Superintendent Johnson Joins Mayor Menino in Seeking Turnaround Status for 48 Non-Turnaround Schools

By Richard Stutman

Mayor Thomas Menino in late December announced that he would be filing legislation this month seeking to give superintendents across the state the right to impose level 4 “Turnaround” status on all level 3 schools. Statewide, 288 schools, including 48 in the BPS, would be targeted. Superintendent Carol Johnson quickly joined in and issued a press release on 12/21 in support of the mayor’s action.

Level 4 Turnaround status as it has played out in Boston and elsewhere gives superintendents the authority above and beyond the collective bargaining agreement to evict staff, as well as other unilateral authorities, such as the ability to extend the school day without proper compensation and to make unilateral staff reassignment within the building. Collective bargaining is not required for any and all of the aforementioned. In Massachusetts there are currently 43 Turnaround schools, 11, in Boston. (The 12th Boston Turnaround, the Agassiz, was closed two years ago.)

Why does the superintendent want more Turnaround schools? Read her press release:

“...Boston’s 11 Turnaround Schools, identified as underperforming in 2010, have successfully shown dramatic improvement and higher-than-average growth. With longer school days, quality school teachers and leaders, as well as extra time for teacher training and support (emphasis added), 44 percent more families are selecting these schools as a top choice than just three years ago...”

The superintendent wants longer school days, quality school teachers and leaders, as well as extra time for teacher training and support, and she apparently needs to have “super” powers to accomplish this.

We won’t address here the issue of “quality teachers. We all work for the same school system. The superintendent has recruited and hired thousands of teachers, and her team has trained and evaluated all of us. If non-Turnaround teachers are not ‘quality’ teachers by now, that lies at the feet of the superintendent and her ever-changing leadership team—not on us.

Here’s what’s undeniable. The superintendent had 27 months of negotiations to come to the table and speak about all of the above. Until the last weekend of the negotiating process she was famously absent. Despite her absence, her team had ample opportunity to place any of these items before us for discussion—improving teacher quality across the board, providing better training and so on. But it did not. In fact the subjects never came up.

And as has been said many times, the superintendent’s team did not put the items on the table a few items for extending the school day. At various times the BPS team sought an extension of three hours, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, and finally two hours. What was noteworthy, however: Never did her team have a stated proposal for using the time. And never did her team have a consistent proposal as to how much longer the school day ought to be. Now, using the legislation as a prod, a hammer, the district hopes to gain what they could not gain in negotiations—a contractual structure (weighted student formula). Great!

Our school system is on the move, and we are moving in the right direction. Our schools have done well. There is a new contract in place that works and includes many negotiated reforms. It is a contract that the mayor and the superintendent have embraced with much fanfare. We will look to turn this to our advantage.

Giving enhanced powers to untrained administrators is too far reaching and fraught with potential for abuse. Keep in mind the following: The superintendent has had to remove dozen of school administrators in the last few years for cause. And even then many lingered under a cloud of inadequacy for far too long. In short, her track record has been awful. What makes anyone certain that the superintendent will not make the same mistakes again with much higher stakes—and appoint many more untrained and inexperienced administrators? How do we know that this time the superintendent will choose wisely, that she has full of 48 seasoned administrators whom she can trust with expanded authority?

This initiative is yet more example of asking the legislative process to use our urban schools as guinea pigs. One half the level three schools in Mass are concentrated in seven communities: Boston, Brockton, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Worcester, and Springfield. Most of the rest are found in smaller gateway cities, such as the Holyoke and Chelsea. A fair and honest approach to getting all of our schools moving in the right direction would be to examine the close connection between poverty and so-called failing schools. Instead it’s the same blame-the-teacher mentality.

Curiously, the mayor and the superintendent threw in a few nuggets that would be a first step in leveling the playing field between charters and city schools, by enforcing real set-asides for Special Education and ELL enrollment in charter schools and then enforcing some with financial structures (weighted student formula). Great! It’s about time — but we’ll believe it when we see it.

Regrettably the recent track record of the legislature has not been kind to labor unions, including teachers’ unions. Whether the subject has been pension “reform”, health care “reform,” education “reform”, the outcome has been good. To believe the outcome will suddenly change this time, by its own accord, would be foolish. So we will have to work differently this time.

