

Winter 2025

Higashi Highlights



www.bostonhigashi.org

*Helping children with autism
exceed expectations since 1987*

(781) 961-0800

Program Director's Perspective



Dr. John Maina

Excellence, Growth, and Community Impact

I am very proud of where we are as a school! We continue to meet all expectations of quality and meaningful education for all of our students. Simultaneously, we continue to ensure adequate staffing ratios in both the Day and Residential programs. To maintain the optimum staffing levels we continue to maximize both local and international recruitment and hiring. Regarding international hiring, I applaud supervisor Hide Nishizawa and Ken Moriguchi for spearheading a recruitment drive in Japan on behalf of Boston Higashi School.

At the division level, the supervisors and their master teachers continue to provide training and support to staff with the aim of improving their performance and productivity. This intentional focus on staff training and development will bolster the student learning outcomes. Importantly, the school's great physical infrastructure, with adequate classrooms, a gymnasium, swimming pool, as well as residential program facilities continue to support teaching and learning. In this regard, credit goes to the Executive Director, Mike Kelly, for our school's great physical infrastructure. I am happy that all classrooms are equipped with interactive boards. Indeed, this investment continues to expand options for students while promoting improved learning.

I am also happy to report that earlier in the year, Henry Njoroge was promoted to be the Residential Program Director. He has already shown to be a collaborative team leader with the potential to move our residential program to the next level. My office has been working closely and collaboratively with Henry. I am looking forward to seeing him continue to harness the energies and synergies of the residential team while promoting great program growth.

In addition, the Continuing Adult Education Program (CAEP), which was started several years ago continues to grow. This program has been instrumental in reconnecting our former students and having them participate in productive vocational activities. The program includes a food distribution program to those in need in our neighboring communities. Importantly, this program has helped our school meet an important social responsibility, while providing our students with meaningful vocational opportunities. Related to this effort, I am very impressed with Megan Loftus, who is the Continuing Adult Education Program (CAEP) Manager, for the way she has been steering this program. Finally, we look forward to consistently raising our threshold of expectation while working collaboratively to steer Boston Higashi School to greater heights!!

Highlights

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Fun & Giving Season

This winter has been a flurry of activity at Higashi! Despite the occasional snow shower, our students have been engaged in a variety of exciting events. From dances and the Winter Music Festival to Valentine's Day celebrations, there's never been a dull moment.

Some students embraced the indoor warmth by honing their rock climbing skills on our Boston Bruins-branded wall. Thanks to generous community donations of new holds, even more challenging and unique climbing sessions are in store!

This winter wasn't just about one dance—we held two! Students and their families enjoyed evenings filled with joy at both our winter and Valentine's Day dances. It's always wonderful to take a break and celebrate with friends and family.

Our Emergence Division has been characteristically busy. In addition to their academic and music studies, they continue to prioritize community service. Demonstrating their compassion, EP students recently partnered with School on Wheels to collect and donate school supplies. After such an eventful winter, we're eagerly anticipating all that spring will bring!



Parent Association

The Higashi Parent Association once again demonstrated their incredible dedication to our staff. This year, they undertook an ambitious project: raising funds to gift winter jackets to every single staff member. It was a significant undertaking, but the parent community rallied together to make it happen.

After collecting sizes and names, the monumental task of sorting began. A dedicated group of parents generously volunteered their time to manage this complex process.

Adding a personal touch, the parents also included handwritten thank you notes with each jacket. They then accomplished the seemingly impossible, ensuring all the jackets were ready for pickup before the holiday break.

Staff members were delighted to find bags bearing their names, each containing a beautiful black winter jacket embroidered with "Higashi Staff" on the sleeve. These jackets are sure to become a cherished part of the Higashi community and a common sight at future events.

We are immensely grateful



to our Parent Association for their extraordinary efforts. Their dedication truly exemplifies the close-knit family atmosphere that makes Higashi such a special place.



Winter Warmth and Celebrations

This winter, our residential program thrived with joy and community spirit, culminating in a delightful Valentine's Dance Party that brought together students, staff, and families!

