

The Voyage

Paul Cuffee School 🚢 A Maritime Charter School for Providence Children 🚢 Spring/Summer 2011 🚢 Vol. 9 Issue 1

Reading Regatta Creates Big Appetite for Books



Left to right: Ms. Conley and Ms. Guzmán-Polanco reviewing the scores; Sebastian Peña, Wesley Feliz, and Yenely Cepeda from team "The 18 Stars"; and Noah Turner, Monica Neema, and Anthony Gomes from team "Savvy Sailors" thinking about the answers to the quiz questions.
Bottom right: Team "Gold" after hearing they won first place and 5th grade teachers Ms. Conley, Ms. Berrios, and Ms. Guzmán-Polanco.

Imagine an end of year accomplishment as great as this! On Friday June 17th, rather than cleaning out their desks, 60 Paul Cuffee students participated in what will become a new tradition at Paul Cuffee School, the Fifth Grade Reading Regatta. This competitive event required that every student in the grade read as many books as possible from a collection of 45 brand new books. At the end of six weeks, the students were assigned to three teams and quizzed by their teachers in a TV show like atmosphere, earning points on each correctly answered fact. As teams took their turns, they not only earned the pride and applause associated with their achievements, they learned how much fun it is to read great books and recall salient information on command!

Fifth grade teacher Kate Conley, whose idea it was to adapt this literacy based competition to Paul Cuffee School's maritime theme, enthusiastically reported that she and her colleagues will repeat this activity every year. She noted with gratitude that this event would not have been possible without the generosity of a donor who responded to her wish list on our website.

Ms. Conley also connected the successful Regatta activity to her students' dramatic improvement on year-end reading assessments. "Proficiencies skyrocketed," she said, "instead of the usual end-of-year decline associated with warm weather and waning interest in school." She hopes that students will continue to satisfy their voracious reading appetites during the summer vacation as a result of their participation in this activity!

Student Gabriel Matos, who was on the winning team, had this advice to share when asked if he would recommend this activity to rising fifth graders: "Read as many books as you can because winning feels really good!" He also mentioned, "I love to read and liked that we got to read lots of really good books. But studying the facts with friends was especially helpful for the Regatta."

In just 15 seconds, could you provide an answer that requires recalling specific details about a main character in one of 45 books that you and your friends read in a six week period? Did you even read 45 books this year? On June 17th our fifth graders were stars. Their elementary school experience ended on a truly bright note because a generous donor provided the funding to fulfill their teachers' dream project. How great is that? Greater than we'll ever know. 🚢

"I love to read and liked that we got to read lots of really good books. But studying the facts with friends was especially helpful for the Regatta."

Gabriel Matos, 5th grade student



Summer Course Will Expand Teacher's Views on Region's History

by Jenny Boone



Humanities Teacher, Josie Batista

“Students benefit when teachers have opportunities to hone their craft.”

How do we make sure that we at Paul Cuffee School are keeping pace with the latest trends and research in the field of teaching and learning? In this issue of *The Voyage*, we spotlight sixth grade humanities teacher Josie Batista, who recently won a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to take part in a professional development opportunity this summer. Besides building upon her own knowledge of New England's history, the experience will help her teach this particular subject matter in a way that is more personal, relevant, and memorable for her students.

Ms. Batista will be one of 30 K-12 teachers, along with scholars and historians, who will explore “The Role of Slavery in the Rise of New England Commerce, Industry, and Culture to 1860” at an NEH Summer Intensive in Providence from July 17-29. The program will focus on the often overlooked “web of connections” that enabled New England to become an economic powerhouse leading up to the Civil War.

Some of the questions she looks forward to discussing with other educators are: How and why did New England become the center of the American slave trade? How could the region that most vigorously opposed Southern slavery build an industrial empire that depended upon it? And, what was life like for former slaves, including children, after the slave trade ended in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts?