This we know: Our school system is on the move, and we are moving in the right direction. Our schools have done well. There is a new contract in place that works and includes many negotiated reforms. It is a contract that the mayor and the superintendent have embraced with much fanfare. We will look to turn this to our advantage.

We will join with our allies and colleagues from around the state and put forward a united front on this issue. In particular we will reach out to our colleagues in urban areas who face the same challenges as we do. We will ask how this proposal will benefit our schools, and we will demand answers. We will ask for more resources so we can get to the root of our problems. And we will not be content with letting our leaders take the easy way out.

We thought and prayers go out to the children, parents and teachers of Sandy Hook Elementary School and the people of Newtown, Connecticut!

1 As of mid November, Boston had 14 level 1 schools, 22 level 2, 48 level 3, and 12 level 4. 22 remaining schools, according to the state DOE, have insufficient data by which to make a judgment.

2 http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/news
Of Heroes and Villains

Because It's Good Politics: Angelo Cristiani, BTV Political Director

Retiree Benefits Under Threat

**Benefits Under Threat,** submitted for publication by Andrew Powell of the American Federation of Teachers (AFTMA), is an important article for every current teacher (inclusive of all BTU members). Current teachers are recommended to stay alert because every BTU member may need to become involved when final bills are filed at the MA State House.

The Mass Gov website states, "The pen-..." (continued on page 6)

Angelo Cristiani

By Andrew Powell

Teachers, librarians and other public employees who’ve been eyeing retirement in the next few years may be taken by surprise when a state commission recommends in late December that they work longer or pay more for retiree healthcare benefits, or both.

“We’re comfortable that current retirees will not be impacted,” said Andy Powell, the American Federation of Teachers’ representative on the 12-member Special Commission on Retiree Healthcare, following a Nov. 13 meeting. “But we’re encouraging employees to keep an eye on it.”

How close to retirement employees will have to be to be protected from the changes – five years out, 10 years out – is still unclear, said Powell, an AFT field representative and former Dracut firefighter. “Delay debates as to who will be the impacted population.”

What’s likely to occur, Powell reported, after the commission’s sixth meeting, is that “access will be different for [retirees] than it is now.” “People should be paying attention!” said retired Lowell School Teacher Mickey Dumont, whose daughter, Jennifer Machado has been a teacher in the Lowell Public Schools for nearly 15 years. “Younger people need to know what to expect at the end of their careers.”

Dumont, an AFT Massachusetts Vice President, says that she also fears for re-... (Image 663x542 to 761x683)
What is the New Excessing Process?

The new-excessing process is called the Post Transfer Placement Process (PTTP). It occurs after the resolution of the transfer process in the same timeframe the current process was taking place on in order to make excessing more timely. This new process will replace the excess pools.

There will be information sessions reviewing the PTTP process on Monday, January 16 from 5-7 p.m. at the BTU. Interested BTU members are welcome. These sessions will be run jointly with the BTU and BPS Office of Human Resources in order to familiarize folks with the process prior to the February 1st deadline to apply to participate. Closer to the PTTP actually taking place, there will be a ‘mock/practice’ PTTP session for excessed teachers.

As has previously been the case, involuntary excessing from a school is first by volunteers within a Primary Program Area then by reverse seniority within a PPA. In order to voluntarily apply to excess oneself when there is going to be a reduction in position(s) in a given PPA at a school, a teacher who is more senior can fill out Attachment #2 by February 1st (Application for Reassignment) in Superintendent’s Circular HRS-HR-7 “Staffing Reassignment And Hiring For School Year 2013-14”. This process is consistent with our previous contract.

To be eligible to participate in the new Post Transfer Placement Process by voluntarily excessing oneself, teachers must be permanent in BPS (have Professional Teacher Status-PTS); have not received an overall evaluation rating of “Needs Improvement” or “Unsatisfactory” as of February 1st; have not voluntarily excessed oneself more than once in the prior two school years; and there are fewer than 20% of the teachers in a school voluntarily excessing themselves in any one school year (this 20% does not include senior teachers who voluntarily excessed themselves by February 1st: the ones with more seniority are able to voluntarily excess themselves until the 20% cap is reached. The 20% cap can be exceeded with approval of the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources. If all eligibility is met, a teacher wishing to participate in the PTTP must submit Attachment #2 in HRS-HR-7 to BPS HR by February 1st.

