

## CLASSROOMS WITHOUT WALLS: A Global Education

Students at Media-Providence Friends School are multi-faceted and unique learners. MPFS fosters a teaching environment that can take place as easily in a park or on a trip to Philadelphia as it can on campus or Skyping with students across the ocean.

From the moment they wake up, students are switched on and plugged into technology and while this can create an ever-shrinking, and even isolated world for children, it can also afford them the freedom to learn outside of the classroom as well as expand their world inside of the classroom. T. Shirley, our 4th grade teacher and curriculum

coordinator, notices a huge amount of excitement among her students around computer programming because of the flexibility and interconnectedness provided working across genres. For example, a group of her 4th grade students chose to use the Scratch MIT program in language arts for a book presentation and ended up teaching other students, who were impressed with the presentation, exactly how they used Scratch for this project. Across the hall, T. Angela's 5th grade students taught themselves how to use their iPads to make stop-motion video book reports, and also plan to Skype

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Dear Friends of MPFS,

In this issue, we're talking about "Classrooms Without Walls," a concept that describes both a school-wide philosophy of integrated, cross-curriculum learning and the idea that, for our unique and engaged students, learning is a global pursuit.

Each year, our students look forward to science-focused overnight trips (that also build resilience and independence). 3rd Graders overnight at Ashland Nature Center in Hockessin, DE where they test water pollution levels by observing which insects inhabit the stream. In late winter, with snow still on the ground, 4th graders enjoyed an overnight at Silver Lake Nature Center in Bristol, PA. They learned about aquatic animals in the area and studied foxes and deer tracks. Our 5th graders year-end trip is also an overnight: a whole week at Echo Hill Outdoor School in Worton, MD. This experience builds on what students have learned throughout their lower school years, including the environment and science, teamwork, leadership, and more.

At MPFS our classrooms even extend beyond the U.S. After a number of years traveling to Northern New Mexico, the 8th graders returned to Costa Rica for their culminating trip. Students participated in several service learning projects, which you can read more about in this issue's feature article! While 8th graders had a lot to say about all their adventures - zip lining, hiking the cloud forests, and horseback riding - I was most pleased to hear how close they became with their fellow soon-to-be graduates during the trip. Jaelynne Bethea, shared that what she valued most about the trip was quality time with her peers. "At school sometimes we're split up, there's always so much going on, but on the trip we were able to hang out altogether and really bond."

At Media-Providence Friends School, the process of learning looks different for each student and that's a great thing. We work to create diverse learning environments both inside the classroom and out. From our 5th grade class Skyping with their pen pals in Switzerland to our 8th graders taking flight in Costa Rica, we strive to provide our students with the freedom and flexibility to learn, play, study, and grow in settings that spark and fuel their curiosity, wherever in the world they might be.

In Friendship,



W. Earl Sissell  
*Head of School*

## LETTER FROM The Head of School



T. Earl plays Super Earl in the faculty Earth Day play!



## CLASSROOMS WITHOUT WALLS: A Global Education | *Continued from cover*

with students in Switzerland at the end of the year as a culminating activity for their pen pal project.

Our teachers encourage the wide range of learning styles and focus on the “journey” of problem solving – not solely the solution. This journey can take many forms and simply the act of removing “the four walls” of academia can breathe new life into a subject for students. Art and science collide for our students during walks to Glen Providence Park where they observe their adopted trees throughout the seasons, study the condition of the creek, and lend a helping hand to Friends of Glen Providence Park. Students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade each experience science-driven nature overnights where they learn about the natural habitat, its inhabitants, and how our daily decisions impact both our local environment and the world globally.

