

Theater Arts Program Draws Rave Reviews



HMS's after-school theater-arts group performed at the Walnut Street Theatre in October during "Independence Starts Here: A Festival of Disability Arts and Culture." (From left) Taylor Fina, Melea Wise, Elisheva Apple and Malia Fluellen present their original skit with help from WST education-outreach staff.

The rehearsal for an upcoming performance was over. Students were just hanging out. But Melea and Kristin stayed in character from their skit, laughing with one another, maintaining the fiction of their roles. Three years ago, when Walnut Street Theatre's (WST) educational outreach program started a theater-arts project at HMS, no one would have anticipated such an outcome.

Recreation therapist Rich Magnuson says, "The WST program gives kids a new grasp on communication—taking on roles, expressing emotions, developing simple plot concepts." Students who participated from the outset show that they are thinking in different ways. In theater-arts sessions,

they're communicating more and in more appropriate ways.

A WST teaching artist initially worked every other week after school with a group of residential students; Mr. Magnuson led the activity in alternate weeks. Their effort grew out of a long and fruitful relationship between HMS and WST outreach staff who had performed and offered short acting workshops at HMS for 10 years. WST and HMS hoped that a more intense program would expand students' communication. As the program evolved, progress came in tiny steps, but by the end of the first year, it was clear that the activities had made a valuable impact.

At the outset, one student would impulsively push selections on his

communication device. Over time, Mr. Magnuson would hold the youngster's hand until it was his turn to respond. By late in the first year, Mr. Magnuson could stop holding and the student waited for his cues. Another student's responses became more appropriate to the topic at hand. She began using her device more and would occasionally vocalize a word. She became more in tune with what was happening and how to contribute.

The following year HMS added a group during the school day modeled on the after-school program. Susan Nicodemus Quinn, Director of Education for WST, volunteered her time because she believed so strongly that WST

continued on back page

Putting the Pieces Together: 125th Anniversary Conference Underscores HMS Team Approach

In honor of the school's 125th anniversary, HMS hosted a professional conference in early April that brought together participants from throughout the greater Delaware Valley. Over two days at Philadelphia's Cira Center, nurses, therapists, teachers and parents addressed the challenges of "Putting the Pieces Together: Empowering Children with Complex Medical and Educational Needs."

Participants attended a wide range of interactive workshops, one track geared primarily to parents, educators and therapists, and a second aimed at medical professionals. Presented by HMS staff and other specialists, Track I discussed power mobility, the creative arts, relationships and sexuality, alternative and augmen-

continued on page 3



Stephen Bennett, President and CEO of United Cerebral Palsy, presented the keynote address at HMS's 125th anniversary professional conference.



Executive Director's Message

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD

This issue of the newsletter highlights HMS's history of cutting-edge programs that expand students' ability to communicate. An essential ingredient of our success is putting youngsters in real-life situations that motivate them to apply what they learn in classroom and therapy sessions.

We regularly take groups of students for trips into the community. A walk through Clark Park, a trip on a SEPTA bus or one of many planned outings to restaurants, sporting events and a variety of performances—these opportunities excite students' desire to talk about their experiences.

