

Head of School Report

September 2020

BE THE EXAMPLE

As you read this month's report, I hope you are as proud as I am of our school, our teachers, and our staff. This is a rich report with many examples of the quality education your children (and grandchildren) are receiving despite COVID-19. While this is not how I wanted to start our 2020-2021 school year, I can confidently say that we have taken lemons and made lemonade!

We continue to watch the COVID-19 metrics in Houston as we plan for Hybrid 1. Some of the data points are trending in the right direction and some are still concerning. We believe that the success we have had in preschool is an indicator that we can bring all students in lower school back on campus next week. Please see below for a narrative on Hybrid 1 for lower school. We have been asked, "Why not middle school?" Trust me, we want all students on campus – yesterday! However, we have committed to our families and our employees to do it when we feel it is safe and when we can safely manage 912 students at one time. This staggered approach allows us to gain confidence in ability to protect our students and faculty. Continue to pray for the health and safety of our community.

The National Association of Independent Schools has been doing a periodic snapshot survey to give us benchmarking data regarding how COVID-19 has impacted independent schools. I thought you may be interested in seeing how ROBS fares as compared to other independent schools across the nation. If you are interested, just click the link below.

[NAIS Snapshot Comparison.xlsx](#)

Enjoy the report!

Japan American Society Chiba City Exchange update:

The Japan American Society of Houston confirmed this month that Chiba City would still like to honor the ROBS students originally selected in June of 2020 to tour Japan. As Chiba City works toward that outcome, including helping to host the Olympics in the summer of 2021, they are not sure if the exchange program will resume in the summer of 2021, or be pushed back to the summer of 2022. As details come available, we will be in touch with those families!

6th Grade Collaboration

Just this week, while spending time in the Mosing Middle School with 6th grade, a conversation was struck between Sarah Larzalere, 6th grade Language Arts, and Todd Herauf, Associate Head of Academics. Sarah was sharing how far we have come as a school considering COVID-19 and the opening of the new building. She

went on to say that if someone had planned out everything that needed to be done (and has been) from the building, to the new technology, and on to changes in how we teach in-person and remotely, people would say “Can’t happen!” But it HAS happened and CONTINUES to happen. She went on to say that she is deep into discussions with Jeff Reynolds, 6th grade History, about moving to the adjoining rooms, opening the movable wall, and having a Humanities-style course between the two classes! Ultimately, the hope to collaborate on a longer piece of writing that 6th grade has been wanting to incorporate for a few years.

Academics

Preschool:

Spotlight on The Return to School

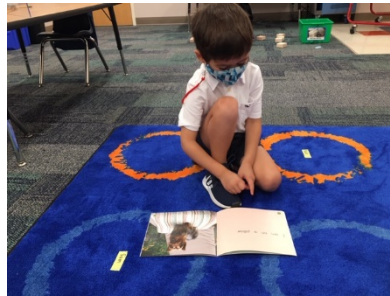
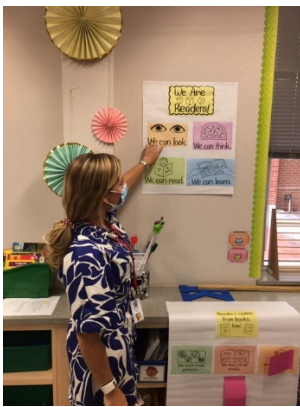
Following a summer of planning and visioning, preschool returned to all-on-campus at the beginning of the school year. We added extra sections in Readiness and Pre-K to reduce density in classrooms and hired two more outstanding teachers to support our already exceptional faculty. Under the leadership of Sarah Graham, our instructional coach and preschool department chair, our teachers are engaging our children in playful learning through a rich, thoughtful curriculum that is tailored to their needs while adhering to appropriate standards. With the addition of remote learners in each classroom, teachers have risen to the occasion and actively included these children whether through Zoom, individual contacts, videos, and materials sent home weekly. Here is a comment from a parent appreciative of the quality of our remote learning efforts: *“The activities that have been sent home are wonderful. I did not know what to expect with distance learning, but the materials and support have been phenomenal. Thank you and everybody else involved in making the distance learning experience as positive as possible.”* Our goals this year are to maintain our high standards of teaching and learning, keep vigilant regarding health and safety practices, and love and support one another.