Here at Media-Providence Friends School, it is a priority to provide real world opportunities for our students to be true agents of change. This

year, 5th graders made a trip to West Philadelphia as part of their study of the Middle East. Students visited the Penn Museum’s collection of Middle Eastern art, had lunch at an all-Halal Middle Eastern eatery, and toured a local mosque. This cross-curriculum, immersive experience allowed students to experience and interact with the local Muslim community and exemplified the beauty and richness of a culture often depicted in the media in a negative light. Service learning projects also play an important role in the Quaker principles we teach as well as breaking down walls for our students to have the chance to learn from and experience the world around them. This year, 6th grade students organized and promoted a food drive for a local food bank. Here they learned, by the numbers, exactly how their donations would affect neighbors in need and how one small action can create a huge impact in their community.

Our 8th graders traveled to Costa Rica for their culminating trip before graduation and took on



*1st graders enjoying a traditional Japanese story time during their visit to the Shofuso Japanese House & Garden in Philadelphia*

the role of international journalists by blogging and photographing the entire experience for their classmates, teachers, parents, and friends at home. For our 8th graders who have heard our “act locally, think globally” mantra throughout their time at MPFS, it was an immersive, hands-on cultural experience offered at an invaluable time in their lives. Students each donated school supplies for a rural school with limited resources, planted avocado trees in the St. Elena Reserve, and learned how Quakers preserved much of what was left of the cloud rainforest in Monte Verde. Students reported a serious change happening in their community during the trip and, despite countless hours spent together over the years, side by side, in classrooms, they were pleasantly surprised how much closer they felt to their peers as they banded together over the course of their adventure.

The idea of classrooms without walls is not a new one – and our students, better than anyone, can tell you how cyclical trends can be – but it’s a vital and vibrant philosophy that faculty at MPFS have always made a priority for their students across grades and subjects.



*8th graders take in the scenery on their year-end trip to Costa Rica*

## Phyllis & Manley Mincer

Let's not mince words: MPFS is grateful to Phyllis and Manley Mincer.

Joint recipients of the 2014 Murry Engle Lauser Cornerstone Award for Outstanding Service to MPFS, the Mincers have acted with concerted effort to help keep this little Quaker school focused, funded, and with the freedom to educate children according to our mission.

Their presence has been warm and inspiring, their financial contributions have been generous and sustained, and their service has been invaluable. MPFS and the students we serve are fortunate to have had "Team Mincer" at bat for us.

In 1988, Phyllis and Manley enrolled their older daughter Dana and, from day one, the Mincers were a visible and vibrant presence on campus. "The school was so welcoming and I felt so included in the community that it was easy to be involved," says Manley. Younger daughter Alexis joined MPFS in 1992.

While both Mincers were extraordinary parent volunteers, Phyllis also evolved into a legendary Director of Development here, recruited by former Head of School Ginny Christensen who sought "someone who had great people-organizing capability and who had a real passion for MPFS" and saw that someone in Phyllis and her "endless supply of genius ideas."

As Director of Development, Phyllis built our Endowment, raised the intake of the Annual Fund, expanded Development operations, cultivated Planned Giving, fostered Alumni Relations, and embarked on new programs like PA's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. Working with then-Head of School Lynn Oberfield, Phyllis helped raise \$1.5 million for a facilities upgrade.

"Phyllis loved to learn new things and she became a student of school Advancement, fundraising, Capital Campaigns, and supporting volunteers," says Lynn. "I have never seen anyone tackle a whole new world with such vigor."

"And Manley joyfully took part in hanging out with us peculiar people to weed, rake, plant, haul furniture, cook spaghetti, work at the Auction, raise money for scholarships, and support his children's school," Lynn continues. "All in all, they represent the best in Friends schools and just what every Friends school needs: new



*Lexi '01, Manley, & Phyllis Mincer at the 2014 Cornerstone Award Ceremony*

ideas and energy, respect for the past, openness, sureness, endurance, and loyalty to mission."

The Mincers are members of our Planned Giving community, the 1876 Society, and have given generously to Financial Aid, Annual Giving, and the Auction. Manley and his Dental Arts on the Square partner Hope Berman have participated in the EITC and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs to support Financial Aid.

