



Parents Bulletin

Winter 2010 • Issue 2

FROM THE ACADEMIC DEAN

At Beacon every day, your children and their teachers focus on making excellence a habit—one that your children practice while working in their classrooms, analyzing art at the Museum of Fine Arts, listening to inspiring people like Ayanna Pressley of the Boston City Council or doing their homework.

Since you and your children have received their interim grades and comments, this time in the year provides the opportunity to reflect on your children's progress so far and to set specific goals.

During the fall, your children continued to experience Beacon's rigorous educational environment, and they heard us explain all that we are expecting of them.

Now, they have begun to refine their own expectations and to set their sights on ways to improve their performance and bolster their effort for the rest of the term. As they revisit their priorities, they are relying not only on themselves, but also on everyone in the Beacon support network to help them realize their goals.

As parents, you are essential to your children's success.

By reading and discussing the teachers' comments with your children and talking with their advisors, you can help your children focus on one of the most important aspects of a Beacon education: steadily improving academic performance by setting clear, specific and feasible goals.

You should now regularly discuss with your children their sense of progress toward realizing those goals—always making sure that your children are accepting the responsibility for that improvement.

You might want to explore

- how your child self-assesses performance in each subject
- what progress is looking and feeling like
- how your child's daily routines and study spaces might change to produce improvement and

'We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act, but a habit.'—Aristotle

•how much effort your child is putting into the work.

Some thoughtful student self-assessment and goal-setting that I have heard in the Beacon halls have included

•"I am not getting enough sleep, so I think that I am not doing as well as I could."

•"I try to do my homework first without asking questions; after I have tried my hardest, the help that I get from my teacher or tutor makes more sense."

•"I shouldn't wait until the night before the test or quiz to study."

•"I think I need to manage my time better, and I am going to talk with my advisor about helping me. Maybe keeping a study log is a good idea."

Our partnership with you is critical. Please be sure that your children take advantage of all the resources available to them in our school.

Beacon is a community of accomplishment, and we all look forward to ensuring that the students in the class of 2011 realize their dreams by making excellence a habit.

Please feel free to contact your child's advisor or me if you have any questions or concerns.

—Joanne Hoffman, academic dean
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Calendar of events

December

Along with their parents and coaches, all students participate in **interview days** Thursday, Dec. 2 and Friday, Dec. 3.

Holiday reunion of Beacon Academy Parents Association, B.A.P.A., is at Temple Israel Thursday, Dec. 9 from 6-9 p.m.

Workshop on parent statements that go into secondary school applications is Thursday, Dec. 9 from 6-8 p.m.

Beacon Academy hosts an **open house** Friday, Dec. 10.

Term 2 **grades close** Tuesday, Dec. 14.

Marsha Feinberg hosts a **holiday party** Friday, Dec. 17.

School is closed for **winter vacation** Saturday, Dec. 18 - Sunday, Jan. 2

January

When available, coaches will attend **application workshop days** Monday-Friday, Jan. 3-7, and Monday and Tuesday, Jan. 10 and 11.

Family workshop on deadlines is Tuesday, Jan. 4 from 6-8 p.m.

Students and their parents attend an **interview day**, and there will be **applications** work Thursday, Jan. 6.

Two more **interview days** with simultaneous **applications** work are Tuesday, Jan. 11 and Tuesday, Jan. 25.

Students attend shabbat service in honor of **Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.** at Temple Israel Friday, Jan. 14.

No classes, but students attend **Boston Children's Chorus** performance at Jordan Hall Monday, Jan. 17 at 6 p.m.

UPDATES

on courses

COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING

Now that the preschool reading program has begun, Beacon students are making friends with the preschoolers downstairs.

In some classrooms, there are assigned reading groups, and in others the book buddies evolve over time. In either case, the preschool teachers and children eagerly await the arrival of the “big kids” each Tuesday and Thursday.

After each session, Beacon students share their stories—mostly humorous—about what has happened in the classroom. They often come upstairs singing the Hebrew songs they’ve learned.

Before the December break, they will write a paper based on their observations in the preschool. Since the paper constitutes most of their Community Service Learning grade, they are urged to turn in a first draft before the *deadline: Thursday, Dec. 16.*

For their paper topics, students choose between what they have learned about child development and what they have observed about teaching techniques. They draw upon their experience in the preschool to provide illustrative examples.

To prepare for the holiday party Friday, Dec. 17 at Marsha Feinberg’s students will make traditional Christmas decorations and cutout cookies.

During the week before vacation, they will travel to Sally Baker’s house to bake the cookies and to string cranberries and popcorn plus create paper chains. Be sure to look for their decorations at the party!

Special note: Please remind your child to pack a lunch Tuesdays and Thursdays.

—Sally Baker
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ENGLISH

While continuing to build their vocabularies, study grammar and improve their writing, students have read three main selections.

Students have added more than 400 new words to their vocabularies, including “foregone conclusion,” “tenacity,” “temerity” and “myopic.”

The study of grammar has focused on

subjects, nouns, pronouns, predicates, verbs, adjectives and direct objects.

