

DOUGLAS DIGEST

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Douglas Digest

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From the PTO

The sleds haven't gotten much work this winter, but the rest of Douglas has been hoppin'! From an all-school pajama day before MLK weekend to the start of an "out of this world" March Reading Challenge last week, the halls of Douglas (still decorated with the hard work of the winter exhibitions) have reverberated with joy and wonder—something that many potential kindergarten families remarked upon with smiles and appreciation. If only they could see this list of exciting things to come....

In less than a month, our rootin'-tootin'-est event of the year will round us all up at the Social & Auction on April 2. Put on your biggest belt buckle, shine up those cowboy boots, and giddy up to some Wild West fun—and maybe even a little bidding (no panning for gold required!)—to support our lasso-ropin', kid-herdin', book-learnin' classroom assistants. See page 2 for more information.

Of course, it's not just the parents who can do a little Boot-Scootin' Boogie.⁵ Our annual talent shows begin this month: March 24 (grades 3 and 4), April 27 (grades 5 and 6), and May 26 (grades K-2). Those mornings fill the cafeteria with style, smiles, and pride.

And while there will surely be fewer Taylor Swift impressions, tomorrow night (Tuesday, March 8, 7:30pm) is a chance to bring your smile to our next General PTO Meeting in the Douglas cafeteria. Additionally, we are pleased to welcome School Committee members Mike Copolino and (Douglas's own) Amy Krishnamurthy, who will join us in a conversation about the proposed school budget for next year. What a great way to learn more before the April's Town Meeting; we hope you'll join us!

Speaking of... The PTO is in its own season of budget planning. At our April 26 General Meeting, we will present our proposed budget for next year, as well as our nominees for next year's PTO board of directors. We hope you'll come to share your thoughts. And if you're interested in getting more involved, please drop us a line. We have many roles that are just begging for your expertise, as you can see on the next page. Thanks, and see you there!

Abigail Vargus and Annie Hamill
PTO Cochairs

Honey, Where's Your Homework?

Please read this article to the end even though you may want to place it in the "Here he goes again," or the "Another reason Dr. Whitbeck makes me angry," or the "Dr. Whitbeck, he's my hero," file. No one will file it in the "ambivalence" file. The amount of homework assigned is something about which everyone seems to have strong opinions. It is my responsibility to help parents and teachers challenge unsupported conventional thinking. We don't have the time or energy in education these days to make policy based on opinion. Whenever it is available, we must use research to make our decisions, and the research on homework is clear: There is no evidence that homework provides benefits in elementary school.¹

We tell ourselves that homework is like piano practice—the more you do, the better you will become. Of course there's the belief that it "reinforces" what kids are taught, and helps them to become more successful learners. If we don't believe that, we say that it teaches our children independence, responsibility, and good work habits necessary for junior high.

You may be familiar with the saying, "Correlation does not imply causation." My favorite example is the correlation between pirates and global warming (<https://goo.gl/hBriRr>), or the one between lemons imported to the US and the total US highway fatalities (<http://goo.gl/Dlp99>). Just because we can find a correlation between two things doesn't mean that one causes the other. Researchers have looked for correlations between homework and achievement.^{2,3} In elementary school, there

isn't a correlation between whether children do homework (or how much they do) and any meaningful measure of achievement. The only effect that does show up is more negative attitudes about school and abilities from students who get more assignments. Homework does not cause children to do better in school. These findings continue through middle and high school.⁴

If we're making kids do homework, it's either because we're misinformed about what the evidence says or because we think kids ought to do homework *despite what the evidence says*. But by ignoring the research we are damaging our children. Pennsylvania State University researchers David Baker and Gerald Letendre write: "Not only did we fail to find any positive relationships," but "the overall correlations between national average student achievement and national averages in [amount of homework assigned] ... are all negative."

Finally, not a single study has ever supported the claim that homework teaches good work habits or develops positive character traits such as self-discipline and independence. These are urban myths. There are better ways than homework to create a link between school and family, reinforce what students are taught in class, or teach children self-discipline and responsibility (a homework claim for which absolutely no evidence exists).

If you know of any research that puts homework in a different light, I'd love to read it. I have been discussing this with many including the junior high and high school principals. Currently the Douglas guideline is homework that is essential. This coming school year, staff and I will be discussing: *No homework except on those occasions when it's truly necessary*.

This doesn't mean no homework ever. The teachers and I will have thoughtful conversations about this and define what is truly necessary. This will include thinking about when homework will help students think deeply about questions; assuming that children are meaning makers and not empty vessels; and expecting that children will wrestle with ideas and not mindlessly follow directions and complete repetitive practices. This will only positively affect both achievement and students' attitudes toward school. Be careful next year when you ask, "Honey, where's your homework?" You're likely to enter a thoughtful and deep conversation.



¹ Marzano & Pickering, "Special Topic / The Case For and Against Homework," *Educational Leadership* Vol 64 No. 6 (March 2007): pp. 74–79

² Adam V. Maltese, Robert H. Tai, and Xitao Fan, "When Is Homework Worth the Time? Evaluating the Association Between Homework and Achievement in High School Science and Math," *The High School Journal*, October/November 64(5): pp.96–72. Abstract at <http://ow.ly/FxhOV>

³ Harris Cooper, Jorgianne Givney Robinson, and Erika A. Patall, "Does Homework Improve Academic Achievement?: A Synthesis of Research, 1987-2003," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 1⁰ (644^o): pp. 1–62.