"It really boils down to four rather simple, yet compelling reasons why Manley and I give of our time and money to MPFS," Phyllis says. "We see great things happening at MPFS for children of all faiths."

We see MPFS committed to the kind of society that we all want to see. We see MPFS as a viable option to a quality education for children coming from all socio-economic backgrounds. And, personally, we are very grateful for the education our daughters, and we as parents, received here at MPFS."



## Development Update:

### Businesses Earn Extra (Tax) Credit with EITC & OSTC

Businesses that participate in Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs earn tax credits for their charitable gifts to our school—and deserve credit and our thanks for giving children the opportunity to have an MPFS education.

Through EITC and OSTC, corporations and partnerships that donate to support need-based scholarships for MPFS students can reduce state tax liability up to \$750,000 and gain a charitable deduction on Federal taxes. Businesses receive tax credits for up to 90% of gift value, so it costs a dime to donate a dollar!

Participation in either program is simple: Businesses complete an online application and, if approved, can redirect up to \$750,000 in tax payments to MPFS. 100% of that donation provides for children's education. A recent amendment to the programs adds the Malt Beverage Tax to the list of taxes to which credits could be applied.

In 2014-15, corporations collectively contributed \$134,452 toward our Financial Aid Fund through EITC

and OSTC. Gifts from Alliance Business Systems, Aqua Pennsylvania, Bridge Educational Foundation, The Bryn Mawr Trust Company, Dental Arts on the Square - Manley Mincer DDS and Hope Berman DMD, DNB First, Hawkins Technologies, The HUB, Keystone Health Plan East/ Independence Blue Cross, The MCS Group, Phelan Hallinan, Philadelphia Insurance Companies, Philip Rosenau Co. Inc., Republic Bank, UHS of Pennsylvania, and a generous anonymous corporate donor offset financial aid expenses that normally would come from the school's operating budget. We are most grateful to these donors.

With additional donor support, we could raise the more than \$350,000 that we are eligible to divert to Financial Aid for MPFS students in need through the EITC/OSTC programs. We encourage business owners of corporations authorized in Pennsylvania to consider applying. Or, please direct Director of Development Cynthia McGoff (610.565.1960 x106, [cmcgoff@fox.mpfs.org](mailto:cmcgoff@fox.mpfs.org)) to the proper inquiry channel at your employer.



## DIVISION SPOTLIGHT: Math & Science in Lower School

During an activity in T. Betty's 2nd grade class, a student joked, "Hey! You're trying to trick us into learning our times tables!" This student wasn't wrong – she was making her own connections. Lower school students at MPFS have the great advantage of a teaching staff that works together to cultivate interconnectedness in mathematics and science across subjects, which fosters a greater understanding of the topic and its real world applications.

"We want our kids to be fluent in math. You hear about

T. Shirley. "We want kids to move *towards* math. We want our kids to talk about math the same way they do about books, to have those mathematical conversations, and to learn from each other as we explain the problem solving strategies."

Lower school students at MPFS are taught to value not just the answer to a question but the journey that lead them to that conclusion. This training prepares young students for more advanced and abstract thinking that comes



*T. Betty & 2nd grade student identify & sketch adopted trees for a cross-curriculum science/art walk to Glen Providence Park*



*1st graders use all of their senses*

reading fluency, but we also want to create math fluency so that we are making sure kids understand how mathematical concepts are interrelated and interconnected – and that math is everywhere and tied into language arts and science and problem solving and life," says T. Shirley, our 4th grade teacher and curriculum coordinator.

"One thing that always puzzles me is the way adults will say, no, I can't do this middle school math or algebra, or [when they] back away when it comes to math," says

in middle school and beyond. "The thing that I think is valuable is what is discarded by students. The mistakes that they make help them get to the next point," says T. Shirley. "Sometimes we give them the answers to free them to really take on the process of math. And to have fun with the journey. We try to develop that stick-to-itiveness that is so important in the real world."

