

Higashi Highlights



Executive Director's Perspective



Mike Kelly

Highlights

FEATURES

4-5. RESIDENTIAL NEWS

6-7. CAMPUS UPDATES

8-9. WINTER MUSIC FESTIVAL

10. HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

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We hope you all enjoyed your holiday season and now it is hard to believe that we are already halfway through the 2025-26 school year. We have been having an old-fashioned stormy winter with severe blizzard conditions most recently. We hope everyone "weathered the storm," as they say. This has been one of the more challenging winters we have had in several years. With this in mind, I want to thank our staff for their resilience and dedication.

As they always do, our staff rose to the occasion in order to provide care for the nearly 90 residential students living at the school and monitor conditions for when Day Program students can return. We have our Facilities and Maintenance Team working endless hours keeping the buildings warm and secure, shoveling entrances and plowing our parking lots so direct care staff have a place to park and emergency vehicles have access to our facility. Our Program Management and Direct Care staff respond to all of the needs of our students, many times working double shifts and sometimes even a third shift after catching a few hours sleep. The Kitchen staff stay overnight to ensure there will be breakfast in the morning and meal preparation continues. Our Nursing Staff are administering medications and fulfilling their duties 24 hours a day regardless of the harsh weather conditions. We can all take great pride in our staff and their dedication that we see from them time and time again.

Speaking of Personnel, we do have some announcements. As we have mentioned in the past Dr. John Maina has been out on a medical leave and, unfortunately, he will not be returning to the Higashi School. We certainly wish John and his family the very best going forward. We hope to honor John at a special event in the future for his leadership and many contributions to the Boston Higashi School since joining us in 2007. We will do our best to keep everyone informed about future developments in this area.

In addition, Janelle Palleschi will be transitioning to the position of Director of Student Services & Program Communication formerly held by Janice Oliver who retired last June. Janelle will continue to supervise the Younger High School and consult with the older High School Divisions during the transition period.

Another position change is Jennifer Mesa-Heredia, formerly the Administrative Assistant to the Director of Programming, who will transition to Compliance Coordinator, a position that coordinates with our many regulatory agencies and ensures compliance with regulatory policies applicable to the Boston Higashi School.

Let's all do our best to look forward with great enthusiasm to the Springtime, with warmer weather, more sunshine, and our school calendar filled with many more exciting events.

Please stay safe and healthy everyone!
Best wishes,
Michael L. Kelly

Fun & Giving Season

It's been a bustling and joyous winter here at Higashi! Our students kicked off the season by showing off their incredible musical talents at the Winter Music Festival back in December, wrapping up the year on a high note before enjoying a well-deserved holiday break. They certainly didn't let the momentum stop there, though. Returning with renewed energy, our students dove straight back into learning and exploring new concepts in the new year.

Inside the classroom, our Communication lessons have been an absolute highlight. Students had a blast helping their Division Directors "stay warm and look good" through hilarious, interactive games like "Pin the Beard" and "Pin the Glasses." It has been incredibly rewarding to witness the creativity of our amazing teachers, who constantly find fresh, engaging ways to make learning memorable for everyone involved.

And of course, let's not forget the snow! With what felt like a never-ending forecast of winter storms week after week, our students made sure to take full advantage of the weather. The sounds of laughter and pure joy echoed across our Randolph campus on countless snowy afternoons. Our front hill quickly became the ultimate destination, packed with students eagerly grabbing sleds and making winter memories every chance they could get.





A Season of Giving, Snow, and Smiles at Higashi

With snow still on the ground, our residence staff and students are eagerly anticipating spring. The last three months have been incredibly fun, but a little warmer weather would certainly be a blessing!



Throughout December, our younger divisions enjoyed a festive Holiday Trolley ride through local towns, graciously donated by long-time supporters Victoria Collins and Chuck Feely from Mobsters and Lobsters.

Our Jewish students celebrated all eight nights of Hanukkah, and it was breathtaking to see their progress as they memorized Hebrew prayers and safely lit the menorah themselves using the shamash. On December 25th, students who stayed on campus enjoyed a visit from S-A-N-T-A! Everyone opened presents courtesy of our North Pole elves—the Shea and Teixeira families, and Ocean State Job Lot—though eating candy canes right off the tree might have been the real highlight.