The last question relates directly to Paul Cuffee School's namesake, the son of a freed Ghanaian slave. Information about the contributions of Paul Cuffee and others like him is limited, and what we have is geared toward readers of scholarly publications and books – not elementary, middle and high school students.

Ms. Batista applied for the grant after realizing that she, along with her students, had limited knowledge of Cuffee and the period when Rhode Island dominated the slave trade. “Our school serves a diverse population of students,” she said. “Eighty-eight

percent are African American, Latino, or Native American, so the history of people of color in Rhode Island is particularly important to them, as it is to me, as a Dominican-American educator.”

Another window onto the topic opened when Keith Stokes was invited to speak at this year's Wiggins Celebration at Paul Cuffee School on April 28. Stokes, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, is a descendant of a mixed-race family in Colonial Newport. He is also a well-known historian of African American and Jewish history. His presentation, which some of Ms. Batista's students attended, focused on the contributions of African children brought to Rhode Island during the 18th Century.

“The words that resonated in my mind after his lecture,” said Ms. Batista, were, “the only truly dead are those who have been forgotten.’ I don't want my students to be unaware or forget the people or events that have shaped our history and contributed to where we are today.”

Ms. Batista looks forward to incorporating what she learns from the Summer Institute into her teaching. “Working at a charter school, I have the ability to create my own units, and I'm eager to introduce one that focuses on the rich history of Rhode Island,” she said, adding, “I look forward to sharing what I've gained with all of my students and colleagues.” 🌟

Your Annual Gifts Enrich Programs and Inspire Urban Youth

We are proud to announce that your contributions to our annual giving campaign not only increased in number this year, *your gifts and the year-end matching challenge helped us to exceed our \$125,000 goal by more than \$14,000.00!* Because of your generosity each year, we are able to offer our students the enrichment experiences and resources they need to thrive! We are grateful for your investment in a school that is forging a path to excellence for Providence youth.



HELP US MAKE HISTORY COME ALIVE FOR PAUL CUFFEE STUDENTS!

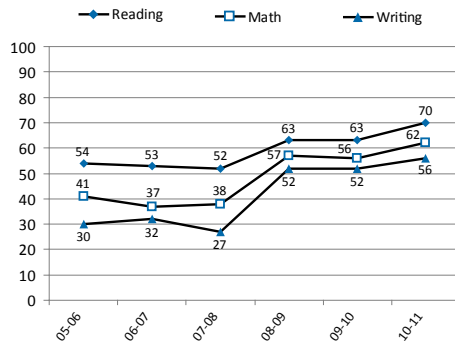
Paul Cuffee's librarian is eager to support Josie Batista and other Paul Cuffee School teachers by buying historical fiction and nonfiction that is engaging and relevant to our students. Please consider making a monthly gift of any amount to our school library fund or to the Wiggins Collection of books and media by and about African Americans. Your donations will add high-quality, new titles to our collection, as well as subscriptions, and audio and visual resources aimed at readers of all levels.

Please go to www.paulcuffeeschool.org to make a secure online donation today, or write a check to “Paul Cuffee School,” and send it to the Office of Institutional Advancement at Paul Cuffee School, 459 Promenade St., Providence, RI 02908. For further information, contact Julia Karahalis at 401-453-2626 x118, or jkarahalis@paulcuffee.org, and help write our students' success stories.

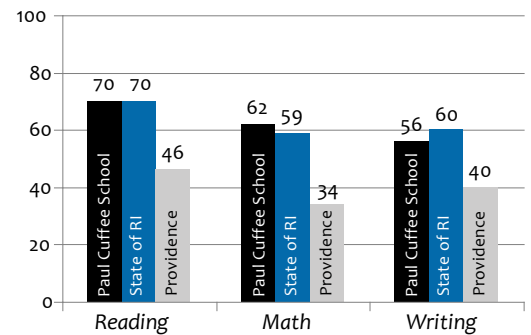
Test Scores Continue IMPRESSIVE Rise

Our students' performance on standardized tests is on the rise because of great teachers in every grade, a school culture of shared expectations for success, and families and friends, near and far, like you! Producing these results is a collective effort! Thank you for contributing to our success every year!