Similarly, T. Holly, who teaches our 1st through 3rd grades science class, focuses her students on the following



questions: *How did you get there? How did you think of it? How do you explain how you know that?* “They might be saying the exact same reasoning (as another student) but they’re saying it differently and they feel good about that,” says T. Holly, who encourages students to find their own path, even to finite answers.

Small class sizes allow our faculty to follow the threads that most excite their students. This is crucially important for subjects like math and science that tend to carry a

arithmetic with three digit numbers. “Each teacher teaches the students that they have. That’s what we do here. We don’t teach one book, we teach our kids with a variety of sources. Whoever our kids are – that’s who the subject area is geared towards. The choices and the decisions and the pacing and the progress are all geared toward that group of students,” says T. Emily.

With school-wide activities like Math & Science Day and Family Math Games Night, our students learn to



Students participating in baking soda experiment



3rd graders simulate pollination with real dried bees

perception of inflexibility. “We want to delve more deeply into topics, going deeper not necessarily wider,” says T. Shirley. For example, 2nd and 3rd graders plunged into chemistry and chemical testing as a culminating science activity with T. Holly this year. Students had to identify five unknown solids in water. “It’s logic, mystery, curiosity, articulating, recording, measuring, being systematic – everything they need to be a scientist!” T. Holly says.

Meanwhile, T. Emily’s 1st graders were able to begin

work together, to learn from each other, and to enjoy the processes of math and science. “I think the whole year is a stepping-stone into the next. It’s building their skills and making sure they really understand fundamentally what it is they’re learning. We’re not moving onto the next things without that,” says T. Emily. “We want them to be ready for what comes next in math and science. It’s just a continuum.”

## ALUMNI PROFILE

## Sibling Revivalry:

## Andy Aguilar '08 and Lianabel Aguilar '10



*Lianabel & Andy Aguilar visit MPFS, spring 2014*

“...Wherever friendly paths intersect, the whole world looks like home for a time.”  
- Hermann Hesse, Author

When the Aguilar siblings came to MPFS in 2005—Andy as a 6th grader and Lianabel into 4th grade—they found friendly paths that forked into to a whole world of possibilities, fueling success into higher education, and toward making a world of difference. Still, while MPFS helped clear some roads, Andy and Lianabel are steering their own courses powered by talent, enterprise, and compassion.

Prior to enrolling at MPFS, the Aguilars attended a school at which they did not feel fully engaged or feel safe as students. “I felt very anxious at my old school,” Lianabel recalls. “It was so much friendlier at MPFS, which made me forget my worries.”

“It was so warm and welcoming here,” Andy reinforces. The siblings’ parents were seeking a better educational option when a woman who met Andy and Lianabel through a community kids program introduced the family to MPFS.

Lianabel recounts that, as Spanish-speaking immigrants from Guatemala, her mother and father were not fluent in English, and that the family worked closely with MPFS in regard to communications and paperwork. “The school really helped us,” she emphasizes. “[Those experiences] make me want to support people in similar situations. When I see them struggling, I take it personally, and I want to help.”

Currently, Lianabel is completing her first year at Eastern University, majoring in Political Science and Spanish with an interest in History. She is also a teaching assistant for Eastern’s Spanish Department.

Andy is a Diplomacy and International Relations major at Seton Hall (Class of 2016). A member of Alpha Phi Omega National Service Fraternity and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, he is just finishing an internship for the White House’s Initiative on Asian and Pacific Islanders to facilitate transitions for immigrants, new citizens, and foreign parents. Oh, and he speaks English, Spanish, French, and Mandarin.

“At MPFS, I was very interested in conflict resolution and later became fascinated with ambassadors and diplomats,” Andy notes. “Overall, the school provided a unique education with Quaker values. Those values were not preached or pushed in your face, but I saw them among students and between students and teachers, and I still carry them with me.”

“MPFS is like a big family and the teachers are amazing,” says Lianabel. “Coming here made me really value my education.”



