

Mission Hill Pilot School  
Boston Public Schools

Address: 67 Alleghany Street  
Roxbury, MA 02120  
Deborah Meier, Principal

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Entering its fourth year in fall 2000, when it will go from K2-8<sup>th</sup> grade.

- Small. 175 students - class sizes around 20 students.
- Two adults - a teacher and assistant in each classroom.
- Multi-age. At least a 2-year age span in all classrooms.
- Graduation by performance. Students graduate 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and go on to high school based on demonstrated ability to handle high school work, and on being in the habit of using their minds well.
- Active/inquiry-based learning. Curriculum and pedagogy built around interdisciplinary projects - emphasis on the integration of arts and academics.
- The Arts: Arts emphasized in all our work. Instrumental instruction and other music experiences offered.
- School/family collaboration. Family involvement and mutual respect are musts.
- Multi-cultural, anti-racist, anti-homophobic. We define excellence as including understanding of diverse cultures and a concern for fairness.
- Multiple assessments. Mission Hill School is built around observing students in multiple settings, not primarily standardized testing.
- Partnerships: Partners with other BPS schools, the Coalition of Essential Schools, Wheelock, Lesley, Northeastern and Harvard colleges, and several museums and art organizations. Parent-organized after-school program co-sponsored by the Huntington Avenue YMCA.
- *Its pilot status with the Boston Public School system also allows it greater freedom and flexibility in selecting staff, organizing curriculum and spending its budget allocation.*

## The Mission of Mission Hill School

The task of public education is to help parents raise youngsters who will maintain and nurture the best habits of a democratic society—be smart, caring, strong, resilient, imaginative and thoughtful. It aims at producing youngsters who can live productive, socially useful and personally satisfying lives, while also respecting the rights of all others. The school, as we see it, will help strengthen our commitment to diversity, equity and mutual respect.

Democracy requires citizens with the capacity to step into the shoes of others, even those we most dislike, to sift and weigh alternatives, to listen respectfully to other viewpoints with the possibility in mind that we each have something to learn from others. It requires us to be prepared to defend intelligently that which we believe to be true, and that which we believe best meets our individual needs and those of our family, community and broader public — to not be easily conned. It requires also the skills and competencies to be well informed and persuasive—to read well, to write and speak effectively and persuasively, and to handle numbers and calculations with competence and confidence.

Democracy requires citizens who are themselves artists and inventors — knowledgeable about the accomplishments, performances, products and inventions of others but also capable of producing, performing and inventing their own art. Without art we are all deprived.

Such habits of mind, and such competence are sustained by our enthusiasms, as well as our love for others and our respect for ourselves, and our willingness to persevere, deal with frustration and develop reliable habits of work.

Our mission is to create a community in which our children and their families can best maintain and nurture such democratic habits.

Toward these ends, our community must be prepared to spend time — even when it might seem wasteful — hearing each other out. We must deal with each other in ways that lead us to feel stronger and more loved, not weaker and less loveable. We must expect the most from everyone, hold all to the highest standards, but also respect our different ways of exhibiting excellence. We must together build a reasonable set of standards for our graduates so that they can demonstrate to us their capacity to meet this mission.

## Mission Hill School's HABITS OF MIND

(For more details see the Mission Hill Pilot proposal as well as literature about the Central Park East schools in New York City.)

The Mission Hill Habits of Mind are an approach to both the traditional academic disciplines (math, science, literature and history) and the interdisciplinary stuff of ordinary life. They are what lead us to ask good questions and seek solid answers. They are our definition of a well-educated person.

1. **Evidence**: How do we know what's true and false? What evidence counts? How sure can we be? What makes it credible to us? This includes using the scientific method and more.
2. **Viewpoint**: How else might this look if we stepped into other shoes? If we were looking at it from a different direction? If we had a different history or expectations? This requires the exercise of informed "empathy" and imagination. It requires flexibility of mind.
3. **Connections/Cause and Effect**: Is there a pattern? Have we seen something like this before? What are the possible consequences?
4. **Conjecture**: Could it have been otherwise? Supposing that? What if? This habit requires use of imagination as well as knowledge of alternative possibilities. It includes the habits described above.
5. **Relevance**: Does it matter? Who cares?

None of these five habits stand separately. And the way we use such habits differ, if we are studying a mathematical proof, a scientific hypothesis, an historical dispute, a debate over economics, the appreciation of a piece of art, a critique of a novel, the telling of a myth or a narrative, or the settling of a playground dispute.

**The Mission Hill Habits of Mind** are supplemented by **Habits of Work**: the habit of meeting deadlines, being on time, sticking to a task, not getting frustrated quickly, hearing out what others say, and more.

Both sets of "habits" are developed in the process of gathering appropriate knowledge and skill in school and out. The best test is whether students use such habits in the course of their work. And again, not just in school. Knowing "how-to" is no substitute for having good habits. Who cares if you *could* drive well, if you're not in the habit of mind of doing so? Who cares if you *could* be on time, if you never are?