NECAP Tests Paul Cuffee School
(Combined Percentage of Proficient and Above Students)



Comparing Fall 2010 NECAP Tests
Percentage of Proficient and Above Students



High School's First Year is Full of Promise

by Jenny Boone

Of the many noteworthy firsts at PCHS this year, the televised visit of Governor Chafee and Commissioner Gist on March 10th is most memorable. After observing classes, the two officials met with administrators, teachers, board



Head of School Michael Obel-Omia, Governor Chafee, and 9th grader Elvis Artigas during the Governor's visit on March 10th.

members and students. They heard about the school's challenges and responsibilities, and witnessed teachers' efforts to nurture students' love of learning and commitment to social justice. They gathered students' impressions of the school, and even discussed Arizona's controversial immigration law, which they compared to similar fears and divisions among characters in *The Crucible*, which they were studying.

For our new Head of School, who loves great literature, a proud moment was our students' participation in Lincoln's School's third annual Shakespeare in the City event. Under the direction of PCHS performing arts teacher Tom Epstein, six of our students delivered Act II, Scene ii from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a showcase that brought together young actors from 14 schools. Mr. Obel-Omia also described the joys of discussing great books with 12 high school students who elected to join the very first of the Carol Montrond Book Clubs. The membership swelled to capacity as enthusiastic reports of each meeting spread through the school.

At the end of her first year, Principal Becky Coustan proudly reflected on the strength of her team and the solid foundation on which the high school can grow one grade at a time over the next three years. She relished having the "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hand-pick a complete school staff," which now includes

the 10th grade teachers she hired for next year. Asked which qualifications she values above all else, she replied, "sharing a vision of what a high-performing urban public school looks like, and an ability to work collaboratively with students, colleagues, and community members in support of that vision."

Ms. Coustan also spoke highly of the students themselves, noting their interest in assuming more leadership responsibilities throughout the year. "They've run weekly meetings since October, created a Student Senate, held fundraisers, and sponsored social events," she said. "They are also becoming articulate advocates for policy changes, and serve as eloquent ambassadors with new students, teaching candidates, and our many distinguished visitors. They will become mentors to our new 9th graders, an initiative they requested for themselves."

With caring and talented adults in charge, and a supportive community behind them, the future looks radiant for Paul Cuffee School students. 🌟

COUNTING THE WAYS YOU HELP OUR STUDENTS SUCCEED

Whether you are:

- ★ translating documents
- ★ helping our students with academics
- ★ supporting the Carol Montrond Clubs
- ★ attending a special event
- ★ volunteering at our yard sale
- ★ sewing costumes for the school play
- ★ bringing visitors to the School
- ★ chaperoning a field trip
- ★ supporting our library
- ★ sponsoring an enrichment program
- ★ fulfilling a wish list item

...your involvement is changing the lives (and futures) of our students!

Thank You!

Wishes Really Do Come True

Thanks to you, our generous friends, the entire 2010-11 teacher wish list was granted! Our teachers are ecstatic, and our students are learning how to write great letters of appreciation. We are grateful to all of you for making our wishes come true!

Check out the new wish list at www.paulcuffeeschool.org and also visit *Donors Choose* to find Paul Cuffee teachers' descriptions of new projects they'd like to share with our students.

“Abby was the original *Mean Girl*,” said Caroline Azano about *The Crucible* character who sets off the chain of tragic events in Arthur Miller’s play about the Salem witch trials in the 1600’s. Azano, Trinity Repertory Company’s education director, knows the character will resonate with her students as they wend their way through an American classic studied by high school students around the country, including at Paul Cuffee High School in Providence.

With a grant from the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts (RISCA), Azano led a six-week workshop that enabled PCHS humanities and performing arts teachers Aaron Weiser-Woodward and Tom Epstein to collaborate with teacher-artists from Trinity Rep. Their project took place prior to and during all 60 ninth grade students’ intensive study of *The Crucible*. In addition to the performing arts classes, the collaboration included standards-based *Crucible* lesson plans and affordable access to a matinee of the play performed at Trinity Rep.

