

Winter 2023

Higashi Highlights



www.bostonhigashi.org

*Helping children with autism
exceed expectations since 1987*

(781) 961-0800

Program Director's Perspective



Dr. John Maina

Highlights

FEATURES

4-5. RESIDENTIAL NEWS

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FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



We are raising the bar!

We recently crossed the threshold of 100 days for the 2022-23 school year. What is often a celebrated milestone in Elementary schools across the country, as students look back to see how far they have come, and look forward in anticipation of the new skills they will learn, is also an opportunity for reflection on my first 100 days as your new Director of Programming.

Our students continue to inspire me, and walking the halls to see the fun activities their teachers have worked tirelessly to plan gives me great optimism for the coming months. Our Elementary students recently celebrated the 100th day with many engaging math activities, from counting out 100 balls, books, and straws, to counting 100 popcorn kernels, then popping them in the classroom for a special snack! Also, seeing our younger students with their OTs and PTs in the morning has been very heart-warming. To see the Older High School students serving staff coffee and snacks at the Sundae Fundae Cafe shows the great potential for employment in the future. I thank our staff for their dedication and commitment to our students and I look forward to everyone staying on this positive trajectory.

As I reflect on my first 100 days in this new position, I am buoyed by a sense of optimism as I see our staff determined to make a difference. Since we started the new school year, the winds of change have been blowing, ushering in new dispensation in a variety of areas. One of these areas is a deliberate effort towards improving our students' learning outcomes, nurturing them into well-rounded individuals who are ready for the future. To achieve this goal, we prioritized conducting a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, whose outcome has placed us in great position to effectively continue implementing our BHS Action Plan and Vision 2025, while factoring the contextual realities and needs of our program. To this end we are grateful to our staff and team leaders who make our great school what it is today!

We look forward to continued cooperation and collaboration with our parents and families in the Higashi spirit of CHALLENGE. BELIEVE. TOGETHER!

Community Partners

Bob's Discount Furniture Comes Through Once Again!

For the second time in less than a year, Bob's Discount Furniture came to the rescue again! With the approval of Bob's Chairman, Ted English and under the direction of Kurt Pappalardo, Director of Commercial Sales, Bob's furnished 10 bedrooms at our newest staff residence at the former St. Mary's Convent in Randolph. Furnishings for each room included a bed, box spring and mattress, desk, chair, dresser and area rug. In addition Bob's provided a new dining room set and living room furniture. This donation follows a similar donation for 22 rooms at the St. Joseph's Convent adjacent to the EP Program in Holbrook this past summer. Bob's generosity has allowed us to welcome and embrace 32 extremely talented International Staff from Kenya, Japan, and Cameroon.

Thank you Bob's!



Yale Appliance Foundation Supports Higashi's International Outreach



As Yale Appliance prepares to celebrate its 100 year anniversary, it wanted to support some special causes in the Greater Boston Area and fortunately for us, they embraced the mission of the Boston Higashi School. The Foundation was particularly interested in our efforts to bring to our school individuals from the International Community who wanted to work with our students. As a result, the Yale Foundation jumped on board to support our new staff residence at the former St. Mary's Convent in Randolph by donating a refrigerator, stove, microwave, dishwasher, and washer and dryer. What an incredible gift from an amazing group – we cannot thank the Yale Appliance Foundation enough!

Call For Volunteers

Spring is just around the corner and we can use lots of help! Although we didn't get much snow, we got a lot of wind and rain and there is a lot of cleaning up to do. Our trails and outdoor classroom are in need of clean up and our farm land needs help waking up for the planting season. No skills are needed, just the motivation and desire to help out. Most volunteer groups work for approximately 2- 3 hours and find the work both fun and rewarding. In the past we have had parent groups, business and corporate groups, school groups and scouts pitch in and help out. If you or your group are interested please contact: Paul.fanning@bostonhigashi.org.

We look forward to working with you!





The Winter That Snow Forgot

but we had fun all the same

This winter season may as well go down as the least snowiest in recent memory. Most of the winter fun activities we normally have around campus such as snow shoeing, sledding down the hill, or making snowmen did not happen. However, that did not dampen the spirits of the season. We remember the beautiful holiday lights around the school and especially all over the nature trail. The lights made the campus so beautiful in the evenings. Thank you to all volunteers that were involved in putting up the lights.

We also spent time outdoors enjoying leisure walks around the campus, going for weekend/holiday community trips as well as shopping for groceries for the culinary arts classes. Speaking of shopping, our divisions went out to get wall decorations from the local stores. Funds for these wall decorations were from the most recent "Giving Tuesday." A big shout out to Mr. Paul Fanning for extending the courtesy of allowing the residential program to utilize the funds to make our hallways look very nice. The Valentine Dance Party was an opportunity to celebrate love and our students and staff seemed to enjoy the evening of dance and snacks while adored in red, the color of the day.