Weekends were filled with exciting trips into the community, where students discovered a variety of indoor fun activities. Arcade adventures saw students racing each other and experiencing virtual reality for the first time. The NFL playoffs sparked a visit to the Patriots Hall of Fame, where students eagerly tried on professional gear, imagining themselves in the big game.

With colder weather keeping everyone indoors, our staff creatively transformed residential common areas into hubs of entertainment. Older students honed their skills at the pool table, while the rare snowfall days brought joyous outdoor play for younger students. They eagerly embraced sledding on our iconic hill and playful snowball fights, making it hard to coax them back inside.

The winter sessions culminated in our beloved Valentine's Day dance parties. The younger students' party was a resounding success, marked by a fantastic turnout and infectious energy. Alex and Ken's lively dance performance captivated everyone, and an inclusive game fostered joyful interaction between students, staff, and families. Witnessing students actively participate in the decoration process, showcasing their dedication and enthusiasm, was truly heartwarming.

This winter brought significant staffing changes, as we welcomed six new teachers from Kenya into our residential ranks. We are thrilled to have them join our team, and they have already demonstrated their remarkable capabilities with our students. We also congratulate Edwin Nyong on his well-deserved promotion to Overnight Director, where he will now be supporting the Young Adult division.

So many heartwarming moments have filled our winter that it's difficult to recount them all. What remains clear is that our Residential Program continues to impress with its ability to adapt and find joy in every situation. We are proud of our students and staff for making this winter a truly memorable season.

Food Pantry Update

The Higashi Food Pantry continues to expand its delivery-only program, extending its reach to the communities of Rockland, Randolph, Quincy, and our neighbors at the Simon C. Fireman Community. This vital program operates in partnership with the Weymouth Food Pantry, the Friendly Food Pantry in Randolph, and the Quincy Community Action Program (QCAP). Through these collaborations, students in the Emergence Program, Older High School, and alumni in our Continuing Adult Program gain valuable vocational experience and meaningful community involvement. The Friendly Food Pantry is currently undergoing renovations, which has necessitated additional support from Higashi. Upon completion, the renovated facility will offer even more on-site opportunities for our students. We deeply appreciate the ongoing support from parents and extend our sincere gratitude to the Walker Family for their consistent and generous monthly food drives in their hometown.



Parents Social

A warm and inviting atmosphere filled the Gym/Pool Complex on Thursday, January 16th, as we hosted a delightful parent social. Around 30 parents mingled with Higashi staff, enjoying delicious appetizers and drinks. The evening's purpose was simple: to connect and build community in a relaxed, informal way. A highlight was Eric Leeds's entertaining presentation, which set a lighthearted tone for the evening. We're thrilled with the turnout and look forward to hosting more of these events. If you couldn't make it, don't worry! We'll be announcing the next social soon, and we'd love for you to be a part of our growing parent community.



Leadership Visit

On Wednesday, January 29th, approximately 20 members of the Leadership Metro-South Cohort, in partnership with the Metro South Chamber of Commerce, toured Higashi as part of their Education Day. This day focused on community partnerships and collaborations that support youth and young adults in obtaining an education relevant to workforce needs. Joanne Tully, Community Relationships Officer at South Shore Bank, commented that "the work being done to educate and care for the students, all of whom have autism, is both impressive and heartwarming." The tour concluded with an outstanding performance by the student jazz band.



A large, modern medical examination room with a white countertop, orange accent walls, and large windows. The room includes a white cabinet with a green cross symbol, a metal rack, and a white medical device mounted on the wall.





After a year-long journey of meticulous planning and thoughtful design, in close collaboration with our talented architects and dedicated contractors, the new health center on the first floor of the Magennis Building is finally ready to open its doors. This transformation has resulted in a bright, spacious, and welcoming environment, meticulously crafted to provide the highest quality of care.