In this school year, only as a transition from the prior years’ excess pools, if a teacher who participated in last school year’s excess pools did not receive three positions to bid on or who received their third bid, may, if they have not received excess themselves by February 1st (as defined in our prior contract), voluntarily excess themselves utilizing Attachment #2 in HRS-HR-7 by February 1st.

BPTS Teachers with permanent status that are working in pilot, in district charter, turn around, or innovation schools in good evaluation standing, have always been able to excess themselves by submitting Attachment #2 of HRS-HR-7 by February 1st. In the previous contract, excessed teachers in what we call ‘traditional’ schools, could only voluntarily excess themselves if there was a reduction in their PPA (which can still exceed one third under paragraph 3.B.3). Now, this PTTP process allows teachers in ‘traditional’ schools to have more flexibility in leaving their schools. It does also give the schools’ personnel subcommittee of the School Site Council more flexibility in hiring who they determine to be the best fit from all of the eligible applicants who applied rather than the principal being the sole determinant of who is selected from those who bid in the previously the case in the excess pool process. The new contract mandates that all positions filled during a given school year, September through the end of June, must be vetted and selected through the Site Council personnel subcommittee. Under the previous contract only transfer applicants had to go through this process. All other positions could previously be filled through the Principal’s discretion only. This new mandate gives much more ownership and transparency to the whole community them. School Site Councils are an important aspect of our schools and we should all be involved.

In addition to a primary program area (PPA), don’t also have an active alternative program area (APA) in BPS if I have a current Mass. license on file at Court Street in case I want to transfer into a position using that certification?

No. In addition to having an active license in your subject area you are currently teaching in aka your primary program area (PPA), you must apply for your other current licenses on file at Court Street, to become “active in BPS”. If you, for example, do not have a current Massachusetts Educational Reform Act, even if you have further limited a teacher’s flexibility in leaving their schools. It does also give the schools’ personnel subcommittee of the School Site Council more flexibility in hiring who they determine to be the best fit from all of the eligible applicants who applied rather than the principal being the sole determinant of who is selected from those who bid in the previously the case in the excess pool process. The new contract mandates that all positions filled during a given school year, September through the end of June, must be vetted and selected through the Site Council personnel subcommittee. Under the previous contract only transfer applicants had to go through this process. All other positions could previously be filled through the Principal’s discretion only. This new mandate gives much more ownership and transparency to the whole community them. School Site Councils are an important aspect of our schools and we should all be involved.

Happy New Year from the Officers and Executive Board of the Boston Teachers Union

The Boston Union Teacher is published eleven times a year September - July, inclusive.

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DIRECTOR: The opinions expressed in the Boston Union Teacher do not necessarily represent the views of the Boston Teachers Union, or those of its members.

WHEN WRITING: All letters to the Boston Union Teacher must be typewritten and include the author’s name and school or department if not school-based. All articles must be appropriate to the publication, and in good taste.

COPIES OF LETTERS: All copy should be e-mailed to letters@btu.org

DEADLINE: The deadline for submitting articles for the Boston Union Teacher is January 15th. All copy should be e-mailed to letters@btu.org

This deadline will be strictly adhered to.

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Children’s Christmas Party Was Fun For All

Photos by Michael J. Maguire
Tricia Melanson (Madison Park) and Mary Gaughan (retired) collected toys for needy children at the Teachers’ Holiday Party held on December 14th at the BTU Hall.

Thanks to All Who Donated Toys!
Claustrophobic Teaching

We spend the first year of a child’s life teaching it to walk and talk and the rest of its life to shut up and sit down. There’s something wrong there

– Neil deGrasse Tyson, Astrophysicist

Administrator lands inside my classroom, administering a test. The student is being quizzed and the student is coping with the amounts of tests that have been administered on them. This has created what Paul Dumont, who has been a professor in a number of key academic subjects, would call an educational system that is almost impossible to propose that the way the educational system is being run is about to become one that is run by someone else. Has neglecting our central role in the management of human and natural resources been a good historical move?

