

November 13, 2011

Students and staff from the Tulsa MET Middle School celebrating their recognition as a top 10 most improved school!



## There is a whole lot going on...

Check out all the great news this week - our students and staff are doing amazing work!

In the news this week:

- Excellent article in The Post-Standard about LaFayette's learning in the real world. [http://blog.syracuse.com/neighbors/2011/11/lafayette\\_school\\_educates\\_students\\_through\\_internships.html](http://blog.syracuse.com/neighbors/2011/11/lafayette_school_educates_students_through_internships.html)
- Hanneke and the group from Big Picture in the Netherlands just completed their second Big Bang! See page 4 for more details and photos - and see who from the United States showed their Big Picture Learning awesomeness in the Netherlands!
- Tulsa MET Middle School under the direction of Mrs. Roberta Jones has been named one of the top 10 improved schools in Tulsa - and last year were highlighted as a model alternative school!
- East Bay MET in Newport will be hosting a Senior Thesis Project conference in December - see page 5 more details!

Keep sending pictures and news and we will share with the network!

Have a great week!

Mark your  
calendar!

Principal Retreat in  
Sunny San Diego  
California!

February 8-10, 2012

More details will be  
coming soon - but hold the  
date!



# Co-Corner: D to the E

## From Doc

Happy Birthday Elliot! The big 3-0 (times 2). Congrats! Just think, we met when Elliot was 19 years old.



At the 27th Coalition of Essential Schools Conference there were 5 of us there at the beginning. The meetings have been as large as 2000 people. Today there are 700. A great chance to spread the BP word.

I went to a New England Board of Higher Ed meeting with college presidents and other important people. The topics were right- education and US workforce training...but the pedagogy was horrible. Speaker after speaker lectured to us, even talking about the importance of hands on learning- as they lectured. Very embarrassing. The people who attended were so talented. What a shame not to use everyone, to share, to have conversations.

The adult college group of 23 brought 21 potential recruits for College Unbound next year. If your students bring more students, something must be going right.

The next days were spent working on a next generation grant for a \$5000 year college and convincing Roger Williams University that it's a good idea. More recruitment, more planning on every project and then a treat- both Charly Adler and Deb Meier had a chance to speak with the college students who are studying education- what a treat.

## Praise

The Met started a program a year ago where students interested in construction management could do a paid internship after high school with a construction company(the President was a BP board member) while doing the internship the student would go to the community college. After 2 or 3 years, the student would transfer to Roger Williams University and finish the BA. Both the university and the construction company pay part of the student's tuition.

We had our first student start Roger Williams and as the Provost mentioned to me, he is number one in every class. Very cool. The experience of working in the field (internship) made him so much more knowledgeable than the other students...and he had been paid over 20,000 a year for internship (community college 4000), thus coming out on top financially.

Pursue Passions: Demand Google 20% Time at School

The article is great. It talks about how the best work in companies comes for the 20% time some businesses give their employees 1 day a week to work on their own ideas and projects.

At the end of the article the author mentioned The Met (Big Picture Schools) as examples where students can work on areas that interest them.

Peace,

Dennis

Pursue Passion: Demand Google 20% Time at School  
Posted: 10/24/11 08:08 PM ET

Ever wonder why students struggle with picking a major in college? When was the last time students were asked what they'd like to study in school and given the time to pursue their own interests? Ask a kid what they want for their birthday, and they'll tell you 10 things. Ask them what they want to learn? They don't know, because they've never been asked. They've been taught to follow the rules and jump through prescribed hoops set by authoritarians who know what's good for them. They design a school day to ensure that all kids get the same "basics" and manage their day to deliver it to them. How can we expect more from students at the end of that journey? Maybe if we asked and then gave kids permission to do some of the things they'd love to do throughout their academic careers (K-12), we wouldn't be so lost and confused in college or in life. And maybe if we start pursuing what we're passionate about we would actually solve the world's most impossible challenges along the way.

Google's "20% Time", inspired by Sergey Brin's and Larry Page's Montessori School experience, is a philosophy and policy that every Google employee spend 20% of their time (the equivalent of a full work day each week) working on ideas and projects that interest that employee. They are encouraged to explore anything other than their normal day-to-day job. As a result 50% of all Google's products by 2009 originated from the 20% free time, including Gmail. Real break-through happens when we are free from others' expectations and driven by individual passion.

Self-directed experimentation is common in companies like 3M, HP and more with slight twists, like Twitter Hack Week, with positive results. At this year's BIF-7 Innovation Summit

Dan Pink illuminated the value of what he coined "non-commissioned work" with several stellar examples including the stories of Nobel Prize winning physicists Andre Geim and Konstantin Novoselov. The pair won the Nobel prize for their amazing invention of Graphene, the world's thinnest, and likely strongest

material. They discovered Graphene in their "non-commissioned" lab hours. The scientists dedicated every Friday night to working on something that was not funded, nor part of their daily work. It was play time. (They also won the Ig Nobel Prize, a parody award for silly scientific discoveries, for using magnets to levitate a frog. See the video on NPR. As Dan Pink wisely advised BIF7 participants, "go levitate some frogs.")

What we can take from these examples is that the work outside of the expected, commissioned work produces the most creative, awesome discoveries, and some silly ones that are just fun by-products of the passion-driven journey. Commissioned work just delivers expected, rote outcomes.

What do we expect from students? It seems schools expect them to demonstrate what we already know -- recite dates and complete calculations that could be done on a computer -- rather than create new knowledge. Institutions fill our brains with what is known. How will these students survive in college?