Writing assignments have included self-editing, peer-editing and frequent revisions of students’ personal essays on the significance of religion and culture in their families’ lives and on their personal goals and aspirations.

Honing their skills in close reading and textual annotation, students studied Chaim Potok’s *The Chosen*, the story of two Orthodox Jewish boys—one Hasidic and one not—and their unlikely friendship. Within the context of this novel, students developed a basic knowledge of Orthodox Judaism and the Hasidic Jewish world of Brooklyn in the 1940s.

Next, students read Nobel Prize-winning author Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, the story of a young man’s spiritual quest to find himself. In order to understand the context of the story, students learned some of the basic tenets of Buddhism and Hinduism.

This past month, the class has been reading John Steinbeck’s classic novel, *Of Mice and Men*.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

—Anne-Marie Yu-Phelps
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FACING HISTORY

We spent most of their class time last month exploring the history of post-World War I Germany. The Treaty of Versailles and the Weimar Republic were focal points.

To immerse the class in the period, we used our laptops to explore the Facing History Weimar Learning Module, which features politically significant documents, important examples of Weimar era visual art, and music from the period.

We also spent a significant amount of time examining and formally debating the politically charged issues of citizenship in our country today and the proposed downtown NYC Islamic Center.

This month, the class is concentrating on propaganda, its effects on the public, its use in political advertising and, primarily, its role in the rise of the National Socialist regime in post-World War I Germany. The class will also study the introduction of Elie Weisel’s autobiographical classic, *Night*, which sheds light on the horrors Holocaust victims endured.

We will also introduce other important Holocaust texts including Anne Frank’s

Diary and “The Bicycle Thief.” Later this month the students will be assigned a fairly ambitious research project.

—Mervan F. Osborne
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MATH

In class, students are

1. solving algebraic equations and inequalities. They’re seeing that algebra is a good way to represent all kinds of real-world relationships, and they’re improving rapidly at using algebra to represent their own mathematical ideas. For example:

• $6m - 2(8 - 5m) = 4(4m - 4)$. Solve for m .

• Mr. Dunkel’s band decided to record a CD. They paid \$800 to reserve time in a recording studio, plus \$2.50 per disc to order a bunch of CDs. Then, when they played shows, they sold the CDs for \$10 each. How many CDs would they have to sell in order for their overall profit to be positive? (Assume they sold every CD that they ordered.)

2. using ratios and proportions to compare quantities. (The “honors” section just finished this topic. The “regular” section will start it soon.) Beyond basic math skills, this process gets students to think in a precise and logical way: What quantities can we reasonably compare, and how should we interpret our answers? For example:

• You can buy six ounces of dried cranberries for \$2.70. At this rate, how much would one pound of cranberries cost? How many pounds of cranberries could you get for \$36?

3. taking weekly Friday quizzes. Weekly quizzes force *daily* accountability. If students are sharp in every class and diligent with each night’s homework, the quizzes should be fairly straightforward. But students can never afford to just “catch up tomorrow” – because by then, we will have moved on to new material.

• improving their arithmetic. To date, 19 out of 20 students have passed our difficult arithmetic test. (They must earn a score of 85% or above.) Once all students have mastered arithmetic, the entire class will earn Texas Instruments graphing calculators.

As you can see, we’re moving fast. Please visit a math class any time. We love having parents around!

—Matt Dunkel
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THIRD ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

An honest conversation about race, class and economics in independent schools

More than 300 people attended Beacon Academy's third annual Symposium: An Honest Conversation about Race, Class and Economics in Independent Schools: Mastering the Secret Handshake.

Special thanks to the panelists, who spoke about personal and professional experiences: Jimmy Atwood, a Noble and Greenough parent who received financial aid to attend an independent school; Jim Hamilton, head of admissions and financial aid at St. George's School; Rachel Nagler, a teacher of fine arts at Buckingham Browne & Nichols; and Jon Ross-Wiley, head of the lower school at Park.

Topics and scenarios during the symposium Friday, Nov. 19 included

- the myth of the "golden ticket"—including the demands and responsibilities that accompany the financial aid package—and the reality of scholarship students having earned their place and having

much to add to the independent school culture

- the challenges of social identity development within the context of the enormous socio-economic divide in our schools

- reintroducing "inclusion" in mission statements—a concept that seems to have gotten lost in the new long-range strategic plan shuffle

- eliminating the tensions and dynamics that persist in independent schools even after 30 years of ostensible focused work on inclusion

- social issues for black girls especially
- coping with being in the "bubble of privilege" without really getting the privilege

- reconditioning white students as part of the curriculum so that decency and respect are more reliably part of the overall culture and climate of independent schools

- eliminating the "sanctioning of immaturity" in secondary schools

- eliminating the continued reliance on stereotypes through redefining school culture and climate—getting rid of the "one slip" burden, especially for our students of color

- making room for values that routinely get lost in elite schools, such as using a uniform that is perfectly fine rather than buying a new one

- eliminating the "I want it, so it will magically appear" syndrome.

