

Winter 2024

# Higashi Highlights



[www.bostonhigashi.org](http://www.bostonhigashi.org)

*Helping children with autism  
exceed expectations since 1987*

(781) 961-0800

# Program Director's Perspective



Dr. John Maina

## We are a School in Pursuit of Excellence

Boston Higashi School continues to make great progress in a wide range of areas. I am particularly impressed by our team for the great work they are doing to nurture and maximize our students' potential. It has been great to see our new students adjusting well in our program. To ensure that all our students continue to gain pertinent knowledge and skills, we have been intentional in our focus on professional development of our teachers. I am optimistic that these efforts will ultimately ensure that our students continue to make progress and transition from Boston Higashi school with valued life outcomes. Moreover, the school's physical infrastructure continues to be in great shape. All the classrooms are equipped with smart boards to provide expanded options for student engagement and consequently improved student learning outcomes. I truly thank our staff for their dedication and commitment to the vision and mission of our founder Dr. Kiyo Kitahara as captured in her famous quote,

*"In every child there exists a bud of self identity. Searching it and fostering it with loving care is the essence of education for a child with autism"*

Reflecting on Dr. Katara's vision, I have been inspired by the special dedication to our school's mission. This story of hope is perfectly portrayed in our classrooms. I have been inspired by the teachers working in our Elementary division for working so hard to lay a firm foundation for the education of these wonderful children.

We have recently had several fun-filled events. These include the Winter Music Festival and Valentine's Dance Party. As always, our students and staff rise to the occasion. Sibling day was a success as the students and their siblings engaged in a wide variety of fun games. We are looking forward to the graduation ceremony and the Formal Dance for the Emergence Program students. The December vacation program went very well, and we are now looking forward to the April vacation program.

We continue to support our alumni through the Continuing Adult Education Program (CAEP). This program has helped our former students to use our campus to learn and reconnect with their peers and former teachers while participating in a variety of productive activities. I sincerely thank the Mitsui Foundation for providing scholarships to students participating in the CAEP. This has directly contributed to increased enrolment that currently stands at 50 alumni per session. I am indeed thankful to our Executive Director, Mike Kelly for his efforts to increase alumni services to include a Day program. We intend to start a food pantry that will serve those in need in Randolph. This effort is also expected to provide more vocational opportunities for our older students, through food deliveries.

Finally, I welcome the collaboration of our families and partners during the numerous all-inclusive activities in our calendar, such as Emergency Program graduation, Formal Dance, Annual Celebration and the inaugural International Festival later in the year.

## Highlights

### FEATURES

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BRIGHT FESTIVAL

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FESTIVAL

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# Whirlwind Winter

The whirlwind winter semester at Higashi has flown by! It feels like just yesterday we were gearing up for the holidays, but time, as ever, marches on. After a rejuvenating December break, our students returned with renewed energy and a thirst for learning. Routines buzzed back to life, classrooms brimmed with academic focus, and joyous birthday celebrations filled the air.

The beloved Sundae Fundae Cafe also made its triumphant return, tantalizing taste buds and fostering sweet memories. While winter's white blanket was a tad thinner than in years past, it didn't dampen our spirits! When snowflakes did grace the ground, students gleefully seized the opportunity to reconnect with the simple joys of catching them on their tongues and reveling in the magic of being a child.

Meanwhile, inside the school, a collaborative masterpiece blossomed in the music & art hallway. You might recall the captivating murals painted by our dedicated art teachers. Well, one large wall still awaited its transformation, and guess who gets the honor this time? Our very own students! Guided by their artistic mentors, they meticulously prepared the canvas with a base coat of blue, setting the stage for a school-wide artistic collaboration. Stay tuned for exciting updates as this unique project unfolds!



# Parent Association

Every year, the Higashi Parent Association rallies to show their appreciation for the dedicated staff who nurture and inspire their children. This year, their goal was ambitious: providing 300+ staff members with cozy new fleece vests as a warm token of thanks.

As December unfolded, it became clear that reaching their \$9,000 fundraising goal would require extra effort. But the Higashi community spirit shone brightly! After a passionate call to action, donations poured in, exceeding expectations and ensuring every

staff member would receive a well-deserved gift.

With vests secured, the next challenge was wrapping: a seemingly Herculean task amidst busy holiday schedules. Yet, the Parent Association team once again united, dedicating a Sunday morning to meticulously wrapping each vest with love and care.

Their tireless efforts culminated in a heartwarming moment. On the final day before the break, staff were surprised with individually wrapped vests – a tangible expression of gratitude from the Higashi



community. The vests weren't just fleece; they were warm hugs of thanks, a symbol of appreciation that resonated deeply with everyone.



# Kicking off the New Year with Bright Spirits

Our residential program kicked off 2024 with ambitious resolutions, involving students, teachers, and parents to ensure sustainability throughout the year. However, we faced a significant transition as 26 students moved divisions and several residential teachers joined the school in various roles - from classroom teachers to case managers. While challenging, we tackled these changes together for the benefit of our students.