Rather than scripting our K-12 experience -- and expecting miracles when we get to college that we'll suddenly have clarity about our interests -- we have to start asking students what turns them on earlier, and enable them to pursue those interests. For example, if a child is inspired by bridges, why not start there and let the learning follow their curiosity? They may need to learn calculus to build a bridge, but then they have a reason to love and seek calculus, rather than calculus being a requirement. They may need to understand the history, policy and politics of getting a bridge approved. Or team-building to get all the right talent on board.

Examples include teacher Diana Laufenberg of Philadelphia's public Science Leadership Academy challenging students to set their own experiential learning agendas, Loveland, Colorado's district approved Be You House learning lab and Providence, Rhode Island's The MET.

It doesn't have to be that complicated, as reinventing the entire school. It can start with giving students their 20%. Every parent and citizen should take the time to ask a child everyday, "what would you like to learn?" Ask our schools, school boards and legislators to give permission to students to spend 20% of their "school time" noticing their world, dreaming up questions, connecting to information and people based on their curiosity, and ultimately doing the things that really matter to them. Awesome things.

Give kids their 20% to be genius every day; and they'll not only be more aware and driven college students. They'll be more aware and driven human beings applying their genius in life.

## From Elliot

Covering the waterfront

While the 27th CES Fall Forum is happening at the Met, Mario and I are at a fund-raising meeting in Silicon Valley for a new BP charter school. BPCA CEO Keith Mussili-Johnson and Board member Keith Reams are with us as well as Jovanta, a graduate of MetWest. Jovanta is getting her MBA and also working full-time at the MetWest. We teamed up for a presentation to potential funders that landed a one-two combination punch. It's nice to be able to have a presence in so many places and know we are not missing in the conversations.



Speaking of teaming up, Mark Mitton made it to MUSE with me this week. We had times with students, staff, and parents. It was great to have the kind of influence in a school where you can spontaneously walk into a room and change the dynamics. In one instance, Mark was doing some tricks and one of the kindergarten students got real close to him. In the excitement of the trick, the child fell down and bumped his nose. He came up crying with one of those loud droning cries. The next part was magic. In front of the whole group of 15 students spanning in age from 5-10 years-old, Mark put this young student on his lap and told him he was going to make the pain go away. He took his hand that didn't hold his nose, rubbed it and then did this twisting of the wrist trick where his hand appeared to go 360 degrees around as the rest of his arm stood in place. Very slowly as the kindergartener focused on what was occurring, his crying slowed down. The volume lowered commensurate with the frequency of the cries and then stopped. Everything was good again and the rest of the class of kindergarteners through 10 year-olds sat back in a bit of wonderment. The teacher said, "Can I have him here all the time?" "Can I learn how to do that?"

For years, I've been telling Mark that teachers need to have a similar bag of tricks to magicians that they use to manage all sorts of situations. We've talked about the similarities of school situations, street performances, and clubs. At any given night and at any given time, something can happen where you get out of sync with your group. You have to have ways of getting them back. There is a great deal teachers can learn from magicians.

Next week, I'm on my break in Hawaii celebrating my birthday. I'll be writing the book Charlie and I are completing called Making Their Way In The World.

Enjoy the weekend!

# Big Picture Netherlands

## From Hanneke te Braake-Schakenraad

Last week, the Dutch Big Picture group celebrated their second Big Bang with attendance of over 180 people, including colleagues from Ireland that came especially from Dublin to join the learning. The theme for the Big Bang was Personal Learning takes you to optimal results.

At the Big Bang, there was a demonstration of the European champion chainsaw woodcarver Peter van de Meijs. During the day he carved a statue that expresses development and growth. The statue is being given to a school where it can stay for one year to encourage and celebrate the Big Picture redesign of their school.

The Big Bang was the highlight of a week of Dutch Big Picture activities that included students and staff from the United States -including students Spencer James Goethe, A'crissa Grayson; principals Timothy Jenkins & Eunice Mitchell, and Big Picture staff Elliot Washor and Carlos Moreno.



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual SENIOR THESIS PROJECT CONFERENCE



**Above left:** Corinne Clapper's STP is Environmental Outreach and Activism including a recent trip to Macedonia to teach Elementary School Students about recycling. **Above Right:** Joe Duffy's STP is studying the environmental effects on Mountain Biking Trails.

## CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The conference will aim to support the development of strategies for student-engaged formative assessment in relation to Senior Thesis Projects. The conference is designed primarily for Big Picture senior Advisors, Big Picture school leaders, and Big Picture senior students, and is also open to anyone interested in this aspect of our work. A second conference designed primarily for rising senior advisors and students (current 11th grade advisors and students) will be held in the spring.

## *Creating Excellent Work through Student Engaged Assessment*

### **Conference Dates:**

12/1/2011 & 12/2/2011

### **Facilitated by:**

Michael Soguero and Dan Condon of Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center

### **Hosted by:**

The Paul W. Crowley East Bay Campus of the Met School and Big Picture South Burlington

### **Location:**

East Bay Campus of the Met School, Newport, Rhode Island

### **Accommodations:**

Best Western Mainstay  
151 Admiral Kalbfus Road  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840  
(401) 849-9880

*\*Please indicate that you are with the East Bay Met School Conference and you will receive a reduced rate.*

*Conference Registration Fee is \$15*

**Please Contact Mary Vieira with questions and to register at [mvieira@metmail.org](mailto:mvieira@metmail.org)**

**The registration deadline is November 18, 2011**