⁴ Valerie A. Cool and Timothy Z. Keith, "Testing a Model of School Learning: Direct and Indirect Effects on Academic Achievement," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 16 (1991): pp.28–44

⁵ Can you guess which cochair can do the Boot Scootin' Boogie?

Dates to Remember

Thursday, March 10

Spirit Day
Willow Books Night, 6–8pm

Thursday, March 24

Grades 3–4 Talent Show, 9:45am

Friday, March 25

NO SCHOOL (Good Friday)

Monday, March 28 through

Wednesday, March 30

MCAS, Grades 3–6

Saturday, April 2

Spring Social & Auction

Monday, April 4

Acton Town Meeting

Monday, April 18 through

Friday, April 22

April Break: No School

Tuesday, April 26

PTO General Meeting: Budget & Board
Presented, Douglas Cafetorium, 7:30pm

Wednesday, April 27

Grade 5–6 Talent Show, 9:45am

Snack Cart Donations

See snack details on the PTO website.

March 10 Grades 5 & 6

March 17 Grade 4 (Popcorn day)

March 24 Grades 2 & 3

April 7 Grade 6

April 14 Grades 4 & 5

April 21 No School (April Break)

April 28 Grades 2 & 3

Save These Dates

May 9–11: MCAS, Grades 3, 4, 6

May 9–11, 16–17: MCAS, Grade 5

Thursday, May 26: Grade K–2 Talent
Show, 9:45am

Monday, June 6: Douglas Day!

Monday, June 27: Douglas Night at
Lowell Spinners



Spotlight: Reading Is Fundamental!

March has a special place in any Douglas book-lover's heart because it's the season of reading. Read Aloud Day and the March Reading Challenge put books front and center. But reading itself has a special place at Douglas regardless of the season or the grade, and not just in the reading specialists' rooms.

It's easy to picture reading in kindergarten; the kids are agog as their teacher reads a picture book to the group. But what about the rest of Douglas? Reading is so crucial, it can be hard as a parent to picture how it stays fun for all Douglas learners, so here are a few examples of

what keeps your kids engaged in this elemental part of education.

Every student in first grade has a poetry binder, in which they may simply see fun things that don't take very long to read, but the repetition and rhyme build fluency. In second grade, students are learning how to apply reading skills across the curriculum. That sounds like boring educational policy talk, but it means that your seven- or eight-year-old's eyes light up for crossword puzzles and other word games. Upstairs in third grade, students take on chapter books in class. The comprehension is shown, however, when they make themed groups (ask about their "mouse groups" for *Ralph S. Mouse*) and act out scenes or interview characters.

Fourth-grade pupils are becoming far more independent readers. One fantastic example of that is when they take on *Eagle Song*, a modern-day Native American tale that covers everything from bullying to social studies. It culminates in an amazing cultural enrichment event for their grade. In fifth grade, student reading has evolved, and they show off their skill and enjoyment with literature circles—think book groups for the eleven-year-old set. Finally, our oldest kids add a new skill in their reading for research. It's that skill that turns sixth grade into a really exciting (and fun!) time as they delve deeper into everything they do, from mythology to exhibitions.

Douglas Spring Social & Fundraiser—Coming Soon!

Don't get caught with your cowboy hat at the dry cleaners! Write down these dates now, so you'll be ready for the Social & Auction—the biggest social event (and fundraiser) of the year!

- April 2, 6:30–10pm: The best party y'all ever saw east of the Mississippi, held just round the bend at the Maynard Rod & Gun Club
- March 18: Your last chance to saddle up your horse and buy tickets. Buy them on that newfangled Internet (www.DouglasSchoolAuction.com) or via Pony—er, Backpack Express. (\$35/guest)
- March 30: Raffle ticket stubs and money are due in Deputy Sheriff Crooks' office. (Attendance not required to win.)
- Never too late: Join the auction posse! No such thing as too many cowboys when it comes to set up, clean up, check-out, or keep the party running smoothly. Send an email to the Auction Rodeo Queens at auction@DouglasSchoolPTO.org

Can't wait any longer to learn more? Mosey on over to www.DouglasSchoolAuction.com to take a gander at all the details and our eye-poppin' catalog!



Gracias! Danke schoen! ありがとう! Merci!

Grazie! Thank you!

To all of our volunteers who have made so many things possible—from kindergarten tours and nature walks to Read Aloud Day, the March Reading Challenge, and the bustling Eagle's Nest Store—we say thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Gift Card Giftback!

Don't let that Scrip Giftback flyer slip away before the March 11 deadline! You can order online or with the paper form. Buy a gift card for a friend (Starbucks, anyone?), a present for a coach (Dunkie's too), or just fill up your balance at your favorite retailers (Amazon...) and local stores (Willow Books and Roche Brothers!). Thank you to everyone who shops for Douglas success!