## MPFS Class of 2011: College Bound, Boundless Futures



*Class of 2011 8th grade graduation*

Where in the world of higher learning are these MPFS alumni and soon-to-be high-school graduates? We're proud to report their college choices and to congratulate them for their achievements! There's much more to tell about the Class of 2011, so go to the MPFS website at [www.mpfs.org](http://www.mpfs.org) for a closer look at their plans, news, and considerable accomplishments.

**Margaux Bigelow**, Tulane University  
**Sam Dahlke**, Grinnell College  
**Sam Dainton**, Mount St. Mary's University  
**Alejandro Flores-Brown**, Washington University in St. Louis  
**Arbour Guthrie**, Emory University  
**Noah Howells**, Appalachian State University  
**Darell Jackson**, Valley Forge Military College  
**Olivia Jarrell**, Gettysburg College  
**Peter Kashatus**, Earlham College  
**Caroline Lentz**, Appalachian State University (*may take a gap year*)  
**Chris Levy**, Tulane University  
**Eli Linvill**, Warren Wilson College  
**Noah Marcolongo**, Drexel University  
**Melissa Mejia**, The Pennsylvania State University  
**Evan Palmieri**, St. Joseph's University  
**Haley Peterson**, Smith College  
**Michaela Rhile**, Wellesley College

## MEET Teacher Erica



*T. Erica & student dig in during kindergarten's culminating science activity: dissecting owl pellets!*

**T**eacher Erica became a teacher with hopes of instilling a lifetime love of learning in her students and we know she's done just that over the last six years as a Kindergarten teacher at MPFS. She attributes her own "Aha!" moment in her academic career to learning to play the flute in 8th grade (she went on to minor in music in college and currently teaches flute for our Afterschool Enrichment program) and becoming an avid reader in 9th grade after reading Anne Tyler's *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*. "I had a really hard time reading when I was little so when I finally learned different strategies that worked for me, I realized that I really liked learning. I wanted to go back and give that to other people," T. Erica says.

Hailing from Ohio, T. Erica grew up in Cincinnati and attended college in Cleveland. She holds a B.S. in Early Childhood Education from Baldwin Wallace University and a Masters of Education in Literacy from West Chester University. Before moving to Media, T. Erica worked in schools in Camden and Philadelphia where she was a model classroom teacher for the Children's Literacy Initiative, an organization that "coaches teachers – one-on-one and in small groups in the classroom – to provide them with demonstrations and feedback that will help them incorporate effective

literacy practices into their daily work with students."

More recently, T. Erica took part in the Adolescent Literacy Program, an intensive program for children with severe reading needs and dyslexia, at Delaware Valley Friends School. Last year, she completed an eight day workshop and a summer internship with DVFS and she is currently completing a year of Saturday morning courses. "This experience has changed everything for me. If you're missing certain areas of literacy like phonemic awareness or alphabet awareness by third grade, it becomes a major deficit. So I make sure to introduce it with my class so it's a part of their daily experience early on. It becomes scaffolding for their later years of learning."

What strikes T. Erica most about MPFS and her students is that all styles of learning are celebrated and that learning can take place in any environment. At five and six years old, she sees her students learning from one another and taking care of each other in the classroom to create a positive, accepting learning environment.

When she's not at MPFS, Erica loves to cook, read, and cross stitch! She lives in Springfield with her husband Brian and they are expecting their first child on July 4th this summer.



**IMPORTANT DATES:**

**Summer Camp,**  
June 22 – August 21  
(Limited space – call 610.565.1960  
today for more information!)

**First Day of School,**  
September 9



*4th Graders take a closer look at leaves found on their overnight trip to Silver Lake Nature Center*

**"Are you following along?"**



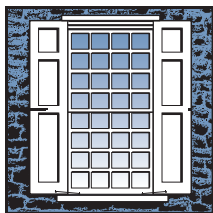
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*Pre-School students use watercolors during  
a trip to the Philadelphia Museum of Art*

