



hms school news

HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy • Founded 1882 • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania • Spring 2013

Executive Director's Message

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD



People tend to underestimate our students. Not just strangers — but sometimes their own families, as well as educators without our extensive experience working with children with severe, multiple disabilities. When this happens, children languish in classrooms unchallenged. Our students *can* participate meaningfully in school, with their families and their community, benefitting from

insightful assessment and facilitation by teachers and therapists who have worked with other students with similar disabilities. As pioneers in educating students with complex education needs, we possess a treasure trove of knowledge that allows us to see each child's potential.

We set realistic expectations for our students, built on years of experience and long-term vision, that often far exceed what their parents or school districts envision. As our multi-disciplinary team works with our students to meet their expectations, others outside HMS are amazed by the abilities of these students from whom there is too often little expected.

We want to celebrate and exclaim that HMS students and others with similar disabilities have amazing abilities to participate meaningfully and who, when tapped by experienced, knowledgeable staff with appropriate expectations, shine — often wowing us with their insights, abilities, and generalizations.

Our parents gratefully (and often tearfully) tell us of their pride when they see their child doing something they only dreamed of ... safely maneuvering a power wheelchair through a crowded farmers market ... using an eye gaze-directed communication device to engage another person in conversation...being socially at ease in a new situation and engaging in meaningful interactions as they move on to post-graduation experiences.

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Education at HMS: Beyond the Classroom

By Peter McGuinness, Director of Admissions



For HMS, a pioneering school for children with disabilities that began providing education in the late 19th century and now as a Pennsylvania Approved Private School, the term “education” is central to our conversations and meetings. Education is what we do all day, every day, as staff work with our students in school, after school, and in the residence, with our families and with each other. But at HMS, “education” is defined more broadly.

More than imparting particular knowledge or skills (which our faculty and staff do exceptionally well), the educational process at HMS conveys the respectful, caring interaction between staff and student. In its complete definition, education here depends upon the determination and creative planning of staff to maximize the potential of each student to participate in their communities outside of our school building. Oftentimes, that means preparing the outside world for our students. And that requires us to become educators to the public, our colleagues, and leaders within our field.



In 2012, HMS teacher Kristin McKeown and assistive technologist Dawn Rainey, presented “10 Things I Can Do for Myself” at The Pennsylvania Low Incidence Institute: High Expectations for Achievement. Using the concept of “a day in the life,” the two provided concrete, detailed directions for helping students with multiple disabilities function more independently at school and at home. Because children with severe disabilities are often underrepresented at conferences, this forum and the information provided were vital to the teachers and parents in attendance.

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Throughout the presentation, Dawn and Kristin used the lessons learned at HMS to teach educators and parents from across the Commonwealth how to actively engage children with complex disabilities in their home and school. In doing so, these professionals helped change the perception of our students and their abilities.

Therapists and teachers welcome opportunities to engage in critical research in their areas of specialty. Also, HMS participates in research by partnering with the numerous medical institutions situated within this biotech-rich region.

Publications based on innovative and insightful work at HMS underscores the uniqueness of the HMS education program. In 2012, the *Journal of the Neuro-Developmental Treatment Association* (NDTA) published, “Going Beyond Speech and Language to Assess Clients’ Assistive Technology Needs,” by speech/language pathologist and feeding specialist Marianne Gellert-Jones. This article reveals Gellert-Jones’s extensive experience in conducting comprehensive assistive technology assessments at HMS.

A few additional examples of educational leadership by our team in the past 12 months include:

- Heidi Kecskemethy’s presentation,

“Osteoporosis in Immobilized or Paralyzed Patients,” with University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill pediatric orthopedic surgeon, Richard Henderson, MD, PhD, at the 2012 International Society for Clinical Densitometry Match 2012 meeting, in Los Angeles

- Dawn Rainey’s presentation at the 2012 Closing the Gap Conference about the new wireless technologies available for integrating computers and augmentive and alternative communications devices with power wheelchairs.

- Dawn Rainey’s presentation, “Designing for Efficiency- Strategies for Organizing Vocabulary on AAC Devices for Alternate Access Users” at the International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (ISAAC)

The technology, knowledge and resources that enable us to educate our students are evolving so rapidly that we cannot even try to guess what will be possible for our youngest students upon their HMS graduation. Yet we recognize our obligation to prepare our students for these advances and move nimbly as opportunities present themselves. By educating others to embrace the innovations created here and by others, our staff opens doors to HMS students and students like them in the greater community.

Ways to Give to HMS

There are many ways to support HMS School. Listed below are various giving options:

Direct Gifts Tax-deductible gifts of cash or check can be made directly to the school. You can also contribute on-line via Paypal at www.hmsschool.org

Stock Gifts Transfers can be made in 48 hours or less to our PNC Advisors Account.

United Way Employee pledges can be made through United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey, *Donor Choice Agency #00240*

Corporate Match Ask if your employer has a matching gifts program.

Planned Gifts Bequests, Charitable Gift Annuities, cash, and other planned gifts can be made to HMS School.

EITC Program Corporate donors may qualify for 90% in tax credits for a contribution to HMS School’s Scholarship Fund through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program.

Gift-in-Kind If you wish to make a contribution of material goods please contact the school.