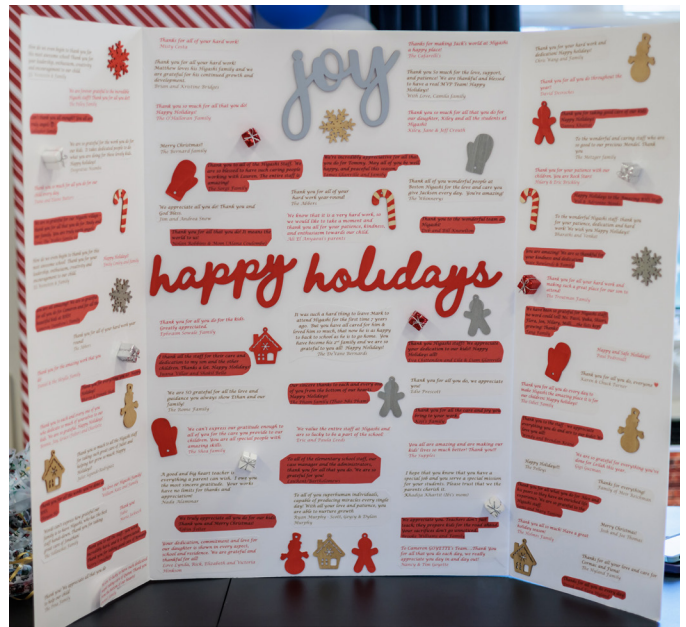
The residence also continues to receive new living room and bedroom furniture, an effort that has been led by the Residential Director of Students Affairs, Mr. Chris White. We are also glad to welcome new leadership at the residence with Mr. Kariuki Muriithi and Mr. Henry Njoroge settling into their new roles of Residential Director and Residential Academic and Coaching Director respectively. We wish them well as they steer the BHS residence to be the best managed residential program in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Parent Association

It's been a busy few months - spanning Christmas to Valentine's Day - and none of us have let any Covid surges get us down. We parents were sad to miss the holiday parties that we hold so dear, but we understand and look forward to celebrating with gusto in the near future! At holiday time the parent community banded together and accomplished an amazing fundraising effort that enabled the PTO to purchase and gift-wrap a Higashi sweatshirt and lovely chocolates for each and every staff member. We appreciate all that this group does for our children every single day! A big thank you to all!

Togetherness was also seen from the parent community during the holiday lights decoration. Thank you to all who participated! The children really look forward to seeing the sparkly lights and they bring everyone so much joy. We had planned to begin hosting "Saturday Coffees" but the Covid numbers sort of squashed that idea for now. We aim to start a Zoom parent group instead - stay tuned on the plan. Please email Kate DeVane at katehap5@comcast.net if you are interested in getting info on the Zoom parent group.

Sending love to all as we look forward to Spring.



Higashi Fathers Gathering

"A Father's job is to be able to fix things"
Carlos Gusmao, BHS Dad

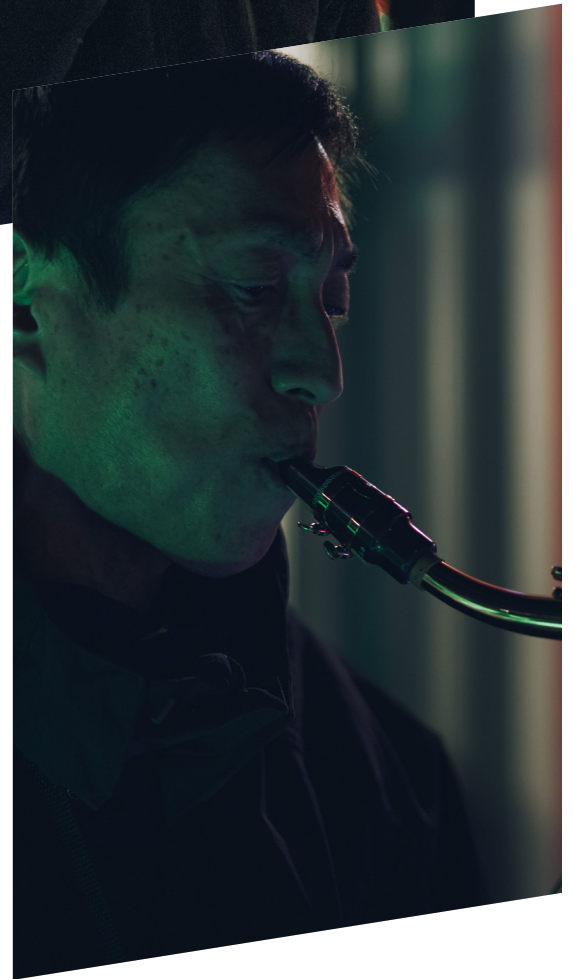
On Thursday evening, February 23rd, a group of 12 Dad's from the Elementary and Middle School Division joined Higashi staff Paul Fanning, John McAllister, and Chris Stanbrook for an evening of banter and libations at the Brook Kitchen and Tap in nearby Holbrook. Initiated by Carlos Gusmao, this first-ever Dad's Group gathering was an opportunity for these father's to be around other guys, who in their words "get it". Being the parent of a child with autism brings with it significant challenges and a huge sense

of isolation that can be overwhelming to say the least. The opportunity to get out for a few hours, share some stories and just be able to laugh, proved to be an invaluable and relaxing experience.