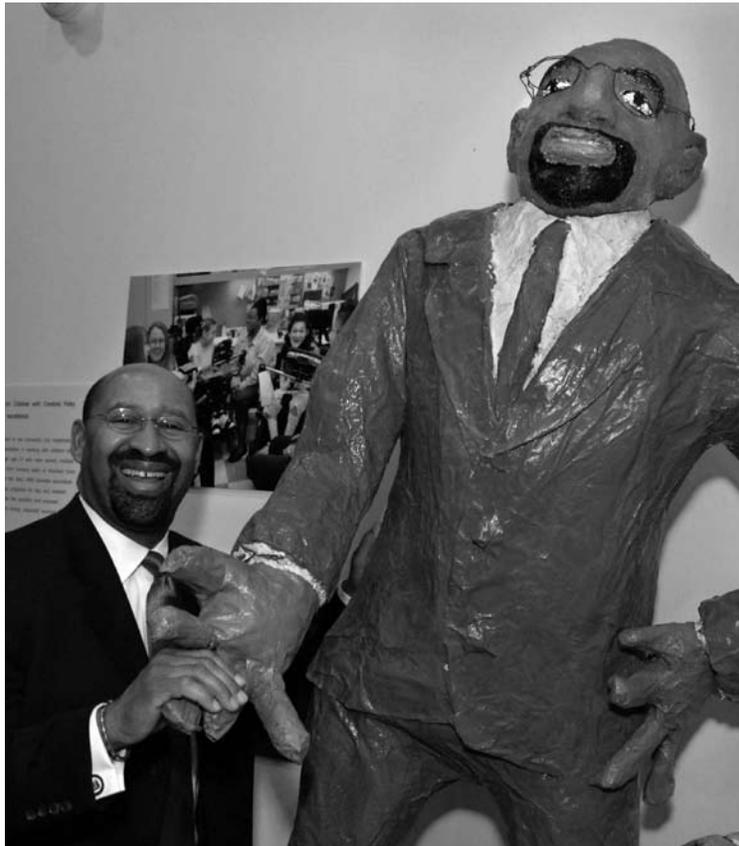
We invite community members to visit HMS as guest readers or as participants in other special occasions. They talk with students about their work and their personal experiences, expanding students' world view and further encouraging communication.

As part of our regular program, students participate every week in intensive creative-arts activities that stimulate their imagination and profoundly impact their desire to express themselves. The Walnut Street Theatre (WST) program described in this newsletter is a program that has not only stretched our students' capabilities, but also staff expectations. WST has allowed us to see how students can participate when we might not have thought it possible and to recognize their capacity to present a different side of themselves as learners. We've watched youngsters step out of themselves to take on a role—presenting someone else's perspective is a sophisticated concept. It teaches us how important it is to provide students with varied opportunities for self-expression.

Similarly, when children interact each week with their "Something Magical" partners from Germantown Friends School, they stretch to communicate because their motivation level is so high. In therapy, a decision is made about a child's device. The therapist begins the learning curve with classroom support. But all of these special programs and activities—in school and out—take that child's interest and learning to another level.



Eiko Fan, curator of HMS's Art in City Hall show and the school's art instructor, acknowledges the crowd's applause for her outstanding work with students.



Mayor Michael Nutter greets his likeness, created by students, at the opening reception for HMS students' Art in City Hall show.

Art in City Hall Showcases HMS Student Work

HMS student art enlivened the walls of Philadelphia City Hall this spring. The students' powerful work was selected for a six-week show by Art in City Hall, a program that showcases local artists and young artists who love to create. The show also paid tribute to Eiko Fan, HMS art instructor, who has helped students to communicate their passion through art for almost 20 years.

Mayor Michael Nutter attended the show's opening reception on March 3 to chat with students and their families, staff, board members and other invited guests and to get an up-close look at the Michael Nutter life-size sculpture students created for the show.

The well-attended event amazed and delighted those who walked the halls to enjoy each student's work. Interspersed with the art were photographs of students making art. Ms. Fan leaves no stone unturned

in devising ways for youngsters to participate in the process, and the photos highlighted some of the methods she has developed for empowering their efforts. Students use their hands, their feet or adapted brushes and tools—whatever works. As Ms. Fan has said, "I try to find a different way for everyone's small movements to become the power they can create with."



The Mayor spent time greeting guests at the reception. Here he chats with student Shannon Ward and her mother, Janine Blyth.