T he unlimited possibility of paths that can be done to curb skyrocketing costs for schools has not been discussed. "Dumont can't help but wonder if it's possible to inject the fear of failure as a motivator of students to study harder and discover by themselves who they are," he says. "The educational system is not a claylike entity that can be molded, where the curriculum, the educational standards things to say and then write in history which the institution that brings such maladies is considered of no serious and unexceptionable, as to keep us looking for ways to make it work assuming that at some point it would. Slavery, church, wars, government, the secondary human class of women, and many others are exiled. As much as we know today that they are wrong, there was a time where everyone, including the most brilliant minds around, thought of them as unquestionable and part of the human and obvious way of doing things. We are at that time that would require the most astute class of thinkers to do more than make it look the humankind from one of the most crooked institutions ever created.

Please, don’t get me wrong confusing education with the school as an institution. But it is a sign of the times. Governmental bureaucracies, together with the commerce and banking industry, even when facing the greatest flux in the management of human and natural resources that the history of civilization has ever witnessed, have been able to perform strengthening the best and, in fact the only possible solution. Schools have also made themselves conveniently indispensable by providing long-term childcare to working parents. But, aren’t the parents failing to realize that their children are not yet ready to be able to go out and accumulated profits for someone else? Has neglecting our central role in the management of human and natural resources been a good historical move?

I t makes us wonder if we allowed ourselves to be fooled into into a situation where working parents use their freedom to get a job and be “financially independent”, seeing it and defending it as a good idea, but had it been clear that they must be preserved and must be preserved at all cost, when in fact is all part of a very convenient control and money making scheme for those who are Jewish. The revolution is then in the hands of the children, since they are the ones that can still surrender their mental schemes to what we need, banking industry, even when facing the greatest flux in the management of human and natural resources that the history of civilization has ever witnessed, have been able to perform strengthening the best and, in fact the only possible solution. Schools have also made themselves conveniently indispensable by providing long-term childcare to working parents. But, aren’t the parents failing to realize that their children are not yet ready to be able to go out and accumulated profits for someone else? Has neglecting our central role in the management of human and natural resources been a good historical move?

T he problem of youth unemployment, and in the process, making sure that they end up having a future that is in a future that is sustainable and must be preserved at all cost, when in fact is all part of the personal control and money making scheme for those who are Jewish. The revolution is then in the hands of the children, since they are the ones that can still surrender their mental schemes to what we need, banking industry, even when facing the greatest flux in the management of human and natural resources that the history of civilization has ever witnessed, have been able to perform strengthening the best and, in fact the only possible solution. Schools have also made themselves conveniently indispensable by providing long-term childcare to working parents. But, aren’t the parents failing to realize that their children are not yet ready to be able to go out and accumulated profits for someone else? Has neglecting our central role in the management of human and natural resources been a good historical move?

Commentary: Ricardo A. Vega

modern teachers face the following dilemma, do we fully embrace an analysis of the current school system that, for the sake of the children, would send us to the floor to look a long walk and ask them to please leave us alone, or do we take advantage of the opportunity of having a steady flow of students, administrators, students, parents, and teachers the best we can within the organization?

Currently pushed into adapting our schools to a political mold, the administrators, in a coordinated agreement with the private sector, use the fact as an excuse to promote plans and cuts, which will kill us. It seems that our students will fall in line and that we will remain our place at the top of the community of educators.

Acting within this framework of urgency and desperation, politicians and school administrators have been able to capture ample school funds, to hire private consultants, and present their agenda as one that is vital as well as logical. The school system, they argue, needs to be strengthened and nobody can argue with that. The catch is that someone is then limited to decide what strengthening plan deserves to prevail. Amazingly, almost nobody is able to propose that the problem might be rooted in the nature of the very educational system everyone is trying to fix. This has created what Paul Goodman calls a mass myth or superstition, the widely accepted idea that the school institution is unquestionably good for society and that we only need to tweak it here and there. Everyone, including the parents, is trying to do the same, in order to make it work. To do away with the whole current academic institution would mean that no one is trying to accumulate evidence on the irreparable damage that the school as an institution causes to children will be disregarded as out of line, if not outright dangerous.