Lower School:

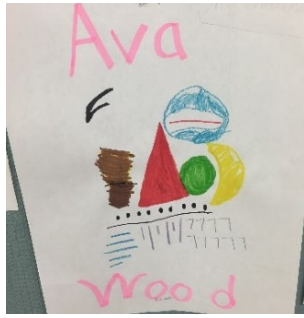
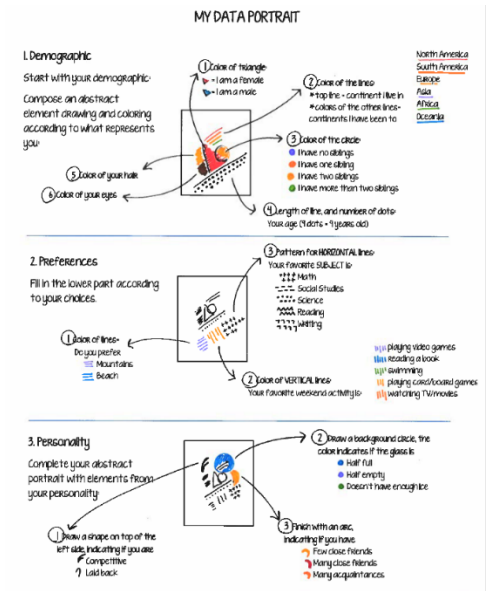
Kindergarteners are off to a great start. In their first few weeks, all students have learned to see themselves as readers. Typically, some kindergarten students begin the year ready for traditional reading while others need a bit more foundational work with letters and sounds. In this first unit of study, children learn that they can independently make meaning from text, even if they are not yet quite ready to sound out words. Teachers have reminded children of all the words they can already recognize, from stop signs and food packages to labels in their print-rich classrooms. As they have explored books in the classroom library, children have learned that we

can learn about the world from books (nonfiction) and that we can enjoy stories in books (fiction).

In mini lessons and reading conferences, teachers have modeled how we can look, think, and learn from books by looking closely at illustrations. Children are learning to think critically about the pictures in books, telling themselves what they see using story-telling language. Classes are growing reading stamina as they enjoy books independently for about ten minutes. Then, their comprehension skills are growing as they discuss their books with a partner, while safely socially distancing. The important work they are doing with illustrations now will prepare students for the weeks ahead when they will learn to use picture clues to support sounding out words.



Fourth-grade math teacher, Jessica Thompson, attended Jo Boaler's 21st Century Teaching and Learning Course this past summer. It affirmed what our math teachers have been thinking—the importance of developing data literacy in their students. Data tells a story and learning to interpret the data and find the story is a fast-growing life skill. The fourth-grade math teachers gave their students the opportunity to tell their own story, Mrs. Thompson and Ms. Tindel created a data portrait, inspired by the book, *Dear Data*. The portrait includes information about the student's demographic, preferences, and personality. Demographics included their gender, their siblings, their age, hair and eye color, the continent where they live and the continents they have visited. Next, they described their preferences, such as their favorite weekend activity, their favorite subject, and their preference for mountains or the beach. To complete their abstract drawing students described elements of their personality, such as indicating whether they were competitive or laid back, if they have few or many close friends or many acquaintances, and if their glass is half-full, half-empty, or doesn't have enough ice. This activity was a fun way for the students to get to know one another, build classroom community, and create a data portrait at the same time.