hms school @ 125

HMS at 125: Giving Students a Voice

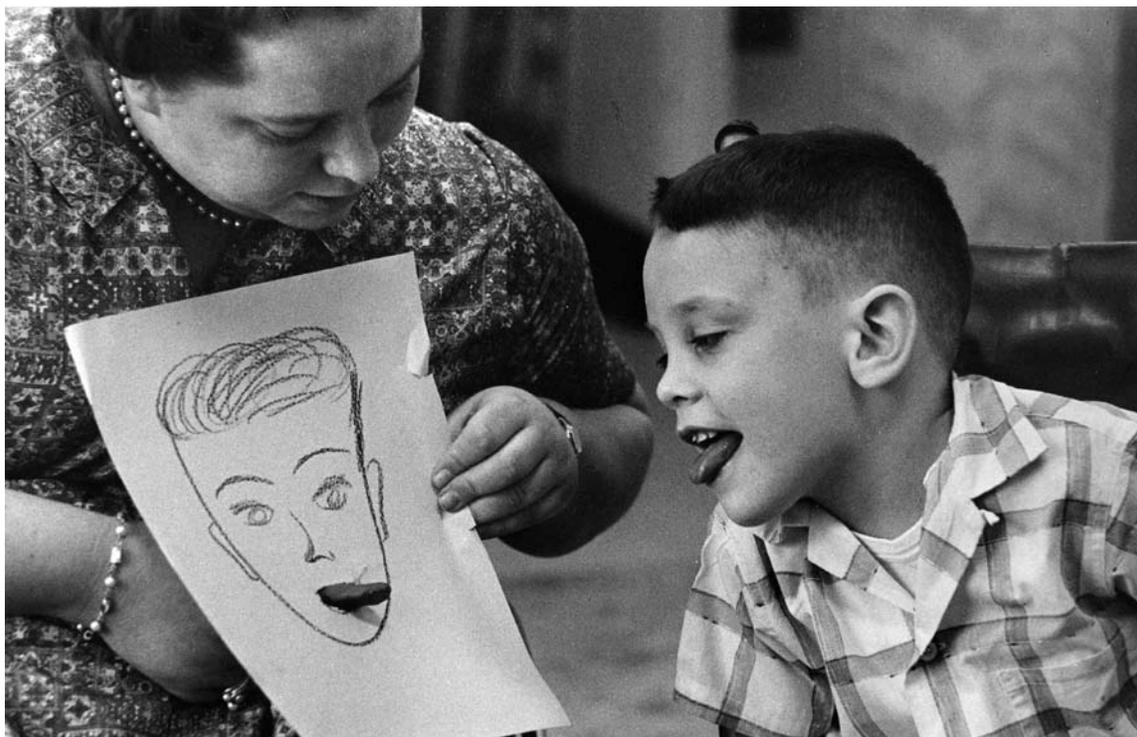
HMS School is a pioneer in expanding students' communication. In every decade, administration and staff have sought cutting-edge techniques, benefited from top scholar-experts, developed specialized techniques and acquired the latest equipment.

From the 1960's, when HMS began to focus on children with cerebral palsy, the speech/language pathology department has expanded with the school's increasing enrollment and severity of students' disabilities. When Addy Schultz came to HMS in 1967 as department head, she joined two part-time staff serving 37 students. Today, the department has three full-time and two part-time speech/language pathologists and a full-time speech therapy assistant for 57 students. And major advancements in technology have provided many more treatment options.

"We had no electronics," Ms. Schultz says. "We used custom-designed, hand-made language boards." With input from staff, parents and the student, speech therapists designed the board around the child's vocabulary and the way the child could point or access the pictures. Boards were time consuming and tedious to construct. As the child progressed, the therapist needed to design and make more sophisticated boards.

Prior to language boards, children who could not speak were forced to be more reactive, responding to "yes" or "no" questions. Language boards gave them the opportunity to initiate conversation. But not everyone embraced boards.

"Some saw boards as a crutch and thought the child would never try to communicate independently," says Ms. Schultz. "I found the opposite. Boards remove stress and frustra-



A one-on-one language session in the late 1960's focuses on articulation.

tion, making it easier for the child to try. And children who can't speak don't have experience with expressive language. Boards are a big help with language learning and other skills."

Ms. Schultz had studied at Penn State with Dr. Eugene McDonald, renowned for his expertise in speech/language development and therapy. Beginning in 1959, he became a valued consultant with HMS for almost 40 years and an innovator in speech for children with cerebral palsy (CP). Together, drawing from their work at HMS, they published a seminal article in speech literature in 1973 on using communication boards with children who have CP.