Taking into consideration the complex interrelated processes of human beings, and in this particular case, the youth, is not something that politicians and school bureaucrats are capable of doing when making educational plans. The unlimited possibility of paths that can be done to curb skyrocketing costs for schools has not been discussed. "Dumont can't help but wonder if it's possible to inject the fear of failure as a motivator of students to study harder and discover by themselves who they are," he says. "The educational system is not a claylike entity that can be molded, where the curriculum, the educational standards things to say and then write in history which the institution that brings such maladies is considered of no serious and unexceptionable, as to keep us looking for ways to make it work assuming that at some point it would. Slavery, church, wars, government, the secondary human class of women, and many others are exiled. As much as we know today that they are wrong, there was a time where everyone, including the most brilliant minds around, thought of them as unquestionable and part of the human and obvious way of doing things. We are at that time that would require the most astute class of thinkers to do more than make it look the humankind from one of the most crooked institutions ever created.

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O course every now and then some administrator lands inside our classroom and makes standards things to say and then write in the evaluators’ notes how to have to deal with them. But no CMO will allow me to know if the students meet the learning objectives of the day, and a few other unrelated comments. But can...
The entire AFT community is shaken to its core by the massacre of young children and the educators and school employees who care for and nurture them at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., says AFT president Randi Weingarten. The horror we have felt for the Sandy Hook Elementary School community and all of Newtown, as well as the AFT nurses caring for victims at Danbury Hospital, following this heinous act,” Weingarten says. “I just got off the phone with Newtown Federation of Teachers President Tom Kurosoki, and pledged to do everything we can to provide support and comfort to the students, teachers, administrators, their families and everyone in this community grappling with this trauma.

“Our thanks go out to all of the first responders for their efforts to ensure the safety of all the students and staff. In this horrible moment, there were also extraordinary acts of courage by school staff to lock down the school and protect children.

“We will never be able to prevent every senseless act of violence, but our children, educators and school employees go to school believing it is a safe sanctuary. We’ve been through this too many times. Everything we can do, we must do, including a renewed focus on gun control and preventing gun violence.”

NRA’s Call for Armed Guards in Schools is Dangerous

A fter remaining silent for an entire week following the Newtown massacre, the NRA’s call for more guns in our schools and our society is both irresponsible and dangerous, AFT president Randi Weingarten says.

“No matter how much money the NRA spends or propaganda it tries to spread, one thing is clear—the NRA is not serious about preventing gun violence.”

(continued from page 6)

I predict what it is going to be learned in class when I myself just have a general idea about it! I don’t have the stomach to play the administration’s game and have their school be safe sanctuaries, not armed fortresses.

Someone who would suggest otherwise doesn’t understand that our public schools must be safe sanctuaries, not armed fortresses. Anyone who would suggest otherwise doesn’t understand that our public schools must be first and foremost be places where teachers can safely educate and nurture our students.”

[Joint AFT-NEA press release]

Clandestine Teaching...

Today’s school administrators and their partners even try to tell us to forget about power as a way to explain the current educational stage of our students, stripping the economical forces and their protagonists of their share of responsibility in bringing students to their own definition of proficiency, placing the burden on us teachers, and if we don’t do it, it is as if our fault. It is imperative to take out of school everything that hinders back students’ learning, primary for their welfare, but also for teachers sake, since whatever school does to the students it does as well to us. And it should not be a surprise, an environment that takes away the love for discovery ends up taking away also our love for nurturing a sense of healthy and natural wondering. The classroom then becomes our only refuge, and when we succeed in shielding it from the administration nonsense, it also becomes the place where we can have the most fun. Every single day I wake up and go to school excited for the time and moments I will exchange with my students. But if for any reason, I allow my mind to wonder about the irrational things that school administrators are expecting me to do, I invariably get depressed and want to go back to bed. To portray the current public education system as a right that we all need to defend is loud, false, and promote the mediocre intervention of the existing establishment in the virtual slaughter of our children’s natural curiosity.

The talk will be held at 5:30, immediately following our membership meeting. Light fare and refreshments will be provided.

A can’t miss event for Celtics fans! All Welcome! After 44 years at the Boston Globe, Ryan retired last summer. He authored many books, including biographies co-authored by Celtic legends John Havlicek, Bob Cousy, and Larry Bird.

Ryan’s accolades include the following prestigious awards:

• Dick Schaap Award for Outstanding Journalism (2006)
• Curt Gowdy Award from the Basketball Hall of Fame (1996)
• AP National Sportswriter of the Year (2000)
• College Basketball Writers and New England Basketball Halls of Fame

This is an all ages event – free and open to the public.

