The Case House Gazette

November 2019

Attendance

—by Dr. Midge Connolly—

We want your children at school and we know that you do as well. Regular attendance is critical for learning and feeling a part of the classroom and school community. A growing body of research shows that students who are often absent from school receive lower grades, have fewer friendships, and feel more isolated from their school communities than those students who come to school regularly. Whenever possible we want to avoid these negative consequences for all of our students. As a result of these findings, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has recently included chronic absenteeism as a measure for determining school and district accountability. We aim to work together with families to monitor absences, determine root causes, and arrive at solutions so that each child can attend school regularly.

So that you are aware, going forward, when a student reaches 5 absences, excused or unexcused, school personnel will contact families to talk about attendance and problem-solve as necessary. At 10 absences, the principal or designee will schedule a meeting with parents/guardians to start thinking about strength-based approaches to help students come to school. These meetings may reconvene at 15 absences and every 5 absences thereafter where more interventions, accommodations, and/or incentives can be discussed and agreed upon. We believe that through effective home-school partnerships, we can bring chronic absenteeism down to a minimum.

We look forward to working collaboratively with all families to help ensure that each child succeed with a high-quality education. If you have any questions about these new guidelines, please contact your child's principal or the Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, Dr. Kimo Carter.◊

High School Principal Hiring Process

—by Dr. Midge Connolly—

As many of you know, Anthony Parker has announced that 2019-2020 will be his last year as principal at Weston High School. We greatly appreciate his service to the Weston Public Schools and wish him well as he moves forward professionally and personally. Thus, one of the most critical jobs I have this year is to facilitate an inclusive process which will lead to the hiring of our next principal. We will be looking for an individual who will understand and reflect our district

Message from the Superintendent

We are excited to launch our quarterly newsletter, *The Case House Gazette*. The goals of this publication are to highlight some of the exceptional work that is happening in our schools and to help inform you about pertinent issues and topics within our district. Following are two messages from me about the importance of good attendance and the High School Principal hiring process. Also in this issue is an article about our MCAS results and a feature story that highlights our wonderful art department.

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- Screening of "Angst"
- Visual Arts Showcase
- Upcoming Events

mission, vision, and core values that are outlined in the district's Strategic Plan.

We will begin the High School principal search in mid-November with the goal being to have a candidate under contract by mid-February. During the month of November, a survey will be sent out to all parents and guardians in the district, all students at the High School and Middle School, all faculty and staff at the High School, and the district's Administrative Team. From survey data by all stakeholders, we will be better able to define our hiring priorities. Next, we will be posting for the position for one month starting in early December. This will place us quite early in the annual principal hiring window and maximize the number of applications we will receive. After the new year, we will screen applications to narrow down the field and conduct interviews to determine our finalists. Finalists will then spend a day visiting our district and talking with members of the Weston Public Schools community. After final interviews, I plan to announce the new principal in mid-February. Our process will include a number of opportunities for our school and family communities to participate as we believe this will help to ensure that we hire the best candidate for our High School and the district.

Principal Search Timeline

Timeline	Activity
Mid-November	Send survey to families, MS/HS staff, and MS/HS students to collect feedback on hiring priorities. Include opportunity to volunteer for hiring committees.
12/8/19	Post the position and begin recruitment
1/8/20	Close the posting (e.g., stop accepting applications)
Early January	Review applications and select 8-12 candidates to advance
Mid-January	Notify candidates and send a hiring exercise
Mid-January	Conduct first round interviews and determine finalists
End of January	Finalists come to Weston for site visits
Early February	Final interviews
Mid-February	Come to a decision and announce the new principal

If you are an eighth through twelfth grade parent/guardian or student who would be interested in participating in some part of this hiring process, please email the Director of Human Resources for the Weston Public Schools, Mr. Tim Heavey, at heaveyt@weston.org by November 15, 2019. Please write a brief paragraph explaining the reasons for your interest. This is an exciting time and opportunity for the Weston Public Schools and I look forward to working with you to find our next High School principal.◊

Weston's MCAS Results Remain Strong

—by Dr. Kimo Carter—

In early October, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released school and district MCAS results for 2019 and we are pleased to report that student achievement and growth on the MCAS remain very strong. Some highlights include.

- **Strong overall scores.** In grade 10, the percentage of Weston students who scored in the "exceeds expectations" category was more than double the state percentage. In grades 3-8, the percentage of Weston students who scored in the "exceeds expectations" category was more than triple the state percentage. On the other end of the scale, the percentage of Weston students who scored in the "partially meeting expectations" or "not meeting expectations" categories was quite low, less than one-half of the state percentage on every test.