January arrived quickly. After ringing in the New Year with a special Chinese food lunch, the divisions enjoyed a big community outing to the New England Aquarium. The students had a blast finding the temporarily relocated penguins scattered around the exhibits alongside the sharks and sea turtles.

Despite the bitter cold, our students also continued collecting food for our pantry from houses around Randolph and Holbrook, beautifully demonstrating our Higashi mission of giving back to the community.

February brought the love with an unforgettable Valentine's Day gym dance for our older students and a fiercely competitive game of musical chairs for the younger ones. A special thank you to our organizers, Pascaline Ehade and Lilah Chong!



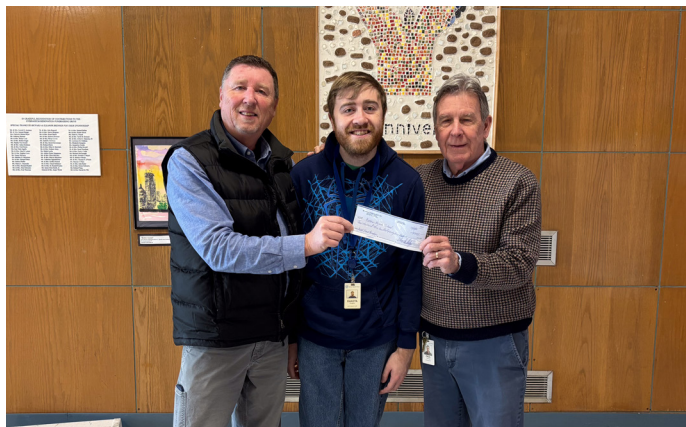
Soon after spreading the love, a nearly three-foot blizzard arrived. In all our years at Higashi, we have always been incredibly well-staffed during snow emergencies, and this was no exception. Our school shines on a typical day, but during these storms, the Higashi team burns brighter than the sun. A massive shout-out goes to Marion Mwangi, who used her "magical" Ford Explorer to safely transport even more staff to work from Randolph and Holbrook during the heart of the storm. Everyone truly gave 110 percent!

What's to Come?

Please be on the lookout for parent training sessions at the residence in March and April. We will invite families from each division for hands-on training during residential activities like art, cooking, swimming, or mealtime. Our goal is to help you generalize the skills your students have learned with us so they can use them successfully at home.

Fishin' with a Mission

We are continually amazed by the support of our community, and the 11th Annual "Fishin' with a Mission" is a perfect example! Held at the Mystic Wellington Yacht Club to support Autism Awareness, the day was packed with boat rides, fishing, a barbecue, a water slide, and even firetrucks for our Higashi students and their families to enjoy. Hosted by Alumni Parent Mark Burgess and Eli Delaney, the event was our most successful to date, raising an amazing \$4,335! We are so grateful to the Yacht Club volunteers and to Mark and his son Dakota for their generous donation.



A New Playground

We are thrilled to announce that final plans are underway for a brand-new playground! As our population of younger students continues to grow, we are preparing to replace our existing, well-loved play area. Breaking ground this spring, the new playground will be more than twice the size of the current one. Students can look forward to sophisticated, safer equipment, a specialized flexground surface, and a customized playground communication board. We can't wait for our students to explore!



Food Pantry Delivers

The Higashi Community Adult Program (HCAP) Food Pantry continues to experience wonderful growth. With 16 Alumni now enrolled, HCAP proudly partners with seven community programs to serve homebound individuals. Every single day, our dedicated alumni deliver food across seven local towns—and even through challenging winter weather, they haven't skipped a beat! Thanks to this ongoing success, Dan Quirk, CEO of Quirk Automotive, has generously donated a second new van to assist with our deliveries. A massive thank you to the "Quirk Works" team!



Spreading Joy

We want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our friends at Ocean State Job Lot for their continued generosity. Over the holidays, they donated a pallet and a half of toys to bring smiles to Higashi students, local daycares, and community food pantries. A special shoutout to Ocean State Ambassador David Sarlitto, who personally drives these donations all the way from North Kingstown, RI to Randolph, always arriving with a big smile and a warm embrace. Thank you, Dave!



