

March 27, 2015

To our Deer Hill School Community,

There is no newsletter this week, but I did want to draw attention to a few important events and share some thoughts from Robyn Costa, our Adjustment Counselor.

Tonight we cheer on the Deer Hill School Basketball Team as they compete to retain the PSO Basketball Competition Trophy, which was hard won against the formidable Osgood Team at the last game! Our team features Robyn Costa, Mike Weydt, Mike Lewis, Julie Bradford, Nick Pestone, Erica Parrell, and Cassy O'Brien. They have been practicing for this event and make a very strong showing. GO DEER HILL!

This week brought us a little closer together as a school community as we faced the challenge of going into lockdown mode when the police notified us of a neighborhood disturbance. The staff and students responded swiftly, calmly, and safely, as I knew they would. It was earlier than we would have liked to have our security measures tested in such a way, (we have been planning to do a drill with just faculty in April), but it turned out to be very successful. After the event, I met with the faculty to debrief and to discuss ways of strengthening our system, not only logistically but also in terms of human needs. This was a fruitful exchange and we will incorporate improvements in communication, etc., as we move forward.

Finally, Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, is World Autism Awareness Day. Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a range of complex neurodevelopment disorders, characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped behavior. Autism is the most severe form of ASD, while other conditions along the spectrum include a milder form known as Asperger syndrome. Experts say that 1 out of 88 children age 8 will have an ASD, and males are four times more likely to have an ASD than females. The hallmark feature of ASD is impaired social interactions. (from the National Institute of Health website: [http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail\\_autism.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm).)

In my experience as a teacher and administrator, I have seen many students with ASD struggle to make friends and keep them. These students' significant difficulty in seeing things from another's point of view often leads to misunderstandings and hurt feelings on both sides. The normal give and take that is required in friendship making and other collaborative experiences is the skill set that poses the greatest challenge. Part of the difficulty is that, although ASC is in fact a disability, it is invisible to other students and adults, and often masquerades as uncaring, unruly, malicious, or insensitive behavior. Students with an ASD tend to be high achievers academically, in possession of a strong memory and rich vocabulary, and these strengths lead others to believe they are more capable of communicating and understanding their world than they are. No one would ever accuse a child in a wheelchair of laziness for not

running in the mile-run, but I have seen many parents assume that insensitive behavior from children with ASD stems from maliciousness or even bad parenting. (The internet is full of real life examples of cruel messages sent to the parents of children with an ASD due to lack of understanding.) Children I know who have an ASD do benefit from explicit discussions of other people's feelings, once their own frustration has passed, but still, understanding others for these children is not the intuitive skill most of us take for granted.

It's interesting to note that popular culture is helping us to understand the nature of ASD in adults. On the television show *The Big Bang Theory* (a favorite of mine) the main character Dr. Sheldon Cooper displays all the signs of being on the autism spectrum. He is a brilliant scientist (possessed of a genius level intellect) who is well respected in his field of physics. His friends, also physicists, often lose their patience with his insensitivity to others, but they understand that it comes from an innate difficulty, not maliciousness, and they (sometimes patiently, sometimes impatiently) explain to him the impact his unexpected actions have on others. This character leads a full life and uses his strengths of reasoning and memory to help him navigate the world successfully. The novel *The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion tells the story of a geneticist on the autism spectrum (although he doesn't altogether realize it himself, believing that his way of seeing things is the only possible way) who falls in love and works very hard to win the affections of his beloved Rosie, a task made difficult because it is nearly impossible for him to imagine how she feels. This book had me laughing and crying, but mostly thinking that Rosie, if she could just come to understand what was behind his unexpected behavior, would realize he was the catch of a lifetime.

So please join Cohasset Public Schools as we celebrate this day of Autism Awareness by wearing **blue** (the official color of the event) on April 2<sup>nd</sup> next week. For more information, please see the website from Autism Speaks: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/world-autism-awareness-day>.

Also, please check out my weebly site under Parents for an article entitled "Autism spectrum disorders: Ten tips to support me" by Joaquin Fuetes, MD, published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. It's excellent.

Finally, please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DeerHill2015> and fill out our annual School Council Parent and Guardian Survey for 2015. Information resulting from this survey will help the School Council create the Deer Hill School Improvement Plan for the next school year.

Thanks and see you tonight at the game!

*Jennifer deChiara, Principal, Deer Hill School*

A note from Robyn Costa, Deer Hill School Adjustment Counselor:

It is that time of year again. That time where many discussions focus around one thing, STANDARDIZED TESTING, more specifically the MCAS. I am not sure about any of you but when I was a student testing brought up a number of feelings; anxiety, worry, what happens if I fail? It is important that we as adults can reconnect with how we felt as children when we were presented with a high-stakes test. Remember how YOU felt-if it was a positive experience for you, what made it positive? If it wasn't a positive experience-what can you do to change that for your own children?

One of the phrases I have used most over the past month has been "Harvard isn't going to look at your MCAS scores from 3rd/4th/5th grade." I encourage students to try their best and remind them IT IS JUST ONE TEST. One test that DOES NOT define who they are as a person or as a learner. They are more than just a score. (This is tough to remember but it is so true!)

I have attached two websites and a few books that might be helpful. These websites showcase some thoughts on test anxiety and how the adults can assist.

**An article for parents:**

<http://www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/10697-help-your-child-reduce-test-stress>

**An article for students:**

[http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/school/test\\_anxiety.html#](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/school/test_anxiety.html#)

**Some books to read at home with your child:**

*Testing Miss Malarkey* by Julia Finchley

*Tyler Tames the Testing Tiger* by Janet M. Bender

*The Anti-Test Anxiety Society* by Julia Cook (she has TONS of great books!)

*The Big Test* by Julie Danneberg

*Robyn Lotspeich-Costa, M.A., LMHC, F.T.*

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