The grant, and Trinity’s involvement, expanded critical thinking and writing



Mari Perez and Margarita Gonzalez performing a scene from *The Crucible* at PCHS’s Art Share event.

skills, and encouraged the ninth graders to collaborate, unlock hidden talents, and take risks when performing scenes from the play.

Trinity’s Azano drew students’ attention to this last point during a May rehearsal. “The greatest gift actors have is that they can make a choice and throw it away if it doesn’t work and then try something new tomorrow. You can’t do that in real life.”

To help them impersonate the devious Abby in a scene with John Proctor, Azano asked students, “What are the different ways to get someone to do something you want them to do?” Sweet talk, bargaining, and yelling were all mentioned as ways to calibrate one’s intentions. As freshmen Margarita Gonzalez and Nick Polanco worked out their dialog in front of the group, improving with each of Azano’s suggestions, the rest of the class waited for their turn on the boards.

Rehearsals culminated in a performance at PCHS’s first Art Share on June 20. Non-performers learned stage management and technical skills, including building props; painting sets; assembling costumes; running the lighting, sound, and video equipment; and creating publicity materials.

Many thanks to RISCA for giving students and teachers the chance to work with Trinity Rep, a singular Providence institution with national reputation. Developing a thorough understanding of the play, and being able to enact it, anchored our students’ knowledge of *The Crucible* in ways that could not be achieved by simply reading it. 🌊

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Alex Bolvin '07 graduating from LaSalle Academy

specific details about the 26 students who responded to our inquiries! In a nutshell, ninety-six percent of students with whom we connected graduated from high school, and 92% are going directly to a two-or four-year college, many as the first in their families to do so. Most have technical career plans, and one is joining the military. Below is the list of former PCS students and their next destinations:

1. Anthony Alegria, Rhode Island College
2. Mario Alvarez, Community College of Rhode Island
3. Alejandro Andino, Universal Technical Institute
4. Vivian Argueta, New England Institute of Technology
5. Alexander Bolvin, University of Rhode Island
6. Sean Canton, Community College of Rhode Island
7. Nastashia Castillo, Johnson & Wales University
8. Eugenio DaSilva, Johnson & Wales University
9. Tatiyona Dennis, Community College of Rhode Island
10. Ezequiel Gonzalez-Caines, Year Up/CCRI
11. Erick Javier Mella, University of Rhode Island
12. Isabel Justiniano, Rhode Island College
13. Alexandre Lopes, University of Rhode Island
14. Raeanne Lopes, University of Rhode Island
15. Reginaldo Lopes, University of Rhode Island
16. Justin Montañez, Community College of Rhode Island
17. Nathan Nunez, Bridgerland Applied Technology College
18. Andiel Pantojas, Community College of Rhode Island
19. Joel Ramos, Community College of Rhode Island
20. Janira Rivera, Sanford Brown Institute
21. Thalia Rosario, University of Rhode Island
22. Denys Ruiz, joining the military
23. Gisela Sejas, Utah Valley University
24. Sayumi Tani, Community College of Rhode Island
25. June Rose Trimbach, Marlboro College
26. Carmelo Valle III, Community College of Rhode Island

Rounding Up the Class of 2011

“David Bourns was amazing. He taught us to keep moving forward, and that’s what I’ve been doing.” Andiel Pantojas, PCS Class of ‘07

Four years before our high school opened, 50 Paul Cuffee 8th grade students bid farewell to the trusted teachers who had guided them through their formative years at Paul Cuffee School, setting out for various high schools across the district. To keep track of their post-secondary career plans, we checked in with as many of them as possible this spring to see what their plans are for the next year, and asked how their experiences at Paul Cuffee may have influenced them. Please go to our website at www.paulcuffee.org to read the whole story and get