Middle School:

The middle school successfully moved in to the beautiful Mosing Middle School Building on Monday, August 17, which was a week later than we had originally planned. After a flexible and productive virtual in-service, mostly conducted on Zoom, our teachers and staff got to tour, move in, and set up their learning spaces. We trained on lesson planning in a hybrid rotating class schedule, streaming classes via Zoom through multiple technology resources, utilizing our Learning Management System (Blackbaud) to run virtual classes, and incorporating COVID-19 safety protocol into our daily routine. We quickly hired and onboarded two positions that came open due to COVID-19: Middle School Counselor and 6th Grade Math Teacher. For the first time ever, we successfully trained our fifth and sixth grade students with their new laptop devices and tech resources during two days of live instruction *before* the official start of school. Before that official start, we also recorded and posted virtual, asynchronous lessons to keep the learning going that week. On Monday, August 31, the Mosing Middle School Building officially opened its doors to half of each grade level, in our Hybrid 2 model. Since then, we have been conducting live classes while simultaneously streaming them via Zoom. Under the most challenging teaching model there is, which is a first for our school and the world, our teachers and students are doing a great job learning together during this pandemic. It is a year of firsts for the middle school: new schedule, new building, and a new teaching/learning model. So far, all is well, and we pray that it continues.

Athletics

ROBS athletics for the Fall season has been limited to “Virtual” practices under Hybrid 2 learning model. ROBS is a member of the Houston Junior Preparatory Conference which has decided as a league to delay and condense the Fall athletic season. Some schools have decided not to play the Fall season but for those that are still attempting to play, practices cannot start until Sept 14th at the earliest and all games and meets will be held during the month of October. For ROBS, we are still holding out a bit of hope for a few games, but it all depends on getting out of the Hybrid 2 model and into a model that allows all students to return to on campus instruction and also administrative permission to play other schools. Overall, the Fall season looks like a long shot. Winter and Spring seasons are being planned, but there is a wait and see approach to what will happen there as well. ROBS coaches are committed to giving all ROBS athletes an experience in their sports so everything that can be taught virtually is happening with practices after school over Zoom. If we cannot compete against other schools, ROBS will have an in-house season with practice and intra-squad games with the goals of building for the future and team bonding time.

Capstone

One of the focuses of Capstone this year is to give students an opportunity to work in larger team groups. With our ongoing A/B schedule and the combination of remote and in person learning there is a need for activities that provide opportunities for teamwork. After reflecting on current challenges, several students recommended creating an Esports league. They pointed out not only the current lack of opportunities for teamwork, but also that they missed competition. Most of the class is interested in working on this project and its already been decided that the game Rocket League, which is a cross platform, student friendly, and has team-oriented gameplay would be the game that meets our needs.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

In September, 48 employees participated in voluntary professional development on the experiences of students of color in independent schools. An essential idea is that “cultural competence” is not a list of do’s and don’ts. Rather, it is how we show up (what awareness, habits, and skills we have) when we observe, enact, or experience hurt because of a difference of identity. Topics of discussion included why it is important to talk about race and how to handle challenging situations in the classroom around race. Employees recommended a proactive approach before, during, and after lessons about race-related topics such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and the Civil Rights movement. Ideas included (1) notifying parents in advance about how our curriculum approaches the topic; (2) offering support to

students of color separately before the lesson begins (e.g., “I’m here for you if this gets hard” or “here’s how you can signal to me if you need to take a breather”); (3) including adults of color in the conversation, such as faculty or grandparents with first-hand experiences about the topic; (4) describing and discussing the social-emotional dynamics in the classroom, even if it means delaying the academic content of the lesson; and (5) being prepared to circle back to the class after-the-fact to address an awkward moment or to discuss a better way a situation could have been handled.

Spanish teachers are leading student-centered activities around Hispanic Heritage Month, including student interviews with prominent Houstonians with a Latinx background, student-led KROB segments about Hispanic heritage, recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in Spanish, and art projects related to significant works by Latinx artists.

Plans are underway for our diversity consultant Alison Park (Blink Consulting) to begin working with our entire faculty and staff. An initial session is planned for November 4, with a second meeting scheduled during January in-service.

Fine Arts

“Teaching the arts during a pandemic through a screen”- things we thought we would never say, let alone accomplish.

