strong foundation. And if your child is already a solid math student, independent study habits are absolutely critical as we look toward possible Honors classes in high school.

Once a student has finished his or her assignments for the next day, doing **"extra work" isn't just optional.** We expect every student to take initiative and go "above and beyond" a nightly basis.

To help meet this challenge, here is the hand-out that I distributed on Back to School Night. It offers suggestions about things that students can do when they've finished their core assignments... or when they're "stuck" on their homework.

Please contact me any time if you have questions, ideas, or concerns about all of this. I always love to hear from parent.

—Matt Dunkel.
617-785-0905

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Questions to ask your children about their Math homework

If they say, "I've finished my homework..."

- "Have you re-read the assignment and the instructions?"
- "Have you checked your answers?"
- "Have you tried questions that Mr. Dunkel didn't assign?"
- "Have you re-read your class notes?"
 - Then re-write them in more complete form, noting any places where you don't understand.
- "Have you reviewed old material?"
 - Earlier topics from the current chapter
 - Re-read introductions and class notes
 - Try (and check) some problems
 - Earlier chapters
 - Arithmetic (fast facts, basic operations, fractions, decimals...)

If they say, "I'm stuck..."

- "Have you re-read the question?"
 - Look for instructions.
 - Underline—then write down on your own paper:
 - What does the question ask for?
 - What facts are "given"?
 - Are any variables being used?
- "Have you re-read the introduction to the lesson?"
 - Underline and take notes.
 - Read example problems.
- "Have you reviewed your class notes?"
 - What ideas from class seem as if they could help me here?
- "Have you written down what you do understand and don't understand?"
 - For example: "Questions 5-7: I know how to find the perimeter, but I don't know how to find one of the sides."
- "Have you called a friend?"
- "Have you called Mr. Dunkel?" (617-785-0905)

ENGLISH

During the summer session, students read Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and reviewed literary terms. They also did weekly writing assignments and studied more than 300 new vocabulary words.

In September, students read Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They worked on close reading and using text-based evidence to support their ideas. Frequent writing assignments included an expository paragraph on one of the characters in the book. In addition, they added 230 new vocabulary words (such as unfathomable, predilection, umbrage, degeneration, apoplectic) to their lexicons and began their study of grammar.

This month, students continue to hone their skills in reading, writing and critical thinking, to develop their knowledge of grammar, and to expand their vocabulary. They will also begin reading Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*.

—Anne-Marie Yu-Phelps
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FACING HISTORY

Our social studies curriculum aims to inspire the students to take responsibility for their world. We help the students see that their choices and actions matter, and that young people can and should be agents of change.

The curriculum is based on the Facing History and Ourselves Institute's resources and strategies. The resource book, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*, explores the consequences of hatred, bigotry and oppression through the victims, victimizers, bystanders and upstanders.

In pursuit of deeper understanding, the students also explore primary source documents, novels and biographies as well as documentary and narrative films.

They also meet exemplars of courage and compassion in the face of injustice, survivors of genocides who share their own experiences with the class

We agree with Facing History's principle

that students are moral philosophers, able and willing to think about tough moral and ethical dilemmas in surprisingly sophisticated ways.

—Mervan Osborne
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COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

During the summer session, all students visited the Beacon Academy community garden in Jamaica Plain.

In small groups, they weeded our own plot and some of the pathways, and they learned about assorted vegetables and herbs.

Because of the lack of rain in August, our garden was disappointing in terms of what we harvested before school started. Nevertheless, the garden project launches a yearlong study of sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and environmental awareness.

Thursday, Sept. 16, we traveled to Hampton, N.H., for Timberland's annual Serv-a-palooza Day of community service.

Each year Beacon students work alongside other volunteers to make a significant difference in renovating a public space which has fallen into disrepair. This year our assignment was to clear two large areas of brush and overgrown weeds, the first step to restoring former gardens that will eventually be open to the public.

At the end of the day, we were amazed at how different the property looked!

This month, Beacon students begin their partnership with Temple Israel's preschoolers. Twice a week, they will read with their "book buddies" in one of the preschool classrooms.