The new facility boasts several key improvements, including two generously sized sick rooms designed for comfort and recovery, a modern and well-equipped exam room, a comfortable and inviting waiting area for students and staff, and a centralized medication center for efficient and secure handling of prescriptions. Furthermore, the center includes extensive storage solutions to ensure a well-organized and clutter-free environment, along with dedicated office space for staff to work efficiently and effectively. This comprehensive redesign has incorporated all the amenities one would expect in a state-of-the-art health facility.

Beyond the enhanced interior, the new location offers significantly improved accessibility for parents, particularly those with mobility challenges, as well as easier access for emergency medical personnel. The inclusion of a conveniently located elevator ensures that everyone can reach the center with ease, and its closer proximity to available parking further streamlines the process of getting to and from appointments. This new health center represents a significant investment in the well-being of our students, and its realization is the culmination of a long-awaited process. We are incredibly excited to share this new space with you and are confident that it will provide exceptional care for years to come.



Winter Music Festival



After a few years of limited attendance, our Winter Music Festival returned in full force, and it was truly special. This event is always a highlight of the year, and this year's performances by all divisions made it even more memorable.

The festivities began with our Older High School students opening the school store, offering families a chance to browse and buy custom-made items, from clothing to unique artwork.

From the first note to the last, the performances had the audience

clapping and dancing along. The energy in the room was electric as each student took the stage to showcase their musical talents.

We also celebrated our visual artists by announcing the winners of the class poster contest. A bittersweet highlight of the morning was the final on-stage jazz band performance by two recent graduates. The entire event was filled with moments to cherish.

We're already looking forward to our next event, energized by this one. Our families continue to amaze us with their support and

enthusiasm every time they join us on campus.



Holiday Activities



Fresh off the excitement of our Winter Music Festival, students were ready for a break, and our Winter Vacation Program provided just that. Led by our enthusiastic Activity Leaders, the program offered a chance for relaxation and fun during the holidays.

Art classes were a popular choice, with students diving into creative projects using paints, pencils, and paper. They unleashed their imaginations, creating unique works of art, and some even crafted new ornaments to take home and share with their families.

Always a strong contender, music lessons drew a crowd as well. Despite their recent Winter Music Festival performances, the students couldn't resist the allure of a good beat and some instruments. The sounds of music filled the air, accompanied by plenty of smiles.

The gym was transformed into a hub of joyful activity, with games and sports galore. Students enjoyed quality time with their friends and teachers, playing their favorite games and sports.

And, of course, no vacation program would be complete without some time in the Culinary Arts kitchen. Cookie making was a huge hit, offering the immediate reward of warm, freshly baked treats.



Winter Dance Delights

Our Residential Program has been a whirlwind of fun this school year, with three dances already under our belts—two of them just this past winter! December saw our festive Winter Dance Party, followed by a joyful Valentine's Day celebration in February.

In December, students donned their holiday best and headed to Marble Hall and the Gymnasium, where festive music awaited. Our younger students enjoyed sing-alongs with their families and a special visit from a certain jolly gentleman in a red suit! Meanwhile, the older students showed off their moves to a mix of popular tunes and winter classics. A quick intermission featured a lively game of team rock-paper-scissors, adding to the excitement before the dancing continued.

February brought another celebration, this time with everyone dressed in shades of red to embrace the spirit of Valentine's Day. Group dances and conga lines kept the energy high all night, followed by some fun and games.

Adding an extra touch of magic to our younger student parties has been a special guest artist who creates custom balloon animals upon request!





BOSTON HIGASHI SCHOOL
800 North Main Street
Randolph, MA 02368

(781) 961-0800
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Upcoming Events

Events

- 3.21 **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT DAY**
- 3.28 **OPEN HOUSE**
10am-12pm
- 3.26 **FORMAL DANCE**
7:30pm
- 4.14 **SPRING VACATION**
Apr 14th - 25th
- 4.28 **DAY PROGRAM REOPENS**



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WHEN

Tuesday, April 22

Doors open: 5:30 PM

Temple speaks: 6:00

Q&A and Book signing: 8:00

Event ends: 9:00

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