

*Principal's Page*  
*December, 2007*

One of the great pleasures I experience as principal is the chance to share special birthday lunches with the children. Once a month we announce that there will be birthday lunch for anyone who has a birthday that month, and we meet in three shifts, one for each lunch period. I usually see a number of students who have forgotten to come during their actual birthday month, and that's always fine. We all sit at the large tables in the front office area. We introduce everyone. Often I'll ask for a few volunteers who'd like to try and go around the table, remembering everyone's name. Our conversations are *ALWAYS* interesting. For instance, recently one group discussed amazing stories from Ripley's Believe It Or Not books. Another group of third grade boys liked pondering what they might do when they are older – kind of a toss-up between being a surgeon or a football star. Frequently, we discuss favorite books we've read and students always have lots of good recommendations for me. I always laugh a lot at birthday lunch! At the end, before students leave for recess, I invite students to choose one small gift from a selection of trinkets (squishy balls, fancy pens, stuffed animals, tops, etc.). This generates much excitement. Sometimes it takes a *LONG* time to make a choice. In addition to providing much joy for me, the birthday lunch always reminds me of how little it takes sometimes to help children know how important they are – to listen to their stories and ideas, to sit together to eat a meal.

In October, we sent individual student results from the Spring MCAS testing to parents whose children are now in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. I generally say very little about our MCAS scores because I never want to give undue weight to a standardized test that represents only a snapshot of what children can demonstrate in terms of understanding in different subject areas. In addition, our performance can vary slightly from year to year, given different points of emphasis on the test and given different cohorts of students. At the same time, it is important to note that the MCAS results at Haynes have been consistently very strong. Within the three grades that took the Spring 2007 MCAS tests, 85-96% of our students fell within the proficient or advanced range in language arts and mathematics. In certain grades our student performance resulted in our school being ranked fourth or fifth in the state (out of slightly over 1,000 schools). It's good to celebrate successes and recognize the hard work of our students and dedicated teachers! In case you're interested in learning more about the MCAS tests, you can always go to the Department of Education web site and download the tests that were given. See how *you* might do on these tests!

*Web site: [www.doe.mass.edu/mcas](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas)*

### ***Dressing for winter***

Snow has already fallen and our children are enjoying building snow sculptures and rolling in the snow. PLEASE send your child to school with a warm jacket, snowpants, boots, gloves/mittens and a hat. ALL children will go out to recess! If snowpants or boots are left at home, the child will have to go out anyway and just remain on the shoveled walkway – and that's pretty boring for kids. If you have any difficulty providing these critical supplies, please let me know. We have extra gear in the school that we can make available for students. On cold days when all this gear is needed, we will not go outside in the morning for our ten-minute break. By the time the students are

suited-up, the recess period is over. Instead, teachers will provide a break for students in the classroom.

### ***Tardy for school?***

The teachers and I would really love to see ALL children arrive to school on time each day. When children walk into school 5-15 minutes late, they often feel uncomfortable because so much has already happened to start the day. Class is in progress, attendance & lunch counts have been taken, and an overview of plans for the day has been conducted. In some classes, students go to special subject classes first thing in the morning. In addition, children miss out on having a few minutes at the start of class to reconnect with friends and socialize. The school day begins at 8:55 a.m. (the doors of the school are open at 8:45). Tardy slips are issued to children beginning at 9:00 a.m. Getting ready for school can be a busy time in the morning at home. If you find you are consistently late, try getting your child up that much earlier. Some families find that it is much easier if children need to catch the bus because they bring their own motivation to getting out on time. Imagine if a teacher was consistently late to work, arriving in the classroom fifteen minutes after the children have arrived. Of course, that would be absolutely unacceptable. Now is the time to instill good habits with children, helping them to see the importance of “getting to work on time”.

### ***Vacation Planning***

An increasing number of families are choosing to take vacations during school time. This has meant that some students have missed anywhere from one to three weeks of instructional time. It is always difficult for me, and teachers, to respond to requests and notifications of intent to take a child out of school for an extended period for a family vacation. As a parent myself, I know how much we value family time and opportunities to travel together to see new places or to spend time with extended family members.

