

SUMMER HIGHS AND LOWS

The summer ‘highs’ kept the low points in check. The enthusiastic kids and staff of WEDJ summer school, the revitalization of the school’s physical plant and Ms. Palmer’s hard work at leading the ten staff professional development days continued to keep WEDJ moving in a positive direction. I did, however, notice an increase in the number of closed session meetings at the WEDJ Board level.

Mr. Carter took a lead role in coordinating the activity program for summer school that was open to any student in the DC area. Ms. Bradshaw was responsible for the academic program and Ms. Lawson took care of the business of summer school. I can still hear the joyful clatter of the happy dancing feet in the multipurpose room! I used this time to formally plan for the upcoming year and build in two weeks of holidays. WEDJ work didn’t actually stop for me; I just took my laptop and cell phone to Canada and worked in virtual space.

I was very excited about the progress being made in our new school library and the PK playground. It was energizing to see the school transform before our eyes. The maintenance and security teams worked hard to add walls and walls of ceiling tiles to increase the amount of space for posting student work outside of each classroom. At first, it seemed strange to glue ceiling tiles on the walls, but they painted up nicely, and saved teachers so much time, as staples simply lifted off easily, allowing for more frequent changing of themes and sharing of student learning. Mr. Johnson, our senior member of the maintenance team, was especially proud of installing these tiles and I was very appreciative of the tender loving care he put into this work. Students needed to see their work honored and by showcasing their work frequently, the school would have more opportunities to demonstrate what great schools do.

In addition to the sparkling makeover of the school, Mr. McKeiver created a brilliant mural showcasing the school’s character education focus for PAL (Promoting Arts and Leadership) Program. With Mr. Johnson’s guidance, I painted between each step of our stairway, our school color, purple, so Ms. Nugent could add her special math touch to the stairs, listing ‘multiples’ to help students learn their math facts.

It was exciting to see the plans turn into reality as the walls came tumbling down in the former office areas on the lower floor. We were nervous with the amount of drywall carnage piling up, but the team from D.R. Hartman Construction took care of everything from the removal of walls to the installation of new walls and rugs in our new spacious library. They also worked closely with our own maintenance team to coordinate a professional clean up, just in time for the start of school! Ms. Cadag had to be commended for all her hard work, the transporting and rearranging of

books and materials to furnish the new library space. It was not easy, but with her attractive decorating and management of additional technology stations, Grace was able to help make the Imagination Centre a new reality at WEDJ. The amount of space generated by removing so many small offices was truly a fine addition to the school.

During the summer, the PK playground was installed before the first day of school! We were thrilled with the grant support offered through Playground Structures, Inc., and pleased to add this feature to our physical plant. After all, we had over 100 PK's who were delighted to have this play option when they returned for school after the summer.

That summer, our Admissions Coordinator, Ms. Morgan had emergency brain surgery and had to go on medical leave until January 2014. The staff and families truly missed her warmth and positive spirit. We responded by hiring a former school leader, Mary Robbins, to take on the task of coordinating admissions, marketing and analysis of enrollment and re-enrollment data. Mary, who also was very familiar with the school's database, *PowerSchool*, proved to be a valuable asset until Ms. Morgan's return.

I experienced a low point in the summer when I had to leave school on July 17th for emergency dental surgery. What I hoped would have been a 15-minute solution, turned into a 2.5-hour bone grafting event with three added days of bed rest, nurturing an extracted tooth and serious infection. Ms. Evans had to bring me papers to sign; I'm sure she was shocked to see the gruesome me, swollen with ice packs and painkillers. In all my days at WEDJ, this was the only time I could not read, write or dream about the school. When I left for the appointment, I had every intention of returning for the Board meeting that evening, but this health matter was much more serious than I thought. I knew there would be questions about the draft budget and I was so disappointed that I was unable to address them in person. Ms. Lawson sent my regrets, but apparently, Goldman was quite upset that I hadn't called him directly to let him know I would not be attending the meeting.

While I had communicated the specifics of the school's accomplishments within each school report at Board meetings, I was surprised that the Board did not recognize or address the school's growth at meetings. Our roster for the coming year was complete with 76% staff returning, up 23% from the previous year; 87% of our families were returning, up 30% from the former year. The new library renovation and PK playground improved the indoor and outdoor physical plant. We had 700 students on a wait list. Overall, our DC-CAS scores improved, and we made significant gains in mathematics. The loss of a few percentage points in reading was a drop many charters experienced that year in the DC-CAS testing, but it was not an indicator, in any way, that the school was in trouble.

I could sense from a read of the Board meeting minutes that the tide for my support was waning. What was happening at the grassroots level was affirming, but at the Board level, there seemed to be a gap, in terms of valuing all the significant changes

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brought about by many hard working, committed and supportive staff members. The number of closed session Board meetings continued into the fall and new year. No minutes of these sessions were published, and I was never informed of the contents of these parts of the Board meetings. While I hoped for renewed transparency and the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Board of Trustees, I knew I would have to wait for their invitation. In the meantime, my students, staff and families needed my energy and support.