The holidays brought festive cheer to the residence! We embarked on outings to La Salette and Jordan's Furniture, soaking in the twinkling lights. A Rabbi visited our school, illuminating the Hanukkah candles and filling the air with warmth. Celebrations were abundant – we danced, cherished time with families, and even enjoyed a refreshing swim on campus! Bowling, movies, and laughter filled our days. December's warmth didn't stop us from indulging in hot chocolate after invigorating hikes. We fueled our festive spirit with Dunkin' runs and homemade cookies from our culinary arts room. Birthdays were extra special, celebrated on-site with parents, peers, and teachers, creating lasting memories.



January kicked off with exciting trips to the Boston Aquarium and local restaurants! Our students showcased their learned skills by navigating both environments independently. At the aquarium, they marveled at underwater wonders while maintaining excellent group behavior, even amidst large crowds. We received positive community feedback, particularly on their effective use of communication devices when ordering food.



February found us in full swing! Younger students were diligently mastering their letters and numbers, while older students tackled a new recipe - chicken stir-fry. Our recent Valentine's Day Open House was the residence's most attended event since Covid, fostering a vibrant community atmosphere. We also ventured to the JFK Museum and Library, learning about our local hero, President John F. Kennedy.

Every day at the residence is a blend of learning and fun, both within our walls and out in the community. We're excited to continue sharing our journey and student successes throughout the year!

# Community Support

The crisp December air buzzed with festive energy on the Boston Higashi campuses. In Randolph, Iron Workers Local 7 donned warm hats and scaled towering ladders, transforming the Nature Trail into a twinkling winter wonderland. Their handiwork soon brought smiles and laughter to families during their holiday walks, creating cherished memories that warmed the winter days.

Meanwhile, over in Holbrook, another heartwarming scene unfolded. A group of dedicated parents, including visitors from Tuscany who beamed as they painted decorative rocks, got their hands dirty digging holes for posts, and painting tires for future flowerbeds. This ongoing Greenspace project, a product of big collaborative effort between volunteers and Emergence Program students, is really taking shape, promising a vibrant outdoor space for everyone to enjoy!



## Marlee Foundation

William Hale, a successful tech entrepreneur with a passion for giving back established the Marlee Foundation in the name of his dog. On a visit to the Boston Higashi School last year, he was deeply impressed by the music program. He saw firsthand the impact of music on students' lives, fostering creativity, teamwork, and self-expression. Being a musician himself and inspired by our staff's dedication, Hale decided to make a significant contribution – a donation of 50 Yamaha marching snare drums. After an eager wait, the drums finally arrived at the school on January 11th, marking a joyous occasion for the entire Higashi community. This generous gift will ensure every student has access to this transformative program, nurturing their talents and enriching their lives for years to come! Gone are the days of bucket drumming as students welcome the gift of learning on professional kits.



# A Night of Love & Laughter

Reliving the Valentine's Day Dance Party!





February 7th wasn't just any ordinary day at our school – it was a magical night filled with love, laughter, and unforgettable memories thanks to the Valentine's Day Dance Party! It seems like Cupid himself must have taken a vacation to our school, sprinkling his magic dust everywhere.

The gym and Marble Hall transformed into vibrant dance floors, pulsing with the rhythm of happy feet and thumping hearts. Our youngest dancers stole the show with their adorable routines, melting hearts with their innocent charm. Their infectious enthusiasm set the stage for the older students, whose electrifying moves turned the gym into a dazzling disco. It was impossible to resist the urge to move, and soon everyone – students, parents, and teachers alike – were swaying to the music, creating a beautiful tapestry of joy and connection.

But the fun wasn't just limited to dancing! Parents joined in the merriment, participating in games and activities alongside their children. The laughter echoing through the halls was a testament to the genuine sense of community and togetherness that filled the air. And who could forget the delicious treats? From heart-shaped cookies to cupcakes adorned with sprinkles, the sweet treats were the perfect fuel for all the dancing and merriment.

As the night drew to a close, everyone left with smiles etched on their faces and hearts brimming with warmth. It was more than just a dance party; it was a celebration of love, friendship, and the joy of being part of a special community!



# Winter Music Festival



The winter chill couldn't compete with the jubilant warmth that echoed through Higashi's halls as the beloved Winter Music Festival returned! A joyful explosion of music filled the air, melting hearts and swelling families with pride. After months of dedicated practice, our talented Elementary and Middle School students were ready to take center stage and shine.

The stage lights transformed each young performer into a radiant star. Soaring vocals, like birdsong echoing through crisp winter air, filled the auditorium. Rhythmic

percussion pulsed, mirroring the steady beat of excited hearts. In each note, each movement, the power of music resonated, weaving a tapestry of dedication, talent, and pure joy.