- **Steady growth.** MCAS scores have improved substantially from 2017, when the next-generation MCAS tests were introduced for grades 3-8. In English Language Arts, the percentage of students exceeding expectations rose from 14% to 33% in this three-year span, while the percentage of students partially or not meeting expectations fell from 25% to 17%. Similarly, in Mathematics, the percentage of students exceeding expectations rose from 20% to 31% while the percentage of students partially or not meeting expectations fell from 23% to 18%.

- **High rankings.** When ranking schools and districts by average scaled scores, Weston is #1 in the state for Grade 4 English Language Arts and Grade 7 Math. Weston is one of the top five districts in the state for Grade 3 ELA, Grade 4 Math, Grade 5 Math, Grade 6 ELA, Grade 7 ELA, Grade 8 Science, and Grade 10 ELA.

Although overall the data is very positive, there remain areas where we can do better. We can still do more to ensure that all students reach proficiency, to reduce chronic absenteeism, and to support our students who are learning English as their second language. For a more complete analysis of our MCAS and accountability data, please refer to the MCAS Spring 2019 Report that was submitted to the School Committee on October 7th.◊

Screening of "Angst" Documentary

—by Dr. Kimo Carter—

The Weston Public Schools and the Weston PTO are pleased to host a community film screening of the documentary film, *Angst: Raising Awareness Around Anxiety* on Wednesday, November 13th at 7pm in the Weston High School auditorium. As part of the Weston Public Schools ongoing social-emotional learning initiatives, this film will open a dialogue in the community regarding an issue facing many WPS students and families. Through interviews, the film tells the stories of children and teens who discuss their anxiety, its impact on their lives and relationships, as well as how they have found solutions and hope in addressing their challenges.

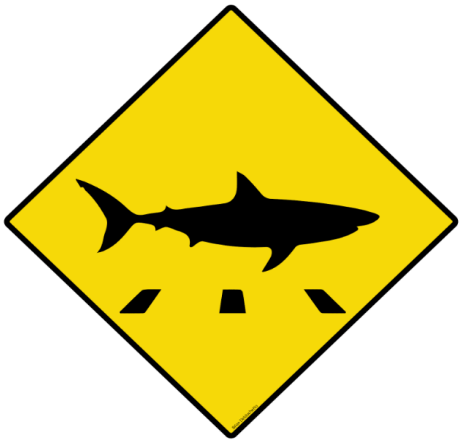
The event will feature a viewing of the film followed by a panel discussion. All high school students, parents, guardians, and adult members of the community are welcome and encouraged to attend this free event. Due to mature content however, we ask that middle school students attend the event with a parent and we do not recommend the film for elementary-aged students. If you have any questions, please contact Amy Kelly, Director of District Advancement, at kellya@weston.org. We are looking forward to seeing you there! ◊

Virtual Art Showcase

—By Margaret Burns, Cat Ciccolo, Chris Fehl, Jacob Ginga, Julie Hom-Mandell, Bekki Kowalski, and Dana Lanciloti—

Recently, much recent educational research and policy has focused upon deep, differentiated learning, where teachers change the learning environment to one of discovery, challenge students at all levels, provide students with voice and choice, and empower students to become self-directed learners. These best instructional practices may be relatively new to many educators, but they have been fundamental to the teachers in Weston's Art Department for many years. Following is a showcase of the critical skills students obtain through art instruction and examples of how Weston's Art teachers develop five critical skills—creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, confidence, and empathy/cultural awareness—through innovative, creative projects.

In any career or avocation, an important skill that often sets someone apart from the rest of the pack is **creativity**. The ability to think differently—whether it be laterally, imaginatively, with new perspective, or out of the box—is a skill cultivated through art education. At Weston High School, graphic design teacher Cat Ciccolo develops student creativity through her road signs



"Graphic Design is art with a clear communication purpose"

project.

It may seem counterintuitive to discuss creativity when the assignment given is to copy the style of our ubiquitous road signs. However, we all learn by copying and then making something our own. True creativity lies within the confines and parameters of restrictions. Orson Welles went one step farther with, "The enemy of art is the absence of limitations."