In our department, we are determined to hold tight to our vision of educating the whole child. In that spirit, although all arts classes are virtual as of this writing, students are still learning to create, to find their own unique voice, and how to express that voice. Our new programming in the middle school is off to a fantastic start, offering our students a more robust elective program.

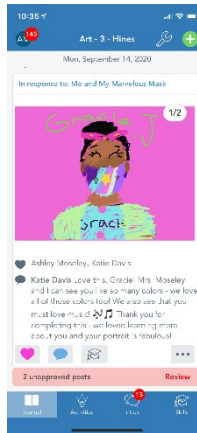


Theatre students are using Zoom to record videos for chapel, and we have secured the streaming rights to Wizard of Oz, which will be presented as a Zoom musical and streamed to families at the end of the trimester.

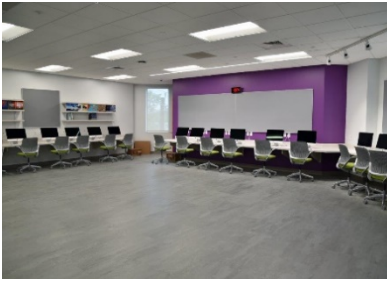
Choir and Orchestra classes have been focusing on music theory, listening to classic pieces of music, and learning about composers. They will soon shift gears to learning about their instruments (vocal or string) and are working toward a virtual performance at the end of the trimester.



Visual Arts students began the year with a unity project, which is especially meaningful noting our current social climate. Using a variety of geometric shapes and a limited color scheme, students were asked to design a quilt square that represents parts of their unique identity. Each individual square will be hung alongside other middle school students' squares, creating a large 'unity quilt' inspired by artist Lib Elliott.



Lower School students are using the Seesaw platform for their art and music classes and enjoy sending in their work.



Finally, our new digital arts class and yearbook are producing invested students with great amounts of creativity. The digital lab, with the new Mac desktops is incredible. Learning to create, refine, edit, and recreate are just some of the skills students are focusing on. Designing an image around a “moment in time” category, a student submitted this remarkable work:



Innovation

Our teachers are superstars. Yes, it is true. As COVID-19 has changed how we interact with our students, our teachers have become virtual, in person, and hybrid educators of quality instruction. ROBS has implemented virtual learning on multiple platforms by primarily connected with distance learners through our school's Learning Management System and Zoom. Our teachers have been innovative with lessons and assignments, further instilling the innovative spirit in our students as they complete each day's work.

It has been a tremendous joy to see our amazing fifth grade team trying new technological innovations. For example, just this week, Joyce Toombs created a Flipgrid for her class. Through this Flipgrid, each student will be sharing their insights gleaned from reading chosen books, providing them with the opportunity to practice their verbal expression as they record themselves on video. In the past, these book

reviews had been shared in written form only, and in today's digital, post-textual society, it is incredibly important that students not only be able to effectively express their learning in text, but it is also tremendously vital that they be able to meaningfully express their knowledge through verbal means, thus emphasizing the development of public speaking/presentation skills.

It has also been a joy to walk through the gym and witness our coaching staff utilizing technology in new ways to encourage movement and the development of motor skills. For example, just yesterday, they were tapping into students' visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning capabilities through displaying a larger-than-life-size projection of a virtual instructor, leading the students in a fun dance set to lively music. The students were socially distanced, but still actively engaged, and it was evident that they were tremendously enjoying this opportunity to release energy while having a wonderful time!

Additionally, we have added new hardware to every single instructional room to add to the virtual experience. In our preschool we have added iPads on tripods to support distance learning as needed. In lower school, we have added iPads on tripods, microphones, and even new ActivPanels to replace our hardware that was like Smart Boards for deeper dives into lessons and interactivity. As you can imagine, our middle school has added bells and whistles including projectors, displays, and new spaces for engagement. We continue to absorb opportunities to innovate, build on new ideas and will continue to be the school our community needs.

Library

How does the library work during COVID?