At the same time, I am very concerned that we have students who miss so much school. There is a lot of teaching and learning that occurs, and this cannot be replicated by just having a child keep a journal or complete some work during a trip. It isn't possible for teachers to cover this material with students upon their return. It is also very difficult to teach if you have students coming and going at different points of the school year, at times other than designated vacation weeks. Having students absent from class for any extended period makes it very difficult for teachers to maintain momentum in teaching the demanding curriculum of the district. The other important thing to consider is what message we give our children concerning the importance of school. I think to miss so much school gives the message that school is not as important. Please make every effort to take vacations during designated school vacation weeks so that your children have the consistent exposure to learning and instruction without interruption.

It is especially important for all students to be in school during EVERY day of MCAS testing. The State of Massachusetts makes no exceptions for any student or school. All children educated in public schools must take all MCAS tests in grades 3, 4 and 5. The MCAS testing for this year is scheduled for GRADES 3, 4 and 5 during the weeks of March 24 through April 7, and May 12 through May 29.

*For all families that celebrate holidays at this time of year, I wish you happy and nourishing family time. Our faculty thanks you for the opportunity to work with your wonderful children. We treasure each day with them!*

*Susan Carlson*

## **News from the School**

December 2007

Kim Swain, Literacy Specialist and Lead Teacher

### ***Spotlight on Teaching and Learning***

Haynes teachers demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to researching and implementing teaching practices that maximize student learning. One of the ways this commitment is demonstrated is through the writing of grants. Congratulations to the latest round of SERF grant recipients. Emily Dolan and the math leadership team were awarded a grant in the spring of 2007 to purchase supplemental math manipulatives. Housed in the conference room, these hands-on materials and games enable teachers to differentiate math instruction more easily and to incorporate multi-sensory activities with more traditional instructional approaches. This fall, Barbara Wasley received a grant to purchase literacy center games. These games will be used during reading workshop and will allow students to explore word study concepts in a fun and engaging way. Josh Baumer collaborated with k-2 teachers and was awarded a grant to create a video catalog of master lessons to support the Lucy Calkin's *Units of Study* pilot. For each unit of study, a video record will be made at the three grade levels of a mini lesson and conference. These videos will help teachers reflect upon their practice and provide a model for differentiating key concepts in the teaching of developing writers. Initiatives such as these are some of the many ways Haynes teachers to address the district's goal of "improving on excellence."



### ***Spotlight on the Haynes Community***



Every Monday, at the conclusion of school meeting, the fifth grade hosts share that week's Project Wisdom moment. Project Wisdom is a well respected character education program that is used in many schools nationwide. Typically, these pithy moments make a connection between pearls of wisdom found in proverbs, fables, and/or the experiences and reflections of famous thinkers and students' real world experiences. The messages are intended to set a positive tone for the week and deepen students' understanding of our community's core values.

After the Thanksgiving recess, we shifted our focus to a new core value: "Show a positive attitude." In the words of Winston Churchill, "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference. A positive attitude is in large part a result of the inner dialogue we engage in with ourselves. Do we look at challenges as opportunities? Do we accept

mistakes as an inevitable part of learning? Do we look for the good in ourselves, others, and the situations we find ourselves in? You can help your student develop and maintain a positive attitude by modeling empowering responses to daily situations and by helping him/her practice positive self talk. As our hosts remind us each week with Project Wisdom's recurring tag line, "Make it a great day or not, the choice is yours."

*Did you know?*

Every week, students and staff gather together as a community to open and close the week. This fall, in response to student and staff feedback, a committee was formed to revamp the Friday school meeting. The objectives were to strengthen student participation and revitalize the format. This year, in addition to student performances, Friday school meetings may include the Salad Game (How carefully are you listening?), the Vocabulary Challenge (Can you figure out which is the true definition?), the "Who's Telling the Truth?" game (How sharp are your powers of deduction?), an interactive read-aloud (*The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, by Kate DiCamillo), and, of course, community sing-a-longs. Thus far, we have also enjoyed special performances by classrooms, staff members, and members of the broader community. Families are invited to join us Fridays at 2:45 PM in the auditorium for this important weekly affirmation of our commitment to being a strong and vibrant school community.