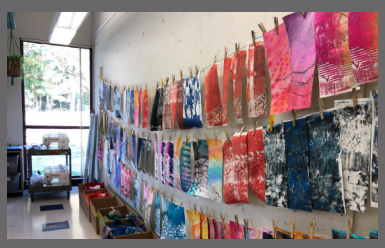
Road signs (perhaps the only truly international language… and a direct link to much environmental impact) seemed appropriate to address the global problem of climate change. Graphic design students warn through recognizable, but altogether different imagery, the potential hazards literally down the road.

Collaborating with the Science Department and Students for Environmental Impact (SEA) on their Climate Strike efforts, Graphic Design students had to think quickly and critically to make their client's campaign visible through eye-catching, clear and even witty images that push the realm of expectation. Designers have to be empathetic and put themselves in the eye of their viewer -- will they understand what I am trying to communicate through simple shapes and silhouettes? There is simultaneous teaching and collaborating with the viewer. It is a delicate balance when less is more but particularly monumental ideas need to be expressed... all with an impending and inflexible deadline, in this case the Climate Strike September 20-27.

Graphic Design is art with a clear communication purpose. For students in Graphic Design courses, time is spent learning to notice what needs attention, thinking of as many possible solutions and then creatively redesigning the world around them for the better.

When creating art, students have a unique opportunity to practice their **critical thinking**. When constructing their art project, students use organizational skills, observation skills, reasoning, and problem-solving strategies. This is exemplified in Bekki Kowalski's 8th Grade Contemporary Art Class. Students spend an entire nine-week quarter constructing a set of textured collagraph plates, and then using the plates as tools to create a large collection of experimental prints. The idea of making an object that then in turn creates art requires a shift in their thinking. The students arrive to class familiar with the "we make art" concept and leave with a new perspective of "we can make the tools that make art." In addition to this conceptual awareness, students also must manage, organize and track a large volume of supplies including plates, ink, brayers, watercolor, glue, oil pastel and a mile high stack of prints. The space begins as a traditional classroom, but by the end of the quarter it is a humming independent artists' studio.

In addition to Bekki's printmaking, fourth graders in Jacob Ginga's art classes are engaging in multidisciplinary **critical thinking** and **creativity** through their current art experiences. Jake introduces students to alliterations, illustration, and alphabetics as a way to deeply understand



8th Grade Artists Using the Printing Press

Kindness Rock Garden, Class of '18

the connection an illustration should have with its written counterpart. He then challenges students to brainstorm, write, and revise an alliteration using a letter or sound that is randomly assigned to them. Once they've fine-tuned their alliteration, they begin planning the illustration that will accompany it. Students must make decisions about what elements of their alliteration will be visually represented and what materials they intend on using for it. Students will have to employ several materials and approaches to their illustration based on their artistic vision and needs.

In today's increasingly interconnected world, **collaboration** is a skill that it is increasingly valued. By working collaboratively on a project, students learn to communicate more effectively, compromise when necessary, and recognize each other's strengths and contributions. One example of collaboration in art here in Weston are the Senior class murals constructed in Julie Hom-Mandell's Studio Art 3, 4 classes. These murals are featured all around Weston High School. Art 3, 4 students sketch out the theme, idea and concept in collaboration with Senior class student and parent advisors. Graduating seniors are invited to sign their names on the painting, mural, or installation as a permanent gift to Weston High School. The power

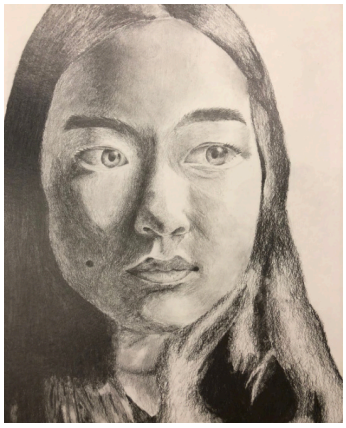
Example from last year's 4th grade

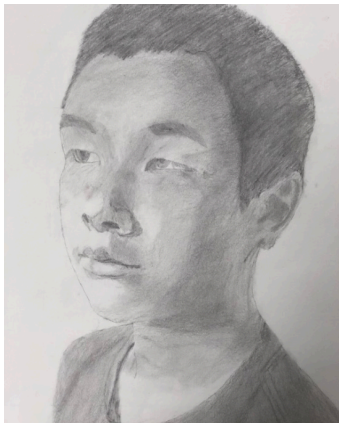
of collaboration, creativity and community visually resonates throughout Weston High School through these projects. Each Senior class mural is generously supported by WEEFC, Senior class parent advisors, faculty advisors, and K-12 art teachers, who volunteer their time and donate materials. Thank you for these memorable creative experiences!