Dr. "Mac" had a huge impact at HMS. He helped children think in logical ways to communicate. An excellent clinician, he used a holistic approach to assess children and, with staff, planned students' treatment



programs and helped to problem-solve for their care. He consulted with staff and students' families, fostered staff development and brought state-of-the-art research to HMS.

Sally Greenberg, another of his

In the early 1980's, Pam Price (left) points to a selection on her language board, while Andy Sipple activates an early electronic communication device with a head pointer.





Tom Porreca points to an image on his communication device while working with his one-to-one aide Tracy Walker.



Ashley Overton communicates the pudding flavor she prefers to speech therapist Tonja Johnson by using a switch to indicate her choice on her electronic communication device.

graduate students, was impressed during a field trip to HMS with a CP class. She joined the staff in 1969 when HMS was incorporating a variety of techniques in addition to language boards. Dr. McDonald had introduced Blissymbolics to HMS, a system for nonverbal individuals that represents ideas with graphic symbols and provides an alternate means of communication. In the 1970s, HMS had a class for hearing-impaired students with CP who used a combination of language boards, sign language, speech and Blissymbols. HMS also enrolled students who could speak and did work in articula-

tion and language skills.

When Ms. Greenberg left HMS from 1981-1988 to raise a family, there were already prototypes for the first electronic communication devices; on her return, devices were in use at the school. Early devices had no voice output, limited pre-programmed vocabulary and used a ticker tape printout. By the 1980s, devices had robotic-sounding computer voices. They could be mounted on a wheelchair but were large and unwieldy. Earlier models were most suitable for children with adequate hand skills to activate the device. Meredith Cracknell, Speech

Therapy Coordinator, who came to HMS in 1987, explains that later technological advancements enabled students to operate devices with other means.

Devices evolved from those with a limited vocabulary to more dynamic units that provided an extensive vocabulary. They also became smaller, lighter and more portable. As devices became more sophisticated, it became easier for children to initiate communication and to learn that they could have a significant impact on their environment.

Despite technology's innovations, Ms. Greenberg, who retired in 2007, cites several important threads running through the decades. One is assessment. Regardless of what means of communication a child uses, "The same things we're assessing now, we were assessing in the early days... vision, developmental level, ability to access things like the board and tray and seating," she says. A second thread is HMS's commitment to continually reassess the student and to update whatever assistive communication methods the child uses, keeping images, vocabulary and messages current and meaningful.

And a third thread is the team. "There's always been a team approach at HMS," says Ms. Greenberg. "I could always go to a colleague and say, 'I need your help with this positioning or seating.'

Having everyone physically nearby and willing to share information was important—and the meetings that pulled everyone together."

Throughout her long tenure, Ms. Greenberg applied the same philosophy. Knowing the huge impact of a child's communication skills, she believes a therapist should aim for the best functional communication possible, which might call for a combination of signs, gestures, a language board or an electronic device.

Ms. Cracknell says, "Technology has opened many doors, but it isn't functional in every situation and it does go down, so our goal is for children who use a device to have back up like a language board, gestures or vocalization."

Christina Coia, HMS Director of Education, points out that HMS has been a pioneer in providing a variety of low-tech, manual techniques to aid children's communication. "We offer communication opportunities for children at all levels and meet their physical challenges. We aim to maximize linguistic capabilities," she says.

"We're not married to any one brand or device. Our therapists learn all of the devices and take students through an extensive evaluation process," she adds. "HMS's speech therapists are assistive technology specialists, making it a point to stay current."

HMS can now borrow state-of-the-art devices from lending libraries supported by PA Department of Education. Given the cost of high-tech devices, therapists can try out a student with a particular device before attempting to find funding through the school district or insurance.

As students' needs have changed and become more complex, the school has continued to find ways for each child to communicate. Staff apply their knowledge, experience and dedication to maximizing each student's self-expression. "As a result of our philosophy," Ms. Coia says, "kids who for years used a single switch have been able to branch out and use more sophisticated means of communication. Our commitment is in finding a voice for every student."