HMS School is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit. All gifts are tax deductible. For more information, please contact Erica Cheslock, Development Associate, at echeslock@hmsschool.org or 215-222-2566



Staff Highlights

HMS would like to recognize the following employees for their years of service anniversaries:

5 Years

Tyrisha Campbell | CNA
 Kiya Jones | CNA
 Kristin McKeown | Teacher
 Felicia Tillery | CNA
 Al Wadler | Director of Finance

10 Years

Sheldon Garadetsky | Facilities

15 Years

Judy Lynch | Occupational Therapist
 Colleen McGowan | Charge Nurse
 Mary Taylor | Nursing-Unit Clerk
 Anne Peregmon | Physical Therapist

20 Years

Barri Alexander | PT/OT Coordinator
 Ron Banner | Facilities Maintenance
 Talaya Crocker | CNA

25 Years

Dee Avegnon | Director of Residential Services
 Larry Blickley | Director of Facilities
 Ed Contaldi | Teacher
 Meredith Cracknell | Speech Therapy Coordinator
 Betty DelVacchio | Executive Assistant
 Linda Table | Physical Therapy Assistant

30 Years

Mindy Olimpi-Zucca | Student Services Coordinator

50 Years!



We would like to recognize a special milestone of 50 years of service for Mary Ann Wilson! Mary Ann began her work at HMS in 1962 as a house mother and continues her service today in 2013 by assisting students at lunchtime meals. Ms. Wilson enjoys watching children progress in their skills over time and continues to encourage them to acquire new ones. In honor of Ms. Wilson's 50 years of care-giving at HMS School, the "Mary Ann Wilson Award for Care Giving Excellence" has been created and will be awarded to a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) every year, for outstanding accomplishments and performance. Her firm, caring approach to HMS students makes her an ideal role model for CNAs.

A Special Award



Eiko Fan, HMS School's art specialist, received The Leeway Foundation's 2012 Transformation Award in recognition of her work with individuals of various abilities from HMS School and The Philadelphia Art Museum, as well as her work with wood sculpture. Eiko encourages all of her students to express their own ideas in their work, no matter what their abilities. The Leeway Foundation's Transformation Awards are granted annually to women and transgender artists who have demonstrated their commitment to social change through their practice of art. The 2012 awards were presented to a diverse group of artists working in a wide range of disciplines including literary arts, performance, music, visual arts, media and folk art.

Just Ask... With this newsletter, we kick off an informative column, called "Just Ask." This column will answer questions raised by families related to their HMS child or their family in the context of their child's disability. Topics might range from homesickness to trusts, to long term care and transition, to supporting siblings or coping with one's own fears for their child. Please email your questions to Editor@hmschool.org. We will print them anonymously alongside their answer and a list of suggested resources.

Parents' Corner

Often when a parent first enters HMS with his or her child, they have no idea what to expect, or even what is realistic to expect. Part of our job is to set realistic goals for their children, increasingly setting the bar higher with the ultimate goal of achieving the maximum independence possible. Following is an excerpt from a letter we received from the parent of an HMS alumni talking about their family's journey at HMS.

The moment we entered the school on our interview day, Amy was whisked off to work and it was that way ever since... The results were more than we ever expected. Not that I didn't know what Amy was capable of, but I didn't know anyone who knew how to get her to show it to all of us! The list is a big one: from the refining of her mobility issues and keeping her physically healthy in every way, to her developing the ability to live on her own to the extent that she does now, to her flexibility with strangers – a very hard thing for Amy to learn, and her joy for life which was allowed to flourish. But most of all – the biggest surprise – was the ability to communicate with all of us – not only her wants, but her thoughts, fears, sense of humor, and all that came with that. I'll never forget the first time she would actually tell us on her communication device that she was nervous about going to the dentist – and didn't have to just cry in frustration. And now, can you believe that she actually calls us up independently on the phone to talk to us several times a day! This continues to blow us away!

I cannot thank you or tell you enough what you all meant to us at a time when I just couldn't figure it out on my own. You never accept 'what is.' You treat each of our children with respect and love, and you have great expectations for each that is encouraged by thinking 'out of the box' forever.

— Merrill, Hal and Amy Levine



4400 Baltimore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19104

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

James E. Gowen, II | *President of the Board of Trustees*

Diane Gallagher Ph.D. | *Executive Director*

4400 Baltimore Ave.

Philadelphia, PA 19104

215/222-2566; fax 215/222-1889

www.hmsschool.org

HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting/serving students from any locality without regard to race, color, religion, disability [except as limited by PDE program approvals], ancestry, national origin, age [within school ages] or gender.

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.

Director's Message/From page 1

Critical to our students' success — and what we teach when we present at conferences, write journal articles and work with interns — is our well-coordinated, interdisciplinary team of specialists/experts collaborating and drawing from an increasingly vast and sophisticated array of knowledge, assistive technologies, and strategies.

We have a “bigger vision” for our students because we know what is possible and have experience taking other students from point A to point B in their curriculum. We set them up to be capable with supports, and we work to diminish or withdraw those supports over time and with the student's increasing competence. What a gift it is to help parents and communities change their expectations so that the abilities of students with significant disabilities are understood and appreciated in the same way we value accomplishments of all students. We honor our students by expecting them to learn.

Your Support Makes a Difference!

Please consider a gift to HMS School through your organization's United Way campaign by designating HMS as the recipient. HMS is #00240 on the donor choice form for the United Way of Southeastern PA and is listed on the UW website, www.uwsepa.org. HMS is also eligible to receive United Way funds from other regions. Your gift will help us to continue valuable creative arts programs and other special projects that enhance students' development. ***Thank you for your generous support.***