The next meeting (*Elementary and Middle School Dad's only*) will be held on March 16th. Once again at the Brook Kitchen and Tap in Holbrook. If you are interested in joining us or for further information please contact: paul.fanning@bostonhigashi.org or john.mcallister@bostonhigashi.org.

Light the Night Bright Festival

Continuing traditions with the
help of our Higashi community!





Wednesday, December 14th was a dark chilly winter evening but the Higashi campus had a special feeling in the air. In what has become a new cherished tradition, we held our Annual Light the Night Bright Festival! Parents and families were invited to join us for an evening filled with happy faces and joyful singing.

Gathering outside of the Brady building, families had warm fires to stand by while listening to the selected Jazz Band members warm up their instruments. When the time came, everyone shifted from the fires to listen to the Jazz Band playing holiday music followed by announcements from Mike Kelly and Heather Katz. Finally when it was time to turn the lights on, Deborah Donovan selected a student to help as they counted down the final moments of darkness before the campus was illuminated!



Lights turned on all at once across campus! Reds and greens on the buildings, white trees along the track, along with hundreds of lights making the Evan Henry Nature Trail an unforgettable experience. With everything turned on, students joined their families for a walk through the enchanted trail leading behind the barn where more fire pits and hot cocoa was being served.



We do not have the words these days to express how thankful we are to those that help with the creation of new Higashi traditions such as this event. Without the help of the Teamsters, Ironworkers, Parents and staff, this simply would not be possible. We thank each and every one of you and look forward to sharing memories every year with you all.

Winter Music Festival



The end of the year event at Higashi has looked different for three years now and this year was no exception. Winter Music Festival was held as a mostly virtual event where we had a class represent each division. While everyone was in classrooms participating, one class from each division went into their music room to perform.

The performances brought out the high energy from other students that we've come to love and expect at a Higashi event! With bright

smiling faces, the rest of the school was able to follow along and be just as merry. We had performances happening in both the Large and Small Music rooms as well as in our new Jazz Club space.

One big change to this event was a surprise farewell to two members of our Higashi community that have made the decision to retire. Both Janet Murphy and Deborah Donovan were attending their final Higashi event as staff members, so students provided a special moment for

each of them. The bigger surprise for everyone was when Deborah Donovan sang one of her favorite songs for us all, accompanied by Mr. Oba on the piano. It was an incredible performance and one that we won't forget anytime soon as we sadly said farewell to our Principal of 14 years.



Winter Wonderland



This sure was a fun night for everyone! Our Winter Dances were held the same evening as our Light the Night Bright Festival for the first time. So many of our students had the opportunity to spend time with family and friends outside before heading inside to celebrate!

Inside there were festivities happening all over the school! Our younger students came down to Marble Hall for a few songs and dances before heading to their division living rooms where they played games with their friends all night!

Older High School students used their day program classrooms as locations for different activities like games, movies and dancing!

While all of this was going on around the school, our Emergence Program students were in the gym dancing the night away! In a more traditional sense, EP students grouped up by class and danced with friends and family. Taking a quick break for refreshments, they also played a game using skateboards to pretend they were sledding indoors! It was a long night but a very fun way to end the year!



Love All Around US

There is no denying that Higashi love is unique and special in so many ways. The week before Valentine's Day, our Residential program held their dance parties. Much like our dances in December, the event was modified to provide safe spaces for our students.

Marble Hall was filled with photo backdrops for some lovely portrait photography before moving to the front of the room where they enjoyed thematic music with our teachers. When students weren't smiling for photos or dancing, they could be found in our Culinary Arts kitchen baking cookies!

Upstairs in Older High School each classroom had it's own special game set up. Students played large games of Tic Tac Toe, shared candy hearts with each other, and created fun bubble art by sticking a straw in paint and blowing bubbles!

Emergence Program students could once again be found in the gym dancing, this time many were in pairs learning to dance with someone else. The half time entertainment this time was an enjoyable game of musical chairs!





BOSTON HIGASHI SCHOOL
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Upcoming Events

Events

- 3.3 **OPEN HOUSE**
10am-12pm
- 3.29 **PARENT TRAINING**
9:30am - 12pm
- 4.10 **SPRING VACATION**
Apr 10-14
Apr 18-21
- 4.24 **DAY PROGRAM REOPENS**

New Higashi Website!

We are excited to announce that we have launched a new website for the Boston Higashi School! We have been working behind the scenes for months to update the look of our school website to better suit the needs of our community. We think that this new website is a better representation of who we are! We hope that you find this as enjoyable as we do. You can learn more about who we are and what makes us the best school for children with autism in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts! See it for yourself by going to www.bostonhigashi.org or by scanning the QR code below!