Student Art Show Opens with Fanfare

Always a celebratory event, opening day of the annual student art show moved up a notch in this, HMS's 125th anniversary year. Anne d'Harnoncourt, Director and CEO of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Maida Millone, Executive Director of the Center for Emerging Visual Artists joined the festivities to serve as judges for the show.

Clearly moved by the experience, Ms. d'Harnoncourt praised students' talents and noted how the importance of art comes through in their work. She recognized that for children who have little control over their hand and/or arm movements and who are nonverbal or have limited verbal skills, art becomes an especially important form of communication and an opportunity to build self-esteem.

But she also emphasized how essential it is for art to be a part of everyone's life. She and Ms. Millone each presented two student awards, while other young artists received medals for works selected by each department at HMS.

Eiko Fan, HMS art instructor, rose to the challenge of hanging two overlapping shows—the in-house show and Art in City Hall opened only a week apart. It's a credit to her motivational approach with HMS students that she had more than enough outstanding work to choose for both events.

The HMS community is saddened by the recent news of Anne d'Harnoncourt's death. We are grateful for her interest in our students and for taking the time to be with us for their show.



HMS art instructor Eiko Fan holds up a painting by Carolyn Miller as Carolyn receives an award presented by Maida Millone, Executive Director of the Center for Emerging Visual Artists and Anne d'Harnoncourt, Director and CEO of the Philadelphia Museum of Art during HMS's Annual Art Show.



Amazing Dedication

Dorm aide Mary Ann Wilson was honored at the Holiday Show for 45 years of devoted service to HMS students. She holds a photo of herself caring for a student in 1962.



Valentines for Vets

HMS students hand crafted 125 valentines for HMS's 125 years. A group of students personally delivered the cards to residents of the Philadelphia VA Medical Center's Nursing Home Care Unit. Here Andrew Wyatt shares an exchange with a resident veteran, along with HMS recreation therapist Karen Turek.

125th Anniversary Conference

continued from page 1

disabilities to live more independent, self-directed lives. Track II addressed issues of therapeutic feeding, nutritional needs, mental health, spasticity, managing a child's return to school following surgery and visual function. Programs of particular interest to parents were finding the balance between stress and resilience and planning for the future.

Stephen Bennett, President and CEO of United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), presented the keynote address, "Getting to the Future Early." He talked about cutting-edge work that could change life significantly for individuals with all types of disabilities. Universal design—adaptive approaches that benefit everyone—will become more common-place. He also described "smart houses" designed to satisfy diverse needs. If someone falls and can't get up, floor sensors pick up data and send the information to a central station for help. The refrigerator might record how long a milk container has been there, its fullness and when to reorder. These designs will allow people with

disabilities to live more independent, self-directed lives.

UCP's strategic plan includes opportunities for people with disabilities to engage with others in the community, creating access to "potent, agile networks." The agency recognizes that change takes place when people with needs work together with other interested parties who have a vested interest.

In another session, James Roebuck, PA State Representative and Chair of the House Education Committee, also urged people to get involved. "You have to be part of the solution," he said, working with others in similar situations to improve education and services for people with disabilities.

Diane Gallagher, HMS Executive Director and Steven Bachrach, HMS Medical Director wrapped up the first day with "Putting the Pieces Together," a model of the team approach and the heart of HMS's program. Integrating elements from the day's sessions, they showed how enormous benefits emerge when all involved share a common vision and set of goals and contribute based on their individual expertise.





Parents Corner

by Nicole McLaughlin-Moore

Last spring, to celebrate my daughter Nikki's birthday, our family took a trip to Disney World. I searched the internet for a suitable wheelchair-accessible rental. I found a ranch home that looked perfect. Next was airline transportation. This is where the problem began.

When I made the reservations, I was informed that it was unnecessary to make special arrangements for my special-needs daughter who uses a wheelchair because this airline was in complete compliance with ADA. However, due to Nikki's inability to sit upright without assistance, HMS loaned us a Gorilla seat as a precautionary measure.