One big happy family, Class of 2019 Mural

Art can build a student's **confidence**. Because the arts reach students in ways that are not often used in other subjects, many students who struggle in school find that they excel in the arts. Furthermore, students gain a sense of pride after their finished piece of art and then will try to accomplish more. At Weston Middle School, Margaret Burns demystifies photo-realistic drawing by having students work with a grid over their self-portrait photograph and concentrate square by square until the likeness is unmistakable. With this confidence, she finds students much more willing to lean into abstraction and expression, now that realism has been achieved.

Another confidence-building art project is Chris Fehl's Clay Studio II experience on the potter's wheel. In a world of apps and touchscreens, the potter's wheel teaches students to see failure as part of any learning experience. Building on the brief encounter with the wheel in Clay Studio 1, students' perseverance in Clay II is rewarded with the satisfaction of forming a successful vessel from spinning clay, and then repeat the process, getting progressively better each session. Everything tastes better when served in pottery made with one's own hands. Something so challenging can be accomplished by not being deterred by failure. Students who master the wheel





"Because the arts reach students in ways that are not often used in other subjects..."

leave high school with an extra swagger in their stride.

Art is a terrific medium where students can understand others' points of view, developing their **empathy and cultural awareness**. Through art, students learn from others all around the world and discover that we have more in common than not. Woodland and Country School art teacher Dana Lanciloti's 1st grade integrated art curriculum complements the grade level study of Japan and features a series of projects which promote and support these understandings. In the fall, Dana introduces students to the contemporary Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama and her whimsical paintings, prints, and sculptures of pumpkins featuring an endless sea of color and dots.

WHS Students demonstrating wheel-throwing skills at K-12 Art Show

In the early spring, when 1st graders begin their in-depth study of Japan, Dana and her 1st grade artists create their own *koinobori*—the colorful carp streamers that decorate the landscape of Japan for Children's Day (*Kodomo no Hi*) in early May. These colorful kites are then displayed in students' classrooms for their April Children's Day celebration with families. The carp was chosen as the symbol of Children's Day because the Japanese consider the carp the most spirited fish, full of energy and power to fight its way up rapidly-flowing streams.

1st Grade Artists work on their Kusama inspired pumpkin drawings and the fantastic results

Dana and her 1st grade artists also create two additional pieces of art which celebrate Japanese culture and food and provide students with a deeper understanding of what people, especially children, typically eat for lunch. This first project transcends just one culture and provides students with an empathic and respectful view towards cultural differences in general. After reading Rosemary Wells' book *Yoko*, students use mixed media and collage techniques to create *bento* boxes filled with all sorts of delicious typical Japanese foods.

1st Grade Artists working on koinobori - traditional Japanese carp streamers - for their Children's Day celebration

Dana's final project of this extensive cultural study is *Gyotaku*. *Gyotaku* (Japanese 魚拓, from *gyo* "fish" + *taku* "impression") is the traditional Japanese method of printing fish, a practice which dates back to the mid-1800s. This form of printmaking was originally used by fishermen to record their catches, but has evolved into a highly specialized art form of its own.

Traditionally, fish are cleaned and inked with sumi ink and printed onto rice paper. 1st Grade Artists watch videos of artists using the traditional techniques but print with rub-

ber fish replicas and add colorful details and signature "stamps" once the prints dry. These beautiful prints are always a favorite of students and are displayed at the K-12 Art Show in May.

When students go through the K-12 curriculum here in Weston, not only do they learn concepts such as color, layout, perspective, and balance, they also develop broader skills and habits of mind -- creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, confidence, and cultural understanding -- that all successful students need to develop in whatever field they specialize. In Weston, art is truly for everyone.

To learn more about art and art education here in the Weston Public Schools, you can connect with the following sites below. Also, please don't miss our art shows. This year the Art Department, with a generous donation from WEEFC, has purchased new, much more mobile display panels that will make it much easier for our Art Department to showcase student work in different venues. Art shows event dates can be found on our website. ◊

Art Faculty websites and Social Media Links: Woodland School: WS and CS Instagram: @woodland_country_art | Field School: Instagram: @artwithmrg | Middle School Grade 8 Drawing: Instagram: @weston_ms_art | Hom HS Art | Ciccolo HS Art: HS Instagram: @ms.ciccolo @artstronghom

Our mission: To educate, equip, and inspire all students to achieve their full potential and enrich their communities.