At the B.A.P.A. meeting Thursday, Dec. 9, we would like to continue the discussion and role play some of the scenarios while we work together on holiday crafts.

Please also feel free to join in and continue the conversation at the Symposium 2010 Discussion Board on the Beacon Academy web site.

—Laura Coleman and Joanne Hoffman

Secondary school process has gotten well under way

The Secondary School Process has begun and we have plenty of activity in the coming months.

Students began to attend their interviews in early November and will continue to do so through December.

Mrs. Lora Farkas, director of secondary school coaches, continues to manage the complicated travel schedule for coaches and parents who will drive students to and from the various schools.

Parents are enthusiastically encouraged to attend as many of these interviews as they can and should check in with us about making arrangements.

Our interview workshop November 2 was a great success.

We were fortunate enough to host admissions officers from Concord Academy, Buckingham Browne & Nichols, Belmont Hill, Rivers, and Noble and Greenough.

In October, students also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from Hotchkiss and Phillips Exeter Academy, who were our guests at Beacon.

Inspirica, a standardized test prep company, continues to provide our students with the SSAT preparation course.

Our first SSAT was Saturday, Nov. 13. By sitting for the ISEE Saturday, Nov. 6, many of the Beacon students gained confidence as they practiced and prepared for the SSAT.

Thursday, Nov. 18, parents were required to attend an important evening workshop in the Simmons College computer lab.

The object of this meeting was to complete the online financial application, an absolutely crucial aspect of the secondary school process.

We provided step-by-step guidance to all parents as we completed the online Personal Financial Statement (PFS) as well as fee waivers.

Soon, we can all relax and have a great holiday.

— Mervan F. Osborne
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Financial aid deadlines

Check each school's web site.

Application deadlines January 15, February 1, or February 15 (Check web sites)

Important web sites

- www.aisne.org Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE)

- www.boardingschools.com The Association of Boarding Schools

- www.sss.nais.org School & Student Services by NAIS

B.A.P.A. October meeting notes

FRESHMAN-JUNIOR PARENTS focused on report cards and the advisory system.

Joanne Hoffman, the Beacon Academy academic dean, and Rodney Glasgow, the dean of students and freshman dean at Worcester Academy, advised parents to read academic reports carefully.

"Whenever you are concerned, be in touch with the advisor to ask questions and find out what the school can do to support your child," they said.

"If your child is showing any minor academic difficulty, inquire about a tutor. This proactive move will help best if done sooner rather than later."

Topics parents discussed at length included

1. Expectations for advisors

The advisor's role is to look out for the academic, social and emotional well being of your child, Hoffman and Glasgow said. However the parent is the child's best advocate, even at a distance. Parents should make sure they communicate frequently. They should participate in at least one Parents Association Meeting.

2. How to help the advisor/ad- visee match succeed

Parents need to let the advisor know their expectations at the beginning of the school year, including grades and other priorities, Hoffman and Glasgow said.

Also, they said, parents need to make sure the advisor knows the best way to communicate with them. Parents should emphasize that they want to be in close

communication, at least once a month. Parents should definitely participate in Parents' Weekend, which is usually in the fall.

3. What to do if the advisor/ad- visee match is not the best

Parents should work with their child to identify other sympathetic adults, such as other teachers and/or house parents to fill in for a less than perfect situation.

The end of the school year is a great time to request a change in advisors, but Glasgow said it can be done any time. The child's best interests come first, whether the child is on scholarship or not.

SENIOR PARENTS discussed financial aid for college applications.

Categories of financial aid:

- merit based awards/scholarships
- grants (federal, state, institutional)
- work-study
- outside scholarships and
- student loans.

Key pieces of information parents need to complete financial aid forms:

- parents' 2009 and 2010 income taxes and W2 forms
- student's 2009 and 2010 taxes and W2 forms
- student's and parents' current checking/savings balance, and
- record of any untaxed benefits: welfare, SSI, disability, unemployment.

Websites crucial to applying successfully for financial aid:

www.accessedu.org

Access is a Boston organization provid-

ing free financial aid advice and advocacy to students and families. It's at 31 St. James Ave., Suite 520, 617-778-7195.

www.fafsa.ed.gov

Free application for Federal Student Aid / FAFSA required by all colleges from students requesting financial assistance.

Applications can be online or on paper starting January 1. Priority goes to students who submit their forms early.

FAFSA Help Line (1-800-4-FEDAID)www.collegeboard.com

Click on Students, Pay for College, then Profile Online for the CSS/Financial Aid Profile, only required by some private colleges in addition to the FAFSA.

Complete online immediately. Submission costs \$25 for the first school, and \$16 for each additional school (waivers for up to six schools).

CSS/Profile Help Line
(1-305-829-9793)

Also, parents need to know that although each college has a deadline for submitting forms, they should submit the forms early.

The colleges have a limited amount of funds to give out, so those who wait until the deadlines may lose out especially for colleges that are not need blind.

Students or parents can contact Access or us if they have questions.

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—Barbara Guilfoile
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