RSVP: columwhyte@yahoo.com
We're Learning Here  

Washington Irving Middle School

I visited the Irving Middle School, on Cummins Highway in Roslindale, just before the winter break. Hallways have names such as “Warrior Way” and “Integrity Court” — making school values a daily reference. I noticed that the warrior theme is carried out throughout the building with small signs reminding students of appropriate behavior — in hallways, bathrooms, and the auditorium — an idea worth sharing.

The first class I visited was Dance, where teacher Erica Schwartz was having her students practice their “chair dance” routine. She had them hold their poses so I could get a couple of clear photos, since capturing kids in motion is a bit beyond my small camera’s capabilities! These seventh graders showed amazing poise and discipline... makes me wonder how dance and other arts might be used to engage students more fully in their academic subjects. In the Theater Arts class across the hall, Gregory Allen was conferencing with individual students while most of the class worked independently to review their lines.

Hallways were quiet as I walked from class to class on a Tuesday morning; as I entered or peeked into classrooms, students were bent over books and papers or listening intently to their teachers. Eighth graders were writing responses to their reading of Night, the powerful story of the Holocaust by Elie Wiesel. I was amazed by the ubiquitous use of technology — laptops available for research projects and students using hand-held “clickers” to post the answers to their “Do Now” questions, which were instantly tabulated and projected for class review.

The Irving has an extended day (until 4:15 PM) from Monday-Thursday, and dismissal at 11:45 AM on Friday for staff meetings. Their website (http://www.theirvingbps.org/) is impressive, with information and a variety of resources posted for student and family reference. Enjoy this month’s photos and student voices, as they explain what they’re doing and learning. Please invite me to your school... I’m serious! There are always good things going on, and I’m committed to celebrating “ordinary” teachers and kids working together for academic achievement.

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I was writing Cornell notes about the book Night, by Elie Wiesel, which we’re reading in ELA. I’ve learned how to ind good evidence to support my ideas when writing a 5-paragraph essay.

— Macdony Charles, Grade 8

I was in art class with Mr. Dracup. I’m learning how to draw from “first point” perspective, which means in 3 dimensions.

— Kevin Desvallons, Grade 7

We were in dance class with Ms. Drew. We were practicing our routine for a school performance. We’ve learned how to “chair dance” and we’ve learned that when we synchronize our movements (all do something together),

— Rickardo Smith & Eddy Class, Grade 7

We were in history class with Mr. Ennis. We were taking notes, annotating and summarizing an article on Jim Crow laws. We’ve learned that whites in the south had a lot more rights than colored people back in the 1950s.

— Alicet Rodriguez & Cedrick Pena, Grade 8

We were working on our science fair topics. Ms. Soto was helping us organize the materials needed for our projects. We’ve learned that human tissues are made of cells. We’ve also learned that the small and large intestines are part of the digestive system.

— Jorge Ramos & Julien Soto, Grade 6

We were working on a project in science. I’ve learned how our lungs help us breathe.

— Juliet Wrena, Grade 6

We’re in dance class with Ms. Drew. We were practicing our routine for a school performance. We’ve learned how to “chair dance” and we’ve learned that when we synchronize our movements (all do something together).

— Anthony Martinez, Kevin Desvallons & Jonathan Waldoz, Grade 7

This is in Math class and we were solving problems with integers. We are learning to do all the operations with positive and negative numbers. We’ve also learned to solve a problem that looks complicated by applying it to a real-life situation.

— Anthony Martinez, Kevin Desvallons & Jonathan Waldoz, Grade 7

I was in physics class. Ms. Almeida was helping me with my notes. I’ve learned how to figure out the speed (how fast something is moving) if you know distance and time.

— Samantha Gomez, Grade 7

We were working on our science fair topics. Ms. Soto was helping us organize the materials needed for our projects. We’ve learned that human tissues are made of cells. We’ve also learned to solve a problem that looks complicated by applying it to a real-life situation.

— Aline Rodriguez & Cedrick Pena, Grade 8

We were working on our project in science. I’ve learned how our lungs help us breathe.

— Juliet Wrena, Grade 6