Upcoming events

Monday, October 28	7:00-8:00 PM	Parent Workshop – What are you puffing – Vaping & Our Youth	WHS Auditorium
Thursday, October 31	2:00 PM	CS Hat Parade	CS
Friday, November 1	3:30 and 7PM	MS Fall Play "Scared Silly"	WMS Amy Potter Center
Saturday, November 2	5:00 PM	MS Fall Play "Scared Silly"	WMS Amy Potter Center
Monday, November 4	7:00 PM	School Committee Meeting	WMS Library
Wednesday, November 6		Early Dismissal —Elem at 11:30 AM; MS/HS at 12:45 PM	
Thursday, November 7	6:00 PM	Field School Game Night	FS
Friday, November 8	6:00 PM	Woodland School Movie Night	WS
Monday, November 11		VETERANS DAY – ALL SCHOOLS AND OFFICES CLOSED	
Wednesday, November 13	7:00 PM	Community Film Screening of "Angst: Raising Awareness Around Anxiety"	WHS Auditorium
Friday, November 15	6:00-8:00 PM	K-5 Math & Science Night	WS
Saturday, November 16	10:00 AM	Field School Pancake Breakfast	FS Dining Hall
Monday, November 18	7:00 PM	School Committee Meeting	WMS Library
Wednesday, November 20	9:00-11:00 AM	SEPAC Meeting	HS Media Center
Thursday, November 21	7:00 PM	PTO/BWMPO Joint Board Meeting	Weston Public Library
Thursday, November 21	7:00 PM	HS Play "Twelfth Night"	WHS Auditorium
Friday, November 22	6:00 PM	Country School Movie Night	CS
Friday, November 22	7:00 PM	HS Play "Twelfth Night"	WHS Auditorium
Saturday, November 23	7:00 PM	HS Play "Twelfth Night"	WHS Auditorium
Wednesday, November 27		Early Dismissal — Elem at 11:00 AM, MS/HS at 11:45 AM	
THANKSGIVING DAY		– ALL SCHOOLS AND OFFICES CLOSED	
Thursday, November 28	10:00 AM	Thanksgiving Football Game	HS Proctor Field
Friday, November 29		– THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO SCHOOL	
Tuesday, December 3	7:00 PM	Special Town Meeting	WHS Auditorium
Wednesday, December 4		Early Dismissal (Elem at 11:30 AM; MS/HS at 12:45 PM	
Wednesday, December 4	7:30 PM	HS Band Winter Concert	WHS Auditorium
Thursday, December 5	7:00 PM	MS Band Winter Concert	WHS Auditorium
Wednesday, December 11	8:45 AM	Grade 4 Winter Concert	FS Gym
Wednesday, December 11	10:15 AM	Grade 5 Winter Concert	FS Gym
Wednesday, December 11	7:30 PM	HS Chorus Winter Concert	WHS Auditorium
Thursday, December 12	7:00 PM	MS Chorus Winter Concert	WHS Auditorium
Friday, December 13	8:45 AM	WS Gr 2/3 Winter Concert	WS Gym
Friday, December 13	10:15 AM	WS Gr Prek, K, Gr 1 Winter Concert	WS Gym
Tuesday, December 17	7:30 PM	MS/HS Orchestra Winter Concert	WHS Auditorium
Wednesday, December 18	9:00-11:00 AM	SEPAC Meeting	WHS Media Center
Wednesday, December 18	7:30 PM	Snow Date MS/HS Orchestra Concert	WHS Auditorium
Thursday, December 19	8:45 AM	CS Gr 2/3 Winter Concert	CS Gym
Thursday, December 19	10:15 AM	CS Gr Prek, K, Gr 1 Winter Concert	CS Gym
Thursday, December 19	6:30 PM	BWMPO Holiday Celebration	Blue Hills Collaborative
Friday, December 20		Regular Dismissal times, all schools	
December 23 — January 1		— FIRST WINTER BREAK, SCHOOLS CLOSED	
CHRISTMAS DAY		— ALL SCHOOLS AND OFFICES CLOSED	
NEW YEARS DAY		— ALL SCHOOLS AND OFFICES CLOSED	
Thursday, January 2, 2020		— Schools reopen regular times	

Please see the Weston Public School's website calendar for more details.