When it was time to board, an attendant arrived with a transport chair to bring Nikki to her seat, and her wheelchair was placed in storage. But the transport chair could not be used because it lacked proper support. My husband carried Nikki onto the plane. When the Gorilla seat was in place and Nikki fastened into it, the room remaining for her legs was totally inadequate. As a result, the flight attendant moved us from coach into first class, where Nikki had more legroom but the seat had to be tilted back to prevent her from sliding out of it. However, passengers are only allowed to tilt their seats back once the plane is in the air. To add insult to injury, when we arrived and recovered Nikki's wheelchair, it was damaged! The return flight was not much better.

Clearly airlines need to be more accessible for wheelchair passengers, allowing them to use their own wheelchairs, with means of secure tie-down or strapping. They need to provide wider aisles and more legroom. A handicapped person should not have to use first class. That is a form of discrimination. I read recently that the Boeing 787 Dream Liner will have wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, a start in the right direction.

On the brighter side, the house that we rented was perfect. Disney World was fantastic, and Nikki had the time of her life.

continued from page 1
should be involved. For the past school year, a walk/run fundraiser by students at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia made it possible to hire a teaching artist for two in-school groups.

Mr. Magnuson also developed a theater-games approach to accommodate three groups of students who lack the communication skills to participate fully in the theater-arts program. As students act out stories, staff provide hand-over-hand help with the actions. Some youngsters can follow cues for the appropriate action. One group recited a poem about peanut butter and jelly: knead the bread, throw it in the oven, slice it, crush the peanuts, stomp on the grapes, spread it on the bread and eat it!

The in-school theater groups worked weekly this year on ethnic

variations of the Cinderella story, developing their own adaptations. They started with the same kinds of activities as the initial group—talking about emotions, how faces can reflect our feelings and how actors can make us experience different emotions. Mr. Magnuson says that staff see a similar progression. Students enjoy the activities, are engaged and contributing and like following a script they helped to create.

In October, HMS participated in "Independence Starts Here: A Festival of Disability Arts and Culture." Several staff attended opening night at the Kimmel Center, and the after-school student group performed an original work at Walnut Street Theatre. Their performance—very well received—was followed by a discussion targeted to educators

and others who work with special-needs children.

In their third year, the after-school group now focuses more on students' creativity and input. Mr. Magnuson says, "Students' growing ability to contribute to the story line has surprised the staff. Our students have not had the opportunity to participate in pretend play as a group, and this is a growth opportunity."

Clearly vested in the program, he adds, "Theater arts activities are an important aspect of what we can provide our students. We've also taken them to theater performances, and we've talked about these experiences. It's hard to get at students' understanding of a professional performance, but I believe that even as adults they'll have a deeper understanding and appreciation of theater."



Historic Wonders

During the holidays, Cynthia Cheston, a member of HMS's Board of Trustees, shared a charming 19th-century story—"Mr. Kris Kringle"—with HMS students. The story was written in 1893 by Ms. Cheston's great-grand uncle, S. Weir Mitchell, renowned Philadelphia physician and author, to benefit Home of the Merciful Saviour for Crippled Children. Here Ms. Cheston shows an illustration to (from right) Gregory Viola and Shawn Lee while Melea Wise looks on.



HMS School News Summer 2008

A publication of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy, dedicated to reporting about student life, school programs and important events.

Anne P. Wilmerding
President of the Board of Trustees

Diane Gallagher PhD.
Executive Director

4400 Baltimore Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215/222-2566; fax 215/222-1889
admin@hmsschool.org
www.hmsschool.org

HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting children from any locality without regard to race, religion, gender or country of origin.

The Mission of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy is to educate, nurture, and care for children and youth with motor impairments who may also have other disabilities resulting from brain injury with the goal of assisting each individual in achieving his or her maximum potential. HMS School aims to facilitate independence and improve the quality of life for its students in a safe and secure environment so they can lead fulfilling, stimulating lives in their present and future environments.