While we would prefer to have the students and their smiling faces in our library spaces; however, we cannot have students browsing and sharing the space right now. We have developed a book request system, called BookHub, to fill requests for the younger students. Starting in third grade, students can place holds in our library catalog. We are working hard every day to fill the requests and get books into our students' hands. We miss our massive volunteer team even more now than we did during the move. Once books are returned, they are quarantined for 72 hours before being put back in the system and re-shelved. Luckily, we caught our librarians Christa Pryor and Adonica Aston going down to Kinder for Library time just this week.



Spiritual Life



Welcome to our 2020-21 school and theme **Simple Moments Change the World**. Each year our theme develops through a committee made up of teachers from across divisions. We meet from January to March to pray, brainstorm and search and seek for what God has planned for ROBS.

This year our scripture comes from the book of Galatians 6:10a. "So seize any opportunity the LORD gives you to do good things and be a blessing to everyone." The word "seize" really caught our attention in this particular translation of the verse. Our prayer is that students would take every opportunity, eagerly and decisively, to do good to others.

The inspiration for our theme came from the song "Dream Small" by Josh Wilson. He says, "It's the little moments God gives us that changes the world. Think of an orchestra. Each instrument plays their part. They each look different and sound different, but you put them all together and they make a beautiful sound. As individuals, we play a part and over time God uses all of us. Each with our unique individual differences, working together become a big dream. It is the little acts of kindness that change the world daily."

Our chapels will be virtual for now, but we know God can use our messages, even if by video, to make a lasting impact in the lives of our students. If you are interested in watching chapel, they are saved on our website. Leanne Reynolds did this week's chapel.

Join us in being world changers! Seize every opportunity in your words, actions, and prayers because simple moments change the world.

Student Support

Welcome James Blackwell to River Oaks Baptist School as our new Middle School counselor! James joins us three-quarters of the time as he finishes up his work with the Nick Finnegan Counseling Center. James jumped right in and has worked with

Dr. Crystal Collier to establish a pilot-program of new SEL (social emotional learning) video content for the middle school to be utilized through advisory. James has also continued his training in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and is nearing the certification phase of the course. Allison Hamff, the lower school counselor has created presentations, in both video and slideshow formats, pertaining to both parents and faculty. For parents, a series of video presentations is continuing to be developed. The lower school counselor coordinated a virtual iteration of Crime Stoppers' Cyber Safety presentation for both lower and middle school. Finally, Allison attended the Institute for Social and Emotional Learning's virtual summer conference, *Paving a Path for All to Thrive*. James and Allison are excited to work collaboratively on programming to meet the needs of our whole community – including students AND parents.

Learning Specialists

On June 5, the middle school learning specialist, Tarsy Wagner, attended a virtual conference focused on Reading and Dyslexia hosted by Learning Ally. Tarsy attended sessions about the foundations of literacy, orthography, screening for dyslexia, the memory connection in learning, and the latest research on reading and dyslexia. At the beginning of July, Mary Stewart (Lower School Learning Specialist) and Tarsy attended the virtual Blackbaud K-12 User Conference. They listened to leaders in online education as well as classroom educators share ideas of what worked in their online learning and how they maintained communication with their families virtually. Both learning specialists attended the Zoom Academy Teacher/Educator Track in July. They learned about the best in-class technology and collaboration tools. Since returning to school on August 3, the learning specialists have been busy with curricular and technology trainings in addition to transition meetings and student support meetings. They have both been in communication with families regarding how to best support students on campus and at home. Tarsy has met with students and parents via Zoom to help with organization, homework, and study skills. She will also be sending some tips for at-home learning with families. Mary Stewart has started Homework Club again, meeting students in third and fourth grade at the end of the day to ensure that they have their assignments written down and everything they need to complete their work at home. Additionally, she has been working with individual students on enrichment and extension activities. For fifth grade families, Tarsy is helping with the transition to middle school by showing them how to navigate the website and become familiar with Blackbaud. She continues to post the weekly homework/assessment sheet on the weekends for students and families to access. There is a lot going on during this time, but it is the mission of the

learning specialists to continue supporting the students who need it – regardless of the method of instruction.

Respectfully submitted: Leanne Reynolds, Head of School