This year's festival held a special significance. While bittersweet, it marked the triumphant return of a limited audience, welcoming parents back for the first time in three years. The shared experience, filled with familiarity and excitement, was a testament to the enduring power of music and community.

As the final melody faded and

applause thundered, a bittersweet feeling lingered. Winter break loomed, marking the end of the fall semester. Yet, an undercurrent of excitement cracked. Spring, with its promise of new beginnings and renewed energy, beckoned on the horizon. We dream of the day when all families can reunite and immerse themselves in the magic of the Winter Music Festival, but for now, we cherish the memories made and embrace the anticipation of a vibrant spring semester.





# Winter Wonderland



The halls resounded with laughter and merriment as Higashi's Winter Holiday Vacation Camp unfolded! Our creative Activity Leaders conjured a whimsical wonderland of games and activities, transforming December's chill into a season of pure joy.

Imagine towering sculptures reaching for the ceiling, fueled by imaginations as bright as the twinkling holiday lights. Watch monthly core words effortlessly weave into conversations, a testament to the camp's subtle learning woven into the fun.

But the magic didn't stop there! A slyly crafted maze awaited, brimming with hidden treats that unlocked the coveted prize at the Sundae Fundae Cafe. Learning with a sugar rush? Absolutely!

Beyond the festivities, a deeper purpose bloomed. After the dedication poured into the Winter Music Festival, this camp served as a rejuvenating respite, renewing energy for the semester ahead. It was a time for self-discovery, where hidden talents blossomed under the warm glow of holiday spirit.

Higashi's Winter Holiday Vacation Camp wasn't just a break; it was a celebration of community, creativity, and the boundless joy of being a child. Every late December day was filled with something special, a memory to cherish as students returned, ready to embrace the new year with vibrant enthusiasm.



# Campus Updates

It certainly has not been a quiet winter regarding facilities updates and changes:

## New CAEP Space

As our Continuing Adult Education Program continues to grow in attendance, so does the need for a designated space here in Randolph. Currently, the Saturday only program has spiked to 50 participants, many of whom are searching for more meaningful vocational, social and recreational opportunities as a result of a tremendous void in programs for our adult graduates. To ameliorate the impact of this issue, experts like those at the Boston Higashi School have been working diligently to fill the gap in quality service programs for adults with ASD.

To that end, the school has renovated the basement of the Magennis Building to accommodate that demand. Planning has been underway for the past several months to expand CAEP to a weekday program with the Magennis Building serving as its home base. Once furnished, three beautifully renovated rooms, in an area once occupied by EP will soon be ready for business. Stay tuned for updates!

## Brady Fitness Center

The Fitness Center in the Brady basement is being overhauled with new treadmills and stationary bikes. In the works for several months now, the outdated and overused treadmills, ellipticals, stair climbers and bikes will be a thing of the past. With proceeds from a the Jack Gives Back & Will's Warriors Golf Tournament hosted by Higashi parent, Eric Brickley, and through the generosity of Pulse Fitness Equipment, this long awaited overhaul is now a reality. We are so grateful for their amazing support!

## Higashi Food Pantry

Watch your mail (both paper and email) for upcoming announcements regarding the Higashi Food Pantry. With meaningful vocational opportunities a major challenge for our students and alumni, along with the growing challenge of food insecurity (50% of families in Randolph are food insecure) we see this as a win-win situation for students and the residents of Randolph. What better lesson to teach our students than giving back to those in need, all while acquiring vocational skills and social interaction opportunities that were once unforeseen. We will be calling on all of you for your support as we will soon be announcing drop off stations at the school.

## New Health Center

With better access, almost twice the space, and an overall brighter and cheery environment, the new center will be a game changer for our students, staff, families and the overall healthcare delivery at the school. We will keep you all updated about this exciting development!



**COMING SOON!**

**Higashi Food Pantry**  
building community - enriching lives





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# Upcoming Events

## Events

- 3.1 **OPEN HOUSE**  
*10am-12pm*
- 3.21 **PARENT TRAINING**  
*9:30am - 12pm*
- 4.8 **SPRING VACATION**  
*April 8-19*
- 4.22 **DAY PROGRAM REOPENS**



## To Bright Futures

As the new year began, we bid a heartfelt farewell—but not goodbye—to a true Higashi legend. John Kolwaite, a cornerstone of our community for nearly 30 years, has embodied the very essence of academic excellence, stepping into virtually every role imaginable with unwavering dedication.

His philosophical insights have illuminated countless minds, and his unwavering advocacy for Daily Life Therapy® has transformed countless lives. John has been our most eloquent ambassador, and his passion for Higashi's mission has been an inspiration to us all.

While his presence will be deeply missed, we celebrate the profound impact that he has made on our institution and the indelible mark he has left on our hearts. John's legacy will forever resonate within these walls.

We wish you the very best in your new endeavors, knowing that you will continue to shine brightly wherever your path may lead. Thank you, John, for sharing your extraordinary gifts with us. We are forever grateful.

Warmest regards,  
The Higashi Family