Surfing with Siblings

Gnome Surf Spreading Good Times





The energy on campus was absolutely electric as we welcomed approximately 50 siblings of our students for the Annual February Vacation Sibling Day!

This year's celebration was extra special, thanks to our incredible friends at Gnome Surf, who completely transformed the day by hosting a full-day surf therapy event right here on campus. For our students, there is nothing quite like the pride of showing their brothers and sisters their world, and they were absolutely thrilled to share the Gnome Surf experience with them.

The day kicked off in the gym, where siblings teamed up to practice their balance and coordination on dry land. There was so much laughter and encouragement as they coached each other through the motions. After fueling up with a great lunch together, the crew headed to the pool to put their new skills to the test on the surfboards! The splashing, the cheering echoing across the pool, and the high-fives after a successful ride made for an unforgettable afternoon.

It is always incredibly moving to witness the unique, resilient bonds between siblings. Watching them cheer each other on was a beautiful reminder of why we do what we do. It is a true honor for us to help these families connect even deeper through the philosophies of Higashi—building confidence, finding joy in shared physical activities, and fostering heart-to-heart connections. A huge thank you to everyone who made this day a splash!



Winter Music Festival

A December to Remember



As we move forward into the new year, we can't help but look back on one of the absolute highlights of last December: our annual Winter Music Festival. While the holidays have passed, the memory of that day remains vivid—it was, without a doubt, one of our most electric gatherings yet.

The performance was the culmination of months of hard work, with students pouring their energy into their music classes to prepare. That dedication translated into an exceptional atmosphere in the room.

The air was absolutely buzzing as parents, friends, and visitors found themselves dancing in the aisles and singing along to performances from every single student division.

We were also incredibly fortunate to have the legendary Tiger Okoshi join us on stage. Having him lend his iconic trumpet sound to the student performances elevated the event to a whole new level. But the surprises didn't stop there—the community spirit was on full display when the staff from the Business Office took the mic for a spirited and joyful

special performance of "Jingle Bells."

From the professional jazz notes to the staff singalongs, the entire event had an overwhelmingly fun and exciting feel. It was a perfect send-off for 2025, and while we aren't quite sure how we'll top that energy next December, we are already planning to try!



Holiday Activities



It's been an incredibly busy and rewarding few months here at Higashi, with our students and staff making a special effort to put others first throughout the holiday season and beyond. The spirit of generosity has been everywhere—starting with our wonderful Parent Association, who showed their gratitude by giving a gift to every single staff member. Our students also embraced the season of giving, inviting their friends from Thayer Academy to campus to wrap donated gifts for those in need.



Our music program received a fantastic boost thanks to generous donations from Will and the Marlee Foundation. Their gift of new speakers and two brand-new sound systems made a huge impact during their highly successful debut at the Winter Music Festival. Finally, in a truly heartwarming community connection, our youngest students visited The Cordwainer memory care facility. Dressed as “little penguins,” they sang and danced for a highly engaged audience. Experiences like this remind us time and again how incredible our local community is, and we take great pride in being part of such a caring network.



Winter Dance Delights

The winter months hold two of our favorite dances of the year. In December, our students celebrate the holidays together with fun, festive music as they dance the evening away. Then, in February, they gather again for a night full of love and good vibes.

December had everyone dressed in greens and reds to celebrate their favorite holiday season. With fun games like tossing rings on the antlers of reindeer that suspiciously looked a lot like their teachers, there was so much laughter in the room. A nice break in the action leading up to the Winter Music Festival, students had a great time with everyone smiling from start to finish.

February brought everyone back in celebration of love. Now wearing reds and pinks, students were ready for another night of fun. Special treats in the shape of hearts kept everyone topped off with energy to keep on dancing. Younger students performed songs and played games with their families, while the older students invited their guests to the dance floor to show off their moves.





BOSTON HIGASHI SCHOOL
800 North Main Street
Randolph, MA 02368

(781) 961-0800
www.bostonhigashi.org

Upcoming Events

Events

3.11 **ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT DAY**

3.27 **OPEN HOUSE**
10am-12pm

4.9 **FORMAL DANCE**
7:30pm

4.13 **SPRING VACATION**
Apr 13th - 24th

4.27 **DAY PROGRAM REOPENS**