As Beacon students participate in this reading program, they not only form connections with the preschoolers, but they also appreciate their role of service in the larger community of temple parents, teachers and children.

—Sally Baker, Director of CSL
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Joanne Hoffman, director of studies

Joanne Hoffman, was head of the Moses Brown School in Providence, R.I., having been an administrator and a teacher at Concord Academy, Concord, Mass., and at the Ethel Walker School and Kingswood-Oxford School in Connecticut.

Ms. Hoffman and a colleague, Patty Hager, completed the five-year Beacon Academy evaluation last year. The evaluation provided the school community with important insights into how our students are doing in secondary schools.

During the spring term, she led a Research class with the students and brought in Axis of Hope, a non-profit that leads workshops in conflict resolution.

Ms. Hoffman earned her bachelor's in English from Marymount College and her master's in English from Trinity College.

Shawna Russo, development assistant and program coordinator

Shawna Russo works in development and serves as the main administrative point-person for the students, faculty, and donors.

Having grown up in Albuquerque, N.M., she graduated from Tufts, where she majored in international relations.

She came to Beacon Academy after a year as a college adviser at East Boston High School through the National College Advising Corps and a summer as a research fellow for the Breakthrough Institute in Oakland, Calif.

Anne-Marie Yu-Phelps, English teacher

Anne-Marie Yu-Phelps comes to Beacon Academy from João Pessoa, a small city in northeastern Brazil where she worked for the past three years in a holistic health and education center. Previously, Ms. Yu-Phelps taught for 10 years at Newton Country Day School. She has also taught English in a school for orphaned and abandoned children in Honduras and has worked with refugees and taught English in Hong Kong and El Paso, Texas.

Ms. Yu-Phelps graduated with honors in English and Spanish from Amherst College and earned her master's degree in education from Harvard with a focus on teaching and curriculum for secondary English.

SECONDARY SCHOOL PROCESS

Beacon Academy is committed to ensuring that every one of its students is ideally matched with the best possible secondary school, one that will allow each graduate to flourish at the next level.

Outside of their academic requirements, our students face grueling and unforgiving application processes. It is crucial that they are well prepared.

We recognize that the transition to life at independent secondary schools can be complex and demanding.

Our program aims to substantively address the many social and cultural challenges that lie ahead for our students.

We hope that every student and every family feel confident and supported throughout the many steps of applying to secondary schools.

Weekly meetings

We meet with our students weekly in a time slot dedicated exclusively to the Secondary School Process (Thursday afternoons).

Test preparation

To build students' test-taking skills and confidence we have developed a course of study that provides our students with weekly intensive SSAT preparation (Tuesday mornings).

Financial Aid Workshop

Admissions officers from many of the area's top secondary schools have agreed

THE COACHES ARE COMING!

What is a Beacon Academy Coach?

A coach is a carefully selected and trained adult volunteer who knows the ins and outs of applying to secondary schools and works with one student and his or her family throughout the year to help them manage the process of visiting schools, writing applications and filing financial aid forms.

Our coaches have had children at independent schools and understand that the process of applying and choosing a school can be overwhelming.

They will be a resource to you as you and your child learn about the schools. No question is too small.

They will call you to introduce themselves to you during October and will be meet with your children at school.

Questions?

Call or email Lora Farkas, director of the Coaches Program at Beacon Academy. (617)413-8740

to partner with us.

They will participate in Financial Aid Workshops and panel discussions dealing with the rigors of the application process for students and their families.

Mock interviews

These same officers further assist us by conducting videotaped mock interviews with our students to help get them ready for what can be a daunting exercise.

Shadowing students

All of our students spend a full day in the early fall shadowing students enrolled in New England independent schools.

Open houses and fairs

Our students will also attend numerous open houses and high school fairs.

The Association of Independent Schools in New England and other organizations conduct these events.

As a result of this program, all of our students gain essential information that allows them to identify the schools that are their best matches.

—Mervan Osborne, director of secondary school placement
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